



Sedrick Huckaby

Hidden in Plain Sight

List Gallery, Swarthmore College
January 22 - February 24, 2013

Born in 1975 in Fort Worth, Texas, Sedrick Huckaby takes inspiration from his family, Christian faith, and African-American heritage. He studied at Texas Wesleyan University before transferring to Boston University, where he received a B.F.A. in Painting. After receiving a M.F.A. from Yale University's School of Art, he traveled to Europe to study old masters in England, France, and Italy. He has received numerous awards including a Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, the Imagination Celebration Spirit of the Future Award, an Anne Giles Kimbrough Grant from the Dallas Museum of Art, an Elizabeth Greenshield Award, a Lewis Comfort Tiffany Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Additionally, his work is featured in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Whitney Museum of American Art; the African American Museum in Dallas; and the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University.



The 99%, List Gallery Installation (detail), 2013, varied media

Curated by Andrea Packard, List Gallery director, *Sedrick Huckaby: Hidden in Plain Sight* features Huckaby's quilt paintings and *The 99%*, an assemblage of portraits in varied media including approximately 100 lithographs made during his recent residency at the Brandywine Print Workshop in Philadelphia. This exhibition marks the first time Huckaby has installed so many portraits as a composite work and integrated them intimately with his quilt paintings. One can

understand his portrait installation as a type of quilt in itself—individual pieces joined to suggest a greater entity.

Quilt Paintings

Sedrick Huckaby is most well known for illusionistic paintings of family quilts that evoke cultural history and the passage of time. Larger works such as *Winter* (2001-2009), an eight-foot-tall by twenty-foot-long work from Huckaby's series *A Love Supreme*, surrounds the viewer's field of vision. In works such as *From Earth to Heaven* (2012) and *Her Hands on the Word* (2008) he uses thick impasto to build relief-like surfaces that intrigue and draw in the viewer. The heavy layers of paint emphasize contrasts in tone and texture. For example, in *From Earth to Heaven* Huckaby sculpts the bottom of the canvas (earth) with thick oil paint that thins as it ascends to the top of the composition (heaven).

Although he portrays everyday objects, Huckaby challenges the viewer to find transcendent meanings within them. For example, *Hidden in Plain Sight* (2011) is comprised of four canvases, each of which represents a different quilt. Arranging four quilts in his studio, Huckaby gathered the fabric into continuous arcs that create a large oval uniting the disparate patterns. Within this oval, the intersection of the four canvases suggests the shape of a cross. Huckaby's title, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, further encourages the viewer to seek embedded meanings in his paintings and to consider the way a creative shift in context or presentation can alter our perception. Such works remind us that the quilts are more than just objects. As carefully designed art forms, they transmit treasured memories, enduring values, and creative strategies to live by.



Hidden in Plain Sight, 2011, oil on canvas, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Gotvald

Huckaby first used the quilts as backgrounds in portraits he made of his family and friends.

Handmade quilts, which filled his grandparents' house, now function as family heirlooms. He realized that although they were commonplace in his childhood experience, they were, in fact, his grandmother's art form. Continuing his family's creative legacy through painting, he became interested in folklore about the role of quilts as containers of cultural identity and coded signals on the Underground Railroad. In addition, Huckaby's titles often compare his use of color and design to rhythms of jazz. For example, Huckaby's series of four mural-sized paintings, *A Love Supreme*, is named after John Coltrane's four-part masterpiece album.

Huckaby's grandmother was the religious matriarch of the family and he often memorializes her in his paintings. Her religious conviction had a profound effect on Huckaby's life and art. His use of religious symbols and imagery such as the scripture in *Her Hands on the Word* (2008) and the crucifix in *Quilt for Christ II* (2009) convey a spirituality that cannot be fully conveyed through spoken language. In *Her Hands on the Word*, the juxtaposition between the smooth Bible pages and the rough texture of her labor-worn hands suggests a difference between the material and immaterial spheres. For Huckaby, his painting process is a meditative experience intended to communicate both internal and external experiences of the world.



Quilt For Christ II, 2009, oil on canvas, Courtesy of Valley House Gallery, Dallas, Texas

The 99%

The smaller room of the List Gallery features *The 99%*, an installation of portraits in varied media including drawings on Mylar, oil pastels, ink drawings, lithographs, and paintings. The portraits represent members of Huckaby's Fort Worth, Texas community, some of whom he has portrayed before, as well as new acquaintances he has made in his neighborhood and on travels. Through these varied portraits, Huckaby prompts us to consider those who would otherwise remain unheard and unseen. The artist sometimes asks his subjects about the things that are most important to them and inscribes a quote beneath their image. These quotes intermittently punctuate the installation, reminding us that many more voices remain unheard. Both Huckaby's inscriptions and expressive language of portraiture communicate empathy and inspire compassion in a world of racial and economic injustice.



The 99%, List Gallery Installation (detail), 2013, varied media

It is not surprising that Huckaby's arrangement of portraits on rectangles of varying sizes and colors should resemble a quilt. The walls of *The 99%* installation have been painted grey, imitating a fabric background and setting the project apart from the adjacent quilt paintings. However, this patch-work made of portraits differs from the quilts found in nearby paintings. Whereas the quilt paintings featured in the larger room of the gallery refer to family traditions and required years to complete, the majority of portraits in *The 99%* reflect a diverse community and took a relatively short time to create.

Huckaby's quilt paintings are concerned with memory and history, but the title and diverse media and subjects of *The 99%*, deal specifically with contemporary life. In particular, his ink drawings convey a greater immediacy than his paintings, and the red ink he uses for some inscriptions calls out to viewers with urgency. Although Huckaby's painted representations of quilts convey a different sense of time than his patchwork representations of community, both bodies of work raise questions of inheritance.



The 99%, List Gallery Installation, 2013, varied media

In his List Gallery exhibition, Huckaby demonstrates his mastery of patchwork—the recombination of fragments to make a new whole. Huckaby's translation of folds, colors, and patterns through the medium of paint reinterprets and preserves stories and images that might otherwise be lost. However, whereas the quilt paintings recall the past and convey a certain nostalgia, his ongoing series of portraits encourages the viewer to meditate on the current state of our communities and to project into the future. Both bodies of work prompt us to ask: what are we inheriting? What are we passing on to the next generation? Although Huckaby celebrates the beauty of objects we assemble, mend, and pass on, he is not primarily concerned with the material things. His grandmother inspired him with the rich materials of her own works of art—her quilts—but it is her memory, values, and spirituality that transpire when all the pieces are recomposed.

Written and designed by Nicole Vanchieri and Sarah Vogelman



It has been a pleasure to work on *Sedrick Huckaby: Hidden in Plain Sight* and this accompanying catalog. We would like to thank Andrea Packard, List Gallery director, and Samantha Goldstein, dear friend and design guru, for their guidance throughout this project.

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