

GAY LETTER

ISSUE 22
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Artist Rahn Marion has almost always been a member of the church. Raised in Memphis, Tennessee, he quickly became aware that his identity as a gay boy was subject to hierarchies of condemnation and the hypocrisy of a god-fearing ideology — a notion that became especially strong during his teenage years. Though when he moved to Baltimore, Maryland to pursue a degree at the Maryland Institute College of Art, he took a break from being part of a congregation. In addition to openly exhibiting his queerness for the first time, he showed off his Blackness by becoming playfully competitive with his fellow Black students, each growing the tallest flat-top hairstyle possible. It was a time of personal exploration and radicality for the artist, and upon returning to Memphis and starting his first real romantic relationship, his boyfriend at the time had become a pianist at the First Congregational church in the midtown neighborhood of Cooper-Young. The church had a hostel for its workers, and Marion's boyfriend persuaded him to live there and try it out.



At first he wasn't sure how to relate to the church given his past. After attending sermons from the female pastor, however, he realized how fact-based and open-minded they were and that they were regularly feeding hundreds of homeless people in the church's congregation.

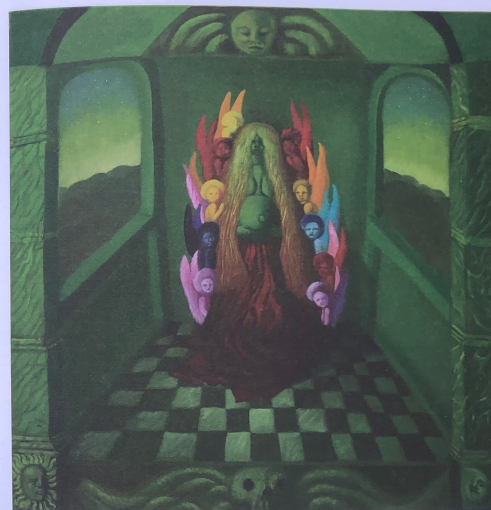
The space seemed to somehow break the stratified social classes outside its walls, all walks of life living in fellowship together. He decided to give it a chance and after about a year, he began to warm up to his position there as Minister of Art. He felt affirmed by their welcoming of his creative talents; any amount of effort he put into making things for the church was valued in a way he hadn't previously experienced. He began painting murals on cotton bed sheets he had sewn together, installing them in the sanctuary for liturgical season: nativity scenes for Christmas, resurrection scenes for Easter, and scenes of the apostles for Pentecost. He began to feel a new relationship to the notion of action in a community during this time. The task filled him with a sense of purpose — painting for others and for room and board freed him from feeling his creative work was frivolous, solitary, and selfish.

Marion stayed with the church for seven years before deciding it was time for him to leave. He hoped to build something of his own and figure himself out in a way that seemed impossible while he was living in service to the church and its people. Ultimately, he had become disillusioned by those mostly outside his church who used Christianity as a marker of their social designation and morality, and decided to focus on his own interpretation of biblical stories and Christianity as an artistic mission. "Much like being a bottom or top:

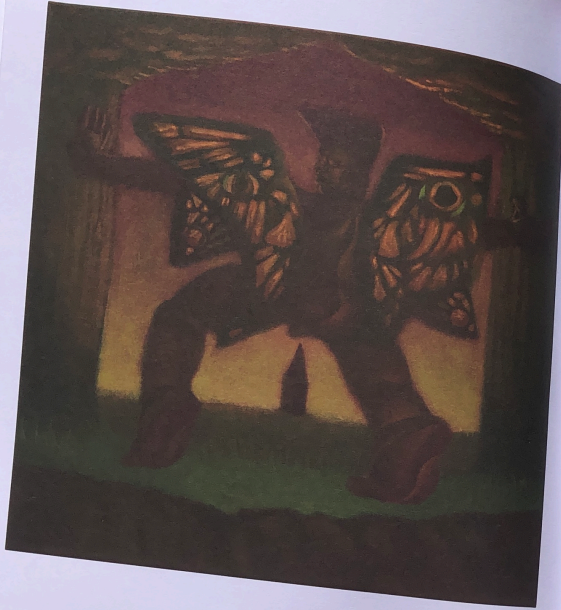
it's personal," he laughs. So, he began re-searching "Catholic icon painting — representing its 'power and grandness' and mining biblical texts for their complicated metaphors and symbols.

