

Rodney McMillian /
by Patricia Ellis

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Central to Rodney McMillian's practice is the concept that history is not fixed: it is constantly authored, edited and reformed as an ergonomic template for the present. McMillian openly questions the strategies of power that shape predominant understanding of contemporary society. Through his sculptures, paintings, installations and videos, McMillian challenges our engagement with our environment. Incorporating references to art, politics and popular culture, McMillian's work wittily subverts the inherent „messaging“ within everyday experience, highlighting the ever-increasing breakdown between the private and the public.

Often citing art-historical styles and the tactics of museology, McMillian confronts the supremacy of high culture. In collaged paintings, he uses degenerate household materials to transfer the utopian autonomy of modernism into the realm of the plebeian. A well-worn armchair is presented as a revered relic. McMillian translates its pathetic remnants from a humble portrait of lower-middle-class masculinity into a potent symbol of modern America. Another good example for this practice shows the domineering classical facade of the Supreme Court which is cropped from a canvas, flopping in a parody of the „impotent“ institution it represents.

Viewing history as a „readymade“ for the artist's use, McMillian's materials are sourced to correspond or conflict with pre-fab ideals. Through the inviting tactility of these works, McMillian creates a physical intimacy at odds with peremptory symbolism. Narrowing the gap between proscribed social identity and individual experience, McMillian rewrites the established story of lineage and „authenticity“ as something malleable and inclusive.

In: USA Today. New American Art from the Saatchi Gallery, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2006, pp. 244-247.