

ART IN REVIEW

## Harmony Hammond

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Abstraction and activism are not mutually exclusive, as the career of Harmony Hammond attests. Ms. Hammond was on the front lines of the feminist and lesbian art movement in New York in the early 1970s. She was a founding member of A.I.R., the first women's cooperative gallery in the city, and of "Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics."

The earliest work in her small, handsome, career-spanning survey at Alexander Gray dates from 1971. Abstract paintings done on supermarket bags and festooned with ragged strips of cloth, they're like urban medicine pouches. Among their other virtues, they gave the kiss-off term "bag lady," much in use in the depressed city of that time, a whole new meaning, a new power. Part of the power lies in the impression these paintings give of having a hidden content, something inside you can't see.

In a similar way, later work seems to operate on a dynamic of half-revealing concealed layers. The dark blue-green color and tweed-textured surface of the 1976 shaped painting "The Black Leaf" all but obscure a peach-orange underlayer. The biomorphic forms of the four-part 1981 sculpture "In Her Absence," made of strips of fabric wrapped around armatures, convey a tight-to-the-bursting-point interior energy.

In the 1980s, Ms. Hammond took a teaching job in Arizona and has lived in Galisteo, N.M., since. An assemblage called "The Gift" (1992-93) recalls what she found there in abandoned farmhouses: a rectangle of floral-patterned floor linoleum with a clock face affixed at the top and a hank of hair at the bottom.

In more recent paintings, she returns to abstraction. The monochromatic "Red Bed," from 2011, is literally bed-size, but also door-size, its surface crisscrossed with bands of cloth that suggest restraints, bandages and structural reinforcements.

If Ms. Hammond hadn't left New York when she did, her profile here would undoubtedly be higher. On the other hand, she might not have been able to explore the politics of abstraction as consistently, adamantly and beautifully as she has. In any case, a serious retrospective here is in order.