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CL CREATIVE LOAFING

A few questions with Shara Hughes

By Muriel Vega @murielvega on Mon, May 5, 2014 at 10:42 AM



COURTESY SHARA HUGHES AND AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY

FEELING STILL: "Follow Me Follow Me" by Shara Hughes

In collaboration with Get This Gallery, MOCA GA is currently exhibiting Shara Hughes' *Guess You Had to Be There* as part of the museum's 2012/13 Working Artist Project. Originally from Atlanta, Hughes left the city to study in New York, Denmark and Rhode Island before returning here in 2008. With bright colors and textures, Hughes combines interiors, landscapes and human relationships into her work. She has shown her work in New York and across Europe.

Here, Hughes talks to CL about working with textures, her latest show and shifting from interiors to human subjects.

How did the concept for *Guess You Had to Be There* come about?

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Looking at the show as a whole, the theme for *Guess You Had to Be There* is very much about seeing an experience of feeling as a still life. You can remember how something felt or how a long-term decision about something major seems so urgent and heavy, but you can't capture the longevity of turmoil. Many of the pieces are like telling one of those stories where you go on and on and the punchline comes up, but only you remember how it felt. You have to leave the listeners with "oh... guess you had to be there." These paintings are somewhat trying to capture that long-term feeling of

how hard the ups and downs can be but then, realizing it's also not so bad.

This go-around, your work has evolved from highlighting interiors to using human subjects. What caused this shift in your work?

I think in all honesty, a relationship. Being in my 20s for most of those interiors, I guess my work had always been about being in your 20s in a way. The feeling of trying to figure out where my home was, or where I belonged after college. Making those interiors was a way for me to try many different scenarios of what home was physically and mentally. During that time I went through some personal losses which brought those interiors into a more symbolic realm of painting. At this point in my life, I've chosen to share myself with someone else in a way I never have before, so the work has naturally become more figurative. The main character is every person at times so that a feeling of multiple emotions through single event can come across. In other paintings, it is only about two people working together or not working together.



COURTESY OF SHARA HUGHES AND AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY

"My Hero" by Shara Hughes

Tell me about your experience as a Working Artist Project at MOCA. How have you grown as an artist?

The WAP has been a great way to focus on one large space. I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do for the show, so during my year of making work, I was focusing on changing scale. I created an obscene amount of small work. I never work small, so it was a challenge for me to continue to struggle with them for this amount of time. I think the small work helped the larger ones become more intentional and less planned out at the same time. To have a year of focusing on this one show, I really was able to find freedom in the work mainly because I had no plan. Being able to have no plan in the work has been important because it allows myself to trust in my techniques enough to let go of what the piece would be about and let the piece reveal itself to me. It's a trust in letting go which sounds so hippie or something, but I guess it's one of those things you need to learn at some point.

With so many bright colors, textures and use of abstraction, what's your creative process behind your paintings?

It's really become intuitive at this point. I'll start with some kind of color on the surface, or some kind of shape. Then I just become reactionary with what I see as a potential for some kind of space or figure. The painting gets addictive and then edited over and over, until I latch on to one kind of theme and then run with it. It's frustrating because it's a feeling of having no control for most of the time while making the piece. However, once you fight with it long enough, it reveals itself in a deeper and more honest way than it would have come about if I had it planned out and then just executed my plan.

Guess You Had to Be There, an exhibition by Shara Hughes, runs through June 28 at MOCA GA. More details at the gallery.