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NO MASK IS WHOLLY A MASK

14 SEPTEMBER - 16 OCTOBER 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 2021

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Terry Allen, *Pioneer*, 1990
mixed media on paper, 34 1/2 x 26 5/8 in. (87.6 x 67.6 cm)



Gajin Fujita, *The Saints*, 2008
gold leaf, acrylic, spray paint, and paint marker on six wood panels, 72 x 108 in. (182.9 x 274.3 cm)

No mask is wholly a mask. (...) Some people, no doubt, do wear their masks as a sheath for the lithe but insupportable emotions beneath. But surely most people wear a mask to efface what is beneath and become only what the mask represents them to be.

More interesting than the mask as concealment or disguise is the mask as projection, as aspiration. Through the mask of my behavior, I do not protect my raw genuine self — I overcome it.

— Susan Sontag, *Reborn*

No Mask is Wholly a Mask brings together the work of over 20 artists to examine the idea of the mask, and what it is to either wear a mask or take off a mask, both literally and figuratively. Many media are represented, including painting, drawing, photography and sculpture. All works were created prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Artists include Terry Allen, Sarah Awad, Tony Bevan, Rebecca Campbell, Binh Danh, Marcel Duchamp, Jimmie Durham, Llyn Foulkes, Gajin Fujita, Charles Garabedian, David Hockney, Ben Jackel, Nancy Reddin Kienholz, R.B. Kitaj, Michael C. McMillen, Jiha Moon, Christopher Pate, Sandra Mendelsohn Rubin, Katharina Sieverding, Don Suggs and Tom Wudl.

Several sculptors address the visceral. Created in stoneware, Ben Jackel's oversized *Gas Mask*, 2016, reimagines the original object's materiality and scale, which appears to threaten and overwhelm while protecting the wearer. *Caliban's Mask*, 1992, by Jimmie Durham conveys the physical qualities of the mythical half man, half monster character from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, while the small-scale bronze *Head I*, 1998 by Michael C. McMillen imagines a head completely encased.

A more light-hearted approach is conveyed in Jiha Moon's *Peach Mask*, 2013, which brings together an exuberant collision of

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Rebecca Campbell, *Glitter Girl*, 2015
oil on canvas, 84 x 65 in. (213.4 x 165.1 cm)

motifs: a blue peony, a tiger, magical animals, trees, eyes and Korean symbols emerge from the form of a giant pink peach. A decorative painted face becomes a mask in Gajin Fujita's multi-paneled painting *The Saints*, 2008, which depicts a ferocious samurai who wears black robes that bear New Orleans football team's insignia; the word "Saints," written in gold, is foregrounded: football player is reimagined as warrior. Also adopting another persona, *Ann Margaret and Peter Bull*, 1978 by David Hockney portrays the two actors in character from Tony Richardson's 1977 movie *Joseph Andrews*.

Several works convey figures that are partially obscured. Terry Allen's *Pioneer*, 1990, humorously lampoons a conservatively suited man who wears a beaver hat back to front. The transparent fabric that covers the naked figure in Alison Saar's *Pallor Trick*, 2004, accentuates the vulnerability of the body and questions the idea of transformation and identity. In contrast, Rebecca Campbell almost completely conceals her subject in *Glitter Girl*, 2015: masked in sparkling glitter itself, the sitter stares directly at the viewer through her glitter mask leaving one to wonder the true identity and personality of she who has been imposed with such artifice.

Don Suggs' *Citizens: a Japanese/a Bangladeshi*, 1988, asks us to consider the nature of identity through citizenship with two identical outlined heads, placed side-by-side, each masked by a different national flag. Katharina Sieverding also employs two adjacent images in *Stauffenberg-Block III/XI*, 1969-1996, in which each of the large, cropped, polarized faces stare directly at the viewer. In this work the artist uses her own face to give visibility to the German army officer who attempted to assassinate Adolph Hitler: Claus von Stauffenberg.

The unmasking of the creator is prominently featured in the exhibition through several candid self-portraits. Tony Bevan employs raw, powdered pigment and acrylic to portray his naked torso, his gaze averted. By contrast Charles Garabedian's *Self portrait*, 2000 directly confronts the viewer, with forehead rendered in abstract form; while Sandra Mendelsohn Rubin's *White*, 2003 subsumes the image of creator in a small mirror reflection.

Masking is timeless, but is given meaning in its time, and in our time, appropriated for political purposes mask have become contentious. Masking and unmasking, concealing and revealing, a mask hides but also exposes who we are.

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

Michael C. McMillen: *A Theory of Smoke* (Various installations)

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