

MODERN PAINTERS

'Jim Hodges'
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Bridget Moriarty

Spokane, Washington-born, New York-based Jim Hodges, like most artists, has his trademarks. He typically employs ordinary materials to create elaborate constructions, all of which invite the viewer to reflect and see beyond the obvious. More often than not, his pieces have an elegance to them that belies their raw ingredients. Take *A Diary of Flowers*, a room-sized installation of 565 wrinkled napkins decorated with the artist's doodles and musings and gracefully pinned to the wall. The work premiered in 1994 to raves in Hodges's first solo exhibition, at CRG Gallery in New York.

In his most recent museum show, "You Will See These Things," at the Aspen Art Museum, Hodges debuted three new pieces. *Generator* (2008-09), a sprawling installation of plywood painted black and geometrically patterned with hinges and smaller pieces of plywood bolted in place, was the centerpiece. It consumed the gallery space: jutting out from the walls, covering portions of the floor, and requiring visitors to step over it to maneuver themselves around the work. In the middle of *generator* was *Golden Straw* (2009), a skinny, 30-foot-long, gold-leafed copper pipe, which began at the artist's head level and extended eight feet upwards through the museum's private offices to the outside, where it drew fresh air into the gallery. The final work, *Give Three Times* (2009), three panels of fabric, each emblazoned in brightly hued lettering with the phrase *give more than you take*, hung on the museum's side facade. It's what Hodges came up with when asked by the Aspen Skiing Company — in partnership with the Aspen Art Museum — to create the design for its 2008-09 season lift tickets.

The trio of works, aided by the thought-provoking titles that frame them, inspired contemplation. But they lacked some of the visual inventiveness that has earned Hodges his artistic stripes. Because of the works' clashing scales, the poetry and prettiness of *Golden Straw* didn't offer enough of a counterpoint to *generator*'s deliberate clunkiness. And the eloquence of *Give Three Times* was in the wording, not the rainbow color scheme or the chunky hand-made font. It doesn't feel entirely fair, however, to evaluate the latter project, with its utilitarian requirements, alongside pieces that could be as impractical as the artist wished. Then again, it was being exhibited with them.

With this latest showing, Hodges demonstrated that he is still making great, thoughtful stuff, in his own tradition, but absent was the aesthetic punch of the delicately assembled and detailed work that has come to define his oeuvre.