

Harmony and Me: A Topography

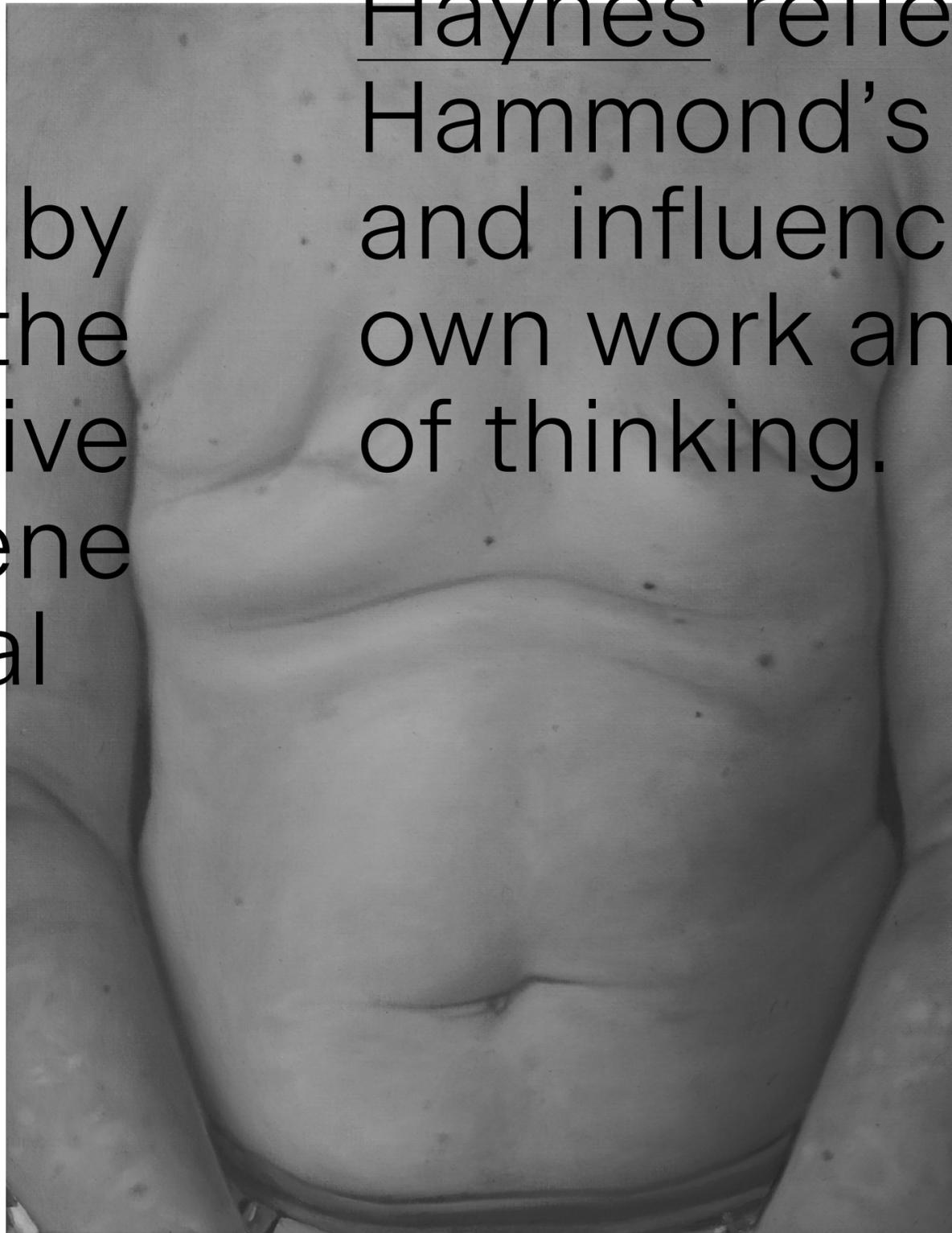
An artist, writer, editor, theorist, and curator, Harmony Hammond was at the vanguard of both the feminist art movement and early queer art-world activism. She co-founded A.I.R. Gallery (established 1972 in lower Manhattan, now in Brooklyn), the



first all-female artists cooperative gallery in the United States, and, as a member of the feminist political artists' group the Heresies Collective (established 1976), was a co-founder and editor of the journal *Heresies: A Feminist Publication of Art and Politics*. In 1978, Hammond

organized A *Lesbian Show*, a groundbreaking exhibition of work by lesbian artists, at the influential alternative art space 112 Greene Street. Her seminal book *Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History* was published by Rizzoli in 2000.

