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Jamal Cyrus

'Winners Have Yet to Be Announced'

*The Kitchen
512 West 19th Street
Through Saturday*

An artist collaborative eases the pressure of developing new ideas, but it can also be a crutch. As a member of Otabenga Jones & Associates, a Houston group of young African-American artists who base their fictional movements and identities on 1960s radicals, Jamal Cyrus has shown at the Whitney and the Menil Collection. His own voice, as seen in his first New York solo show, is still being developed.

The crux of the show is an untitled video, inspired by Palmer Hayden's Social Realist canvas "The Janitor Who Paints," that takes the form of surveillance footage. It shows a maintenance worker engaged in a performative drawing with his broom and a pile of graphite dust. Mr. Hayden's heroic subject, who works on his art in the off hours as his adoring wife, baby and cat look on, becomes a moodier, more elusive figure in Mr. Cyrus's portrayal. He circles the room, spreading the dust into a galactic swirl and then erasing it with crosswise strokes.

In several seemingly unrelated sculptures, Mr. Cyrus modifies musical instruments. In "New Ghosts," he plasters a drum kit into a gallery wall; in "Conga Bomba," he fashions trumpet brass into an ax blade. "Piece of the Sargasso Sea," another drum kit, is festooned with coral, seaweed, incense sticks and a graphic pattern of black-and-white safety tape. These works owe a lot to David Hammons's sardonic street art and to Jim Lambie's punk-rock assemblages.

A cryptic set of graphite-dust drawings (bearing no resemblance to the janitor's) round out the show. They seem to reproduce blacked-out documents, with an ironic-poetic twist: the streaky graphite makes precision and control impossible.

Mr. Cyrus needs to clarify his intentions and distance himself from his idols (Mr. Hammons in particular). Indulging his material attraction to graphite dust, in the drawings and video, is a start.

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