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3 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

by Will Heinrich



Reggie Burrows Hodges's "For the Greater Good: White Ground," from 2019. His works "are at once visually striking and dense with cultural argument." Credit Reggie Burrows Hodges and Karma

Reggie Burrows Hodges

Reggie Burrows Hodges isn't the first artist to depict Black people with the color black, though it's always a powerful formal choice, at once visually striking and dense with cultural argument. But the way Hodges does it, in his debut New York solo show at Karma, adds a level of extra magic. The trick is that he doesn't actually paint people at all. Instead he paints entire canvases black, then fills in furniture, walls and clothing around them, leaving the subjects themselves as untouched, impossibly deep silhouettes.

Most of the paintings in this exhibition catch their subjects in fleeting, ordinary moments — applying mascara, leaping over a hurdle — that contrast strangely with the otherworldly quality of their bodies. In a smaller painting like "Community Concern" (2020), which shows a woman in white shirt and orange pants in mid-dance, you might not notice so much. Her posture gives you all the expression you might otherwise look for in her featureless face, and she stands out against the deep green wall behind her. But in a larger piece like "For the Greater Good: White Ground" (2019), in which the figures are contiguous with their own endless shadows, the contrast between body and soul becomes more evident.

It doesn't diminish the bodies, though, or what they're doing. It simply proposes that as real as hurdles or mascara may be, there's something even realer behind them.