

GLADSTONE GALLERY

"Generator," Art Review, January-February 2009, pgs. 44-5

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'There was an assumption that artists of colour could only and would only talk about their identity'

JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2009

Jim Hodges in Aspen
"I don't believe in purity"

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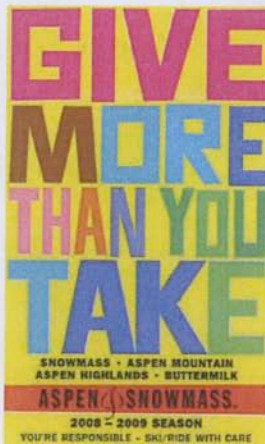
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● ON VIEW

GENERATOR

On the eve of an exhibition of new work in Aspen, Colorado, Jim Hodges discusses the processes and ideas that power his art



ARTREVIEW: I wonder if there are particularities of Aspen that will affect what you choose to show there?

JIM HODGES: When I visited the museum over a year ago, the entrance into the gallery appeared to be a frame to me. In the frame I envisioned another kind of passageway or door. Over time, contemplating this idea of the passage, the architecture and the specific energy the site transmitted to me during my visit, I started making drawings utilising the threshold of the space as an entrance into my psyche. This led to some rather dark work – of course, the times being what they are, it's not only from my insides that a darkness is emanating. Anyway, I was drawing these dark blank spaces that over time revealed a kind of mechanism for building. I built a kind of fetishised hinged wooden structure made with the cheapest materials I could use, painted black and somewhat out of control in the space. I let that work stand in my studio for months. In fact it's still standing there. I call it *The Generator*.

JH: My work certainly presents a point of view, though not all of it is autobiographical. One work in particular, from 1998, *Landscape*, was one of the most overtly autobiographical, and there have been other works over the years that can be framed as such. Using personal subject matter was initially most important as a younger artist struggling to find my voice and learning to speak through my work. The personal was what I knew and where I located myself emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, etc. These efforts to bring forth meaning through a self-conscious and overt display of the personal are metaphoric after all. And one hopes, in releasing what we call art into the world, that the personal transcends and the art acts as a useful transformational vehicle for others. I'm acutely sensitive to rather loaded materials and images often located in the realms of the common, pop or everyday. If I were to analyse my attraction to these things, it becomes a very personal history that I unravel. The personal is embedded in the general shared terrain, after all, and from that field emerges the art object. There is also the mysterious aspect of not knowing the 'why' of things, which is also a kind of revelation of the personal, I suppose.

AR: Given that you show your work in a public context, how do you avoid it becoming onanistic or solipsistic...

JH: Being self-absorbed and getting bogged down in anything – even a 'good thing' – can be a problem, so keeping conscious and alert is a daily exercise. I don't believe that people are pure, so I expect to make mistakes, as much as I hope not to make them. I guess one always runs the risk of getting overly self-absorbed, especially being rather isolated in one's

interview *ArtReview*

AR: Does your work always start through drawings?

JH: It always starts inside my body, and I use drawing as a way of getting it out.

AR: Are you often surprised by what comes out? Does making art act as some sort of therapy? And how do you feel about making the results of this internal process public?

JH: It's not therapy, but certainly a drive for understanding, which I assume is what one would derive from a therapeutic endeavour. But I'm not surprised by the ideas that come out. Making things public always comes with some risk; that's normal.

AR: Given that you said your work is a reaction and extraction from within yourself, is there a sense in which all of it is autobiographical?

practice. Actively participating in lively dialogue with other artists, family members, friends, strangers, reading papers, books, the Internet, music, even riding the subway everyday keeps me open and watching. I guess I'm a rather flexible guy; I work at being flexible and open, and I don't subscribe to any belief that is locked into one place. I enjoy the flow and especially enjoy the unknown, the 'what's next?', the unsure. The question mark is my favourite punctuation. Where my work is seen or how it's introduced into the world is an exciting aspect of what I enjoy in my job, and specific things, such as exhibitions that are site-specific in time and place, can be looked at as records as much as events.

