

# ON THE WALL

## GRAND PALAIS

23 NOVEMBER 2018 – 14 FEBRUARY 2019

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Michael Jackson is one of the 20th century's most influential cultural figures and his legacy is still very much alive today. Born in Gary, Indiana, an industrial city in the Midwestern United States, he was the first black musician to achieve international fame and overcome the barriers, stereotypes and prejudices that once restricted the opportunities open to African-American artists. This exhibition focuses on the King of Pop's impact on contemporary artists and not on Michael Jackson's life and biography. Michael Jackson's influence on choreography also plays a particularly important role at the Grand Palais, for which three French choreographers were invited to create film performances, which can be seen at different stages of the exhibition. Michael Jackson's image and music continue to have a far-reaching influence on cultural life. Though his impact on music, dance, short film and fashion is widely recognised, little attention has been paid to his significance for contemporary art. From the 1980s to the present day, many artists have been inspired by Michael Jackson, regardless of their age, where they come from, their outlook or technique. This exhibition takes both a chronological and a themed approach. It aims to highlight the aesthetic, cultural, social and political questions raised by Michael Jackson in the minds of artists.

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## 1. A LEGENDARY DANCER

Few people are recognisable by their silhouette, clothing - gloves, shoes, a hat - or gestures alone. This first room examines how artists such as Dara Birnbaum and Appau Junior Boakye- Yiadom capture this characteristic specific to Michael Jackson, and draw our attention to his now legendary dance steps and body movements.

In *VIA*, Raphaëlle Delaunay takes Michael Jackson's iconic gestures, and works them into a sequence of classical dance steps. Combining two choreographic styles, it brings together different dance traditions. Michael Gittes invites us to rediscover Jackson's body movements in the short film for the song "Smooth Criminal" to the sound of Frank Sinatra's "Fly Me to the Moon".

## 2. THE ADVENT OF THE KING OF POP

Featuring works by twelve artists, this room explores Michael Jackson's transition from child star to global celebrity. In the decade between the release of his solo album *Off The Wall* in 1979, *Thriller*, the world's best-selling album, in 1982, and the *Bad* album in 1987, Jackson experienced an unprecedented rise to fame.

Artists Susan Smith-Pinelo and Rodney McMillian examine Michael Jackson's social origins. In *Sometimes*, Smith-Pinelo dances to the sound of "Workin' Day and Night" (*Off The Wall*, 1979), and exposes the issue of intensive labour. McMillian draws a parallel between a photograph of the Jackson family's childhood home in Gary, Indiana, and the words to "Hi Ho", a song about working in a mine, taken from Walt Disney's 1937 film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

Susan Smith-Pinelo, Glenn Ligon and Rashid Johnson explore the importance of Michael Jackson as a model for African-American youth in the 1970s with the Jackson Five and throughout the 1980s.

British artists Dawn Mellor and Graham Dolphin provide works that bring forward the quality of the handmade in contrast with mass-produced images. As a teenager, Dawn Mellor produced a large series of drawings inspired by the photographs of Jackson that proliferated in the media in the 1980s. Graham Dolphin's works are comprised of multiple copies of Jackson's vinyl album covers for *Off The Wall* and *Thriller*, upon which he has painstakingly handwritten the complete lyrics to Michael Jackson's songbook, which comprises 616 songs and 90,000 words.

This room also explores Michael Jackson's encounters with Andy Warhol and Keith Haring, two iconic Pop Art artists.

### 2.1 THE KING OF POP ART

Warhol interviewed Michael Jackson in 1977 about his work on *The Wiz* (1978), a film adaptation of the musical *The Wizard of Oz* featuring African-American actors. In subsequent years, Warhol photographed him on various occasions and began collecting souvenirs, items and documents relating to him. In October 1982, he chose Jackson's image for the cover of his magazine *Interview*.

In 1984, Warhol used one of Michael Jackson's portraits, a screen print, for the cover of *Time* magazine. Some years after Warhol's death in 1987, Jackson returned the compliment, featuring a self-portrait of the artist (*Self-Portrait*, 1986) in the short film for "Scream" (1995), a duet with his sister Janet.

