NEW YORK

David Hammons
L & M ARTS

In 2007, David Hammons made a show at L & M Arts on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Collaborating with his wife, Chie Hammons, he installed six fur coats on dressmaker's dummies; each fur looked fine from the front, but was grotesquely charred or glopped with paint or plaster at the back. For this recent exhibition—his first since then—Hammons returned to L & M's two-Georgian town house with another not-so-obscure, not-simple caricature of luxury goods and fetichism. If the coats were conceived as post-Duchampian sculptures, their burns and dips the Hammons's R. Matt in quotation marks, then the new show turned to look at painting since, say, 1942. Veiling and revelation, preciousness and transgression, individualist marks and ready-made forms were again at issue. First I was disappointed; it all seemed obvious. Then I was amused; the guy remains an elegant gadfly. Finally I saw the "paintings" as placeholders, portals. They were props in a social sculpture, and so was I. Twelve works were displayed. Ten of these are large, broody abstractions in hot, de Kooning-esque turquoises, indigo, and lilacs—or in cool, Warholian metallics. Each is almost totally occluded by drapery; flung over the canvases in swags or crack in wrinkles to their surfaces are huge, scuffed sheets of used-to-be-clear plastic, a frayed tarp, non garbage bags, a raggy towel, etc. One silver-black abstraction (think knock-off Richer) is enmeshed with pieces of gray garbage bag and pleated green silk. A turquoise mirror framed, fitted to the painting's face, its unvarnished backside toward viewers. The last two "paintings" consist of layered sheets of ripped plastic, one translucent white on opaque black, the other a double ply of clear. An irregular cut length of transparent plastic clouded by prior use (not a "work"—at least, not included on the checklist) hung in a doorway like the heraldic banner, or the remnant of a shafttown. There were no painting titles, thus no refuge to be found in the linguistic twist that often add a dematerialized dimension to Hammons's art. Per his instructions, there was no press release. Each work is Untitled (with the dates ranging from 2007 to 2010). After all, one should contemplate the sublime materiality of abstract painting in wordless吸收, right? And there are, in fact, passages charged with that compositional poise Michael Fried named "pneumatics." A pinkish white smear of paint peeps from, and thumps with, a frayed gap in the blue-green tarp. The printed and folded clear-on-clear plastic is a back alley Fontana aspiring toward Balzac's chef d'œuvre montre. Also, it's junk. L & M Arts occupies two floors of its gracious building off Museum Mile; you have to be buzzed in, and a uniforeed guard opens the door for you. It is a very white space. There are porcelain floors, dentil moldings, and a grand staircase with an oval skylight high above it, which leads from the ground floor to a parlor floor and a round reception room with thrones and a half-wall ceilings. Yes, one knows: Galleries are in many ways elitist; vast sums change hands for symbolic things; the risks love to go squirming, but mechanisms are in place to keep the riffraff out. What went through my mind, however, wasn't that lethal snobbery, I felt more of a kind of comic haunting. Perhaps my very confidence in post-Dada sophistication lay in wait for me. In any case, a fourth wall seemed to dissolve. An almost palpably real living audience—though who would care enough about this scene to observe it, and yet be so removed—enchanted the building's bustled solidarity to watch on (critic, guard, staff, artist, collectors, historians, etc.) act out pneumonia of "judgment" and "value." Walking away Seventy-eighth Street, I thought, "This is all a David Hammons." —James Richard

Hurvin Anderson
MICHAELE WERNER GALLERY

The thirteen paintings and one diptych, most intimately sized but some of epic dimensions, in Hurvin Anderson's first New York solo gallery exhibition can be classified as landscapes. They picture the lush, equatorial scarsity of Trinidad, where the London-based artist spent some time a few years ago. That they are predominantly green thus stands to reason. Why, then, did the omnipresent verdancy (and in its guise—lime to teal, olive to emerald) feel at times superluous, a gliding-slyly excess? The answer, I think, is that Anderson is at heart just as much an abstract painter as he is a figurative one (certain earlier canvases verge on total abstraction, and a suite of domestic interiors, shown at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2009, are studied with nonrepresentational elements). And while most of these images seem at times to be abstract, all have liberal passages unherded to reality, and a few—namely A Scene from Rocker Baptism (all works 2010) and Northern Range—are kept from the bounds of abstraction only by their titles and our knowledge that, well, grass is green. But the tension does not emerge as insurrection; on the contrary, Anderson foregrounds his process of working between seemingly antithetical genres—the tug of rendering nature and freeing a muck from the burden of mimetic the clash of the landscape's mandate to lunch deep space with the abstractionist's in its invent to some figurine-ground relationships— lending conceptual consequence to what is undeniably postmodern. In some instances, the dynamic is overt, a matter of pictorial logic. A horizontal cluster of vegetation in the diptych, Unified, is consistent across the pair of panels, literally staging a confrontation between the interior space established in the composition and the exterior one imposed by its edges. Beaded Curtain (Red Apple) identifies in its title the dual function played by an all-over crimson chevron design as fruit on an arboreal range and the section through which the greenery is glimpsed. Fences, gates, and grills operate simultaneously as objects circumventing the countryside and geometric patterns charting the canvas surface, and a number of paintings contain diagrammatic lines evoking a viewer's grid, or, in the case of Central, a