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## ROY DOWELL

MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY

Imagine a gaggle of Expressionists, Cubists, Constructivists, Dadaists, Futurists, and early abstractionists coming of age after Pop amid the Pattern and Decoration movement and the rise of appropriation, and you might get a sense of Roy Dowell's twenty-five modestly scaled, untitled, numbered works. These burlap-and-acrylic works on canvas and collages on illustration board (all works 2003) have much to do with early modernism yet seem to find their place in what could be called a post-postmodern moment.



Roy Dowell, *Untitled (#874)*, 2003, collage and acrylic on illustration board, 16 x 12".

Perhaps it's too easy to describe work by one artist in terms of imagined combinations of others, but in fact Dowell's visual cocktails function openly as both pastiche and synthesis. With its centralized starburst image in red, orange, yellow, black, and white and its rich brushwork coupled with a rough graphic sensibility, #875 could be the product of a collaboration between Andy Warhol and Marsden Hartley if they'd spent some time with Mexican folk art and the early paintings of Judy Chicago. Compositions like #874 and #880, meanwhile, seem as shaped by Kurt Schwitters's elegant clash of forms as by Miriam Schapiro's capacity for harmonizing disparate material as by James Rosenquist's dynamic fragmenting and recombining of image and graphic. The controlled volatility of #888—with its explosion of strong strokes rendered in a pink-dominated palette and boxed into compartments—could have been made by a young Roy Lichtenstein, an older Jasper Johns, and Piet Mondrian playing a game of exquisite corpse. Seldom does one find such a varied host of allusions—ranging from Agnes Pelton to Arthur Dove to Richard Hamilton to Hannah Höch—but Dowell neither buries his references nor looks to ride their coattails. Rather, he punctuates and rephrases them, grants them autonomy and makes them his own.

From #889, which portrays something like two arched Slinkys joined end to end (or the setting sun, visible both above and below the horizon), to the assorted flower, pinwheel, spiral, star, cross, check-mark, and mandala forms that crop up again and again, most compositions revolve around dominant central elements. The less symmetrical among them tend to pinball you between various near-referential foci that could be black holes, supernovas, innies and outies, fans, fingerprints, or eyes. In the long run, the artist's quirky employment of image, style, and composition, while delivering a lot of pleasure and placing the work very much in the moment, seems an attempt to address something more enduring and contemplative. Dowell's cosmopolitan approach to such a variety of sources and influences makes evident a devotion to the nuances of abstraction and collage and strengthens the works' weave of human and cosmic associations. These are paintings of big bangs, of points of contact, of little touches.

—Christopher Miles