

credentials are smartly compounded by the commonplace, unglamorous iconography that grounds their work. In Rauschenberg's *Painting with Red Letter S*, the artist's deft, almost sublime paint handling is brought crashing down to earth by a bold red letter S lying prone on its side at the bottom center of the canvas. Harrison's similarly non-hierarchical appropriation of seemingly everything in her path, from boy bands to trash cans to the work of other "lofty" artists (as noted, de Kooning, Haacke, and Stella), here reminded us that art is, after all, stuff that artists make out of other stuff—a pointed leveling of quotidian objects and blue-chip artworks, whose values are inflated by the auction markets in which they circulate.

Harrison's stance could be read as a smugly cynical commentary about the particular market in which she (somewhat reluctantly) operates—and in which Rauschenberg arguably operated as well. Rauschenberg produced his irreverent Combines at the apex of Abstract Expressionism, the movement that took itself perhaps more seriously than any other in the past century. Thus the viewer could be forgiven for interpreting the work of both artists as intentionally antagonistic toward the art market and its fickle privileging. But the frank and unprecious way that Harrison and Rauschenberg, both individually and together, seem to celebrate the clunky and imperfect world for all its perverse gifts was the first and most lasting impression of their works in conversation.

—Brynn Hatton

## BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MICHIGAN

### Nick Cave

CRANBROOK ART MUSEUM

Nick Cave's work moves fluidly between sculpture, performance, and social practice and explores the African American body as a site of tragedy, as well as a catalyst for change. Focusing primarily on the artist's work from 2014 and 2015, the Cranbrook Art Museum presented a powerful demonstration of Cave's incisive critical take on the current sociopolitical climate, while simultaneously evidencing his efforts to assemble alternative communities.

The show, curated by Laura Mott, opened with a selection of twenty-nine Soundsuits, Cave's signature wildly decorated dreamlike armatures, whose stitched, beaded, buttoned, and toy-festooned forms simultaneously evoke African art, the costumes donned by New Orleans Mardi Gras revelers, contemporary couture by Jean Paul Gaultier, and mass-market consumer ephemera. Ranging from fragile, almost unwearable sculptural works to soft—if bulky—performance garb, Cave's Soundsuits transform their wearers into astonishing, shaman-like figures, while concealing obvious signs of gender, race, and class. Protective as well as constraining, the Soundsuits were here arranged as a sculptural ensemble, seemingly gathered into an organized group, or perhaps phalanx, poised for some kind of unidentified mission. Whether their purpose was celebration, protest, or religious ritual remained (intentionally) indeterminate.

In a second room, seven Soundsuits, predominantly white and emblazoned with various decorations—including buttons, floral appliques, a wood and metal washboard, and industrial metal-polishing pads painted with red-and-white bull's-eyes—were juxtaposed with a massive beaded untitled tapestry (made earlier this year) evoking a star-filled sky. The installation, which also included a large wall-mounted circular sculpture, *Tondo*, 2012, ornamented with a similarly celestial theme, explored the relationship between fine art and craft. Although the suits were predominantly light and the skies largely dark, each was shot through with its opposite tone. And as one stared at the



Nick Cave wearing *Soundsuit*, 2003, Michigan Central Station, Detroit, 2015.

individual beads, buttons, and appliques spread across the figures and environments, the dichotomy between black and white became a commingling, an integration of a spectrum of different hues.

A third room presented the artist's most recent sculptural output, some of which was shown at Jack Shainman in New York last year, and further emphasized the importance of contemporary black experience to Cave's work. If the Soundsuits evoke dance and celebration, the sculptures in this room struck a more static and mournful tone. They are also less unified—the appropriated mass-market and thrift-store objects from which they are made are generally not sewn together; instead the parts are allowed to retain a more singular existence. *TM13*, 2015, a humanoid form composed of sneakers, jeans, a hooded sweatshirt, plastic lawn toys, and multicolored netting threaded with pony beads, memorializes Trayvon Martin, the black teenager slain in Florida in 2012 (the 13 in the work's title references the year his assailant, George Zimmerman, was acquitted). From certain angles, *TM13* looks like a giant Easter Island head; from others, a striding figure that appears both trapped and weighed down by its constituent parts. *Hustle Coat*, 2014, hung on a wall nearby. Gold bling—chains, watches, etc.—covers the entirety of the garment's interior. Suggesting the garb of a 1970s street-corner fence, the coat, with its jagged and glittering interior, seems ready to rend the flesh of anyone brave enough to put it on. In the center of the room, a black lawn-jockey statuette stood on an antique shoeshine stand, surveying an array of boxes containing various found and made objects, including vintage ceramic birds, thistle seed, and strung beads arranged in a strict geometry on the floor. Confronting the viewer with two powerful symbols of black subjugation, the sculpture *Property*, 2014, evokes at once a flea market and an aerial diagram of a slave ship. As these works and the show's attendant wall texts suggested, although Cave mines collective aspirations for strong, supportive communities and for compassion grounded in mutual understanding, he also directly engages with the nightmares of black experience—the terrible cycles of pain, violence, and suffering that characterize not only the present moment but also our nation's long history of systematized inequity.

