

# MICHAEL C. McMILLEN

## A Theory of Smoke

14 SEPTEMBER - 16 OCTOBER 2021

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 2021

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FURNACE COVE, 2010  
unique cast bronze

24 1/2 x 21 x 15 in. (62.2 x 53.3 x 38.1 cm)



Movie still from A THEORY OF SMOKE, 2021

L.A. Louver is pleased to present *Michael C. McMillen: A Theory of Smoke*, a survey exhibition that includes *Observatory*, 2021, a film installation; *Cinema Futura*, 1990-2021, a time-based multimedia wall installation; and a selection of sculptural constructions created over the last three decades with shared thematic reference to architecture.

Upon entering the gallery foyer, the visitor encounters a neo-classical, battered, miniature proscenium, the façade of the *Cinema Futura*, with its references to both theater and film. The artist's remarkable attention to detail delivers a voyeuristic pleasure as the work continually reveals itself to the lingering eye. Caught in time between past and present, permanence and transience, the cinema promises "Things to Come," but delivers an opportunity for the viewer to imagine a future.

In the main gallery, the hand-lettered oil on wood panel, *Observatory*, 2000, directs the visitor to pass through a black curtain. In the darkness floats a miniature of a giant viewfinder. The 16:9 proportion suggests a frame through which we construct a personal narrative. The film, *A Theory of Smoke*, 2021 is projected on the adjacent wall. The dream-like sequences combine to create a world which is both hyperreal and consciously distorted.

The exhibition continues upstairs in the viewing room with a group of constructions, both wallbound and freestanding, that together demonstrate the range of the artist's sculptural works over the last three decades. The eponymous *A Theory of Smoke*, a painted wood and metal construction, 1997/2021, had been in France for fourteen years when it was returned to the artist earlier this year. McMillen has said, "It was like discovering an old friend and I was inspired to renew our relationship". When asked about the meaning of smoke as a theory, McMillen states, "It obscures and mystifies, it portends disaster and lingers after the damage is done."



**A THEORY OF SMOKE, 1997/2021**  
painted wood and metal construction  
37 x 26 x 10 in. (94 x 66 x 25.4 cm)

Concurrently on view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's recently reopened Modern Art Galleries is McMillen's installation *Central Meridian (The Garage)*, 1981. Nearly 40 years after it was first installed at the museum, this immersive work transports viewers into a midcentury garage and laboratory built from thousands of found and fabricated pieces. McMillen created *Central Meridian* for the LACMA exhibition *The Museum as Site* in 1981. The current installation is its third iteration, following a second in 2000 for the exhibition *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-2000*. Each installation of the work has differed in layout, but not in fundamental nature.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Michael C. McMillen earned both an MA and MFA at UCLA and was an early proponent of installation art. One-person museum exhibitions include the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1977); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1978); Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia (1980), and the Oakland Museum of California (1990 and 2011), which featured the installations *The Pavilion of Rain* (1989), *Train of Thought* (1990) and *Red Trailer Motel* (2003). The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art exhibited a solo show of McMillen's works in 2015, as part of their ongoing series MATRIX, and, in 2020, McMillen's monumental sculpture *The Pequod II* (1987) was installed at the Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts.

McMillen's work has been presented in numerous museum group shows including the Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York; The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; and the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow.

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**Also on view at L.A. Louver 14 September - 16 October 2021:**

*No Mask Is Wholly a Mask* (First Floor)

Yvette Gellis: *Verdure* / *A Rogue Wave Project* (Second Floor)