MATH BASS
MARK BRADFORD
ELIJAH BURGHER
TOM BURR
MARK JOSHUA EPSTEIN
EDIE FAKE
FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES
HARMONY HAMMOND
NICHOLAS HLOBO
JOHN PAUL MORABITO
CARRIE MOYER
SHEILA PEPE
PREM SAHIB
JONATHAN VANDYKE
JADE YUMANG

Pages 2–3
Mark Joshua Epstein
Silks up your sleeve (detail),
2019
cat. 8

queer abstraction

JARED LEDESMA
WITH AN ESSAY BY DAVID J. GETSY

DES MOINES ART CENTER

Foreword and Acknowledgments

Jeff Fleming, Director, Des Moines Art Center

This ground-breaking project is the first major museum exhibition in the United States to focus solely on the concept of queer abstraction, and it is the first show in the Des Moines Art Center's history to concentrate exclusively on queer subject matter. Artists in the LGBTQ community first embraced abstraction during the period of Modernism and continue today to communicate previously unauthorized desires and identities through an accepted form of visual language. Now, through this exhibition, their efforts can be brought forward, noted, and explored. The Art Center is honored to present the following body of work and, in turn, place its contributions within the cultural record.

A project of this depth takes extraordinary efforts from an array of individuals. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the staff of the Des Moines Art Center as well as its board of trustees for their support in presenting this work. The exhibition was conceived and organized by Assistant Curator Jared Ledesma. Chief Preparator Jay Ewart and his team, and Chief Registrar Mickey Ryan and her team facilitated every aspect of the exhibition with great success. Annabel Wimer designed this beautiful catalogue, which includes insightful contributions by Ledesma and scholar David J. Getsy. Terry Ann R. Neff expertly edited each component.

To the numerous individual and institutional lenders to the show, we express our deepest gratitude: the Baltimore Museum of Art, Math Bass, Elijah Burgher, Tom Burr, DC Moore Gallery, Detroit Institute of Arts, Gail English, Everson Museum of Art, Alexander Gray Associates, Harmony Hammond, John Paul Morabito, Sheila Pepe, Prem Sahib, Progressive Art Collection, Southard Reid, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art with a special thanks to Gary Garrels, Sid and Shirley Singer, Susanne Vielmetter and Los Angeles Projects, Jonathan VanDyke, Jade Yumang, and private collections. I would also like to thank the staff at Bortalami Gallery, the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation, Lehmann Maupin, Western Exhibitions, and Hauser & Wirth for their help in securing works for the exhibition. *Queer Abstraction* has received affirmation and financial support in part by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Sotheby's and its Sotheby's Prize program and Faegre Baker Daniels. We are extremely grateful to these organizations for their vital participation in allowing these voices to be heard in a broader context. Lastly, I thank the many participating artists for their courageous declarations, and for sharing them with the world.

Nicholas Hlobo
Phantsi Komngcunube
(detail), 2017
cat. 17

Queer Abstraction, Queer Possibilities: An Introduction

Jared Ledesma, Assistant Curator, Des Moines Art Center

Carrie Moyer's *Jolly Hydra: Unexplainably Juicy* (plate 1) seduces us at first blush. Its candy-colored palette whets our appetite; thrusting, biomorphic shapes crackle with energy. Flat areas of color intersect regions of poured paint, generating the illusion that the picture plane is fluctuating between two- and three-dimensional space. The organic form that extends throughout the work is composed from a pair of matte, tangerine-hued breasts and exuberant rubbery phalluses. Though created from symbols associated with male and female anatomy, the form reads as one subject. Moyer produces this site of slipperiness as a specific, visual strategy enhanced by her fusion of artistic means (flattening the picture plane, hard-edged brushwork, and staining). These multiple levels of allusion lend the work a queer sensibility: it possesses, as David J. Getsy would say, moments of resistance to our instinct to make sense of the image, and moments of capacity that "make room for the otherwise" (see page 71). In this case, at issue is the artist's visualization of gender fluidity.

