

ARTFORUM

FEBRUARY 2020

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

POPE.L

RAYYANE TABET

REMEMBERING JOHN GIORNO

LIFE IS A KILLER

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Paul P., *Untitled*, 2019, oil on linen, 10% x 8 3/4".

that tangentially brought to mind the self-assured sitter in John Singer Sargent's *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw*, 1892. Paul P.'s brushstrokes are consummate and enlivening, performing a kind of ocular choreography.

The sculpture *Rex Prisms*, 2016, was an ash-wood armature of a trifold screen backdrop and a low stool, suggestive of the sitting area for an artist's model but with none of the softness or active properties. It is a dormant relic without corporeal presence, and intimates what isn't there—a spiritless ghosting. A suite of three ink drawings of the lusty goat god Pan were sketched from the 1867 Emmanuel Frémiet sculpture *Pan et oursons* (Pan and the Bear Cubs) at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. The illustrations depict only Pan's face and

hand and have a breathy air about them, awash in aloof reverie.

Paul P.'s work is perhaps too clever, so laden with erudition that it preempts critique at almost every turn, but the artist insists (by example) upon a prolific dream life. A rent boy becomes a debutante, a whore a virginal waif, and the wastes of ruination become the sweetest songs of heaven and earth. Some might say it's precious, but we need a museum of glass flowers every now and then as an exercise in immortality, and the artist-archivist knows this. Paul P. upholds and reworks lore; mythology is the sacrosanct provenance of the queer aesthete, affirming because it exists outside the bounds of law, time, and plague. The duty of the living is to honor the deceased and keep the flame going.

Or, as in Siegfried Sassoon's 1918 poem "The Death Bed":

*Light many lamps and gather round his bed.
Lend him your eyes, warm blood, and will to live.
Speak to him; rouse him; you may save him yet.*

Queer visibility is simultaneously crucial and meaningless nowadays: We are steeped in exposure, getting closer to burnout with each dip into oversaturation. Paul P.'s consistently human portraits refuse obliteration and stasis—risen from the past, they shimmy beyond the present and get as close to us as we let them. They promise longevity. The incentive to believe is up to the viewer, but at least one cannot doubt this artist's faith in his craft.

—Charity Coleman

Tyree Guyton

MARTOS GALLERY

"Love, Sam," Tyree Guyton's solo exhibition at Martos Gallery, was titled in honor of the artist's grandfather Sam Mackey. A housepainter by trade, he gave his grandson his first paintbrush when he was nine years old. Guyton, who is now sixty-four, would go on to study art at Detroit's College for Creative Studies in 1980; six years later, he began painting candy-colored polka dots on the facade of Mackey's house on Heidelberg Street in McDougall-Hunt, a predominantly black, working-

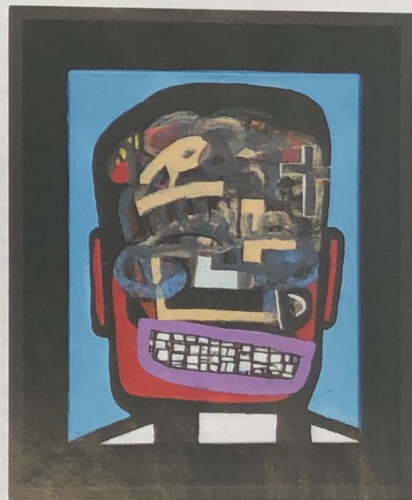
class enclave on Detroit's east side. This benignly eccentric act marked the beginning of the Heidelberg Project, an ever-changing, gleefully shambolic site-specific environment for which Guyton is best known. The sprawling work grew to encompass two residential blocks and is festooned with paintings, children's toys, car parts, household appliances, and miscellaneous clutter.

Stippled with Guyton's recursive vocabulary of dots and crosses, numbers and letters, many of the works here were once a part of Heidelberg and show the wear and tear of a life outdoors. In *Extinction*, 2017, a pair of toothy, rectangle-headed visages appear on a rumpled car hood; painted red and white letters spell out SAM and 1967—the year Lyndon B. Johnson sent tanks and soldiers to McDougall-Hunt in order to crush that summer's wave of civil unrest. "I thought the world was coming to an end," the artist remembered. In a sense, it did. Many of his neighbors abandoned the area, leaving behind the disinvested real estate, empty houses, and discarded belongings that would become the materials of Guyton's art.

For Guyton and his admirers, Heidelberg was a monument made from ashes. For his detractors, it was an eyesore and a symptom of the very decay it claimed to remedy. Long a target of municipal bulldozers and arson fires, his scrapyard *Gesamtkunstwerk* squared less easily with the rhetoric of urban renewal and "creative placemaking" than with more recent reno-artworks—such as Rick Lowe's Project Row Houses in Houston's Third Ward, or Theaster Gates's Dorchester Projects on Chicago's South Side—though that may soon change. In 2016, Guyton announced plans to dismantle the installation to make way for "Heidelberg 3.0," an "arts and culture village" appointed with a residency, a gallery, and programming.

Seeing pieces of Heidelberg in a commercial gallery might conjure a kind of Benjaminian melancholy: Indeed, they seem to narrate art's shift from an auratic value rooted in community and place to what the philosopher called "exhibition value," becoming deterritorialized and exchangeable. But Guyton's paintings jeer at this lapsarian story even as it takes shape, serving up comedy, menace, and a knowing yet irrepressible exuberance. His "Faces of God"—as this 1989–series of portraits is called—vary greatly in style and facture, from the Picassoid jaunt of *Nothing Is Real*, 2017, and the broken impasto of *The "Y" Theory*, 2018, to the painterly muddle of *Good Boy*, 2016. The most common feature among them is a gaping rictus: an irregular grid of squares signifying teeth. Hanging alongside these works were wild drawings by Mackey, made when he was in his late eighties and early nineties. Manifesting from energetic, looping tangles of pen and colored pencil, these happy grotesques, farragoes of stretched mouths, saucer eyes, and flipper-like limbs, vibrate with an almost eschatological optimism. "If you remove the veil of the flesh," writes Jenenne Whitfield, Guyton's wife and the Heidelberg Project's executive director, "you will see that the man/woman is always smiling, perhaps suggesting that they know something that the rest of us don't."

—Chloe Wyma



Tyree Guyton, *Good Boy*, 2016, house paint on canvas, 26 x 22". From the series "Faces of God," 1989–.