

GREGORY COATES
Presse- und Kritikerstimmen

Berlin-Berlin

KULTURKALENDER

Was vom Reisen übrigbleibt

Das Wochenende: Der Geist des Tacheles, der Baron auf den Bäumen

BILDENDE KUNST. „Ich versuche nicht, eine Geschichte zu erzählen oder eine politische Aussage zu treffen“, sagt Gregory Coates: „Das Werk erzählt seine eigene Geschichte.“ Im dritten Stock des Tacheles zeigt der in New York lebende Künstler seine Ausstellung „seventeen“, für deren Rezeption es allerdings dennoch ganz nützlich zu wissen ist, daß Coates' Assemblagen „im Geiste Kurt Schwitters und der Arte Povera“ aus Fundstücken wie Fahrradschläuchen, Industriepaletten und Schnüren zusammengesetzt und mit Tuschen bemalt sind. Eine Herangehensweise, die das ihn seit Anfang Juni berherbergende Kunsthaus an „viele Künstler aus den frühen Tagen des Tacheles und des neuen Ostens“ erinnert. Überprüfungen von Koinzidenzen sind Mo-Fr 14-23, Sa/So 13-23 Uhr möglich.



Aus Gregory Coates' Ausstellung.

BÜHNE. Noch bis zum Sonntag ist „Filao“, die Cirque-Nouveau-Inszenierung von Italo Calvino's „Der Ba-

ron auf den Bäumen“ zu sehen - als Mischung aus Zirkus, Theater, Tanz und Musik. Les Colporteurs spielen Freitag und Sonnabend um 20.30, am Sonntag um 17 Uhr im Zelt am Anhalter Bahnhof (Strsemannstraße). Kartenreservierungen sind unter Tel. 23 00 46 51 möglich.

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AUSSTELLUNG. Manfred Heckmann hat Syrien, Laos und den Irak bereist, in Grönland als Schafhirte und in Schweden als Pflastermaler gearbeitet. Neben seiner umfangreichen Korkenzieher-sammlung hat er beim Unterwegssein auch Ersttagsbriefe aller Herren Länder zusammengetragen. Als aquarellierte „Mail Art“ zeigt er sie bis zum 9. September (Mi-Fr 15-20, Sa 11-16 Uhr) in der Galerie Carlos Hulsch, Kudamm-Karree. (ku.)

Art in Review

Gregory Coates

'Slang'

*Kenkeleba Gallery
219 East Second Street, East Village
Through Dec. 18*

These two very different shows co-exist in a kind of civilized harmony, neither upstaging the other but each helped by the other's brio.

Word games like Scrabble inspire Gregory Coates's striking arrangements of flat painted squares that bear three-dimensional, abstract glyphs of twisted rubber tubing, suggesting the alphabet of a mysterious language. The pieces are much enlivened by contrasts of texture and color; a particularly suave one is "Chill," in which the shiny black tubing formations appear on smoothly finished tiles of deep royal blue alternating with matte black blanks. The asymmetrical arrangement is one you might encounter in a crossword puzzle.

Other works present tiles in hotter or paler color schemes, some with subtle underpainting, contrasts between rough and smooth surfaces, smaller or larger numbers of squares, and differing puzzle-oid arrangements. If they could speak it would undoubtedly be babble to us, but within their own realms they seem to converse harmoniously.

GRACE GLUECK

Gregory Coates

Struttin'

"In street reality as in genealogical fact, "blackness" is both an abstraction and a spectrum."—Robert Storr

The new work of Gregory Coates, like those before it, comes from a deep and long tradition with abstraction and common materials—discarded, excess or just plain forgotten. Assembled of wrapped rubber and plastic, the works are layered and often three-dimensional. Yet, as Deirdre Scott has noted, Coates "works at the junction between disciplines, media and meaning creating works that are wholly constructed, at once painting and wall sculpture."

While much of Coates' work has become known for its particularly black aesthetic of inventive material reuse and repetition of form, his work's materiality remains immersed in the abstraction of improvisation. Depending on where you're coming from in the encounter with the work, they hint at and/or shun any form of narrative. Even when monumental in size, the work remains elusive to categorization, further enhancing its provisional character.

One might find that Coates' works speaks of the fabric of the urban landscape. The materials come from warehouse, perhaps like those of the garages that once populated the now gallery-filled streets of Chelsea. Fittingly, this show is called Strut. Walking sidewalks or streets—the changing urban landscape—the material is a reminder of the erosion of working-class urban landscapes. As a modernist-inspired flaneur, Coates struts and works at the same time. The disappearance of neighborhoods in favor of marketable development is also very much at the heart of these works. Using industrial colors like beige and a house paint white, the constructions seemingly celebrate a more gritty reality that takes comfort in the fact that there is so much to offer in the material world at our hands. Fortunately for us, Coates brings that reality to life.

