

DAVID
KORDANSKY
GALLERY

Bruts

Curated by Rashid Johnson

July 2 – August 24, 2024

Exhibition Binder

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Bruts, a group exhibition curated by artist Rashid Johnson. The exhibition's opening day is Tuesday, July 2 from 10 AM to 4 PM, and the show will be on view through August 24, 2024.

Bruts features paintings and sculptures by fifteen artists whose work comes into being through feats of physical, psychological, spiritual, and emotional strength. Many of the works on view were produced in ways that foreground the roughness of an artist's interactions with their materials, resulting in aggressively textured surfaces and an absence of smoothness. Johnson has composed the exhibition like a poem, seeking to generate unexpected correspondences that cannot be reduced to mere visual or biographical affinity. In keeping with this ethos, the show is populated by a variety of takes on abstraction, including works that otherwise present as figurative. It also reflects Johnson's evolving view of his own ideas and project, which have continually found him negotiating a terrain where non-objective mark making and composition overlap with lyrical approaches to representation understood in the broadest possible terms.

The example of French artist Jean Dubuffet provides a centralizing force both in Johnson's thinking and in the exhibition itself, which features a focused acrylic work by Dubuffet from 1981. Dubuffet coined the term art brut to describe practices in which artists honed and defined their own notions of what it means to be skillful. As he became interested in art that resisted or exceeded academic expectations about form, he used the aesthetic freedoms of modernism to make paintings and sculptures that were both highly personal—the artist would often root his compositions in his experiences of people in his intimate circle—and abstract enough to override viewers' attempts to locate them in any particular subject.

The other major figure whose work provides a foundational layer for the conception and realization of Bruts is the American artist Bill Traylor, who also depicted people and scenes in his immediate environment. As is immediately discernible in the seven works by Traylor on view, his incisive—and intuitive—sense of design and his felt understanding of his

materials gave him the tools to transform seemingly straightforward visual elements into images with archetypal power. Their emotional impact belies the economy of means with which they were made and reveals what becomes possible when artists fully synthesize the handling of their materials and the conception of their work. In works like these, neither process nor design dominates. Rather, there is an amalgam of the two that roots the picture, however identifiable or abstract it might be, in the visceral presence of the artist's and the viewer's experience alike.

A sculpture by Isa Genzken, for instance, incorporates a mannequin as the support for a brooding assemblage of objects—including clothing, ribbon, and a garishly painted mask—that brings together a cacophony of moods and visual provocations. The object points in any number of contextual directions, but the freedom of expression with which it has been rendered continually disrupts attempts to locate it as a response to a particular social, political, or personal condition. Throughout Bruts, representation becomes a means of support for decidedly non-representational gestures, even in the case of the paintings by Jeff Sonhouse, in which the precision of the artist's drawing and paint application are offset by highly physical interventions like the use of wooden matches to construct his subjects' hair.

If expressivity is one of the abiding principles that unifies the works in this exhibition, another is the spirit of free and poetic juxtaposition that also defines the approach Johnson has brought to selecting them. The conversations that emerge between a work by an artist traditionally associated with art brut, like Aloïse Corbaz, a sculpture by ceramic pioneer Peter Voulkos, and a painting by abstract expressionist Herbert Gentry provide not only a series of histories and alternative histories about the evolution of Western Hemispheric art in the twentieth century, but a feeling for a prevailing spirit that presented—and presents itself—in varied works by varied artists from varied backgrounds and orientations. One result of this approach is the lessening of hierarchical thinking and looking that it engenders. Another is the sense that thinking about and looking at artworks are themselves creative

propositions, and that the observations that follow from them might be the more meaningful engines for historical classification—and revisionism—than top-down decisions based on pre-established concepts, stylistic similarities, or chronological overlap.

Bruts demonstrates how immediacy in art functions as its own kind of anti-academy, allowing individual artists and viewers to hone their responsiveness to the physical world around them. The unabashed pursuit of individual perspective that characterizes many of these works becomes a path not toward obscurantism, but toward a democratic, heterogeneous, and productively challenging space where universal connection is achieved through disagreement and dissonance as well as harmony and assent. In this respect, the exhibition's mood is one of thorny optimism, and the propositions it makes are accordingly oriented toward spheres of life—including social and even political ones—whose intersection with the artistic domain demonstrates the central role that raw acts of creation play in all human endeavor.