Here, artist Clarity Haynes reflects on Hammond's impact and influence on her own work and ways of thinking.



2 Clarity Haynes

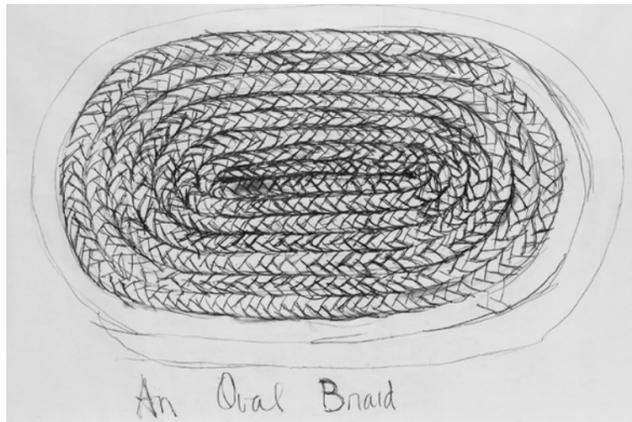
Words by Clarity Haynes
Artwork by Harmony Hammond & Clarity Haynes



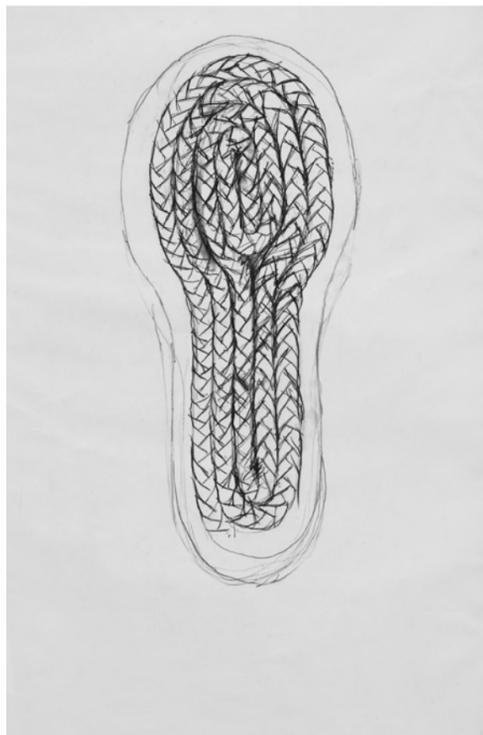
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I first heard of Harmony Hammond when I was a young artist in Philadelphia in the late '90s. I knew she taught at the University of Arizona, and I wondered if I could live in the West. I was drawn to her as literally the only role model I knew of, a generation or so ahead, who had lived what I was living as a lesbian artist. As my work explored how non-heteronormative experience manifests itself in visual art, and how art can expand queer understanding and visibility, Hammond became one of my earliest and longest-standing points of reference.

Hammond's work—abstract, minimalist in some ways—was very different from my own, at first glance. Yet I knew she was involved with the same conceptual issues. She has written extensively, and one line of hers always echoes with me: "The body is always near."