Franklin Sirmans

CITY DRIVING

Lia Gangitano

Bumper to bumper. Rubber burning. Slow plus fast equals city driving. Making shiftless contradictions becomes preferable to seeking designated meanings. Hence a decision to stop literally searching and start waiting to get one- a philosophy.

A cultivation of boredom, repetition, simplicity, made credible by Warhol, leads to infinite production, the delegation of responsibilities. Gregory Coates does not like ironies, but he tends to list them, to look at them later. His paintings do not just display themselves; they tend to be in transition. Like driving fast, the solid road blurs, the fence picks up speed.

The idea that painting should broaden and repeat itself is motivational. Some reversals are implied by titles like Mimic, Echo, Family names. Unlike the groping for emotion implied by the vernacular of Abstract Expressionism, Coates has found something quieter, a project whose longevity alludes to indefinite retreat - embracing a scarcity of material, an explicitness of color. But they would not be his own if these terms were not made to contradict themselves.

Some contradiction lies in Coates' composition of the paintings' structure, surface. The structure is found material, wooden packing palettes scavenged from his neighborhood, around which more found materials are wrapped, bicycle inner tubes mostly, sometimes rope, duct tape. Clear allusions are made to makeshift swellings, patch-job refinements, the style of the street. To these structures, a coating of pigment is added. Most importantly they do not shine. A covering of powder (slow) over (fast) material causes an inward stare, offering no reflective way out.

Oddly, Coates cites a reference found in nature, a stream, fast water moving over slow dirt. The mundane natural discrepancy is applied to an urban rhetoric of debris.

There is no medium of concealment, just a dry accentuation of the elements drawn beneath. That the inner tubes, etc, comprise a drawing style on their own, whose formal duration, interruption of width relate to architectural spaces the pleating of grids, and the metaphorical implication of lines, highlights the versatility that Coates demands of painting.

By abandoning the hidden stretch of canvas, other tensions are divulged. Binding materials (tape, rubber) augment control, and are thrown off by strokes of color. Process not without audacity. His pursuit of a certain junk fetish (an accumulation and repetition of material) is dolled up with some rope tricks and the melodrama of accurate restriction. This conflation of cultured art history (Modernist color quotations) and streetwise performance (dressing up, acting) constitutes a subculture unto itself, much like the eighties art world from which Coates emerged and toward which many artists still aspire.

It's time to discuss Sado-Masochism, a literal and metaphorical situation, once described by artist/cinematographer Arthur Jafa in relation to the cinematographic representation of black-on-black violence in films such as *Boyz in the Hood* and *Menace II Society*. When deprived of power, one must create a context for dominance by any means necessary - an uneasy displacement of master/servant roles. So, Coates' literal references to bondage (restrictive, binding material and at times unadorned black rubber, a specificity of knots and hardware) speak of this transference of power, both in its social and overlapping aesthetic circumstance. Discarded objects on the street become elegant dominatrices in a Minimal power play for painting field. The material information lies in its accentuation of restriction, the drama of its accumulation and fabrication.

By overlapping aesthetic circumstance, I mean to allude to wry promise of Abstraction for earlier generation of African American practitioners in the genre in the mid forties, fifties. As a field of artistic expression, unencumbered by explicit cultural signifiers, Abstraction offered a level field for artists despite racial differences. However, social factors, namely segregation and racial prejudice, prevented the realization of the promise, and amassed a repository of forgotten heroes called African American Abstract Painters, to which Coates refers in equal part with their famous white counterparts. But with Coates there is

no “African American nobility clause, “ no preaching, just he pacing together of art historical references made disparate only by the circumstances of history. And this history continues in its relegation of art to racial categories, written in the scarcely understood recitals of a black vernacular hardly updated since the Harlem Renaissance.

And so the exhibition of Coates’ work in an alternative space, geographically located in downtown Manhattan (where he lives and works) presents an opportunity for the expansion of his installation practice as well as the formal dialogue he engages. A mature experiment in restraint, *to be Distributed* not only refers to the careful placement of adaptable units in space, but also to the positioning of his work in an environment fraught with heterogeneous associations of race, class and discipline – an encounter between a past utopianism posited by Abstraction and the complexities of present day exhibition practice.

Lia Gangitano is the director of Participant Inc. in New York City.

Ms. Gangitano curated the exhibition: Gregory Coates, to be distributed at Thread Waxing Space, NYC 2002