

Press Release

Rashid Johnson. Birthday Boys

3 November 2026 – 16 January 2027

Hauser & Wirth New York, Wooster Street



New York...This November, Rashid Johnson will present an exhibition of new work that considers the complex relationship between fathers and sons. Including four new mosaic works, a group of suspended sculptural figures known as the 'Exhausted Figures' and one new film, 'Birthday Boys' (2026), the presentation explores tensions between the fundamental imperatives of intimacy and independence, inheritance and self-determination, considering what it means to recognize another person as separate from oneself, even when that person shares one's history, gestures and features.

In the film, Johnson draws on the idea of mirroring to reflect on the shifting relationship between father and son over time, particularly as a child moves into adolescence and increasingly asserts his own identity and prerogatives. The title carries a personal significance for Johnson, who shares his birthday with his son. The work takes as a point of departure the concept of The Mirror Stage, first developed by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to describe a child's early recognition of himself as a distinct individual. This question of how we come to recognize ourselves—and, in turn, how we recognize others—also connects to Hilton Als's essay 'Tristes Tropiques,' from 'White Girls'—Als's 2013 publication—which has been influential to Johnson's thinking. The essay explores the ways we find, project and sometimes lose aspects of ourselves through our relationships with others. Johnson turns these ideas toward the parent, considering the possibility that as a father he must undergo his own process of recognition: learning to see his son not as an extension or reflection of himself, but as a person with independent desires, ideas and ambitions. Through moments of doubling and resemblance, 'Birthday Boys' explores the point at which identification gives way to autonomy and the realization that a child will begin to emerge as a person distinct from a parent.



The four 'Broken Soul' mosaics on view explore these same ideas through the materiality and visual language of the medium. Using mosaic allows Johnson to construct images of apparent unity from disparate pieces, holding together elements that remain distinct even as they form a larger whole. Each new work here features two heads assembled from various fragments of tile and other materials, bringing unique shapes into close proximity. The figures appear intertwined, at times competing for space within the frame, their contours and features merging in ways that make it difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins. The resulting compositions mirror the contradictions inherent in relationships shaped by shared familial experience: the desire for connection alongside the need for space and individuality.

The exhibition also introduces a group of suspended sculptural figures whose elongated, precarious forms suggest bodies caught between movement and collapse. Drawing on the suspended compositions of Alexander Calder and the expressive physicality of Auguste Rodin, these works negotiate a tension between weightlessness and exhaustion, their awkward, seemingly falling gestures evoking both the vulnerability of the body and the emotional complexity of holding oneself—and others—together.

Together, these bodies of work negotiate the relationship between intimacy and independence, suggesting that closeness need not depend on sameness. Instead, the recognition of another person's uniqueness can become its own expression of attachment. 'Birthday Boys' ultimately considers the challenge of allowing someone you love to become fully themselves, beyond the expectations and reflections that first bound you together.

About the artist

Born in Chicago in 1977, Rashid Johnson is among an influential cadre of contemporary American artists whose work employs a wide range of media to explore themes of art history, individual and shared cultural identities, personal narratives, literature, philosophy, materiality and critical history. Johnson received a BA in Photography from Columbia College in Chicago and studied for his masters at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Johnson's practice quickly expanded to embrace a wide range of media—including sculpture, painting, drawing, film making, and installation—yielding a complex multidisciplinary practice that incorporates diverse materials rich with symbolism and personal history. Johnson's work is known for its narrative embedding of a pointed range of everyday materials and objects, often associated with his childhood and frequently referencing aspects of history and cultural identity. Many of Johnson's more recent works delve into existential themes such as personal and collective anxiety, interiority, and liminal space.

On 7 November, 2026, 'A Poem for Deep Thinkers,' Johnson's major mid-career survey exhibition first presented at the Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2025, will open at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Other recent exhibitions include 'Seven Rooms and a Garden. Rashid Johnson + Moderna Museet,' Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden, 2023; 'Rashid Johnson. Nudiustertian,' Hauser & Wirth, Hong Kong, 2023; 'The Chorus,' The Metropolitan Opera, New York NY, 2021; 'Summer Projects. Rashid Johnson,' Creative Time, New York, NY, 2021; 'Rashid Johnson. Capsule,' National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada, 2021; 'The Crisis,' Storm King Art Center, New Windsor NY; 'Rashid Johnson. Waves,' Hauser & Wirth, London, UK, 2020; the touring exhibition 'Rashid Johnson. The Hikers' at the Aspen Art Museum, Aspen CO, the Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico and at Hauser & Wirth, New York, 2019; 'Provocations. Rashid Johnson,' Institute for Contemporary Art, Richmond VA, 2018; 'Rashid Johnson. No More Water' at Lismore Castle Arts, Lismore, Ireland, 2018 and 'Rashid Johnson. Hail We Now Sing Joy' at The Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City MO which traveled to the Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee WI, 2017.

For additional information, please contact:

Andrea Schwan, Andrea Schwan Inc., andrea@andreaschwan.com, +1 917 371 5023

Christine McMonagle, Hauser & Wirth, christinemcmonagle@hauserwirth.com, +1 347 320 8596

Sarah Knight, Hauser & Wirth, sarahknight@hauserwirth.com, +1 615 975 3449

Caption and courtesy information:

Rashid Johnson
Still from 'Birthday Boys,' 2026
© Rashid Johnson
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Broken Soul "Tristes Tropiques"
2026
Ceramic tile, mirror, spray enamel, branded black walnut, oyster shell, oil stick, black soap, wax, bronze
185.42 × 238.76 × 10.16 cm / 73 × 94 × 4 in
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Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Stephanie Powell