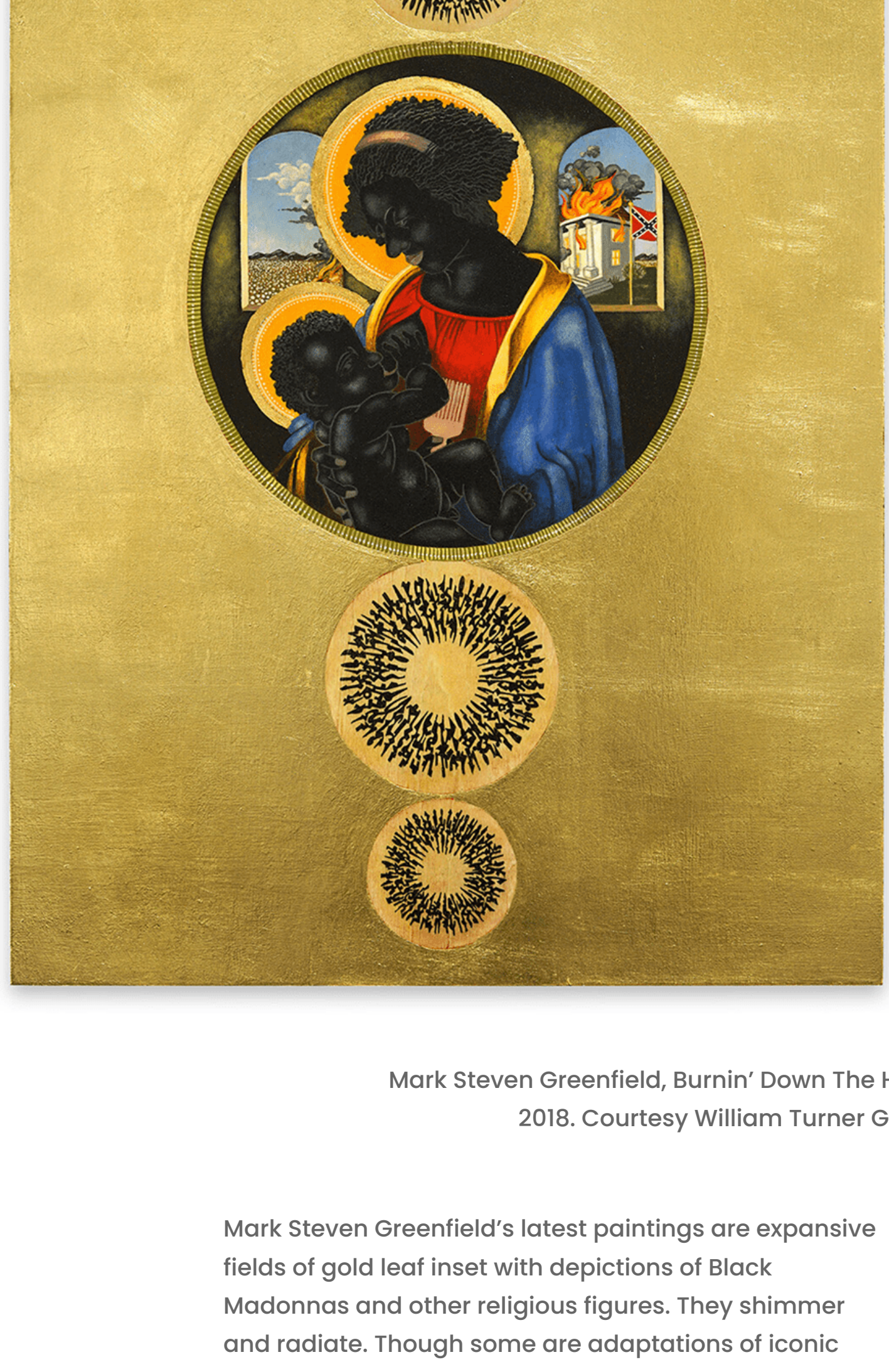


Mark Steven Greenfield

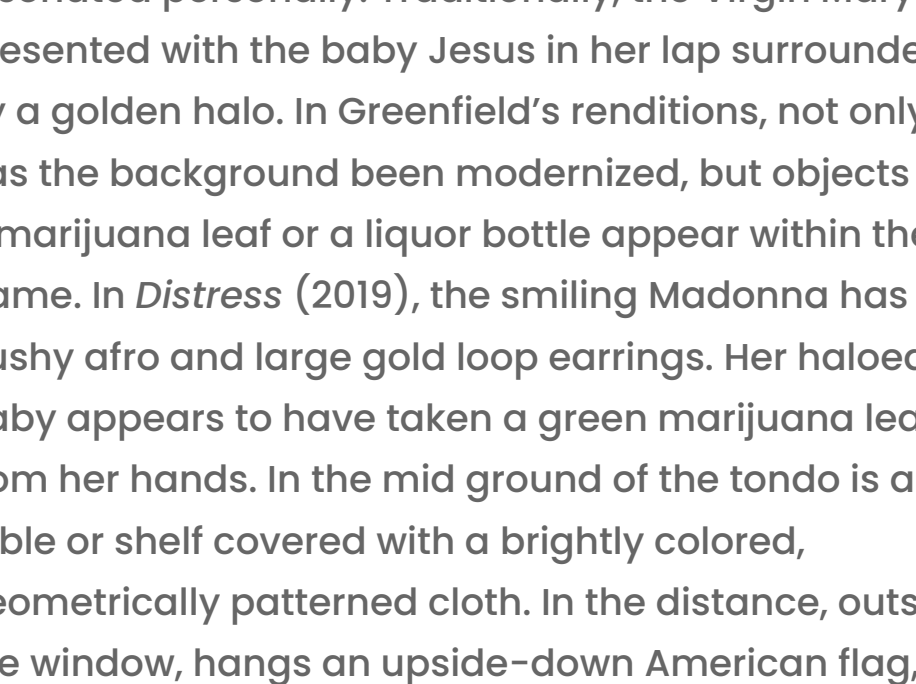
William Turner Gallery

by Jody Zellen | Nov 10, 2020



Mark Steven Greenfield, *Burnin' Down The House*, 2018. Courtesy William Turner Gallery.

Mark Steven Greenfield's latest paintings are expansive fields of gold leaf inset with depictions of Black Madonnas and other religious figures. They shimmer and radiate. Though some are adaptations of iconic Madonnas from art history and as the artist states, "blackified," their context has been updated so they speak to and about the present, often incorporating background scenes of racial conflict and social injustice. The works are deftly crafted. Greenfield pays acute attention to details and has an innate ability to render beautifully and realistically. Adding to these remarkable skills is his wherewithal to incorporate scenarios illustrating historic abuses of power and instances of racial discrimination. While the majority of works feature his Madonnas, Greenfield also includes a stunning representation of the Zang Massacre in 1781, when more than 130 enslaved Africans were thrown overboard on their passage because there was not enough food on the ship. A portrait depicts St. Esdras Anastacia, an enslaved woman with healing abilities who was cruelly treated by her masters and forced to wear a muzzle-like face mask and metal collar.

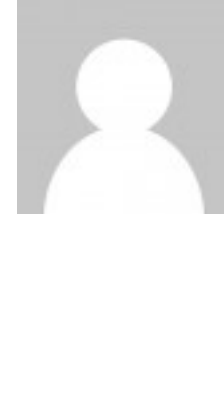


Mark Steven Greenfield, *Collateral*, 2020. Courtesy William Turner Gallery.

Combining the historical and the contemporary, Greenfield's paintings are well-researched representations of Byzantine religious icons. While he hunted for Black Madonnas, there are few documented, so he adapted what he found that resonated personally. Traditionally, the Virgin Mary is presented with the baby Jesus in her lap surrounded by a golden halo. In Greenfield's renditions, not only has the background been modernized, but objects like a marijuana leaf or a liquor bottle appear within the frame. In *Distress* (2019), the smiling Madonna has a bushy