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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute presents

Jayson Musson: His History of Art
February 8 – June 17, 2023

Return the Gaze
February 8 – March 23, 2023



Kansas City, Mo. (January 30, 2023)

The H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI) is pleased to present two timely exhibitions that merge the historical with the contemporary to explore the oldest traditions of art and examine the ongoing shifts in the appreciation of art history.

An opening reception will be held at the Artspace on Wednesday, February 8, from 6:00-8:00 pm.

Jayson Musson: His History of Art is a Midwestern premiere of the new three-episode video series written, starring, and co-directed by Jayson Musson and produced in its entirety as part of his artist residency at Philadelphia's celebrated Fabric Workshop and Museum.

Named one of the top 50 exhibition of 2022 by *Hyperallergic* and pronounced “wacky and profound” by the *New York Times*, *His History of Art* playfully deploys costumes, props, puppets, and scenery and centers on a sitcom-style video series, in which Musson—performing as “Jay”—endeavors to educate his skeptical puppet sidekick Ollie on the relevance of art. Dressed in bespoke tailored corduroy suits, Jay and Ollie journey across a three-episode arc from prehistoric art through the present, encountering figures as varied as Pablo Picasso and a larger-than-life Venus of Willendorf along the way.

His History of Art is perhaps best described as “a sitcom orbiting art history and all the fun to be had dancing on the minefield of the past,” according to Musson, who has taken inspiration from the structure and tone of educational programs such as PBS children’s shows and nun-turned-art critic Sister Wendy Beckett. With his own twisted spin, he conducts a satirical survey on art history, its relationship to the general public and the ways in which popular art historical images impact our cultural consciousness.

“Good humor always moves toward truth,” Musson explains. “This exposure of truth is what causes a joke to resonate with a listener and connect with their often-unspoken experiences and feelings. Jokes uncover, jokes expose, jokes bring into the light things which are oft-buried by individuals and a society. Comedy’s propensity to dig up skeletons and parade them in front of an audience with little regard for consequence or moral constraint is one of the main reasons it has been a useful tool in exposing inequality and grand social failings.”

Jayson Musson became an internet sensation in 2010 with his *ART THOUGHTZ* video performance series. Over the course of 20 YouTube-based performances, Musson, through his character Hennessy Youngman, incisively satirized both pop culture and art “insiders,” exposing the elitism of the art world and critiquing contemporary art while offering new ways of understanding the cultural landscape he traversed.

Ten years later, art institutions are re-examining their role and acknowledging the fault lines in their foundation. Yet, the fundamental instrument of validation in the art world—the field of art history—remains narrow in scope and entrenched in a Western, male-dominated canon. This is the focus of Musson’s current cultural critique, with an approach that equally informs and interrogates through his signature humor and accessibility.

“Jayson’s work has been wildly embraced by our audiences, who have filled our galleries with laughter and brought friends with them to see it again and again,” says Alec Unkovic, the exhibition’s co-curator at The Fabric Workshop and Museum. “We’re so excited to bring the experience to Kansas City, where it’s sure to continue to resonate with wit, hard-truths, and timely questions about how our shared understanding of art history is shaped and what that means for our current moment.”

Film Credits

His History of Art (2022)

Written and Directed by Jayson Musson

Assistant Director: Scott Ross

Produced by All Ages Productions

Props and set by Jayson Musson in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum

His History of Art is organized for the Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, and accompanied by an exhibition catalog. Major support for the exhibition has been provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, with additional support from The National Endowment for the Arts, The Wyncote Foundation, and All Ages Productions. The Artspace presentation is made possible with support from the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency, and the H&R Block Foundation.

Public Events

Opening reception

Wednesday, February 8
6:00–8:00 pm

More public events to be announced.

About the Artist

Jayson Scott Musson was born in the Bronx, NY. He received a BFA in photography from University of the Arts and an MFA in painting from the University of Pennsylvania, both in Philadelphia, also attending the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, ME, in 2011. Musson is represented by Salon 94 in New York and Fleisher/Ollman in Philadelphia. His solo exhibitions include *We Sing in A Dead Language*, Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery, Luxembourg City, Luxembourg (2019); *Demon All Day*, Salon 94 Freemans, New York (2017); *The Truth in the Song*, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia (2016); *The Grand Manner* at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia (2011); and *Too Black For BET*, Dazed & Confused Magazine Gallery, London, England (2008). His work has been included in group exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Lisson Gallery, and Postmasters Gallery, New York; Whitechapel Gallery, London; Galerie Perrotin, Paris; Grimmuseum, Berlin; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; David Castillo Gallery, Miami; and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, among others.

About the H&R Block Artspace

Dedicated to artists, art, and ideas since 1999, the H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute presents innovative exhibitions, public programs, and commissioned projects to engage and inspire the next generation of artists, designers, and culture workers.

The Artspace receives support for its programs from the Missouri Arts Council – a state agency, H&R Block Foundation, The Stanley H. Durwood Foundation, the Jesse Howard Fund at KCAI, and from private contributions.

The Artspace is open and free to all. Public hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 12:00–5:00 p.m.

For more details about the Artspace's public programs and additional information, visit www.kcai.edu/artspace. To schedule a group visit, call 816-802-3571. Follow us on Instagram [@hrblockartspace](https://www.instagram.com/hrblockartspace) and on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/hrblockartspace/>.

About the Kansas City Art Institute



Founded in 1885, the Kansas City Art Institute is one of the oldest and most respected art and design colleges in the United States. Located at 4415 Warwick in Kansas City, Mo., KCAI is a premier private, fully accredited four-year college of art and design awarding the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 13 majors. The mission of KCAI is to prepare students to transform the world creatively through art and design.

About the Fabric Workshop and Museum

The Fabric Workshop and Museum (FWM) is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art museum devoted to the creation, presentation, and preservation of innovative works of art. Its mission—*Collaborating with artists, revealing new possibilities*—embodies a 45-year commitment to helping artists experiment with the expressive possibilities of a broad spectrum of new materials and techniques. Through its renowned Artist-in-Residence Program, FWM provides artists at all stages of their careers with the opportunity to collaborate with its studio staff and take their work in fresh and often unexpected directions. FWM presents large-scale exhibitions, installations, and performative work, utilizing innovative fiber and other media including sculpture, installation, video, painting, photography, ceramics, and architecture. Founded in 1977, FWM brings this spirit of creative investigation and discovery to an eager audience, broadening access to art and advancing its role as a catalyst for innovation and social connection.

Image: Jayson Musson as “Jay” with “Ollie.” Jayson Musson, in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, *His History of Art*, 2022. Photo credit: Carlos Avendaño.

H&R Block Artspace at Kansas City Art Institute

16 East 43rd Street

Kansas City, Missouri 64111

Hours: Wednesday-Saturday, 12:00-5:00 p.m.

www.kcai.edu/artspace

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