ALMINE RECH

‘Lineage’

Aug 24 — Dec 5, 2021 | Samek Art Museum, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, US

‘Vaughn Spann: Lineage’ is the first museum exhibition to focus exclusively on the artist’s abstract paintings including examples from his ongoing series of Xs, Rainbows, Dalmatians, and Flags. He refuses to restrict himself to one visual language—abstraction or figuration—and prefers instead to give himself the freedom to flex in either direction, open both at once. Spann often speaks about his refusal to “choose one conversation:” “I wanted to tap into a lineage of making. . . a lineage that represented my heritage not just ethnically but materially.” He is mindful of the interrelatedness of his formal and conceptual concerns and this reciprocal process is one of unifying elements of his practice.

Spann’s work delves into formal, expressionist, and conceptual concerns related to tropes of black identity and aesthetics in art, history, race, politics, and personal and collective memory. The paintings range in size from roughly 20×20 inches to massive multi-panel paintings that stretch to 300 inches wide. These deeply sensual, tactile, and color-packed works use unexpected textured mixed media materials, such as hand-dyed terry cloth, thick granular pigment mixed with paste, sand, and fiber, and dried splotches of latex house paint, often applied by hand, thrown onto canvases from above, or covered with an extended paint roller, squeegee, palette knife, and sometimes even a paint brush. The works can be improvisational and athletically built up into powerful, emotive seemingly volcanic or geological reliefs, while others are pre-planned and more cerebrally organized. Spann’s abstract paintings may be experienced purely on formal terms in relation to the history of abstraction and in relation to an art historical discourse regarding race and representation dating back to early debates around African American art during the Harlem Renaissance, Great Depression, and Black Arts Movement.