



**Raymond Saunders, *Untitled*, 2000–10**, mixed media on panel, 58 5/8 x 21 5/8".

NEW YORK

## Raymond Saunders

ANDREW KREPS GALLERY

22 Cortland Alley

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Perhaps universally, blackboards conjure images of a teacher's neat handwriting, lines of arithmetic, or other mundane memories of rote instruction. But touched by Raymond Saunders's wayward, hermetic mark-making, these objects are transfigured into a dazzling realm of play and expression. At Andrew Kreps Gallery, sixteen mostly untitled paintings—several of which feature a blackboard as a substrate—hang in the artist's first New York solo show in more than twenty years. But these dark surfaces are not merely backgrounds: They

hum with myriad textures and rhythms and goad the pictures into breaking out of the confines of their own two-dimensionality.

The pieces here teeter between painting and assemblage: Splashes of paint ooze with bright color and collide with bricolaged found materials that, in previous writings about Saunders's art, have solicited rather easy comparisons to the work of Robert Rauschenberg. But what differentiates these images from the neo-Dadaist's is Sanders's numinous use of chalk: Dancing across his surfaces, the material becomes a metonym for the essence of line, which traces out both abstract and figurative forms. Inscrutable but electric scrawls that whiz with seeming abandon become plants, fruits, and other motifs of the still-life tradition. These patterns appear randomly throughout the artist's imagery with playful sweetness.

Yet a haunting sense of uncertainty lurks in Saunders's compositions, threatening any promise of solidity. Beneath all the layers of material is the subdued but unmistakable presence of erased chalk marks—palimpsests that suffuse the blackboards with the hazy, spectral shadow of history. These smears fall in and out of stability and instability; at any moment the traces could disintegrate into the abyss of their own ephemerality. Confronting them, I couldn't help but feel that the artist's phantomlike pictures might actually be memento mori.

—Zoë Hopkins