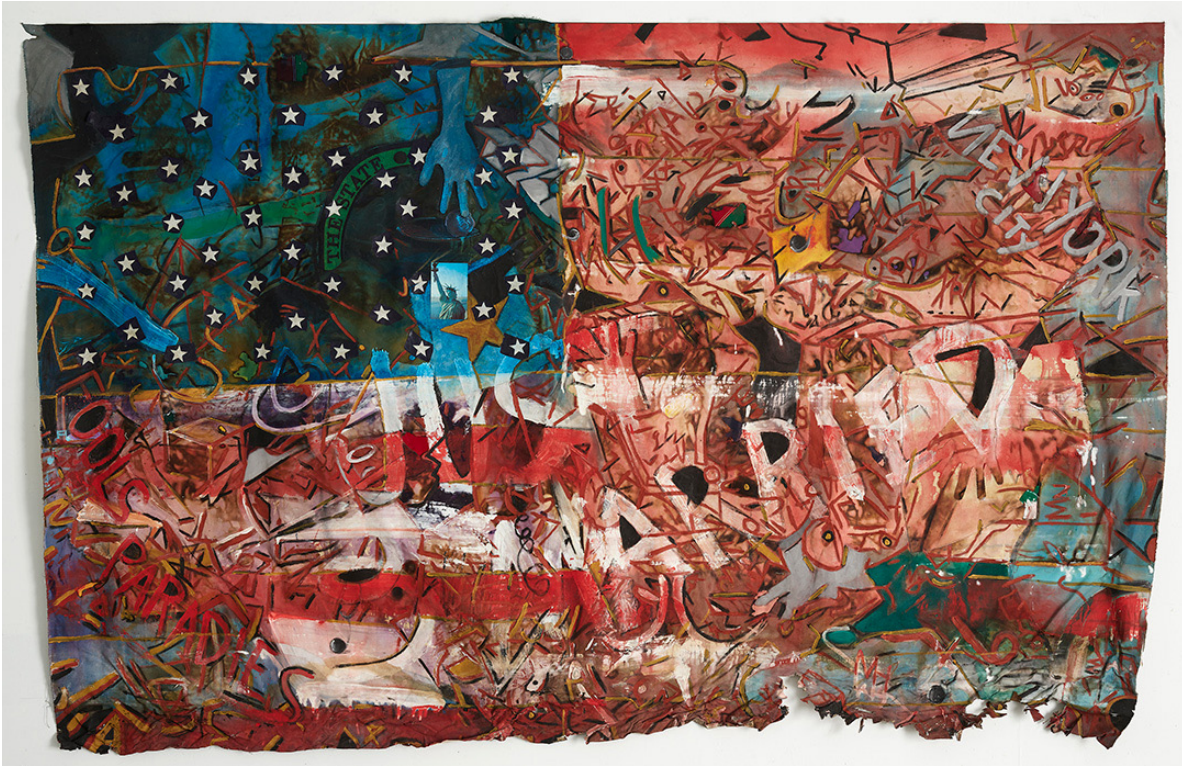


‘Mike Henderson: Before the Fire, 1965-1985,’ First Solo U.S. Museum Exhibition in 20 Years, Brings Rarely Seen Works to the Manetti Shrem Museum



Mike Henderson, *Love it or Leave it, I Will Love it if You Leave it*, 1976. Mixed media, 69 × 108 in.
© Mike Henderson. Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery. Photo: Robert Divers Herrick.

The Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, at the University of California, Davis, is proud to present *Mike Henderson: Before the Fire, 1965-1985*. Opening January 29, 2023, this ambitious exhibition brings to light the pioneering artist’s rarely seen contributions to the history of contemporary painting and filmmaking, radical Black politics, and to the story of California art. It marks Henderson’s first solo U.S. museum exhibition in 20 years.

UC Davis Professor Emeritus Mike Henderson started exploring the role and responsibility of an artist early in his practice. His “protest paintings,” which he began while studying at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1965, confront the anti-Black violence of the Civil Rights era. One of these figurative works, *Non-Violence*, 1967 — included in *Mike Henderson: Before the Fire, 1965-1985* — was shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1969, and recently in *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* at the de Young Museum, San Francisco, in 2019. *Non-Violence* and other large-scale works bridge the gap between the past and present, challenging and resonating with contemporary audiences as America continues to grapple with systemic racism and social justice issues.

