

VINO'S CARNIVAL OF CERAMIC CURIOSITIES, OR THE CIRCUITOUS PATH TO CALAMITY

MELVINO GARRETTI

January 30–March 27, 2021

Parker Gallery is proud to present its first solo exhibition by Melvino Garretti, the artist's first solo gallery presentation in his native Los Angeles since 1985. The exhibition features exuberantly glazed ceramic sculptures displayed on pedestals and wall-hanging ceramic masks incorporating African textiles, all made within the past year.

A series of nine sculptures present a vividly colored tableaux depicting the spectacles and carnival games commonly found at county fairs and circuses, including: milk bottle toss, lion taming, fire-breathing, dancing elephants and acrobatic clowns. These narrative scenes summon the inner child as a means of subverting a superficial, candy-colored innocence. Lurking just beneath the surface glazes is a somewhat demonic reality. The rituals of carnivalesque games are evocative of the trials and tribulations of daily life.

A group of ceramic masks imagine superhuman alter egos, decorated with shredded textiles, like streamers from a kite. It's not hard to imagine the masks animated by a performer in a fantastical ritual, embodied with the spirit of a mystical deity. Some of the masks are almost diaristic, commemorating cultural calamity and new rituals of human behavior.

In the late 1960's, Garretti worked with Studio Watts and Anna Halprin's San Francisco Dancer's Workshop on an "interracial dance encounter," *The Ceremony of Us*. The work premiered in 1969 at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, not far from where Garretti grew up. The experience inspired increased awareness and sensitivity to his environment, which Garretti continued to explore as a graduate student at the San Francisco Art Institute (1973–76). These performative acts included a mountain of dirt in the SFAI cafeteria which was transformed into a landscape of mud (1975) and dragging a wagon down Columbus Street to the Transamerica Pyramid (*Journey to the Pyramid*, 1976). Since these early actions, Garretti's work has sought to activate the viewer's own subjective experience and self-awareness.

Melvino Garretti (b. 1946 in Los Angeles, CA) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. Solo and two-person exhibitions include *Space Versus Space*, Vernon Gardens, Vernon, CA (2018), *Melvino Garretti and Joe Ray: Aliens Were Astronauts*, PØST, Los Angeles, CA (2016), *Michael Frimkess and Melvino Garretti*, South Willard, Los Angeles, CA (2014) and Brockman Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (1984). Select group exhibitions include *Sculpture from a Distance (Part III)*, Parker Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2020), *African American Artists in Los Angeles: Pathways 1966–89*, California African American Art Museum and Los Angeles Municipal Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2005), *Aesthetics of Graffiti*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA (1978) and *Process Results*, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA (1976).