

Harmony Hammond

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AUTHOR: PATRICK GREANEY

08.02.14-09.28.14 *RedLine*

Harmony Hammond's exhibition "Becoming/UnBecoming Monochrome" offers a sampling of the artist's works, including fourteen large paintings from 2001–2014, fifteen smaller paintings from the mid 1970s, and *Collection of Fragments*, 1974–76, a display of baskets, shoes, and pottery. In some of the early paintings, such as the lozenge-shaped *Ninja*, 1976, Hammond created density, depth, and luminosity with oil paint and Dorland's wax, working the viscous mass, perhaps with the butt end of the brush, into a honeycomb or spongelike pattern. Almost forty years later, the surface still seems wet and alive, as if the artist could dig in again to reshape it. For the near-monochrome *Muffle*, 2009, Hammond stretched mat covers from the dojo where she practiced and taught the Japanese martial art aikido for decades. Grommet-studded straps hold down the covers under thick layers of tactile black oil paint. The composition here, like the work's title, suggests violence and restraint.

In her book *Lesbian Art in America*, Hammond writes that she has "always tried to work on the edge between abstract form and political content." Being an artist and practicing aikido are inherently feminist pursuits for Hammond. Politics are manifest in the works' controlled vehemence, the focused gestures of layering and wrapping that join art and craft, painting and self-defense. In a manifesto printed in this exhibition's catalogue, she insists that her paintings "occupy some sort of fugitive or queer space," even in their "refusal to 'look' queer." Hammond doesn't say what should be seen. She leaves us looking as she moves on, giving new forms to the embodied political tensions that have always motivated her work.