

AP

Exhibition explores Michael Jackson as artists' inspiration

By JILL LAWLESS

Jun. 27, 2018



A woman looks at artworks by Todd Gray on display at the Michael Jackson: On The Wall exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in London, Wednesday, June 27, 2018. TA new art exhibition in London depicts Michael Jackson as a savior, a saint, an entertainer, an icon, a monarch, a mask and a mystery. The National Portrait Gallery show explores how many contemporary artists have been drawn to the late King of Pop, as an artistic inspiration, a tragic figure and a fascinating enigma. The exhibition runs at the gallery from June 28 until Oct. 21. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)

Meliksetian MB Briggs

...The exhibition includes works that reflect on what Jackson meant to his fans, his place in African-American culture, the way he manipulated fame — and the way fame manipulated him.

U.S. artist **Todd Gray**, who worked for Jackson as a photographer in the 1970s and 80s, recalled him as a sweet-natured youth — “If he stepped on an ant, he would cry” — but also someone keenly aware of his image. He remembered Jackson refusing to change his mismatched socks for a photo shoot, saying: “People will talk. That’s what I want.”

Gray has reworked his old photos by layering other pictures over Jackson’s face, including images from Ghana, where the artist has a home.

“It’s my way to place Michael in the African diaspora,” he said...

Meliksetian MB Briggs



How Nearly 50 Artists' Attempted to Do the Impossible: Illustrate Michael Jackson's Enormous Influence and Legacy

by

[Stephanie Eckardt](#)

July 8, 2018 2:04 pm

Slideshow

Meliksetian MB Briggs



The collection of Aryn Drake-Lee Williams & Jesse Williams. Image courtesy of Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles. © Todd Gray

8/15

Todd Gray, *Exquisite Terribleness in the Mangrove*, 2014. On display in "Michael Jackson: On the Wall" at the National Portrait Gallery in London through October 2018.



STYLE

[Arts](#)

'Michael Jackson: On the Wall' grapples with the singer's complicated legacy'

Written by Steve Dool, CNN

June 29, 2018

From a bell-bottomed child prodigy performing in lockstep with his siblings to a gaunt recluse marred by scandal and addiction, Michael Jackson left behind no shortage of indelible images by which he can be remembered....

"Such an extraordinary array of artists has been drawn to Michael Jackson as a subject," said Nicholas Cullinan, the director of the National Portrait Gallery and the exhibition's curator. "This exhibition is not about his biography or memorabilia. It's about looking at him through the prism of contemporary art."

Of the 48 artists featured, only a handful, including Andy Warhol, Keith Haring, [David LaChapelle](#) and **Todd Gray**, his former staff photographer, knew Jackson personally....

Meliksetian MB Briggs



In his mixed media work "Exquisite Terribleness in the Mangrove" (2014), American artist Todd Gray combines images captured during his time as Jackson's personal photographer with portraits of everyday black families. Credit: Courtesy Todd Gray/Meliksetian | Briggs / The collection of Aryn Drake-Lee Williams & Jesse Williams



INDEPENDENT

On the wall: Michael Jackson's impact on contemporary art, a decade after his death

48 artists offered their responses to the King of Pop, for an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery

- [Sarah Bradbury](#)
- Thursday 28 June 2018 17:44

... Some sections of the show delve into the more political aspects of Jackson as a figure, particularly his positioning as an African American artist brought into the mainstream. **Todd Gray** was the singer's personal photographer from 1979 to 1983, documenting his skyrocketing fame from The Jackson 5 through to *Off the Wall* and *Thriller*. Gray has a room here, where these images are transformed through collaging and juxtaposition with photos he took in Ghana. The intention is "to put

Meliksetian MB Briggs

Michael in the African diaspora; to start a conversation about colonialism.”

He confesses that the initial idea was a critique of Jackson, looking at him through the lens of race, class and gender. But while writing his masters thesis he had a realisation: “I am also a subject of mental colonialism, thinking my blackness makes me inferior. I was accusing [Jackson] of being inferior because of straightening his hair, straightening his nose, taking on these Western notions of beauty and suppressing the African qualities. And then I thought, ‘oh my god this is systemic, Michael Jackson is not a weird person at all.’