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Aloïse Corbaz

Untitled (Figure with Blue Eyes), c. 1950
oil pastel and pencil on paper, double-sided
26 x 27 3/4 inches
(66 x 70.5 cm)
framed:
34 1/4 x 36 1/8 x 1 inches
(87 x 91.8 x 2.5 cm)



Thomas Houseago

Demon, 2024
redwood, rebar, and plaster
89 x 18 x 23 inches
(226.1 x 45.7 x 58.4 cm)



William Hawkins

Nine Faces of Modern Man, 1984
enamel on Masonite
39 x 31 3/4 inches
(99.1 x 80.6 cm)
framed:
41 1/8 x 34 1/4 x 2 inches
(104.5 x 87 x 5.1 cm)



Bill Traylor

Untitled (woman with purple shirt), 1939
colored pencil and graphite on paper
15 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches
(39.3 x 24.1 cm)
framed:
22 1/2 x 16 3/4 x 1 1/2 inches
(57.1 x 42.5 x 3.8 cm)

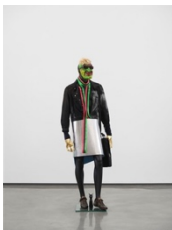
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Herbert Gentry
On The Way, 1984
oil on linen
48 x 36 1/8 x 1 1/2 inches
(121.9 x 91.8 x 3.8 cm)
framed:
49 5/8 x 37 3/4 x 2 1/8 inches
(126 x 95.9 x 5.4 cm)



Leon Golub
Boxer I, 1960
lacquer on canvas
96 1/4 x 80 3/4 inches
(244.5 x 205.1 cm)
framed:
98 3/8 x 83 x 3 inches
(249.8 x 210.8 x 7.6 cm)



Isa Genzken
Untitled (Schauspieler), 2012
mannequin and mixed media
75 x 27 x 15 inches
(190.5 x 68.6 x 38.1 cm)



Mark Grotjahn
Untitled (Skull), 2023
oil on cardboard
18 x 14 x 1/2 inches
(45.7 x 35.6 x 1.3 cm)
framed:
30 1/2 x 24 1/2 x 2 1/8 inches
(77.5 x 62.2 x 5.4 cm)

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William Hawkins

Three Hanging Men, 1985

enamel on Masonite

32 x 48 inches

(81.3 x 121.9 cm)

framed:

34 1/2 x 50 1/2 x 2 1/2 inches

(87.6 x 128.3 x 6.3 cm)



Bill Traylor

Untitled (Brown horse), c. 1939 - 1942

poster paint and pencil on cardboard

12 3/8 x 15 inches

(31.4 x 38.1 cm)

framed:

18 x 21 1/4 x 1 1/8 inches

(45.7 x 54 x 2.9 cm)



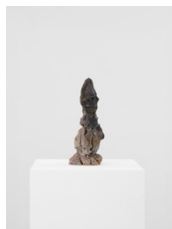
Rashid Johnson

Untitled Anxious Men, 2016

ceramic tile, black soap, and wax

47 x 34 1/2 x 3 inches

(119.4 x 87.6 x 7.6 cm)



Peter Voulkos

Untitled, 1982

wood-fired stoneware

12 1/2 x 5 x 5 inches

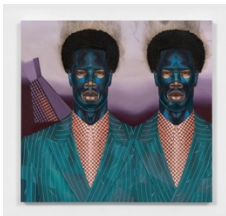
(31.8 x 12.7 x 12.7 cm)

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Jean Dubuffet

Site avec 3 personnages, 1981
acrylic on canvas-backed paper
26 3/4 x 20 inches
(67.9 x 50.8 cm)
framed:
30 x 23 1/4 x 1 3/4 inches
(76.2 x 59.1 x 4.4 cm)



Jeff Sonhouse

Codependent Defendant, 2024
oil paint and wooden matches on canvas
36 7/8 x 39 3/8 x 2 inches
(93.7 x 100 x 5.1 cm)



Huma Bhabha

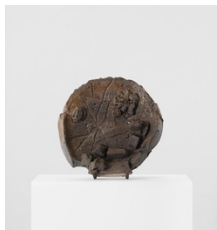
Stars, 2024
cork, wood, cardboard, acrylic, and oil stick
88 3/8 x 40 x 6 inches
(224.5 x 101.6 x 15.2 cm)



Loïs Mailou Jones

Cock Fight, 1960
oil and newsprint collage on Masonite, in hand-carved Haitian
wood frame
19 3/4 x 16 inches
(50.2 x 40.6 cm)
framed:
29 1/4 x 25 1/8 x 1 3/4 inches
(74.3 x 63.8 x 4.4 cm)

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Peter Voulkos

Untitled Plate, 1997
wood-fired stoneware
19 3/4 x 20 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches
(50.2 x 52.1 x 29.8 cm)