The exhibition concluded with a room in which one wall bore the title "Map/Action." The map in question provided the locations of the photo shoots, dance labs, film screenings, and performances that Cave organized in conjunction with local artists and communities between

the spring and early fall of this year. A monitor displayed videos shot by the Detroit-based production company Right Brothers, which documented these often collaborative and improvisational events—happenings that were designed to bring attention to different parts of Detroit's diverse urban fabric. Embracing the city that had helped to empower him when he studied at Cranbrook Academy of Art in the predominantly white enclave of Bloomfield Hills in the late 1980s, Cave, through his collaborative practice, harnesses social engagement as a means to work toward collective healing.

—Matthew Biro

## CHICAGO

### Joseph Yoakum

CARL HAMMER GALLERY

The fabulist and inveterate drifter Joseph Yoakum was known to claim that he had traveled the world as a circus man, a soldier, and a train porter during the first six or so decades of his life. In 1962, at the age of seventy-one, he took up drawing and began working out of a storefront gallery on Chicago's South Side, quickly becoming the self-taught paragon of the city's art community. Yoakum's visionary landscapes had an especially profound impact on the developing visual styles of the Chicago Imagists, who were rising to international prominence in the late '60s (and who made him an honorary member). His influence is perhaps most clearly felt in Chicago Imagist Roger Brown's work. The younger artist's graphic paintings featuring built-up, repetitive motifs are indebted to Yoakum's rich visual vocabulary and inventive use of pattern and design. Brown would acknowledge that discovering Yoakum was "like finding Rousseau in our own backyard."

At Carl Hammer Gallery, an intercontinental array of fourteen small drawings by Yoakum modestly punctuated the perimeter walls. Encyclopedia illustrations, travel magazines, and personal recollections served as source material for Yoakum's landscapes of astonishing places—real and imagined vistas culled from as far away as Mongolia, Ireland, Brazil, and Syria—distinguished by idiosyncratic geological features. Yet the wonderment that these drawings elicit stems from the artist's spiritually imprinted imagination, which produced naive but formally accomplished graphic translations of the external world. For example, *Blue mounds Highest Point, of Kansas State*, 1970, rendered

in ballpoint pen and colored pencil, commingles two unique hill formations: a dramatic, twisted blue mountain ridge flanked by four crimson-shaded conical mounds, each carefully patterned with linear striations. Emerging from a pattern of lime-green trees, these peaks are ringed by the outline of a distant fire, the smoke from which consumes a blue sky. As eerily haunting as Albert Pinkham Ryder's dense clouds or Charles Burchfield's animal-shaped nighttime mists, Yoakum's flat brown plumes take on ghostly contours that hover above the fixed landscape below.

A watercolor and pencil composition, *A Granit mtn. Riverside Cal.*, ca. 1962–64, combines both aerial and atmospheric perspectives to evoke an especially abstract interpretation of the physical world. Here, blocky brown rock formations are arranged in a quilt-like pattern that is broken only by the contour of a blue lake and small fields of uniformly colored green trees. However, its red-and-blue atmosphere glows with vast illusionary depth. Yoakum's use of watercolor offers a pulsing radiance that complements his slow and diligent line work, a spatial affect less convincingly achieved by the colored pencils and ballpoint-pen drawings.

*Mana Kea near Papaikow on Hawaiian Island USA*, ca. 1969, a fantastical stab at depicting a culturally dense landscape in aqua, purple, orange, and blue, was inspired by Polynesian motifs. Nearly unrecognizable as a landscape, this drawing offers up a selection of organic abstract shapes that take their cue from sea corals and woodcarvings. By contrast, in *Paradice Range near Damascus Syria South East Asia*, 1969, Yoakum makes a detailed attempt at accuracy, adorning the sandy folds of a desert landscape with palm and cypress trees. A centrally placed yellow sun with long pointed rays orients the drawing like a compass, giving the composition's foreground, middle ground, and background a median focal point.

The story, possibly apocryphal, that Yoakum began to draw after an image of Lebanon appeared to him in a dream was widely perpetuated by Chicago's art establishment during the artist's most prolific years. What we *can* verify is that Yoakum described his drawing activity as a "spiritual unfoldment," believing that the meaning of the picture was revealed to him while he worked on it. We also know that his line and pattern work greatly influenced Chicago-based artists such as Christina Ramberg, Jim Nutt, and Gladys M. Nilsson and that his radiant gradations had a pivotal effect on both Brown and Philip Hanson. As the Chicago Imagists receive a critical embrace from the contemporary art world, Yoakum's drawings are a poignant reminder that the self-taught-artist tradition heavily contributed to their preposterous, virtuosic imaginings.

—Michelle Grabner

## LOS ANGELES

### Alex Hubbard

MACCARONE

Alex Hubbard's latest show, which christened Michele Maccarone's new Los Angeles space—and which, as so much initial press detailed, opened in tandem with the Broad Museum nearby—serves as a prime example of the recent westward migration of New York galleries, and of a more general media interest in contemporary cultural production in LA's Arts District. Hubbard's "Basic Perversions," the artist's third outing with Maccarone (on view through December 19), has the additional distinction of marking the fifteenth anniversary of the gallery. Given Hubbard's practice, which attends deftly to the place of his work's making and viewing, he was a canny choice for the first slot, here exhibiting eleven large-scale wall- and floor-mounted paintings produced over the past year in the artist's studio, which,

Joseph Yoakum,  
*Paradice Range near  
Damascus Syria South  
East Asia*, 1969, pen  
and colored pencil on  
paper, 12 x 19".

