



# MONSIEUR ZOHORE

**Monsieur Zohore** is an Ivorian-American artist whose practice investigates the nature of consumption and digestion by conflating domestic quotidian life and labor practices with artistic production. Through performance, painting, video, installation, and sculpture, Monsieur Zohore draws from art historical and queer histories as well as popular culture and his Ivorian-American heritage, deploying systems of humor, economics, religion, and mourning.

He received an MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2020 and a BFA from The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York in 2015. He is currently Assistant Professor of Painting and Printmaking at Virginia Commonwealth University, and lives and works between Richmond, VA, New York, NY, and Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Previous solo exhibitions include *That's Amore*, KDR305, Miami, FL (2022-23); *MZ.25 (My Condolences)*, M+B, Los Angeles, CA (2023); *Les Eternels*, von ammon co., Washington D.C. (2022); *Le Revenant*, De Boer, Los Angeles, CA (2021) and *Tu Rêves*, Jack Barrett Gallery, New York, NY (2021).

His work has been included in group exhibitions at Sperling, Munich, DE (2024); KOW, Berlin, DE (2024); The Baltimore Museum of Art, MD (2023, 2020); Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art, Auburn University, AL (2023); Galerie Mitterand, Paris, FR (2023); Sculpture Center, New York, NY (2022); The Baker Museum, Naples, FL (2022); Pace Gallery, New York, NY (2022); Von Ammon Co., Washington, D.C. (2022); The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, Bowmanville, ON (2022); Yeh Art Gallery, St. John's University, New York, NY (2022); Tick Tack, Antwerp, BE (2022); Institute for Contemporary Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA (2021); Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, NY (2021); Terrault Gallery, Baltimore, MD (2020); and The Columbus Museum of Art, OH (2013). His work will be included in upcoming exhibitions at the Kreeger Museum and the Phillips Collection, Washington D.C.

His work is in the public collections of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., the Baltimore Museum of Art, MD, the Rubell Museum, Miami, FL, The Zuzeum, Riga, LV, The Bunker Artspace, West Palm Beach, FL, Dangxia Art Space, Beijing, CN, Brookfield Collection, New York, NY, The Roux Collection, Panama City, PN, and Marquez Art Projects, Miami, FL.

Born in 1993, Potomac, MD  
Lives and works in Richmond, VA

*artnet*

October 3, 2023

**artnet**

## The Founders of Amanita Have a Big New Gallery in the Old CBGB's Space—and an Even Bigger Vision

We spoke with Caio Twombly and Jacob Hyman, two of the space's founders.

Crowds flooded the old home of famed rock club CBGBs this week. This time, however, revelers were there for the opening of Florence-based Amanita Gallery's new long-term NYC home, and the main attractions were pressed-velvet works by Italian artist Leonardo Meoni.

Caio Twombly—grandson of famed painter Cy Twombly—originally joined forces with Tommaso Rositani Suckert, the great-nephew of Italian writer, artist, and diplomat Curzio Malaparte, in 2017. The two went on to found Amanita in Florence in 2021, aiming to highlight contemporary Italian voices in a city understandably more focused on Renaissance greats. Since that time, Jacob Hyman left a four-year stint in sales at Gagosian to help oversee the business, while Garrett Goldsmith became their Head of Operations. All four parties are partners.

In October 2021, Amanita made its NYC debut with a pop-up group show called "The Loneliest Sport," centered around boxing. Featuring over twenty artists ranging from Jenna Gribbon to Monsieur Zohore, the splashy debut show's focal point was a ring installed in the makeshift gallery's sunken center where they held actual boxing matches.

The Brooklyn Rail

March 2023

## BROOKLYN RAIL

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# Monsieur Zohore with Claude Wampler



Installation view of *Monsieur Zohore: MZ.25 (My Condolences)* at M+B Almont, 2022. Courtesy the artist and M+B.

### Editor's Note:

I invited the artist Monsieur Zohore to discuss his recent exhibition *MZ.25 (My Condolences)* at M+B Almont, which reimagined the format of the solo show as an opportunity to invite ninety-three artists to make a portrait of the artist. In Zohore's choice to redefine the gallery space and the solo show as a freeform space of curation-as-performance, the artist refused reduction and commodification while challenging the inclusive limits of curation. Monsieur Zohore invited the influential performance artist Claude Wampler to discuss the tensions and negotiations presented by the exhibition and recorded the following conversation that also covered the current state of performance, the role of hosting, and the market pressures that seek to overdetermine and simplify artistic practices.

**Wampler:** Which was nice actually. I think, if we are going to talk about the professionalization of the art world and how it's a contaminating factor, the fact that these emails, these invitations, were followed up by friendly text nudges is very much like what I remember New York was when I first moved there. It was like, "Hey we're putting on a show!"

**Zohore:** "Let's put on a show."

**Wampler:** Let's put on a show.

**Zohore:** That's kind of what I was hoping to create with this project. It did really start with me being at a bar and saying "Hey would you make a portrait of me?" or some kind of something; I think the language was "Let's make a portrait within any media you see fit." It can be anything. The idea is that we are challenging the question of representation.

**Wampler:** Right, and whatever a portrait means to you.

**Zohore:** And so initial invitations took place at airports, bars, like "Hey I'm doing this crazy thing and you should do it too," and that's how it all started; but I think I was trying to get to that thing. You know that art world, that 'New York' that you were talking about. You know, like walking down the street and seeing Christo and going to the studio afterward or something like that. He used to be my neighbor, and sometimes he would invite me to his studio when I was young. I've never felt more connected to a system—

**Wampler:** I don't know about you but when I'm teaching, the students always ask me what's the most important thing to do after you graduate and I always say, *community*. Create a community. Stay in touch with your satsang. Do not rely on the structure of the art world to sustain you. Really don't do it. Because, A) it might never happen and B) it's boring as hell. And vicious. Think back to high school, and then one hundred times worse. So you need to have a community where you look at each other's work, make shows and dream up ridiculous shit. Which is how I remember it being, accurately or not, and then, if you were lucky, the art world caught on to what you were doing. It wasn't like you had to have a gallery to create your thing. You were already creating your thing. And then maybe somebody would find out and jump on it.



**Zohore:** And give you space and support to keep doing your thing. Yeah, exactly. I tell my students the same thing. The art world exists in this room right now. Whatever you think the world looks like isn't always the case. If you hate the people you're graduating with, try to make sure you can talk to them the next day or something. Or even if you do hate them forever, who cares?

**Wampler:** But it doesn't even have to be those people here and now. Whomever you determine it to be, y'all have to be self sufficient. Because there's not necessarily a *there* there. There could be many years down the road. Perhaps never will the art world pay attention to you or sustain you.

**Zohore:** You know I met Laurie Simmons at a friend's wedding. And then we stayed in touch through COVID talking on Instagram. And then when I built up the courage to be like, Okay, I guess, let me ask this lady to be in the show, and then she calls me. I'm sitting at a TGI Fridays, in an airport, running down my spiel of, you know, my little baby project. And she's into it and it's really rewarding that there are still no actual limitations in the art world other than the ones in my mind. During COVID, I did so much work like this. Communicating with people, connecting with people on the phone, on Instagram, doing those weird things like karaoke Zoom nonsense; just to maintain my relationships, build new ideas, and communities online. You didn't need to be at some opening for a show in the blue-chip gallery or be doing anything to prove to people that you were worth paying attention to, who cares about a blue chip gallery anyway? The free food is generally not worth it.

**Wampler:** Right. And you don't know if a blue chip gallery will even exist when the waves come. Hopefully we will have our priorities straight! Actually, I was really hoping that the pandemic would sort of decentralize art and the way it's seen, somehow. I was thinking about all the empty schools, office buildings, the stadiums. Stages everywhere!

**Zohore:** I feel spoiled because we met in Baltimore. I think Baltimore did so much more for my career than any of the other cities ever have. I think being there, paying attention, becoming part of that system, being part of the community of artists that we're sharing, connecting, that we're all drunk in a bar somewhere, you know, being able to talk to people, the people that the Mount Royal and Luca Buvoli attracted to Baltimore, like you [Claude] and all the other great artists that showed up that I would take to a bar and get drunk with. That did more for the work I make now and show in these museums. Honestly, the first museum that got really invested in my work was the Baltimore Museum. I met a lot of the curators of the institutions I work with internationally in Baltimore. And the relationships I had in New York and LA have only solidified again once I like, presented all this work that was made in Baltimore.

**Wampler:** Yes. So what I like is that you didn't reject anyone, right?

**Zohore:** No.

**Wampler:** Any piece?

**Zohore:** Nope.

**Wampler:** Any piece, no matter how butt ugly? And, also, you invited some people who aren't necessarily artists who were like "Hey I'd love to do that!" and you were like, "Sure!" So "curating" wasn't happening?

**Zohore:** Yes.

**Wampler:** If you have enthusiasm, if you make an effort, then you will be included.

**Zohore:** I know... her talk questions if everybody is in fact an artist. She's making fun of that Russian—who's the guy that gave a talk called "everybody is an artist?" Whatever, whatever his name was. I literally just was watching that one too, but I can't remember... And, she makes a lot of really interesting points about like, yeah it is not necessarily feasible for absolutely everyone to be an artist. There is an intention that has to be there. I tell my kids every day, it's like the only thing that really makes you an artist is if you wake up in the morning and say that you're an artist to somebody else. And actually, like stick into it every single day. Until you pass out, pass away.

**Wampler:** Well, I think being an artist is kind of like having Type 1 Diabetes—you're going to have it for the rest of your life. And it's a condition that you're just going to have to deal with.

**Zohore:** [*Laughs*]

**Wampler:** I really don't think everyone's an artist. No. I believe that there's a special kind of person that views the world in a very peculiar way and they need to make stuff that doesn't already exist, or obsessively remake the stuff that does. You know. You could ignore the impulse, but to your own detriment. Or you can fully embrace it and take your insulin.

**Zohore:** Get that checked out.

**Wampler:** Yeah, no, I mean it's a condition. It's a condition. Maybe that's a bleak view. But really, the older I get, the more I can see it internalized in people and I'm thinking uh-oh, they have it, and they're doomed! Oh! The other thing I wanted to ask you about was sometimes the gallery, if they're touring somebody through the show, they'll say this is a "Monsieur Zohore show."

**Zohore:** Yes.

**Wampler:** They won't say this is a group show.

**Zohore:** Yes.

**Wampler:** Which is an interesting—

**Zohore:** Yes, we had spent a lot of time talking about this—

**Wampler:** —differentiation. So tell us about that?

**Zohore:** Yeah, I was very clear with the gallery about that. The early language the gallery was trying to use was that this was a curatorial project, which I thought limited my performance to just being the curator of the show. But then we sat down and I explained to them that, yes, the show does take on the form of a curatorial project but that it was also masquerading as that—a solo show masquerading as a group show.

**Wampler:** Or it's a group show masquerading as a solo show.

**Zohore:** For me, that action is my practice. The implication of masquerading, the implication of all these different kinds of misleading, and trickery, and all these different things, are words or ideas that I'm interested in and create in my performances. Questions like: Who's the author here? Who makes what is made? What is the work? Who really owns it? All those different things were definitely part of the idea of *My Condolences* as soon as I had it. We spent a lot of time talking about the language, making sure that they'd be like yes, although he is playing the curator of the exhibition, he is also its author and its subject at the same time.

**Wampler:** Right. I'm a participant, but I'm not a participant that cares so much about that. I can see it for whatever you tell me it is. I appreciate it because I've made similar work, very similar work, where I've, you know *BLANKET*, gone to other artists I wanted to have a reason to talk to and said, "tell me what to do for ten minutes!" And then that becomes MY performance. I made the *Cult of Claude* project. Everyone declared their allegiance to me and my Pomeranian, The Embodiment and offered a piece or performance in order to be in the cult. But anyway, what I'm saying is, I'm very flexible, in terms of what I consider to be authorship and I don't have a tight grip on my own work, necessarily. But I'm wondering if any of the people participating took issue with the fact that you were claiming it as a solo show?

**Zohore:** I don't think so—



**Wampler:** Okay. So I also wanted you to talk a little bit about this: maybe you're not even aware of this happening, because you're on the other side of it, but your request kind of opened up the possibility that the artists make work outside of their normal practice.

**Zohore:** Yes

**Wampler:** When I go around and look at the show (I know some of the artists' work and what they usually make) there is a kind of freeing quality where like, you know, when you make a gift for somebody for Christmas? You're not so concerned about whether it's good art or not. And sometimes those things end up being more beautiful and interesting than the work you normally make. So it has this really wonderful freedom. I'm making this gift for this person, this portrait or this tribute. It totally freed up some of the artists in the show where I felt like some of the work was really good because it is outside the norm of what they usually make. There's something adorable about that. I don't know, I, for myself, in particular, I would never have done what I chose to.

