

Jim Hodges: Give More than You Take at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

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Detail of Jim Hodges, *Untitled (one day it all comes true)*, 2013, Denim fabric, thread, 144 x 288 in. Private Collection, San Francisco. (Artwork © Jim Hodges, photo by John Kennard, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.)

What will you leave behind when you die? This appeared to be the question asked in the recent mid-career retrospective *Jim Hodges: Give More than You Take* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (ICA). In organizing this exhibition, the ICA's curators worked closely with Hodges to install artworks representative of nearly three decades of the artist's work, made of a hodgepodge of materials ranging from delicately applied gold leaf to human spittle. Hodges' voice was unmistakably present, and, considering the deeply personal nature of many of the pieces shown, it was a welcome addition. Yet, even in this celebratory exhibition of the artist's life's work, the presence of his contemporaries and predecessors – his influences and inspiration – loomed large. The retrospective exhibition is, in effect, a homage, not just to its subject, but also to those he has followed and loved throughout his career.

In the show's opening artist's statement, Hodges acknowledges the many contemporary artists, including Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Richard Tuttle, and Kiki Smith, who impact his work, and links between Hodges' art and the works of these individuals were evident throughout the exhibition. In identifying artists that have influenced him at the outset, Hodges draws together an artist's community, both past and present, into which he inserts himself. Like these artists, Hodges challenges society's marginalization of traditionally feminine materials and craft. For instance, he consistently incorporates embroidery in his works, elevating its aesthetic status. A particularly impressive example of this is seen with *Untitled (one day it all comes true)* from 2013, a large work created from interwoven scraps of denim. In the accompanying text, the artist credited the skilled seamstress with whom he collaborated. Indeed, throughout the show, collaboration emerges as an integral part of the production and display of Hodges' works.

The retrospective also includes more intimate works that directly address the artist's loss of loved ones. These read like personal eulogies. A seminal example is the

rarely displayed room-sized installation titled the dark gate. Constructed in 2008 after the death of the artist's mother, this installation symbolically recreates the experience of personal memory through its construction and distortion of physical space. The dark gate is composed of two spaces, one of which is placed within the other. The outer room, which the viewer enters first, is completely unlit and as a result, disorienting. Inside it stands a pinewood shed with a brightly illuminated interior, accessible through a double-swinging door on one end. On the other side is a second, much more striking opening, remarkably outlined by sharp steel spikes, the tips of which are spritzed with Shalimar perfume. While viewers in the dark room outside can look through the spikes to see into the illuminated pinewood box, those looking from within can, at most, only discern shadowy figures in the dark. Viewers abandon comfort by entering this claustrophobic space. Moreover, through this visual and physical negotiation of spatial depth, the viewer becomes an active part of the artwork.



Detail of Jim Hodges, the dark gate, 2008, wood, steel, electric light, and perfume. Private Collection. (Artwork © Jim Hodges, photo by John Kennard, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston).

In these sensitive tributes and their installation at the ICA, this show explores two divergent themes in Hodges' work. First, that he challenges the traditional (albeit increasingly scrutinized) marginalization of craft by utilizing nontraditional media for aesthetic exploration. Second, in other more personal works, he engages death as a transformative process rather than as a grim ending. In the true sense of the word "retrospective," Hodges returns to the profound eulogies he created for his friends, family, and lovers in these works. Throughout the exhibition, the processes of give and take are always apparent. Wandering through the galleries and through Hodges' career, the viewer becomes implicated in these exchanges. We are reminded, with every mention, every offering of thanks, every tribute, no matter what or how much you take, to give more.