afro and large gold hoop earrings. Her haloed baby appears to have taken a green marijuana leaf from her hands. In the mid ground of the tondo is a table or shelf covered with a brightly colored, geometrically patterned cloth. In the distance, outside the window, hangs an upside-down American flag, a symbol of distress. In *Mississippi Cookout* (2018), baby Jesus wears yellow-rimmed sunglasses and regards a small red-covered book held in both his and his mother's hands. In the background, Greenfield paints a Klansman being burned at the stake, the billowing gray smoke extending horizontally and spreading its embers to the farmland and blue sky surrounding the figures.

*Toppling* (2020) draws from current events, as behind the Madonna and child is a statue of a Confederate soldier on horseback, surrounded by ropes as if in the process of being dragged off its pedestal. The finely dressed Madonna looks lovingly at her child who holds a ripe green apple in both hands. Greenfield infuses his Black Madonnas with stoicism and regality, re-asserting their presence in art and in history. He challenges preconceived ideas about race and the absence of Black figures through the juxtaposition of innocence and terror. The Madonna and child stand in contrast to his background scenarios depicting racial violence and white supremacy. Within each golden rectangle, Greenfield also includes small round discs filled with abstract lines radiating from the center that appear like halos, but are in fact representations of mantras. These insertions are moments of pause and reflection meant to balance and bridge past and present. While they punctuate the individual paintings, they simultaneously unify the body of work and give it a transcendence beyond mere replication or reinterpretation.

## 2 Comments



Carol Es

on November 19, 2020 at 8:46 am

Excellent review. I'm a big fan of Mark's work and this series knocks it out of the park!



Ronald Ostrin

on November 27, 2020 at 2:29 pm

One of the best shows of 2020. Very powerful.

artillery

Brave New Art World

Get Your Copy Now!

