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## David Hammons Makes a Hood Stand for a Race – and Racism

Blake Gopnik, Wednesday, April 27, 2016



David Hammons, *In the Hood* (1993). Courtesy of Mnuchin Gallery, New York.  
Property of a private collection. © David Hammons.

**THE DAILY PIC (#1537):** Concision is the word I'd use to describe the best work of David Hammons. Although he's often addressing the terrible complexities that come with being black in America, he does it with an incredible economy of means.

In this 1993 piece titled *In the Hood*, from his show at Mnuchin Gallery in New York, all Hammons has done is nail the hood from a sweatshirt up on the wall, and let it stand for what it's like to be young and black and male. It's just a scrap of industrial cloth, but hanging it on high evokes lynchings and maybe even Christ. The crude severing of hood from hoodie – as calculated a move as any brushstroke by Titian – evokes a body torn limb from limb. (Another calculated move: Hammons has inserted a wire in the hood to open a space for an absent head.)

The hood itself becomes a metonym for all the black bodies in this country – or maybe it stands for how we, as a society, are willing to condense all those very different bodies and souls into a single image of them. That's what's called racism. It's an act of metonymy. Who'd have thought a trope from classical rhetoric would help us get at the problem?