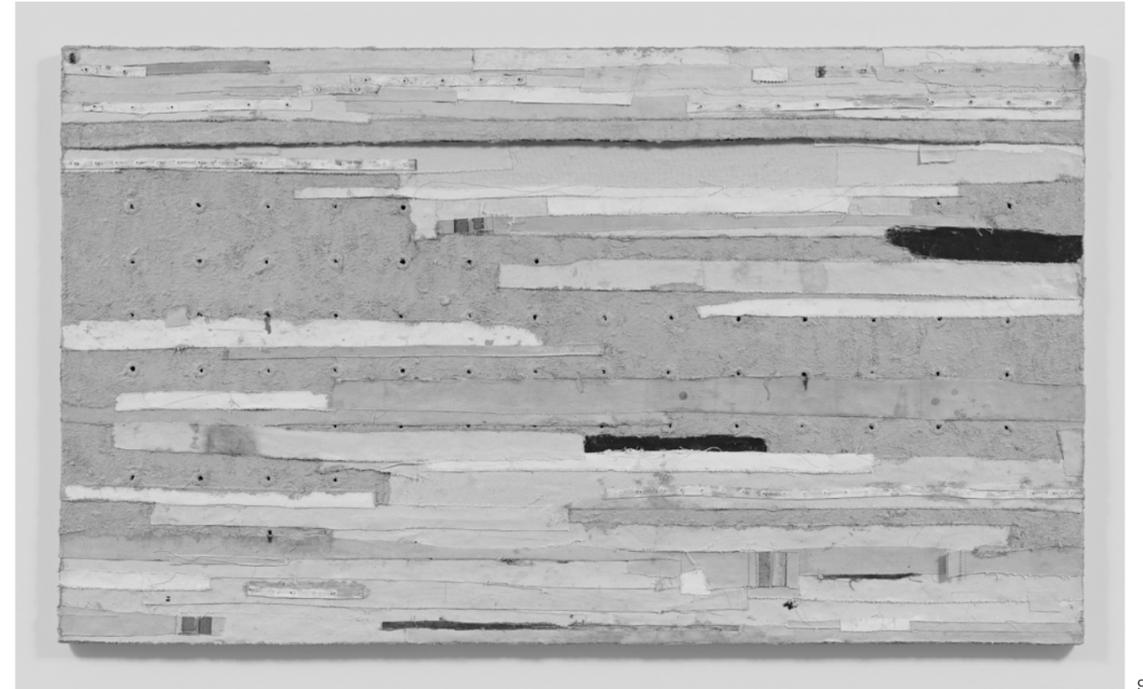
The kinship I feel with Harmony's work is about as primal as it can get. It's subtle, maybe even invisible. It's a feeling. The physicality of

her work, the texture, the frontality, is like a painting (even when it's a sculpture) and like a body. The surface of her work is like flesh, and she intends it to be. Often monochromatic, her paintings and sculptures speak of the expanses of flesh we carry and wear and meld with—in our sexual lives, in our daily lives, in our dreams.

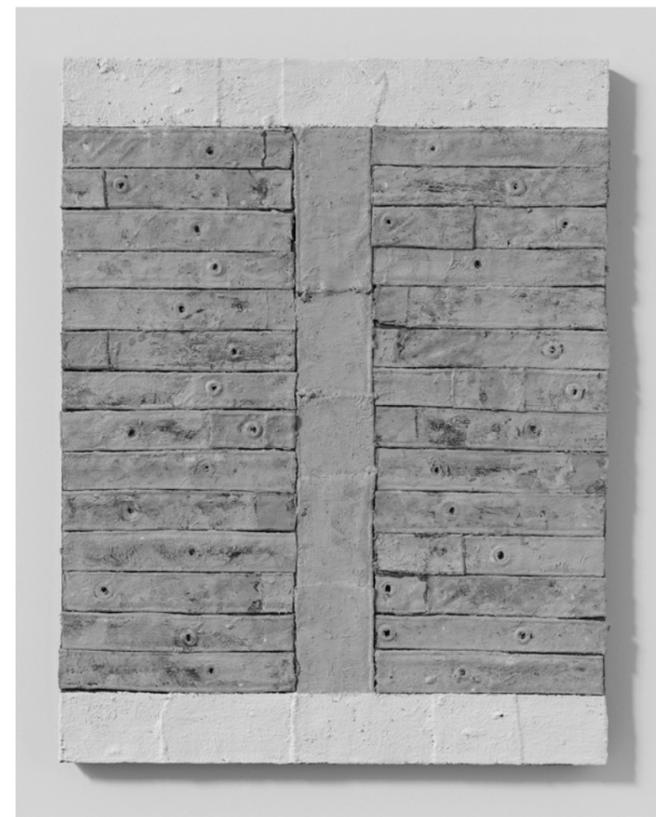
In her 2010 essay "A Manifesto (Personal) of Monochrome (Sort of)," Hammond writes, "Monochrome painting allows one to escape figuration but presence the body. The skin of paint calls up the body, and therefore the painting body. By that, I mean the physical object as well as the body that makes the painting. At their best, the paintings transmute the painting field into the body." When I look at her work, I feel I understand it. The restraints, the bumps, the gathers, the rigid unyielding surfaces, the fleshy colors, dark or pale. The sometimes blinding bright color fields. The irregular, handmade variations on the



