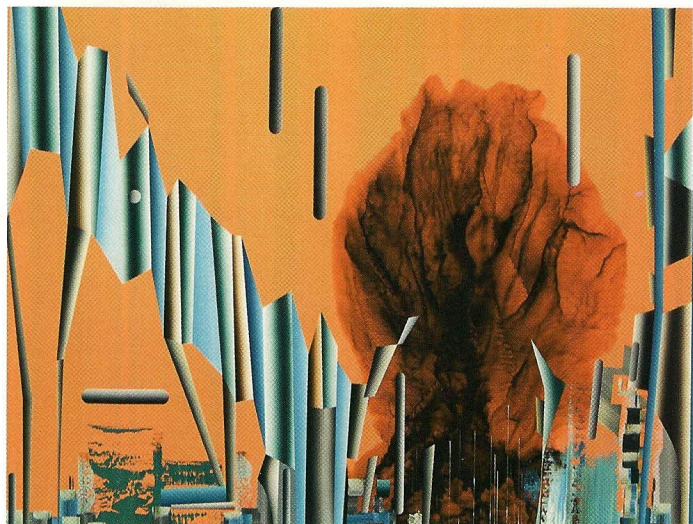
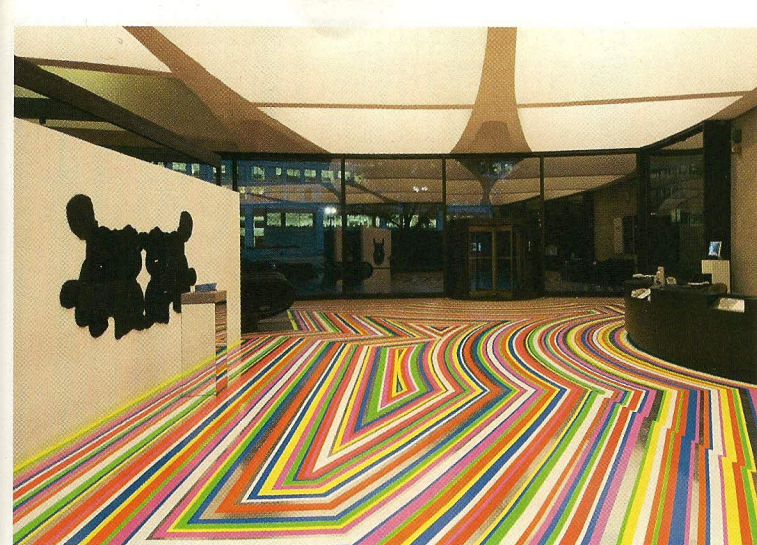


JIM LAMBIE

WASHINGTON

The impressive ring of concrete and granite housing the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum has always presented a certain paradox. Though it successfully extends the language of modern sculpture into architecture, the Gordon Bunshaft 1970s structure bears little relationship to the institution's collection. Not only does the building's monumental scale overshadow the sculptures skirting its base, but its curving walls also challenge the rectilinear format of most paintings and photographs. Fortunately, the institution's mandate transcends its collection and, seeking to present the broadest range of determining contemporary practices, the museum's *Directions* series turns such discrepancies into exciting opportunities for artistic projects. Well aware of the building's unique characteristics, Associate Curator Anne Ellegood invited Scottish artist Jim Lambie to transform the Hirshhorn's humdrum lobby [May 13—October 2, 2006].

Hidden from the outside by darkly tinted glass, Lambie's blast of intense colored lines initially disorients visitors as they enter the building. Seeing others in the lobby, they are encouraged to move forward, but not without first analyzing the surface on which they must tread. Examination of the lobby's floor reveals a deceptively simple, although labor intensive, technique. The application of vinyl tape begins along the edge of every barrier in the place. Stripe follows stripe until stripes collide, creating spatial illusions—the floor before a revolving door seems to dip down—and various geometric and architectonic forms. The fluorescent colors, accentuated by lines of chrome, imply a fondness for psychedelic album cover designs. Together, the work's jazzy title, *Zobop*, and the variations in tape width suggest musical rhythms emanating from the floor's outer edges, and from its encounters with the base of the information desk, the escalators, and the gift shop's inner and exterior walls. Lambie, who is also a musician, makes additional musical references in the sculptural works that accompany the floor piece. The wall mounted *Atomic Dog*, 2006, recycles the title of a George Clinton



ADAM ROSS
WASHINGTON

song about innate tendencies. Black T-shirts stretch over wood to make up an irregular Rorschach combining the silhouettes of Jimi Hendrix, Billie Holiday, Kurt Cobain, and Miles Davis. Though Lambie described his floor as the bass and drums to the sculptures' guitar and vocal in a 2005 interview linked to his Turner Prize nomination, it is his intuitive ability to use materials in interesting and unexpected ways that makes this exhibition such a success.

