



DAVID HAMMONS (b. 1943)

Untitled

Signed lower right, "Hammons"

enamel on masonite

23 5/8 x 47 5/8 in. (25 1/2 x 49 3/8 x 1 3/8 in.)

c. 1965

38595

PROVENANCE:

Leftover Gallery, San Francisco

Private Collection, California

This "Untitled" enamel painting by David Hammons is a precursor to the artist's famous body prints of the late 1960s and '70s, as well as compelling recent works. The painting was completed just before Hammons enrolled at the Chouinard Institute in Los Angeles (now CalArts). By this time, Hammons had studied with the realist activist Charles White and was influenced by the found-object assemblages of Dada, the humble materials of Arte Povera, and the politically charged imagery of the Black Arts Movement. For his body prints, Hammons created life-sized representations of his own body by slicking himself with margarine, baby oil, and other greasy substances, and pressing himself against surfaces, creating imagery in which viewers can discern the face and clothes of the artist.

After moving to New York City in 1974, Hammons partook in assemblage, installation, and performance work but, in recent years, he has returned to the two-dimensional support. In his "Kool-Aid" series, the sumptuously colored and fluid style seen in this early enamel painting reappears, and in his "Basketball" series, dark smudges are the product of a basketball dribbled on the paper support. Poured enamel and cheap powdered drink, dribbled balls covered in "Harlem dirt", and the press of a body against support all are inflected by chance. Fugitive materiality recurs in Hammons practice, nuancing his political commentary on the African American experience.

David Hammons was born in 1943 in Springfield, Illinois. An African-American conceptual artist, Hammons uses the found-object media as a platform for Dadaist social commentary, specifically on racial themes. He is fundamentally a political artist, focusing on issues of black history, poverty, drug addiction, and racism.

Despite studying art in Los Angeles at the Chouinard Art Institute and Otis Art Institute, and then in New York City at Parson's School of Design, he has said, "I can't stand art actually. I've never, ever liked art, ever. I never took it in school." When asked, Hammons places himself as an artist somewhere between Arte Povera and Marcel Duchamp.

Hammons' work is rooted in the black urban experience. He creates pieces out of the debris of African-American life, to defy cultural stereotypes and to highlight racial issues. Since the 1970s he has created pieces from grease, hair, barbecued ribs, cheap wine bottles and dirt, usually on the streets and in vacant lots instead of the gallery space. Hammons states "I do my street art mainly to keep rooted in 'who I am',

because the only thing that is really going on is on the street. It isn't happening in the galleries."

In the early 1980s, Hammons first gained a reputation for his series of Body Prints that were executed in the early 1970s. They are imprints of the artist's body made directly on paper using grease. With their detail and eerie translucency, they embody an X-ray like quality.

In 1983, he did a performance piece at Cooper Square in New York, entitled Bliz-aard Ball Sale. Standing between street vendors, Hammons offered snowballs, priced according to size. This piece focused on the idea that given the right setting, anything can be commercialized. It also illustrated Hammons' views of the art market, where seemingly senseless objects can be given a price.

Hammons began creating art on the theme of basketball, based on the belief that the African-American experience is one of exploitation by the white establishment and that it plays an integral part on street culture. Hammons desires the black viewer to recognize his/ her own reflection in his art, and the white viewer to see appreciate another culture in which they are an accessory. He handles these difficult issues with the compassion and complexity that they are due and forces the viewer to look at our current culture with a critical and dissecting eye.

The information and material herein represents Gallery's best efforts and understanding of the current history and scholarship with respect to the provenance of the Work(s) of Art described and is not part of any warranty.

















