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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in July Denzil Hurley

There's found abstraction: Weathered posters hung in galleries by the Italian artist Mimmo Rotella; animal bones that were at the root of Henry Moore's sculptures.

And there's made abstraction: Almost all other abstract art, by the likes of Agnes Martin or Donald Judd.

But the works by the painter Denzil Hurley now on view at Canada seem to inhabit a new category we might call "made-found abstraction."

Hurley's objects are clearly made, from scratch.

"Orange Glyph," for instance, presents a bright orange canvas that would live happily among the postwar monochromes of Yves Klein.

The piece titled "J2#1" involves an all-black oblong, about head-high, whose subtle mottling make it a dark counterpart to the all-white paintings of Robert Ryman.

But Hurley pushes beyond the customary "made-ness" of his abstractions by adding elements that produce a found, functional vibe. The canvas in "Orange Glyph" comes perched on top of a wooden stick that makes the whole ensemble look vaguely useful, like a protest sign soon to be lettered. "J2#1" is anchored in a crude block of lumber, as though waiting to have a marksman's target stuck to it.

Hurley was a longtime art professor who



Denzil Hurley's "Orange Glyph" (2019) at Canada. Credit... via Denzil Hurley and Canada, New York

died, age 72, in 2021; he knew his abstract antecedents by heart. He was also Black. I wonder if the “foundness” in his works captures a sense, widespread among Black artists, that mainstream culture never made those antecedents as fully available to him, or to any Black artist, as they might have been to white artists, who could access European art’s grand tradition without any question that they had a right to it. By making found abstractions, Hurley links his works to functional traditions that bypass fine art altogether.