

# Art in America

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## REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

### NEW YORK

#### Jane Hammond at Galerie Lelong

Eight years ago, poet John Ashbery complied with a request from artist Jane Hammond to supply her with 44 titles that she could use for paintings. In the intervening years, this has resulted in 66 complex and, at times, profound works of art. [For an account of the first stage of this long-running project, see *A.i.A.*, Mar. '95. Until Mar. 3, the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art exhibited 20 Hammond-Ashbery collaborations.] The final batch of 12 served as the inaugural show at Lelong's new ground-floor Chelsea establishment. These mixed-medium paintings on canvas or wood panel, measuring as much as 9 feet square, are exuberant with thickets of meanings. As always, Hammond's dense, color-infused works are populated by found images: phrenology charts, Tantric symbols, Hottentots and Turks, tinted Buddhas, top-masted schooners, self-portraits in disguise, all with the old-fashioned look of cutouts from antique books. The paintings frequently take on a sculptural aspect, mimicking maps, matchbook covers, blackboards, even Oriental dinner plates.

In *No One Can Win at the Hurricane Bar* (1998-99), Florida's panhandle and tip literally burst out of the sides of a huge oil-on-canvas map, itself on a crazy tilt. As on a coffee-shop placemat map, Hammond's Florida is littered with images of pelicans, camping tents, speedboats and easy chairs, each rendered with manic obsessiveness. The routes of actual hurricanes are also worked into the composition, with more leisure-time debris being

tossed up in their wake, including dominoes, topsails and even real dartboards that the artist glued to the canvas.

The paintings interweave autobiographical and cultural references, meditations on mortality and the past, but most of all they ruminate about art-making and the workings of visual language. *The Mush Stage* (2001) depicts a free-form puppet theater where, around a hapless stick-figure marionette, float a plethora of scrim, stage maquettes, painted backdrops and hinged windows. Cascading visual planes give the sense that a trapdoor may open at any moment, plunging one into some new, startling landscape. Above, a schooner betokens a journey into the imagination.

Overall, Ashbery's enigmatic phrases seem to have jolted Hammond into a mind-boggling level of inventiveness. Even surfaces tell a story. The fanciful mapping of Asia in *The Stocking Market* (2001) is painted over a collage of rice-paper Orientalia, fascinating but only noticeable when viewed up close. Yet, beyond the exuberant visual mayhem there can lurk a kind of depression. In *Good Night Nurse* (2000-01), a palazzo courtyard is cluttered with the debris of sculpting (stone chips, carving tools) while disporting figures, including an ice skater juggling a windsail and boys playing leapfrog, balance on coffins serving as pedestals. The painting evokes a vision of art-making, and of life itself, as a kind of scavenger hunt for meaning played out amid the detritus of culture.

-Carey Lovelace



Jane Hammond: *The Mush Stage*, 2001, oil on wood panels, 104 by 74 inches; at Galerie Lelong.