Moyer's embrace of abstraction as a vehicle to implicitly represent queerness is not without precedent. Since abstraction itself appeared in the early twentieth century, many artists have favored the style to visualize queer difference, as abstract art's opacity allows for the messiness of gender identity and sexuality to be fully explored without recourse to legible imagery.[1]

American modernist Marsden Hartley depicted his love, Karl von Freyburg, constructed of flat planes, symbols, and expressionist marks in his

1. Carrie Moyer
Jolly Hydra: Unexplainably Juicy, 2017
cat. 22

Fig. 1 Marsden Hartley
(American, 1877–1943)
Portrait of a German Officer, 1914
Oil on canvas
68 1/4 × 41 3/8 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949

Fig. 2 Forrest Bess
(American, 1911–1977)
The Hermaphrodite, 1957
Oil on canvas
7 15/16 × 11 3/16 in.
The Menil Collection, Gift of John Wilcox, in memory of Frank Owen Wilson, 1992-06
Photographer: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

Fig. 3 Louise Fishman
(American, born 1939)
ANGRY JILL, 1973
Acrylic on paper
26 × 40 in.
Image courtesy of the artist
© Louise Fishman
Photographer: Brian Buckley

influential painting *Portrait of a German Officer* (figure 1). Texas artist Forrest Bess rendered tense, internal struggles with gender and sexuality in intimate, mid-century paintings whose personal mystical symbols refer to gender-queer identity (figure 2). Louise Fishman has utilized abstraction—a style she referred to as "an appropriate language for me as a queer" because of its contrast to figuration—in her "Angry Paintings" of 1973 (figure 3), to express her rage and desire during the Women's and Gay Liberation Movements of the 1970s.[2] In a conceptual vein, the abstract work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres can be considered a response to right-wing censorship of gay art that culminated at the height of the AIDS crisis. Two rings that hang side-by-side, for instance (figure 4), can be interpreted as a same-sex pair. This reading, however, can easily be missed by those who are looking for more explicit references to queer bodies. Though this art history exists, it has only been within the past decade that queer perspectives in abstraction as a broader trend have received focused attention from curators, art historians, and artists themselves. This stylistic phenomenon goes under the rubric "queer abstraction."

Perhaps previous inattention is due to the fact that unlike many styles, queer abstraction cannot be identified by specific markers. Moyer's *Jolly Hydra*, for example, visually appears to be derivative of Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011) or Henri Matisse (figure 5), so its queer undertones can easily be missed. As Getsy maintains, such resemblance is intentional and strategic. Since the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s, queer visibility has been viewed as a form of pride. In effect, however, this visibility prolongs society's dependence upon recognizable stereotypes that indicate

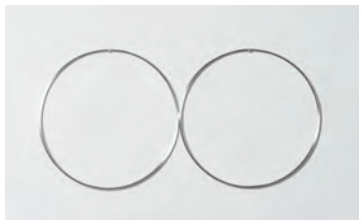


Fig. 4 Felix Gonzalez-Torres
(American, 1957–1996)
"Untitled", 1995
Silver-plated brass
16 1/2 × 33 × 5/16 in.
Edition of 12, 4 APs
Des Moines Art Center Permanent
Collections (see page 80)
© Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Photographer: Rich Sanders, Des Moines

Fig. 5 Henri Matisse
(French, 1869–1954)
The Snail, 1953
Gouache on paper, cut and pasted on
paper mounted on canvas
111 3/4 × 113 in.
Tate, Purchased with assistance from
the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1962
© 2019 Succession H. Matisse / Artists
Rights Society (ARS), New York
Image: © Tate, London 2019

queer difference. It ensures the separation of "other" from the "norm," and heightens vulnerability for queer individuals. The photographs of BDSM sex acts between men by Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–1989) are well-known examples of contemporary overt queer imagery, which was famously censored by the conservative right. In Moyer's case, however, the queer subject matter has been camouflaged in the guise of modernist abstraction, and can easily slip under the radar.

