

Flash Art

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LYGIA CLARK

DAVID HAMMONS

L&M ARTS - NEW YORK



DAVID HAMMONS, *Untitled*, 2010. Mixed media, 163 x 117 cm. Courtesy L&M Arts, New York. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging, Inc.

Curator Alison Gingeras was once asked in an interview to name the artists she would choose to represent their countries at the Venice Biennale. Her reply was, "For the USA I'd choose David Hammons, though he'd probably say 'Fuck off.'" Funnily enough, my first encounter with the work of Hammons was actually at the Venice Biennale in 2003. Then-director Francesco Bonami exhibited his work *Praying to Safety* (1997), and wrote that for him that work of art had the same key role in his show as Joseph Beuys' *The End of the Twentieth Century* (1983-85) had in the previous edition of the biennial, organized by Harald Szeemann. David Hammons' playful yet uncompromising sensibility has influenced a generation of young artists; perhaps the only other artist whose impact has been similarly ubiquitous is Cady Noland. Sometimes the connection is literal, as in the case of Joe Scanlan's *Idee Fixe* (2009), a replica of Hammons' *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* (1983). I could continue telling stories and legends about his relationship to the market and galleries but I believe it is time to speak about the show. For his second solo show at L&M Arts — for which he asked not to have

any press release distributed — the artist seems to deal with the legacy of painting. The first hint of that is the handwritten signature on the gallery wall, welcoming visitors as they enter the space. Since we assume the artist's intent is not that of being informative, the other possible interpretation is that with this apparently minor act Hammons is "signing" the entire building. Written with pencil and therefore not so easy to see, the signature seems to underline the artist's appropriation of the exhibition space — a marvelous building on the Upper East Side. This realized, the rest of the show becomes easy to decode. Painting here is several times raped: covered with plastic and rungs, put behind a dresser and so forth: these canvases are corporeal metaphors for the human condition. However, a lack of guidance and the elusive style permeating the show makes one think, even for a minute, that this is just a joke, and probably the artist is laughing at our attempt to understand what this means. My only way to solve the dilemma is through Gustave Flaubert, who said: "That which needs an explanation is not worth an explanation!"

Nicola Trezzi

JOE BRADLEY

CANADA/GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE/THE JOURNAL GALLERY - NEW YORK



JOE BRADLEY, *Human Form*, 2010. Installation view at Canada, New York. Courtesy Canada, New York.

Two seemingly incongruous bodies of work on view concurrently delve further into Joe Bradley's mystifying figurative abstraction. "Mouth and Foot Paintings" at Gavin Brown's enterprise are crude chalk-on-unprimed-canvas works that continue along the same trajectory that began with his "Schmagoo Paintings" (2008), which consisted of clumsy doodles of stick figures and barely-there markings of various cultural signifiers. Here the imagery builds on those

simplistic origins with a surprisingly layered, colorful and physically labored group of paintings. Though still haphazardly sewn and folded, these canvases are painted on both sides, giving them an unexpected depth and texture, as if Bradley were self-consciously "building up" the painterliness of his canvas while simultaneously riffing on the faux-primitivist forms in the foreground. The technique invokes the spontaneity of stone rubbing; when paired with Bradley's goofy humanism the resulting energy suggests a kind of Art Brut cave painting.

Breaking completely with this buoyant expressionism, Bradley's newest show at Canada, "Human Form," is decidedly minimal and altogether more perplexing. Comprised of roughly a dozen eight-to-ten-foot black silhouettes in pseudo-hieroglyphic poses silk-screened on white gessoed canvases, these may be the most explicitly figurative of Bradley's works, yet also show the least of the artist's hand. Full of imagery that is vaguely suggestive of Greek vase painting or Egyptian art (but think The Bangles' "Walk Like an Egyptian," not Akhenaten),

the paintings rather evoke the performative thrust of an awkwardly choreographed dance sequence. Though physically commanding, these figures are mere graphic projections, as vacant and impenetrable as pop icons. Ultimately, however, the sparseness and surprising visual clarity in this grouping reveal Bradley's humorous Pop sensibility, undermining the heroism and pomp of the show's title so that all that is left is the trace of an image.

"Drawings," an exhibition at Brooklyn's The Journal Gallery, focuses solely on the artist's works on paper, an often-neglected fraction of the artist's body of work. Thirteen of Bradley's ink or graphite works on mostly letter-sized paper (all from 2010) range from amputated figures with misplaced sexual organs to caricatures of Hitler and "Judas" (an outline of the artist's right hand). The humble scale and bare materials here allow the artist to experiment wildly with drawing and figural conventions, while an undeniable sweetness in Bradley's oeuvre finally comes to the fore.

Dmitry Komis