**Zohore:** Will you tell everybody about your piece?

**Wampler:** Yeah well, because the show is called *My Condolences* and because I knew you were staging a funeral for yourself, in a coffin, and it was a kissing booth coffin! People could come and give you a kiss through a glory hole in the coffin and they transformed the gallery office into a funeral home... That was really cool. It was quite austere and moving actually. Felt like a funeral. And they only let a few people in at a time so it had a hushed quality... Oh yes, okay, so I knew you were going to do that performance and because there's something about Black folks when memorializing someone's death, especially those who've died in an untimely manner. There's such incredible artwork, if you can call it that, that comes out of that - the face of the dead printed on the petals of roses or there are these really cool...

**Zohore:** The airbrushed t-shirts!

**Wampler:** The airbrushed t-shirts!

**Zohore:** All of the reproductions of the person's likeness on everything.

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**Zohore:** All of the reproductions of the person's likeness on everything.

**Wampler:** On everything. A cake with the passed person's face on it.

**Zohore:** Where I'm from in Cote d'Ivoire, we make wax prints specifically for that person's funeral that sometimes features their face on it. The family orders this custom wax cloth for the entire family to wear for the various events and ceremonies surrounding the funeral. The way it works is you get your fabric, and you have an outfit made, and you only wear it for the funeral, and sometimes the cloth has the deceased's face incorporated in the pattern.

**Wampler:** That's incredible. I am not a historian, but in my experience, Black folks really do it up right in that particular way that you're describing.

**Zohore:** Yeah, I think it's cute!

**Wampler:** So what I was saying was you were staging your own funeral. So, of course, I wanted to do the funeral flowers, and so I did. I decided to be *the florist* and rethink what funeral flowers are. I wanted it to be a daily performance, bringing a new arrangement every day; freshen up the old arrangements and take them away when they are done, replace them with new ones, keeping the status of the space as a funeral home. Plus they were a gift to you. I ended up working with flowers, which I love to do, but in a much more sculptural than a floral design-y way. I don't think I would have conceived of this project without the freedom of this fun group show that is actually your show! So it took the pressure off of me professionally to have to do the Claude thing, and then I got to do something that now has become the Claude thing!

**Zohore:** Yeah, when I was designing the show, I was having a lot of conversations with other artists, especially the ones who don't have more expansive practices like ours. They end up doing the same thing all the time. The conversations would always get to a point where the artists would mention how they wish they could make something else, you know. At this point, their market forces, whatever, the art world, force them to continue making the same thing. So when I was talking with people like that I'd make sure to tell them that this was an opportunity for them to experiment, make something that wasn't going to be scrutinized by the market, and without having an audience to say, Wait, when did you change up your whole practice? What was the other question you had about Africa?

**Wampler:** Oh the difference between, yeah—the pretty vast difference between the figuration of the Black male in America, and then what that means to somebody coming from a completely different place, the African National direction; and how immediately everything, everybody assumes that all, all racist rules apply to the color of your skin. You have to sort of absorb all of it. It does become your reality, whether it is or not.

**Zohore:** Yeah.

**Wampler:** Because there are assumptions there?

**Zohore:** Being in this country kind of renders me a Black American, you know, because I mean I was personally born here, but even my parents who aren't born in this country, are rendered a Black American by being in this country, you know before they open their mouth and you hear their accent. Before they say anything, they're immediately misidentified—

**Wampler:** I don't know what that means for the show, but it's definitely a part of the conversation when making the show. It's almost as if you are on the outside looking in too. You have to shift your sensibilities to frame your own work in the way that you are perceived?



**Zohore:** It's really interesting having to maintain this archive of references, of the kind of code-switching that needs to happen in order for me to understand what's happening inside of some of these works, and also understand how it's separate from what I like and what I have to deal with inside of these kinds of misunderstandings that happen a lot. You know, the Kayode Ojo piece, for example, in the show— that kind of sparkly spangly one in the sculpture room, he made that on as a joke about, a misunderstanding of my Ivorianess, through these kinds of fast fashions—which I loved. It's really, it's very important, the difference, for me in the end.

**Wampler:** But it's not like you have a choice.

**Zohore:** Exactly, for it to not be important or not. I mean, I guess I do have a choice.

**Wampler:** Ehhh I don't know but...

**Zohore:** I've never met anybody that it's unimportant to, but I remember even when it wasn't important to me, you know, when, being African was the scariest thing that I could possibly be, and I was trying to be anything but that. It was, I guess, it became a choice at the end of the day, because I was trying not to be. You know it was something so important to me that I needed to get rid of—something more important about me, but now I don't know. I don't know. I think... I got stoned earlier. So now, I'm—

[*Laughter*]

**Zohore:** So I'm thinking a little differently now. [*Laughter*] But yeah, I mean, what do you think? How does it, how does it appear in the show for you? What happens?

**Wampler:** Well, to be totally honest, and this can be cut, but I think in a way you feel somehow obliged to take that on, thematically.

**Zohore:** Oh, the African?

**Wampler:** No.

**Zohore:** Or the portraiture?

**Wampler:** The African American male you.

**Zohore:** Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's true.

**Wampler:** And how it works right now, in the art world especially. The image of being that and how it works, or doesn't. There's almost an obligation to include that, not that you always do in your work. I'm not saying that, but I'm just saying for this project, it feels a little obligatory.

**Zohore:** Maybe that feeling of obligatoriness is coming from the show. I wanted to blow open this Black figuration thing. I wanted to really get down and dirty about it and look at what it meant for people to be representing someone that looks like me, you know, and what it meant for collectors to be buying this, buying a lot of it. This was on my mind and my target throughout the whole project on top of wanting to build community. I was really trying to pull the pants off of this procedural we are acting in right now. And so, I think that my kind of blonde ambition, my aim is what maybe comes across in the parallel universe where the same show happens, I want people to be kind of not trapped or stuck, but aware of the idea that in whatever you're making for My Condolences, you're representing a body that is othered; or that is under some kind of scrutiny because that's how it feels when I make something, you know? It's like even when I'm not showing my face or whatever, and you're not seeing my body in the work, I know that other people are.

**Wampler:** So it's not Black enough?

**Zohore:** Yeah, I mean I, I don't know what the criteria is but I'm pretty damn sure that my work is Black enough. But you know, but I don't think it's celebrating or communicating the same kind of ideas that you would experience inside of this figuration thing—nor the kinds of work that I'm seeing collected by people of color. That's not to say that everybody's buying the same thing. It's to say that I see the work that is being sold, and I see who's buying it, and I see myself specifically left outside of that.

**Wampler:** And what do you think about collectors that are collecting just because it is Black figuration?

**Zohore:** Which is also funny, which I think because we've debunked that in *MZ.25*. There are so many Black figurative portraits in the show, you know, and a lot of them are going to go unsold. I think there's also now the stigma of my critique of the institution on these works, so the artists aren't going to experience the frenzy of them being collected for that reason which proves that the system—

**Wampler:** Ooooh yeah because nobody can talk about it. They're scared to discuss. They will say the wrong thing guaranteed.

**Zohore:** Yeah. Exactly.

**Wampler:** What a minefield.

**Zohore:** So when was the last time you saw a performance?

**Wampler:** Two weeks ago, I saw this really amazing performance. An artist who did this really weird and wild piece. He was inside a coffin, and there was like a glory hole—

**Zohore:** [*Laughs*]

**Wampler:** —but not where his cock is. Where his mouth is. You get to smooch him. If you're insane or had COVID recently, you got to smooch him! And his lips were warm! It was so cool. Such a good piece.

**Zohore:** That was pretty cool, wasn't it?

**Wampler:** It was really anal—a juicy anus.

**Zohore:** I was giving a juicy anus, a plump and juicy anus.

**Wampler:** Plump anus. Oh yeah, those are two good words together. So no, I haven't seen much performance in the last many years because it terrifies me. There is nothing more frightening than live bodies trying really hard to do something. Painful.

**Zohore:** We saw that kind of miserable performance together in Baltimore. All that time ago, with those two dancers.

**Wampler:** I believe in those two artists though you'll have to remind me of their names.

**Zohore:** I know their names... I'm just not saying their names out loud because we've called it miserable and we're recording ourselves.

**Wampler:** But I do believe in them! I really believe in their project, but that doesn't make it more tolerable. That's the problem with performance—you can be all in and really believe in the artists, believe in the project, believe in the concept, believe in the fabrication, the performance and the mount—everything—still, UNBEARABLE. I would even say that probably about my own shows. If I had the opportunity or the distance to sit there and watch them.

**Zohore:** Same, same, and I think sometimes the better performances, in my opinion, leverage that unbearably.

**Wampler:** That's what I'm always trying to do. Trying to relieve the unbearable nature of it by planting fake audience members next to real audience members. That takes the stress off of the viewer because they have some choreographed spontaneity guiding them. Like oh, we can laugh! Oh, we can sing along! Oh, we can leave?

**Zohore:** Yeah.

**Wampler:** Oh, we can make out with the person next us! Oh, we can eat fried chicken!

*[Laughter]*

**Zohore:** Whatever it is.

**Wampler:** Yep.



**Zohore:** Yeah, exactly. I think my strategy always is to make use of an action that already exists in the world. I want to make the audience feel so comfortable knowing that they're participating in something they've already done before so that they don't have to realize they're participating in the performance at all. When I hire frat guys to organize a beer pong tournament, you know, everybody knows how to play beer pong. Everybody thinks frat guys are hot—

**Wampler:** No, I do not.

**Zohore:** Well, you throw, you throw a ball into a cup it's really—

**Wampler:** And frat guys are hot?

**Zohore:** Frat guys are disgusting and hot at the same time. I think I don't know if it's the hotness that's attractive or if it's the disgustingness that's attractive.

**Wampler:** I think it's the arrogance.

**Zohore:** Yeah. Yeah. And then you put them in a toga—

**Wampler:** Everything you love to hate. Wait, hate to love?

**Zohore:** Yeah, exactly. And it allows you to diffuse your hatred of the game itself or what that culture is like, onto those other bodies, onto those frat bodies that are in these togas. And it's like, oh, yeah, it's not that I know how to play beer pong. It's that I only know how to do it because these people exist, and that's not true. You know how to do it because you know how to do it. And you just allow these other people to be your scapegoats

**Wampler:** And also, you can culturally appropriate frat boys. They won't take offense.

*[Laughter]*

**Wampler:** It's one of the few groups that are left that won't take offense if you appropriate their culture!

**Zohore:** I don't think they know how to spell "appropriate" half of the time or could realize that it was happening to them. You know? I remember when I did that piece, they were just all thrilled to be like, wait, I'm getting paid to drink beer? And, like, flirt with girls?

**Wampler:** Well, that is frat life.

**Zohore:** Yeah.

**Wampler:** Greek life. You've described it right there. I mean my God, the fundraising. They're rich. They own fancy real estate and they're able to give money to the brothers for tuition, for housing, for drinking and vomiting.

**Zohore:** In my research, I realized that frats and sororities are just elaborate development schemes. You meet at the college at these parties that are paid for. And then you get married. And then you start donating money to the institution, the place where you fell in love, and you bring your kids back, and so the school is just—

**Wampler:** A breeding ground. At UVA there are certain times of the year when the threat of Greek lifers parading about is intense. They are all dressed alike. It is some weird mating ritual. Like, what planet are these strange creatures from? Where the smaller ones can't walk in their shoes and yet they still wear the shoes. Where the larger ones assume they are irresistible.

**Zohore:** Honestly, art fairs are the same thing.

*[Laughter]*

**Wampler:** Yeah. All the same. We're all animals trapped in mating rituals. It's plumage. Bad plumage, good plumage, big plumage, micro plumage...

**Zohore:** The only thing I miss about the experience of being in New York and seeing performances, period. I don't have the opportunity to go be miserable somewhere looking at somebody do something asinine. It's so few and far between, especially because performance is now shifting to the entertainment space. Institutions are hiring nonperformance artists, artists who don't make performances to make entertainment.

**Wampler:** There are so many people that make really good performances, and yet there's this sort of recent, contemporary tradition—well not that recent actually—where you take somebody from outside the opera world, for example. You bring in a famous artist or filmmaker, and you have them direct an opera. I think it's fun, but then it becomes a big focal point of the season and they spend a shit ton of money on it. I just wonder if the opera world, which I'm not that aware of, is offended by that because I'm kind of offended when all of the budget and all of the media is steered toward a famous whomever whose never made a live performance before.

**Zohore:** It goes back to the entertainment. It goes back to the Hamilton of it all. People want to be thoroughly entertained, but by systems that exist outside of that medium. Like musical theater becomes like a music video, and now people are going and pretending like they didn't hate musical theater last week, you know? [*Laughter*] I blame Hamilton for so much of what's happening to performance media right now. And it's like, well, if you don't—

**Wampler:** Or in education. I'm sure for school teachers Hamilton has made their job very difficult. Because now kids need to learn through “rap”.

