

# WHITEHOT MAGAZINE™

Hiroyuki Hamada / Christopher Saunders at Roger Williams University

by *Brian Miller*  
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*Hiroyuki Hamada, #53, 2005-2008, Enamel, oil, plaster, tar and wax 14 1/2 x 38 inches Christopher Saunders, Field 6, 2009, Oil on primed paper, 30 x 22 inches Christopher Saunders, Field 3, 2008, Oil on primed paper, 30 x 22 inches*

Hiroyuki Hamada / Christopher Saunders  
Art & Architecture Gallery  
Roger Williams University  
Bristol, Rhode Island

On first entering the conspicuously untitled exhibit of works by Hiroyuki Hamada and Christopher Saunders, I was immediately struck by the sensation of walking around a battlefield, well after the fighting had ended. Sculptures suggested pieces of war machines, their surfaces scared and dented with the patina of combat. The paintings on the wall provided the atmospherics, the smoke, the clouds, and the menacing sky. This aesthetic was fueled by the unusual pairing of these two artists in a sort of artistic synergistic effect- I don't think I would have felt this from either artist alone.

On the surface these artists have very little in common to suggest a pairing. This is of course one of the great limitations of the two person show, the need to ask for a comparison. Whether it is two artists working in a similar style, or perhaps an essay on influence, a pairing of a younger and an older artist showing an aesthetic ancestor/descendent relationship. The worst two persons shows simply suggest an inability to commit by the curator. As an occasional curator, I fear nothing so much as the two person

show. Of course, a solo exhibit is just that and requires no explanation and a three person show is really just a group show. But in this case Easthampton based curator Jessica Frost tackles these limitations headlong, creating an experience that for this viewer, goes way beyond the usual gallery experience. Frost is cagey on this. Though I did not push the issue, I could not get her to confirm or deny any similar interpretations to my own. As a curator she feels that any attempted definition of content is best left to the observer.



*Installation View.*

But let me return to the post combat allusions in the imagery evoked not by the artists images specifically, but by the pairing. Each artist's piece created a context for viewing the other's work. Easthampton based Hiroyuki Hamada creates beautifully crafted sculptures that are reminiscent of parts of missiles or warplanes. Though their surfaces are paint, wax, and tar they are eerily similar to the painted panels of light gauge aluminum, used to skin an aircraft. Through the production process, dents and gouges occasionally appear and Hamada goes to great length to replicate them when they do not. The surfaces evoke, utility, age, resiliency, and even a certain amount of technological complexity.

Three sculptures in particular, the equivocally named #'s 45, 53, and 54 are all reminiscent of the forms of the nose cones of undetonated warheads. Hamada avoids discussing this type of reading of his work. As an artist he tries to ignore outside references, preferring instead for his work to come from a truly interior space. His artwork is a product of the mind, unburdened by the need to think in real world images. Perhaps this way of working could be associated with the mathematical concept of imaginary numbers? Or perhaps it is much more like the formal concerns one associates with music. Hamada does not seem to mind these representational interpretations of his work, he simply does not see artistic source material as needing any real world referent. Of course once it is out in the real world and out of his studio, all bets are off.



Christopher Saunders, *WhiteNoise no. 2*, 2008, Oil on linen, 24 x 18 inches, Hiroyuki Hamada, #38, 2000-2002, Enamel, plaster and tar, 12 1/2 x 27 inches, Christopher Saunders, *WhiteNoise no. 1*, 2008, Oil on linen, 24 x 18 inches.

By contrast New York artist Christopher Saunders thoroughly embraces the idea of influence. Obvious sources for inspiration include Mark Rothko and Hiroshi Sugimoto. Less obvious sources include Don DeLillo's fiction and Edmund Burke's writings on the sublime. His vertical images follow Rothko's compositional devices rather than the traditional landscape horizontal format. They refuse to commit to either representation or abstraction appearing to be alternately images of skies, clouds, or smoke, or simply color fields of dark earth tones. Some of his titles, *Field 6*, *Field 3* or *Untitled (Flood Field)*, play with this- literal field or color field painting? I would argue both. Hasn't color field abstraction frequently been associated on some level with the aesthetics of atmospheric phenomena? One thinks of Turner, Monet, or Rothko. But Saunders really breaks from the bunch by adding the carbon black of diesel soot, the acid yellow of contaminated air, and the ochre of skies over a ruined landscape. The effect is a hesitant beauty- hesitant only because it feels so damaged. Saunders' titles are also notable in their cautiously leading the viewer to a certain point of view. Several of the images use the word "field" in the title. The rest are variations on *WhiteNoise*, suggesting an allusion to DeLillo's mysterious airborne toxic event.

Finally it is worth mentioning another perspective on this show. As I was leaving the Art & Architecture building after sunset, I was treated to a stunning sight of the gallery from outside through the large glass windows. The gallery was brightly illuminated, much more so than the walkways outside the building. The sculptural elements and the paintings seemed to glow with life, much like this month's view of the moon, coming closer to the earth than it has in many years. This breathtaking effect was a perfect way to see the exhibit for the last time.