

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

The Creators Project
December 28, 2016

An Exhibit Takes Aim at Art History, Race, and Drake

Antwaun Sargent



Spectator. 2016. Acrylic and wiggle eyes on canvas. 25" diameter

It is rare that an artist will share exactly what they think of the current culture. In *Black Drawls*, the emerging artist David Leggett uses popular iconography to do just that, in bright color. Lacing humor with black celebrity and cartoons, the artist's exhibition of paintings, felt decals, sculpture, and installation at the University of Illinois at Chicago's 400 Gallery takes aim at art history, race, taste, police brutality, gender politics, and Drake.

"The art in the show is mostly inspired by current events and popular culture," explains Leggett to The Creators Project. "Many of the works in the show are of black people going through life. Some of the works like, *We got something in common* and *Spectator* are about relationships and how they can be under the microscope and have an expiration date. I was also interested in repeating the same images," he says, "and

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changing the meaning of the images in each composition. By repeating the images I also hope to add a normalcy to the black figure.”



Disco Butt Mud. 2016. Acrylic, felt, and wiggle eyes on canvas. 8"x10"

The paintings and works on paper on display in Leggett’s exhibition express an abstraction mediated by the figure, text and a craft-like materiality. Against a flat yellow plane, with dark undertones, Leggett paints in *Disco Butt Mud*, a personified piece of feces that sits above the text: “Gender neutral shits for all.” In a stencil of a crying meme of Drake, the artist shrouds in a cookie monster costume and looks on tearfully. There is *Post-black Folk Art Smash* of a green felt figure with his middle fingers raised in the air, and the message, “Folk art Hulk smash white supremacy,” in purple ink. It is a subtle critique of the ways in which art made by black artists is categorized. Throughout the exhibition popular figures paired with text challenges the relationship between the figure, its representation and the world in which they function.

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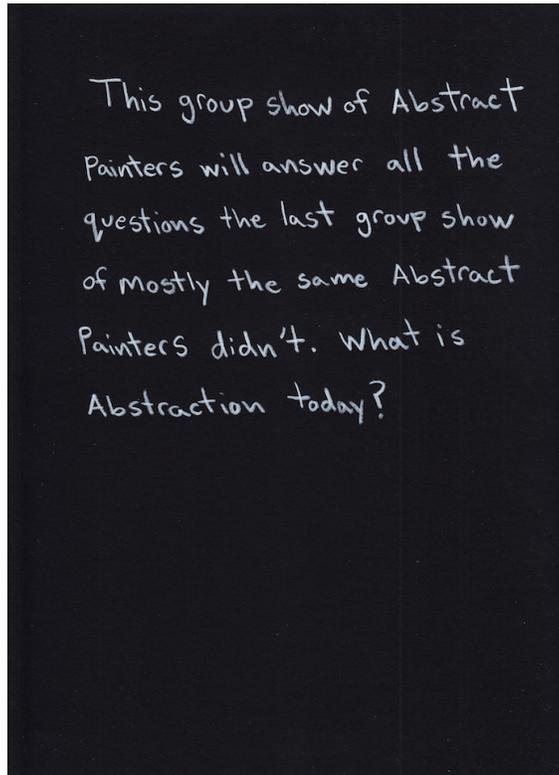


Black cat nine lives short days long nights livin' on the edge not afraid to die. Heart beat real strong but not for long better watch your step or you're going to die. 2016. Acrylic and collage on canvas. 24"x24"

Influenced by abstractionists Jack Whitten and Richard Diebenkorn, Leggett's paintings are as much about making pop political points as they are about critiquing the state of abstraction. "Some abstraction of today is repetitive and void of an individual voice," he says. "I find people make excuses for that and put together shows on the importance of abstract painting today with the same artists from the previous group on abstract painting."

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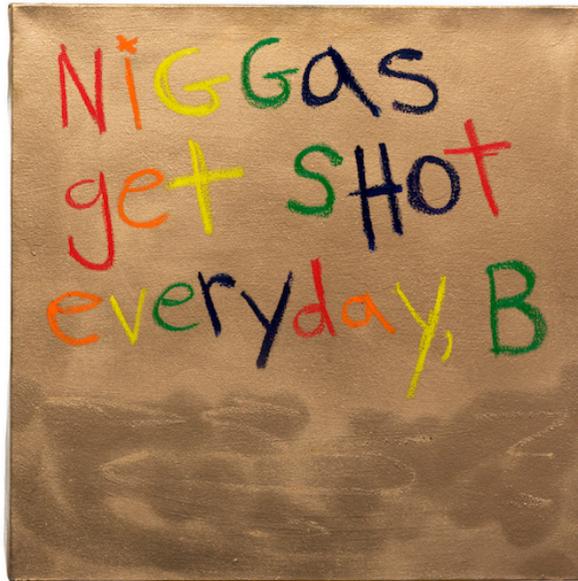
Men of honor. 9x12". Color pencil on paper. 2015. All images courtesy of David Leggett

In many of his paintings Leggett experiments with the ways abstraction and figuration can work together. *Men of Honor* offers the artist's most pointed critique of expressionistic painting. Evoking Ad Reinhardt's ultimate paintings of the 60s, Leggett writes in chalky lettering on a painted black canvas, "This group show of Abstract painters will answer all the questions the last group show of mostly the same Abstract painters didn't. What is Abstraction today?"

