

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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## There in black and white

Pace Gallery presents new work by Adam Pendleton

by Sheryl Nonnenberg / Palo Alto Weekly

The management at Pace Gallery likes to keep us guessing. Last month, the downtown Palo Alto space was filled with the colorful, graphic and self-revelatory paintings of Loie Hollowell. The current exhibition, "Adam Pendleton: Which We Can" (on view through Dec. 22), is a stark contrast. Consisting of black-and-white silkscreens, collages and spray-painted canvases, the exhibition requires close examination and time to parse the artist's messages.



Pace Gallery's current exhibition features the black-and-white work of Adam Pendleton. Photo by JKA Photography.

It is the gallery's policy to avoid the use of labels, wall statements or other didactic material (although the exhibition's press release is available at the front desk). In order to better understand the work, it is always beneficial to go straight to the source. Fortunately, Pendleton was in town for the opening reception and agreed to sit down for an interview.

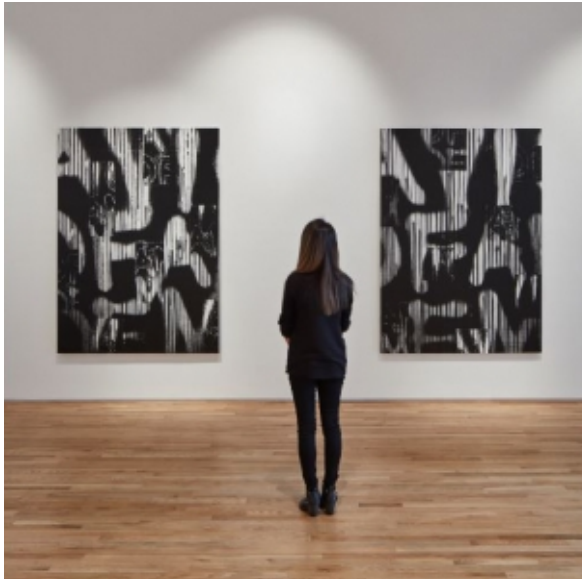
Pendleton is a quiet, thoughtful man in his mid-thirties who is as deliberate and measured in his speech as he is in his artistic expression. He was born in Richmond, Virginia to a family that appreciated and encouraged his artistic aspirations. Following high school graduation at age 16, he traveled to Italy, on his own, in order to study art. After two years, he returned to the U.S. and found a loft in New York City where he set up a studio.

"It was clear to me at a young age that I wanted to pursue the life of an artist," he said. He found gallery representation shortly thereafter and his career began in earnest. Although it sounds somewhat like an overnight success story, Pendleton said that there has been a 15-year period of working and maneuvering through the art world.

"I think that one of the core qualities an artist must possess is that they must be patient," he said. "It requires patience in terms of the development of the work itself and in how you are perceived."

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This exhibition is his fourth solo show at Pace, where he is one of the youngest artists in the gallery's stable. He is considered a conceptual artist, working in a variety of media including painting, collage, murals, video and live performances. A voracious reader, Pendleton said "writing is integral to my process and thinking." In much of his work there are fragments of text, interspersed with images that he has appropriated from a variety of sources. In "Our Ideas," 30 silkscreens on Mylar are assembled in a grid on one wall of the gallery. Some just consist of slashes of black strokes while others have remnants of photographs, text and African masks. Acutely aware of the unsettled state of race relations in this country, Pendleton wrote "The Black Dada Reader," a treatise that unites the philosophy of the post-World War I art movement with the writings of noted figures from the Black Art Movement. When asked if his work was political, he mulled over the question and responded, "There is a drive toward the political in the sense that we have to question ourselves as citizens, as human beings."

He explained that the gestural quality of the work reflects how he was "thinking very fast, making marks because there is a tension of something done quickly and then sort of left on its own terms." The fragmentation of text is also a conscious decision on Pendleton's part because, "We pay more attention to language the harder it is to read." Similarly, the use of the masks was chosen because, "masks conceal and reveal and I am interested in the dualities of that." He chose Mylar as reflective background for these pieces because, "mirrors tend to change the dynamic between artist and viewer."

The other works in the show are untitled, large-scale paintings in which Pendleton has used a white background, upon which fragments of letters and shapes have been silk-screened. He then applies broad, black swaths, using spray paint. It is a medium he likes because "it is so democratic. Anyone can pick up a can of spray paint." The end result is an enigmatic melange of shapes and strokes. What about the monochromatic

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quality of using just black and white, and will he ever use color? Pendleton smiled and said, "Black is a color. Let's just say that I have refined my palette."

Although Pendleton likes to create works in series, he explained that there is no effort made towards completion. He may add to "System of Display" in the future because, "each piece is a continuum. I am always thinking about each piece as it has been and will continue to be."

To the casual eye, Pendleton's work appears very controlled and carefully planned, but he shared that "Making art requires a healthy dose of chaos. You have to be open to chance, to any sort of swerve."

Silicon Valley is a progressive and entrepreneurial environment where distractions abound and immediate gratification is the norm. It begs the question of whether this demographic would be open to the time and thought process required to consider his art. After some thought, Pendleton responded, "The gallery or museum can be a place where we can stop and slow down ... where there is a shift of your geometry of attention."

Having achieved critical attention in the art world, including exhibitions in major museums and inclusion in the 2015 Venice Biennale, has his career gone according to plan?

Pendleton laughed softly and replied, "I am very happy to wake up and do what I do."

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