

Rico Gatson provokes and inspires at MCAD



A still from Rico Gatson's 2001 video *Gunplay*. Image courtesy Ronald Feldman Gallery.

BY JENNIFER HOLDER, TC DAILY PLANET
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"Don't be afraid to take chances. After all, it's only art," Rico Gatson advised art students at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). His multimedia show at the MCAD Gallery—video, painting, sculpture, and drawing—reflects that attitude. The show opened with a lecture by Gatson on Thursday, January 17.

Rico Gatson's exhibit is at the MCAD Gallery through February 17. The gallery is located at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, 2501 Stevens Avenue, Minneapolis, 612-874-3700, and is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Gatson was born in Augusta, Georgia and raised in Riverside, California. He is, however, not a stranger to the Twin Cities: he studied at Bethel College and in 1998 was an artist-in-residence at Franconia Sculpture Park near Taylors Falls. Gatson now lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Gatson's exhibit features a three-minute video of kaleidoscopic images; colored pencil drawings and photo collages on paper; a video installation on a pedestal; and paint on a plywood box with lights. Incorporated in the pieces are historical figures and events that influenced Gatson, including James Baldwin, Kathleen Cleaver, Angela Davis, the Civil Rights Movement, and the war in Iraq.

In Gatson's lecture, he explained that he presents race and politics to allow viewers to "see it, feel it, and negotiate it—and move on." The MCAD, he said, is "a platform to spark dialogue." *Ali Bumbaye*, a video installation, merges media culture and ritual into repetitive patterns using footage celebrating the famous boxing match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman in Zaire in 1974.

The paint-on-plywood 4-paneled piece titled *Untitled* features the image of a swastika. Gatson explained that he takes symbols and re-presents them for us the viewer to think about, allowing the viewer to infuse the symbols with new meanings.

Gatson's work reflects the development of African-American art over the last several years—specifically the movement that Thelma Golden, curator at the Studio Museum in Harlem, has called “post-black.” The “post-black” movement consists of art created by a new generation of black artists who see their work as “being out there [for all] whether I like it or not,” as Gatson put it. His unique style of presenting repetitive images and varying music styles is particularly engaging to art students. In one video—shown at the lecture but not in the exhibit—he collaborated with Mos Def.

Kristin Makhholm, MCAD Gallery Director, says that, “we are at a time here at MCAD when students are ready to engage with a new discourse of social issues, and Rico is bringing many of those issues to the fore in his work. He works in multimedia—across media—which is an exciting thing for students now to contemplate.”

The purpose of the MCAD Gallery is to try to show something “that we think is going to be provocative, inspiring, and educational for the students,” adds Makhholm. Although the primary audience is art students, the MCAD Gallery also aims to present work that resonates in the community as well. Regarding this exhibit specifically, Makhholm says she wanted to bring Rico Gaston and his art to the Twin Cities to open a conversation between art and social issues.

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