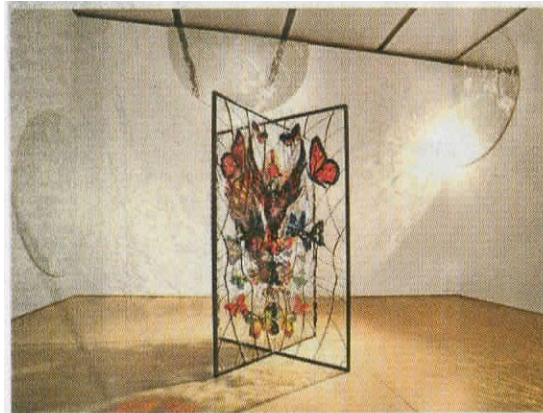


# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Holland Carter, "Taking Wing In a Time of Extremis," *The New York Times*, August 18, 2014, p. C21.



STEWART CAIRNS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jim Hodges: *Give More Than You Take* is a retrospective at the Institute for Contemporary Art/Boston.

## Taking Wing In a Time Of Extremis

BOSTON — In the 21st century, we tend to talk about new art in terms of medium and style: Performance is back, painting is back, Pop is back, and so on. But for roughly a decade, from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, the emphasis was on ideas and emotions.

**HOLLAND  
COTTER**

**ART  
REVIEW**

As racial and gender politics navigated the culture wars, and the toll taken by AIDS grew overwhelming, content often trumped form. In a lesson learned from feminism, personal history and feeling were O.K. Even spirituality, which the New York art world handles with tongs, became an admissible subject.

Jim Hodges's career as an artist began in that in-extremis time. Mr. Hodges was shaped by it and helped shape the art that came out of it. Gay, raised Roman Catholic, living in the AIDS war zone that was New York City, he favored craft-based forms, ephemeral and found materials, and images — flowers, butterflies — traditionally associated with mortality and transience. You'll find all of this in "Jim Hodges: Give More Than You Take," a taut career survey at the Institute of Contemporary Art here. You'll also find work that expands beyond the historical moment to which this artist is usually critically confined.

Mr. Hodges was born in Spokane, Wash., in 1957, studied art in regional schools and graduated with an M.F.A. in painting from the Pratt Institute in New York in 1986. At that point, he lost interest in painting,

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## Taking Wing In Extreme Times

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a shift that seems more or less to have coincided with his coming out. He says in the catalog interview that he was "lost in the hugeness of painting," was unable to find a singular voice in it. And he needed that voice urgently. He was changing, and so was the subculture he was now fully part of. Both were under serious threat.

Some of the earliest things in the show are experiments in addressing these realities. For the 1989 piece called "Deformed," he sliced a scuffed-up Bonwit Teller shopping bag along its seams, splayed it out and pinned it to the wall to form a cross. The bag itself carried some gay coding: Andy Warhol had once designed window displays for this women's department store. The cross has an obvious religious connotation but also suggests a medical emblem, the Red Cross. The bunches of violets print-

*"Jim Hodges: Give More Than You Take" runs through Sept. 1 at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 100 Northern Avenue, 617-478-3100, iccboston.org.*

ed on the bag (not pansies, as they are identified in a wall label) become both floral tributes and funeral bouquets.

A small 1993 collage, made from store-bought plastic decals, of an eagle descending among butterflies was intended as a homage to a friend, the artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who died of AIDS three years later. (In 2008 Mr. Hodges turned the collage image into a large stained-glass sculpture, also in the show.) And a 1992 installation called "What's Left" was conceived with his own possible demise in mind.

It consists of a pile of his clothes — jeans, shoes, briefs, black leather belt — lying on the gallery floor as if dropped in a quick undressing, for sleep, for sex, for a shower. The impression of spontaneity is countered, though, by an additional element: a spider web, woven from fine metal chains, that stretches over the pile, implying that the wearer had long since vanished.

Over the years, Mr. Hodges's work has been routinely identified, and sometimes dismissed, as a lament over AIDS, but this is not his only subject. Childhood is another. "Good Luck," from 1987, is nothing more than a black wool ski mask cut open and flattened out. Hung



Far left, Jim Hodges's "Here's Where We Will Stay," from 1995, in silk, nylon and thread; above, from left, "You," from 1997, and "Untitled (One Day It All Comes True)," from 2013, at the Institute for Contemporary Art/Boston.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEWART CAIRNS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

high on a wall, it peers down, scary-funny, like a Halloween spook.

The tall curtain of stitched-together nylon, chiffon and silk headscarves called "Here's Where We Will Stay" (1995) is an elegant shout-out to his mother and grandmother, who taught him to sew. It also evokes a gay kid's captivation with the hidden world of delicate fabrics stored away in his mother's scented bureau drawers. And the mnemonic power of scent itself summons the presence of Mr. Hodges's own mother in an installation he made after her death in 2006.

Called "The Dark Gate," it's a big walk-in, sepulcherlike wooden box enclosing a circle of sharp steel spikes. Each spike is meant to suffuse the air with his mother's favorite perfume and the scent that Mr. Hodges was wearing the day she died. The piece is overdetermined to the point of heaviness (and I picked up no trace of a scent). But as part of a larger idea of recapturing childhood, and the sting of seductions and losses that start early and never really stop, it makes sense.

A decade earlier, the artist had, in a roundabout way, returned to painting, or something like it. In 1997 he glued a

mirror to a canvas, smashed it with a hammer and exhibited the cracked results. Thereafter, he created a more controlled fracture effect by piecing together small squares of mirrored glass into mosaic panels. These panels reappear here and there in the galleries, refracting light, disco ball fashion, and creating distorted images of quite different works from other decades.

The curators — Jeffrey Grove of the Dallas Museum of Art, Olga Viso of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and Anna Stohart of the Institute of Contemporary Art — have arranged the show by theme rather than date, a good idea. This gives the episodic visual texture of Mr. Hodges's career a sense of consistency, which, indeed, it has. The natural world, it turns out, is a binding presence through 30 years. It's there early, and gently, in the flowers and butterflies, and dramatically — operationally, even — in "Untitled (One Day It All Comes True)," finished last year: a mural-size picture of a roiling cloudscape embroidered entirely from thousands of scraps of blue denim.

What, exactly, are we seeing? Nuclear clouds or Constable clouds? End times or a universe coming, Romanti-

cally, into being? Much of Mr. Hodges's art walks an anxious line between fatalism and uplift. He seems to be, by temperament, a mourner, but one with edges and elbows. He has a shrewd sense of humor, a way of mocking himself through materials: all those recycled jeans, and all that crazy hands-on sewing! And if work slips around from one form to another, how refreshing to see someone not turning out product.

In the end, he makes no great claims for his art. His career is less like an orchestrated score than like a diary of doing and being. It's easy to point out the influence of other artists on him — James Lee Byars, Roni Horn, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Rauschenberg, Kiki Smith, Paul Thek and Richard Tuttle — and Mr. Hodges is the first to name them. Less well documented is the extent to which he has been a role model for a younger generation. If some of the art in his retrospective comes across as wanly familiar in its effects, it's because so many people have learned from him since the post-plague years of the late 1990s, though you probably wouldn't see that if you weren't aware of, or didn't care about, that history.