More recently, he has begun attending a church of Christian orthodoxy, "they have a library," he explains, "and a more literal approach to interpreting the bible. Unlike many American churches, they will describe the resurrection as a mystery. They aren't afraid to call something mysticism or say something goes beyond what is considered normal — which is what I'm interested in with my work: a way to construct a queer history within these stories." Strangely, a queer history have become central to this endeavor — like Mary Magdalene as a sage prostitute as well as scribe and cherubim angels as humanoid projections — in addition to more secular symbols like the skeleton as a memento mori and the goat as a witty fool who cleverly costumes himself to elicit delight. Marion tends to obfuscate narrative in his images, often using titles to name his subjects and guide the minds of his viewers. Landscapes — grassy fields, star-studded skies and rippled waves — become a hermetic genre of the divine. All together, he uses a dynamic mix of pre-existing myths and symbols to produce something that feels brand new — a deeply personal visual language forged from hand-picked pieces of the past. ■

RAHN MARION



"Magdalene" 2025

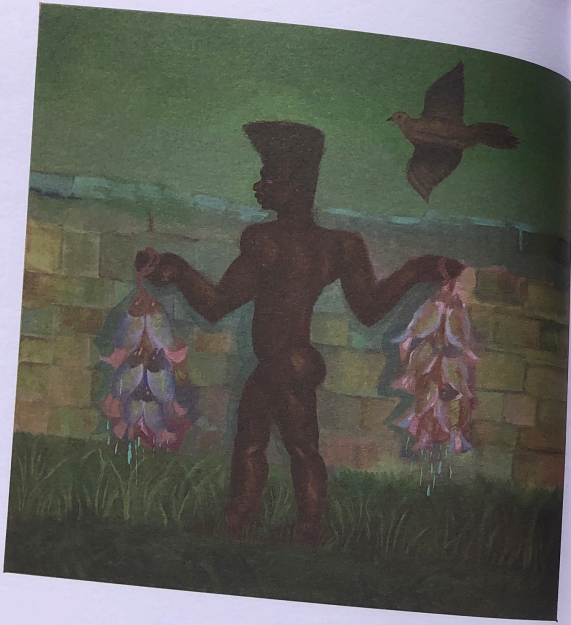


"Come Home" (2023)



"Sooner & Later" (2023)

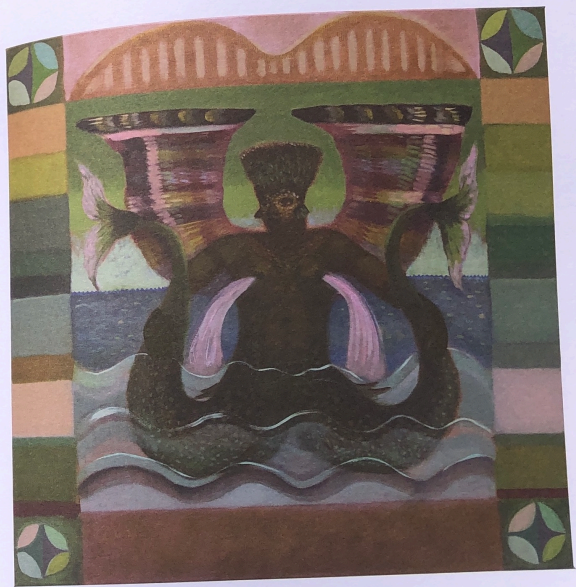
ART



"Fishermen" (2025)

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RAHIN MARION



"Merfolk" (2024)

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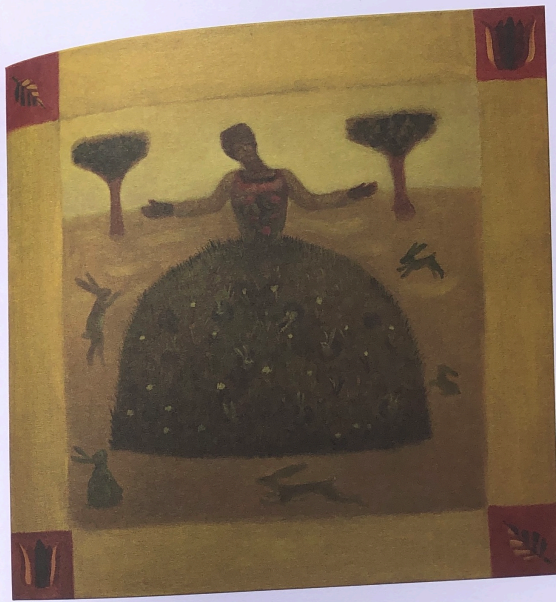
ART



"Ribbon of Annunciation" (2024)

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RAHN MARION



"The Curious Case of Mary Tuk, Miss Mary" (2024)

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"Eccle Seraphim" (2025)



"Ascending" (2025)