

ARTFORUM

New York

David Hammons

L&M ARTS 45 East 78th Street
January 26–March 4



View of “David Hammons,” 2011.

In this exhibition, the esteemed New York artist David Hammons revisits themes that were active in an exhibition he mounted several years ago at this gallery, a posh town house on the Upper East Side. His 2007 collaboration here (with Chie Hammons, his wife) marked a shifting of gears away from overt and found signifiers of race and refuse, instead using signs of luxuriance—fur coats—and defacing them with paint and varnish, in addition to setting them on fire. For the present project, Hammons has hung large abstract paintings and has draped them with torn sheets of plastic, of the sort one would use as a cheap drop cloth for commercial or industrial painting. Where in 2007 Hammons used paint as a means of desublimating commodities, rendering them base and vulgar, paint and painting are restored here as the very object of rich delectation, in turn acted on by the low materiality of the drapery.

The overall effect is one of dereliction, as if each of the heroic-scale canvases—realized in an allover style with vibrant colors and daring brushstrokes—had been unearthed from a forgotten storehouse where they had been left to molder. In one instance, a piece is literally wedged behind an armoire, mostly hidden from view. The viewer, perhaps expecting a moment of sublime contemplation with the abstract canvases,

is forced throughout the exhibition to work around the margins, peek through gaps and rips, and experience a general feeling of both engagement with and repulsion by the work. And yet these industrial materials take on a sort of life of their own, drifting gently with movements of bodies and air; they are so tactile that they confuse the boundary between the autonomous painting and its shroud. As one reaches out to touch a piece of green cloth or translucent plastic, it's difficult to know where the work and the display environment begin and end.

Hammons partially resolves this tension in two works by outright hanging canvas-size sections of damaged plastic and simply nailing into the wall through embedded grommets. This is the artist in a resublimating mode familiar from his earlier work. But here the subjects are not racially charged basketballs and UNIA flags but wider considerations of artistic originality and the auratic autonomy of a medium. In this sense, the show is of a piece with earlier moments in his provocative, nearly forty-five-year practice, while also representing a marked foray into new territory.

— *Ian Bourland*