The fifteen contemporary artists represented in this exhibition address aspects of queerness in their work through various modes of inquiry. The exhibition offers a capacious overview of the structures queer abstraction can inhabit. Alternative identities, desires, and communities are explored through the artists' manipulation of materials and spaces in abstract works that frequently defy the categories of painting or sculpture. Underlying the disparate works is a fundamental and defiant commitment to pushing the limits of abstract art's capability. These objects visualize space for the "otherwise." All viewers are invited to leave preconceived perceptions of the world behind, and discover abstraction's queer possibilities.

1 "Queer" is used here as a reference to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, unless noted otherwise. "Queer" was reclaimed in the 1980s as a symbol of resistance for the LGB and T communities, but its use as an umbrella term is not without problems. For the transgender community especially, "queer" has been a point of debate, and many refuse to be included under the label. For an overview of this history, see David J. Getsy, "Introduction: Queer Intolerability and its Attachments," in David J. Getsy, ed., *Queer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), 12–23.

2 Louise Fishman quoted in Holland Cotter, "After Stonewall: 12 Artists Interviewed," *Art in America* 82.6 (June 1994): 60.

THE ARTISTS

JARED LEDESMA

MATH BASS American, born 1981

Fig. 6 Math Bass
(American, born 1981)
Newz!, 2017
Gouache on canvas
84 × 82 in.
Image courtesy of
Tanya Leighton, Berlin

Math Bass began in 2012 to group signifiers from her lexicon into various formations in an ongoing series of paintings titled "Newz!." Painted with gouache on unprimed canvas, the graphically crisp, tightly composed pictures fall between pictorial and abstract. For Bass, information is "like this theater of images," as meaning functions upon the juxtaposition of text or pictures.[1]

In *Newz!* (plate 2), male and female gender symbols are represented within the same, distinct shape that superimposes most of the picture plane. Bass's unique treatment of positive and negative space tricks the viewer's eye into thinking that at one point, the form depicts a rising, bulbous phallus; but if the viewer were to focus on the negative space surrounding it, the form becomes a tunnel, a spatial passageway, or a vagina. The painting's evasion of a singular, fixed meaning is provocative and invites a variety of efforts to decode the composition. This intentional fluidity locates the work's queer positioning. Bass affirms that as her images "begin to come together, they also fall apart."[2]

Repetition is a characteristic of the "Newz!" series, found in the titles of the paintings and in a recycling of images. Bass intends this to be humorous, but it also suggests a queer strategy. Though she reuses symbols in the paintings, she changes their color or slightly alters their shape (see figure 6). As variations, the images resist an "original" form, or definition, thereby helping to achieve a cohesive body of work that represents indeterminacy. They constitute a defiant, queer gesture, aimed at a society that impulsively categorizes gender, sex, sexuality, and identity.

1 Math Bass, "The Body is a Location: Math Bass in Conversation with Mia Locks," interviewed by Mia Locks, December 14, 2015, http://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=6704, accessed February 20, 2019.

2 Math Bass quoted in Hunter Braithwaite, "Icons and Incantations," *Modern Painters* 27.59 (May 2015): 59.

2. Math Bass
Newz!, 2019
cat. 1

MARK BRADFORD American, born 1961

In *Killing the Goodbye* (plate 3), Los Angeles–based artist Mark Bradford uses abstraction to communicate the pain of an ongoing crisis crucial to LGBTQ history. The painting is from a series of works that refer to the artist's time living in New York in the 1980s, and witnessing the devastating effects of AIDS. *Killing the Goodbye* is rooted in the grand tradition—and critique—of mid-twentieth-century Abstract Expressionism. The canvas achieves a sense of vitality and scale found in the works of Jackson Pollock or Clyfford Still, but the raw topography of its surface belies the search for purity in the work by first generation Abstract Expressionists. The texture, depth, and richness of the painting are imbued with Bradford's identity. "I don't think there is such a thing as 'pure' abstraction," he states. "For me, abstract is a conceptual framework that I use to interrogate my surroundings and my relationships to them."[1] In the case of *Killing the Goodbye*, the artist is interrogating a moment from his personal history, as this painting, like many others, comes out of his "separateness as a gay man," and experiences that are unique to this reality.[2]

