

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Blouin Art
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Adam Pendleton on Black Lives and His Pace London Exhibitions

by Nicholas Forrest



© Adam Pendleton, courtesy Pace London. Photograph by Peter Ross

Pace London's second solo exhibition of American artist Adam Pendleton precedes his presentation in the Belgian Pavilion of the 2015 Venice Biennale. The exhibition of "New Work" continues the artist's ongoing investigation into the relationship between race, politics, language, and current and historic events. It also showcases the cross-disciplinary nature of his practice which draws from African-American political and cultural movements, experimental literature, Dadaism, Minimalism, and Conceptualism.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a series of new "Black Lives Matter" paintings that respond to the political demonstrations that erupted following the highly publicized deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael

2021 S WABASH AVE
CHICAGO IL 60616
+1 (312) 226 2223

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Brown. These paintings are made with what the artist describes as a low-tech “painting machine.” The exhibition also includes a wall work featuring the phrase “BLACK LIVES MATTER” as well as a sculpture composed of letters from the phrase “BLACK DADA” which expands on the artist’s ongoing Black Dada project.

To find out more about the exhibition and the significance of his new works BLOUIN ARTINFO got in touch with Pendleton and asked him a few questions.

“New Work” is your second show at Pace London. What does the exhibition reveal about the nature and character of your practice and how it has changed and developed in recent years?

The “newness” of this show is animated by my engagement with sociopolitical movements that are unfolding now. The visual language I’ve developed over the years has not changed dramatically; I am aiming for the same visual urgency.

New Work spans projects that began in 2008 (the Black Dada paintings) to works that were completed a few weeks before the exhibition opened (Black Dada Sculpture #1 and the Black Lives Matter paintings).

I’m usually too slow to respond to “the news” in the space of the work. It takes time to resolve content visually and conceptually. With this show we are witnessing a contemporary formulation of content that has been in the making for years.

You described your new works as made with a low-tech “painting machine.” Could you explain what you mean by this?

A “painting machine” is like an enormous inkjet printer, but more low-tech. It’s a beautifully stupid, yet sophisticated piece of equipment.

What is the significance of the “painting machine” and the effects it produces?

It creates a surface that lies somewhere between machine-made and hand-made. It’s a fitting dynamic: the Black Lives Matter paintings are at once representational and abstract.

Your new Black Lives Matter paintings respond to the political demonstrations that erupted following the highly publicized deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric

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Garner, and Michael Brown. What approach did you take to these events and how is this manifested in your work?

I've spent a lot of time reading commentary about the "Black Lives Matter" movement, returning many times to Judith Butler's exchange with George Yancy in the New York Times.

I'm trying to broaden how people imagine the phrase's potential by creating a space where "Black Lives Matter" is in dialogue with other cultural threads i.e. Black Dada, conceptualism, and African Independence Movements. The confluence of these allusions complicates an easy read.

The phrase itself represents many realities. It is at once a public mourning, a rallying cry, and a poetic plea. Ultimately, it's a profound reaction to an absurd reality.

You have also expanded on your Black Dada project. Could you explain the basis of the project and how it relates to the new Black Dada work in the show?

Black Dada is arguably the foundation for everything I do.

It's a way to talk the future (socio-political) while talking about the past (art-historical). The paintings are the project's immediate visual signifier. In the show, the letters in the paintings have "fallen" out and become sculpture. Their surfaces contain textual and visual excerpts from the collages and texts found in the Black Dada Reader and around the studio, such as a fragment from W.E.B. Du Bois' essay "Our Spiritual Strivings." My work perpetually indexes the visually and textually dense archive that I continue to edit and expand.

How do you expect a UK audience to perceive and react to your work considering that your practice is so strongly influenced by American culture?

The references in the exhibition are purposefully broad. We can all relate. We can all respond.

As Amiri Baraka said, "...it's up to me, you, all of the so called minds, to find out. It is only knowledge of things that will bring this 'moral earnestness.'"

Adam Pendleton "New Works" is at Pace London until May 23, 2015

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