Consider the sculpture *Medicine Head*, 2006, standing before *Atomic Dog*. Here, a mirrored, square column capped by a block of concrete supports only a pale blue shirt collar. At the opposite end of the lobby stands *Kestrel (Deep Sleep)*, 2006, an oversized ceramic ornament coated in glossy black paint. Disrupting its surface and echoing the colors of the floor are paint drips that run downward from its head. This disruption continues onto the floor where pools of black and color spray paint circumscribe its base. Suspended by old leather belts from a motor fastened to the ceiling, *Where Love Lives*, 2006, an aluminum eyelash covered in blue glitter, rotates up in the air like a store display.

Lambie's deftness at exploring inverse relationships and reflection unifies this disparate collection of objects with the floor and the space. If the floor can be interpreted as a giant painting, it is *Kestrel (Deep Sleep)* that literally demonstrates the characteristics of paint. Likewise, mirroring prevails in the absence suggested by *Medicine Head* and the Rorschach of deceased singers and musicians, in addition to the reflectivity yielded by the use of glitter, gloss, glass, and chrome tape. Lambie's stripes also reappear in the windows, thus extending the installation. As transparent overlays, their reflections zigzag across the exterior plaza, enlivening its bare, grey surfaces, and providing a dramatic contrast with the circular reflecting pool. The installation initiates a conversation with its site, turning a commonly overlooked setting into an extremely fascinating place.

—John Gayer

Like scenes from a futuristic epic, Adam Ross' paintings resonate with the dread of dead-end utopianism haunting speculative fiction [Numark Gallery; April 21—May 27, 2006]. But the spaces depicted in this small survey are eerily familiar. Recalling the ruins of the World Trade Towers, these oil, alkyd, and acrylic works on canvas may be suggesting that we need no escape to the future to face the wreckage of technological dreams.

It is easy to see how the Los Angeles artist earned his tag as a sci-fi painter. Consider *Untitled*, 2004, a small painting in the gallery's reception area. Dark geometric forms float over a warm orange and red background in a work that, composed with the visual economy of a 1950s sci-fi book cover, reads like a safe outpost in an alien world. Moving past the fantasy, the play between figure and ground reveals itself as just one example of the duality at the heart of Ross' art.

The main gallery's larger paintings push the tension between architectural figure and expressive ground into much more ambitious territory—as metaphysical as an encounter with time and being, perhaps. In *Untitled*, 2006, precariously balanced structures as spindly as Tinker Toys threaten to collapse into dark masses of smoky grey paint. I know I'm not the first viewer reminded of post-September 11 Manhattan by this and the three other large canvases.

Of course, we have seen such figure-ground interplay before. Imagine Fra Angelico's pillars, sculpted columns marking off a sacred space, now projected into the future where images of sin replace Mary and the angels. Clearly, Ross toys with the iconography of architecture as a site for encounters with Being. Instead of framing a site of hope and salvation, the spindly columns become police barriers denying us access to the scene of the crime.

Ross relishes dualities—order/chaos, geometric/organic. As a painter, he provocatively exploits paint's reflective and absorptive qualities. For one thing, he uses acrylics to make hard-edged, fountain-filled volumes that project light back into the room like graphic objects

on a computer screen. By contrast, dark, murky grounds built from layers of oil allow the canvas to seep through like a buried, internal light source. Roiling dark clouds recede, drawing the eye into the illusion of deep, primordial spaces.

By offsetting reflective and absorptive approaches, Ross creates a dramatic, symbolic push-pull in the space of the painting. He playfully calls-forth a jittery futurity and then throws it into chaos.

If the larger paintings suggest grand narratives, three medium-sized works are like freeze-frames of curious intuition. Whereas the larger works wrap around or corral in dark overwhelming masses, smaller ones are more intimate. Foreground and background often merge. In *Untitled*, 2006, the accordion-ribbed bands invoke geometry cheerfully dancing over the void.

Curiously, in the smaller works, grey lozenges hover over architectural forms, suggesting yet a third layer of signification. Might they be human stand-ins or markers for the viewer's attention? Do these detached observers mirror our own uncertain place in these strange landscapes?

Ultimately, Ross demonstrates the conservative drive of his craft, its power to absorb and adapt graphic iconography in order to think in paint. Here, he has incorporated computer graphics as a sly critique of technology. This may be why human figures are absent from Ross' paintings. People are not necessary because the myth of technological progress is flawed enough without them.

—George Howell

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Jim Lambie**, view of *Directions—Jim Lambie* at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (photo: Chris Smith; courtesy of the artist and the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington); **Adam Ross**, *Untitled*, 2006, oil, alkyd, and acrylic on canvas, 36 x 48 inches (courtesy of the artist and Numark Gallery, Washington)