Despite its monumental scale, *Killing the Goodbye* paradoxically represents a microscopic view of HIV-infected T-cells. Bradford built the work by affixing a thick layer of wet paper to the surface which he then tore, gauged, and sandblasted. These areas of gnawing at the work's skin appear like violent blood-red and pink lacerations. The process also raised particular areas of the painting, creating tabs and modules that the artist refers to as lesions or sarcoma. Combining his manipulation of materials and his excavation technique, Bradford has depicted a body under siege. But in remembering that the work is a visualization of his own moments witnessing the effects of AIDS, it becomes something broader: a representation of a community in distress. Through his distinct physical approach to the work, Bradford evokes the pain of AIDS, and engages abstraction with his history so that form and content become inseparable.

1 Mark Bradford, interviewed by Michael Auping, "Sweat Equity: An Interview with Mark Bradford," in Cathleen Chaffee, Mark Bradford, Michael Auping, and *Clyfford Still, Clyfford Still, Mark Bradford: Shade* (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2016), 68, 70.

2 Ibid., 70.

3. Mark Bradford
Killing the Goodbye, 2015
cat. 2

ELIJAH BURGHER American, born 1978

In many of his drawings and paintings, Elijah Burgher addresses his queer sexuality through abstract pictures that employ the sigil coding system of the English occultist Austin Osman Spare (1886–1956). Spare's method consists of combining letters that spell out a wish or desire, and creating new symbols from the mixture. Referring to the method as an "alphabet of desire," Spare believed that in order for the desire to materialize, the sigils have to be charged. This is accomplished either through meditation, or by adding semen to them during the moment of orgasm. Burgher became interested in sigils because of their relationship to abstract forms and the unique, physical involvement of sexuality. Since 2011, the artist has painted according to his own queer sensibility onto large canvas drop cloths featuring sigils that either partake of or aid in ritual practices. Burgher likens his manipulation of sigils to speak about queer desire to the coded lexicons used by earlier queer artists, such as Marsden Hartley and Forrest Bess (see page 12) and Hilma af Klint (1862–1944). Burgher considers Bess and af Klint the "parents" of queer abstraction.[1]

New Horny Sun Vision, a drop cloth–painting made specifically for this exhibition, takes its title from a concept drawing Burgher produced after relocating from Chicago to Berlin (plate 4). Formally, the drop cloth–painting disorients the art object in a queer fashion: grommets on all four edges disrupt a reading of "top" or "bottom"; similarly, the artist has painted on both sides of the canvas although one side will remain unseen by the viewer. Featured on the ground-facing side—or what the artist calls the "infernal" face of the canvas—is the "horny sun": a solar anal emblem Burgher first invented when working with sigil mysticism. The emblem is rooted in the famous parody of the "solar anus" by Surrealist writer Georges Bataille (1897–1962), which embodies life in its reference to the sun but also death in its reference to the anus as origin of waste. Viewers are allowed to walk and stand on *New Horny Sun Vision*'s sky-facing side, which features sigils and other motifs. Included are curving S-shapes that are queer or "polymorphic" icons for "tails, penises, anal furrows, pubic hairs, tree-branches and snake tongues," says Burgher.[2] In a broader sense, the icons and symbols that refer to the anus cannot be separated from a connection to anal sex, a form of intercourse that is heavily associated with gay men.

