

HEW LOCKE

Barry Schwabsky, Hew Locke, Hales Gallery Review, Artforum, December 2010

Smithson, "sight" and "non-sight"? A tangle of innuendo was communicated through clarity and excess: overlong texts, doubles (the twin newsprint images of *Columbia Space Shuttle*, each revealing less than the other), even triplicates, as in the personified Columbia, here a goth babe on newsprint rotated ninety degrees, casting six seductive eyes upon viewers wherever they might roam.

The whole show was expertly choreographed, down to the green laser beam that rotated around the gallery, causing pangs of paranoia each time it shot past one's leg. History, gossip, and various open-ended digressions were conveyed through skillfully ventriloquized idioms, ranging from museum-speak to tabloid tell-all, from personal letters to advertising lingo. One left mesmerized, educated, and impressed.

—Gilda Williams

Hew Locke

HALES GALLERY

There have been more than a few processions in art in the past decade or so; actual performances aside, one recalls the cinematic one in William Kentridge's animated *Shadow Procession*, 1999, for instance, as well as the motionless sequence of rhesus monkeys in Chris Ofili's suite of paintings *The Upper Room*, 2002. Like those parades carved in marble on Roman pediments or represented in mosaics on the walls of Byzantine churches, such works depict triumphs of one sort or another—but contemporary triumphal processions tend to be heavily ironic. Kentridge's film, as critic George Baker has noted, shifts uneasily between a sense of celebration and an evocation of "the misery of forced immigration, the relentless entropy that accompanies the conditions of displacement and exile." Ofili's paintings, substituting primates for the twelve apostles, mock their own color-besotted ceremoniousness.

Hew Locke's *The Nameless*, 2010, is another depiction of a procession, this time in the form of a grand-scale installation made of black beads and cord glued and taped to the four interior walls of the Hales Gallery during this recent exhibition. Depicting a train of human, animal, and hybrid figures, it recalls *The Upper Room*, in part because monkeys feature in both works. As in Ofili's paintings, the monkeys in *The Nameless* seem to invite us to identify with them—to see them as almost human—and yet there is something eerie, mocking, perhaps

threatening about them. But Locke's procession actually has more in common with Kentridge's than with Ofili's, not only because it is articulated in severe black and white and has a raucous, almost promiscuous quality (even without the aid of a sound track), but because it, too, feels at once celebratory and funereal. It has a cast of characters drawn from the cultural memory of several continents, as figures of pre-Columbian aspect rub shoulders with others that recall African, European, and Middle Eastern sources. But these far-flung figures have picked up something extra during their travels: Many of them are toting rifles. Are these conquerors or resistants?

As disparate as the origins of his images may be, and as ambiguous their import, I don't think Locke is inviting us to go source hunting. There's a reason why he called the piece *The Nameless*: In this syncretic parade, each creature has half lost its iden-



tity; this riotous procession is perhaps that "bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk," which is what Hegel famously called "The True"—as long as one understands this "true" to also encompass the evanescent. SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI, reads the banner displayed by one of the revelers, a boy standing on the back of a tiger. Yesterday's freedom fighter may be today's tyrant and tomorrow's victim. Locke's parade is a pastiche of times and places, of half-forgotten myths and half-remembered images. What unifies all this is an unerring sense of visual rhythm and the uncommon mix of material straightforwardness and decorative elaboration with which the ensemble is developed. In his earlier freestanding and wall-based assemblages, such as his well-known ongoing series of variations on the heads of Queen Elizabeth II and the rest of the British royal family, Locke has shown himself a master of the imaginative use of dense accumulations of quotidian materials and of the crass, jazzy colors of the contemporary marketplace—of cheap plastics and synthetic fabrics. In *The Nameless*, limiting himself to just a few materials and the simple contrast of black "drawing" on the gallery's white walls, he reminds us that in art, if not in politics, power often resides in understatement.

—Barry Schwabsky

BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

Locky Morris

GOLDEN THREAD GALLERY

The Troubles not only shaped the political landscape in Northern Ireland in the last third of the twentieth century but also influenced local artistic practice there, leaving a mark on local life and imposing on art an ethical imperative to respond. This retrospective of Locky Morris's work, "This Then" (whose second chapter will take place at



the Regional Cultural Centre in Letterkenny, County Donegal, Ireland, next summer), showed the Derry-based artist to have been a prolific commentator on the period, exploring the spirit of the time in diverse works. It also revealed that in the past decade Morris has created art of a more introspective nature, focusing on ordinary matters with an intimist perspective, in keeping with the lived experience of a post-conflict society.

An Bhearna Bhaoil—Gap of Danger, 1988, set the tone for the first part of the exhibition, which focused on emblematic works from the 1980s that sympathetically address the popular resistance led by the Nationalists. The work features seven burned garbage can lids with a stripe of tar across them. The title is a phrase from the Irish national anthem, where it evokes the Battle of New Ross, which occurred during the Irish Rebellion of 1798, and as such symbolizes Republican opposition to British rule. The work translates this historical feeling in light of recurrent events such as riots—in which the burning of items