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Hey you! See this show!

"Hey You! ~ Who Me?" is the last exhibit at 32 Edgewood Robert Storr has organized as Dean of the School of Art. Storr brought together the work of a number of School of Art alumni during the early stages of their careers, just as they were beginning to discover their unique artistic identities. Some of them have not been exhibited before. The work is incredibly diverse, and yet Storr's painstaking curation makes it all come together. The continuity of the exhibit, the way the works converse, create an exhibition of richly varied artwork.

The title of the exhibit posits an exclamation that an artist might imagine at the moment of discovering her or his artistic identity. The accompanying exhibit pamphlet likens this to the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's "Mirror Stage," the moment of both self-discovery and self-distancing caused by a child's first conscious experience looking in a mirror. The exuberant self-awareness of such an experience is ever-present at the exhibit.

The first work in the exhibit is called "Linear Language" by Denzil Hurley ART '79, and the idea of a work establishing its own language is reasserted in every work. Every artist has defined an artistic identity within their featured work, and that identity is also a language, a set of artistic tools that can be pursued to make a whole expressive world in itself. Each work is a potentiality; behind every one is a series of imagined works in the artist's unique language.

What I found even more interesting, however, was the astonishing level of dialogue among the works, evidence of Storr's meticulous work. It's clear "Hey You! ~ Who Me?" is directed at the artist, but who is saying it? I suppose Lacan would say that it is the artist herself or himself, but the exhibit suggests something larger: art itself. Despite their drastic differences, Hurley's work and the piece next to it, "Untitled #21" by Elaine Reichek ART '64, are both based on the line. Art challenges each artist to use its tools, such as the line, to create her or his own vision. "Hey You! ~ Who Me?" emphasizes how their use of the same universal language of art forms an interactive community.

Storr's curation calls attention to how the artworks revise, contrast, augment and relate to the other works. This process is incredibly illuminating, as each work lets you see new meaning in the other works. At first, the photograph by Ram Rahman ART '79, "Safdar Hashmi's Funeral Procession, New Delhi," comes as a surprise among all the paintings and drawings around it, but its connections with Howardena Pindell's ART '67 "Untitled" and William Conlon's "Untitled" appear. Pindell's work is grid paper covered by small painted circles, their repetition creating new diagonal lines that do not follow a grid while maintaining a certain visual rhythm. Conlon's work celebrates shapes in a Kandinsky-like manner. These two come together in Rahman's aerial photograph, the numerous heads creating lines and rhythm like Pindell's circles, surrounding a rectangular tomb, celebrated like the Conlon's shapes.

Two works of the exhibit introduce the theme of racial conflict in earnest, and here the differences are illuminating. The first, by Titus Kaphar ART '06, is ironically titled "Visual Quotations": the painting shows a young black boy alone surrounded by a blank white canvas because perhaps there are no visual quotations available for a black artist in a white artistic tradition. It is a jarring work to come near the end of the exhibit, suggesting the limitations of the artistic community that has been formed. The next work is called "The Bridge," by Njideka Akunyili Crosby ART '11, and it shows a black child kissing a white man on a bed, who could be sleeping or dead. Surrounding the pieces are vibrant dark designs and images of activist rallies embedded. Does this work agree or disagree with the previous work? Is the title ironic? These are the questions brought up by such skillful curation. After the entrance of racial protest as a theme, I went back to a sculpture of a white box by Michael Craig-Martin ART '66 called "Box that's full of itself." It's obviously a comical work, but did its white color signify a racial theme? Maybe not, but it was certainly an interesting thought to pursue.

The exhibition is very small, only 42 works in total, and features almost as many artists. And yet, it is unquestionably cohesive. It touches on themes such as formal composition, constraint, process, gender, race, heritage, color, inspiration and others I must have missed. This is what happens when the skill of someone like Storr and the wonderful School of Art community work together.