**Zohore:** I have to literally play hopscotch with these kids to get them to learn about Agamben or something. Instead of buying a ticket, you have to get a t-shirt, or like it has to be able to produce a kind slogan or a catchphrase. Something that can be turned; that can be like trickled down into a Superbowl ad or something at some point. I remember when I first saw Baby Icky at the museum—

**Wampler:** You saw Baby Ikki?

**Zohore:** I saw Baby Ikki live!

**Wampler:** I never caught Baby Ikki.

**Zohore:** It was the last—

**Wampler:** I wanted to be Baby Ikki's nanny so bad.

[*Laughter*]

**Wampler:** I wanted to be Baby Ikki's nanny pushing a giant man-sized stroller.

**Zohore:** It was during the last Whitney Biennial at the old Whitney. And he was programmed into it. It was in the evening. I was at a bar with my friend. That's when another friend of mine runs into the bar and goes, "We are going to the Whitney right now. Baby Ikki is performing!" And I was like, bet. We had to take a subway and cab just to make it on time. We got there and all my friends were like, wait what? This is all that's going to happen? And I'm like, yes, he's not going to do anything. Just goo goo gaga in a diaper and run around the museum for a bit. At some point, they text me, "we left, you enjoy this, whatever that was." And I was like, I'm having the time of my life!

**Wampler:** Would they have liked it if he had waxed first? If it was more realistic?

**Zohore:** If he was maybe bopping around to Baby Shark or like Rihanna or something maybe then it would have been more palatable. But the silence of that room, except for you know, the rattle and like the squishy diaper. I can imagine that to other people that was unbearable.

**Wampler:** God, I really appreciate that. I love that direction of things. Regression! There's nothing worse than when commercial media makes babies more sophisticated. They have them talk, dance with coordination, sing in little suits.

**Zohore:** Or be bosses.

**Wampler:** Or they know all about the economy. I love the reverse.

**Zohore:** The ingenious "Hey, I am a baby, I cannot move. I just learned to walk and that's as much as I can do."

**Wampler:** Or, "Hey, I'm here in front of lots of colors and patterns. I'm here and I just shat myself."

**Zohore:** In undergrad, a friend and I wanted to do this piece where you could drop off your baby at the museum. And it would just be us babysitting all day. Anybody could bring as many kids as possible all day, and they would just be running wild. Clearly no one ever—

**Wampler:** Or you know, what would be even better—doggy daycare.

**Zohore:** Just shit everywhere.

**Wampler:** I had an idea I thought was just brilliant: I would teach a daily dance class in the museum. But like you know, one that's not so difficult, not so rigorous.

**Zohore:** Like a Zumba?

**Wampler:** I don't want to go there. That's trademarked. Yeah. My version of what that is. Get their bodies moving! Send in the husband that isn't really into art, or the grandma who can do a chair version of it, or the kid who's bored out of their mind. I would get all of the strays and I would work their bodies, work their bodies!

**Zohore:** That sounds like Olivia Newton-John. I'm sorry.

**Wampler:** No totally! Legwarmers!

**Zohore:** "Let's Get Physical." The whole thing. Yeah, like, you know, like members and member preview hours, nine o'clock to eight o'clock.

**Wampler:** Every day.

**Zohore:** You could do it twice a day even.

**Wampler:** No I could not.

*[Laughter]*

**Zohore:** Just a beautiful class on that third-floor mezzanine. There's that mirror because you have to walk up the stairs anyway. And people can hear the class through the museum. Oh, that sounds beautiful.

**Wampler:** You want to help me?

**Zohore:** Yes, let's do that. Let's do that. If any museum is reading this, we are very interested in mounting a Jazzercise performance.

**Wampler:** And also, I want to, for the record, announce: if any young artist tries to co-opt this idea, for the record, Claude Wampler came up with it first mother fuckers.

**Zohore:** Exactly, this is in print. Do you remember when I wanted to make all of these performances of me exercising in my house alone, during COVID?

**Wampler:** You and everybody else! No, but I saw some photos of that right?

**Zohore:** Yeah.

**Wampler:** You had a whole gym.

**Zohore:** I had a whole gym set up.

**Wampler:** Flashy lights and...

**Zohore:** The whole thing. I got tracksuits, and I think you said it was some kind of porn.

**Wampler:** It was fitness porn?

**Zohore:** It was fitness porn—I think that was the word you used? Or no it was productivity porn.

**Wampler:** Oh that's what it was!!!

**Zohore:** Productivity porn.

**Wampler:** There was sooooo much productivity porn during the pandemic. I felt so useless. People were writing scripts and filming nature, breathing a sigh of relief that the humans were finally going extinct. Poor nature.

**Zohore:** Making sourdough starter.

**Wampler:** Making sourdough starter! And um, planting victory gardens.

**Zohore:** Victory for who? Whose victory? I don't know her.



**Wampler:** Oh it felt like sweet sweet wartime. Yeah. It felt like back in the day when sexy women went to the factory to make bullets and families were growing victory gardens and shit like that. It had that same flavor.

**Zohore:** Yeah it did definitely have that. We were rationing paper towels. There were rations at the Costco, it did definitely feel like you know, “Bring our boys home!”

**Wampler:** Yes and the clapping! [*Claps*]

**Zohore:** Which they stole from me actually! [*Laughs*] for the record! Also, everybody owes me 25 cents. If you clapped for a frontline worker between the years of 2019 and 2021, you took from my performance which was initially performed at the BMA a year before, and you owe me 25 cents for each time you clapped. Because you know what happened after that? I pitched that same performance to so many institutions. And they said no. I pitched that performance to so many people. And they all said no, because of COVID.

**Wampler:** They're like, “It's been done.”

**Zohore:** And it would require too many people in a room.

**Wampler:** Oh, well, of course. You can't really trademark applause though. Just saying.

**Zohore:** I tried. And I will keep trying...

**Wampler:** It existed before you.

**Zohore:** Exactly.

**Wampler:** And it will for a long time after you.

**Zohore:** I know. I know. But like, so why are people so comfortable doing it? For other people? Not for me? [*Laughs*]

**Wampler:** That is a good question.

**Zohore:** Exactly. If it already exists. Why can't we do it? You know, I really hope that now that we're pretending that COVID's over, you and my little kids will hopefully invigorate other freaks to be doing whatever kind of nonsense performance art that doesn't necessarily need high production value, or whatever. Just, you know, let's go back to like Sharon Hayes with a megaphone on the street.

**Wampler:** Boob curtains?

**Zohore:** Yeah. Valie Export.

**Wampler:** Yeah!

**Zohore:** Let's come back to Valie Export boob curtains. But, I don't see performances anymore at all. You know how you can always see when a student has the performance bug in their body, I will be like, Oh, I just saw you move your hand, talking about this boring thing that you're talking about. And that hand gesture was so much more exciting. And every time you talk about it, you do this weird thing with your body, whatever. So maybe you should have worked it out physically. And they look at me like I just tried to slap their mother! They're like recoiling from the idea because there's this atmospheric pressure on them to be palatable, which I think is caused by this accessibility of painting or whatever.

**Wampler:** There are people that are making performances where I just feel like, "Why would you ever make a performance? You have absolutely no skills."

**Zohore:** No.

**Wampler:** To mount, to conceive, to activate something live—there's like no skills. And yet they feel like performance is just there for the taking. Just go and flop around. I mean even flopping around takes a certain amount of skill.

**Zohore:** A je ne sais quoi.

**Wampler:** You know what I mean?

**Zohore:** Exactly. No.

**Wampler:** I feel like performance is at the bottom of the hill. The things that didn't have the strength to climb up, just rolled down and ended up sitting at the muddy muddy bottom. That's why performance is so fragile. Because at some point, everybody and their grandma was making a performance or calling it a performance, and then it got all water logged. I know what you mean. There's a young artist or a student that's clearly on the performance track, but they would never ever dare. And then there are people that are performing and you're like, "How dare you!"

**Zohore:** Yeah.

[*Laughter*]

**Zohore:** Honestly, I mean, I feel like I have to lead by example. This is what education is about, right? You're supposed to see those "How dare you" performances. And then that's supposed to fuel you to make something else. I think what happened is I saw a bunch of objects at Dia:Beacon, and I was like, Ew, why the fuck are people making THINGS? I can do performance instead. I can, like, literally twist my wrist and elicit the same response as one of these giant, heavy metal sculptures. So I went that route, and I was pissed, you know? I was wondering what it was gonna take for people to start respecting the craft of performance again, enough to give the people who want to engage with it an avenue to do so; that will foster that deep love for this type of viewership. Because when my body's not there, that means there's more room for someone to put up a painting. And there's nothing standing in front of that painting, for the people trying to see it and for people trying to buy it,

**Wampler:** It's a ruse. Come see these paintings but really just to watch me do this! I hope you know you're a model of success right now.

**Zohore:** Well, I hope I can use that model of success as a conduit to host other people, to follow these ideas. Like we were talking about how my invitation to produce in the show gave people a pass to explore making work more playful or making work inside of specifications; that existed outside of their practice that made them, that took a chance, that took a leap, did something. I was really hoping to be able to host those kinds of spaces, that kind of space with the show at M+B.

**Wampler:** Yeah, Benjamin Trigano is awesome. This is not necessarily his territory, but he is so curious and so delighted. He's wonderful.

**Zohore:** He's wonderful. I love him. He was offered, when we first talked about this I offered him a smaller project, a very small performance that I will not describe because y'all hoes will steal it—it's that good. But he thought it was too smart for Los Angeles and wanted something bigger. And I was like, well, here you go! And look at this, now two years later, you know, we're still here smiling, you know, and it worked. Nobody took the chance on this, and to have someone who really doesn't understand the kind of history and language of performance, but is willing to take the chance on it is a miracle.

**Wampler:** Well you know, what you have in common with Benjamin is generosity. There's a generosity in the invitation that you extended. And there's generosity in his extension of his invitation to you even though he didn't know what the hell he was getting himself into. It's pure generosity.

**Zohore:** I think the origin of my practice extends from that, with my mother being a host/caterer person, you know? Like watching her throw parties and effortlessly moving through all of these stressful tribulations, like the fire, the people, the seating, the this, the that; and watching all of these offerings that she provides to her audience and then the way that they consume these things, in the same way that I offer my body to be consumed in this coffin or in any of the other ways. You know, it's because of Benjamin's relationship to hospitality that he also can see that and is able to make space for it. That's the language he understands—the hosting and the generosity. And I hope that our dear readers find a sense of generosity next time they come across some old man in a diaper in a museum. I don't know, maybe if we can get anything out of this article, it's bringing Baby Ikki back.

**Wampler:** Bring Baby Ikki back Mr. Smith!

**Zohore:** Yeah, bring Baby Ikki back!

ARTnews  
February 17, 2023

# ARTnews

## Scenes from Frieze Los Angeles's VIP Preview

BY **FRANCESCA ATON**  February 17, 2023 2:33pm



Photo : River Callaway for WWD and ARTnews

Monsieur Zohore at Frieze LA VIP preview held at Santa Monica Airport on February 16, 2023 in Santa Monica, California.



Artnet  
January 27, 2023

# artnet

## Wet Paint in the Wild: Artist Monsieur Zohore Rode Out His L.A. Gallery Opening Inside a Bespoke Coffin-Turned-Kissing Booth

The artist takes us through a week in his life.

by Annie Armstrong • January 27, 2023



Monsieur Zohore's absurd, irreverent artwork tends to steal the show wherever it's on view. While the artist is best known for his paintings on paper towels and his confrontational, campy performances, Zohore's work often makes people laugh at first, then realize that these pieces are searing satires of deeply troubling racial realities in America.





A lot of people thought I had a death wish when I told them I was trying to get 93 artists to make portraits of me, to which I would respond "No, I have a death wish because my contribution to the show is a coffin that is also a kissing booth."



Planning meetings with Tess from the gallery all took place at a Lisa Vanderpump establishment because why not? You know you would too if you could. Here we are in front of Sur.



If all of this wasn't enough chaos I decided to crank out a few more of my paper towel paintings just for shits and gigs.



This was the most innovative install I have ever experienced. Benson from the gallery had a solution for every problem, like how to reheat pizza at lunch.



A long day wouldn't be complete without a long dinner with my two favorite French clowns, Benjamin Triggano and Olivier Babin. Meals with them are always dinner and a show.





A show of 93 portraits meant 93 sittings. Here I am after posing for Marianne Simnet at Hollywood Forever Cemetery.



Closed out this day with a bougie sushi dinner with Cameron Patricia Downey, who flew in from Minneapolis for the show.



Back at the gallery on the last day of install and it's go big or go home, like this massive Fawn Rogers video sculpture. Pro Tip: Track suits from Target make your ass look great.



Had to move the studio outside...for my hangover after having too many bougie sushi martinis at dinner last night.



But here comes my bestie Jo Messer to the rescue. She always knows exactly what I need to get through the day.



You haven't lived till you give a lecture in a coffin you built for yourself.



Install is finally over and I go look for a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T with Lakela Brown.



I never thought my last supper would be vegan tacos in L.A. with Sandy Williams IV, Aaron Fowler, LaKela Brown, and Claude Wampler, but I can't say I mind.