### 2.2 METAMORPHOSIS

"Since *Thriller*, this storytelling code has itself become a music video convention ... Jackson enacts a variety of roles as the video engages in a playful parody of the stereotypes, codes and conventions of the horror genre. The intertextual dialogue between film, dance and music which the video articulates also draw us, the spectators,

into the play of signs and meanings at work in the 'constructedness' of the star's image."

Kobena Mercer, "Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson's *Thriller*", 1986

For artists Isaac Julien, Dawn Mellor, Monster Chetwynd and Jean-Luc Blanc, *Thriller* provides the fascinating premise for a double metamorphosis, involving the werewolf and the zombie, which play on representational stereotypes of masculinity and the black body.

### 3. A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

"Michael Jackson's artistic preferences reveal an open mind focused on others and the world. They add up to, and are confirmed by, a musical oeuvre accessible to all, highly federative, which was able to bring people together at a time when there were fringes of the public that seem irreconcilable."

Isabelle Petitjean, « Michael Jackson, au coeur de l'art », 2018

The question of Michael Jackson's role in constructing an African-American identity is a complex one. This room sets up a dialogue between works by Todd Gray, David Hammons, Emma Amos and Faith Ringgold that explore identity representation issues. These diverse works bring Michael Jackson into contact with the inhabitants of Harlem in New York, those of Ghana photographed by Todd Gray, the leaders of the civil rights movement (Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and Malcolm X), and other celebrities (Michael Jordan and Mike Tyson).

In *Body Song* (1997), Jonathan Horowitz plays the video made for "Earth Song" (*HIStory*, 1995) backwards, underlining Jackson's political awareness and concerns about poverty, animal welfare and the environment.

### 4. THE MASK

"In 'The Face of Garbo' Barthes sought to explore the almost universal appeal of film stars like Chaplin, Hepburn and Garbo by describing their faces as masks: aesthetic surfaces on which a society writes large its own preoccupations. Jackson's face can also be seen as such a mask, for his image has attracted and maintained the kind of cultural fascination that makes him more like a movie star than a modern rhythm and blues artist."

Kobena Mercer, "Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson's *Thriller*", 1986

When the *Dangerous* album was released in 1991, the visual featured on the compact disc and vinyl covers, as well as various communication media, was outstandingly unique. It was commissioned by Michael Jackson from the artist Mark Ryden.

Mark Ryden, Jordan Wolfson, Dan Mihaltianu, Isaac Lythgoe and Gary Hume explore the mask as both object and symbol, which occupies an important place in Michael Jackson's work. In his short films, he uses costumes, make-up and cinematic special effects as a mask. For these artists, the mask is no longer a simple accessory, it is the face that becomes the facade. In the works of Jordan Wolfson and Isaac Lythgoe, Michael Jackson is embodied by his gaze alone.

### 5. ICON AND IDOL

The terms "icon" and "idol" can be understood in two ways. A form of sacred representation, each also has a figurative meaning: idol as an adulated person, and icon as a model or archetype. The works in this room explore the potential shift between these different meanings.

In the works of David LaChapelle, Michael Jackson, an "American Jesus", is depicted in three portraits that borrow from Christian iconography. The photographs by Catherine Opie and video by

Michael Robinson portray the friendship between two celebrities - Michael Jackson and Elizabeth Taylor - where reality meets fiction.

In *Moonwalk*, choreographer Jérôme Bel directs some thirty amateurs and professionals who take it in turn to perform the dance move made popular by Michael Jackson.

For her large-scale video installation, *King*, Candice Breitz recorded sixteen Michael Jackson fans singing the entire *Thriller* album a cappella.

This room reveals the diversity of representations that give the King of Pop an exceptional dimension and sketches a portrait of Michael Jackson as seen through the eyes of his fan base.

## 6. SPLITTINGS

The works in this room provide a variety of portraits of Michael Jackson in which his image appears as split, divided, distorted and multiplied.

In Maggi Hambling's work, Michael Jackson, dressed in a white suit, watches his double dance. Paul McCarthy uses symmetry in his satirical reinterpretation of the famous sculpture of the star with his chimpanzee, Bubbles, by Jeff Koons.

In Paul Pfeiffer's videos, Michael Jackson's image recorded at concerts appears divided and duplicated.

The works by Klara Lidén, Dexter Dalwood and Sam Lipp have a more dreamlike quality. In her film, Klara Lidén walks slowly backwards to a hypnotic sound track in a way that reminds us of the moonwalk.

