

David Hammons' quote

The first time I heard from David Hammons was through the words of the outstanding Swiss curator Michel Ritter. Michel Ritter exhibited the work of David Hammons in 1993 at 'Fri-Art', the art space he was running at the time in Fribourg, Switzerland. Michel was in love with the work and person of David Hammons whom he met in the late eighties during his stay in New York. Michel once told me: "I know I only have a modest 'off-space' to offer, but to exhibit David Hammons' work in Switzerland is a necessity and I will wait for years if needed, to bring his work to Fribourg" - and indeed he did. And thanks to Michel Ritter I discovered a dense, charged and powerful work of art which touched me immediately and implicated me as rarely before, through its assertion of an absolute, universal and incisive form. David Hammons does give form! His beautiful work has a potent simplicity, clarity and humor, and its fine irony allows the spectator to be included. His work creates the condition for a direct contact - from one to one. I remember his works "Cold Shoulder" from 1990, and "African-American Flag" also from 1990 which has become, in the very best sense, an 'icon'. The sovereign gesture and offensive affirmation reaches beyond particularism. Therefore "African-American Flag" is not only an artwork, it is a flag for a new nation, a flag for a new insight, it is a new flag for a new form and a new truth. David Hammons creates a new truth - what more can art do? Therefore I think that his work, but also his radical, outstanding, and solitary position have an inestimable influence over younger artists. Free, non-compromising, resistant, and surely a warrior, David Hammons is an example of how to stand up for ones' work. Speaking of his influence, I used a quote from an interview he once gave, in my work "Bataille Monument" at 'documenta11' in Kassel. The quote was written and posted at the two stops of the "Bataille-Monument Shuttle-Service" to link them. I thought that while waiting, people could read the words of David Hammons and think. I also wanted to pay a tribute to David Hammons' understanding of art in public space, and pay a kind of hidden homage to the work of an artist - who himself was not presented in this group exhibition. The quote is: "The art audience is the worst audience in the world. It's overly educated, it's conservative, it's put to criticism, not to understand and it never has any fun! Why should I spend my time playing to that audience? That's like going into lion's den. So I refuse to deal with that audience. I will play with the street audience. That audience is much more human, and their opinion is from the heart. They don't have any reason to play games, there is nothing gained or lost." This potent quote accompanied me since I first read it. His clear way of putting forth the complexity and beauty, but also the difficulty and problematic of the endeavor of working in public space encouraged and still encourages me. David Hammons knows that art in public space means conflict, but also an opportunity for the artist to give this conflict a form. In the matter of art in public space David Hammons did an incredibly graceful work - which to me - is one of the strongest, most poetic and magnificent ways to work with precariousness. This work shows me that art in public space only makes sense if the dimension of precariousness is included. In their precariousness the snowballs of his work "Bliz-aard Ball Sale" New York City 1983, lead to another dimension which art can imply: The snowball is a form that goes beyond its object status - without negating it - and reaches toward something new, different and crucial: The status of transformation. And that is precisely what important art can do. Yes, David Hammons is the best - as you say in America - and I love his work and his position.

Thomas Hirschhorn, Davos, 2016