



Harmony Hammond

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October 23 – December 7, 2013

Alexander Gray Associates

## **A Manifesto (Personal) of Monochrome (Sort of)**

Painting, like any cultural language, doesn't have to rely on its historicized meanings. I don't accept that painting is an over-determined site, a privileged domain of the authoritative masculine voice, or that monochrome painting is necessarily a dead end—the inevitable conclusion of a history of art as a hierarchy of purifications.

I make large thickly painted near-monochrome paintings. While these paintings engage with (and I like to think, interrupt and resist), the history of modernist painting—and more specifically, narratives of abstraction and monochrome—they come out of post-minimal and feminist concerns with materials and process rather than modernist reduction.

They are formal, frontal, condensed. They resist pictorial space and assert the painting object. But they also invite content. My work is not pure, isolated, authoritative, universal, self-referential, self-sufficient, or removed from social function. I invoke references and associations. I welcome the world outside the painting edge into the painting field.

Because monochrome painting is typically one surface and non-hierarchical in composition, the focus is on nuance of sameness and difference within and between paintings. I disagree with readings of monochrome based on absence, emptiness or blankness because they define monochrome as the “other” in relation to image and signification. These readings do not take into account the materiality of paint as a carrier of meaning.

The paintings are layered and built out of themselves—from the inside out. Paint is applied with a brush, but it's not about the stroke or mark in the abstract expressionist sense. The blotchy encrusted surface, both matte and gloss, simultaneously elegant, raw, crude—definitely handmade—functions as indexical sign of maker and making—and yet we aren't sure how it is made.

Despite the thickness of the paint—surface, color and space are indeterminate, unstable, fugitive. We can't quite locate them. They resist definitive articulation. Unlike a lot of monochromes, the paintings refuse to settle down. The painting surface references other materials and substances at the same time it stubbornly remains itself—paint. Color freed from representation, retains referentiality. Dried blood and other body fluids, wounds, scabs and scar tissue, scraped hides, burned, weathered and patinated surfaces, topographical locations. The body is always near.

Monochrome refuses disembodiment. It allows one to escape figuration but presence the body. All painting is about the skin of paint. The skin of paint calls up the body, and therefore the painting body. At their best, the paintings transmute the painting field into the body.

If monochrome is a sign of painting's materiality, then near monochrome, what I do—the not quite monochrome, the becoming or unbecoming monochrome, the disruption of monochrome—is one place that content enters in. Up close under-layers of color are visible through surface cracks and crevices. It's about what's hidden, what's revealed, buried, muffled, pushing up from underneath....a surface under stress. Might the painting surface as edge between art and life be a site of negotiation?

In their refusal to be any one thing at the same time they are themselves, the paintings can be seen to occupy some sort of fugitive or queer space and in doing so, remain oppositional....both in their refusal to participate fully in the received narrative of modernist painting and, at the same time, their refusal to “look” queer (though we might say that the paintings perform queerly).