Search Artillery


Search

Explore Art with Us

Art, podcasts, videos, and more

Learn More

samuellerichardson



Dan McCleary

OAXACA

20 years of prints from the Taller de Gráfica 20 años de obra gráfica en el Taller de Gráfica

JANUARY 19, 2021


Ken Marchionno

January 23 - April 11, 2021

MUSEUM OF ART & HISTORY



VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES



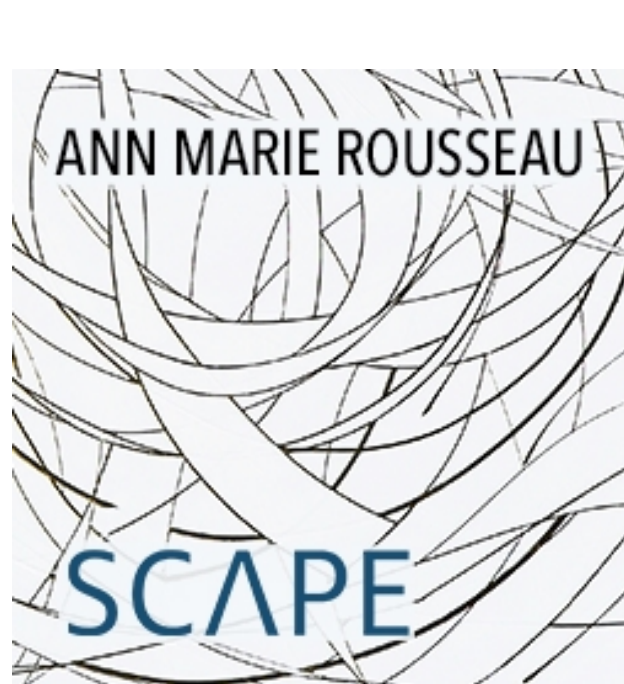
SADIE BENNING THIS IS REAL

FICTIONS IN FRAGMENTS

FU SITE

JUN 23 - FEB 27, 2021

BEFORE THE MOUNTAIN LOVE BEYOND VIOLENCE BEYOND BEVERLY HILLS



ANN MARIE ROUSSEAU

SCAPE

MUR MURS

Gallery • Shop • Cafe

@murmurs.la

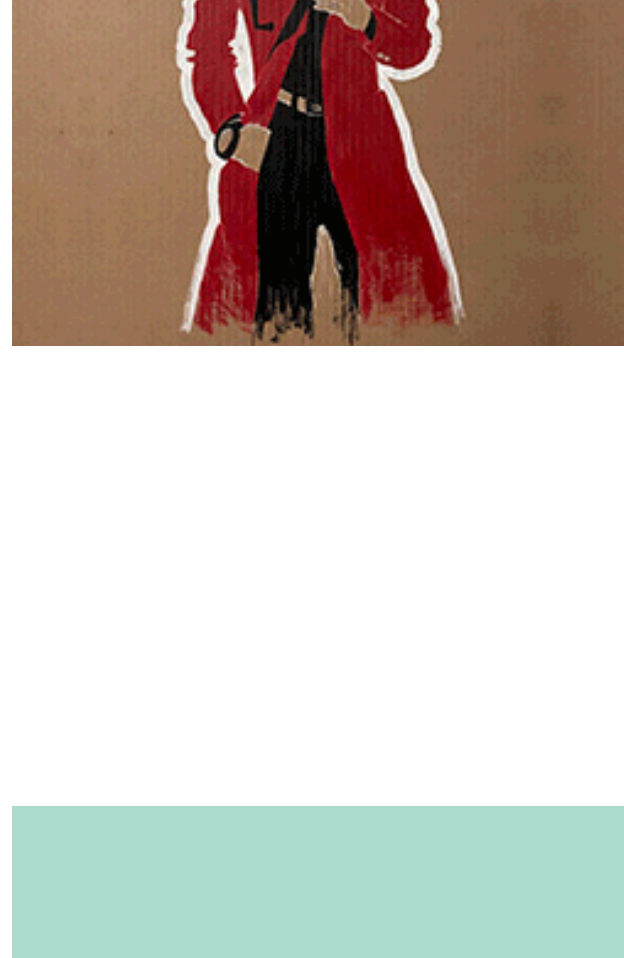
www.murmurs.la

Molly Segal

Marrow Sucker

Feb 10 - Apr 2

Luna Anzals at Wonszler



ANAT EBGI

Behind the Mask




Alicia Miller | Besame Carmalade

ROBERTS PROJECTS

Art in the Plague Year

artintheplagueyear.com

Gegam Kacherian



MADE in California

CALL FOR ENTRIES

SCI+ARc


A School of Architectural Thinking

Apply Today

Artpool LA



ART IN A LIFE



ARTIST ESTATES  
PRIVATE COLLECTIONS  
MUSEUM DONATIONS

Michael Maloney  
Fine Art Appraisal Services  
www.MaloneyArtAppraisals.com  
310.570.6420