“It’s this American or Western culture that elevates whiteness and a certain aesthetic, and denigrates anything that’s not within that purview. That was why I made this work – so that other people can start thinking about the hegemonic power that is our media.” ...

The Economist

Billie Jean is not my Louvre

The King of Pop, the artist's muse

"On The Wall", an exhibition in London, asks why Michael Jackson still captivates

Jul 4th 2018

by B.F.

...“On The Wall” feels most timely in exploring Jackson’s position within the black community. It is only in recent years that the conversation about his identity has progressed beyond “Wacko Jacko” mockery and dismissal; today more sensitive discussions are being had about Jackson’s physical appearance and role-model status. The work of **Todd Gray**, Jackson’s personal photographer from 1979 to 1983, is a striking example of this. A series of collages superimpose Jackson’s image into the homes of black families in America and South Africa: it is an attempt to place Jackson back within the African diaspora, from which he is often seen as distant...

Meliksetian MB Briggs



CULTUREART

Michael Jackson: On the Wall at the National Portrait Gallery

DANIEL AMIR
June 27, 2018



Meliksetian MB Briggs

Few figures in the last 50 years can be said to have had as much of a cultural impact as Michael Jackson. With this expansive display of works about and inspired by MJ, the National Portrait Gallery is almost guaranteeing itself a blockbuster that will pull in fans and art-lovers alike. Far from a rehashing of a biography almost too familiar (some have even called it biblical), the exhibition, curated by the Gallery's director Nicholas Cullinan, sets out to (sometimes literally) cut the man out of the pages of time and see him as a cultural signifier, an icon and a muse.

David LaChapelle's photographs, employing Catholic symbolism to highlight Jackson's spectral fragility, are an effective way in to this thematic thread. The musician, sainted and obsessed over by his fans, reached untold heights as a figure of inspiration, and a touchstone for so many hopes and movements. On a personal level, the labours of love by Graham Dolphin, who juxtaposes Jackson album covers with text, are a testament to this devotion. **The smartest engagement with this is doubtless by Todd Gray, who sees his subject as an inspiring figure for African-Americans. Obscuring the singer's face with pictures of people of colour, using found frames from Los Angeles and Soweto, Gray casts him in a post-colonial light, and it's a reminder of the struggles of racial prejudice worldwide.**

Arguably the bravest work on show is Jordan Wolfson's video piece *Neverland*, showing just Jackson's eyes, silent, whitewashed, as he denies allegations of child molestation. It is a moment of pause that addresses the elephant in the gallery without labouring the point or resorting to value judgements.

Jackson was a lynchpin in 1980s culture and after, working with Keith Haring and Andy Warhol (whose work also graces the Gallery walls) in full awareness of his position in world culture. But he was also a troubled soul, assailed by the world he inhabited, and it is this element of him that is a little thin on the ground. This is a colourful celebration of a man and his explosive, radiant presence, but falls short of being a fully rounded portrait.

Daniel Amir

Photos: Matthew Pull

<https://www.theupcoming.co.uk/2018/06/27/michael-jackson-on-the-wall-at-the-national-portrait-gallery-exhibition-review/>

Meliksetian MB Briggs

CULTURE *Whisper*

Michael Jackson: On the Wall, review, National Portrait Gallery

★★★★★

28 JUN 18 – 21 OCT 18

Celebrate the man in the mirror and the art he has inspired at the new National Portrait Gallery exhibition



Kehinde Wiley, *Equestrian Portrait of King Philip II (Michael Jackson)*, 2010; Todd Gray, *Exquisite Terribleness in the Mangrove*, 2014

... Elsewhere, the exhibition traces the impact of Jackson's identity, talent and status in the context of black America.

Meliksetian MB Briggs

There's also plenty of visual discussions on his outreach work on identity in Nigeria, the working-class youth of an industrially declining Midlands, and renewed struggles for liberation in Romania after the fall of Ceaușescu.

Exploring tensions of identity, **Todd Gray's** photography is particularly arresting. Containing elements from the USA, Ghana, and South Africa, and concerned with the relationship of Jackson's image and self-expression in post-colonial Africa, Gray's compositions on display are a short and welcome contrast to the bombarding colours present in Andy Warhol's stimulating portraits in adjoining rooms...

by Sam McPhail

https://www.culturewhisper.com/r/visual_arts/michael_jackson_on_the_wall_national_portrait_gallery/10242