Harmony Hammond, 2010



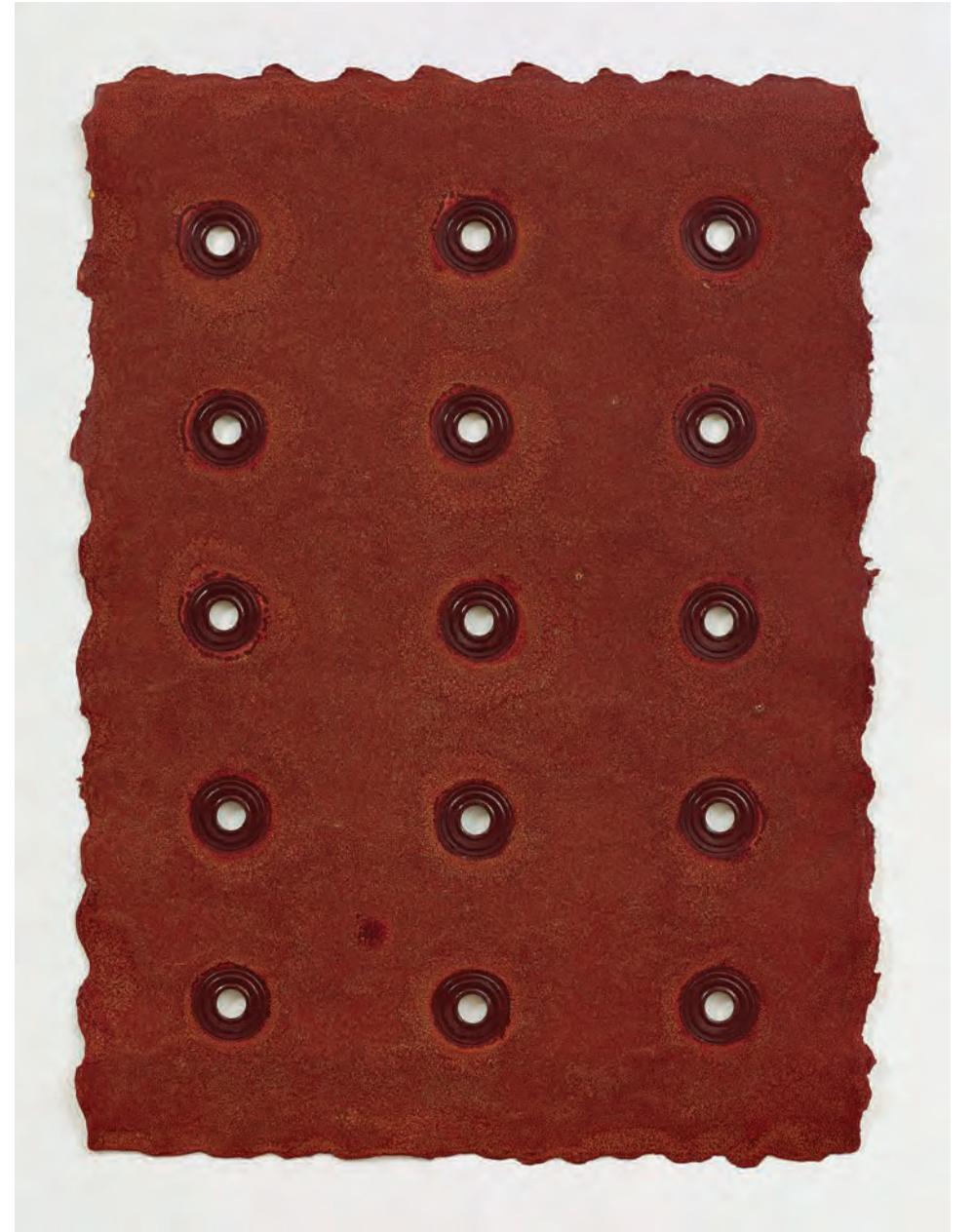
*Rib*, 2013



*Chrysanthemums, 1975*



*In Her Absence*, 1981



Aperture #2, 2013



*Untitled, 1971*



*Untitled, 1971*



Above: *Blanco*, 2012–13  
Right: Detail





VT (2012- #1), 2012



VT (2012- #4), 2012



*The Gift*, 1992–93



Above: *Lace I*, 2013  
Right: Detail





*Flesh Journal #3, 1993*



*The Black Leaf*, 1976



Above: *Red Bed*, 2013  
Left: Detail



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, 2013



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, 2013

Harmony Hammond (b.1944) was a leading figure in the development of the Feminist Art movement in New York in the early 1970s. She attended the University of Minnesota from 1963–67, before moving to New York in 1969. She was a co-founder of A.I.R., the first women's cooperative art gallery in New York (1972) and *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art & Politics* (1976). Since the mid-1980s, Hammond has lived and worked in Galisteo, NM, teaching at the University of Arizona, Tucson from 1998–2006. Hammond's earliest feminist work combined gender politics with post-minimal concerns of materials and process, frequently occupying a space between painting and sculpture.

