



David Ford, *Relax*, installation view, Dolphin Gallery, Kansas City, November, 2009.

The Sound of *Your Fear* being Negotiated, Heard through a Keyhole



David Ford, *Negro Jam Session*, 2009, Acrylic on paper, 22 x 30".

Dolphin Gallery
1600 Liberty Street
(816) 842-4415
Kansas City
David Ford *RELAX*
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By BLAIR SCHULMAN

David Ford unleashes a spiritual stampede of all the elephants in the room. Fully self-taught, his paintings, mostly acrylic on canvas or mixed media, are an allusion to, and a smack at, secular differences. Cinderblock walls create borders and enclosures throughout the space, adding further gravity to this exhibition. All can be conceived as an amalgamation of first world cultures merging head-on with third world customs.

Hanging in the first of two galleries is *Your Fear* (2009). Just those two words in silvery glitter seem innocent enough, but as you drink in the rest of the show, there appears the more portentous *Negotiation* (2009). The soldier blue paper is soothing and



David Ford, *Perception*, 2009, dimensions variable.

the colonial figures shaking hands appear an indication of some mutual agreement between the two that things are bound to change. However, in *Cowboys Die (The Swagger of Entitlement)* (2009), acrylic on vintage paper, those words alone speak to an intrusion of white man on Native American soil, making that previous handshake somewhat sinister. Further along illuminating a vast cultural shift, the diptych, *Shine Shine* (2009) inspired by South African oilcloth, and the name itself "is an African slang term for (President) Obama and the way they feel about him," a reaction to changes coming far and wide.

Perception (2009) mixed media, an antique Islamic rug separated by a cutout shape, also an Islamic reference. Peering through it so close to the floor gains a new perspective on the next, the largest, gallery. It's a clever look linking worlds and cultures that at one time seemed to have no bearing on American lives and are now strongly part of the political and cultural vernacular.

In this second gallery the biggest installation are man-made cinderblock walls a bit over five feet, with two small paintings hung inside — *Good Morning* (2008) and *We're Coming* (2009). They could not be seen unless you crossed over the wall where, during the opening night, Kansas City musicians from Mexico and another Hispanic couple preparing food held court. There was room to cross over and no signs telling you not to, which provided an interesting conundrum. Could it be construed as one's own prejudice — with white people and their wine on one side of the wall and non-whites on the other — that prevented one from crossing over to discover the paintings? To be amongst the cooking food and music might also have been transformational. Conversely, it could also be the fear of being observed rather than an observer, free to turn your back and walk away. Still and all, Ford made it your choice whether or not to cross the barrier. If you did cross the wall, what did you see?

Above that is another interpretation of *Your Fear* (2009). A unique photograph taken by the artist at the 2008 American Royal Parade (Kansas City, Missouri) "as part of an ongoing project examining projected associations. The uniformed women are a part of a High School ROTC program and caught (Ford's) eye for the diversity of participants in what could be thought a homogeneous setting - i.e. Muslim officer(s) in training." One girl has her head cocked, lips pursed as if she were saying "Got your attention now, don't I!" Another girl gives the peace sign, somewhat cocky — but the fear can be hers. She is, after all, the one who is possibly going off to defend our freedom and how will we thank her?

Many of the cinderblocks in the main gallery are propped up with piles of fluffy cotton. Again, the race of nature here can be in line with our own need to build walls and keep the paradise to ourselves, or at least the belief in a paradise. Those who aren't in line with whoever is building these walls are perceived as an enemy. A very good example is *Intractable Position* (2008) acrylic on wood. Two flags — Palestine and Israel, are boxed in a narrow corner with no way for either to emerge together without one following the



David Ford, *Your Fear*, 2009, unique photograph, 55 x 57".



David Ford, Bouquet (background, right), 2009, mixed media, 132 x 72 x 48", Perception (foreground).

together without one following the other.

Yes (2008) is a Muslim paradise. Rich red mountains are strong as the pinks within are comforting. While small rayer rugs and waterfalls float, there is a serenity that takes us to a place of utter believability. Unlike *Tom Cruise* (2009), its narrative seems like a construct of religion with reference words like "maybe" and "other" as a nod to other religions "including Scientology, Christian, Hindu, Islamic and Native American beliefs." But it is the celebrity which floats away from the canvas into the ether, losing its luster. The idea of it becomes more real than the actuality.

Dolphin Gallery appears to have been created with a national scope in mind and is the right environment to experiment with such ideologies. While YJ's Snack Bar in the Crossroads Arts District could arguably be Ford's best work for all the community interaction it fosters, the environment at Dolphin nicely showcases his paintings, mixed media and installations as it was intended. An artist can dream writ large in a space like Dolphin and realize it.



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