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## “Freedom Culture” at The Journal Gallery

by Katelynn Mills

*Freedom Culture*, curated by Graham Collins, at The Journal Gallery

July 1 to August 8, 2015  
106 N 1st Street (at Berry Street)  
Brooklyn, 718 218 7148



Installation view, “Freedom Culture,” 2015, at The Journal Gallery. Courtesy of the gallery. -

It may be true that God is dead. We find ourselves in a time and place where we’ve been freed from contextual restraints in our expression. As Friedrich Nietzsche described the nature of morality, rejecting an objective truth in favor of the subjective decision to determine what is good, evil, and everything in between, the god figure, or master, has become obsolete, the power of ateliers is faded, and overarching movements have become unrecognizable. Although the task of creating art may be daunting when facing the abyss of ever-developing ideas and technologies, it is not at all impossible to generate meaning. And that is what “Freedom Culture,” curated by Graham Collins, is about. Featuring the work of nearly 40 artists, this exhibition, held at Williamsburg’s Journal Gallery, ties together an array of styles, media, and ideas, which result in an equivocal yet solid statement about present culture.

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It raises the question of how we navigate the ambiguity of freedom in our decision making process without an objective aesthetic-moral-contextual-etc. compass to guide the way. Collins tackles this issue by blurring the line between many categories: literal and

figurative, painting and sculpture, as well as object and illusion. Brent Holland Baker's text painting, *Untitled* (2015) — with the words "SMALL PARADISE AND BIG BIG HELL" arranged from top to bottom on a textured, alizarin crimson ground — offers an explicit statement with an open-ended meaning encapsulated by a specific aesthetic experience. It is hung next to an Ida Ekblad piece, *Not Titled* (2015), in which collaged drawings allude to an abstract world where plasticity and flatness interact with each other. In another room, Elizabeth Murray's playful, colorful shaped-canvas painting, *Truth, Justice, and Comics #1* (1990), finds a foil in Elizabeth Jaeger's handsome and serious sculptures made of steel, ceramic, maple, and granite.



The seemingly incongruous set of ideas present in this grouping speaks to the nature of finding meaning. Without over-determined meanings, the individual is solely responsible for her own experience and interpretation of the work at hand. Oftentimes, the process of coming to a decision isn't so simple as landing on one side of a dichotomy, making freedom a little frustrating or even frighteningly unknown. Collins doesn't just want you to wonder if whether Baker's piece is a painting or mere text; by placing it next Ekblad's collage, in a room

separated from Murray and Jaeger's work, we see that freedom is a subjective, metastatic interpretation.

There is no formula, but somehow every work in the show communicates with the space as a whole, while maintaining its autonomy. Inadvertently, this addresses the cultural obsession with individuality and the pervasive need to assert one's uniqueness. We do all sorts of things to maintain such distinction: hair dye, brand-name fashions, customized sneakers and phones. The collection of unique entities in this show can be read as a metaphor for the variety show we participate in every day. Simply choosing to assert ourselves is what makes life unique and meaningful.

Collins has created a matrix of two-dimensional work and sculpture for the viewer to navigate on their own terms. The entire gallery is activated so that one cannot consume any single piece without sensing another in the periphery. A stark conceptual piece living in the front of the gallery, *Oyster Split (pets and cops)* (2015), by Andy Meerow, consists of the words "pets" and "cops" printed, respectively, on two white canvases. Its austere presence pushes the viewer to the mysterious photographs — containing ephemeral, in some cases dark imagery, Such as Sam Moyer's *Willie III*, (2009) which portrays an obscured figure bathed in complete darkness — hanging in the back room, before being pulled back into the center of the gallery where most of the action is. A viewer can go from thinking about politics, to aesthetics, to philosophy, to what was for lunch as she wanders among the work. Like an ant, the viewer's physical and mental path resembles the show's five untitled drawings by David Adamo, which look like they were made by following the path of a tiny insect, becoming nests of indecipherable text.

In this space we sense our small, unique presence in an endless network of happenings. Though our freedom to go one way or another may be arbitrary, the way we communicate with each other in the process can be as meaningful as we make it.