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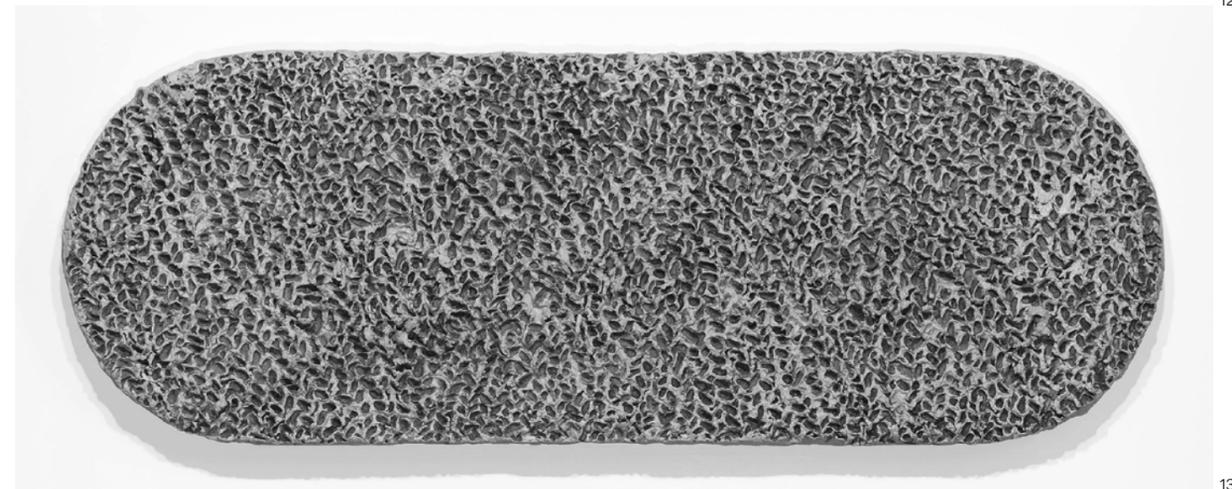
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grid. (The grommets remind me of camping, which reminds me of lesbians, but that's another story.)

Hammond's work is easy to mistake for anything else, but she makes sure we read into it what she wants us to. The paintings shaped like lozenges, with prickly surfaces so much like weavings. Why a lozenge? Somehow that shape spoke to me. Not a rectangle, not a circle. Not vaginal, not phallic. Something you could hold. A bundle. And her wrapped sculptures of the late 1970s and early '80s, such as *Hunkertime*. Like big soft pretzels. Leaning against walls. Like bundled-up wild women.

My paintings are also frontal, and sculptural (conceptually at least). The space is shallow, and there is nothing but body. The narrative of

the face is absent. That's how I get it to be about the body. There is no room for confusion here. The literalness of my approach to painting is related to that of Photorealism, which happened concurrently with the feminist art movement of the '70s, and was in its own way responding to Minimalism. Monochrome painting and this strain of realism share a philosophy, in the insistence that the flatness of the image rarely contradicts the flatness of the canvas.

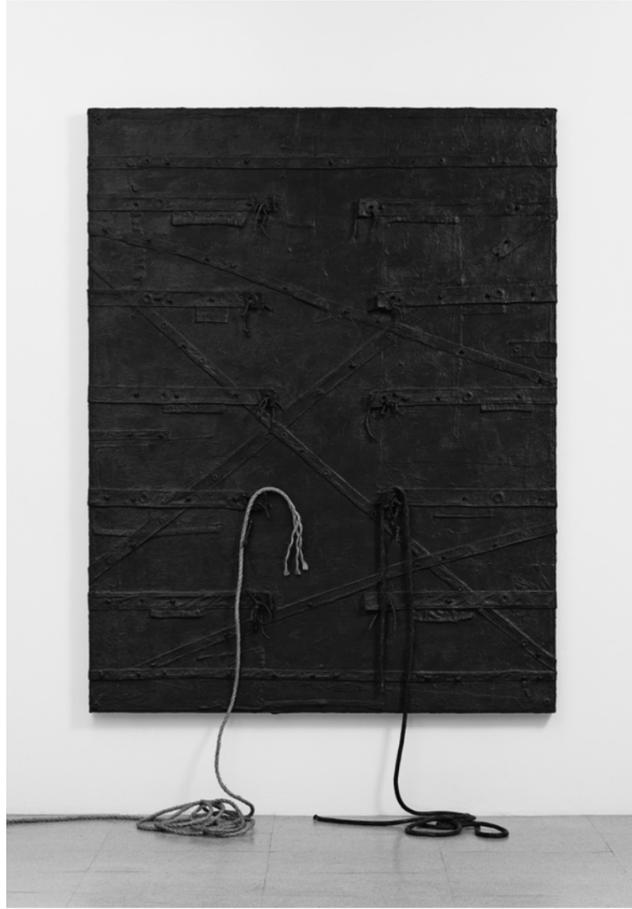
Hammond has described her work as having "a survivor aesthetic." She writes, "A bandaged grid implies an interruption of the narrative of the modernist grid and therefore, an interruption of utopian egalitarian order...a precarity. But also, however fragile, the possibility of holding together, of healing." My own work, too, insists upon the real body

and the heroism of age, survival, taking up space, existing outside prescribed bounds.

