

On View / A matter of identity

George Hughes solo exhibition

BY BRUCE
ADAMS



Skills (2017)

January 26-March 3, 2018

Buffalo Arts Studio (BAS)

On some level, the paintings of George Afedzi Hughes seem familiar. Working large scale with acrylic and oil on canvas, Hughes layers imagery appropriated from numerous pop culture sources—ads, sports, news photos, and anatomical charts, to name a few—mixing in hints of tribal art. Images collide, overlap, and dissolve in chaotic vignettes that evoke myriad associations. His earlier work was expressive, with muscular brushwork, distorted imagery, and flourishes of abstraction. More recently, he has moved toward a

self-consciously flat style approaching illustration. Both display a painter's passion for surface quality.

None of this, however, addresses the heart of Hughes' work. The artist was born and raised in Ghana and spent time in Europe before moving to the United States. He currently lives in Buffalo where he teaches painting at the University at Buffalo. Hughes' artistic practice is informed by the history of turmoil and violence associated with colonialism and the relationship between Western art and postcolonial African society. His recent paintings underscore comparisons between colonialist history and contemporary global conflict. All this is viewed through the lens of today's instant media accessibility to the horrors of global strife.

Not that Hughes attempts to create order out of any of this. Rather, his work reflects the undistinguishable cacophony of sounds and sights that bombard us daily, where global horrors are commodified as accounts of social conflict arrive between sports and shoe ads. Hughes finds dark humor in this, peppering his ruminations with deadpan wit, such as the huge foot that stomps rudely into the picture plane of one work. The flat rendering is emblazoned with bold letters spelling out BLAC, leaving viewers to figure out the rest. Illustrations of skeletal joints find their way into some of the works. That might sound macabre, but, in Hughes' work, they are deadpan reminders of our biological nature.



After Party (2017)

Beginning January 26, an exhibition of Hughes' work titled *The Politics of Identity* will go on display at Buffalo Arts Studio (BAS). The title suggests that our identities—how we view ourselves—are not entirely a matter of choice, but rather a social construct outside our control. The show includes two bodies of work, filling both BAS galleries. Some of the artist's largest canvases will be on view, most of which have not been exhibited in Buffalo. Earlier work mixes sports and military metaphors with disfigured human and

animal body parts. The newer paintings adopt a more outwardly positive tone, while exploring the interaction between colonial regimes and developing economies.

The opening reception for the exhibition is Friday, January 26, from 5 to 8 p.m.

Artist and educator Bruce Adams is a longtime contributor to Spree and writes Spree's online column Long Story Short.

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