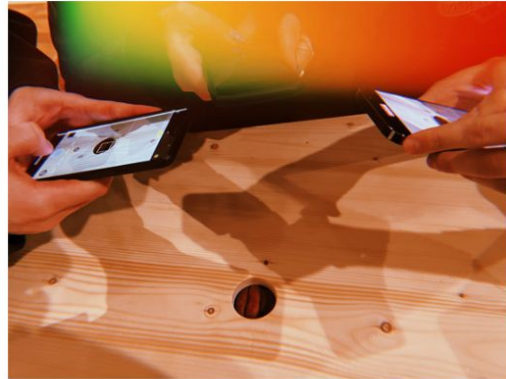




Claude Wampler told me It's bad luck to not buy a new outfit for your opening so we had to go shopping.



And it's even worse luck to not have you fit cosigned by the baddest chick in the room. Thank god Christina Ine-Kimba Bolye waltzed in just in time.



I hope you didn't think I was kidding when I said I built myself a coffin that is also a kissing booth.



Could have done this piece all day. My only regret is not charging for the privilege of my smooches.



Performance is over and it's finally time to party. Nicole Nadeau and Jade Catta-Preta gas me up as I wait for my celebratory special chocolate to kick in.



Not sure who took this picture but bless them for making sure I looked my best.



My chocolate finally hits and I decided to spend the rest of my opening rolling around on the floor. Thank god Lucy Bull was down.



Nothing is better for a hangover than gossiping with Claude Wampler over lobster.



This was my first time going to the beach in L.A. and I have to say it was worth the wait... even if I had to simulate my own death to get there.



*Cultured*  
January 30, 2023

## CULTURED

### The Best Black Art Shows in Los Angeles Right Now

With the start of Black History Month and Frieze around the corner, the city presents an array of diverse and dynamic exhibitions by Black creatives.

Despite a gloomy, wet, and rainy start to 2023, Los Angeles is beginning February and Black History Month with sunshine and a diverse array of art exhibitions, symbolizing a hopeful and strong year ahead.

Another notable show is "MZ.25 (My Condolences)," an exhibition curated by Monsieur Zohore at M + B gallery. The hybrid solo/group exhibition explores various interpretations of Black representation and will include subsequent performances during its run through Feb. 18. "Who Am I If I Don't Represent," a solo show by Glenn Hardy Jr. at Charlie James Gallery on view through Feb. 11 also centers Black bodies and representation through a dynamic series of paintings highlighting Black joy, leisure, and simple quotidian life. Charlie James's second location presents, "JA – RT – LA – 23," an exhibition of plaster-cast sculpture works from John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres in addition to new works that were made during their recent residency at the gallery. The artists have been working together since 1980 to highlight Black and Brown subjects from their native South Bronx community. The pair are true pioneers of intentional multicultural representation, a topic that the art industry continues to navigate today.



*Bmore Art*  
December 7, 2022

# Bmore Art

## Rush: Ritualized Assimilation, Beer Pong, and a Monsieur Zohore Performance at NADA

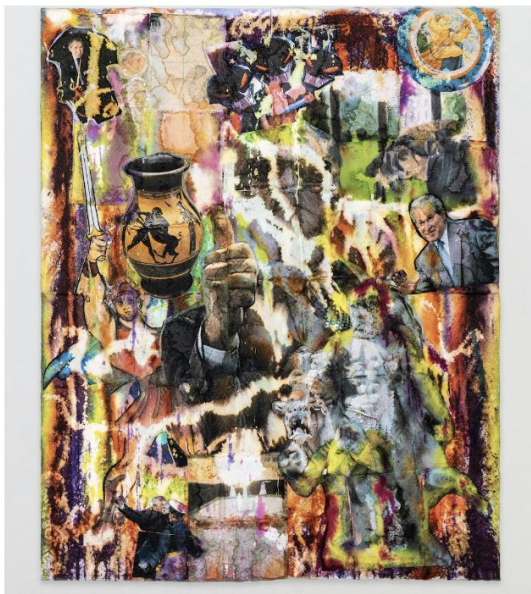
Photo Essay Documenting a Miami Art Fair Performance courtesy of de boer



A group of eight young white men show up, all handsome in a Southern kind of a way, all wearing togas. Their procession weaves through the crowd, causing a gentle stir. Like Greek pallbearers, they carry a long white table, complete with Corinthian columns for legs, through the fair and then into the garden, where they begin setting up red plastic cups. I found out later that the table is eight feet long, 24 inches wide, and 27.5 inches tall, regulation-size for a Beirut tournament, a college pastime and competition widely known as Beer Pong.



de Boer gallery booth at NADA 2021 featuring paintings by Monsieur Zohore



Monsieur Zohore, Zero To Hero, 2021, c/o De Boer Gallery



Monsieur Zohore, MZ.22 Rush, 2021, NADA Miami 2021, c/o de boer gallery





Monsieur Zohore, *MZ.22 (Rush)*, Performance, Nada Miami 2021. Courtesy of the artist and de boer gallery, Los Angeles, CA, photo Harry Griffin

A group of eight young white men show up, all handsome in a Southern kind of a way, all wearing togas. Their procession weaves through the crowd, causing a gentle stir. Like Greek pallbearers, they carry a long white table, complete with Corinthian columns for legs, through the fair and then into the garden, where they begin setting up red plastic cups. I found out later that the table is eight feet long, 24 inches wide, and 27.5 inches tall, regulation-size for a Beirut tournament, a college pastime and competition widely known as Beer Pong.

This is aberrant art fair behavior, which means it must be art. Miami club music swells across the garden, and random arts patrons, recruited earlier by the group of men inside the fair, line up to play America's favorite drinking game with the boys in togas.

Welcome to *MZ.22 (Rush)*, a performance created by Monsieur Zohore, a recent MICA MFA graduate and friend of BmoreArt. It turns out that the eight young men are hired models, selected by the artist with the help of local Miami event agent Beth Accardi and sourced through [de boer gallery](#), the LA-based space representing Zohore's work at NADA this year. The gallery, run by David DeBoer, mounted a sold-out booth of Zohore's signature paper towel paintings, teeming with bold liquid color and appropriated historical and pop-cultural references, but the performance was an integral part of their display.

"I reached out to a casting agent and said I was looking for models to play very white, very American, very bro-ish but loveable college-age guys, kind of like puppies," Zohore says by phone before flying back from Miami. "I was expecting models that I would have to train, but when these boys showed up, they were already exactly in character as themselves. None of them knew each other before the performance, but they all became friends that day, like a real fraternity. We just added beer and togas. It was beautiful."



detail from Greece Lightning, 2021

Zohore says this particular body of work has been in process for about three years, and the performance was conceived as an essential part of the series from the start. "I don't think the paintings should exist by themselves," he says. "They're designed to function in context with performance and action." He explained that de boer gallery provides historical dialogue and supplementary materials for the collectors and institutions who buy the work so that they can properly activate it.

Inside the fair, Zohore's works reference ancient Greece and hetero-normative American college Greek Life. The largest work, *Greece Lightning*, 2020, marries images of a youthful John Travolta with Raphael's *School of Athens*, 1509-11. All of the large and mid-sized works in the series reference fraternity culture, including images from the film *Animal House* (1978), political and popular celebrities, and Greek pottery and statues, in order to explore "the psychosexual conundrum that lies at the intersection of academia and entertainment." Painterly with drips of bold color and bleach, Zohore's paintings manage to be both graceful and absurd, using paper towels as a spongy textured branded surface for poured paint as well as a material reference for late capitalist consumerism and waste.

"There's always a performance happening, whether you're looking at a painting or throwing a ping pong ball," the artist laughs. For Zohore, the combination of theatrical participatory performance with objects has long been essential, with disparate media working in tandem. In *Rush*, Zohore's performance and painting explore "the lascivious practices inherited from ancient Greek academic culture and pokes at ritual assimilation glamorized through popular Hollywood characters."





Zohore says that, after they changed into the togas, the eight young men were instructed to wander the art fair as a group, interacting with people in a jovial manner, flirting and horsing around in a non-threatening way, with the goal of signing people up to play in the beer pong competition. “The beauty of the performance is that they all had an amazing time because they were all so naturally in their element,” Zohore says. “The boys were able to be so natural, and anyone who wanted to participate could do so without breaking the fourth wall.” The actors were instructed not to interfere with any business going on at the fair, to keep consent at the center of each interaction, but to enjoy themselves socializing, and clearly they did.

After an hour of circulating the fair, they returned to the gallery booth to pick up the table, forming a procession as they carried it out to the garden. For the artist, having the beer pong table fabricated at regulation size, as well as finding the right columns and marbling on the surface, was a way to bridge the space between paintings and performance and create a sense that two disparate worlds were colliding: “I wanted to make a fictional ancient Greek beer pong table, a specific link between ancient Greek philosophy and modern fraternity culture, to show that they have more in common than one would think: a bunch of privileged white men drinking and holding forth, a Dionysian ritual.”

The game was boisterous and joyful and boozy, the way a fraternity party can be at best, with the audience participating and also observing. For Zohore, it was important that the audience be critical of the performance and its underlying culture, while also accepting complicity. “We are all participants in full late-capitalism art-market insanity, so we need to really be critical of ourselves,” Zohore says. “Most of us come to fairs to do the same things, but these kind of guys are typically not invited.”

Zohore says that he couldn’t have asked for better actors and audience, or Miami weather, and is filled with gratitude and enthusiasm after the performance. “The art fair is such an organized space of chaos, so it was wonderful to intentionally add more chaos to it, and see the beauty unfold under those palm trees. Eleanor Antin, eat your heart out.”





Monsieur Zohore, MZ.22 (Rush), Performance, Nada Miami 2021, Courtesy of the artist and de boer gallery, Los Angeles, CA, photo Harry Griffin







Monsieur Zohore, BoysWillBeBoys, 2021, deboer gallery, Los Angeles, CA







Monsieur Zohore, MZ.22 (Rush), Performance, Nada Miami 2021, Courtesy of the artist and de boer gallery, Los Angeles, CA, photo Harry Griffin





Monsieur Zohore, MZ.22 (Rush), Performance, Nada Miami 2021. Courtesy of the artist and de boer gallery, Los Angeles, CA, photo Harry Griffin



*White Hot Magazine*

December 2022



## NADA Miami, presented by the New Art Dealers Alliance, concluded the 20th anniversary edition



Miami gallery Jupiter Contemporary presented works by Ivorian-American artist Monsieur Zohore, with one work bought by a collection in France. Swivel Gallery, New York, sold three large paintings from Amy Bravo's solo presentation for \$9,200 each, and two sculptures for \$3,500 each. Nina Johnson, another Miami gallery, sold two works by Rob Davis for a total of \$9,000, and four works by Patrick Dean Hubbell, including one to collector and philanthropist Jorge M. Pérez for \$14,000, and two works by Yasue Maetake for \$6,000 and \$7,500.

Curated Spotlight by Joeonna Bellorado-Samuels Shines

Courtesy of Alycia Kravitz/CKA.

Curated Spotlight highlighted eight solo presentations by exhibiting galleries and quickly became among the crowd-favorites at NADA Miami 2022.

NADA Miami 2022 Curated Spotlight participants included: Amy Bravo presented by Swivel Gallery, New York; Nandi Loaf presented by King's Leap, New York; Lee Maxey presented by Olympia, New York; Nep Sidhu presented by Patel Brown, Toronto; Sienna Smith presented by Chela Mitchell Gallery, Washington D.C.; Pablo Gómez Uribe presented by PROXYCO Gallery, New York; Joe Zaldivar presented by Tierra del Sol Gallery, Los Angeles; and Monsieur Zohore presented by JUPITER Contemporary, Miami Beach.



ARTnews  
December 3, 2022

## ARTnews

### See Inside the Exclusive Art Show Hosted On a Landmark Stiltsville House In Biscayne Bay



The Bay Chateau Stiltsville house in Biscayne Bay, Florida where the "Stiltsville" pop-up art show was held on December 1, 2022.

HARRISON JACOBS/ARTNEWS

If context is everything in art, how does placing an art show in the middle of the sea change our experience of the work? That's the obvious question posed by **New York's Half Gallery**, which hosted the second iteration of one-day Miami Art week pop up *Stiltsville* Thursday.

If nothing else, it made for quite the adventure for the 130 collectors, artists, and art world hangers-on (including yours truly) that braved the two-hour sea journey to the Bay Chateau, one of six houses still standing in Stiltsville. With guests traveling throughout the morning, the weather alternated between clear, bright sun and a steely downpour with gusts of powerful wind, until the boat reached its far-out destination for a genial afternoon of art, swimming, and sun.

Stiltsville is a collection of houses built in Biscayne Bay, off the coast of Miami, in the 1930s. For decades, the houses, of which there were 27 at peak, **were a major nightlife attraction**, featuring restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and gambling houses. Illicit activity hidden from prying eyes was the allure. The surviving houses have become landmarks in Biscayne National Park.

“I think traveling via boat with a small group of other art lovers is more unique than bumping into someone at a fair,” Half Gallery’s director Erin Goldberger said in a statement.

That’s an understatement. Between the mildly treacherous sea journey, a healthy amount of cocktails, and the convivial air from the many friends and family of the artists and gallery present, it was a unique experience indeed.



