

ALEXANDRE

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Art: Vincent Smith's Expressive Style

By JOHN CANADAY

In addition to the usual difficulties that beset all artists, black artists have been subjected for several years now to a form of Uncle Tomism that may be unconsciously practiced by art critics and collectors but is just as degrading as if it were a matter of policy. Black artists have too often been thought of as blacks first and artists second, members of a special group not required to meet the technical standards that apply elsewhere. It amounts to a kind of plantation estheticism that must be extremely embarrassing to those black artists who recognize that to grant such a handicap is essentially condescending and to accept it, humiliating. A black artist whose lackness is the spiritual wellspring of his art is not a good artist simply for that reason. Like any other kind of artist, he has to be able to say whatever he has to say in terms that demand no concessions. Vincent Smith, whose one-man exhibition at the Larcada Gallery, 23 East 7th Street, has been extended through April 28, is such a painter, and his exhibition is the further effect of suggesting that there may be, at last, such a thing as a black school, a school of black painting whose members share points of view and a technical vocabulary that identify them with one another without holding any individual to a group formula. In his combinations of painting and collage, with liberal use of dress fabrics, Mr. Smith's manner is closely allied to that of Romare

Bearden, although the connection is less apparent in Mr. Bearden's current wildly successful exhibition at Cordier & Ekstrom than it has been in the past. Mr. Smith also shares, in one painting or another, some of the gentleness of Jacob Lawrence and the aggressive indignation of Benny Andrews. If these four artists—Smith, Bearden, Lawrence, and Andrews—held a group exhibition, both their unity and their individuality would be as apparent as their blackness would be triumphant.

There are other names that could stand up in this company, but at the moment I might be tempted to put Mr. Smith at the top of the list. He is not as polished or as assured an artist as Mr. Bearden, but the very fact that his art is still in a state of growth and flux is part of its expressive power.

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