## 7. QUOTATIONS

The artists presented in this room use quotation and mise en abyme - the process of representing a work in a similar work - to highlight the scale on which Jackson's images circulated in the media.

In 1984, *Ebony* magazine published a fictional

portrait of Michael Jackson in the year 2000. The artist Hank Willis Thomas modifies the image's status by moving it from the magazine to the exhibition space, reproduced in a larger format.

Artist Isa Genzken has produced a series of works entitled *Wind* in which she uses a famous portrait of Michael Jackson by photographer Annie Leibovitz, published in *Vogue* magazine in 1989.

The images of Michael Jackson with his pet, the chimpanzee Bubbles, circulated widely in the media in the late 1980s. Jeff Koons created a porcelain work inspired by these images in 1988. The following year, and then in 2004, the artist Louise Lawler photographed the work at various exhibitions.

Rodney McMillian shows Michael Jackson's impact on his fans through a montage of sequences of footage of the audiences at Michael Jackson's 30th Anniversary Celebration concerts at Madison Square Garden, New York, in September 2001.

## 8. TIMELESS

The last room brings into focus contradictions between the representations of Michael Jackson in this exhibition, and reveals the exuberance, romanticism and drama that emerge from some of the star's portraits.

Michael Jackson's 'dinner jacket' covered with small silver forks, knives and spoons, made by costume designer Michael Lee Bush on the basis of the singer's own ideas, is introduced here.

Four diptychs by artist Lorraine O'Grady juxtapose portraits of Michael Jackson and Charles Baudelaire at various points in their lives, at once romantic and modern.

The collaboration between artists François Chaignaud and Nino Laisné explores Jules Massenet's French opera *Werther*, inspired by Goethe's tragic hero. It was shot in a setting similar to the Venus Grotto at Linderhof Castle

in Bavaria, famous for its artificial river. Through Chaignaud's voice and body, it echoes Michael Jackson's exploration of another artistic aesthetic - opera - in his musical and choreographic work.

Pieces by Grayson Perry, Lyle Ashton Harris and Johannes Kahrs reflect on the death of Michael Jackson, in different forms, to create a work of memory.

**Head Curator:** Nicholas Cullinan, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, London

**Deputy Curator for the exhibition at the Grand Palais:** Vanessa Desclaux

**Exhibition design:** Agence Clémence Farrell

**Graphic design:** Atelier JBL

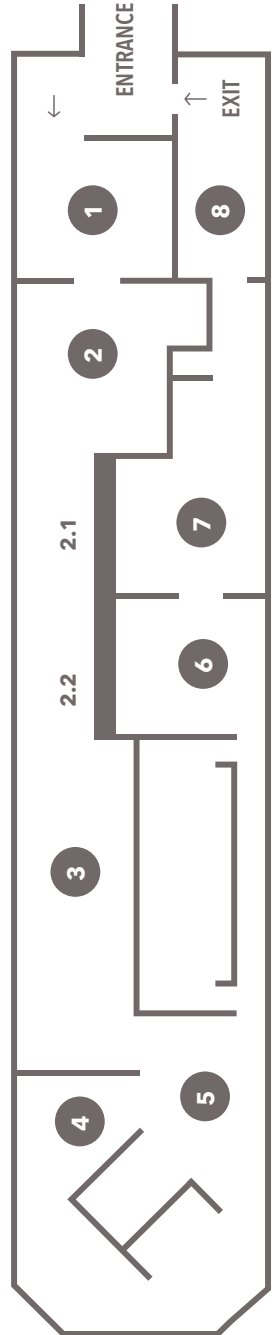
**Lighting design:** Vaste

This exhibition is organised by the National Portrait Gallery, London and produced in Paris by the Réunion des Musées Nationaux - Grand Palais, with the co-operation of the Michael Jackson Estate.



