

HOLLIS HAMMONDS

Blanket of Fog



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

April 2 – May 7, 2015

Austin, Texas



Up In Smoke, 2015, (gallery view), found objects, wood, string, wood veneer, siding, 10' x 12' x 16'

The Dark Forest, 2015, (in background), ink, charcoal & acrylic medium on canvas, 8' x 36'

Cover Panel: *Up In Smoke*, 2015, (gallery view), found objects, wood, string, wood veneer, siding, 10' x 12' x 16'

House on Fire, 2015, (in background), charcoal and acrylic medium on canvas, projected video, 8' x 16'

HOLLIS HAMMONDS *Blanket of Fog*

Hollis Hammonds has instructed art students for the last thirteen years and during this time has transmitted to her pupils the unwritten and seldom spoken rules and protocols of contemporary artistic practice. In her own artwork she frequently flirts with the boundaries laid out by these mysterious codes, always just shy of trespassing outside the territory of “high art.” In *Blanket of Fog*, Hammonds visibly lets go of the considerations and breaks the contemporary restrictions of both form and content. The exhibition is personal, romanticized, readable, illustrative, full of childhood angst, and indulgent in its execution—each itself perhaps permissible in the realm of high art, but in conjunction an obvious blasphemy. Through doing so she depicts a pivotal moment in her own life, the moment that is arguably the genesis of her particular style and consistent subject matter. Here at *Women & Their Work*, Hammonds exposes a piece of personal history, the destruction of her childhood double-wide home in the woods of Independence, Kentucky.

Hammonds remains forever interested in junk, or rather, junk heaps, the telling amalgamations of our culture’s discarded objects, the waste products of a particular lower to middle class consumerist culture. In the artist’s childhood these forgotten objects were encountered both within and outside of the home but with eleven older siblings, to find solitude, one had to escape to nature, a pastime the young Hammonds took up frequently. The depiction and atmosphere of that sweet solitude is invoked by the highly illustrative *The Dark Forest*, a massive drawing hung on a concave wall. By providing this unique space to her viewers, Hammonds allows the outside world to fall away.

In this first person work of embellished biography, the artist allows the illusion of space to take hold and envelop its viewer. They see what a young Hammonds would see, or at least what the adult Hammonds remembers seeing: a forest full of promising props for an unending series of make-believe adventures, long abandoned wrecked vehicles, broken folding tables, discarded radios, hardware of all sorts. The immediate surroundings are drawn in delicate contour, as though in some sort of reverse blueprint—the design of the objects’ undoing. The background, in contrast, falls away from Hammonds’ long trusted style into a blurry, emotive, and indiscernible charcoal darkness.

It’s possible, though doubtful, that this simple upbringing would be enough in and of itself to hardwire Hammonds’ interests in detritus and the importance/unimportance of physical things. There’s something inevitable, however, to such a development in the flickering light of the primary subject of this exhibition. In the rural setting of the artist’s childhood (a setting reflected in the works here) the nearest fire truck was close enough to save the county from the blaze, but certainly nowhere near close enough to save the Hammonds family’s humble dwelling. The house’s faulty wiring harmed no one in the end, but the totality of the destruction to the building, the objects collected by the family, the hoards of bric-a-brac, keepsakes, and just-in-case supplies coveted by Hammonds’ Depression era parents, was complete.

Hammonds recalls the events with admirable calmness, and relates, too, the bizarre calm of those around her during the blaze. Still, it’s

hard to imagine that the ideas of the impermanence of things, the misplaced importance of objects, the interests in disaster and the totality of waste did not sear themselves into fifteen year old Hammonds’ psyche at this moment—a firebrand of concepts heated in the devouring flames of the artist’s home. One sees the need to let go of protocol if the tradeoff is the ability to fully explore that moment.

Despite Hammonds’ retrospective composure, *House on Fire* is quite emotive. Perhaps it’s the subject matter, but the artist seems to break away from her usual careful style here. In previous work, Hammonds implements an admirable care and control over her medium. While no stranger to charcoal (note: the product of fire), in this work, Hammonds’ firm control gives way to something more energetic, frantic even. The material seems pressed deep into the substrate, the line work is trembling, agitated. The resulting image seems shaky and jumbled, the contours of each object or piece of architecture blurring into the next or into the dark space behind it. This depiction of the formative disaster in question is the least designed, but the most convincing in the room. Animating this emotionally saturated large-scale drawing is a video projection of flame. The video dips in and out of working in parallel, and alternately conflicting with the image



The Dark Forest, 2015, (detail),
ink, charcoal & acrylic medium on canvas, 8' x 36'



Up In Smoke, 2015,
ink on drafting film, 20" x 24"