Photo : Justin Namon/Courtesy of Half Gallery

Some of the artists presented works on view at the fairs, like Monsieur Zohore whose *Won't Go Down, 1836-2022* (top left) was from a series shown at NADA.



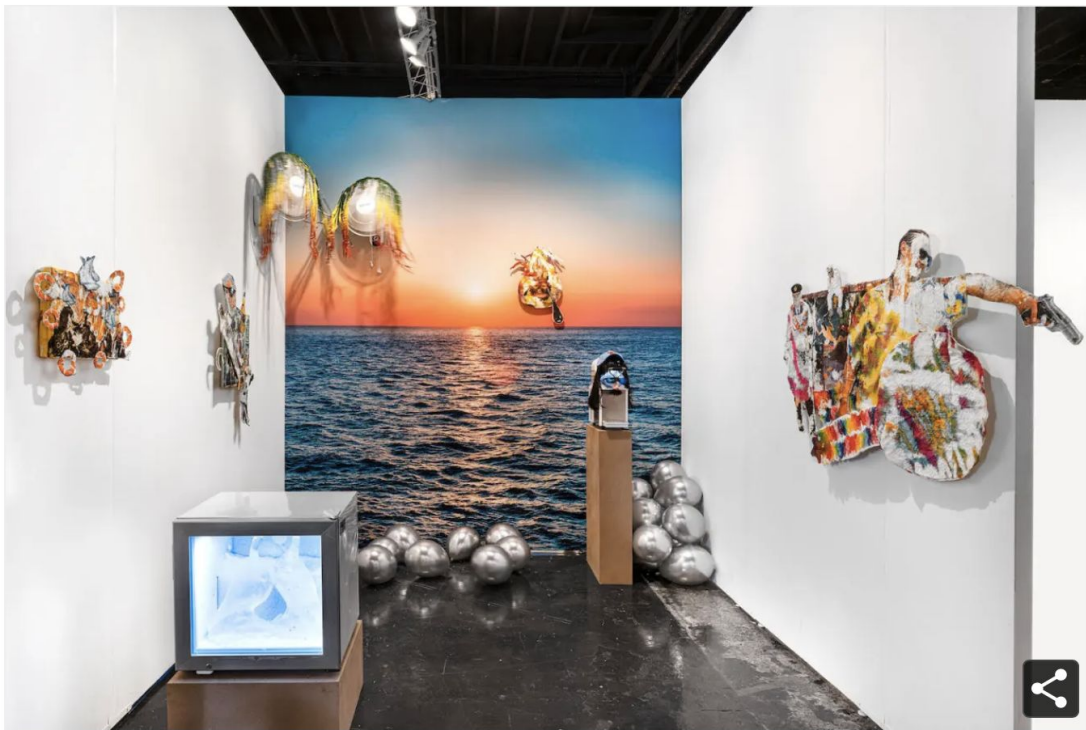
ARTnews  
December 1, 2022

# ARTnews

## The Best Booths at NADA Miami 2022

BY HARRISON JACOBS  December 1, 2022 1:50pm

### 1 Monsieur Zohore at Jupiter Contemporary



An installation shot of Jupiter Contemporary's presentation of Monsieur Zohore's *Bon Voyage* .

Photo : Michael R. Lopez/Courtesy of NADA

Miami gallery **Jupiter Contemporary** has an incisive and funny selection of works by Ivorian-American artist Monsieur Zohore. Through found objects, photos printed onto paper towels and affixed to canvases, and even ice sculptures of pigeons, *Bon Voyage* mixes pop culture, art history, and luxury into an unsettling examination of resort culture. During a week when the art world briefly descends on Miami to party, Zohore's work provides an apt and fairly direct intervention.

ARTnews  
October 18, 2022

# ARTnews

## The 5 Best Booths at Paris Internationale



BY SHANTI ESCALANTE-DE MATTEI  October 18, 2022 12:00pm

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### 2 Monsieur Zohore at von ammon co



Photo : Shanti Escalante-De Mattei/ARTnews

Von ammon and co, the Washington, D.C.-based gallery, is presenting a work that might upset some Parisians: *Divine Comedy*, by the Ivorian artist Monsieur Zohore, which depicts the Notre Dame in flames. Composed of paper towels printed with found images, Zohore put together a tableau that asks earnestly, 'what do we spend our money on and why?' In a brief interview at the fair, Zohore described feeling shocked when he saw the sheer amount of money that was raised to repair the Notre Dame in the days, months, and years after portions of church were destroyed in the 2019 fire.

When the world is "on fire" in so many ways, whether because of natural or man-made disasters, that the Notre Dame attracted so much international grief and support is a stunning spectacle, according to Zohore. He made this point with typical cheek by mashing images of the Pope admiring a Lamborghini that was donated in his honor and a Benin bronze that was in France's possession.

artnet  
June 2, 2022

# artnet

Wet Paint pro

## Thief Steals Artwork From the Whitney Biennial, Frank Stella's Son Donates to Ted Cruz to Spite Dad, and More Art-World Gossip

Plus, who sent a cardboard cut-out to represent him at a gala? Which ex-U.S. President has a big art show coming? Read on for answers.

Annie Armstrong, June 2, 2022



Attendees of Alyssa Davis' gala with a cardboard cutout of Monsieur Zohore.

\*\*\* While away in Atlanta for the weekend, your devoted scribe couldn't attend the [ultra-sceney gala](#) hosted by **Alyssa Davis**, nor could artist **Monsieur Zohore**, who sent a cardboard cutout of himself in his stead \*\*\* Though Wet Paint did spot a billboard advertising a show of paintings by former president **George "Dubya" Bush** on view at the **Atlanta Historical Center**, a hypocritical and head-scratching selection of portraits of immigrants in the notoriously warmongering politician's signature brushy, figurative style \*\*\* Meanwhile, back in New York state, **Joan Semmel**, **Arlene Slavin**, and **Joyce Kozloff** absconded out East for the opening of **Eric Firestone's** "Hanging/Leaning: Women Artists on Long Island, 1960s-80s" at the dealer's **Hamptons** location\*\*\*







Artsy  
April 8, 2022



Art Market

# The 10 Best Booths at EXPO Chicago 2022

Brian P. Kelly

Apr 8, 2022 12:06PM

## Half Gallery.

Main Section, Booth 242

With works by Orkideh Torabi and Monsieur Zohore

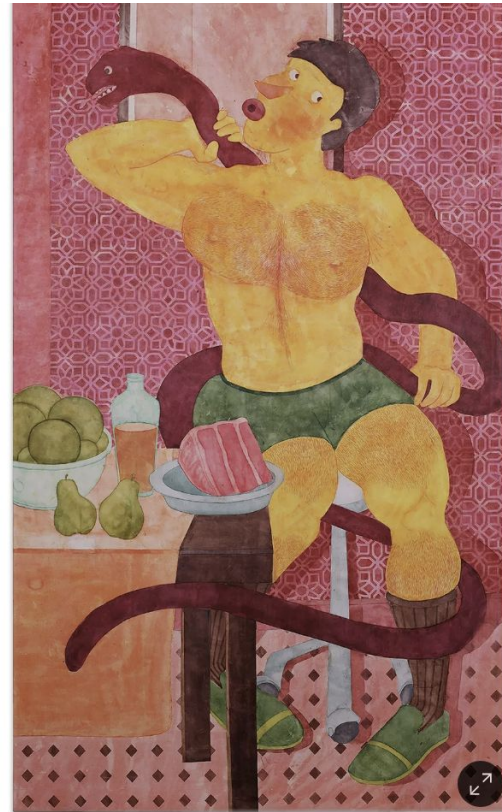


Installation view of Half Gallery's booth at EXPO Chicago 2022. Courtesy of Courtesy Silvia Ros Photography and Half Gallery

Iranian-born painter Orkideh Torabi's works poke fun at the patriarchy by deploying a cast of seemingly self-aware characters: Burly men wrestle snakes and one another; a mustachioed group smokes cigarettes and plays cards; a battered boxer grins through blackened eyes.



Monsieur Zohore  
*Baby Daddy*, 2022  
Half Gallery



Orkideh Torabi  
*Daily Routine*, 2022  
Half Gallery

They're a natural fit to be paired with Monsieur Zohore's mixed-media pieces. Rendered on canvas or with towels, the Ivorian American artist's work upends well-known images with allusions—both subtle and not—to queer culture. Rod Blagojevich wears a leather harness. A Chicago-style hot dog hovers over Phil Jackson's crotch. A teddy bear sports a studded collar. These two artists work in tandem to undermine systems of oppression with their humor and creativity.

Artnews  
April 8, 2022

**ARTnews** Est. 1902

## Artist Monsieur Zohore Plays With Cubs Fans' Minds in Mascot Performance at Expo Chicago



BY SARAH DOUGLAS April 8, 2022 9:07am



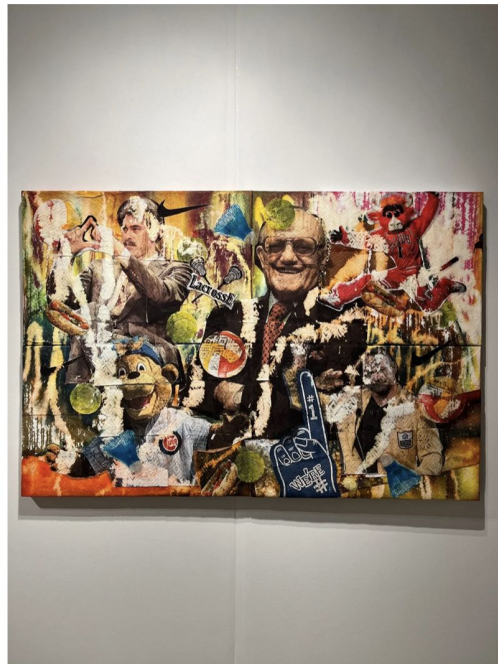
Serious business at the Half Gallery booth  
SARAH DOUGLAS, ARTNEWS

Thursday was opening day for Major League Baseball, and over at Wrigley Field, shortstop Nico Hoerner's home run, caught by a lucky fan in the bleachers, helped the Cubs beat the Milwaukee Brewers 5-4. Earlier in the day, what appeared to be the Cubs' mascot, Clark, the bear cub, was seen wandering the aisles of Expo Chicago, during the fair's VIP preview, occasionally pausing to admire the artwork on view. On closer inspection, it wasn't Clark at all. It was...the **Detroit Tigers** mascot, Paws, wearing a Cubs uniform? What kind of mascot was this?



In fact, the walking stuffed animal suit was donned by artist **Monsieur Zohore**, who was in performance-art mode. This became apparent to *ARTnews* when he sat down at the table in the booth of New York's Half Gallery, tiger head at this feet, leaning back in his chair next to a gallery colleague like he ran the place. In the booth, Zohore was surrounded by his own paintings, one of which, a dead giveaway to any eagle-eyed art viewer wondering who the strange mascot was, contained an image of the real Clark waving at fans.

Zohore, who is based in New York and Richmond, Virginia, where he's a painting professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, said his mascot performance is meant to "conflate a bunch of archetypes" to create "a confused critique of culture." This is not the first time Zohore has done such a thing at an art fair. At the NADA fair in Miami last December, he hired eight men to dress up in togas and set up a beer pong tournament. When told about a piece by Dora Budor where she deployed a Leonardo DiCaprio look-alike to walk around the 2017 edition of Frieze New York, appearing each day in the guise of a different character the actor had portrayed in a film (the *Revenant* was the most, let's say, out of place), Zohore's response was, "I guess I can't do that now."



Clark appears lower left in Monsieur Zohore's 2022 painting "Play Ball", at **Half Gallery's** booth at Expo Chicago  
SARAH DOUGLAS/ARTNEWS

*Pace*

February 25, 2022

**PACE**

# For Monsieur Zohore, Art Is a Balance of Comedy and Tragedy

Published Friday, Feb 25, 2022Courtesy the artist, Palo Gallery, and Yassine El Mansouri

Monsieur Zohore, whose practice encompasses sculpture, painting, installation, performance, and video, often explores the complex intersections of levity and gravity. The artist's work incorporates multifarious materials and objects as part of lively engagements with pop culture. Zohore is part of Pace's ongoing online group exhibition *Twenty-One Humors*, which focuses on enactments of wry and dark humor in art and complements David Byrne's in-person solo exhibition at the gallery's New York space.

The following statements from Zohore, which have been edited and condensed, span *Twenty-One Humors*, the artist's solo exhibition at the Washington, D.C. gallery von ammon co., self-awareness in art, and other topics.

I have two different bodies of work in *Twenty-One Humors*. There's a sculpture in the show called *Hurricane Becky*, which is a standard oscillating fan that's been outfitted with braids and beads to kind of mimic the cultural phenomenon of post vacation, middle school, white female teenagers coming back from a trip with these braids that we've all deemed now to be culturally appropriate. Exchanging the body of the human for this mechanical object that can take on a kind of humanoid gesture creates the comedy of that work. I love this series of sculptures—I've been making them for a while now, so I'm really excited to have one be seen on a global platform.



