

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

“Painting”

THE BOX

805 Traction Ave

December 1–January 26

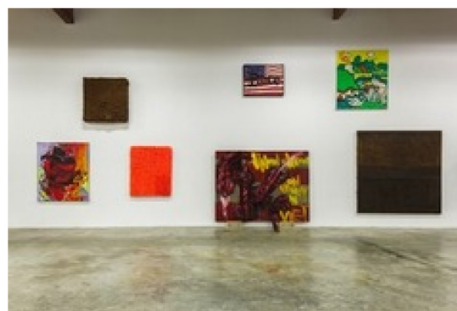
The title of this eleven-artist exhibition sounds like an understatement given the variety of media on view. For instance, the only traditional painting element retained by Carolee Schneemann's three-dimensional *Ice Box*, 1963, is its landscape orientation. Likewise, the bright hues of Barbara T. Smith's 1964 *Day Glo Cotton Balls* probes the confluence of color and light, the issues central to Impressionism, but it does so using nontraditional and modern materials. The most recent piece in the show, the textured shit-brown *Foam Pallet*, 2012, by Paul McCarthy, continues to skewer preconceptions of painting as an alchemy of artist-brush-paint-canvas, as do his six painting-themed videos from the 1970s that are also included here.

On the early end of “Painting”'s chronological continuum is Wally Hedrick's 1953 *Peace*. This impasto oil representation of the American flag is a seminal antiwar piece that predates Jasper Johns's *Flag* by at least a year. The American flag also serves as a background in Judith Bernstein's gory multimedia protest piece *Union Jack-Off on Vietnam Policy*, 1967, which explicitly illustrates the eponymous act.

Much of the other work on view dates back to the 1960s, and none of it is innocuous. Radical as it might seem, Bernstein's take on the axis of sex and politics (a thematic also prominent in Hedrick's 1960 *Big Dick (Nixon) for President*) is not the only work that will make the visitors gasp. Even more shocking and provocative are Mike Henderson's *Non-Violence* and *Castration*, both 1968, two large, expressionistic canvases that depict brutal attacks by animalized white police on animalized African Americans.

Henderson's harrowing narratives unravel on canvas only to dissolve into darkness and, in the case of *Castration*, into cinder: The canvas was damaged in a 1985 fire and is displayed in damaged condition with a portion missing. In a weird way, this chimes with the intrepid character of the entire exhibition and its challenge to the vision of painting as cultivated, tame, and pleasant. And perhaps the paintings here could be all these things, were it not for the brutal honesty with which they approach their subject matter, reflecting times that have been anything but cultivated and pleasant.

— Julia Friedman



View of “Painting,” 2012.