

FORT GANSEVOORT

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4 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Jack Pierson's assembled works; Marsha Pels's conceptual jewels; Gordon Hookey's takes on racism; and Emily Mason's exuberant abstract paintings.

By Martha Schwendener – January 27, 2021



Gordon Hookey's "Elvis" (2003) point outs how cultural appropriation pervades popular music. Gordon Hookey and Fort Gansevoort

One of the biggest art world tempests in 2020 involved the postponement of a traveling retrospective of the work of Philip Guston (1913-1980), a white American artist who had painted hooded figures reminiscent of Ku Klux Klan members. Hooded figures arrive in 2021 from a very different source: the paintings of the Australian Aboriginal artist Gordon Hookey, in "Sacred Nation, Scared Nation," an online exhibition organized in collaboration with the American artist Gary Simmons at Fort Gansevoort.

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Hookey often focuses on popular spectacles, and the sinister hooded figures appear as audience members and occasional stars of his paintings. Trump, Elvis Presley, Osama bin Laden and a host of soccer players and political figures also appear throughout the paintings, which serve as sharp critiques of racism, colonialism and systemic oppression. Some of the works I can mention here are “Victory, Solidarity, Peace and Freedom” (2016) and “Elvis” (2003): Both are bright colored oil on canvas works, couched in a cheerful, comics-inspired Pop Art idiom, which point out how cultural appropriation and racism pervade sports and popular music.

A number of other paintings have unprintable titles or texts, often relating to female genitalia, which soccer hooligans and thugs have hurled at Indigenous players on the field. Similar epithets have been used in paintings by female artists like Lee Lozano, Judith Bernstein and Kathe Burkhart, in those cases offering feminist commentary on violence perpetrated against women. Here the misogyny goes unexplained or doesn't fully translate, which is unfortunate, since much of what emanates from Hookey's works — like the hoods in Guston's paintings — is laudable, fearless and inspiring.