

April 13 - June 22, 2008

Tamasha Williamson's text-based drawings address the way our words reveal and hide meanings, and the way slogans pass from combustible to cliché. The economy of the works is contrasted by encrusted titles that convey an ambivalence about blacks' roles in popular culture.

Disinhibition is a present-tense exploration of the personal, protean, and complex status of class, race, and identity. The ways we act on these factors have become more subtle and embedded, but no less pernicious. Because of social niceties and a lack of knowing what to say, we address these topics in measured tones even in situations that call for courage and frankness. While these artists employ diverse media and practices, what unites the group in the exhibition is a fearlessness in confronting hypocrisy and absurdity and encouraging straight talk.

Blake Bradford
Curator, *Disinhibition*

Related Events:

All events are free and open to the public.

Exhibition Reception: Saturday, April 26, 6 - 8 pm

Film Screenings: Select Tuesday Nights at 6 pm in 4833 RPH

May 13 *Bamboozled*, (2000), Dir. Spike Lee, 135 min.

May 20 *Watermelon Man*, (1970), Dir. Melvin Van Peebles, 104 min.

June 3 *Hollywood Shuffle*, (1987), Dir. Robert Townsend, 82 min.

June 17 *Fear of a Black Hat*, (1994), Dir. Rusty Cundieff, 85 min.

Hyde Park **ARTCENTER**

5020 South Cornell Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60615 773.324.5520 www.hydeparkart.org

The Hyde Park Art Center is a not-for-profit organization that presents innovative exhibitions, primarily work by Chicago-area artists, and educational programs in the visual arts for children and adults of diverse backgrounds. The Center is funded in part by the Alphawood Foundation; The Chicago Community Trust; a City Arts III grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and the Illinois Arts Council; The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; The Leo S. Guthman Fund; The Irving Harris Foundation; The Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; The Joyce Foundation; JPMorgan Chase Foundation; The Mayer & Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; The MacArthur Foundation; The MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; The Orbit Fund; Polk Bros. Foundation; The Clinton Family Fund; The Sara Lee Foundation; South East Chicago Commission; The Wallace Foundation; and the generosity of its members and friends.

Disinhibition: Black Art and Blue Humor

Work by

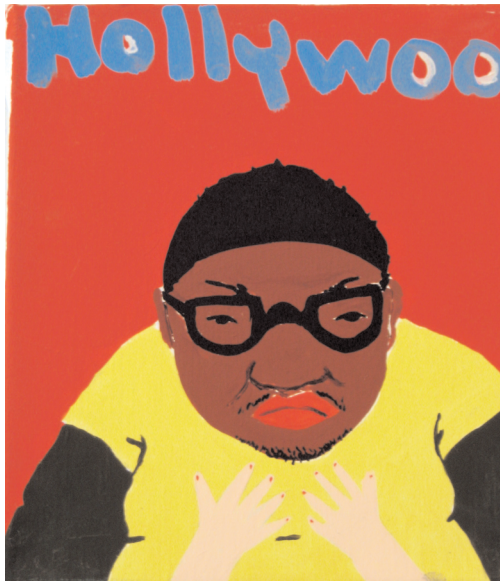
Elizabeth Axtman, Michael Paul Britto,
David Leggett, Dave McKenzie, Jayson Musson,
William Pope. L, and Tamasha Williamson

curated by Blake Bradford



Tamasha Williamson
It Is...Ain't It? The African-American Vernacular and the King's English: Validation v. Degradation (Articulate)
2007
Graphite on paper
30 x 36 inches

America is a place where self-evident truths include all men being “created equal” and our inalienable rights include “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” However, it would seem that even in the post-Civil Rights era, black people’s choices are limited to being lionized or vilified. Oprah, Obama, Tiger Woods, and Richard Parsons are held up as universal examples of success and influence. Simultaneously, Hurricane Katrina, failing urban schools, “superpredators,” and other less natural disasters are disproportionately confined to black America.



David Leggett, *Holly Woo*, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 10 x 11 inches

While we are all, as social beings, encouraged to manage our communications and facilitate getting along, there are venues and mechanisms that encourage fearless honesty and even bluntness. *Disinhibition: Black Art and Blue Humor* brings together artists who use the humor in their work to forthrightly address racial taboos, prejudice, and stereotypes. They look at the contradictions and binds of American society as being particularly absurd. How can the promised freedoms, possibilities, and rewards for which our elders fought remain bound to isolation and unfulfilled potential for so many? How can these two realities coexist?

Participating artists include: Elizabeth Axtman, Michael Paul Britto, David Leggett, Dave McKenzie, Jayson Musson, William Pope. L, and Tamasha Williamson. In a tradition that extends back to the 19th century with French cultural cartoonist Honoré Daumier and beyond, the levity in their work allows them to navigate uncom-

fortable territories and shed light on inconvenient truths. The artists’ investigations and the forms of humor they employ have their roots in comedians ranging from Dick Gregory, Richard Pryor, and Paul Mooney to contemporaries such as Chris Rock and Dave Chappelle. They also run parallel to cultural phenomena like the Daily Show, where the caricature of current events and situations can have more substance, be more poignant, and be more topical than serious news outlets.

Each of these artists is at the forefront of contemporary practice. Elizabeth Axtman, trained as a photographer, commingles performance and digital video in pieces such as *Where’s the Party At?* Her works on paper combine photographs and drawings and explore the relationship between desire and repulsion.

Jayson Musson makes text-based work that draws on Jenny Holzer, graffiti artists, and contemporary collectives such as Space 1026 (Philadelphia) and Fort Thunder/Forcefield (Providence), as well as the “look at me” culture of reality TV, Youtube.com and LastNightsParty.com.

In videos, works on paper, and performances, Michael Paul Britto utilizes a keen eye for pop culture to point out the ways that issues of race have become embedded in our culture.

William Pope. L, who refers to himself as “America’s Friendliest Black Artist,” is best known for performance pieces, although here he contributes a series of declaratory drawings. The non-sequiturs hint at the meaninglessness of racial assumptions.

David Leggett’s salon-style installation is comprised of paintings, drawings, and ephemera that mix autobiography, stereotypes, and popular culture. There’s also an acknowledgement of our complicity as we enthusiastically consume these images.