

# JOHANNES VOGT

**Umar Rashid (Frohawk Two Feathers)**

*The Messier Objects.*

*(You Get the Gods You Deserve).*

*Part 3 of The Americas 1795.*

**March 3–30, 2017 | Opening Reception Friday, March 3, 2017 6–8 PM**

Rashid's conceptual roadmap of "The Messier Objects" is a tapestry of events depicting the creation and subsequent dissolution of the fictitious Kingdom of Harlem (1790-1795). The title is in reference to astronomical objects that can be seen from the earth, as defined by the French astronomer Charles Messier in the late 18th century. At the same time, it is a play on the modern slang term for a complicated and troublesome affair. Rashid further notes that the show applies the "concept of apparent magnitude to identify the brightest objects/people that can be observed by the naked/untrained eye. Often times the brightest stars attract the most people but that phenomenon is based less on their worth and more on their flashiness."

Rashid embeds the Kingdom of Harlem in the context of the fictional nation of Frengland. In this episode the *Empire* has collapsed and various city-states have formed in its wake. The narrative centers "on the lives of the free black people who helped reclaim New York, or Novum Eboracum, from the Dutch while carving out various kingdoms and principalities within that geographical sphere. A soldier of Dutch Guianese decent, and his wife, founded the Kingdom of Harlem as a haven for black people within the polarized European, colonial sphere. External forces constantly harassed the Kingdom of Harlem until its collapse shortly after the assassination of its leaders."

Rashid concludes by saying the following: "Mirroring the present day and history of America, in which marginalized people of color struggle to balance dignity and prosperity while having to accommodate the majority status quo, the Kingdom of Harlem was a tightrope act. Attacked on all sides, the perseverance of that nation became an inspiration but eventually failed due to various internal and external pressures."

Artistically Rashid is translating his varied drawing practice into new territory. His latest body of work is almost exclusively produced on canvas while making use of restlessly produced letter sized felt pen drawings. Deliberately merging the processes of drawing and painting, the outcome of these pieces exceeds the traditional limitations of each individual medium. As always, the syncretism of Egyptology, Christianity, Vodoun, and Native American cosmology plays a prominent role in these works. The artist concludes: "Less episodic than my usual work, the mood of this particular offering is more lyrical, eschewing most of the portraiture synonymous with my oeuvre and replacing that with bold, graphic representations of a re-imagined colonial world at war."

**Umar Rashid** was born in 1976 in Chicago and currently lives and works in Los Angeles. His most recent solo exhibition is currently still on view at the Martha and Robert Fogelman Galleries of Contemporary Art (Memphis, TN); further solo shows include the Hudson River Museum (Yonkers, NY); the Wellin Museum of Art (Clinton, NY); the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey (Summit, NJ); the Nevada Museum of Art (Reno, NV); and the Museum of Contemporary Art (Denver, CO). Rashid exhibited as a MATRIX artist at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, CT, in 2014. Rashid was featured in group shows at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art (Santa Barbara, CA); the Burlington City Arts (Burlington, VT); and Guerrero Gallery (San Francisco, CA). His work is part of the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the Progressive Collections, 21C Museum, the Nevada Museum of Art, and the Wellin Museum of Art, among others. His work has been reviewed, among others, in *Art in America*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*.

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