

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

By Matthew Nichols
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Jim Hodges has long created art that is visibly handmade. Often employing craft-based processes, he can tease visual poetry from rather ordinary materials. But these qualities were largely absent from his solo show, his first in New York since joining Gladstone. Presented in the gallery's two Chelsea locations, Hodges' new works (all untitled and 2011) are distinguished by their ambitious scale, high production values and even some hidden mechanical elements.

The most familiar works displayed on 24th Street were five shaped canvases covered with mirror tesserae, a material Hodges has favored since 1996. Here the shiny tiles are black, and the canvases possess sharp angles and sweeping contours. Though dispersed throughout the gallery, these varied shapes could be unified into a single large circle spanning 12 feet in diameter, and perhaps represent fragments of a shattered disco ball. A related work featured an actual disco ball spinning under spotlights in its own room. Slowly descending from the ceiling, the shimmering sphere eventually disappeared into a water-filled hole that Hodges excavated from the gallery's concrete floor. The submersion seemed laden with metaphor, especially since the room went dark for several minutes, only to brighten as the dripping ball rose from the well and flecks of light resumed their dance across the walls.



Another durational work consisted of a room-size wooden cube, open on one side and fully lined with white canvas. Dozens of small holes are cut into its ceiling, hiding mechanized nozzles that periodically drip or drizzle brightly hued tempera paints. Though each nozzle's goal is a corresponding hole in the floor, the projectiles produce messy splashes or miss their targets entirely creating an evolving carpet of splattered paint. Encouraged to rest on benches that face this veritable theater, viewers witnessed a colorful drama that pitted careful calibration against happy accident.

There were no moving parts on 21st Street, where Hodges installed four massive granite boulders in the center of the gallery. Clustered together in cardinal positions, their interior surfaces are sheathed in lacquered stainless steel in shades of violet, blue, orange or gold. When one walks around and through this grouping, fugitive reflections of neighboring colors slide across each rock's metallic skin. This mutual; exchange of chromas is oddly poignant since the intractable boulders must otherwise remain separate.

Although this installation affirmed Hodges' poetic sensibility, even while working with materials that invoke Jeff Koons, I was pleased to encounter signs of his touch in a suite of photographs on the second floor. These six large prints capture moody cloudscapes - some threatening storms, others burnished by sunsets, and all defaced by webs of scratches. The vigorous marks can read as cancellations - as efforts, perhaps, to undermine a romantic cliché. Yet the incisions also harmonize with the clouds, at times suggesting lightning streaks, jet trails or views through cracked glass. In a show that marked a polished leap forward for Hodges, these scratched skies reminded us that multivalent complexity can arise from the slightest of his gestures.