

LOS ANGELES: Reggie Burrows Hodges



Reggie Burrows Hodges, *Slumber Aura*, 2022, acrylic on wood panel, 48 x 40".

In Reggie Burrows Hodges's painting *Slumber Aura*, 2022, we see a seated figure from behind, leaning back and looking into a vanity mirror. The reflection, rendered in swirling acrylic, captures no discernible face, just a patch of black where one would be. Emerging from the velvety dark ground of the picture, the subject's body is framed by fields of pastel pink, blue, and cream, articulating a languorous interior space where, as Hilton Als writes in a text for the show, we feel as though we're "on the precipice of a dream."

Slumber Aura is one of fifteen paintings in Hodges's latest exhibition, "The Reckoning," which is haunted by a coterie of anonymous figures shown in the act of self-contemplation. The conjoining of facelessness and the gaze brings Hodges deep into conversation with the history of painting, with an allegorical approach (and a deftness of facture) that echoes that of Milton Avery, Jacob Lawrence, Bob Thompson, and Édouard Vuillard, among others. Hodges, however, pushes further in this body of work toward opacity, allowing representation to soften into abstraction. The result gets us back to the gaze. In *Ocean Gateway*, 2023, what appears at first glance to be a person becomes, with more time, a figment of our own projection, coalescing into a glimmer of legibility only to collapse again into a tangle of lavender and white brushstrokes. These are works that simultaneously thwart and reward our looking.

Hodges's most striking achievement, though, is what he manages to do with black pigment. He always paints an inky ground first, so that his figures emerge from, and are constituted of, blackness. In doing so, he decouples Blackness as racial identity from black as a color,

one that absorbs all of the light around it (which makes for especially stark contrast in Karma's bright-white, sun-drenched galleries). Formed of a uniform matte black, Hodges's figures should read as absent presences, melancholic silhouettes or voids cut from a more vibrant reality. But in a way that is utterly beguiling, and true to black's formal properties, Hodges's figures don't sink into oblivion; they float.