

ARTFORUM

Jim Hodges

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[Jim Hodges](#), *Untitled (One Day It All Comes True)*, 2013, denim fabric, thread, 60 x 120'.

Jim Hodges's "Give More Than You Take," the New York-based artist's first US museum retrospective, brings together more than twenty-five years of his early and recent works. Hodges speaks here about his use of drawing, sculpture, photography, and installation to convey the emotional potential that resides within materiality. The exhibition is on view at the [Dallas Museum of Art](#) from October 6, 2013, through January 12, 2014, and then travels to the [Walker Art Center](#), Minneapolis, from February 15 through May 11, 2014; the [Institute of Contemporary Art](#), Boston, from June 5 through September 1, 2014; and the [Hammer Museum](#), Los Angeles, from October 5, 2014, through January 17, 2015.

ONE OF THE FIRST pieces I ever installed was a sculpture by [Christian Boltanski](#). I was working as an art handler and tour guide for the Dannheisser Foundation in 1986, and I remember this particular series of tin boxes that had lights and photographs hanging over the top. It looked somewhat like an altar. To install the boxes on the wall, I had to open them up so I could insert a hanging device. Inside the boxes I found photographs that no one else could see but me. It felt as if I was in contact with the artist through this gesture; he had embedded something into the content of the work that was a kind of secret, reserved for people who would handle the piece in the most intimate of ways. I found that to be quite profound. I was able to read the work by divining meaning through the manipulation of its material. The earliest work of mine in this exhibition is the piece *Good Luck*, 1987. It's a ski mask that I had cut into, disassembled, and nailed onto the wall. I had purchased the mask at an Army-Navy store that used to be on the corner of Canal and West Broadway. The New York art world was much smaller back then; it was just SoHo and the East Village. The Leo Castelli and Sonnabend galleries were across the street from where I worked. Mary Boone had opened down the block, and the New Museum was still on Broadway. I had made *Good Luck* in this context, a year after I came out of art school. I was trying to unlearn the things I had been taught in an effort to move beyond the boundaries that had been placed on my understanding of my work. I took painting lessons practically every Saturday morning at the Shadle Park Mall back in Spokane when I was thirteen, and I received my MFA in painting a decade later. But I eventually grew unsatisfied with paint. I couldn't find myself in the medium.

I needed to get rid of the image, so I took to opening one up, and that's where I found that my practice became very much about process, a kind of ritualistic and emotional experience with materials, which along the way have included water, fabric, flowers, paper, boulders, and dirt. I always had great ambitions in finding out who I was, and I knew that objects could transmit the reality of humanness that we experience in our bodies. But I wanted to feel inflated and liberated instead of feeling compressed. That's when I turned to exploring ideas of expansion, which eventually resulted in my use of architectural space as the material itself. It somewhat follows the mechanism of an artist's practice, which is to push, move beyond, and change location.

A couple of years ago, I was driving upstate in one of my attempts to move out of the city. I was having a hard time making work back home so I thought a good project would be to literally make more room for myself. It should have been a perfect resolution because I wasn't holding on to anything at that point. But while there, I found that I needed the stimulus of people in order to maintain my own sense of self. Throughout my life, I've fallen deeply in love, and that surely has influenced much of my work: I learned how to sew from my mother and grandmother when I was younger and was reintroduced to the process by my first boyfriend, who was a designer.

When I arrived upstate I started taking photographs of the sky. This process-*cum*-ritual of recording the constantly changing atmosphere was the beginning of a work that today, almost three years later, I'm still finishing—an imagined landscape constructed entirely out of denim. It will eventually become part of a series of works that will surround a single room. I've always been drawn to specific materials that latch on and seem to pull and guide me. I really don't know where this current one is leading, but that's where my effort is right now. The mirror of this exhibition has shown me one thing: I am at times embarrassed by what I make, and my burden is to live with these uncomfortable feelings and keep pushing regardless.

— As told to [Frank Expósito](#)