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# Mike Henderson @ Haines Gallery

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Venerated Bay Area artist Mike Henderson speaks of painting as something that “comes from the ground, through you and out you.” His current show, *Traces of Places*, suggests thick, time-laden walls or heavy bolts of fabric patched, troweled, and cobbled together by hands directed by an urgent, clawing impulse. These thickly clotted, intensely worked abstractions speak of a long ago, far away place: the small farming town of Marshall, Missouri where he grew up poor, one of nine children during the 1950s. While Henderson's work has always reflected his origins, this body of work, perhaps more than any other, speaks directly of his memories of that place.

One strength of Henderson's paintings is that they offer visual forms that don't appear to be directed by a catalogue of art historical references or skilled projections of what he “knows” about painting. The paintings seem to materialize from his relinquishing of control and of his understanding of what preexists. They appear to emerge from an almost sub-earthen place where form, plane, surface and rhythm coalesce. His resolute attachment to materiality, to the physical stuff of painting, and his impulse for play brings forth work laden with particles of meaning and intricate micro-references: to broken-down shacks, peeling paint, driving rain, suffocating heat and textiles.

That such references emerge as clearly as they do seems almost miraculous given the complexity of Henderson's technique. He builds his paintings by applying swatches of



At Any Moment, 2013, oil on canvas, 24 x 18"

pigment onto his canvases and flattening them with a palette knife into vertical and horizontal bands. Stacked one atop the other or nestled inside squares or rectangles, they form dense, overlapping skeins in which ground and foreground merge into thickets of intertwining color.

*Between the Cliffs* is a pulsating grid of stacked patches, irregular blocks of scraped, serrated, and



scratched paint fitted together

Between the Cliffs, 2013, oil on panel, 24 x 18"

like a tightly packed cargo container. The result is a rich tapestry of textures, the whole of which far exceeds the sum of its parts.

*Dance Deets* presents a pastiche of curdled creams, stringent greens and bleached ochre with intervening wedges of cold whites that hold the edge and temper the sun-soaked palette. A small rectangle embedded at the top of the painting evokes a silhouetted figure paused behind a window shade, a sweat-soaked refugee from a Hopper-esque afternoon sun.

Amid the larger works *Love Potion*, a 30 x 10-inch canvas, serves as a satisfying punctuation point. In it, a vertical tower of cadmium red stands before slathered horizontal bands of burnt sienna, cobalt blue and gunmetal grays. As insistent and demanding as the red is, Henderson's correcting gradations of cool colors hold the painting in balance.

The intense physical charge these paintings give off is equivalent to the impulses that go into them. They originate in and directly reflect Henderson's memories of where he came from.

–JULIA COUZENS

*Mike Henderson: "Traces of Places" @ [Haines Gallery](#) through July 3, 2014.*

About the Author:

[Julia Couzens](#) is a Sacramento-based artist and writer whose work has been widely shown, most recently at the di Rosa Preserve. Her drawings and hybrid objects are in museum and public collections throughout the U.S. These include the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts; Berkeley Art Museum; Oakland Museum; Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina; and Yale University. She lives and works on Merritt Island in the Sacramento River delta.



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