



COURAGE BEFORE EXPECTATION

Etel Adnan, Mark Bradford, Sonia Gomes, Philip Guston, Carmen Herrera, On Kawara, Kerry James Marshall, Thaddeus Mosley, Laura Owens

Curated by Keith Rivers

Exhibition dates: March 12-June 4, 2022

Opening reception: Friday, March 11, 6-8 PM

The FLAG Art Foundation, 545 West 25th Street, 9th Floor

The FLAG Art Foundation is pleased to present *Courage Before Expectation*, a group exhibition curated by former NFL linebacker turned art patron **Keith Rivers**, on view **March 12-June 4, 2022**, on the 9th floor. Inspired by quotes that intersect Rivers's life in sports and his love of contemporary art, the exhibition explores the pursuit of dreams and unlikely trajectories, and includes **Etel Adnan, Mark Bradford, Sonia Gomes, Philip Guston, Carmen Herrera, On Kawara, Kerry James Marshall, Thaddeus Mosley**, and **Laura Owens**.

"This exhibition is an extension of my interest in having conversations with artists, and sharing, through my eyes and theirs, how talent, perseverance, and trusting the process will get you where you want to go," states Rivers. "I hope this show opens peoples' eyes to possibilities, through examples such as Thaddeus Mosley working as a postman and part-time sports writer and Sonia Gomes as a lawyer, both of whom left careers to become full-time artists; Etel Adnan overcame negativity from her mother, who said she was too "clumsy" to be an artist, and began painting at the age of 34, expanding on her wildly successful writing career; and Kerry James Marshall, whose confidence in himself as an artist gave him the resolve to work for years in solitude to create a vast body of work. His portraits of Black subjects hang in The Met and museums worldwide and have influenced a new generation of Black artists."

The exhibition features artworks that share affinities of color, line, materiality, and abstraction, including a trio of Etel Adnan's expressive pastels on paper, Carmen Herrera's diamond-shaped canvas *Tri-color*, 2019, and Thaddeus Mosley's hand-hewn Basswood and Hickory sculpture *Inverted Dancer*, 2007. Mark Bradford's 25-foot-long mixed-media collage *Ridin' Dirty*, 2006, incorporates found signage, advertisements, and posters sourced from the neighborhoods around his first studio in South Central Los Angeles, while Sonia Gomes's suspended *Pendente* sculptures similarly reconfigure and recontextualize discarded items—multicolored fabrics, bits of lace, beads, yarn, wire, etc.—into extraordinary abstract forms.

A pair of Philip Guston paintings on paper (*Departure II*, 1963, and *Untitled (Outsider)*, 1972) mark the artist's gravitational shift from abstraction to figuration in 1970. Guston's motivation to change course was simple, even if the resulting imagery was anything but: "I got sick and tired of all that purity! I wanted to tell stories!" The figure is also present in a suite of three hyperchromatic black light portraits by Kerry James Marshall, wherein his subjects radiate cool light while submerged in shades of deep blue. Keying in to Rivers finding inspiration from motivational quotes is Laura Owens's *Untitled*, 2014, part Hallmark card /part meme cajoling viewers to persevere, "When you come to the end of your rope, make a knot, and hang on." On Kawara's *Today Series (18 Marz 1997), 1997*—presented with its artist-made box inset with a scrap from *The New York Daily News* the day the painting was made—most directly references the daily ritual, protocols, and self-determination to pursue one's art, which underscores Rivers's conceptual underpinnings for the exhibition.

Most professional fields, creative or otherwise, comprise a range of barriers to achieve success, however one defines it. "I am fascinated by the artists' histories, stories, and the challenges they overcome," said Rivers. "Through the

trajectory of my life, I feel a connection to artists who also had major career shifts and took a leap of faith to be able to dedicate themselves to their art.”

Rivers equates the drive for achievement in the fields of art and sports: pursuing dreams despite great odds, putting in the time and discipline to perfect one’s craft, quashing internal and external negative thinking, and a willingness to take risks. Rivers own life and career in sports has been inspired by motivational thinking from many of his coaches, including Pete Carroll, and motivational speakers Eric Thomas and Les Brown, and the following excerpts from their quotes relate to ideas driving the show: actually doing the work and creating art (*greatness is a lot of small things done well day after day, discipline after discipline, obedience after obedience / the wealthiest place on the planet is the graveyard, because in the graveyard we will find inventions that we were never ever exposed to, ideas, dreams that never became a reality, hopes and aspirations that were never acted upon*); overcoming rejection (*embrace your pain, your pain is going to be part of your prize*); rejecting negative messages from yourself, family, friends (*The biggest enemy you have to deal with is yourself. If there’s no enemy within the enemy outside can do us no harm*); and pushing beyond your comfort zones (*A lot of people become comfortable. They stop growing, they stop wanting anything, they become satisfied. You see when you are not pursuing your goal, you are literally committing spiritual suicide...*)

About:

Keith Rivers (b. 1986, San Bernardino, CA) is a former NFL linebacker turned art patron and collector based in Los Angeles, CA. Rivers attended the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, from 2004-2008, where he was studied public policy, management, and planning, and played starting linebacker for the USC Trojans. Rivers earned All-America honors in 2007 and, upon graduating, was drafted by the Cincinnati Bengals; he would go on to play for the New York Giants and Buffalo Bills, retiring in 2015. Rivers’s collecting focuses on conceptual artworks, many addressing topics of race, identity, and language, and includes a range of established and emerging contemporary artists. Rivers supports museums and art institutions across the country and is currently serving on the Board of Advisors at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Board of Trustees at The Hirshhorn Museum of Art, D.C.; and the Board of Trustees The Walker Art Center, Minnesota.

The FLAG Art Foundation, founded in 2008 by art patron Glenn Fuhrman, is a non-profit exhibition space that encourages the appreciation of contemporary art among a diverse audience. FLAG presents four to six exhibitions a year that include artworks by international, established and emerging artists, borrowed from a variety of institutions, galleries, and private lenders. FLAG invites a broad range of creative individuals to curate exhibitions and works in-depth with artists to provide curatorial support and a platform to realize their own solo exhibitions. Based in Manhattan's Chelsea art district, FLAG and its related programs are free and open to the public.

Courage Before Expectation was curated by Keith Rivers and organized by The FLAG Art Foundation, with the generous support of the participating artists, galleries, and private lenders.