

# THE NEW YORKER

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**David Hammons**

This concise retrospective—a sampler, really—is a big deal, as Hammons shows generally are. Now seventy-two, the artist has, by choice, exhibited rarely during the five decades of his now-you-see-him, mostly-you-don't career. Comedy and spleen seesaw in his art. "In the Hood" (1993) is in fact the hood of a black hoodie, hanging agape, high up on a white wall of the gallery. It's rivetingly clever, but may strike some as menacing. "Traveling" (2002), a beautifully atmospheric grisaille, nearly ten feet tall, was made by repeatedly bouncing a basketball soiled with "Harlem earth" onto paper. The themes of other works stray from race to class. Purple paint is slathered across the back of a gorgeous fox-fur coat, while two apparently lovely abstractions painted by Hammons are largely concealed by tattered plastic fabrics, reminiscent of homeless encampments. The show has an exquisite soundtrack of traditional Japanese court music, played on koto and bamboo flute. (Hammons is enamored of Japan and travels there often.) In 2002, he fashioned a faux Zen garden on a flatbed truck and drove it around Yamaguchi. "A Movable Object / A Japanese Garden" (2012) rings a change on that idea with ragged chunks of asphalt heaped on a swatch of lovely blue fabric, and mounted on a wheeled platform. Beautifying asphalt would seem to be no cinch, but the naked quiddity of the stuff, after a third or fourth look, turns cherishable. It's typical of works by Hammons to repel at first glance and weave a spell on successive viewings. *Through May 27. (Mnuchin, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020.)*