



John Michael Kohler Arts Center

For Immediate Release

JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER PRESENTS ANTHONY OLUBUNMI AKINBOLA: *MAGIC CITY* FEBRUARY 1–JULY 11, 2021

OPENS ONLINE FEBRUARY 19



SHEBOYGAN, WI – *Magic City*, a large-scale installation by Nigerian-American artist Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola, will be on view at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center from February 1 through July 11, 2021. Conceived as a modern-day sanctuary, the site-specific installation explores the commodification of Black culture and the relationship between Africa and Black America. *Magic City* marks the 29-year-old artist's first major solo museum exhibition, which can also be seen virtually on the museum's website beginning on February 19.

The evocative nature of objects is at the core of *Magic City*. In Akinbola's mystical space, mass-produced and readymade materials—specifically those with cultural currency in the Black community—are transformed into animistic power objects that communicate the complexities of identity. Durags—fabric scarves used to maintain Black hair—replace oil paint as a medium for creating monumentally-scaled action paintings; hundreds of stacked Murray's hair pomade cans become looming minimalist totems; and a Cadillac Escalade morphs into a pulsating sound sculpture.

By tracing the arc of fetishism from Africa to contemporary America, *Magic City* challenges perceptions of cultural and racial identities in a globalized world by prompting viewers to question what makes an object "African," "Black," "White," or "American."

"*Magic City* is a temple to objects of worship from African culture and Black America and beyond," Kaytie Johnson, senior curator, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, noted. "With a wry and thoughtful approach, Anthony uses asymmetric information as a tool to complicate and question issues surrounding identity, commodity fetishism, popular culture, and ritual under capitalism."

Among the elements in the installation are Akinbola's colorful paintings made with durags, which have been both objects of derision and symbols of power and resistance in Black culture. Often the fabric is positioned with the tags out revealing that they are made in China, a sly nod to the effects of globalization on these culturally specific objects.

"Akinbola has described his work as 'metaphors for what a first-generation existence might look like,' and his exploration of cultural belonging through the space between his African and American identity offers a compelling and immersive experience for visitors of all backgrounds," notes Johnson.

ABOUT ANTHONY OLUBUNMI AKINBOLA

[Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola](#) (born 1991, Columbia, MO) is a Nigerian-American interdisciplinary artist who uses readymade objects to investigate cultural rituals, connections, and the conflicts in the fashioning of identity. Akinbola has been included in solo and group exhibitions at venues including the Queens Museum, New York; the Museum of Arts and Design, New York; False Flag, New York; Zuckerman Museum of Art, Kennesaw, Georgia; and pt. 2 Gallery, Oakland, California. He has been a resident artist at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass, Colorado; DordtYart, Dordrecht, Netherlands; and Verbeke Foundation, Kemzeke, Belgium. He lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

ABOUT THE JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center located north of Milwaukee in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, was founded in 1967. It is dedicated to making innovative arts programming accessible to a broad audience that ranges from artists and academics to families and youth of all ages. Central to its mission is promoting understanding and appreciation of the work of self-

taught and contemporary artists through original exhibitions, commissioned works of art, performing arts programs, and community arts initiatives. Since the 1970s, JMKAC has preserved, studied, and exhibited works by art-environment builders and has earned a worldwide reputation for its work in this area. Artist-built environments involve an individual significantly transforming their surroundings—for example, their home or yard—into an exceptional, multifaceted work of art.

The Arts Center’s downtown Sheboygan facility includes eight galleries, two performance spaces, a café, a retail shop, and a drop-in art-making studio. Among its program offerings are community arts projects; artist residencies; presentations of dance, film, and music; a free weekly summer concert series; classes and workshops; an onsite arts-based preschool program; and approximately twelve originally curated exhibitions of the work of self-taught and contemporary artists annually. The John Michael Kohler Arts Center also administers the renowned Arts/Industry residency program, which is hosted by Kohler Co.

THE ART PRESERVE, OPENING IN JUNE 2021

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center’s Art Preserve will open in June of 2021. The Art Preserve will be the world’s first museum to focus entirely on work from art environments. Visitors will have unprecedented access and insight into the display, preservation, conservation, and interpretation of the Arts Center’s premier collection through tableaux as well as a unique system of curated, visible storage of the works of art.

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center is located at 608 New York Avenue, Sheboygan, WI. Admission is always free. For information, call 920.458.6144, or visit jmkac.org, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#).

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Image: Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola: *Magic City* installation (detail) at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2021.