Other works are concerned with race and racism. Drawing on Richard Pryor's comedic use of current events to point out the ridiculousness of racism, the artist cheekily points out discrimination that would be thought unimaginable—like crafting legislation in the name of protection that discriminates. *I Did Enough* is a drawing of a white female figure paired with a micro-aggression: "I taught at risk inner city youth for two years. So I just know." While a suite of works bluntly addresses police brutality. *You'll Be Alright*, for instance, reads in the bright colors, "Niggas get shot everyday, B."

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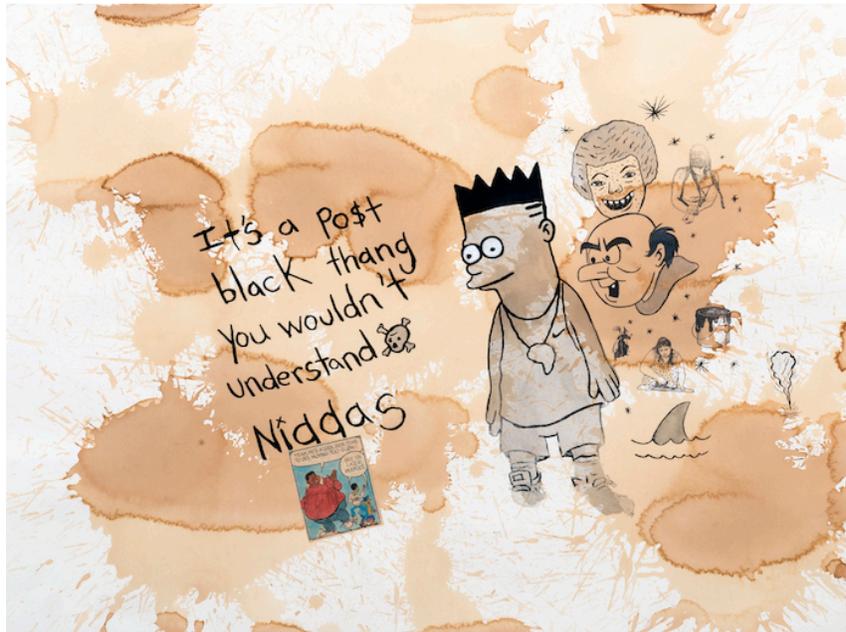
You'll Be Alright. 2015. Spray paint and oil bar on canvas. 24"x24"

“There are clear art references and popular culture references in order to bring the viewer in for a closer examination,” explains the artist. “By using those references you can create a springboard to talk about hard-to-deal-with subject matter.” He says, “I want the audience to leave the show feeling something. If I can make the viewer upset or laugh that is a good feeling.” He adds, “I hope my work provides a strong stance on how black people are represented and treated.”

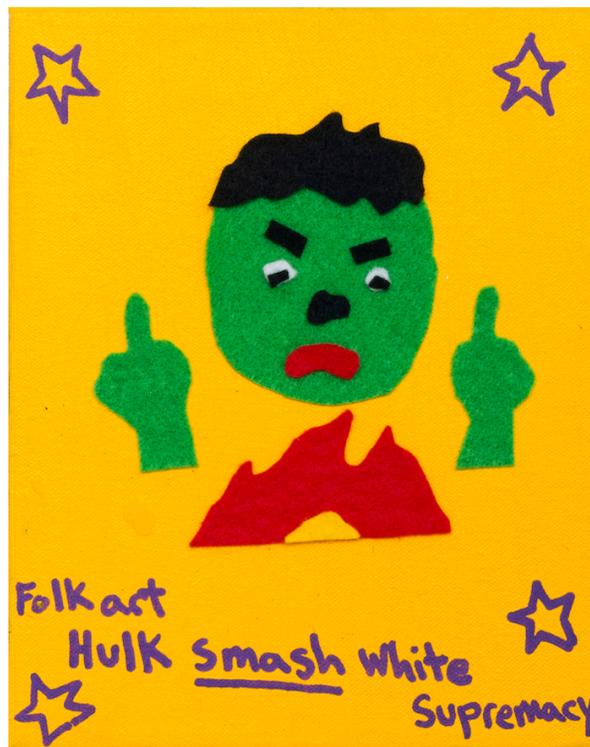
Black Drawls ran through December 19 at the University of Illinois at Chicago’s 400 Gallery.

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Mudfoot is out of his post-black mind. 2016. Screen print, ink, rubber stamp, and coffee on paper.
30"x22"



Post-black folk art smash. 2016. Felt and acrylic on canvas. 8"x10".

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