

JESSICA SILVERMAN

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David Huffman: Odyssey

Opens Friday, January 13, 2023



Jessica Silverman is pleased to announce David Huffman's "Odyssey," the Oakland artist's second solo show with the gallery, running from January 13 to February 25, 2023. The exhibition includes paintings and works on paper created from 2004 to 2009, all populated by "Traumanauts"—Huffman's Black astronauts navigating the political cosmos—against stark, abstract backgrounds. Combining formal abstraction and queries into social identity and race, Huffman's work challenges the viewer to question their own placement within the tidal forces of civilization.

Born in 1963 in Berkeley and raised amongst revolutionaries, activists, and members of the Black Panther Party, Huffman is strongly influenced by radical practice in his work as a painter and educator. His interest in art began at an early age, assisting his mother, Dolores Davis, with the design of the famous "Free Huey [Newton]" flag widely used at protests and rallies at that time.

This cultivation of artistic expression in dialogue with the Black radical tradition have come to inform his association with Afrofuturism, manifested in the development of his Traumanauts as personalities emerging out of the psychological rupture caused by slavery. Though the Traumanauts series is lesser known relative to his other works, it is foundational to Huffman's formal practice, using acrylic, gesso, and glitter to create

evocative compositions chronicling these characters navigating memory, loss, and trauma.

In works such as *Traumaeve 2 Battles Traumatanks* (2009), Huffman's love of anime and science fiction shines forth, with a large-scale female "traumabot" warrior destroying a smattering of tanks. Here, she fights for a better future of Blackness at large and against her own self-doubt. This is further explored in *Intro to Dark Matter* (2006), where two characters float into a void pondering a mysterious beauty filled with bursting stars. They are no longer "tangible aliens," as Octavia Butler once wrote, but rather re-connected with themselves as children of the cosmos.

At nearly seven-feet tall, the largest piece in the exhibition *Make Love Not War* (2006) spans three freestanding painted door panels, upon which scenes of violent conflict unfold. This work, made amidst the context of the Bush presidency in 2006, and recalling anti-Vietnam War activism of the 1960s and 70s, speaks to the entrapment caused by political structures against the human desire for freedom and liberation. The opposite side of the work drives home messages of resistance with six Traumanauts holding various protest signs reading "WAGE PEACE NOT WAR," "FREE THE HUMANS," and "DON'T VOTE FOR WAR."

Another work, *The Seeker* (2005), presents a lone Traumanaut drifting through a whirling cosmos. In the context of the Black diasporic experience, Traumanauts are always in transit in search of home, and the means to get there. Though rife with uncertainty, Huffman's figures are constantly exploring unseen horizons, demanding nothing less than new universes, worlds, and ways of finding themselves anew.

Barclay Simpson Award. He studied at the New York Studio School and received his MFA at California College of the Arts & Crafts, San Francisco. Huffman lives and works in Oakland, CA; he is currently on the board at SFMOMA.



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David Huffman (b. 1963, Berkeley, CA) has work in the collections of SFMOMA, San Francisco; LACMA, Los Angeles; Berkeley Art Museum, CA; Studio Museum, Harlem; Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN; Oakland Museum of California; Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA; San José Museum of Art, CA; Palo Alto Art Center, CA; Eileen Norton Collection, Los Angeles; Birmingham Museum of Art, AL; Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, MN, Arkansas Art Center; ASU Art Museum, Tempe, AZ; Lodeveans Collection, London; and the Embassy of the United States of America, Dakar, Senegal, among others. Huffman enjoyed a recent solo exhibition at the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco and has been included in recent group exhibitions at the de Young Museum, San Francisco; Weatherspoon Museum of Art, NC; and The Wright Museum, MI. He is the recipient of numerous awards and residencies including the Eureka Fellowship, ARTADIA San Francisco, Palo Alto Public Arts Commission, and the Barclay Simpson Award. He studied at the New York Studio School and received his MFA at California College of the Arts & Crafts, San Francisco. Huffman lives and works in Oakland, CA; he is currently on the board at SFMOMA.

Image— Top: *Intro to Dark Matter*, 2006, detail; **Bottom:** *Make Love Not War*, 2006.

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