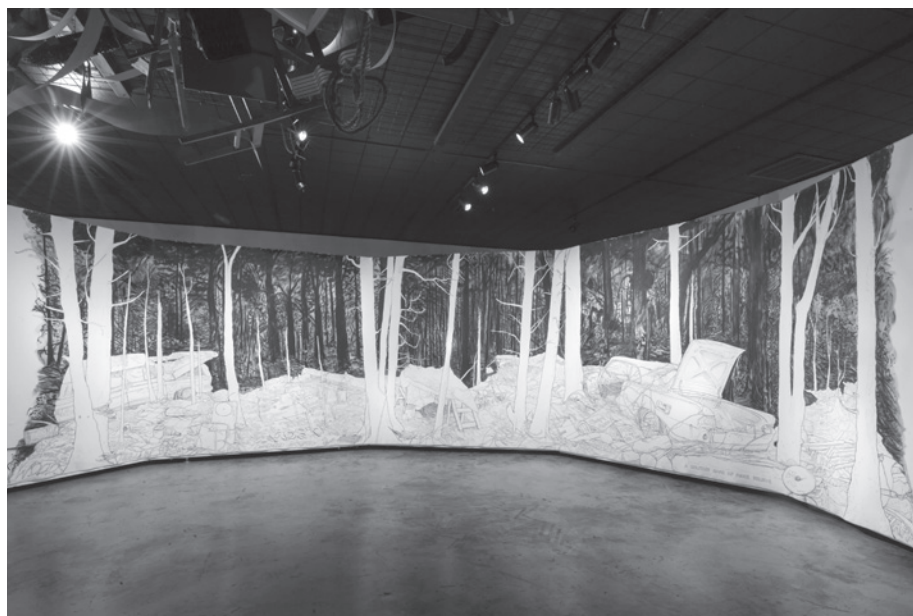
underneath. Compared to the artist's former drawings with their quintessentially careful implementation of line, *House on Fire* acquiesces to chaos. Even that obvious desire to control and to sort out, to bring a hard edge or line to those things which bend the least to its authority (smoke, crumbling matter, dust) may have first been kindled by the subject of this exhibition. Through revisiting that moment, those desires temporarily revert back to their less developed selves and allow for the emotional charge to take the wheel.

Up in Smoke serves as a counterpoint to that drama, a remarkably different interpretation of the same event. Here Hammonds re-invokes the control and draughtsmanship developed over many years as a drawing instructor. *Up in Smoke* is not a house. It's barely an object, really. This is just a symbol. In a sense, this work is not sculpture but instead three-dimensional illustration. The form takes on a blackness, a charcoal skin that clearly delineates its edges from that which

falls behind it. In this way it becomes a profile more than a volume. The house is not meant to be a convincing representation, but instead, a stand in used as a way of tamping down tragedy and presenting a more approachable parallel. This is not tragedy, just the story of tragedy, or more accurately, the children's story of tragedy. In the midst of that charcoal house emerges a whirlwind of household objects that then spread across the ceiling between *The Dark Forest* and *House on Fire*, bridging the fairy tale and the harsher memory. The exploded mass of objects is woven together by twisting strands of wood veneer, a trademark of Hammonds' sculptures past and present. It gives the pillar of smoke volume, but also defines its edges. The veneer acts in the same way that line does in Hammonds' wall based works; it carries the objects, but also tides them, and secures them in their aerial locations. As a whole, it's a very neat, orderly, and approachable version of chaos and destruction.

Through *Blanket of Fog*, Hammonds plumbs the depths of memory and reorders the images found there to create concise, narrative laden artworks. In doing so she also explores the boundaries of her practice, from the controlled, tidy, perfectly assembled images of refuse and destruction, to something less controlled, more emotive and raw. Additionally, (and likely as a result of the exhaustion of fighting against these impulses most of her life) she moves against the loosely defined rules of today's art world. Those risks have produced the exhibition at hand, one in which both the artist's changing practice and the pneumatic touchstone of the artist's interests are laid bare. In the exhibition, the viewer of Hammonds' work may find allusions to what comes next: direct and unapologetic illustration, a focus on new media and installation, and a healthy disregard for the rules of contemporary art.

Seth Orion Schweiger is an artist and writer in Austin, Texas.



The Dark Forest, 2015, (gallery view), ink, charcoal & acrylic medium on canvas, 8' x 36'