1 Elijah Burgher, e-mail correspondence with the author, March 29, 2019.

2 Ibid.

4. Elijah Burgher
Working drawing for
New Horny Sun Vision, 2016
Colored pencil, gouache,
and ink on paper
16 1/2 x 11 3/4 in.
(42 x 29.7 cm)
See cat. 3

INFERNAL SIDE

SKY-FACING SIDE

TOM BURR American, born 1963

Fig. 7 Richard Serra
(American, born 1938)
Titled Arc, 1981
Corten steel
12 x 120 ft.
Image courtesy of
Gagosian Gallery, NY

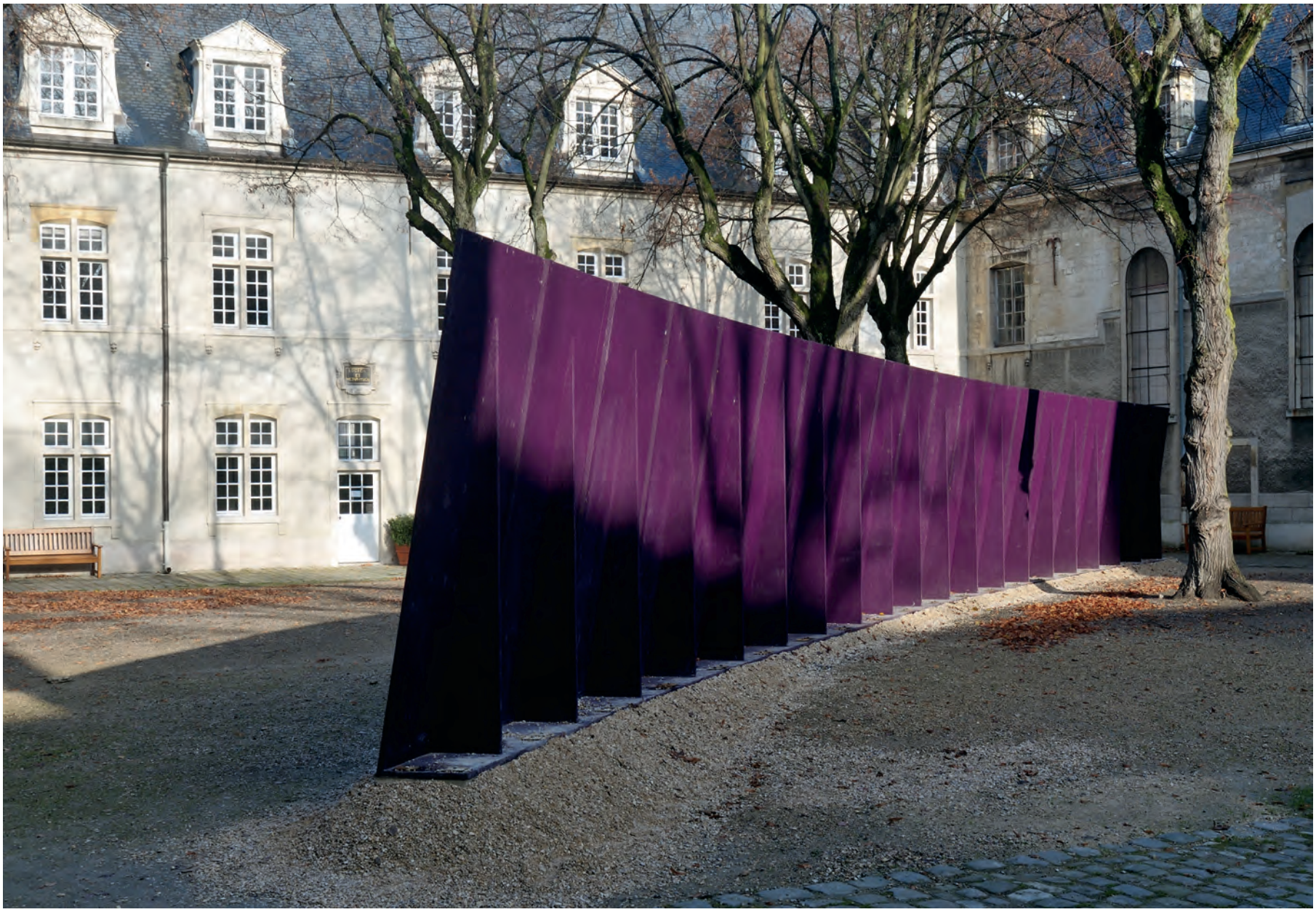
Tom Burr's *Deep Purple* (plate 5) is modeled after *Tilted Arc* (figure 7) by American artist Richard Serra, and is a prime example of when an artwork "queers" abstraction—queer is importantly used here as a verb. Serra's site-specific *Tilted Arc* was installed in Manhattan in 1981 but was eventually deinstalled in 1989 because it was considered a nuisance by the public. Serra's sculpture was an example of Minimal Art's authoritatively masculine aesthetic: it was constructed from Corten steel, it traveled more than a hundred feet, and when it was deinstalled Serra referred to it as "destroyed." With *Deep Purple*, Burr has stripped *Tilted Arc* of its male chauvinist glory and created something quite opposite and over-the-top in its stead. By making *Deep Purple* purposefully smaller in size, Burr ultimately emasculates the original. Moreover, his sculpture is produced from plywood instead of steel, and is covered in a fantastic purple—a color adopted by the queer community in the 1980s at the height of the AIDS crisis as a symbol of pride. Additionally, since *Deep Purple* is composed from panels that are attached together, it can readily be dismantled and shipped for travel, contravening the site-specificity of Serra's installation. For this exhibition, the queering of Serra's sculpture was exponentially heightened by the fabrication of another *Deep Purple*—a second edition—thereby confronting the broader concept of the "original" sculpture that Serra no longer considers an artwork.[1]

