

# M+B

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## **Naked and Famous: Kenrick McFarlane @ M+B, Los Angeles**

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One of the aspects of being an artist that is rarely considered (by the viewers mostly), is the fact that it includes an element of a unique and personal exposure. Regularly putting their "heart and soul" into the work, giving their very best in terms of conceptualization and realization, artists are metaphorically standing naked in front of the observer, at the risk of being observed, judged, or criticized through their work. And with his solo debut at M+B in Los Angeles, Kenrick McFarlane explores and pushes this phenomenon into even more intimate mental space for both himself and the viewer.

"*Naked and Famous* stuck with me," the Chicago-born artist remembers the Japanese Denim jean company he discovered in 2015 when he first began making money from his art. "It reminded me of John Berger's *Way of Seeing* documentary, particularly when he spoke about the nude vs the naked. How the nude figure is a performance to please the viewer, while the naked bears itself to the viewer revealing its raw, uncensored self." Half a decade later, McFarlane created a selection of exciting, energy-infused paintings varying from simple portraits (*Zeli*, *Vivian*, *Study of Nude Girl*, all 2021), over the depictions of moments of interracial sexuality (*Mr Rager's Success Story*, 2021), to almost fantastic, surreal scenes and characters (*Red Hoodie*, *Blue Soldiers*, both 2021). "For this new body of work, I felt that it was a continuation of this ideology, paintings of vulnerable psychological



Kenrick McFarlane, *Untitled (Mr. Rager's success story)*, 2021, oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches

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states revealed to the public, and an artist trying to better understand his desires and fears in front of everyone," he told Juxtapoz about the source of this seemingly heterogeneous body of work. Inspired by the tone of Maurice Ravel's *Adagio Assai* and its melody which feels "like an extremely intimate and sensitive conversation that's filled with trust, and insecurity," the senses of both pleasure and tension permeate each depicted scene, matching the atmosphere of the French composer's curiously hypnotic work.



Kenrick McFarlane, *Zeli*, 2021. oil on canvas, 30 x 24 inches

area within that I normally wouldn't see or experience. These images are portraits of my own inner world, some of them are things I'm fascinated with, while others are things I'm running away from," he explains the relationship between his painting choices and the sources of inspiration or motivation.

And although somewhat differentiating in their motifs, it's McFarlane's technique and decisive, often unexpected approach to mark making that constructs a coherent ambience between the pieces in the presentation. Amalgamating raw, expressive brush strokes (*A Love Letter to Travis*, 2021), alongside merely indicative linework (*The Reunion of Two Souls*, 2021), and occasional realistic moments (*Ning*, 2021), the LA-based artist constructs the emotive setting rather than the factual documentation of the depicted scene. By underlining the important segments with the use of unexpected colors, bold, often destructive strokes (*Walt Disney*, 2021), or even complete absence of certain features (*A Love Letter to Durk*, 2021), an inner psychological moment within a human figure is created and captured. "All of my decisions, which are highly intuitive, give me access to a deeper part of myself, an

"For me, the challenge is finding the right combination of works. During this show, many works were edited out. I'm very picky. Also I want to make sure I feel something once a painting is completed. Lately I've been very stimulated by paintings that make me feel horrified, and astonished," McFarlane revealed how such a deeply personal approach can be difficult to work with and bring to the final stage. But eventually, after spending so much time dwelling into the most personal aspects of himself and baiting the viewer into making a connection with his thoughts, sentiments, and experiences, the artist

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began gaining more clarity as to what was important and what needed to be expressed. Uncomfortably honest and revealing, while thoughtfully retained and non-objectifying, *Naked and Famous* is exploring "the contours between intimacy and taboo, individual fame and collective experience" as seen by the contemporary Black artist.



Kenrick McFarlane, *Untitled (blue soldiers)*, 2021, oil on canvas, 48 x 72 inches