

# MODERN PAINTERS



## NEW YORK

### RICHARD HUGHES

Anton Kern Gallery, May 20-July 3

Stare long enough and a message emerges from the debris of *Jimmy Jimmy* (all works 2010), the front-gallery centerpiece of Richard Hughes' second solo show at Anton Kern Gallery. *Jimmy Jimmy* is a razed home where only the foundation remains. Six letters, one in each room, formed by stains on the floor or rips in the carpet, spell out THE END.

This end is a beginning, the moment when seemingly haphazard junk crosses the threshold into carefully molded artifice, a simulacrum cast in resin, a meticulous reenactment of decay. Nothing is what it seems. The dirty shoes of *Dead Flies* hanging over the telephone wires that traverse the gallery ceiling are not the soiled castaways they mimic. Hughes molds them in polyurethane resin, stitches the canvas, paints the reddish dirt. The same is true of two large lampposts that are not pulled from the street but made of fiberglass and resin and covered with an iron powder that oxidizes into a coating of rust.

Why go to all this trouble to duplicate the type of post-industrial squalor most cities would eradicate if they could? For Hughes there is a personal element, a remembrance of his native Birmingham, the skater kids finding empty lots to claim; groups of people, sometimes gangs, demarcating territory. Hughes reminds us that turf is precious and even the least desirable areas are literally crisscrossed by manmade marks, evidence that someone was there.

The idea of territory and a need to modify external environments to represent something as internal as a personality — collective or individual — continues. *Blue Heaven*, installed along the length of a wall, is the quiet stunner of the exhibition, straddling the lines between absence and presence, minimal materiality and the post-Pop elevation of the everyday. It simulates that ubiquitous blue tack of adolescent poster-hanging. An illegible

Braille, it is composed of 312 unique parts, each about an inch in diameter and cast in bronze.

Like fairytale breadcrumbs, *Blue Heaven* leads the viewer to the back gallery, which contains *Chapel Perilous*. This twelve-part rose window is made of repeating slices of — the same? — teenager's room. The placement in a devoted gallery under a brilliant skylight increases the sense of a chapel, elevating the mundane to the spiritual. The subject matter is almost beside the point — the work achieves its transcendence through symmetry and color. However, back on earth, it connects to the rest of the exhibition as a sanctuary from the grit of the street, a room of one's own.