Bill Traylor

Untitled (Man with Blue Pants and Cane), c. 1939 - 1941
poster paint and pencil on found paper
11 x 8 inches
(27.9 x 20.3 cm)
framed:
18 7/8 x 16 3/8 x 1 1/2 inches
(47.9 x 41.6 x 3.8 cm)



William Hawkins

LOUS JIMINZ NEW MEXICO BULL, 1985
enamel on Masonite
39 1/4 x 48 inches
(99.7 x 121.9 cm)
framed:
41 1/2 x 50 1/4 x 2 inches
(105.4 x 127.6 x 5.1 cm)



Mark Grotjahn

Untitled (Skull), 2023
oil on cardboard
15 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches
(39.4 x 29.2 cm)
framed:
28 1/2 x 22 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches
(72.4 x 57.1 x 3.8 cm)

DAVID
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Dana Schutz
The Gardener, 2021
bronze
34 x 37 1/2 x 32 1/4 inches
(86.4 x 95.3 x 81.9 cm)
Edition of 3, with 1 AP



Jeff Sonhouse
Proper Fit, 2024
acrylic, pumice gel, cowrie shells, and faux pearls on canvas
41 1/2 x 18 3/4 x 2 1/2 inches
(105.4 x 47.6 x 6.3 cm)



Bill Traylor
Untitled (Figures/Construction), c. 1939 - 1942
colored pencil and graphite on cardboard
11 3/4 x 7 inches
(29.8 x 17.8 cm)
framed:
19 x 14 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches
(48.3 x 36.2 x 3.8 cm)



Herbert Gentry
All Areas, 1978
acrylic on canvas
29 3/4 x 25 1/8 x 1 inches
(75.5 x 63.8 x 2.5 cm)
framed:
31 3/4 x 26 3/4 x 2 inches
(80.6 x 67.9 x 5.1 cm)

Bruts

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Artist Biographies**

HUMA BHABHA

For over 25 years, Huma Bhabha (b. 1962, Karachi, Pakistan) has been making objects, drawings, and other works that depict the strangeness and vulnerability of the contemporary figure. Her hybridized forms, which borrow from ancient and modern cultural sources alike, exude pathos and humor, going straight to the heart of the most pressing issues of our time. Posing questions about the alien qualities of unfamiliar beings, and the criteria by which lifeforms are considered monsters, Bhabha locates the point where science fiction, horror, modernist form, and archaic expression intersect. The timelessness of her objects is enhanced by her technical mastery and her creative approach to her materials, by which she draws attention to the similarities and differences between natural and manmade substances. In monumental outdoor projects for public spaces, meanwhile, she uses bronze to stage large-scale meditations on nature, war, and civilization's ancient past and distant future.

ALOÏSE CORBAZ

Visionary Swiss artist Aloïse Corbaz (1886–1964) depicted the sensual lives of women in singular, phantasmagoric drawings. Following a middle-class upbringing, Corbaz dreamed of becoming an opera singer but found employment as a dressmaker and, briefly, as a governess in the court of German Kaiser Wilhelm II, with whom she became infatuated. In 1918 the artist suffered a mental collapse for which she was hospitalized, as she would remain for the rest of her life. Over the course of the next forty years, she produced a formidable quantity of drawings in pencil, crayon, and using stains from flower petals on found paper, which she often stitched together to make larger sheets or composed on both sides of, as in the artwork on view. In 1947 the artist was visited by Jean Dubuffet, who saw

her artworks as essential examples of art brut, and described them as fully-realized expressions of selfhood. In Corbaz's world, uniformed heroes and voluptuous heroines embrace in romantic dramas culled from both the artist's life and historical events. Circles, spirals, and rounded contours appear as patterns, abstractions, and in the signature heart-shaped faces and large, solid-blue eyes of her characters.

JEAN DUBUFFET

Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985) began painting at the age of seventeen and studied briefly at the Académie Julian, Paris.

After seven years, he abandoned painting and became a wine merchant. During the thirties, he painted again for a short time, but it was not until 1942 that he began the work which has distinguished him as an outstanding innovator in postwar European painting. Dubuffet looked to the margins of the everyday—the art of prisoners, psychics, the uneducated, and the institutionalized—to liberate his own creativity, coining the term “Art Brut” as a reflection of the creative possibilities outside the conventions of the day. His paintings from the early forties in brightly colored oils were soon followed by works in which he employed such unorthodox materials as cement, plaster, tar, and asphalt-scraped, carved and cut and drawn upon with a rudimentary, spontaneous line.