Henderson's subsequent works offer new ideas about Black life and utopian visions in a unique visual language that merges abstraction, Afro-futurism and surrealism. In 1985, a fire in his studio damaged much of Henderson's work from the previous two decades and partially obliterated these vital ideas about a time of tumult and change in California and the world. After his studio catastrophe Henderson never returned to this subject matter again. Many pieces that were thought lost have been recovered and restored by the Manetti Shrem Museum and anchor *Mike Henderson: Before the Fire, 1965-1985*. A slideshow of destroyed artworks is included in the exhibition to illuminate dozens of paintings that were not able to be restored.

Henderson joined the groundbreaking UC Davis art faculty in 1970, teaching alongside Wayne Thiebaud, Robert Arneson, Roy De Forest, Manuel Neri and William T. Wiley. He taught for 43 years and had a profound effect on students.

"We are thrilled to give Mike Henderson's work the showcase and scholarly attention it so richly deserves," said Manetti Shrem Museum Founding Director Rachel Teagle. "*Mike Henderson: Before the Fire, 1965-1985* offers visitors an integrated vision of Henderson's politically striking contributions to both painting and filmmaking at a critical phase of his career. With this exhibition, the museum fulfills one of its highest purposes: to recuperate the art of a major California artist who is central to UC Davis' legacy."

Curator Sampada Aranke adds, "Henderson's visions of identity, race and art history help us understand his place in American painting and filmmaking in the late 20th century while asserting his relevance to the vanguard of contemporary art as well as our own historical present."

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalog, *Mike Henderson: Before the Fire, 1965-1985* (UC Press, 128 pages), with a foreword by UC Davis Chancellor Gary S. May. Exhibition curators Sampada Aranke and Dan Nadel; scholars Bridget Cooks (UC Irvine), Erin Gray (UC Davis), Justin Leroy (Duke University) and Carlos Francisco Jackson (University of Michigan); artists Ayanah Moor and Kambui Olujimi; and filmmaker and preservationist Mark Toscano consider the context of Mike Henderson's life, work and the dialogue it generates from a variety of disciplines and viewpoints.

Highlights of Accompanying Public Programs

A robust slate of dedicated public programming is planned in conjunction with *Mike Henderson: Before the Fire, 1965-1985*. Additional programs and further details will be announced at manettishrem.org in the coming months.

Winter Season Celebration: Public exhibition opening event featuring Professor Emeritus Mike Henderson in conversation with UC Davis Chancellor Gary S. May. (January 29)

The "Reckoning" in American Art History and Museums: A conversation between art historians and curators Bridget Cooks (UC Irvine) and Nana Adusei-Poku (UC Berkeley). Moderated by Stacey Shelnut-Hendrick, director of education at the Crocker Art Museum. (February 9)

Book Launch and Signing: *Death's Futurity: The Visual Life of Black Power*. Curator Sampada Aranke in conversation with Essence Harden, visual arts curator at the California African American Museum, about Aranke's first book. (April 20)

About Mike Henderson

Mike Henderson (b. 1943) grew up in Marshall, Missouri, and studied at the San Francisco Art Institute, where he earned his B.F.A. (1969) and M.F.A. (1970). He retired from UC Davis in 2012 as professor emeritus and lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area. Henderson has been the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship (1973), two National Endowment for the Arts Artist Grants (1978, 1989), and was recently awarded the 2019 Artadia San Francisco Award. He is represented by Haines Gallery, San Francisco. Henderson's paintings and films have been exhibited in the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the de Young Museum, the Studio Museum, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is also an accomplished blues musician.

Mike Henderson: Before the Fire, 1965-1985 will be on view from January 29 through June 25, 2023, at the Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art.

Visitor Information

Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art
254 Old Davis Road, Davis, CA, 95616
manettishrem.org

Admission is Free for All.

Art Wide Open

The Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at the University of California, Davis, is a contemporary art museum for today, committed to honoring the past and shaping the future while making art accessible and approachable to all. It builds on UC Davis' legacy of exceptional teaching and practice of the arts to offer engaging experiences, exhibitions and educational programs that reflect and serve the community. The museum shares the university's core values of innovative research, interdisciplinary experimentation and a commitment to educational programming. One-third of its 50,000-square-foot space is devoted to instruction, including a 125-seat lecture hall, classroom space and the drop-in Carol and Gerry Parker Art Studio. Opened in November 2016, the museum has earned LEEDv3-NC Platinum status and was recently named one of the 25 Best Museum Buildings of the Past 100 Years by ARTnews.

Media contact & images

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Publicity photos and captions available upon request.