

ZIEHERSMITH

# HYPERALLERGIC

## How to Embed a Shout: A New Generation of Black Artists Contends with Abstraction

A new wave of black abstract artists are exploring ways to push the language of abstraction and still retaining their cultural specificity. And they're not doing it alone.

Seph Rodney – August 23, 2017

*Excerpt:*



Paul Anthony Smith, "Afternoon Brew" (2016) 95 x 48 inches  
(photo courtesy ZieherSmith Gallery, New York)

[...] Several black artists have risen to prominence by resolutely working with the black figure, shifting it from the margins of culture. Kerry James Marshall, Fred Wilson, Kara Walker, Kehinde Wiley, Mickalene Thomas, Chris Ofili, and Jordan Casteel have all championed the black body, reinserting it into the art histories from which it had been excised. [Tomashi] Jackson tells me that this work "let's us be physically alive in a world that is constantly trying to disappear us." For this gift, she says she is glad to be among a "generational cohort that I love and respect." At the same time she acknowledges, "What I see in the market is a desire for black figuration, blunt and blatant figuration." This mode of presentation does make the black body visible and esteemed. However, [Tariku] Shiferaw, Jackson, and [Adam] Pendleton have taken a divergent, strategic approach in which, as Jackson tells me, the body is implicit, but these artists carefully calibrate how and under what conditions it is seen. It is not for ready consumption. This body will not provide sustenance for appetites desiring the exotic, the sumptuous ethnic flesh that in the larger culture is as much longed for as it is held in contempt.

Other artists have work that aligns with this wave, including [Paul Anthony Smith](#), a 29-year-old artist born in Jamaica but raised in Miami, whose photo-based works, shown at [ZieherSmith gallery](#) utilized images of black people in a parade underneath a scrim of pointillist geometric patterns, and they derive their titles from classic jazz albums [...]