

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Bruts, a group exhibition curated by artist Rashid Johnson. The exhibition's opening day is Tuesday, July 2 from 10 AM to 4 PM, and the show will be on view through August 24, 2024.

Bruts features paintings and sculptures by fifteen artists whose work comes into being through feats of physical, psychological, spiritual, and emotional strength. Many of the works on view were produced in ways that foreground the roughness of an artist's interactions with their materials, resulting in aggressively textured surfaces and an absence of smoothness. Johnson has composed the exhibition like a poem, seeking to generate unexpected correspondences that cannot be reduced to mere visual or biographical affinity. In keeping with this ethos, the show is populated by a variety of takes on abstraction, including works that otherwise present as figurative. It also reflects Johnson's evolving view of his own ideas and project, which have continually found him negotiating a terrain where non-objective mark making and composition overlap with lyrical approaches to representation understood in the broadest possible terms.

The example of French artist Jean Dubuffet provides a centralizing force both in Johnson's thinking and in the exhibition itself, which features a focused acrylic work by Dubuffet from 1981. Dubuffet coined the term art brut to describe practices in which artists honed and defined their own notions of what it means to be skillful. As he became interested in art that resisted or exceeded academic expectations about form, he used the aesthetic freedoms of modernism to make paintings and sculptures that were both highly personal—the artist would often root his compositions in his experiences of people in his intimate circle—and abstract enough to override viewers' attempts to locate them in any particular subject.

The other major figure whose work provides a foundational layer for the conception and realization of Bruts is the American artist Bill Traylor, who also depicted people and scenes in his immediate environment. As is immediately discernible in the seven works by Traylor on view, his incisive—and intuitive—sense of design and his felt understanding of his

materials gave him the tools to transform seemingly straightforward visual elements into images with archetypal power. Their emotional impact belies the economy of means with which they were made and reveals what becomes possible when artists fully synthesize the handling of their materials and the conception of their work. In works like these, neither process nor design dominates. Rather, there is an amalgam of the two that roots the picture, however identifiable or abstract it might be, in the visceral presence of the artist's and the viewer's experience alike.

A sculpture by Isa Genzken, for instance, incorporates a mannequin as the support for a brooding assemblage of objects—including clothing, ribbon, and a garishly painted mask—that brings together a cacophony of moods and visual provocations. The object points in any number of contextual directions, but the freedom of expression with which it has been rendered continually disrupts attempts to locate it as a response to a particular social, political, or personal condition. Throughout Bruts, representation becomes a means of support for decidedly non-representational gestures, even in the case of the paintings by Jeff Sonhouse, in which the precision of the artist's drawing and paint application are offset by highly physical interventions like the use of wooden matches to construct his subjects' hair.

If expressivity is one of the abiding principles that unifies the works in this exhibition, another is the spirit of free and poetic juxtaposition that also defines the approach Johnson has brought to selecting them. The conversations that emerge between a work by an artist traditionally associated with art brut, like Aloïse Corbaz, a sculpture by ceramic pioneer Peter Voulkos, and a painting by abstract expressionist Herbert Gentry provide not only a series of histories and alternative histories about the evolution of Western Hemispheric art in the twentieth century, but a feeling for a prevailing spirit that presented—and presents itself—in varied works by varied artists from varied backgrounds and orientations. One result of this approach is the lessening of hierarchical thinking and looking that it engenders. Another is the sense that thinking about and looking at artworks are themselves creative

propositions, and that the observations that follow from them might be the more meaningful engines for historical classification—and revisionism—than top-down decisions based on pre-established concepts, stylistic similarities, or chronological overlap.

Bruts demonstrates how immediacy in art functions as its own kind of anti-academy, allowing individual artists and viewers to hone their responsiveness to the physical world around them. The unabashed pursuit of individual perspective that characterizes many of these works becomes a path not toward obscurantism, but toward a democratic, heterogeneous, and productively challenging space where universal connection is achieved through disagreement and dissonance as well as harmony and assent. In this respect, the exhibition's mood is one of thorny optimism, and the propositions it makes are accordingly oriented toward spheres of life—including social and even political ones—whose intersection with the artistic domain demonstrates the central role that raw acts of creation play in all human endeavor.