HOLLIS HAMMONDS

EDUCATION

M.F.A. 2001, Painting & Drawing, University of Cincinnati

B.F.A. 1998, Drawing, Northern Kentucky University

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *Solo Exhibition, Hollis Hammonds, Future Perfect*, Indie Grits Film Festival, NEA funded artist in residence, Columbia, SC
- 2015 *Solo Exhibition, Blanket of Fog, Women & Their Work*, Austin, TX
- 2015 *Two-Person Exhibition, Marking Time • Making Space: Drawings by Hollis Hammonds and Chris Troutman*, Haggerty Gallery, University of Dallas, Dallas, TX
- 2014 *Two-Person Exhibition, Constructs* works by Hollis Hammonds and Gladys Poorte, Davis Gallery, Austin, TX
- 2014 *Solo Exhibition, Salvaged*, Austin Community College, Austin, TX
- 2014 *Mark(ing) Time: Expanded Notions in Drawing*, Dishman Art Museum, Beaumont, TX
- 2014 *Solo Exhibition, Worthless Matter*, Redux Contemporary Art Center, Charleston, SC
- 2014 *Solo Exhibition, Worthless Matter: Constellation*, Safe Room Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2014 *Hoarding, Amassing & Excess*, Northern Illinois University Art Museum, DeKalb, IL
- 2014 *Solo Exhibition, Worthless Matter*, Reed Gallery at the University of Cincinnati, OH
- 2014 *Drawn In / Drawn Out*, Grace Museum, Abilene, TX
- 2013 *Solo Exhibition, In Ruins*, Folio Gallery at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX
- 2012 *Solo Exhibition, In Ruins*, Robert E. and Martha Hull Lee Gallery, Hiestand Galleries at Miami University, Oxford, OH
- 2012 *Solo Exhibition, In Ruins*, The University of Southern Mississippi Museum of Art, Hattiesburg, MS
- 2012 *Solo Exhibition, Beautiful Monsters*, Flex Space, Pump Project Satellite, Austin, TX
- 2012 *Solo Exhibition, Beautiful Monsters*, University of Saint Mary, Leavenworth, KS
- 2010 *Summer Some Aren't*, U-turn Art Space, Cincinnati, OH
- 2008 *Making Their Mark*, Nightingale Gallery, Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, OR
- 2007 *Evidence and Residues: An Investigation of Contemporary Drawing*, University Art Gallery, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN

- 2006 *Two-Person Exhibition, RECORDS AND ILLUSIONS: Recent work by Hollis Hammonds & Carrie Nixon*, University Galleries on Sycamore, Cincinnati, OH
- 2006 *TEXTURE*, Arts + Literature Laboratory Gallery, New Haven, CT
- 2004 *b.j.u.r.e., biennial juried underground railroad exhibition, Visual Journey: Enslavement, Underground Railroad, Freedom*, Northern KY University Main Gallery, Highland Heights, KY (Juror: Michael Ray Charles)
- 2002 *Installations & Performances*, The Carnegie Visual & Performing Arts Center, Covington, KY
- 2001 *Intermedia 2001*, Westin Gallery, Aronoff Center, Cincinnati, OH
- 2001 *Inside Out*, Atlantic Center for the Arts, New Smyrna Beach, FL

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2014 *New American Paintings*, No. 114, West Issue, 2014.
- 2014 *International Drawing Annual 8*, Manifest Creative Research Gallery & Drawing Center, Cincinnati, OH, 2014.
- 2014 Interview; Snapshot Magazine, Issue 1, in January, 2014.
- 2014 *Hollis Hammonds: Drawing Beauty from Ruin*, Susannah Morgan, Aether: A Visual Arts Dialogue, Austin, Texas, pp. 3-4, 58-61, Fall/Winter, 2014.
- 2014 *Hollis Hammonds' Worthless Matter*, Stacy Huggins, Art Mag, Charleston, SC, pp. 84-86, Spring, 2014.
- 2014 *Wave of Mutilation: Hollis Hammonds' "Worthless Matter" at Dorothy W. and C. Lawson Reed, Jr. Gallery, DAAP*, Keith Banner, AEQAI, February 23, 2014.
- 2013 *International Drawing Annual 7*, Manifest Creative Research Gallery & Drawing Center, Cincinnati, OH, 2013.
- 2012 *Hammonds' Beautiful Monsters Renders Natural Disasters Majestic*, Caitlin Greenwood, *Austinist, Arts & Entertainment* on May 23, 2012.
- 2011 *Labour-Intensive*, Uppercase Magazine, Issue #11, pp. 42-50, Calgary Alberta, Canada, October, 2011.
- 2006 *Text Messaging*, Hank Hoffman, Connecticut Art Scene, New Haven, CT, September 15, 2006.
- 2006 *Triple Threat: Curator, teacher and artist Hollis Hammonds remains immersed in the local art community*, Selena Reder, Cincinnati CityBeat, Cincinnati, OH, August 23-29, 2006.
- 2002 *Art Avalanche*, Liberty Wampler, Cincinnati CityBeat: vol. 8, Issue 45; Cincinnati, OH, Sept. 19-25, 2002.



House on Fire, 2015, charcoal and acrylic medium on canvas, projected video, 8' x 16'

Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 37th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,882 artists in 294 visual art exhibitions, 122 music, dance and theater events, 15 film festivals, 26 literary readings and 544 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, the *New York Times*, *ArtForum* and on *National Public Radio* and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from

the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 650 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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