Monsieur Zohore, *Hurricane Becky*, 2021, hurricane wall mount oscillating fan, hair weave, and hair beads, 32" x 19" x 5" (81.3 cm x 48.3 cm x 12.7 cm)

[Learn More](#)



The other two works in the exhibition—*Brown Betty* and *Animal Lover*—are part of my paper towel project. These paper towel works masquerade as facsimiles of paintings that I make using Bounty paper towels, an inkjet printer, fabric dye, and bleach. I put these works through an archival bookbinding process to solidify them. I think of them as visual essays, and I usually combine some kind of art historical reference with a pop cultural subject. On the occasion of the death of Betty White, I thought it would be fitting to pay homage to her humor by mining her archive. So, the piece *Brown Betty* features a combination of Apple Brown Betty pies and Betty Boop farting on Betty White in that one scene that she was kind of in blackface. It's not a commentary on that, it's just allowing the audience to be outraged if they want to. Sometimes I think a work is funnier if it's meaner, or if it pretends to be mean.

The other painting, *Animal Lover*, uses a scene from a film in which Betty White was in love with a gorilla. The image of Betty White being in love with a gorilla is masqueraded by a bunch of animal prints, and Betty White was famously an animal lover and an animal rights champion. The work is a funny, tongue in cheek homage to her passing.

Rethinking what the female figure looks like in painting is a really big discussion that we have been dealing with for a while now. The idea of a woman farting in a painting is funnier than her being naked. For me, it's a much more fruitful and generous occupation for a figure to have inside of a space as opposed to the nude reclining or something like that.



Monsieur Zohore, *Brown Betty*, 2022, mixed media on canvas, 72" × 48" (182.9 cm × 121.9 cm)

[Learn More](#)

I describe myself as a clown—that's one of my artistic descriptors—and I'm really interested in the intersection of tragedy and comedy. How close can you get to one, and does that closeness help you get nearer to the other? A lot of my works tackle humor head-on. Humor is so exciting because it's such a diffuser: I'm able to use it as a way of augmenting tragedy or minimizing it. In a certain sense, it's a way of placating my audience into paying attention.

My work oscillates between nasty interrogations and desperate, sincere pleas. Right now, I have an exhibition at von ammon co., my gallery in Washington, D.C., called *Les Éternels*. It features two sets of reproductions *Dragon Ball Z* orbs that figure in the cartoon. In the *Dragon Ball* universe, the balls are made by this mythical dragon and our heroes are on a quest throughout the program trying to receive all seven of them. Once they have all the orbs, they're granted a wish by the dragon. So, these become objects of desire and wish fulfillment, and those wishes are generally used to resurrect someone who's passed away. I approached making the balls by memorializing each set to a specific person who has passed away. In this exhibition, there are two sets. A green orb set for Marvin Gaye, who was born in D.C. and is celebrated for his contributions of love and happiness and joy to the world. He was tragically murdered by his father. The other set of balls is for John Allen Muhammad, the D.C. sniper. He terrorized the community through his random acts of killing in the city in the early 2000s, when I was a child. Imbuing these whimsical and, in a sense, comedic orbs with an austere narrative is one way that my practice moves between those ideas of tragedy and humor.

I think visual art is a successful conduit for humor because art doesn't have to be anything. It takes me back to the Magritte "This is Not a Pipe" painting. It's not a pipe, it can't be, and that's why it's funny. It doesn't have the power to become the thing that it's pretending to be. That kind of limit makes it inherently funny or uncanny.

For me, art has to be funny. There has to be something that doesn't sit right with the viewer. I think humor comes from self-awareness, and that self-awareness is always what I'm looking for in a successful work of art. Works that are too delusional without being participatory in their delusion start to fall apart for me.

*As told to Claire Selvin*

*Bmore Art*  
December 27, 2021

# BmoreArt

## Baltimore's Best Art Exhibits of 2021

The top ten contemporary art exhibitions from Baltimore (including two from DC) that have inspired, challenged, and sustained us in 2021



Ozone Atmosphere at Springsteen

***Ozone Atmosphere at Springsteen Gallery***



*Ozone Atmosphere*, featuring the work of Sandy Williams IV and Monsieur Zohore, was paired with a staggering exhibition text by scholar Tiffany E. Barber that opened with the questions, “What does it mean to watch something live and die in the same moment? What does it mean to be Black in America right now?” The bare walls of Springsteen gave way to the show’s tremendous messages. Each artist’s work spoke their own personal histories within the African diaspora and their own unique locations in this atmosphere.

A video of Williams played on a loop, his gaze both soft and penetrating; periodically the artist moved slightly to silence an alarm clock. His diminutive wax-monument replicas marked another chronology displayed throughout the gallery, lit and decomposing during a time of pandemic and civil unrest. Framed photos of Williams’ relatives on horseback appeared in concert with the melting monuments. Throughout the gallery, there was a direct nod to the temporality and impact of Black life, backpacks that when activated by the touch of human contact began counting down moments until their next encounter.

Zohore’s familiar, multicolored, and multivalent paper-towel artworks were on display, but I was most moved by his telescope sculpture, engraved with a line from Langston Hughes’s 1921 poem “Stars”: “Reach up your hand, dark boy, and take a star.” In the accompanying room, his luminescent dragon balls, marked with stars, seemed to vibrate inside of an acrylic terrarium, nested amongst grass that would inevitably wither away over the course of the exhibition. His opened Windex bottles with stalks of bird of paradise flowers rested in configurations with William’s monuments.

The work served as reliquaries for the two artists’ first collaborative exhibition, as well as the inevitable impermanent but enduring nature of Black life at this moment. It was the most stunning showing of artwork I’ve ever seen at Springsteen.

—Teri Henderson

Artnet News  
February 1, 2021

## artnet news

### Art World

## Here Are 12 Artists Poised to Break Out Big Time in 2021, According to Our Survey of Top Dealers, Advisors, and Curators

Keep your eyes on this group.

Artnet News, February 1, 2021

### Monsieur Zohore



Monsieur Zohore, *Messy Bitch 4 (Lake Titicaca)*. Courtesy of the artist and Palo Gallery.

I've followed Monsieur Zohore since 2010, when the artist was an undergrad at Cooper Union. Zohore recently graduated from the Maryland Institute of Art and is making new paintings with paper towels and puff paint. His work is all over the place—performance, sculpture, installation, and theater—and super queer. There's a unique sense of humor to it and a delightful satire around means of production. He's really found his voice and I am looking forward to seeing the direction he takes this year.

—Ellie Rines, founder, 56 Henry Gallery

*The Art Newspaper*

December 2, 2021



THE ART NEWSPAPER

## From breakdance battles to beer pong: the latest gossip from Art Basel in Miami Beach



Raising the bar: Monsieur Zohore (reclining in the foreground) makes sure that his Raphaellesque protégés are at the top of their beer pong game

### Monsieur Zohore's (beer) cup runneth over

There was much japery at the Nada art fair this week when the Ivorian American artist Monsieur Zohore hosted a beer pong tournament in the Ice Palace Studios courtyard. (We have it on good authority that much fun was had by all participating in this quaint US pastime that involves throwing a ball into cups of beer.) De Boer gallery, which represents the artist, says that Zohore appropriates in his work “imagery from sources such as Raphael’s Renaissance masterpiece, *The School of Athens*, and the cult classic film, *Animal House*”. But Zohore’s art is especially making waves at the fair because of the material he paints on—namely, paper towels. What better material to have on hand in case a game of beer pong gets particularly rowdy?



*Hyperallergic*  
November 3, 2021

# HYPERALLERGIC

Art **Reviews**

## Artists Find Sanctuary at Socrates Sculpture Park

Collectively, the artworks in the 2021 Socrates Annual circumscribe sanctuary as a transitory, idiosyncratic state that provides emotional or physical respite.



by Rachel Remick  
November 3, 2021



Monsieur Zohore takes a less didactic approach in “MZ.19 (Patronus: For Mothers Who’ve Lost Their Sons & Sons That Lost Their Mothers)” (2021). Two 3-D printed monuments, one of the Virgin Mary and the other of the Disney character Bambi, are tucked away toward the back of the park, illuminated by sunlight that scatters through the surrounding trees. As one beholds the sculptures, static and honorific in the manner of funerary monuments, composer Joshua Coyne’s melodic score drifts through the space. In conjunction with the statues, the soundscape seems to manifest invisible or emotional forms of sanctuary, like the patronuses — symbols of protection — after which the sculptures are named.



Installation view of Monsieur Zohore, “MZ.19 (Patronus: For Mothers Who’ve Lost Their Sons & Sons That Lost Their Mothers)” (2021), 3-D printed polyethylene terephthalate glyco

*Bmore Art*  
January 30, 2020

# BmoreArt

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CAREER

## MASTERS: Monsieur Zohore

MICA MFA Candidate, Multidisciplinary Artist, and Spectacle



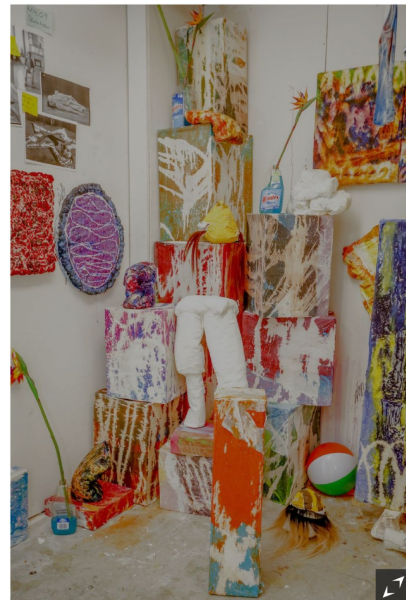


Monsieur Zohore is nothing if not intentional. Every flower, wig, paper towel, diaper, Windex bottle, art book, and designer clothing item within his studio has its place. His studio and physical presence are enigmatic. Zohore describes his artistic self first as a “producer” and secondly as a “clown.”

I was lucky enough to be fully immersed in one of his productions when I witnessed his “MZ.05: GRÂCE” performance at the Baltimore Museum of Art last year. The first act in the Art After Hours: Wickerham & Lomax x WDLY takeover, Zohore welcomed guests to the event with a sea of applause and orchestrated veneration that vibrated the walls of the BMA. (Full disclosure: I participated in this event as a WDLY curator.) Conducted and produced by Zohore, this performance, like every move that he makes, was a work of art.

During our conversation, Zohore spoke about how artists like himself are often expected to perform, to mime, for an audience that sometimes forgets their humanity. But Zohore knows who he is and what his art means, and understands that sometimes these realities are inseparable. His decision to attend graduate school in MICA’s Mount Royal program in 2018 was an extension of this innate self-reflection.

His work ranges from performances painted with the sound of applause, to video work of him covering his body in lotion, to eight-foot-tall canvases adorned with puce-colored paper towels. His most traditional works are radically untraditional, a result of not only his process but also his use of unconventional materials. The spectacle of his creations is nearly ineffable. When I visited Zohore in his studio, he spoke succinctly about his work, explaining that he creates most of his work using household materials—inspired by his mother, a caterer and event planner—as a way to explore the meanings of hospitality, spectacle, and performance in response to his own experiences. “My main medium is my history,” he says.







**Artist:** Monsieur Zohore

**Pictured Wearing:** Dries Van Noten blazer, Marc Jacobs pants, sweater from TopShop, and shoes from ASOS

**Instagram:** @mzohore

**Graduate Institution:** Maryland Institute College of Art, Mount Royal School of Art (Multidisciplinary MFA)

**Tuition:** \$48,510 per academic year

**Teri Henderson: What is your real name?**

Monsieur Zohore: I have a lot of names. In my practice I go by Monsieur Zohore and I think it's a very easy way to organize everything. It's also my dad's name and I think it's really funny. Monsieur Zohore, that's my father. It's also me and my brother and a bunch of other men in my family. In New York, everyone calls me Peter. With everyone I grew up with it's Alex, because my first name is Alexander... and then in Baltimore, Sandy is short for Alexander. I change my name every time I move, and it keeps it going. That's why I've got so many damn names.

**How old are you? When is your birthday?**

I'm 26 years old. My birthday is February 27th, 1993. I'm a Pisces. My brother and I have the same birthday, three years apart.

**What do you think about that?**

Um, that bitch stole my birthday, but it's okay. We're friends now. I forgave him.

**Where are you from?**

I was born and raised in Potomac, Maryland. My parents are both from La Cote D'Ivoire in West Africa—I spent a lot of time there growing up as well. And I cut my teeth and got a couple black eyes on the floor of a bar in the East Village.

**How long have you lived in Baltimore?**

I've lived in Baltimore for just over a year now. I moved here in August of 2018 to attend MICA. Baltimore is a completely different country, you know? And I made sure to treat it as such. When I got here, I made a very big effort to not show up with any kind of baggage from my parents.

**Your feet seem firmly planted.**

I've always been really good at finding myself in a place. Even when I was a kid, and we would travel as a family of five, one person had to sit with a stranger. And I always elected to sit with that stranger because I was always interested in knowing something I didn't know, that I hadn't heard before. Even before I got to Baltimore, I made a very concerted effort to start on social media, paying attention and connecting myself with my surroundings.