AR: How do you bring a viewer into contact with the process of making a work?

JH: Evidence is always available in the work; the amount one gets is reliant on how much one wants

Clockwise from above:
Aspen Ski Pass 2008-9

end of time (light gray) (detail), 2008, cotton, polyester. Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

ghost, 2008, glass sculpture in multiple components, 81 x 56 x 56 cm. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

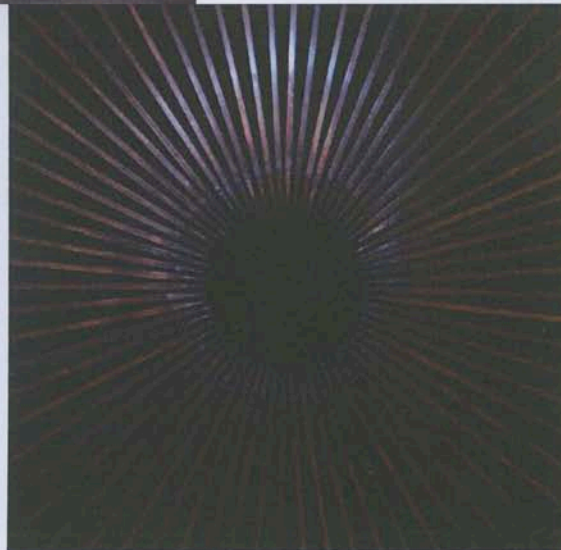
the dark gate (detail), 2008, wood, steel, electric light, perfume, 244 x 244 x 244 cm. Courtesy the artist and CRG Gallery, New York

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“I want to experience ultimate freedom, and art has taught me to work towards and for liberation. Art is integrally infused and functioning in our evolution”



or is willing to commit to the experience. There is an aspect of cocreating at play when one is engaged in the experience of art, and the reading of art can be approached from many angles. It's that complexity of potential experience that I am most motivated by. As a practitioner, it's the delving into and expanding my own range that energises me and ultimately I hope is transmitted into the work. I've always tried to be transparent and reflective, and never attempted to conceal anything in my practice.

AR: You mentioned that recent events have affected how you think of the Aspen show. Is your work as much a reaction to the world around you as it is drawing something out of yourself?

JH: I don't separate myself from the world. I'm in the field. Inspiration, ideas, etc are delivered in a kaleidoscope of ways, and I practise being conscious and open to them. I think it's fair to say that one is in collaboration with life and that the internal and external are equally motivating but not always in balance.

AR: Do you have any expectations for the role of the artist in society today? Do you think about shaping your audience's view of the world? Is this possible?

JH: I have high standards and want to raise them. I expect everyone to be engaged and expect everyone to want and desire the best. (I rarely have expectations but invest in an optimism that others want more from themselves and life, but that is a choice I make and an attitude as much as an expectation.) We share everything and we are all connected. No one is outside the field, though divisions are created and enforced to undermine our connectedness. I want to experience ultimate freedom, and art has taught me to work towards and for liberation. Art is integrally infused and functioning in our evolution. It is a very complicated place we live in, but the shared connective energy is powerful, and it's in and from that energy that art springs forth. Making a practice that has generosity and compassion is what I am attempting to do while keeping in mind that freedom is also an idea and ideas require effort and not everyone is encouraged to challenge and ask questions. Art has taught me to ask. I would never suppose I could change others, but desire intensely to express and hope others will do the same with respect and celebration for varying and differing points of view. We are all on a journey, and each is entitled to their respective story. We get what we make, but consciousness, like happiness, "is an option" – as the Pet Shop Boys say. ♣

Work by Jim Hodges is on view at Aspen Art Museum from 13 February to 12 April. Other solo exhibitions this year include the Centre Pompidou, Paris, touring to Dublin and London