



James Hyde

The artist takes Stuart Davis's modernist legacy as a point of departure.

By T.J. Carlin

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For the show that recently ended at Pierogi's Boiler space, you painted over photographs of sections of Stuart Davis's paintings. What made you think of using his work this way?

I always really liked him. His paintings would always stop me, and I would spend some time with them. I liked the way he sat in the middle of the 20th century, when modernism was contemporary. It seemed like a fascinating moment which is no longer there.

So it started with admiration....

Well, I never wanted to paint like him, but he did get me into dealing with language in art. I was always interested in the way he seemed to go from shape to sign, using letters as an intermediary step in that process. The paintings you see here in my studio are also based on Davis, though they're a bit different from the ones at the Boiler because they incorporate actual words. There is a type of reading involved, which is a way of looking at something while not looking at the same time. All of the words here are connecting words that don't mean anything: *at*, *to*, etc. They're buried in layers of adjustment and process.

You'd taken pictures of Davis's work well before you began this series, correct?

Yeah, I'd been working with my friend Barney Kulok on a collaboration involving images of

Tiepolo. We spent five or six whole days at the Met photographing paintings, including ones by Davis. So I guess this project began percolating in my mind while I worked with Barney. But Davis became a way for me to connect with another artist and a particular type of painting that hadn't been part of my vocabulary.

The paintings are gigantic, and the Boiler was the perfect space for them.

There's actually more of a relationship than you might think. The Boiler had been the physical plant for that whole corner of Williamsburg in which it sits. It was built in 1937. The gallery is not unlike the type of industrial landscape that Davis internalized in his paintings. I'm sampling Davis, and my paintings end up being bits of architecture from his era. This show is very public art in a way, which I don't always do, so I'm happy to be able to do that once in a while.

What changed for you while creating these paintings?

I started listening to jazz! I grew up with rock & roll, and the whole history of jazz had been unknown to me. But since it is contemporaneous with Davis, I wanted to incorporate that. I listened to all the Miles Davis I could get my hands on. I made a lot of these at night, alone, and that sort of soulful mix that Miles has of sadness and intensity really helped me.