



### CHICAGO

#### Paul Anthony Smith: "Mangos and Crab" at Carrie Secrist Gallery

Jamaican-born, Brooklyn-based artist Paul Anthony Smith has become known for a technique he calls "picotage," in which he uses a sharp ceramicist's tool to pick and tear at the surface of a photograph, pulling up the white paper from beneath the glossy surface. From a distance, the effect of this process appears as if glitter or flocking has been strategically adhered to the photo's surface, but up close, this laborious action is not additive, but delicately destructive. Equally as significant as how this effect is administered, is onto what type of imagery it is applied. Each of these intricately torn photographs is a portrait of an average Jamaican citizen, their faces carefully disguised by flecks of picked paper. Immediately imparted in a series of untitled picotage portraits are undertones of the history of racism; the sitters' identities and individualism are dissolved through the repetitive picking pattern, and their dark skin is overtaken with the unnatural white of the paper. This manipulation of complexions also nods to the controversial trend of skin bleaching, popular among many Jamaicans. However, countering these troubling associations are positive ones as well. Smith cites the picotage process as a reference to coming-of-age tattooing and scarification traditions, while several of the portraits feature picotage patterning that highlights eye sockets and mouths—subtle, formal nods to traditional Jamaican tribal masks. In these works, Smith's masking alternates deftly between the suppression and the power inherent in anonymity.

Where the picotage works are highly detailed, Smith's oil on canvas works in this exhibition are simple and graphic. In his paintings, Smith's interest in depicting average Jamaicans takes the form of airport workers. In several small paintings that share the title *44.2258° N, 76.5967° W*, Smith isolates the reflective, striped vests worn by those who work on the runways. These small works are flat and formal, supplementary to *004 TARMAC*, the most powerful piece in the exhibition. Here, four employees are casually gathered beneath the shadow of an airplane wing, and unlike the sitters of the picotage photographs, viewers can see the unique features of this painting's subjects. These figures are depicted from a vantage point slightly above, as if from an airplane window, effectively turning the viewer into a visitor, a tourist, getting only a glimpse of the lives of these working-class citizens. Both in his picotage works and his paintings, Smith is adept at keeping the messages of his identity-based practice open, complex and rich.

—ROBIN DLUZEN

"44.2258° N, 76.5967° W #1"

2014, Paul Anthony Smith

OIL ON CANVAS, 44" x 34"

PHOTO: COURTESY CARRIE SECRIST GALLERY