

# VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES

## Press Release

### Robert Pruitt

#### Goodnight Prometheus

March 11 - April 22, 2023

Opening: March 11, 4 - 6PM



Vielmetter Los Angeles is proud to introduce “Goodnight Prometheus,” our first solo exhibition with Robert Pruitt, comprising of fourteen new Conté and charcoal drawings. A recipient of the Studio Museum of Harlem’s 2022 Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize, the Houston-born, Harlem-based artist is known for life-sized portraits that weave past, present, and future into transcontinental, intergalactic, and intergenerational tapestries. The exhibition title is drawn from an act in the 1961 film adaption of Lorraine Hansberry’s “A Raisin in the Sun,” which the artist watched repeatedly during the completion of this body of work. In the scene, a drunken, embittered Walter Lee Younger chides George Murchison for his collegiate dress and his search for assimilation. George silently pays him no mind until it is time to leave.

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Exiting the scene, he snips, “Goodnight, Prometheus,” invoking the Titan who—in defiance of Zeus—provided fire to man, making civilization’s progress possible. Like Prometheus, Walter is punished for his desire to aid the meek. Impaled to the ground floor of society, and ignored as black in a white world, Walter macerates his liver daily with the devil’s brew.

In “Goodnight Prometheus,” Pruitt continues conversations from more recent bodies of work— “To Control the Universe” (2021) and “A Song for Travelers” (2022). As in previous installations, black women are central in this constellation of drawings. One may read the artist’s representation of women, as in “Dyson Sphere”, as the centrifugal might by which the unequal forces of this world are separated and reformed. What may seem less apparent is the role of the figural black man. In “Sagittarius A Star” and “We knew from the start that things fall apart,” black men appear to spawn into being, their bodies fully formed as their *ori* (i.e., head-consciousness) remains a nebulous compendium of gases yet to solidify. In “This my new dance move, I just don’t know what to call it,” the man’s head is draped in a blue dress as his corpus provides a scaffold for his partner’s militaristic arabesque. Rather than a matter of indecision, these figures may represent new masculinities in the making, on the page and in the life of the artist himself, as the black matrifocal becomes the way forward.

Filial themes are furthered in “Couple in a Vacant Lot,” a neighborhood garden of Eden, complete with a serpent drained of all ill repute. Depicted in a floral array are “all the bad parts”<sup>1</sup> of a community, each living together in an agreeable, though shaky, existence. At the rear of this natal scene lies a specter of racial banishment<sup>2</sup> represented as a “We Buy Houses” sign. Lives—not to mention lovers—lay in the balance. This piece is Prometheus’ prudence at work, illustrating the more-than-human worlds existent within a disinvested community.

Whereas in past installations Pruitt may have sought to control the universe, here he labors to create it anew. This series promises to captivate, provoke, and pencil-in possibilities for being together otherwise, not in some faraway galaxy but on the daily. Goodnight, Prometheus. Diligent work has earned you some rest. But, tarry not too long. For there are as many stories to be told as there are worlds to be built.

Text written by writer and professor Dr. Willie Wright.

Robert Pruitt (b. 1975, Houston, TX) received his BA from Texas Southern University (2000) and an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin (2003). His work is currently included in the traveling exhibition *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration*, which began at South at the Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, and traveled to the North at the Baltimore Museum of Art (MD), and is currently

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<sup>1</sup> Pruitt, R. personal communication, January 13, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Roy, A. “[Racial Banishment: A Postcolonial Critique of the Urban Condition in America](#)”. March 5, 2019.

on view at The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. He has had numerous solo exhibitions including *To Control the Universe*, Salon 94, New York (NY); *Ad Infinitum*, Salon 94, New York (NY); *Guest Minister* at Oxbow, Seattle (WA); *The Banner Project: Robert Pruitt* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MA); *Devotion* at the California African American Museum, Los Angeles (CA); and *Women* at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (NY), among many others. Recent group exhibitions include *Us, We, Them*, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester (MA); *Assembly*, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin (TX); *Men of Steel, Women of Wonder* at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville (AR); and *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem*, which traveled to the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco (CA); the Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston (SC); Kalamazoo Institute of Arts (MI); Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton (MA); Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City; and the Frye Art Museum, Seattle (WA). Pruitt's work was also featured in the 2006 Whitney Biennial. His work is included in many public collections including the Dallas Museum of Art (TX); the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (MA); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (NY); the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (TX); the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham (NC); the Portland Museum of Art (ME); the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (NY); the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin (TX); and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (VA), among others.

The gallery is located at 1700 S Santa Fe Avenue, south of the 10 freeway. Parking is available on the south parking lot adjacent to the building. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 6 pm and by appointment. For further information and press inquiries, please contact Olivia Gauthier at [Olivia@vielmetter.com](mailto:Olivia@vielmetter.com).