



Derrick Adams
Head #1
 2010
 Mixed media on paper
 36 x 36 inches
 Courtesy of the artist

ideas to life. Through a variety of mediums, Adams provides a one-stop shop toward an artmaking that is anchored in a belief that the materials provide him with a platform from which to transcend the banal. Adams says, “It really is about the idea manifesting itself through the material. The formal construct of the object is the most important part of the idea.” Moreover, employing these diverse modalities of expression creates a dialogue with viewers, positioning them to easily enter the work and generate their own comprehension of the hypothesis being investigated.

Iconography, popular culture, and image construction based on media exposure have provided Adams with a rich repository of inspiration. Coming from a family of creatives (his stepfather is a funk musician), Adams has an improvisational style that is quite refreshing

TO WATCH

DERRICK ADAMS

BY LARRY OSSEI-MENSAH

Over the past decade, Derrick Adams’s versatile oeuvre has made him one of the most intriguing figures in the contemporary art world. With a vibrant artistic practice spanning mediums like collage, sculpture, drawing, performance, and video, he oscillates between being an organizer and provocateur via his various roles as a former gallery director at Rush Arts, an independent curator, an educator, and, most important, an artist. After beginning the year with a seminal solo exhibition at the Jack Tilton Gallery entitled “Deconstruction Worker,” featuring a series of mixed-media collages and sculptures, Adams has continued to work at a heated pace with exhibitions and performances at the Rhona Hoffman Gallery (“tête-à-tête” curated by Mickalene Thomas); The Contemporary Wing in Washington, D.C.; MoMA PS1; Studio Museum in Harlem; Lehmann Maupin Gallery; and the Yancey Richardson Gallery; as well as a solo show at the Boston Center for the Arts. This fall he will team up with longtime collaborator Ramon Silva to present a four-day serio-comic performance to christen the opening of the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Fisher building.

Born and raised in Baltimore, the Brooklyn-based Adams has carved out a niche for his unique brand of multidisciplinary artmaking. His practice is deeply rooted in deconstructivist philosophies and the formation of perception in relationship to objects, texts, symbols, and

ideologies. He says, “I draw from my own experiences and kind of came up with my own philosophies and perspective of looking at artmaking.” These philosophical areas of interest are key components of his artistic identity, and result in a comprehensive body of work that evokes a transcendental experience for the viewer. His work’s lush lucidity derives from the audience’s heightened sense of awareness and his desire to engage them in an active visual discourse that creates a context in which Adams can bring his ideas to fruition. His proficiency in a variety of art forms, particularly performance, is truly captivating. Adams says about his performance art, “I don’t think of myself as a performance artist, but I like to make performance work because I feel like certain things have to be performed.”

What is most striking about Adams’s approach is his curiosity. Many artists claim to “investigate” or “explore” a variety of concerns, but his work clearly reflects his desire not only to communicate via object making, but also to push the boundaries of how the audience engages with his work. He says, “Knowing that it is really about the idea manifesting itself through the materials is acknowledging the fact that the material has a power. And that the power of the material should be explored.” That Adams seeks to empower the viewer with the ability to decode their own message from his work is palpable via the multiplicity of mediums he employs to coax his

in an era in which many artists take a formulaic and didactic approach filled with more fluff than substance. Adams believes that “simplicity is a form of heightened complexity,” adding, “I’m not interested in Minimalism — I’m interested in things being minimal.” This poetic approach to artmaking allows him to create a language through object making and symbolism. The “Deconstruction Worker” series is one of his most ambitious to date. It consists of 100 pieces that seek to illustrate the construction of the figure in a performative way. In this series Adams takes a hyperrealist approach, using faux materials and recontextualizing architectural concerns. The “Deconstruction Worker” features “floor plans, elevation sections, figuring living space and footprints,” all elements that are essential to the construction process. Adams says, “Most of my work really resides in this idea of how outside influences really influence the construction of self-image.”

Adams’s work is a testament to the importance of having a thriving and dynamic artistic practice that is continually evolving. His work is clever without being corny, engaging without being ornate, and is just what the doctor ordered. It is timely, relevant and accessible, making him an artist to watch in 2012 and beyond.

www.derrickadams.com