For years, she worked with found and repurposed materials and objects such as rags, straw, latex, human hair, linoleum, roofing tin, and burnt wood as well as buckets, gutters and water troughs as a means of introducing content to the world of abstraction. Hammond's near-monochrome paintings of the last decade participate in the narrative of modernist abstraction. At the same time they insist on an oppositional discourse of feminist and queer content. Their focus on materiality and the indexical, suggesting topographies of body and place, derives from and remains in conversation with her feminist work of the 1970s. Hammond has also developed overtly political work in various media ranging from bronze sculpture to digital prints, that deal with issues of intolerance, censorship, and self-censorship.

Hammond's artwork has been exhibited nationally and internationally in venues such as: the New Museum, the National Academy Museum, the Whitney Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, the Bronx Museum, and MoMA P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, in New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, CA; the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN; and the Neue Galerie in Graz, Germany; among others. Her work was featured in the exhibitions: *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967–1975* (2006) and *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007). Her work will be the subject of the upcoming monographic exhibition *Becoming/Unbecoming Monochrome* at RedLine in Denver, CO in 2014. Hammond's work is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Brooklyn Museum, New York; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; and the Phoenix Art Museum, AZ; among others. Hammond's book, *Wrappings: Essays on Feminism, Art and the Martial Arts* (TSL Press, 1984), is considered a seminal publication on 1970s Feminist art; her groundbreaking book, *Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History* (Rizzoli, 2000), received a Lambda Literary Award. In 2013, Hammond was honored with the College Art Association's Distinguished Feminist Award.

## Checklist

*Untitled*, 1971

Acrylic on paper, shopping bags, and fabric  
26.75h x 22.5w in (67.95h x 57.15w cm)

*Untitled*, 1971

Acrylic on paper, shopping bags, and fabric  
26.75h x 22.5w in (67.95h x 57.15w cm)

*Chrysanthemums*, 1975

Oil and wax on canvas  
24.5h x 38.25w x 2d in (62.23h x 97.15w x 5.08d cm)

*The Black Leaf*, 1976

Oil and wax on canvas  
14h x 45.5w x 1.75d in (35.56h x 115.57w x 4.4d cm)

*In Her Absence*, 1981

Mixed media in four parts  
30.75h x 17.5w x 4d in (78.11h x 44.45w x 10.16d cm) each

*The Gift*, 1992–93

Mixed media  
54.13h x 35.75w in (137.49h x 90.8w cm)

*Flesh Journal #3*, 1993

Acrylic on latex in four parts  
13.75h x 9.13w x 0.38d in (34.93h x 23.19w x 0.95d cm) each

*Red Bed*, 2011

Oil and mixed media on canvas  
80.5h x 54.5w x 4.25d in (204.47h x 138.43w x 10.8d cm)

*VT (2012- #1)*, 2012

Monotype and watercolor on paper with grommets  
15.5h x 11.25w in (39.37h x 28.58w cm)

*VT (2012- #4)*, 2012

Monotype and watercolor on paper with grommets  
15.5h x 11w in (39.37h x 27.94w cm)

*Blanco*, 2012–13

Oil and mixed media on canvas  
90.25h x 72.5w x 3.5d in (229.24h x 184.15w x 8.89d cm)

*Aperture #2*, 2013

Monotype on paper with grommets  
28.75h x 21.25w in (73.03h x 53.98w cm)

*Lace I*, 2013

Oil and mixed media on canvas  
59h x 36.25w x 3d in (149.86h x 92.08w x 7.62d cm)

*Rib*, 2013

Oil and mixed media on canvas  
105.75h x 70.25w x 5.25d in (268.61h x 178.44w x 13.34d cm)

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Cover image: *Rib*, detail, 2013, oil and mixed media on canvas  
105.75h x 70.25w x 5.25d in (268.61h x 178.44w x 13.34d cm)

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