

Clifford Owens

I'm New Here

June 26 – August 8, 2025

New York

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present *I'm New Here*, an exhibition of performances, works on paper, and photographs by Clifford Owens. The exhibition will be on view in New York at 520 W. 20th St. from June 26 through August 8, 2025. An opening reception, featuring a new performance work by Owens, will be held on Thursday, June 26 from 6 to 8 PM. Owens will present three additional new performances during the run of the exhibition on Thursday, July 10; Thursday, July 24; and Thursday, August 7.

For three decades, Clifford Owens has questioned the foundational narratives by which contemporary art is seen, exhibited, and historicized. He has become increasingly recognized as a visionary maker and thinker who moves fluidly between genres. *I'm New Here*, organized by curator Jay Gorney, will give viewers the opportunity to experience the many facets of Owens's project in a single space. The exhibition brings together new work with photographs, objects, and drawings made over the entirety of his career. It will include performances commissioned for the occasion of the show and scheduled throughout its run. The artist will continue to emphasize the presence of the audience as a vital, living element in visual art, demonstrating how performance is an indispensable element throughout a broad range of contemporary practices. This takes shape in his ongoing commitment to establishing a radical pedagogy of performance art, one in which the presence of Black artists and intergenerational dialogue are foundational pillars.

Understood in this spirit of outreach, *I'm New Here* is offered as an act of communion and an invitation to gather. It constitutes an acknowledgment of the central role played by the body in many spheres of cultural production. The wall-based works on view are powerful testaments to this theme. Important examples from his *Scrub* and *Pocket Paper* series find Owens confronting legacies of abstraction and painting through actions in which the movement of the body through space leaves behind intimate traces of its contact. The gestures and materials the artist uses to make *Scrub* works, for example, are informed by manual labor he performed as a young man growing up in Baltimore, when he would scrub the marble steps of row houses. By pushing ink and bleach across the surface of the paper, he highlights ways in which the body is always the primary material by which images are produced, as well as ways in which that body is inscribed in systems of class, race, and power.

Each work in *I'm New Here*, whether materialized or impermanent, therefore functions as an index of registers located both inside and outside of art-specific contexts. Collaborative projects, several of which are represented in the show, provide further evidence of the nuanced and flexible approach Owens brings to production. Studio visits by other artists, for instance, become opportunities for shared artmaking rather than isolated instances of social discourse or critique. In one instance, a visit from Joan Jonas resulted in a collaboration in which Jonas dragged Owens's body across large sheets of paper. The charcoal sticks Owens had strapped to his limbs left behind expressionistic linear marks, and like all the works in this show, the photographs documenting the process reveal their own kind of expression, one that encompasses both looking and creating, and that carves

out necessary spaces for both individual voices and collective reckoning.

Clifford Owens (b. 1971, Baltimore) received a BFA from the School of Art Institute of Chicago (1998), an MFA from Rutgers University (2000), and completed the Whitney Independent Study Program (2001). Solo museum exhibitions include *Better the Rebel You Know*, Cornerhouse, Manchester, England (2014); *Anthology*, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY (2011); and *Perspective 173: Clifford Owens*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, TX (2011). Notable group exhibitions include *Flight into Egypt: Black Artists and Ancient Egypt, 1876 – Now*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY (2024); *Every Day: Selections from the Collection*, Baltimore Museum of Art, MD (2019); *Lone Wolf Recital Corp*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2017); and *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2013).

His ongoing, performance-based projects have been widely presented in museums and galleries, including The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; and Brooklyn Academy of Music, NY. Owens was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2020. Public collections include the Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; and The Studio Museum in Harlem, NY.