

COVINGTON JORDAN: FABLE

GEBERT CONTEMPORARY
558 CANYON ROAD, SANTA FE

THERE IS NO TWOSOME MORE FUNEREAL THAN A CROSS

and a bouquet of flowers, the compulsive use of which makes Covington Jordan's second show at Gebert Contemporary, *Fable*, feel like an occasion for mourning. There are fifteen paintings laden with burlap, tar, and paint, and if a work doesn't have a floral centerpiece it has a quickly rendered cross. More often than not, the two are on the same canvas, and Jordan employs them over and over again with variations in size, color, and medium. He shifts his materials just enough for variety but not enough to avoid insistence. There is obviously something personally fertile here, and for the viewer the work is tough but seductive. Despite Jordan's longstanding integral role at Gebert Contemporary, he is an emerging, self-taught artist whose heavy gravitas is fairly audacious.

Remember Me is a seven-and-a-half-by-five-foot canvas with a centered white scrawl that says, REMEMBER ME. The surface is dark and oily, with a black sheen that looks like a noxious liquid. The earthy browns soak into the burlap edges, and elsewhere the cloth is left bare and dry with a roughness rarely reserved for paintings. Centered on the burlap is a white cross that's not necessarily Christian or even religious, but its context suggests myth of some sort; it's rendered on a murky background with an ethereal white line just below the disembodied cursive memo REMEMBER ME. Above this is a bouquet of flowers that hovers at an angle, like they would on a tombstone. On a grave, flowers are a gesture of remembrance, but on Jordan's painting they are a bouquet of black tar masked by colorful paint—a nearly malicious sign of affection. Their sculptural bulges are smeared onto the rough surface and dolloped with a splash of orange that shines like embers in charred debris. Cut flowers may die fast, but this vanitas make us wonder if there was ever anything to fade. Jordan's request for remembrance is presumptive, especially considering his pessimism. *Remember Me* is a woeful plea from a melancholic artist, a universal familial request, and even a deific demand that threatens to suffocate with burlap and tar.

This Night Will Break Your Heart

has similarly wrenching text written across the entire canvas in huge, white capital letters. THIS NIGHT WILL BREAK YOUR HEART THIS NIGHT WILL BREAK YOU reads from edge to edge with some words broken midway and wrapping below. The text looks spray-painted by a forceful hand and dominates the entire background, if not the whole painting. Competing for attention is a large bouquet of flowers that sits upright and obscures several words. Again, lumps of tar shoot upward and swell from the surface like cinders. A few oranges pop, but otherwise the flower arrangement is dark and heavy, secured by a cross at the base that looks like a ribbon holding the stems together. If destruction and death were ever an opportunity for rebirth, Jordan's paintings give no such hope. His one-liner is frustratingly diaristic and torments with ambiguity: what about this night will break me and does a broken heart precipitate complete ruin? One only assumes the answer is yes.

Unforgiven reads ONLY GOD FORGIVES over and over again until, at the bottom, the word "forgives" becomes "unforgiven," as if to say that no, God does not forgive, and you (or the collective we) are not forgiven. To make the painting graver, a figure emerges from the white and beige crusted surface that covers the words: a Christ-like martyr with outstretched arms dripping in white pigment. He is metaphorically nailed to the canvas with a rosary of stenciled pink roses arching at his feet. *Follow Me* is a found painting of mother and child that Jordan repainted. Once a pious religious portrait, it is now a bubbling green shadow that looks like acid corrosion. Circling around this dark effigy are Jordan's pink-stenciled flowers and, in place of a halo, Jordan wrote TIME TO KILL. The words may as well be written in blood, as their burnt-red pigment barely smudges the lines needed to convey such a timely pronouncement.

With references to graffiti, Neo-Expressionism, and particularly the dense emotive surfaces of Anselm Kiefer, Jordan's show tells a story of misanthropic fables. The word "fable"

elicits cautionary tales as much as mythic adventures, and an acid-green, bubbling Virgin Mary may as well be a burning flag. Despite Jordan's audaciousness and ultimately dark egocentricity, his paintings are enticingly enigmatic. They are large, eventful canvases with extremely tactile surfaces, minimal color, and moody, provocative subject matter. They tell of solipsism flooded by idolatry, death, and decay. If that's not timely and deliciously tragic, I don't know what is.

—HANNAH HOEL

Top: Covington Jordan, *Remember Me*, mixed media on canvas, 80" x 56", 2013



Covington Jordan, *This Night Will Break Your Heart*, mixed media on canvas, 80" x 50", 2013