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NEW YORK

David Hammons

L & M ARTS

In 2007, David Hammons made a show at L & M Arts on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Collaborating with his wife, Chie Hammons, he installed six fur coats on dressmaker's dummies; each fur looked fine from the front, but was grotesquely charred or glopped with paint or plaster at the back. For this recent exhibition—his first since then—Hammons returned to L & M's neo-Georgian town house with another not-subtle, not-simple caricature of luxury goods and fetishism. If the coats were conceived as post-Duchampian sculpture, their burns and



David Hammons, *Untitled*, 2010, mixed media, 92 x 72".

drips the Hammonses' R. Mutt in quotation marks, then the new show turned to look at painting since, say, 1945. Veiling and revelation, preciousness and transgression, individualist marks and ready-made forms were again at issue. First I was disappointed; it all seemed obvious. Then I was amused; the guy remains an elegant gadfly. Finally I saw the "paintings" as placeholders, portals. They were props in a social sculpture, and so was I.

Twelve works were displayed. Ten of these are large, brushy abstractions in hot, de Kooning-esque turquoises, salmons, and lilacs—or in cool, Warholian metallics. Each is almost totally obstructed by drapery; flung over the canvases in swags or stuck in wrinkles to their surfaces are huge, scuffed sheets of used-to-be-clear plastic, a frayed tarp, torn garbage bags, a raggy towel, etc. One silver-green-black abstraction (think knock-off Richter) is encumbered with pieces of gray garbage bag and pleated green silk. A turquoise-silver-orange number is mostly blocked from view by a wooden armoire, its mirrored front pressed to the painting's face, its unvarnished backside toward viewers. The last two "paintings" consist of layered sheets of ripped plastic, one translucent white on opaque black, the other a double ply of clear. An irregularly cut length of transparent plastic clouded by prior use (not a "work"—at least, not included on the checklist) was hung in a doorway like a heraldic banner, or the remnant of a shantytown.

There were no punning titles, thus no refuge to be found in the linguistic twists that often add a dematerialized dimension to Hammons's art. Per his instructions, there was no press release. Each work is *Untitled* (with the dates ranging from 2007 to 2010). After all, one should contemplate the sublime materiality of abstract painting in wordless absorption, right? And there are, in fact, passages charged with that compositional poise Michael Fried named "presentness." A pinkish white scrawl of paint peeps from, and rhymes with, a frayed gap in the blue-green tarp. The pierced and folded clear-on-clear plastic is a back-alley Fontana aspiring toward Balzac's *chef d'oeuvre inconnu*.

Also, it's junk. L & M Arts occupies two floors of its gracious building off Museum Mile; you have to be buzzed in, and a uniformed guard opens the door for you. It is a very white space. There are parquet floors, dentil moldings, and a grand staircase with an oval skylight high above it, which leads from the ground floor to a parlor floor and a

rotunda reception room with thirteen-and-a-half-foot ceilings. Yes, one knows: Galleries are in many ways elitist; vast sums change hands for symbolic things; the rich love to go slumming, but mechanisms are in place to keep the riffraff out. What went through my mind, however, wasn't dutiful intellection. I felt more a kind of comic haunting. Perhaps my very confidence in post-Dada sophistication lay in wait for me. In any case, a fourth wall seemed to dissolve. An almost-palpably rustling audience—though who would care enough about this scene to observe it, and yet be so removed?—breached the building's hushed solidity to watch us (critic, guard, staff, artist, collectors, historians, etc.) act our pantomime of "judgment" and "value." Walking away down Seventy-eighth Street, I thought, "This is all a David Hammons."

—Frances Richard

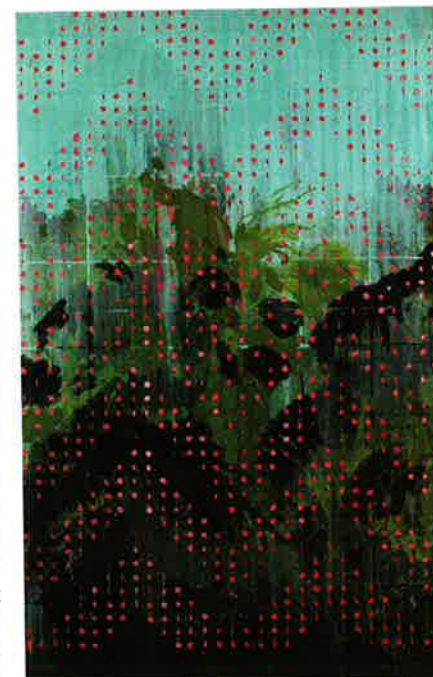
Hurvin Anderson

MICHAEL WERNER GALLERY

The thirteen paintings and one diptych, most intimately sized but some of epic dimensions, in Hurvin Anderson's first New York solo gallery exhibition can be classified as landscapes: They picture the lush, equatorial scenery of Trinidad, where the London-based artist spent some time a few years ago. That they are all predominantly green thus stands to reason. Why, then, did the omnipresent verdancy (in all its guises—lime to teal, olive to emerald) feel at times superfluous, a gilding-the-lily excess?

The answer, I think, is that Anderson is at heart just as much an abstract painter as he is a figurative one (certain earlier canvases verge on total abstraction, and a suite of domestic interiors, shown at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2009, are studded with nonrepresentational elements). And while most of these images read as depictive, all have liberal passages untethered to reality, and a few—namely *A Scene from Rocker Baptism* (all works 2010) and *Northern Range*—are kept from the bounds of abstraction only by their titles and our knowledge that, well, grass is green. But the tension does not emerge as irresolution; on the contrary, Anderson foregrounds his process of working between seemingly antithetical genres—the toggle between rendering nature and freeing a mark from the burden of mimesis; the clash of the landscapist's mandate to limn deep space with the abstractionist's to invert or annul figure-ground relationships—lending conceptual consequence to what is undeniably prepossessing work.

In some instances, the dynamic is overt, a matter of pictorial logic. A central cluster of vegetation in the diptych, *Untitled*, is continuous across the pair of panels, literally staging a confrontation between the interior space established in the composition and the exterior one imposed by its edge; *Beaded Curtain (Red Apples)* identifies in its title the dual function played by an allover crimson chevron design as fruit on an arboreal range and the scrim through which the greenery is glimpsed. Fences, gates, and grills operate simultaneously as objects circumscribing the countryside and geometric patterns charting the canvas surface, and a number of paintings contain diagrammatic lines evoking a viewfinder, grid, or, in the case of *Central*, a



Hurvin Anderson, *Beaded Curtain (Red Apples)*, 2010, oil on canvas, 94½ x 59".