

ARTFORUM

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INTERNATIONAL

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ratio of the vast empty space of the gallery, with its severe spotlighting, to the intimately scaled physical components of the work resembled the proportion of a classic pictorial story line to its collection of poetic tropes. The perpetual sound of the fountain lent the water a unifying physical, cognitive, and emotional pull.

The daffodil—of the genus *Narcissus*, whose name references the eponymous Greek myth, of which *murmur* is undoubtedly a reinterpretation—was one of those poetic tropes. Baird further alluded to the lore by including alongside the aforementioned human ear a disembodied bronze hand, *Vessel (Left)*, 2019. The life-size hollow appendage fantastically appears to be grasping the fountain's outer edge on the left side of the installation. Located near the ground and close to the basin's surface, the appendage suggests that a body is peering into the liquid and thus enacting Narcissus's reflexive gaze into a pool. Some versions of the myth claim that Narcissus first rejected the love of the nymph Echo (perhaps evoked here via the ear) and then fell in love with his own unmatched beauty, which caused his death; a daffodil supposedly grew in the place where he died. Virgil and Milton further entangle the flower with the Narcissus story by contending that the daffodil's corona contains Narcissus's tears. Baird's installation could be read as an active embodiment of this symbolism, as water poured steadily from each of the seven trumpets mounted on the right-hand wall. The transparent rubber hoses attached to the flower heads carried water upward and simulated the vascular function of a flower's stem. The six bronze petals that flanked the corona of each blossom were large and flaring, hiding the spigots' mounting apparatus.

In a statement addressing this new work, Baird claimed to be referencing "spring, birth, and the womb." The daffodil, almost as culturally symbolic as the rose, is associated with these themes (and, further, with death and good fortune) in addition to being affiliated with the Narcissus myth. Yet Baird's bevy of presentational strategies refreshed this lexicon of well-worn metaphors and avoided a clichéd illustration of self-love, instead highlighting the florid complexities intrinsic to all archetypal narratives.

—Michelle Grabner

DENVER

Jordan Casteel

DENVER ART MUSEUM

Two portraits placed early in Jordan Casteel's first solo museum show, in her hometown of Denver, feature sitters in nondescript environments. *Mom*, 2013, employs a muted palette. The background is beige, with plum scumbling in the upper corners; the absence of background details focuses the viewer on the figure. Casteel's mother sits in a wooden chair, her eyes closed, head resting on her folded hands. Her face is a delicate patchwork of tans, browns, and grays, the scarf or sweater in her lap a complex, gestural pattern that repeats in the jewels of her bracelet. She doesn't acknowledge us; we are observing a moment of quietude, rest, and contemplation. The more recent portrait, *Twins*, 2017, conveys another mood entirely. Two toddlers, one clad in red and the other in pink, a Minnie Mouse blanket draped across their laps, are strapped into a double stroller and sit facing the viewer. Exuberance is conveyed via the perky polka dots of the stroller's hoods and the cotton-candy-pink backdrop—which gives only the slightest nod to a space beyond the foreground. The baby on the left is fast asleep, his relaxation evident all the way down to his dangling fingers and feet. The child on the right, by contrast, confronts the viewer with startling self-possession.

Casteel's skill for empathizing with her subjects, for conveying their likenesses such that viewers feel a connection to them, is evident in all

of her portraits. But it is her sitters' particular surroundings, the spaces they inhabit regularly, that animate her large canvases. An earlier work, *Marcus and Jace*, 2015, depicts Casteel's friend Marcus and his son in their Denver barbershop, where college pennants adorn the red walls. Casteel often uses unexpected or seemingly unrealistic colors when rendering her figures. Sometimes, as in *Marcus and Jace* or in *Harold*, 2017, a visible light source provides a logical impetus. In other works, especially in her "Visible Man" series of paintings of male nudes, begun in 2014 while she was a graduate student at the Yale School of Art, figures take on expressive colorings, their skin radiating pastel pinks and purples or various shades of saturated green. Many of the subjects for "Visible Man" were Casteel's classmates, black men who, as the playwright Jiréh Breon Holder explains in an accompanying wall text, were relatively few on Yale's New Haven campus: "Jordan's paintings 'saw' something in us, and we were able to see something in each other that was and remains deeply meaningful."

Casteel's most recent works continue to record—and thereby create—community. Now a resident of Harlem, Casteel approaches people she meets on the streets, people who are working or resting on stoops or chatting with friends, and snaps a series of photographs of them (Casteel's talent as a photographer who puts her subjects at ease should not go unnoted here). She then reworks those images on canvas, choosing which details to include, which to sketch in only slightly, and which to exclude entirely. It would be easy to ascribe an agenda of revolution or resistance to Casteel's paintings by selectively highlighting certain details in her works: a poster featuring black men killed by police, a BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL T-shirt. Yet prolonged looking will evince a subtler form of power in her images. Casteel's aggregation of so many details—advertisements for AriZona iced tea, a Marvin Gaye album cover, a POMPETTE WINES T-shirt—is a political act, for the very reason that the artist finds them all worthy of inclusion in large-scale paintings. Her subjects deserve loving attention, but so do those objects that they live with every day—and this in itself is a radical idea.

—Chelsea Weathers



Jordan Casteel, *Marcus and Jace*, 2015, oil on canvas, 72 x 54".