In the catalogue for her 2016 exhibition at Alexander Gray Associates, Hammond writes evocatively, "Dried blood and other body fluids, flesh, bone, skin, wounds, scabs and scar tissue, scraped hides, stucco, weathered and patinated wood and metal, topographical locations...Straps and strings in the torso-sized *Lace* and *Cinch* paintings, as well as *Klee* where the straps do not wrap around the painting, suggest a rib cage or corset, but do not cinch. They are not pulled tight. There is no constraint—only the possibility of constraint. It's the same with *Rib* where the ties are provocatively left hanging open."

In my work, the flesh is the subject. In reproduction, my paintings

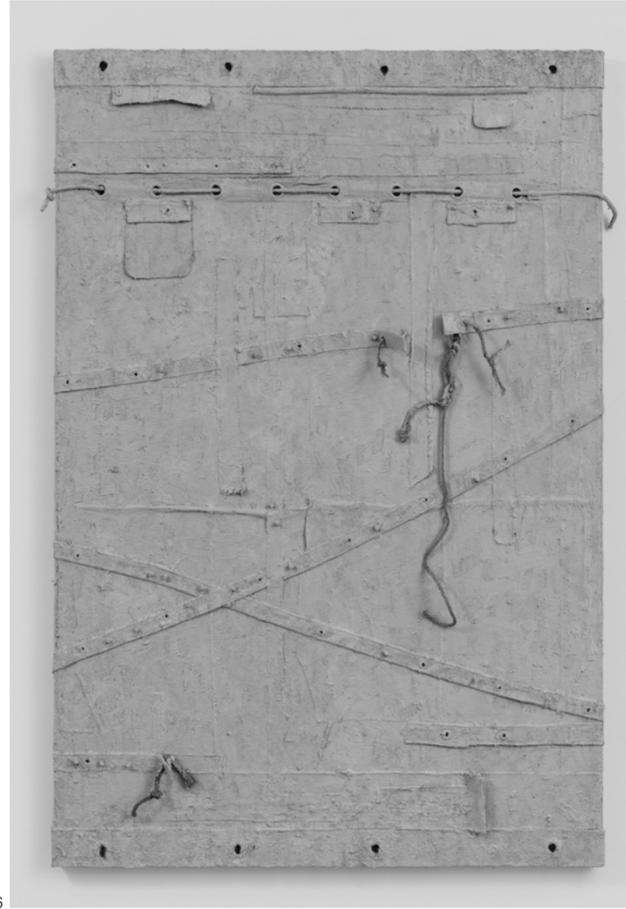
appear photographic, but in real life, at about 5 feet tall, they are more like painted landscapes, which is how it feels to make them. And the story of that flesh, so much entwined with what we know of a lover's body. The familiarity, the intimacy, but more than that, what it *feels* like. Perhaps it's that haptic quality—or an interest in that—that Harmony and I share. And wanting to make it physical, wanting to communicate what had heretofore been private, been invisible. We don't know what our experience looks like because it's been invisible in art for so many years. But the positive side to that is that the story has yet to be fully told, and we get to be part of the making. I think Harmony and I also share the conviction that we must write as well as make work, so that our story isn't told for us, or forgotten altogether.



