



An Incomplete Intervention

“SUBLIMINAL HORIZONS”
AT ALEXANDER GRAY ASSOCIATES
Germantown: Through August 15
New York City: Through August 14
Alexandergray.com

“Subliminal Horizons,” curated by Alvin Hall. Installation view of Alexander Gray Associates Germantown gallery. Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York.

The first thing one notices when coming upon Alexander Gray Associates in Germantown is the serene temple-like atmosphere of this beautifully designed space. Nestled in a historic building on Main Street and tucked into the converted garage downstairs, the welcoming warmth of this gallery extends an exalted energy that is immediate and generous. Curated by Alvin Hall, “Subliminal Horizons” is a lively two-part exhibition split between Germantown and Manhattan. This exhibit is dubbed as an open-ended survey of Black, indigenous, brown, and Asian artists living and working in the Hudson Valley region. The dynamic Mr. Hall—an award-winning TV and radio broadcaster, best-selling author, journalist, art aficionado, and collector—makes his curatorial debut with this conscious presentation. (A footnote here is Hall’s recent project of social commentary in which he drove from Detroit to New Orleans, conducting 45 interviews in 12 days to document stories of under-represented Black Americans).

Bringing together the work of 20 intergenerational artists working in a range of creative media—including Huma Bhabha, Melvin Edwards, Jeffrey Gibson, David Hammons, Laleh Khorramian, Glenn Ligon, Adam Pendleton, Martin Puryear, and Karlos Cárcamo, among others—“Subliminal Horizons” provides a kaleidoscopic peek into the Hudson Valley’s cultural life. Rather than a critically curated thesis per se, this show offers more of a metaphorical stanza cut from a larger creative poem that reaches beyond the exhibition itself, reminding us that art is always expressing aspects of an endlessly imaginative narrative.

“Subliminal Horizons” is not only presented in different locations, the exhibition articulates two

complementary shows at once: The first visual aspect is that of a cheery and playful adventure, while the other is an expression of spiritual sensibilities that border on ineffable. In my reading of the first aspect of the exhibition, the jovial story begins with two small mixed media works by Carlos Vega, *Patmos* (2020) and *Love in the Times of Covid* (2020). These precious, fairytale-like scenes give the impression that we are in an altered state from the outset. This natural world of curious mystery then transitions into a photograph by Xaviera Simmons, *If We believe in Theory #1* (2009). Here a female figure dressed like Little Red Riding Hood stands alone a lush field, pausing to inhale a magical moment of youth. The bold red of her cape carries over into the next work: *Antiquariato Busted* (2020), a full-bleed crimson colored mixed media piece by Lyle Ashton Harris, whose layering of abstract visuals is a systematic orchestration of form. There is a delightful reverberation between two works on the adjacent wall—a two-dimensional bead painting *INFINITE INDIGENOUS QUEER LOVE* (2020) by Jeffrey Gibson and a spray-painted abstraction titled *Fallout* (2021) by Laleh Khorramian—and a series of square papier-mâché sculptures filled with bright acrylic paint by Kianja Strobert arranged in a cluster on the floor.

There is a distinct shift from the fanciful scenes in the main room to the prayerful tone of a smaller room at the back the gallery. This area harbors the second aspect of this “two shows in one” exhibition, and it is sublime. A sculpture by Huma Bhabha, *Not About You* (2012), draws us in. At first glance, this work appears to be a head shape, yet at closer inspection the piece transforms into a kind of muscular compilation that is

both figurative and abstract. Moving into the room we behold three meditation-like line drawings by Jennie C. Jones along the wall, *Yet to be Titled* (2021). One then encounters the most compelling piece in the show, a sculpture by David Hammons with no title or date. This striking work combines the body of a Buddha with an African mask head, presenting a rare Buddhist-cum-Afro-esoteric incarnation. In all my years vagabonding around to visit great art, I have never seen a mash-up of this kind—this sculpture is profoundly beautiful. As I turned to exit that smaller room, a duo of energetic paintings by Kenji Fujita titled *Set/Reset #3* and *Set/Reset #15* (2021) afforded a renewed connection with the whimsical works in the other room. Finally, a large abstract black ink drawing by Martin Puryear, *Mestissage/Camouflage* (2016), and a pigment on polymer gypsum work by Diana Al-Hadid, *Untitled* (2020), provide a metaphysical coda for the show.

I was lucky enough to see both portions of the dual “Subliminal Horizons” exhibition and taken together the graceful combination of elements presented throughout—figuration, abstraction, textuality, interconnection, interiority—allows us to explore a dream-like multiplicity of directions therein. This show is an “incomplete intervention” that is also full of rich reverberations and intentional cross-pollinations. As stated by Hall, within this exhibit “the covering and uncovering of personal and social histories” and the “tensions among traditions, modernism, and contemporary art’s growing pluralism” is thus an exercise in expansion while honoring the creative connections in the Hudson Valley and beyond.

—Taliesin Thomas