

# Haim Steinbach   Yve Laris Cohen   Kerry James Marshall

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A billboard-sized yellow wall painting with a big lion-head graphic greets visitors to Haim Steinbach's latest exhibition. The work reminded me of my little nephew singing "Hakuna Matata" from *The Lion King*. It's an amusing beginning from an artist known for his heady, minimalist investigations into commodity fetishism, but also very fitting given the deadpan style of his work.

From the '80s onward, Steinbach has made flawlessly crafted, wedge-shaped Formica-covered shelves and topped them with a wide assortment of items, including toys, globes and dog chews. These works — several of which appear here — have been read as a critique of consumerism since they expose how the glorification of objects sparks desire. But it is the humor in the singular presentation of these unremarkable things that I find so enticing, not least because we so easily cast them aside. While Steinbach uses the mechanisms of display once again in this exhibition, the focus is on something more omnipresent than the sundry objects we live with: color.

The main gallery is lined with eight wooden, wall-hung cases with glass fronts that each present a different Pantone metal storage box. The colorful containers correspond to hues from the company's famous color standardization scheme, used by designers to ensure color consistency. In an upstairs gallery, thirteen large painted rectangles are underscored by names like Exotic Purple and Poker Green. The work, titled *it would look like this* (2016), could be from a commercial paint shop, offering the customer a name to associate with each color, making them more memorable and marketable. These colors, like the articles found on Steinbach's shelves, are mass-produced and ubiquitous; used to paint countless objects, they easily become comparable to the everyday things that we are indifferent to. Like a logo for a Broadway show, whose design can prompt a child to sing no matter where it's found, Steinbach's work starkly displays how color can find new meaning no matter where it is found.

by Aaron Bogart

For his exhibition "Embattled Garden," Yve Laris Cohen turned the gallery space into a woodshop. For five weeks, he worked on reconstructing Isamu Noguchi's set for the eponymous 1958 ballet by the Martha Graham Dance Company, whose set inventory was flooded during Hurricane Sandy in 2012. MGDC, like many historic organizations and galleries, sustained significant damage; yet, while visions of art-filled dumpsters remain in the collective memory, four years have gone by, and the losses are no longer so visible.

Overall, the exhibition was plainly stated: portions of the original set were laid out on packing quilts or leaned against the wall; plywood, two-by-fours, scrap lumber and tools were stowed in a corner; partially completed facsimiles were positioned in available spaces; and meanwhile Cohen sat at a desk, surrounded by his work. Seeing Noguchi's deconstructed set exposed novel and occasionally inelegant aspects of his otherwise graceful, sculpture-like design. Yet the exhibition predominantly focused on the basic, unspectacular minutiae of carpentry. Cohen had worked for MGDC as a production assistant, and he frequently consulted them on many aspects of his reconstruction — what needed to be load-bearing, or which pieces were always jerry-rigged. It suggested a kind of grieving process: the MGDC members' intimate yet banal recounting of the details of the set were required for an exacting, and useful, reproduction.

Cohen's quite personal exhibition reinvests time, space and resources toward a more distant goal: MGDC performing *Embattled Garden* (1958) with the new set. In effect, the ballet about love and temptation is resurrected by Cohen's unglamorous and unsexy preparation, administration and maintenance — an irony that imbues the earnest labor with an erotic dimension. The exhibition stages a social choreography to preserve part of MGDC's history, showing that to make meaning requires dedication, love and a willingness to facilitate other people's work.

by Sam Korman

While Kerry James Marshall's imitations of Old Master painting techniques to portray idealizations of black people's lives are occasionally susceptible to the limitations of respectability politics, closer consideration proves these quotations of grandiose history painting and conventional portraiture to be not homage but *détournement*, subversions of the cultural schema by which excellence is determined and racism is perpetuated through exclusion and hurtful stereotypes. *School of Beauty, School of Culture* (2012) is an alternative space to those traditions: an immense, opulent scene populated not with European royalty presiding over their courts, but a rich community of women occupying a hair salon. Many of Marshall's more recent paintings celebrate self-possessed women of color defining their own sexualities and refuting narrow conceptions of desirability. The boldly black Wonder Woman in *Black Star 2* (2012) has most recently starred on Lee Daniels's hit TV drama *Empire*, a story full of similarly empowered black women and moguls.

For Marshall, paint is a material with which to contest the ominous and oppressive conditions associated with pervasive darkness even today. *Invisible Man* (1986) shows a nude black figure, his coloring hardly distinguishable from the ground plane against which he is rendered, and a hovering black censor block that fails to fully cover his low-hanging genitalia. Amid black-on-black geometries, this interloper jabs at the racism attached to early reductive abstractions, such as Alphonse Allais's 1897 black square painting whose title translates to "Negroes Fighting in a Cellar at Night." *Black Painting* (2003–06) is literally at home in total blackness, wherein two figures hold one another in a darkened bedroom, a copy of Angela Davis's *If They Come in the Morning* lying nearby. Marshall does not simply reuse moves from painting's canon, but rather inhabits and elevates precisely what has been historically discounted.

by Matt Morris