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CRITIC'S PICK

ROY DOWELL



Roy Dowell assembles collages like *Untitled* (#958), 2008, and *Untitled* (#984), 2009, from painted elements.

Roy Dowell, who has been exhibiting collages for more than two decades, is a master of the technique. He perfectly balances imagery culled from fabric patterns, vintage movie posters, Mexican pottery, and anything that catches his eye. He began his career as a painter, however, and he has recently returned to that medium to create the components that now predominate in his assembled compositions. Where scraps of printed material are still used, he enhances them with diagonal shade lines and painted arabesques. "There is very little now that isn't by me," he says. "I still wanted to construct them, but by making the elements myself, the work can be more diverse."

Always working on several pieces simultaneously, Dowell arranges the modestly scaled works on paper, in various stages of completion, on a pair of tables in his studio. He works in the upstairs space of a two-story 1940s building in Atwater, a bohemian enclave of Los Angeles; his partner of 35 years, the painter Lari Pittman, works downstairs.

The studio contains a few of the extensive collections that inspire Dowell's work. There are Mexican *retablos* lining shelves; teaching plaques, covered in Islamic writing from the Koran, on a wall; and framed art by the nun-turned-artist Corita Kent. "My work is often an outgrowth of my collections, even my desire to collect. If I can't buy something, I can make it," the artist says. Collecting began early. Dowell remembers his grandmother bringing him exotic souvenirs of her world travels, including an antique key from Denmark. "I was smitten," he recalls, and a collection of old keys was born.

His family moved around California almost every year, until Dowell began high school in La Cañada, not far from his present home. The artist believes this nomadic upbringing led him to be both introspective and independent; he started reading and drawing at an early age. He completed the undergraduate and graduate art programs at CalArts, finishing in 1975. He studied with John Baldessari, Allan Kaprow, and Emerson Woelffer, whom he credits with influencing his teaching as well as his art. Dowell, still boyish-looking at 58, has been chair of the graduate fine-arts department at Otis College of Art and Design for 20 years and teaching since the late '70s.



Dowell was busy throughout 2009 creating work for a fall show at Margo Leavin Gallery in Los Angeles and a winter show at Lennon, Weinberg Gallery in New York, where his painting-collage hybrids were priced at \$6,500 for 16-by-11½-inch works and \$7,500 for 16-by-20-inch ones. Now he is preparing pieces for the group exhibition "The Jewel Thief," set to open at the Tang Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York, on September 18. "I appreciate how a glimmer of typography transports you to a different time," says Tang curator Ian Berry, "yet the collages still look completely fresh." —Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Hunter Drohojowska-Philp is a Los Angeles correspondent for ARTnews.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY, LOS ANGELES (L); TOP: BRIAN FORREST (2); BOTTOM: LARI PITTMAN