SAN FRANCISCO

Rosha Yaghmai

CCA WATTIS INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS

A bathroom scene enlarged: floor, a few inches of wall, a lone strand of hair. The slightly raised ground is covered with what appear to be oversize ceramic tiles of a pastel-green hue but are in fact painted MDF. The trompe l'oeil binding "grout" is made of paint and sand. Along the walls, black "tiles," roughly four feet tall, are also made of wood panels and coated with piano lacquer. Their edges hug the floor in decorative curves. The whole space is an amplified, supersize reality. "It is the unfamiliar familiar, the conventional made suspect," Mike Kelley might



Roshia Yaghmai, *Hair* (detail), 2019, pipe, Hydrocal, epoxy resin, limestone, Miracle-Gro, mud mask, graphite, rust, glass, earth pigments, found materials, 2' 10" x 17' x 3' 9". Photo: Johanna Arnold.

say, and, indeed, this installation's scale shift is an uncanny bending of household material.

This simulation is "Miraclegrow," an exhibition by Roshia Yaghmai at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts whose title is a misspelling of a brand-name product attributed to the infamous pesticide company (which was handed significant fines in civil settlements for mislabeling potentially carcinogenic products, among other crimes). The promise of synthetic fertilizers such as Miracle-Gro, which endures relatively unscathed post-lawsuit, is that plants fed with the product will grow faster at the cell-structure level, cheating time. This vector—the relationship of scale to time—imbues Yaghmai's magnification with new meaning: The scene is fictional but plausibly backed by contemporary science. It is a rendering of America in all its inorganic vastness.

Spatially speaking, the centerpiece of the show is that oversize strand of hair (*Hair*, 2019), shaped from rusty pipes bent and welded together. Recalling decaying coral that has absorbed the toxins of its ecosystem (or bodies exposed to various pesticides and hormones), the hair's surface is an amalgam of substances: household plastics, limestone, rust oxide, graphite, Miracle-Gro, mud masks, and plaster, all intermingled, eroded, and melded together. To make this conglomerate, the artist initially cast parts of her body (in what she tells me was a "very liquid" process) using these materials and then applied the resulting synthetic skins to the metal structure, wrapping its form with melted legs, elbows, and hands. The hands remain the most recognizable as they visibly grip the shape; the other body parts undulate, ripple, and fold unnaturally around the wiry sculpture. The work is visceral. It is abject. It is a body, blended into a messy puddle of nothing but information. DNA, like memory, is a chemical log of organic and inorganic inheritances. There is a cinematic horror to the thought of all the things passed down to you that you cannot control: the unnerving mystery of genetics and ingrained experiences.

The question of inheritance unfurls further in a more subtle work on view: A metal pipe protrudes from the far wall, prompting one to look in (or out). Up close, one begins to hear sounds and see light flickering from around a bend in the portal at the recognizable pace of a television set. The pipe must lead to a space out of reach, another room. The sound is a work: Commissioned by the artist from her brother, it is a nearly indecipherable fusion of the *Three's Company* theme song with another by the Persian singer Ramesh. Foreign and local, nostalgic and haunting, the music establishes a certain distance. The artist connects this feeling to her experience as a Persian American woman raised with only an unspoken understanding of her culture and heritage, whose

influence on her reasoning, behavior, and taste is like a sound heard from a deep recess. (Memory is still conceived of as a mysterious molecular technology for identity and sensory retrieval.)

Feebly casting a black-light glow on its immediate surroundings, a bug zapper (the only other object to scale in the room, tethering us to reality) is stationed near the pipe. The installation is too bright and forensic for its effect to be immersive. The artist is a cool customer in the face of perceptually altered realities. Her investigations evoke the query of every psychedelic experience, every "miracle": Which real is real? Akin to this spiritual understanding is the conceptual but viscerally felt weight of Yaghmai's works; they operate beyond language. This show is simple and yet profoundly experiential; in it, discomfort emanates from something fantastically familiar.

—Lauren Mackler

LOS ANGELES

Gary Hume

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

Spread across the Matthew Marks Gallery's two locations in this city, Gary Hume's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles in more than twenty-five years revealed the tenacity of certain long-standing concerns and the emergence of others. Among the eight recent paintings (enamel on aluminum or paper) and three painted-steel sculptures on view, a giant trompe l'oeil of vertical boards crisscrossed with super-glossy white x's suggested the flattening of a barn's side and the sliding plane of its door. Titled *U.S.A.*, 2018, it recalled Hume's other portals, the big rectangular slabs of the "Door" paintings, 1989–91, with which he is still associated after exhibiting them in the generation-defining 1988 "Freeze" exhibition curated by Damien Hirst in London. Like those earlier monoliths, *U.S.A.* renders the painting coincident with its source—here the generically American outbuildings of upstate New York as opposed to a specific state-funded hospital in London's East End. If the previous appropriations of the swinging doors at the derelict St. Bartholomew's Hospital managed to abstractly but no less intently excoriate the Thatcher administration's funding cuts to the National Health Service, this newer version deftly imaged an agricultural locale that, as painted, shades red.

Connecting the two spaces were Hume's wafer-thin sculptures, all freestanding wagon wheels variously painted yellow, blue, and lime green. *The Wonky Wheel (Yellow)*, 2013, was the earliest piece in the

View of "Gary Hume," 2019. From left: *The Beach*, 2018; *The Wonky Wheel (Blue)*, 2018; *The Wonky Wheel (Lime Green)*, 2018; *Water*, 2018.

