

JOHNSON LOWE GALLERY

Press Release:

Rush Baker IV, *The Structure of Ruins*

On view September 30, 2026 – December 19, 2026

Opening Reception: Wednesday, September 30th from 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Atlanta, Georgia – Johnson Lowe Gallery is pleased to present *The Structure of Ruins*, an exhibition of new paintings by DC artist Rush Baker IV, on view September 30 – December 19. The exhibition marks Baker's first solo presentation with the gallery.

The following text is excerpted from Dexter Wimberly's commissioned essay, *Rush Baker IV, An American Panoramic*.

Rush Baker IV has reached an inflection point: a reframing of his long examination of the American experiment. For his latest exhibition, *The Structure of Ruins*, Baker turns to the American landscape as a site of political geography. The shift is meaningful because it moves his work away from abstract depictions of the past and toward a harder question: *how does American ideology become material?*

The histories Baker draws on are not the subject so much as the evidence, the specific cases through which a larger argument about land and power becomes visible. The paintings make a statement through atmosphere before they make it through image. Architectural masses surface and dissolve inside fields of smoke, stain, and vapor; grids and ramparts assert themselves briefly, then give way to washes that behave more like weather than like structure. Baker's materiality does the work of history, allowing these places to emerge from the surface as pressure and residue rather than be illustrated as scenes, so that abstraction becomes the condition under which the past can appear at all.

The Civil War offers Baker his most sustained example of this process, and it remains a potent source of inspiration, but he is careful to distinguish inspiration from literal subject matter. Rather than depicting the war's events, he unpacks its consequences. Fort Sumter, Atlanta, Stone Mountain, Savannah, Charleston: these places function not merely as destinations but as overlapping fields of historical pressure. Sherman's March to the Sea holds particular force for Baker because it transformed the southern landscape through movement, infrastructure, and the deliberate restructuring of space itself.

Baker's latest body of work treats ruins not as romantic objects but as systems that continue to organize our lives. These paintings ask how a landscape can carry the residue of violence, resistance, and political mythology simultaneously. Baker does not sort these forces into a hierarchy, he holds them together in a single field, where they press against one another without any obvious resolution.

The Atlanta Cyclorama (1886) offers Baker a case study in exactly this kind of layered pressure, and a demonstration of how thoroughly the political organization of space extends to its representation. A 360-degree painting the length of a football field, it was created to depict the 1864 Battle of Atlanta as a Union victory, then altered in 1892 to recast the same scene as a Confederate triumph, with fleeing soldiers repainted and captured prisoners reassigned to suit Southern audiences, before a 1930s campaign reversed those changes to restore the original design. A single canvas thus carries at least two contradictory accounts of one event, each painted over the last.

That palimpsest of revision is a portrait of America's constant negotiation with its own past, its willingness to repaint history to match the story it wishes to tell. Baker is confronting this directly. His layered surfaces and buried references enact the same accretion the Cyclorama underwent, but he refuses the fantasy of a final, corrected version. Where the Cyclorama was repeatedly overpainted in pursuit of a single authoritative narrative, Baker leaves the competing layers visible, insisting that the contradictions are the subject.

Underlying all of this is Baker's response to the present moment. As the United States marks its 250th anniversary, he asks what it means to live in a nation whose foundational contradictions remain unresolved, and how those contradictions continue to shape the landscapes we move through every day. Baker is asking whether abstraction can carry an investigation that neither historical narrative nor patriotic ritual is equipped to hold. His belief is that it can, that a painting built from atmosphere and sediment and shifting space can register the simultaneity of a national history that refuses to resolve. The

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American landscape, in Baker's hands, becomes something that will not stabilize, a panorama that keeps turning, holding conflict and preservation, violence and memory, in the same unfinished frame.

- Dexter Wimberly

The complete commissioned essay, *Rush Baker IV, An American Panoramic*, will accompany the exhibition in print and online.

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About Rush Baker IV

Rush Baker IV (b. 1987, Washington, DC) is a painter whose work explores landscape, history, and the circulation of images. Drawing from archival photographs, historical paintings, maps, and digital fragments, he constructs layered surfaces that move between representation and abstraction. Combining printed imagery with plaster, resin, and paint, his paintings examine how political histories become embedded in the landscape and how historical narratives are continually constructed, fragmented, and remembered.

Baker has presented solo exhibitions at Future Gallery (Berlin), HEMPHILL Artworks (Washington, D.C.), the University of Iowa, and Keijzers Koning (Dallas). His work has been exhibited at The Phillips Collection and is held in the collections of The Phillips Collection, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the International African American Museum.

He received a BFA from The Cooper Union and an MFA from Yale University, where he was awarded the Elizabeth Canfield Hicks Award. Baker is a tenure-track Assistant Professor of Painting and Drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

About Johnson Lowe Gallery

Johnson Lowe Gallery champions emerging, mid-career, and established artists from our region and beyond. Our program reveres the transformative power of artistic expression, honoring the profound nature of visual language and its ability to drive personal and societal paradigm shifts.

Founded in 1989 by Bill Lowe, the gallery's extensive exhibition history includes renowned artists such as Thornton Dial, Michael David, Ida Applebroog, Markus Lupertz and Leiko Ikemura. In 2023, the gallery was re-established as Johnson Lowe Gallery under the Direction of Donovan Johnson with *The Alchemists*, a historic exhibition co-curated by Seph Rodney. This exhibition featured works by Sanford Biggers, Mark Bradford, Ebony G. Patterson, Thornton Dial, William Downs, Shanequa Gay, Trenton Doyle Hancock, and many others.

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Notes to Editors

Artist: Rush Baker IV

Title: *The Structure of Ruins*

Dates: September 30, 2026 – December 19, 2026

Address:

764 Miami Cir NE #210, Atlanta, GA 30324

Hours:

Tuesday – Friday | 10:00 am – 5:30 pm

Saturday | 11:00 am – 5:30 pm

Sunday, Monday, and Evenings by appointment

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For all media inquiries, please contact info@johnsonlowe.com

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