HERBERT GENTRY

The vibrant paintings of American modernist Herbert Gentry (1919–2003) are the products of nearly six decades of a transcontinental life influenced by the artist's contact with multiple movements at the vanguard of postwar art. Having grown up in the hotbed of the Harlem Renaissance, Gentry was one of the first African American artists to use his G.I. Bill to study painting in Paris. Noting degrees of cultural support for Black artists unheard of in the United States, Gentry saw his education as occurring not only in the studio, but in the city at large: beyond the academy he studied with Cubist elder Georges Braque, for example, and soon opened his own gallery and jazz club in Montparnasse. During subsequent decades, Gentry traveled regularly between Paris, New York, and Scandinavia. His process, as he

described it, was spontaneous and subconscious, relying on intuition and receptivity in the spirit of the Surrealists and the CoBrA artists he soon befriended. While the influence of Abstract Expressionism is strong in Gentry's early work, he was uninterested in the movement's emphasis on individualism, gravitating, instead, toward understandings of the artist as part of a larger, social collective. The visions he put forth on canvas, he explained, were informed by "all the types that I've met in my life."

ISA GENZKEN

Isa Genzken has long been considered one of Germany's most important and influential contemporary artists. Born in Bad Oldesloe, Germany, Genzken studied at the renowned Kunstakademie Düsseldorf whose faculty at the time included Joseph Beuys, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Gerhard Richter. Since the 1970s, Genzken's diverse practice has encompassed sculpture, photography, found-object installation, film, drawing and painting. Her work borrows from the aesthetics of Minimalism, punk culture and assemblage art to confront the conditions of human experience in contemporary society and the uneasy social climate of capitalism. Genzken is best known for her sculptures, gaining attention for her minimalist oriented Hyperbolos and Ellipsoids in the late 70s, and architecturally-inflected works such as her recent epoxy resin windows and skyscraper Columns from the 90s. Genzken's practice is incredibly wide-ranging, but her work remains dedicated to challenging the viewer's self-awareness by means of physically altering their perceptions, bringing bodies together in spaces and integrating elements of a mixed media into sculpture.

LEON GOLUB

Beginning in the late 1940s, American artist Leon Golub's (1922–2004) paintings confront the concrete ways in which power manifests, often to violent ends. After serving in World War II, Golub became a leading member of the Chicago figurative group dubbed the "Monster Roster," known for their visceral, occasionally horrific subject matter and their belief that art should be concrete and observational in order to leave a lasting, indelible impression on the viewer. Building on these early concerns, Golub continued to critique

abuses of power in scenes of palpable, person-to-person violence. Throughout his career, his art practice often coincided with his own political activism, especially during the Vietnam War, during which he created his most observational artworks, including long, illustrative tableaus which directly depict the horrors of war.

MARK GROTJAHN

Mark Grotjahn (b. 1968, Pasadena, CA) has developed a practice that merges abstraction and figuration, and geometry and gesture. With an oeuvre encompassing paintings, sculptures, and works on paper, he strikes a balance between exacting rigor and intuition and improvisation. The artist's contextual influences range widely from the history of geometric modernism in the works of artists such as Mondrian and Malevich, to experiments in musical and filmic composition and typographic design.

WILLIAM HAWKINS

The compelling, idiosyncratic paintings of self-taught artist William Hawkins (1895–1990) infuse vernacular imagery with imagination and spirit. Born on a rural farm in Union City, Kentucky, Hawkins learned to draw at a young age by copying illustrations from auction posters and other ephemera. At the age of twenty-one he moved to Columbus, Ohio, whose buildings and neighborhoods would become one of his most perennial subjects. Hawkins painted primarily on wood and masonite salvaged from his neighborhood and the odd jobs he worked, and culled photographic source material from books and magazines, which he kept archived in a suitcase. Animals, memories of farm life, and scenes both imaginary and social appear across his concise panels in an observational style defined by loose figuration, layered perspectives, and an evocative handling of color in limited palettes.

THOMAS HOUSEAGO

Thomas Houseago (b. 1972, Leeds, England) brings a vanguard approach to sculpture's original subject, the human body. Utilizing mediums associated with classical and modernist sculpture—such as carved wood, clay, plaster, and bronze—as well as less traditional materials like rebar and hemp, Houseago builds monumental figures rife with the traces of

their making. Body parts rendered from flat portions of wood adjoin others sculpted in the round to create an interplay between two- and three-dimensional elements. His bulky-shouldered figures replace the grace of their serpentine contrapposto stance with awkward contortions of piecemeal appendages. Crouched and stilted on thick limbs, these reductive interpretations convey a striking sense of weight and anatomical structure. By tapping into the nuanced legibility of the human form, Houseago's figures oscillate between states of power and of vulnerability.

