

The Hollywood
REPORTER

Michael K. Williams Described as “Heroic” Posing as War Soldier in Chaz Guest’s NY Exhibition

by Chris Gardner
January 22, 2022



Michael K. Williams RODRIGO VARELA/GETTY IMAGES

Gallerist Vito Schnabel talks to The Hollywood Reporter about mounting Guest’s first solo New York exhibition in two decades and the impression Williams leaves in the works: “It’s a beautiful sentiment.”

A new year has delivered two new projects featuring the late Michael K. Williams.

The beloved actor, who passed away in September at age 54, stars opposite John Boyega in Abi Damaris Corbin’s 892 that screens as part of this month’s (virtual) Sundance Film Festival. On Jan. 22, at the Vito Schnabel Gallery on Clarkson Street in New York, Williams debuts in artist Chaz Guest’s exhibition *Memories of Warriors*. The showing marks the first New York solo outing in more than two decades for L.A.-based Guest, a prominent painter and creator whose works have been acquired by the Obamas, Oprah Winfrey, Ted Sarandos and wife Nicole Avant, and Angelina Jolie.

Schnabel tells *The Hollywood Reporter* that he’s known Guest close to a decade and has always been a fan of his work. They’ve been in talks over the last few years about collaborating and Schnabel says he was particularly taken a few years back by one large-scale work he happened to see. “I asked if he would continue that series of work or if he had more ideas in that scale with the subject matter,” Schnabel recalls. Guest kept up the works and they settled on featuring eight portraits that, per the gallery, “depict scenes of perilous military action – portraits and battle tableaux – that reclaim the story of the Buffalo Soldiers.”

The unit was the Army’s first African American regiment, instated in 1866 following the Civil War. Guest, who also used the soldiers as inspiration for a graphic novel, combined the novel and the paintings for a deal with Eric Paquette at his Meridian Pictures where he’ll develop the series into a feature film. In the months before his death, Williams posed for Guest and their collaborations resulted in works titled *Michael K. Soldier* and *The Lonely Night*.

“The paintings are timeless,” Schnabel says, “and the fact that they represent Michael in this moment of time are a beautiful way to honor him and his life and the work he’s done. The way he’s depicted is heroic, which he was. I can feel the love Chaz has for him come through the paintings. It’s a beautiful sentiment.”

Chaz Guest: Memories of Warriors will be on view at Vito Schnabel Gallery through March 19.



Michael K. Williams in *Michael K. Soldier*. CHAZ GUEST/COURTESY OF VITO SCHNABEL GALLERY