

**Nari Ward**

***TILL, LIT***

**June 2—August 25, 2017**

**536 West 22nd Street, New York**

#nariward | @lehmannmaupin

**Opening Reception:** Friday, June 2, 6-8 PM



*National*, 2017 U.S. currency edges, acrylic paint, indelible ink, overproof white rum, and used cash register drawers on wood panel 68.75 x 56.75 x 4.5 inches 174.6 x 144.1 x 11.4 cm. Photo: Max Yawney. Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong.

New York, April 27, 2017—Lehmann Maupin is pleased to present ***TILL, LIT***, Nari Ward’s fourth solo exhibition with the gallery. Ward will debut a series of new work comprised of mixed media paintings, sculptures, and installations. These works examine the ways value is assigned throughout society, with Ward attempting to disrupt existing monetary-based value structures in favor of social enrichment. On the occasion of this exhibition, Ward and Lehmann Maupin will donate a percentage of sales to **Housing Works**, the New York City-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to end the dual crisis of homelessness and AIDS.

Ward garnered acclaim early in his career with pieces like *Amazing Grace* (1993), which he produced while in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. For the sculptural installation Ward used hundreds of discarded strollers and recycled fire hoses woven to resemble a ship’s hull as a reference to both the history of the transatlantic slave trade and today’s homeless population. The methodologies implemented in this early work can be found throughout his career, with the artist repurposing found objects and placing them in juxtapositions that highlight their functional purposes, cultural associations,

and metaphorical potential. Ward lives and works in close proximity to his subject matter: He chooses media sourced from his local surroundings, delicately inserting his own experience in the work. He contributes to socio-political themes, including identity, race, religion, immigration, patriotism, tourism, and consumer culture, by imbuing his work with historic and personal narrative, while intentionally leaving obscured space for open-ended meaning.

One of the first pieces viewers’ encounter in the exhibition, the sculptural installation *Lit*, demonstrates Ward’s acumen for using everyday objects to create a tangible link between economic and societal reality, and spirituality. A light tower similar to those erected by the NYPD on street corners and parks to deter crime is installed horizontally, affixed to a ladder rendered useless by its concrete encasement. The lighting is employed to maximum effect, with the bright light beaming back on its capsized base and illuminating a pyramid shadow cast by the ladder. Behind the ladder, galvanized steel wash bins hold the remains of burning candles similar to those typically used in street memorials.

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Ward has also created seemingly minimal paintings out of cash register drawers, referred to as the *Till* paintings, surrounded by faint rectangular forms on a background of metallic colors associated with money—gold, copper, and silver—that directly reference commerce. The size and shape of the rectangles repeated throughout the works recall a dollar bill, which Ward has indeed extracted from paper money, removing a margin so thin the alteration is undetectable to the naked eye, allowing the altered bills to remain legal tender.

Other large-scale paintings, *Providence Spirits (Gold)* and *(Silver)*, use the bills to render the pyramid from the back of U.S. \$1 bills as a focal point, however the faint outlines of the bricks appear to be laid in a frenetic manner that suggests the structure is on the verge of toppling. Ward overlays this contemporary monetary reference with cowry shells, an earlier form of currency found in many cultures, and gives the paintings a distinct patina by pouring and rubbing white rum flecked with gold and silver powder in a ritualistic fashion, producing an ethereal aura much like a Color Field painting.

Finally, in his installation *Hanging study* the bills are used to spell out the word “Reparations” across a series of panels propped up against the wall, the future hanging places designated in paper outlines. The aspirational placement of the paintings, and their current ‘tabling’ in lieu of action is a direct reference to the longstanding debate regarding atonement for America’s history of slavery and racial subjugation. Throughout all of these works, Ward treats the word “till” with double entendre in both noun and verb form, representing both a receptacle for capital, and allusion to the hidden or unacknowledged labor required in its acquisition.

In essence and action, *TILL, LIT* engages the value systems found in our relationship with currency, with the artist subverting this system to ultimately benefit those who have been undervalued and marginalized economically and socially. While politically minded, Ward is not an activist, but an alchemist, removing a small part of the transactional economy to add tangible value to the social transformation that takes place in art making.

Running concurrent with *TILL, LIT* in Chelsea, Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens will exhibit *Nari Ward: G.O.A.T., again*, through September 4, 2017, a series of newly commissioned outdoor artworks created on site by Ward, while a recent commission of his piece, *We the People*, is on view at the New-York Historical Society on the Upper West Side. His mid-career survey, *Nari Ward: Sun Splashed*, will be on view at The Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, through September 4, 2017.

### **About the artist**

Nari Ward (b. St. Andrew, Jamaica; lives and works in New York) graduated with a BA from City University of New York, Hunter College in 1989 and an MFA from City University of New York, Brooklyn College in 1992. Ward’s work has been widely exhibited on an international level, including solo exhibitions at The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA (2016); Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL (2015); SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA (2015); Louisiana State University Museum of Art, Baton Rouge, LA (2014); The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, PA (2011); Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams (2011); Institute of Visual Arts, Milwaukee, WI (1997); Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA (2002); and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2001, 2000). Ward has taken part in important group exhibitions, including *The Great Mother*, *The Fondazione Nicola Trussardi*, Palazzo Reale, Milan (2015); *NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star*, New Museum, New York (2013); Nanjing Biennial, Nanjing, China (2011); *Contemplating the Void: Interventions in*

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*the Guggenheim Rotunda*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010); Prospect 1, New Orleans, LA (2008); the Whitney Biennial, New York (2006); and *Landings*, Documenta XI, Kassel, Germany (2003). Ward has received prestigious honors and distinctions such as the The Vilcek Prize in Fine Arts, Vilcek Foundation, New York (2017); Joyce Award, The Joyce Foundation, Chicago (2015); the Rome Prize, American Academy of Rome (2012); and awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the National Endowment for the Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, and the Pollock Krasner Foundation. Special projects include *Smart Tree* (2016) commissioned by Friends of the High Line, New York; and *Sugar Hill Smiles* (2014) commissioned by No Longer Empty, New York. Additionally, he has received commissions from the United Nations and the World Health Organization.

### **About Housing Works**

Housing Works is a vibrant, healing community of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Our mission is to end the dual crises of homelessness and AIDS through relentless advocacy, the provision of lifesaving services, and entrepreneurial businesses that sustain our efforts. Housing Works is the largest grassroots AIDS organization in the U.S., as well as the largest minority-controlled AIDS organization.

### **About Lehmann Maupin**

Founded in 1996 by partners Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin, Lehmann Maupin has fostered the careers of a diverse group of internationally renowned artists, both emerging and established, working in multiple disciplines and across varied media. With three locations—two in New York and one in Hong Kong—the gallery represents artists from the United States, Europe, Asia, South America, Africa, and the Middle East. Known for championing artists who create groundbreaking and challenging forms of visual expression, Lehmann Maupin presents work highlighting personal investigations and individual narratives through conceptual approaches that often address such issues as gender, class, religion, history, politics, and globalism.

### **Current & Upcoming Exhibitions**

Wangechi Mutu, through July 8, 2017, Pedder Building, HONG KONG

*From a whisper to a scream*, through September 1, 201 Chrystie Street, NEW YORK

For more information on Nari Ward or other Lehmann Maupin artists, please contact Marta de Movellan or Kathryn McKinney at +1 212 255 2923, or visit [lehmannmaupin.com](http://lehmannmaupin.com).

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