

SURFACE

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Self, Employed

L.A.-based artist Aaron Curry uses the human body as the inspiration for larger-than-life sculptures.



Portrait by Mike Rosenthal

BY MARINA CASHDAN

Like a lot of teenagers in the '80s, the artist Aaron Curry got his first dose of art from album covers. "I would trace album covers, and then try to draw them," he recalls of his youth in San Antonio, Texas. "I didn't grow up around art at all, but later, when I was in high school, I discovered Salvador Dalí and Picasso." While not typically compared to Dalí or Picasso, Curry's brightly colored biomorphic sculptures, disorienting wall-paper, and three-dimensional paintings are often described as contemporary kin to the work of Jean Dubuffet and mobile master Alexander Calder. He was a protégé of '90s "Helter Skelter" artists Mike Kelley and Liz Larner, and his pieces owe plenty to their influence, too.

It was Curry's physicality that inspired a new storefront project at the Dior Homme flagship store in L.A., where he's based. "I decided to enclose the space, which I think almost makes it a bit more traditional as far as a window display," says Curry, 41. "But it also demarcated my sculptural space. I made this box, which creates a window display, and the sculpture goes up 17 or 18 feet, penetrating the ceiling of the box, breaking into the space of the store." To come up with the towering sculpture's black-and-white pattern, Curry took photos of his skin and hair to create what he calls a "skin environment." "It's like a giant nude," he says, "but I created it out of weird photos of abstract parts of my own body."

The installation differs from his works at New York's Lincoln Center, on view through January. There, Curry erected 14 aluminum sculptures ranging from 4 to 19 feet in height, all in his signature, bright-colored car paint. Like his Dior work, the installation is based on

Michael Werner 4 East 77 New York New York 10075

the human figure. However, “it’s not necessarily like, ‘Oh, this piece is a figure,’” he says. “It could just be like an arm that fell off another [sculpture].” As if bicoastal exhibitions weren’t enough, Curry also has a show on view at Paris gallery Almine Rech (through Nov. 9), for which he took the “skin pattern from the Dior [display] and elaborated on it,” he says, this time in vivid colors.

To create such monumental sculptures, Curry employs assistants in his two L.A. studios—one devoted to screen printing, the other to wood. He also works from a home studio in Beachwood Canyon, where he makes most of his preliminary drawings. At home, he finds inspiration in a common indulgence: television. “When my wife first met me, she couldn’t believe I had the TV on all the time,” he says. “I was really into MTV as a kid. It was like an escape, somehow.”

Telephone 212 988 1623 Facsimile 212 988 1774