

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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ARTFORUM

LOS ANGELES

Gary Hume

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Spread across the Matthew Marks Gallery's two locations in this city, Gary Hume's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles in more than twenty-five years revealed the tenacity of certain long-standing concerns and the emergence of others. Among the eight recent paintings (enamel on aluminum or paper) and three painted-steel sculptures on view, a giant trompe l'oeil of vertical boards crisscrossed with super-glossy white x's suggested the flattening of a barn's side and the sliding plane of its door. Titled *U.S.A.*, 2018, it recalled Hume's other portals, the big rectangular slabs of the "Door" paintings, 1989–91, with which he is still associated after exhibiting them in the generation-defining 1988 "Freeze" exhibition curated by Damien Hirst in London. Like those earlier monoliths, *U.S.A.* renders the painting coincident with its source—here the generically American outbuildings of upstate New York as opposed to a specific state-funded hospital in London's East End. If the previous appropriations of the swinging doors at the derelict St. Bartholomew's Hospital managed to abstractly but no less intently excoriate the Thatcher administration's funding cuts to the National Health Service, this newer version deftly imaged an agricultural locale that, as painted, shades red.

Connecting the two spaces were Hume's wafer-thin sculptures, all freestanding wagon wheels variously painted yellow, blue, and lime green. *The Wonky Wheel (Yellow)*, 2013, was the earliest piece in the

View of "Gary Hume," 2019. From left: *The Beach*, 2018; *The Wonky Wheel (Blue)*, 2018; *The Wonky Wheel (Lime Green)*, 2018; *Water*, 2018.



show (the other versions were from last year). Its bent edges indicated that it was the prototype for the other two, which similarly exhibited perfect geometry in the erect rods radiating from their centers but which were just as banged up on the outer circle. As do the “Doors,” which were also a pretext for formal experimentation with an adaptable iconography (e.g., the inclusion or omission of such otherwise banal details as porthole windows and kickplates), the wheels propose the wanton seriality of a product line offered in many hues. They connected to the surrounding paintings by design—both bodies of work were coated in Hume’s signature medium, enamel—and as wry jokes about his paintings being “the thinnest sculptures in the world,” in his oft-repeated words. Positioned in front of the *U.S.A.* painting, *The Wonky Wheel (Yellow)* likewise recalled the opportunism of the pioneers inching across vast lands inconveniently inhabited by other people.

Migration, willed and otherwise, was the show’s unmistakable subject. In the second space, Hume configured the image of a life jacket into a repeating design that floated across the slick, watery surfaces of mural-scale horizontal paintings on paper (so thickly covered with paint that they had become rigid, even as they were ever-shifting, catching and redistributing ambient light). Arrested mid-undulation, the three 2018 works perfectly layered the life jackets onto shimmering grounds: Against the impenetrable inky expanse of *Flotsam*, the black vests nearly disappeared; in *Shadows*, the pink and purple shapes seemed to float over flag-like bands of turquoise, brown, and aquamarine; and in *The Beach*, ocean blue undergirded life jackets painted in the incongruous palette of rainbow Skittles. In each of these works, the forms summon so many similar items awash on beaches throughout Europe, buoyant but absent of bodies, or still carrying them, too late, to shore. These are gruesome sights, here differently submerged. Just a few miles away, the Marciano Art Foundation was displaying *Life Cycle*, 2018, by Ai Weiwei. Ai’s installation similarly took as its focus the global refugee crisis: A makeshift bamboo boat constructed with the technique intended for traditional Chinese kites anchored a room full of mythological beings hanging from the ceiling. Back at Matthew Marks, *Water*, 2018, a blue-green monochrome of its titular substance, deftly captured that suspense, imaging nothing but writhing waves in an improbable elegy.

—Suzanne Hudson