

NY CULTURE

On Pins and Social Struggles

By PETER PLAGENS

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Harmony Hammond

Alexander Gray Associates
508 W. 26th St., (212) 399-2636
Through Dec. 7

Harmony Hammond (b. 1944) was a major player in the New York art world's first blush of feminism in the early 1970s. During her career, she co-founded AIR gallery, a pioneer women's cooperative; helped start "Heresies," a feminist art-and-politics magazine; and wrote two influential books—"Wrappings: Essays on Feminism, Art, and the Martial Arts" and "Lesbian Art in America." From such a résumé, you might expect Ms. Hammond's art to lean considerably to the agitprop side of things. You'd be wrong.



Harmony Hammond's 'VT (2012- #4)' (2012).
Alexander Gray Associates, New York

Living and working in New Mexico for the past 30 years, Ms. Hammond steadfastly treads a kind of middle path between muscular, late-Minimalist formalism and feminist content. In fact, if you didn't know her history, you might reasonably conclude that her painting is really mostly about painting—color, paint application, scale, heft and all that. In three canvases in her current show (Ms. Hammond's first solo in New York in this century, a bit of a retrospective tucked in with recent work), she wraps the works with grommeted belts and then coats them in oil paint and wax (wholly red, black or off-white) until the objects ("Rib," 2013, "Blanco," 2012-13 and "Red Bed," 2011) remind you of rusted and repainted factory doors.

At first, it seems as though Ms. Hammond's feminist concerns have been all but buried beneath canvas, paint and straps. But there's something more than formalism in her recent work, something contesting her

constraints (those straps have meaning). Look at her art for a while and a sense of social struggle comes through. It's a powerful combination.

Mr. Plagens is an artist and writer in New York.