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July 26, 2023



Reggie Burrows Hodges: Reggie Burrow Hodges, Swimming in Compton: Shallow End, 2021. Acrylic and pastel on linen, 51 1/4 x 61 inches (130.2 x 154.9 cm). © Reggie Burrow Hodges. Courtesy of the artist and Karma.

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Swimming in Compton: Shallow End

Swimming in Compton: Shallow End, painted by Reggie Burrows Hodges (e.g. Acrylic and pastel on linen, 51 1/4 x 61 inches (130.2 x 154.9 cm), is an exception to the rule that art is always filled with brilliant colors and figures with faces. This huge picture has a faceless, blurry figure on it and is painted in gloomy hues including black, yellow, pink, dark green, brilliant green, blue, and white. Reggie Burrows Hodges produces his works to have a powerful message. Reggie Burrows Hodges develops art from events in his life that appeal to viewers with the aid of his faceless figures and the locations in which he presents them. His capacity to inform others about Black Americans and about the realities of daily Black life acts as the source of inspiration for his work.

His artwork is located on the fourth floor of this gallery, it is horizontal in composition, and is leaning up against the right wall of the hallway. A longer look at the painting reveals that it has some texture in some areas along with the trees in the painting's foreground being given a light pink shadow. The light pink color in this painting is employed to depict shadows for various items. It is utilized to blend in with the dark hues and give the impression that there is sunlight outside casting shadows. The viewer will see that a boy is cleaning the pool at night without any lights on when they look at the painting. The young person in the image lacks a face, which is one of his most distinguishing features. This image is quite captivating because they are unidentified and cleaning a pool at night. Given that the painting as a whole is darker, due to the presence of there being a faceless figure cleaning a pool at night conveys mystery.

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Reggie Burrows Hodges was born in California in 1965, is currently 58 years old, and he is an African-American. His inspiration for his art comes from his life events. He draws inspiration from everyday Black life (racial issues, being Black in America, etc.) as well as the experiences he had while growing up in Compton. For instance, "Hodges' works uncover universal subjects such as identity, community, truth, and memory and often draw inspiration from his childhood in Compton." Due to his childhood in Compton, this contributed to his creativity in the art world, in which he developed a wide spectrum of themes in his paintings. In response to such inspiration, he uses a white canvas to spread "an inky, monochromatic black" all over before letting his regular painting technique take over.¹ The result is his alluring works.

The primary theme exposed by Reggie Burrows Hodges is of ordinary Black existence. Because he draws inspiration from the lives of Black citizens, he can tell a more comprehensive story about his and their existence to a range of audiences. As a result of this, a wider audience will be able to relate to his art and engage in self-reflection that can connect them to his art. Reggie's faceless figures are what make his works of art so appealing and mysterious. For instance, "his subjects' faces, bereft of distinguishing features such as eyes, noses, or mouths, are spectral presences—mirrors through which we see ourselves or project some kind of 'other.' These are spaces of charged self-reflection, where notions regarding race, context, and identity come to the fore."² Reggie creates engaging depictions of ordinary Black life and makes sure that his figures have a lack of facial features on purpose because he wants his audience to recognize themselves in his work, regardless of their many identities. This is significant because

¹ David Everitt, Howe. "Reggie Burrows Hodges at Karma | 22 East 2nd Street." ArtForum, Accessed July 24, 2023. <https://www.artforum.com/picks/reggie-burrows-hodges-85063>.

² IBID.

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he uses surrealism in his art to convey a story of Black life in each of his paintings. Reggie uses the faceless figures in his artwork as a mirror, enabling groups of people to see their own "self-reflection" within it. This is evident when looking at his artwork, as the figures that are present have all-black painted faces rather than having face features at all.

Environment plays a significant role in Reggie's artwork since he creates the environment as a means of communicating. As can be seen in, "work centers around visual metaphor and storytelling. Hodges paints from a black ground, developing the environment around the figure so it emerges from its surroundings, examining the possibility that we are all products of our environment."³ His art is a form of storytelling, he builds the setting around the character in his pieces to grab viewers' interest. This enables his surroundings to tell the tale Reggie wants to create. He created situations that relate to various events in which he has participated, which is how he is able to create the figures that are shown in his work. His characters can have more traits without the necessity for "facial features" because all of his paintings have faceless people, which is a distinctive aspect of his work. This has a big impact on how he conveyed the story of Black existence through the usage of faceless characters.

His art is quite special in that he lets the viewer see themselves within it. He encourages his audience to tell their own stories by placing themselves in his artwork. Reggie does not contain any facial traits, yet after examining his work more thoroughly, there are obvious justifications. In each of his works, including Black Life, which he mentioned earlier, he wants

³ "Reggie Hodges." Maine College of Art & Design. Accessed July 24, 2023. <https://www.meca.edu/people/reggie-hodges/>.

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the spectator to fully immerse themselves in the universe he has created and the numerous occurrences he experiences as an African-American citizen living in the U.S.

Reggie Burrows Hodges uses his artwork as a platform to share tales with a variety of audiences that come into contact with them. The work's title serves as a tool for educating readers about black life in America. Considering why Reggie's artwork always has a dark sense, which refers to a gloomy, shadowy, remote place, after understanding more about Reggie and his motivations for creating art the way he does.

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Bibliography:

Reggie Burrows Hodges: Reggie Burrow Hodges, *Swimming in Compton: Shallow End*, 2021.

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© Reggie Burrow Hodges. Courtesy of the artist and Karma.

1. Howe, David Everitt. "Reggie Burrows Hodges at Karma | 22 East 2nd Street." ArtForum, Accessed July 24, 2023.
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