



Dewey Crumpler

Painting is an Act of Spiritual Aggression

Organized by Sampada Aranke, Dan Nadel, Jordan Stein

March 17- April 23, 2022

Opening reception: Thursday, March 17, 6–8pm

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present Dewey Crumpler's first New York solo exhibition featuring recent and historic paintings and works on paper.

Thirty years ago, Crumpler became fascinated with a photograph of an object identified as an iron slave collar. He read it as an ovoid mass with a circular hole in the center, indicating both absence and presence of a Black body. Sometime after, he noticed his son's hoodie sweatshirt thrown over a chair. It looked like the presence that might have historically filled that (o)void. These chance happenings married in Crumpler's mind with his interest in ritual objects, Black culture, and space-time cosmology, and birthed *The Hoodies*. *The Hoodies*, which Crumpler has manifested in small-scale paintings since the early 1990s, resemble human beings, but their outer form holds an unearthly void that permits traveling impossible distances, from the far reaches of outer space to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. These figures are witnesses to history, and their presence alone questions dominant socio-cultural narratives alive in art history and practice. In a time of great social and political recollecting and reframing, the artworks call from their canvases, asking complex questions about lineage, likeness, and access. Who controls history? How does art align with power and resistance? What does it mean to witness through time?

In related works, Crumpler intimates that *The Hoodies* arrived on cargo ships – human goods transported to build the “New World.” These ships contain and symbolize the ravages of racial capitalism, marking a history built from the very transport of enslaved Africans, who built the America—as idea and manifestation—we know today. In Crumpler’s collages we see that our entertainment, art, literature, and religion all traveled through that middle passage. And now, in new large-scale paintings, cargo ships bring us the very hoodie sweatshirts that many have been conditioned to fear on our streets along with all the rest of the consumer goods which occupy our lives, tumbling into the ocean when they fail to make the voyage, or being carted off to more containers when they do. These goods, Crumpler says, are built upon the cargo of old – a presence forever felt on land, sea, and in the deepest reaches of space.

Dewey Crumpler (b. 1949, Arkansas) began his artistic career in the late 1960s in the Bay Area. Together with Emory Douglas, he was part of a group of young Black artists that attended weekly meetings at the home of curator, artist, and arts advocate Evangeline (E.J.) Montgomery. With Montgomery and her friend Elizabeth Catlett’s help, Crumpler studied mural painting in Mexico with Pablo O’Higgins, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. In 1974 he painted the now-iconic murals at George Washington High School in response to Victor Arnautoff’s controversial *Life of Washington* works.

Crumpler has taught in the painting department at the San Francisco Art Institute since 1989, where he has led classes on not only mark-making, but Jazz and African studies. Crumpler was the subject of a retrospective, *Of Tulips and Shadows*, at the California African American Museum (2008). His most recent exhibitions include *COLLAPSE: recent paintings by Dewey Crumpler* at the Hedreen Gallery, Seattle, and *Possessions*, a virtual gallery at Frieze 2020 curated by Chisenhale Gallery Director Zoé Whitley. *Crossings*, a large-scale exhibition of his recent *Shipping Container* works, opens in 2022 at the Richmond Art Center in Richmond, California. His work is in the permanent collections of the Oakland Museum of California; the Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, CA; and the California African American Museum, Los Angeles.

The present project originated in the *The Complete Hoodie Works*, an exhibition at Cushion Works, San Francisco (2021), which was accompanied by a catalog featuring an interview with the artist by curators Sampada Aranke and Jordan Stein.

Sampada Aranke is an Assistant Professor in the Art History, Theory, Criticism Department at the School of Art Institute, Chicago. She is scholar-in-residence at the Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, UC Davis, where she is co-curating *Mike Henderson, Before the Fire: 1965-1985* with the museum’s curator-at-large, **Dan Nadel**. Nadel is a 2021-2022 fellow at the Leon Levy Center for Biography at the Graduate Center, CUNY for his forthcoming biography of Robert Crumb. **Jordan Stein** is the author of *Rip Tales: Jay DeFeo’s Estocada and Other Pieces*, a curator-at-large, and the founder of Cushion Works, a San Francisco exhibition space.