

CULTURED

Derrick Adams Explores The Pleasure Principle

Editors

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Derrick Adams in his studio in Brooklyn alongside works in progress for "Repose," his solo show at UTA Artist Space opening October 28. Portrait by Devin N. Morris.

Derrick Adams might be the hardest working artist in America. His art is on exhibition with such regularity, it came as no surprise that in a recent episode of the hit HBO comedy-drama *Insecure*, Issa Rae and her twenty-something girlfriends considered the facts of dating before Adams's Pilot #1. The large-scale, color-blocked collage (resembling the *Cosby* kid Rudy Huxtable) was hung in his spring solo exhibition, "Derrick Adams: Network," an exploration of the portrayals of black Americans in the media at the California African-American Museum in Los Angeles.

It was a busy summer too for Adams. On top of mounting two solo shows—"Patrick Kelly: The Journey," at the Studio Museum in Harlem and "Future People" at Stony Island Arts Bank—he also participated in the group show "Body and Soul: Performance Art—Past and Present" at Palazzo Pisani in Venice. This fall is even busier for the artist.

"I want for people to see the work and feel empowered and normal," he tells me, sitting in his Brooklyn studio before half finished collage paintings of black figures in repose for "Repose," a solo show at UTA Artist Space opening October 28. The subjects, lounging on inflatables in sky blue pools of water from his Floater series, are in one of three bodies of work in progress that are mounted on the studio's walls. Charged with history and intention, the outlines of figures are sketched across several canvases in the corner of his studio. He says they



will evolve into “non-traditional aerial landscape portraits” that allude to African tribal forms. It’s imagery that will be included in his forthcoming show at Tilton Gallery—poised to be titled “Figures in Urban Landscapes”—opening November 8.



Derick Adams' *The Journey*, 2017.

If there are common threads between the works being created in his studio, aside from Adams’s formal consideration of color and geometric form, it’s the art’s conceptual point: the black body can do more in contemporary art than signify struggle. “Martin and Malcolm went to the beach, too,” he explains, looking at a picture he constructed of a little girl blissfully floating on a swan. For *Jacob’s Tables*, a series of painted wall sculptures of tables, a motif he found curious in Jacob Lawrence’s 20th century paintings, he further mines the fantastical to explore his twin concerns of black leisure and pleasure.

“In my research, I found that a lot of his work has to do with community space, where people are in conversation or engaged in leisure,” Adams tells me, standing before a image of Lawrence’s *Chess Players*. “I don’t think we see it enough, especially in times of protest. You have to also have moments of reflections, relaxation and regrouping. If anything I want to create aspirational images because that’s what most people want to see.” The Lawrence inspired work is for SCAD Museum of Art’s “*Lines of Influence*,” a group show commemorating the great American painter on view through February 4, 2018.



Derrick Adams' "Future People" at Stony Island Arts Bank. Courtesy of artist.

When Adams isn't opening his own shows this fall, he will be curating them. For the opening of the New York-based Jenkins Johnson Project Space, he has curated a series of exhibitions, "Arjan Zazueta: Beautification" and the group show, "Hidden in Plain Sight," opening September 30. "I was a curator at Rush Arts Foundation for 13 years," explains Adams, who curated artists Kehinde Wiley, Deana Lawson, Wangechi Mutu and Jacolby Satterwhite's first solo exhibitions at Rush Arts. "My interest, as a curator, has been to allow artists to exist to just make their art."

"I'm super busy," he finally admits, speaking about why he keeps up a robust curatorial practice. "But I think there is so much talent out here and sometimes artists who are in positions of power should use that to get other artists to the next level." For the fall season, Adams has also curated the National Youngarts Foundation's "Imagination Land: Fantastical Narrative," through December 15. Exhausted for him, I ask why does he keep up such a pace? He smirks and simply says, "Because making art is fun."