

JAMES HARRIS GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE



Noah Davis:

Savage Wilds

July 12 to August 24, 2012

Opening Reception

Thursday, July 12, 6 – 8pm

Gallery Hours are:

Thurs. - Sat. 11:00am - 5:00pm

Tuesday & Wednesday by appointment

Additional images are available upon request

Left: *You Are*, 2012 Oil on wood, 48" x 60"

James Harris Gallery is pleased to present our second solo exhibition by Noah Davis. With *Savage Wilds*, Davis considers the blurry line between reality and the artificial within the artist's process of fashioning an identity and a corresponding body of work. The show takes its name from a 1988 play by author Ishmael Reed in which he sought to expose the absurd nature of American racism, especially as represented in mainstream television. Davis uses the phenomenon of late 20th century American tabloid talk shows to look at the production and spectacle of modern life, its relationship to the notion of artist as creator, and the latent parallels between highbrow and lowbrow culture. Transposing the televised world of Jerry Springer and Maury Povich from midday trash TV into the gallery setting, he adds yet another layer to this dialogue, which emphasizes the voyeuristic exchange between artist and audience, drawing attention to correlations between staging, performance and the cult of personality.

With the rise of tabloid talk shows, America experienced a new and special type of social voyeurism. Contentious situations that normally would have been reserved for more intimate settings, such as confessions of infidelity, were suddenly broadcast openly into the living rooms of an estranged audience. These daytime talk shows offered a window into a world that was both familiar (real) and bizarre (dramatized), complete with an authoritative host at the helm. Acutely aware of the cultural and sociological significance of these wildly popular performances, Davis considers the art establishment within this context. The artist's renderings of video stills from tapings of *The Jerry Springer Show* and *Maury Povich* delineate an art/life cross-over, the spectacular shows standing in for Davis' own similarly constructed environment, complete with a stage, celebrity branding and spotlighting.

The action depicted in these works is often violent and humorous, serving to stress the absurd characteristics of the spectacle. *You Are* is beautifully composed, drenched in red and dotted with glaring spotlights above the stage. It is also confrontational, with swinging limbs and deliberate gaze reversals, such as the text "You" looking back at the viewer in the foreground of the screen. Davis' paintings are engaging, calculated and witty, oscillating between a display of erudite painterly skill and the exposure of its irrelevance.