**Where did you go to undergrad?**

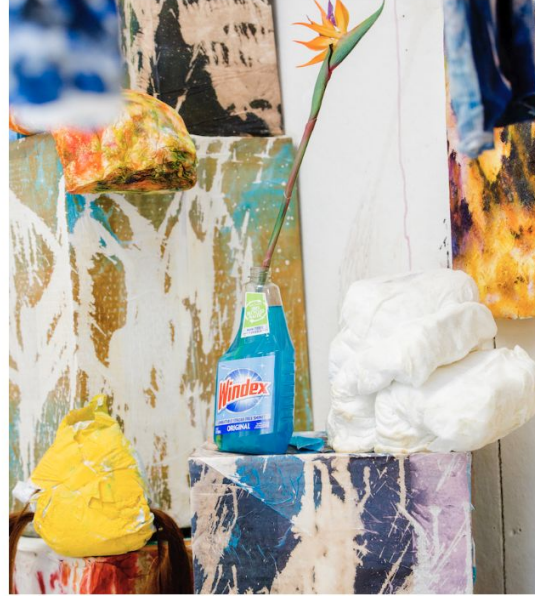
I went to Cooper Union from 2011 to 2015. It was a really wild time because when I was there, they announced that the tuition would no longer be free. So half the time was spent in the studio and half the time was spent protesting. It was really a turbulent time. It was exciting to be part of making this big change in my life and then having that change be compounded with this sudden change at this institution. I just didn't take that for granted—and the people that I was able to meet in this whirlwind, the energy was something I used to propel me forward.

**That's really beautiful. When did you decide you wanted to apply to grad school?**

It was 2017, because I remember my [graduate] interview [with MICA] was on my birthday on February 27, 2018. And so I applied in December and I had an interview in February, and then I got in a month later. It was a very quick-turnaround process.

**Why did you decide to come to MICA?**

I was very interested in the idea of learning from Baltimore, and also trying to learn about my Blackness in a city that was and is undeniably Black. I am trying to understand what brings me closer to everybody and what sets me apart. As a first-generation African person, there is always a misalignment, a miscommunication between cultures and I wanted to really parse through that.







**Do you feel like you would be able to make the work that you make without having gone to art school?**

I'm not sure I would have known to call what I do "art" if I hadn't gone to art school but I'm sure I'd still be making a fool of myself somewhere.

**How do you describe your practice? Are you a painter, a sculptor?**

I struggle with this, but I would call myself a producer. I practice in performance and in painting. I think I make performances about painting or paintings about performance.

**Maybe you're a poet.**

I am a comedian. [Laughs] I'm a clown.

**Okay, I'll write your job title as "I'm a clown?" [Both laugh]**

No, write that down, honey: "I'm a clown." I clap in museums for hours on end. I love to cover myself in lotion, for no apparent reason.

**I think that something that you do that is tangential to your grad school experience but still embodies the spirit of your artistic practice is the *Real Housewives of Atlanta* Watch Party that you curate weekly. Can you tell me more about that? How did it come about?**

I host The *Real Housewives* View Party and Discussion every Sunday night at 8 p.m. at Rituals. I see it as being a part of my practice. It's a performance I get to do every week. To me, that show is like Anna Deavere Smith's early experimental theater works. It explores the human condition in a heightened and messy way.

**How can institutions better support Black and brown graduate students?**

By showing up and buying things. By amplifying our presence. By not misspelling our names.

**What is the best thing you've ever read?**

I was profoundly moved and inspired by the catalogue of a show Helen Molesworth curated in 2006 called *Work Ethic* which was mounted right here at the BMA. I'll be giving a lecture on the show sometime in 2020, so please stay tuned.

**If you could give a single piece of advice to an upcoming MICA grad student what would it be? What wisdom would you impart on an individual who is in the process of applying to the Mount Royal School of Art?**

Don't come if you don't already know what you want to get out of yourself. Don't come if making art is just your hobby, because there are better ways of spending 80 grand, and I would be more than happy to help you do that.





**Do you visit your work at your studio every day?**

Yes, every single day I'm here. Even if I'm just watching *Real Housewives* or taking a nap, I come here every single day and stare at something.

**Can you walk me through a typical day of yours when school is in session?**

I don't really have classes. I come to my studio and maybe we have a meeting or seminar or lecture or something. And then, back in my studio, I stare, when I have time to stare, or I'm sending an email confirming a venue for performance. During my time here at school, I'm mostly processing. I do really enjoy working in secret, so the parts of the work that I touch happen when no one's looking. And then when people are around, I am processing the work with them as they see it. If I made work while people are around, it would dilute my process or just allow too many voices to infiltrate. So I'm here and I work, then I go to a lecture and then I teach.

**Is the opportunity to teach something that is unique about your program?**

We are allowed to go into the undergraduate department and take on teaching assistant positions. Graduate teaching interns is what they call it. And that's how they get away with not paying us that much. My first year I taught an interdisciplinary freshman intro class that was a year-long class. And then the next semester I taught surface-resist dyeing with Christina Day. This year I am teaching interdisciplinary and senior thesis sculpture with Sarah Doherty (the chair of the sculpture department) and renowned artist Abigail DeVille, and for me it's really fun to meet kids on their first and last days of school. I like understanding where they came from and where they want to go.

**How do you take care of yourself?**

I make my work. I laugh with my friends. I invite them over and make elaborate meals for them. I call my sister. I try to remember to buy underwear and socks.

**Who is your favorite living artist?**

Tracey Emin is someone that I recently have fallen in love with after hating her work for many years. When I was in New York at Cooper Union, I was trained in this elitist mentality, that "selling out is for sell-outs." I had this posturing without any understanding and I didn't like Tracey Emin, because I thought that artists who make neon signs are stupid. It was last year, over winter break, that I asked myself, why do I hate Tracey Emin so much? And I realized that she talks about life being dangerous and difficult in her work, and there's also a religious read to it, and an obvious love of art history. And there's a religious read to my work also, and I found a sense of kinship.





**I think that part of the reason why your work resonates with me is that my college minor was in religion. Especially in the performance piece at the BMA's Art After Hours (The House We've Built: A Wickerham & Lomax Takeover in Collaboration with WDLY), I appreciate the clapping, the rituals that you enact, that are part of your process.**

It took a while for me to be able to articulate the religious impulse. As a lapsed Catholic, it's very difficult to understand. I've read Nietzsche and, like, yay, God is dead and all that. But I kept having these ideas, wanting to make a ceremony, wanting to explore process as spectacle, and to honor ideas of devotion. I may or may not be religious, but giving myself that permission has opened me up to the possibilities.

**Who are your favorite musical artists?**

My favorite musical artists is a slap-in-the-face question. I find it really sad every day when I look at Beyoncé and I try, but I'm sorry, Lady Gaga takes the cake. I think Lady Gaga is one of the most undeniably talented forces. Inescapable. I wrote my thesis paper and another grant about her.

**Give me a second. I'm just about to pass out.**

I know, I know, I know, I know. But Lady Gaga, her artistry is unparalleled. I think that the way she approaches ideas of fame and endurance is unsurpassed. It's like something I've never seen before in the pop landscape. I believe that if it wasn't for Lady Gaga going up, we wouldn't have the Beyoncé you see today. I think we wouldn't have a lot of the performers that we know see that the landscape of pop music.

**Do you like being an artist?**

It is my job. I see myself as an employee of artistic practice. I work for it. It doesn't work for me, but I wouldn't do anything else. I wake up every day, I go to bed thinking about it, wake up every morning dreaming about it. I think that liking what you do isn't necessary because people have things to do, people need money, people need resources and jobs provide that. I think I have the luxury of having a job where I get to think about working. I get to address ideas of labor and for me that's a privilege. I'll never take that for granted.





**How does your identity, however you want to describe that, inform or affect your artistic practice?**

Being a queer man of color is in and of my practice. I think it's my relationship to humor and sadness and being able to like understand those two ideas, my relationship with my Blackness and Frenchness, my Africanness, is truly the material that I started to build my practice off of. Sometimes I wonder what would happen if I was one less thing, or one more? I think everything would look different. Truly, my main medium is my history. I think a lot about my identity. I think a lot about acts of labor. I think about who's working and what work they are doing. I think a lot about privilege and who has it and what it is. I think about it from a lot of different perspectives.

**If you had to give one distinct piece of advice to yourself when you were applying to your program, what would it be?**

"Good job, girl. Truly good job. And, you know, finish that application."

**What major decision have you made recently that has impacted your work and life?**

Leaving New York was one of the biggest and scariest decisions I ever made because of this idea that you're taught there, that you work all the time to make your work, and then you work some more. In New York, you have to stay there and grind without stopping until something happens. And I think this is a hoax manufactured by the city of New York to keep you paying the high rent. I realized that a lot of my friends didn't live in New York anymore. And while everyone else was off doing their work, paying the rent, and going to parties, I was done there.

**What place in Baltimore inspires you the most?**

The Crown on Tuesdays at 9 p.m.! Karaoke Forever is a place where I really found my voice. I've always performed; I've always performed live. I've always sang live in my performance work, but I've always had a fear of microphones and the amplification of my voice. It is terrifying and disorienting. Being able to go there every Tuesday and, just in general, the idea that I can go perform karaoke every night is powerful. I perform somewhere every night in Baltimore. It's been such an enormous help. Also the fact that I can get feedback from an audience keeps the work moving.

**Where do you get the materials that you use in your work from? How do you pay for them?**

I'm attracted to domestic materials. I am attracted to the symbols. I'm also attracted to objects that you could just straight buy from the art supply store, but usually life happens in a Costco or or Kmart or Target. I like consumables, things that people already have access to, and I like watching myself reinterpret them or explore them. I'm attracted to objects that have an intended sense of labor and I'm interested in excusing them from that ask.

Sometimes I find that art—art making, art craft—those materials can be a little too elitist for me. I never really liked the idea of oil paint because—why would I waste my time? It's a time suck, you know? And it's expensive. Especially when I can find more meaning in household materials. My mother is a caterer and event planner and I always found my lexicon in her practice, and I always told myself that if my mother doesn't have it in house, can't use it. So I work with canvas, fabric, paper towels, cotton balls, and diapers and [looks around studio] Windex and fake flowers, and find purpose in the repurposing.







**How does your identity, however you want to describe that, inform or affect your artistic practice?**

Being a queer man of color is in and of my practice. I think it's my relationship to humor and sadness and being able to like understand those two ideas, my relationship with my Blackness and Frenchness, my Africanness, is truly the material that I started to build my practice off of. Sometimes I wonder what would happen if I was one less thing, or one more? I think everything would look different. Truly, my main medium is my history. I think a lot about my identity. I think a lot about acts of labor. I think about who's working and what work they are doing. I think a lot about privilege and who has it and what it is. I think about it from a lot of different perspectives.

**If you had to give one distinct piece of advice to yourself when you were applying to your program, what would it be?**

"Good job, girl. Truly good job. And, you know, finish that application."

**What major decision have you made recently that has impacted your work and life?**

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*Bmore Art*  
December 23, 2020

# BmoreArt

NEWS & OPINION

## Monsieur Zohore's "The Last Supper" at the BMA

A performance protest featuring a cast of Baltimore-based artists and bright yellow paint



“Dealing with performance art in a pandemic is nerve-racking,” admits Monsieur Zohore, a few days after organizing a guerrilla performance outside the Baltimore Museum of Art. On Sunday, November 28 at 4 p.m., Zohore, with twelve other artists in black robes, ate pizza and drank wine served on a long rectangular table while being dribbled in bright yellow paint. The performance was intended as a reenactment of Andy Warhol’s “The Last Supper” (1986), a giant yellow recreation of Leonardo Da Vinci’s famous fresco from 1498. The Warhol, a 35-foot-long double screen print of the Da Vinci on canvas, was listed for private sale by the museum for \$40 million in early October but pulled off the market on October 28, the date of the intended sale.

“This is the first time I have ever performed in plein air, specifically outside and also unsanctioned by an institution,” says Zohore, a performance artist and recent MFA graduate of MICA’s Mount Royal School of Art. Zohore has established a record of performing works inside institutional spaces, offering humorous critique and melodramatic spectacle, but in the past, these have always been enacted with explicit consent. This performance, titled “MZ.18 (Endowment for the Future; Last Supper for Baltimore)”, marks the first time Zohore has created and performed a critical work outside of these boundaries.

“I came up with the piece the day of the radio show about the deaccessioning,” says Zohore, referring to a WYPR segment where lawyer and former BMA Trustee Larry Eisenstein and I spoke to Tom Hall on Midday about the BMA’s controversial decision to deaccession Warhol’s “The Last Supper,” as well as paintings by Clyfford Still and Brice Marden. “I was sitting in a Trader Joe’s parking lot in a group chat with friends from Baltimore and we were all listening and, suddenly, I was just filled with passion and energy. I wanted to stand up for the artists in this community.”