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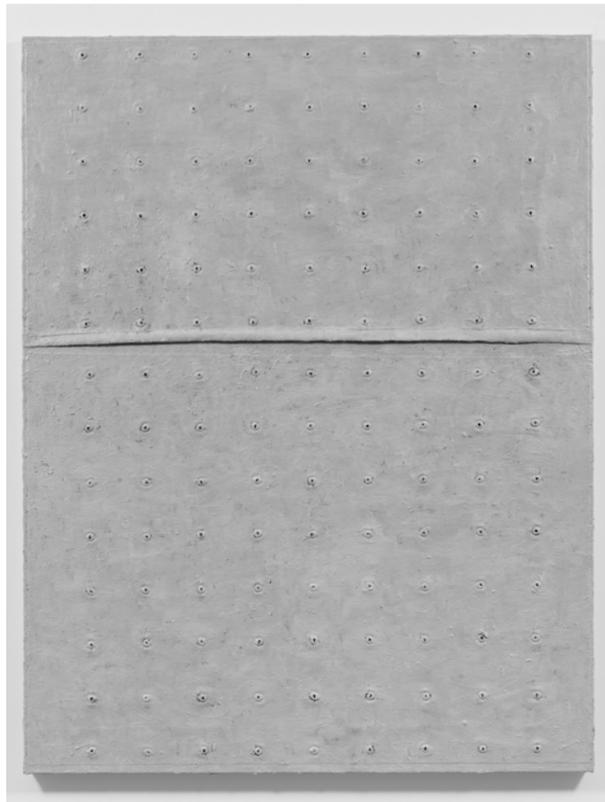
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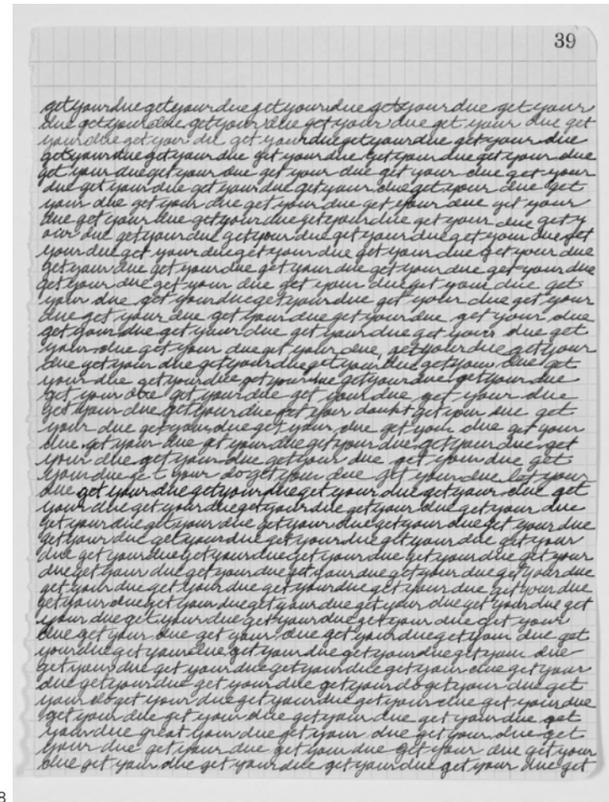
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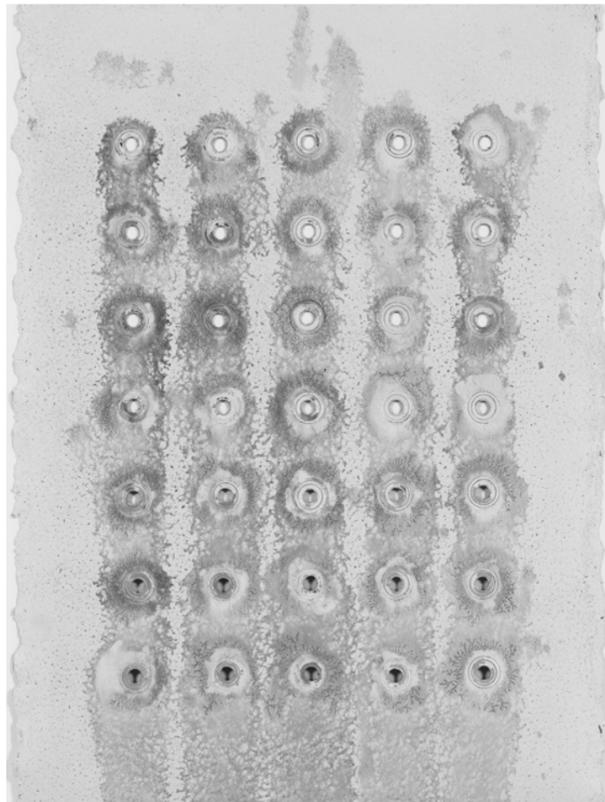
many years. — Clarity Haynes



