

DAVID B SMITH
GALLERY

Robert Hardgrave

Relic

December 17 – January 15, 2011

David B. Smith Gallery
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Exhibition Statement

Relic: New Paintings by Robert Hardgrave

This is a critical and exciting time to be an artist. In an era of mass communication, it is difficult to avoid the alarm caused by the world's seemingly inexhaustible supply of negativity. We live beneath a constant bombardment of depravity and violence. There are those who claim the end of the world is nigh — or at least the end of humanity. While I don't doubt that our destructive behavior has put us in dire straits, I also think it has necessitated the need to create new forms to insure our survival. We have an opportunity to transform what we have destroyed. We can find ways to adapt our behavior, to take the grim world around us to a more hopeful place.

Recently, my studio practice has led me into new territories. Where I once pre-planned an idea before painting, I now require myself to approach what I'm doing as an "unknown." What begins as a flat painting can now become something else entirely. I allow myself the freedom to explore different configurations. The canvas is a starting place for a conversation that leads me to new insights about pictorial and sculptural forms. Pieces become surfaces that I can "destroy," only to take their remains and build something new. Where I once tried to present answers with my work, I now find myself asking questions about what I can do with the leftovers, how I can reconfigure the scraps and how it will change the way I paint.

Cultural motifs from around the world have inspired me for quite some time now. I'm interested in marks that are made on baskets, textiles, and vessels. I utilize them as starting points when I paint. Most recently, I've been drawn not just to those marks, but also to the objects on which they are painted. This trajectory of thought has had enormous implications for me. I wonder how I can take this idea of the "object" in its sculptural form and present it as a painting. Can I present these objects as vessels for ideas? Can I take all that I see around me in the world and present it as something hopeful? Can I take my failures, the destroyed relics of my new transformative studio practice, and create triumphs of both form and spirit?