A complete vision of the performance appeared in the artist's mind, and he says this is how he typically works. He asked a few friends, casually, if they would mind being covered in yellow paint, and by the end of the day, Zohore had written a proposal and sent it out to a few trusted colleagues in the Baltimore, NY, and DC arts communities, both to gather critical feedback and to fund the project. "It was important to me to compensate the performers for their participation and time," he says. "By the end of the weekend, I was contacted by Paul Henkel from Palo Gallery, and he agreed to fully fund the work."



Over the next two weeks, Zohore worked out the plans, inviting twelve artist-colleagues to participate in the performance, securing a photographer to document, and scouting out the location at different times of day, all while keeping the project a secret. Citing the museum's desire to sell the Warhol in part to buy works by women and artists of color, Zohore says that he appreciates the museum's stated values of inclusivity. However, he believes that the chance for an artist like himself to exhibit or perform in context with Warhol's "The Last Supper" is the opportunity of a lifetime that could never exist if the painting had been sold, especially if it had gone into a private collection, outside of public access.

"I have had a long, deep relationship with Andy Warhol's work," explains Zohore. "I have always understood Warhol's practice as being larger than the material objects he made and seen Warhol's personality and practice as a kind of performance. For me, as a queer artist of color, Warhol's "The Last Supper," and its specific relationship to the AIDS epidemic when it was collected by the BMA in 1989, signifies the museum's ongoing commitment to diversity." Zohore says he was a little shocked when he learned about the museum's intended sale of the painting because he had no idea that the work was here in Baltimore. Although it had been on display at the center of the BMA's contemporary wing for close to twenty years, the painting was kept in storage during the two years that Zohore lived in Baltimore as a MICA student.

Zohore's "MZ.18 (Endowment for the Future; Last Supper for Baltimore)" performance, enacted across the street from the BMA's iconic marble steps, co-opts the literal subject of Da Vinci's "The Last Supper" and considers the museum's deaccessioning in the same way that Jesus was said to have sacrificed himself, breaking bread and sharing wine as symbols of his body and blood with his disciples. "For me, the deaccessioning became a kind of transfiguration of the body of Christ," Zohore says. "The painting is sold and the money is supposed to be used to feed the community that the painting is leaving, the same way Jesus's death consecrated our sins... or whatever." He laughs, acknowledging the influence of a now-lapsed Catholic upbringing that still impacts his ideas about the spectacle and ritual he cultivates in his art.

When he envisioned the performance, it was before the museum decided not to sell the piece, so originally it was intended to protest the sale that he assumed would occur. Although the museum decided not to sell the painting, Zohore believes that the meaning of the performance remains unchanged, based largely on the subject depicted.

“I was thinking about ‘The Last Supper’ as a form of protest in itself,” he says. “By inviting all these Black and brown and queer performers who were willing to stand up with me to protest, it meant I was asking them to take a professional risk. Some people declined to participate because of their level of comfort or their fear of stepping on institutional toes and I totally respect that.” Zohore says that he is touched that twelve significant Baltimore-based artists did decide to participate and recognizes that it could not have happened without their trust and support.





Although he has only been in Baltimore for two years, Zohore has earned several opportunities to perform through various BMA platforms. The first one, “MZ.05 (Grâce)”, was performed during a BMA Art After Hours event organized to celebrate a decade of collaborative art-making by Wickerham & Lomax during the BMA’s *Generations* exhibition. Zohore was invited to present a collaborative, applause-based performance at the museum, a spectacle that included thirty volunteers dressed all in white who clapped enthusiastically for thirty minutes.

“I wanted to present applause in an uncontextualized state, and the way the sound impacted the way people navigated exhibitions that night. You could hear the applause throughout the entire museum.” Zohore says that, as a child of Catholic immigrants, it was important for him that the ideas of exaltation and grace were realized through ecstatic clapping as well as the color white, and for him, the site of the BMA offered validation for the performance.

The artist has also participated in the BMA Salon and Screening Room, two online platforms created during the COVID-19 pandemic to celebrate Baltimore-based galleries and curatorial projects. In the Salon, galleries each selected works by eight artists to share. (Disclosure: BmoreArt’s Connect+Collect was included). Zohore’s “MZ14 (Celestial Bodies)” was exhibited with ‘sindikit, a nomadic, experimental curatorial platform organized by artists Zoë Charlton and Tim Doud. “The work is a response, a decision to no longer feel helpless to the multitude of pandemics we are facing, and to alter reality for the better, despite my own frustrations and awareness of the danger the world places on my queer Black body,” says Zohore.

In “MZ14 (Celestial Bodies),” Zohore worked with a star naming registry, Cosmo Nova, to purchase the name of a star that appeared on the day that Freddie Gray was killed in Baltimore, in order to commemorate his life. Zohore has subsequently purchased additional stars for other individuals who have passed away due to racial or sexual violence, especially during the pandemic. Zohore is raising funds for the project through public donations, institutional grants, and the sale of an open-edition sculpture in the form of a brass telescope engraved with the Langston Hughes quote, “Reach up your hands, dark boy, and take a star.”

“The stars to be purchased are ones that were visible in the same area where and at the same time when the named person was killed so that the members of that community may look to the sky and metaphorically see their loved one as a celestial being,” Zohore explains. Each subsequently purchased star will be donated to a local institution that is devoted to the preservation of the lives and cultures of people of color.

In the BMA’s Screening Room, you can watch Zohore’s “MZ.11 (Comédien Ivoirien),” a video shot in front of a live studio audience, where the artist nimbly dodges plantains thrown at him. Zohore was flattered to be invited, although he notes the curatorial selection process and differences in pay were unclear to him at the time. A BMA spokesperson said that curators from the Contemporary department made selections based on “the excellence and merit of the work while also considering variety in experimental, narrative, documentary, and performance-based videos,” giving preference to female artists, queer artists, and artists of color. Individual artists were paid \$500 while collectives received \$750 for licensing fees. “I’m a young artist and just earned my MFA, so I didn’t feel like I was in a position to ask questions about this,” Zohore says. “I just felt grateful to be included and to accept what was being offered to me.”



When Zohore arrived in Baltimore in 2018 for graduate school, the BMA was in the process of deaccessioning six redundant works from the collection by white male artists, which raised \$12 million to purchase new works by women and artists of color. “It struck an exciting tone,” he recalls. “It seemed to be a statement that this museum cares about the people who are living and working here, that the arts ecosystem would be impacted for the better.”

However, when Zohore realized that almost all of the money raised was used to purchase works by artists who don’t live in Baltimore, he felt disappointed. “It’s a museum’s job to be aware of the cultural moment in their city,” he says. “If an artist is having a moment, a museum should support this by adding them to their collection. There are a number of artists living and working here who are being collected by museums outside of Baltimore, but not at our local museums.”

Zohore says that he knows a number of artists who have built relationships with the museum through exhibitions and performances, bringing new audiences to the museum, but so far have been overlooked in the collection. “As a very new person in the Baltimore art community, I’m happy that my work has been shown at the museum, but there are so many other artists who are pillars of the Baltimore community and have built solid careers here and the museum is not collecting them,” he says.



“I have fallen in love with the Baltimore community because artists support each other, we are constantly spreading the wealth, recommending each other for teaching positions and lectures and exhibitions,” he says. “It’s exactly what we should be doing as artists, especially in the face of an institution that placates us in this sphere. I think it’s fine for the museum to continue a ‘vanity celebration’ of the work of local artists, but realizing that they’re not collecting it shows a disconnect. On one hand, it’s a testament that the artists are able to persevere and succeed without institutional support, but something has to change if we want to continue. We need entities with resources and access to provide us visibility and continue this work with us fully committing to Baltimore-based excellence and experimentation.”



Zohore is emphatic that his newest collaborative performance is not just about his own work or ideas. “It’s a greater statement asking the institution to hold itself accountable to the bodies of the artists who live in this city that it says it wants to support,” he says. “If you look at the makeup of the performance, the cast is predominantly Black and queer.” He says he is not convinced that Warhol himself would have approved the sale of his painting, but thinks he would have loved the drama around it, so this inspired Zohore to create a melodramatic performance.

Although the performance is based on Warhol’s “The Last Supper,” Zohore says he was most interested in highlighting a phenomenon he found in Baltimore, a stance on nontraditional art-making, which he sees as directly related to diversity and social justice. He says that he would like to see more risk-taking at the museum in the range of works they are willing to collect, especially evidenced in the work being made in Baltimore.



“I am hoping that the museum takes a bigger interest in experimental work and objects that fit outside of a traditional commercial art market,” says Zohore. “I fund my practice through grants because my work sits outside of commercialism, and so do many of the artists who participated in this performance. I would like to see the museum take up this challenge, not even for themselves, but for the patrons and visitors in the museum, challenging the viewers to look at what their city is providing them.”

Zohore says that, from his perspective, it seems like the museum is waiting for artists to be undeniably successful with external global validation before they will exhibit or collect. “How much support does an artist have to show an institution for them to collect the work?” he asks. “We are seeing institutional attention paid to artists based here, and it’s incredible to see the museum exhibit Jo Smail and Maren Hassinger and other locally-based artists. But why are these artists not collected and kept indefinitely, so that Baltimore has access to this work for the future?”

Now that Warhol’s “The Last Supper” is going to remain in the BMA’s collection, I ask Zohore about the opportunities that may exist for him to interact, perform, or make new works within the context of the history and legacy of this one work, as it evolves. Our conversation returns to the power of the giant physical object as it straddles the history of painting, as well as its symbolic meaning for a Baltimore-based artist.



“My original art practice was rooted in painting, so for me the yellow was important,” he says, explaining that he has a history of performance art wherein he poured paint on himself. “I often use my body as a substrate for a painting, or to transform the traditional gaze of the artist, so borrowing the exact yellow from the painting was my attempt to recreate it in a 21st-century context, updating the painting with bodies of performers that reflect the city from which it was made.” Zohore says that the yellow also directly references the color featured in Tom Marioni’s 2006 performance “The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art,” exhibited at the BMA as part of Helen Molesworth’s seminal exhibition *Work Ethic*. “I was handed a copy of that catalogue when I started trying to define my brand of performance art and that show remains one of my biggest inspirations to this day,” he says.

The “Last Supper” performance included a long table that was set with pizza and wine to symbolize the “blood and body” of Christ from communion, and also, Zohore says, to update the meal with an art studio vibe. Zohore printed out the photo of the original work for all the participants so that it could be used as a starting point for their own poses. He ordered black choir robes for all the performers to mimic the black and white contrast of the screen printing and had custom-dyed button-down shirts made for each, in yellow and other colors, to mimic the colors and language in his own painting practice.

Each performer was instructed to stand behind the table with a blank expression while he poured paint on them first, then poured the paint over himself, and then they all struck poses from the painting. Zohore choreographed the performance to Mozart’s “Lacrimosa,” an unfinished part of his last *Requiem Mass in D Minor, K. 626*, a reference to the memento mori that follows a work of art made just before the subject’s (or composer’s) death. Zohore reimagined this as a reminder to celebrate the lives of these artists working in Baltimore, presenting living bodies in front of an institution that says it wants to support them.

“Everyone was gifted the shirt that they were wearing,” he says, “commemorating and unifying us into this expression.” Zohore says that he has always been interested in small-scale merchandise culture, such as a commemorative T-shirt from a Bar Mitzvah, and he says that Warhol was a master of selecting middle-class signifiers of consumer culture and transforming them into banal, funny, and poignant metaphors. He believes that Warhol doubled the image in “The Last Supper” in order to make the scene both queer and humorous, and says he wanted to match that energy in his performance.



“We broke bread together in front of the BMA’s front steps, and this was a humbling experience for me,” he says, admitting that it reminded him of his first performance at the BMA, part of the collaborative WDLY and Wickerham & Lomax Art After Hours Takeover event in October 2019. “That performance validated me as a member of the Baltimore community and I wanted to repay the artists who supported me, to represent a different work with the same group of people, and it was a true privilege.”

“How many more prizes do these artists need to win before the museum properly values them?” Zohore asks, specifically about Wickerham & Lomax, a Baltimore-based collaborative who won the Sondheim Prize in 2015 after the annual Artscape exhibition at the BMA and won the Trawick Prize in 2020. “They were invited to throw a party at the museum, to invite friends and perform, but the institution has not attempted to collect their work. These artists are just one example of those who have gone the extra mile, participated in national and international exhibitions off the strength of their own networks, but without the institutional validation from the Baltimore museum.”

Zohore believes that all museums can play a greater role by engaging seriously with the contemporary art community in which they are situated. In addition, he says that the museum’s collection has been built over time, slowly and purposefully, so he would like to see them continue to add works by diverse, globally known artists, but to balance out these acquisitions with artists based locally. It is the museum’s collection that will stand the test of time, as directors, curators, exhibits, and initiatives come and go. And it’s essential that the Baltimore museum reflects the art being made here and now and that its collection reflects this for generations to come.

“Warhol’s “The Last Supper” belongs to the citizens of Baltimore City,” says Zohore. “It belongs to the artists of Baltimore. For me, it would be ideal to have my work seen in the context of that Warhol, rather than sacrificing it. Why isn’t my work good enough to validate? Why does it have to be sacrificed by this monumental work?”