RASHID JOHNSON

Rashid Johnson (b. 1977, Chicago) is recognized as one of the major voices of his generation, an artist who composes searing meditations on race and class while establishing an organic formal vocabulary that fuses a variety of sculptural and painterly traditions. Though he employs materials drawn from specific autobiographical contexts—including those related to African American intellectual and imaginative life—and though his practice had its beginnings in photography and conceptual art, Johnson is equally interested in testing the ability of abstract visual languages to communicate across cultural boundaries. The visceral experience of art, on formal terms, is therefore considered inseparable from the social matrix that gives rise to it. Johnson's work is predicated upon moving freely between these two modes. The breadth and generosity of his vision has resulted in a wide range of two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects, installations, videos, and performances.

LOÏS MAILOU JONES

Over the course of her ever-evolving career as both an artist and arts educator, Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–1998) created paintings and works on paper informed by her longstanding engagement with African cultures and their diaspora. After a formal education in fine art that overlapped with mentorship by Harlem Renaissance founders, Jones initially worked as a textile designer in New York before shifting her focus to painting, where she gained recognition in Paris beginning in 1937. While Jones's early works are masterful examples of en plein air landscapes and impressionistic portraits, it was her eventual experiments

combining representational depictions, abstract principles, and the influence of African masks, fetish objects, and textiles that would come to define the range of her visual output. Beginning with her first trip in 1954 as a visiting professor, Jones developed a long-standing relationship with Haitian art and culture that would last decades.

DANA SCHUTZ

Dana Schutz (b. 1976, Livonia, Michigan) is a New York-based painter and sculptor who constructs complex visual narratives that engage the capacity of art to represent subjective experience. Often depicting figures in seemingly impossible, enigmatic, or invented situations, her works reveal the deeper complications, tensions, and ambiguities of contemporary life.

JEFF SONHOUSE

Jeff Sonhouse's (b. 1968, New York) portraiture addresses topics of personal and public identity. The artist once stated, "I paint the black male figure because it's mine. That's who I am." Throughout his paintings, Sonhouse explores how notions of African American masculinity are constructed, performed, and interpreted within Western culture. He embellishes these portraits with vernacular material, like beads, masks, fibers, gems, and glitter. His figures often sport jeweled suits and accessories; but invariably, their lineaments are partly concealed behind masks. Mask, and other elements of costuming, are emphasized by their painted and collaged textures which stand out against Sonhouse's flat backgrounds.

BILL TRAYLOR

At once poignant, acerbic, and aesthetically arresting, the artworks of Bill Traylor (1853–1949) serve as indelible insights into the experiences and perspectives of a nearly hundred-year life which spanned a deeply fraught era of American history. Traylor was born into slavery on an Alabama plantation where, following emancipation when he was twelve years old, he continued to work as a laborer and tenant farmer for decades. After three marriages and more than fifteen children, most of whom moved north during the Great Migration,

Traylor began making paintings and drawings in the last ten years of his life, by then living in urban Montgomery and relying on the hospitality of local Black business owners to house and feed him. Working on salvaged cardboard with graphite, poster paint, and other materials easily at hand, Traylor depicted folkloric figures, farm animals, and scenes of labor, leisure, and brutality in a visual style recognizable for its graphic outlines, flattened volumes, and extreme selectivity of detail.

PETER VOULKOS

Foundational to the midcentury reprisal of ceramics, West Coast artist Peter Voulkos (1924–2002) redrew the boundaries of a form previously understood as merely utilitarian or decorative. Following a formal arts education, Voulkos worked as a successful potter who briefly taught at the Black Mountain College in 1953. There, he met John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, and others, and was exposed to abstract expressionism, which radically transformed his conception of the possibilities of clay. In response to the restraints of traditional plates and vessels, the artist created risky, non-functional forms, occasionally working monumentally or according to a singular process of assemblage and marking, puncturing, or glazing his surfaces with lines and shapes that celebrated spontaneity, asymmetry, and the accident. Voulkos’s process was governed by tactile interaction: “I am not a conceptual artist. I can’t just sit there and think of an idea. Most of it comes out of my hands,” an intuitive approach exemplified by the works on view. Recalling the contours and surfaces of rock formations, the vertical sculpture from 1982 attests to the artist’s expressive material engagement as well as the human impulse to stack—arguably one of the most embedded creative urges—and the foundations of a form which recurs across cultures.