

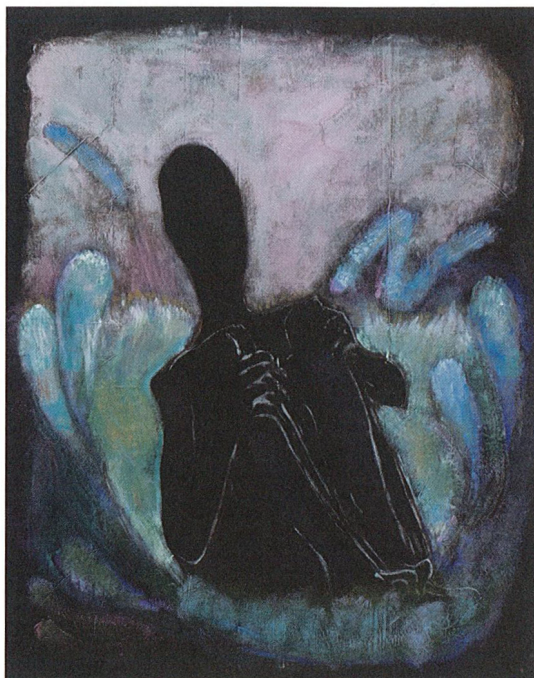
REGGIE BURROWS HODGES: HAWKEYE

Center for Maine Contemporary Art • Rockland, ME • cmcanow.org • Through September 11, 2022

The past four years or so have witnessed the brisk rise of the painter Reggie Burrows Hodges in the ranks of American artists. After several stellar solo shows at the Dowling Walsh Gallery in Rockland, Maine, Hodges took off, landing residencies, winning prizes, including the Jacob Lawrence Award in Art from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and accruing a list of prestigious public collections, among them, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney, and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

The dozen acrylic and pastel paintings on canvas from 2019–2021 at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art (CMCA) confirm the accuracy of the attention: This Lewiston, Maine-based artist represents a major addition to the roster of eminent figurative painters that includes the likes of Lois Dodd, Cinga Samson, Philemona Williamson, and Henry Taylor. Like them, Hodges brings new resonance to the domain.

Several paintings relate to Hodges's ongoing evocation of scenes from his childhood in Compton, California. In *Cannonball: NFJ*, a black figure is caught mid-dive, his hands holding his knees, the broken surface of the water splashing in stylized leaps up around him. This evocation of a hot summer day has an edge: frozen in time, the faceless balled-up boy will disappear below the surface.



Reggie Burrows Hodges, *Cannonball: NFJ*, 2020, acrylic and pastel on linen, 82½ x 65½" (209.6 x 166.4 cm). RH-20-060. Courtesy of the artist, Karma (New York), and Dowling Walsh Gallery (Rockland, ME). Photo: Dave Clough.

Hodges frequently works in series. One example from this show: two paintings of referees from 2020 and 2021. Both feature "zebras," those often-maligned authorities in black-and-white striped shirts who preside over the football field. By its title *Referees: It Stands* implies something more consequential than the man shown bent over signaling an infraction. The painter might be making a point about who makes the rules in his country—and whether we can trust them to make the right call.

In one of the earliest pieces in the show, *Father's Self-Portrait* from 2019, a Black man in a bathrobe stands half-turned in a non-descript room holding a newspaper in his hand, his blue socks adding an accent of color to an otherwise dark image. The stern demeanor of the figure brings to mind some of Max Beckmann's self-portraits.

At heart Hodges is a storyteller; his images provoke narratives. By its title, *The Story of Ruth*, 2021, might be biblical. A woman with umbrella and a boy holding onto his hat make their way along what appears to be a city street. We imagine the story here might be one of urban survival. In a statement on the Joan Mitchell Foundation website, the painter expresses his interest in "intersecting an internal experience

and symbolizing that in my work in order to present a view of my personal heritage and journey." Perhaps he is the boy in the painting.

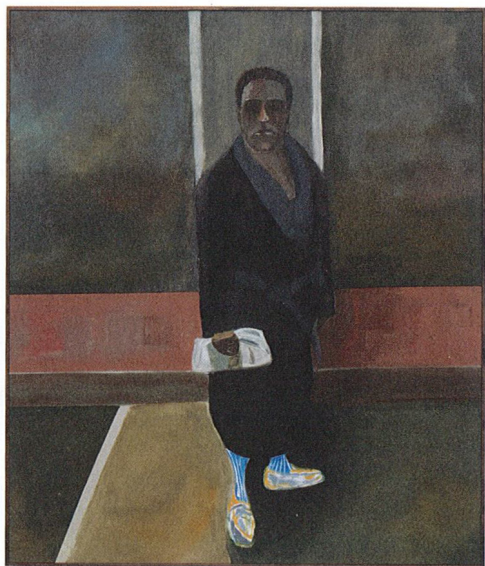
Not all is figurative in the show. One might describe three paintings as large abstractions featuring oval black shapes and broad white lines, but the "hawk-eye" in one of the titles reveals the source: They're close-ups of tennis shots provided by a line-calling camera. In *Fault*, the shape shadow of the elongated ball falls outside the service area while in *Wide* it just misses. Both 2021 paintings can be read as handsome abstracts and symbols of surveillance.

A note on technique: Hodges begins each painting by placing one or more layers of an opaque, matte black on the linen or canvas. Atop that he uses oil pastel and acrylic to create the imagery. Sometimes the surface can have a softened look, yet the power of the paint is never lost.

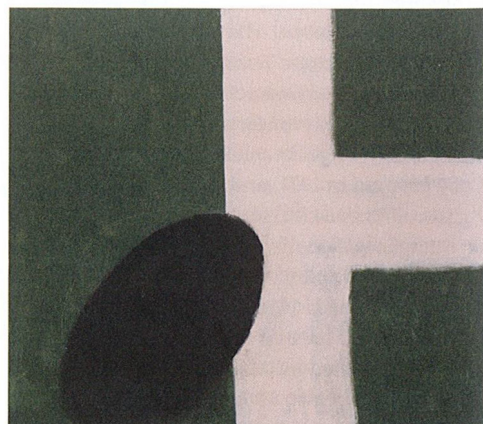
Take *Melba*, 2021: Against an expressive patchy color field, a female figure in a colorful bathrobe stands over what appears to be a toaster. The black of the featureless face contrasts with the decorative robe while the indefinite setting adds to the enigma.

Reggie Burrows Hodges: *Hawkeye* came about when the painter won the \$25,000 Ellis-Beauregard Foundation Fellowship in the Visual Arts in 2019. The prize included a solo exhibition at the CMCA. Among other things, the judges noted the "cinematic sensibility" of his paintings and his "sophisticated approach to figuration, composition, and color." Good eye, great appraisal.

—Carl Little



Reggie Burrows Hodges, *Father's Self-Portrait*, 2019, acrylic and pastel on canvas, 80 x 68" (203.2 x 172.7 cm); 81 x 69" framed (205.7 x 175.3 cm framed). RH-19-028. Courtesy of the artist, Karma (New York), and Dowling Walsh Gallery (Rockland, ME). Photo: Dave Clough.



Reggie Burrows Hodges, *Fault*, 2021, acrylic and pastel on linen, 63⅞ x 71⅞" (160.4 x 180.7 cm); 63⅝ x 71⅝" framed (161.6 x 181.9 cm framed). RH-21-095. Courtesy of the artist, Karma (New York), and Dowling Walsh Gallery (Rockland, ME). Photo: Dave Clough.