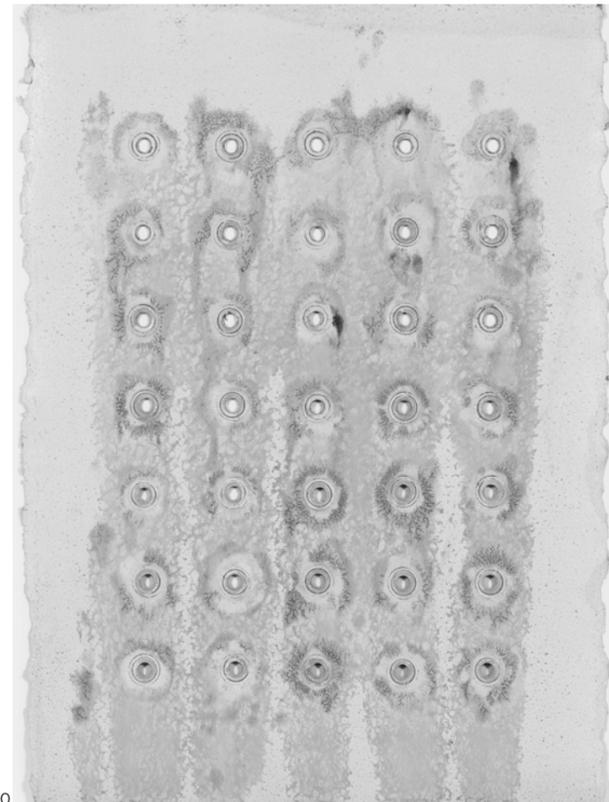
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|----|---|--|
| 1 | Rims (Dark Red on Light Red)
2011
Monotype on paper
13 x 10.5 inches
(33.02 x 26.67 cm) | Oil and Dorland's wax on canvas
12 x 34 inches
(30.48 x 86.36 cm) |
| 2 | (Clarity Haynes)
Michael
2016
Oil on linen on board
11 x 14 inches
(27.94 x 35.56 cm) | 14
Rib
2013
Oil and mixed media on canvas
90.3 x 72.5 inches
(229.36 x 184.15 cm) |
| 3 | In Her Absence
1981
Mixed media
34 x 86 inches
(86.36 x 218.44 cm) | 15
Lace I
2012
Oil and mixed media on canvas
36 x 36 inches
(91.44 x 91.44 cm) |
| 4 | Double Elegy
2009
Digital print with lithography
6.9 x 5.3 inches
(17.53 x 13.46 cm) | 16
Things Various
2015
Oil and mixed media on canvas
80.25 x 54.25 x 5 inches
(203.84 x 137.79 x 12.70 cm) |
| 5 | An Oval Braid
1972
Charcoal on paper
25 x 38 inches
(63.50 x 96.52 cm) | 17
Witness
2014
Oil and mixed media on canvas
90.25 x 70.50 x 3 inches
(229.24 x 179.07 x 7.62 cm) |
| 6 | Shoe
1972
Charcoal on paper
38 x 25 inches
(96.52 x 63.50 cm) | 18
Ledger Drawings Suite B
2015
Ink on paper in five parts
11.75 x 9.50 inches
(29.84 x 24.13 cm) |
| 7 | Hunkertime
1979 - 1980
Mixed media
Dimensions variable | 19
White Rims #1
2015
Monotype on Twinrocker paper with metal grommets
47 x 33.5 inches
(119.38 x 85.09 cm) |
| 8 | Bag X
1971
Cloth and acrylic
47 x 18 inches
(119.38 x 45.72 cm) | 20
White Rims #2
2015
Monotype on Twinrocker paper with metal grommets
47 x 33.5 inches
(119.38 x 85.09 cm) |
| 9 | Bandaged Grid #1
2015
Oil and mixed media on canvas
44.25 x 76.5 x 2.5 inches
(112.39 x 194.31 x 6.35 cm) | |
| 10 | Klee
2015
Oil and mixed media on canvas
36.25 x 28.25 inches
(92.08 x 71.75 cm) | |
| 11 | Girdle
1971
Cloth and acrylic
52.25 x 53 inches
(132.72 x 134.62 cm) | |
| 12 | Floorpiece II
1973
Cloth and acrylic
46 x 46 inches
(116.84 x 116.84 cm) | All images courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York and © 2017 Harmony Hammond/Licensed by VAGA, New York. |
| 13 | Yum Yum
1977 | |