National  
Portrait  
Gallery

## EXHIBITION MAP



# AROUND THE EXHIBITION

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## CULTURAL PROGRAMME

### WEDNESDAY MEETINGS - 6.30 PM

#### Opening conference

##### Wednesday 28 November

#### Michael Jackson : On the Wall

Presentation of the exhibition by Vanessa Desclaux, Deputy Curator for the exhibition at the Grand Palais

#### “Michael Jackson and the Arts” series

##### Wednesday 16 January

#### Michael Jackson and Fine Arts

Lecture by Isabelle Petitjean, PhD, Musicology and Contemporary Music, Sorbonne University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities

##### Wednesday 23 January

#### Michael Jackson through the visual arts: kaleidoscope

Lecture by Sophie Orlando, Art Historian, Professor of Art Theory, Villa Arson

##### Wednesday 30 January

#### The Icon of Pop by Pop Artists Michael Jackson and contemporary art

Lecture by Annabelle Ténèze, Managing Director of Abattoirs and FRAC Midi-Pyrénées

## NIGHT OF IDEAS

##### Thursday 31 January at 7 pm

#### Addressing the present: Michael Jackson, a model for artists today?

MK2 Room at the Grand Palais  
Screening of the film *Prince* by Wojtek Dorozzuk, with Elohim “Prince” Ntsiete, 2014, 30’ followed by a discussion with the director, Marie Canet, Art Historian, ENSBA, Lyon, Valérie Belin, artist, and Mehdi Derfoufi, Doctor of Film Studies and Associate Researcher in Postcolonial and Gender Studies at the IRCAV, University of Paris 3 Sorbonne-Nouvelle

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## PUBLICATIONS

### EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

*Michael Jackson On the Wall*, 24.5 x 26 cm, 212 pages, bound, 140 illustrations, €35

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## CULTURAL MEDIATION

### AUDIO-GUIDE HIRE

**In situ**, in French, English and Spanish, €5

**From the app**, €2.29 in French and English (itinerary for adults)

On Google Play and Appstore:

<https://tinyurl.com/appgrandpalais>

**GUIDED TOURS** book at [grandpalais.fr](http://grandpalais.fr)

**Adults** - Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes

Dates:

**Out of school holidays:** Wednesday at 2 pm, 4 pm and 7 pm, Thursday at 2 pm and 4 pm, Saturday 2.30 pm, Saturday at 10.30 am and 4 pm

**During school holidays:** Wednesday at 2 pm, 4 pm and 7 pm, Saturday at 11 am, 2 pm and 4 pm

**Price:** €22 **Concessions:** €15

**Tribu ticket** (for a group of 4 paying visitors, including 2 young people aged 16 to 25): €59

**LSF** (French Sign Language) - Duration: 2 hours

**Saturday 11 January at 10.30 am**

Discover a host of contemporary creations over the course of two hours with a sign language tour guide. All attest to the interest of international artists in the career and fascinating personality of Michael Jackson.

**Price:** €7 for disabled card holders

**Price for assistants:** €10

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## MULTIMEDIA



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# AUTUMN 2018

## GRAND PALAIS

### MAGNIFICENT VENICE

**VENICE: EUROPE AND THE ARTS IN THE 18TH CENTURY**

26 September 2018 - 21 January 2019

In full artistic renaissance, Venice of the 18th century was a city open to every type of pleasure. Its modernity was exported all over Europe and founded the new aesthetics. In tribute to this vitality, musicians, dancers and actors will interact with the paintings, and with the public.

### MIRÓ

3 October 2018 - 4 February 2019

Bringing together nearly 150 works, this retrospective traces the technical and stylistic evolution of the artist. Miró creates from his dreams and opens the door to his poetic universe.

## MUSÉE DU LUXEMBOURG

### ALPHONSE MUCHA

12 September 2018 - 27 January 2019

An emblematic figure of Art Nouveau, Alphonse Mucha was a multifaceted artist. Beyond his work as a poster artist, this exhibition reveals the work of a humanist painter who never forgot his native Bohemia.

MICHAEL  
JACKSON  
O N T H E W A L L

**FROM 23 NOVEMBER 2018 TO 14 FEBRUARY 2019**

AT THE GRAND PALAIS, SOUTH-EAST GALLERY ENTRANCE  
OPEN EVERY DAY EXCEPT TUESDAY

MONDAY, THURSDAY & SUNDAY FROM 10AM TO 8PM  
WEDNESDAY, FRIDAY & SATURDAY FROM 10AM TO 10PM

The museum will close at 7 pm on 23 November 2018  
It will close earlier at 6 pm on 24 and 31 December

The exhibition is sponsored by Aurel BGC, Kinoshita Group and HUGO BOSS France.

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