Fig. 8 I.M. Pei gallery,
Des Moines Art Center
Photographer: Rich Sanders,
Des Moines

The work's installation at the Des Moines Art Center queers space as well. The Art Center's I. M. Pei building, which opened in 1968, is a textbook example of Brutalist architecture (figure 8). Clean lines, bare materials, and bush-hammered concrete walls complete the structure that is primarily used to showcase large-scale sculpture and paintings. For *Queer Abstraction*, *Deep Purple* has been installed both inside and outside the Pei building, essentially carving its own space. It sashays right through the building's center—bisecting the gallery floor and hitting a glass wall—then continues outside over the reflecting pool. It disregards boundaries, and in so doing, reveals new, queer spaces in the building that were previously invisible.

1 Interestingly, Tom Burr had earlier thought about creating a second edition of *Deep Purple*, and found this exhibition to be the perfect opportunity. The fabrication of the second edition was overseen by Burr, and executed by the Des Moines Art Center's installations team.

5. Tom Burr
Deep Purple, 2000
Wood and acrylic
78 x 984 x 17 in.
(198.1 x 2499.5 x 43.2 cm)
Edition 1 of 2
Collection FRAC
Champagne-Ardenne
See cat. 4



MARK JOSHUA EPSTEIN American, born 1979

Mark Epstein's shaped panels embrace abstract painting yet refuse its traditional presentation. His chaotic designs and distinct patterns all interact with one another, creating a pictorial space of hybridity. Historically, artists like Frank Stella (b. 1936) and Elizabeth Murray (1940–2007) pioneered the shaped canvas to address issues of physicality and bodily presence in the work. Epstein builds off this concept but the panels he crafts include sections that are missing a frame. The idea of "frame interrupted" is integral to the refusal of tradition, as typically a frame functions like a boundary that confines and defines what is presented within. In Epstein's works, however, hybrid worlds are given the option of escaping the limits of the work. The paintings do not sit well within familiar abstraction, but do not work as full-on representation. They are unfixed, resist categorization, and perform queerly. Like a messy drag queen, they are rogue and ignore rules.

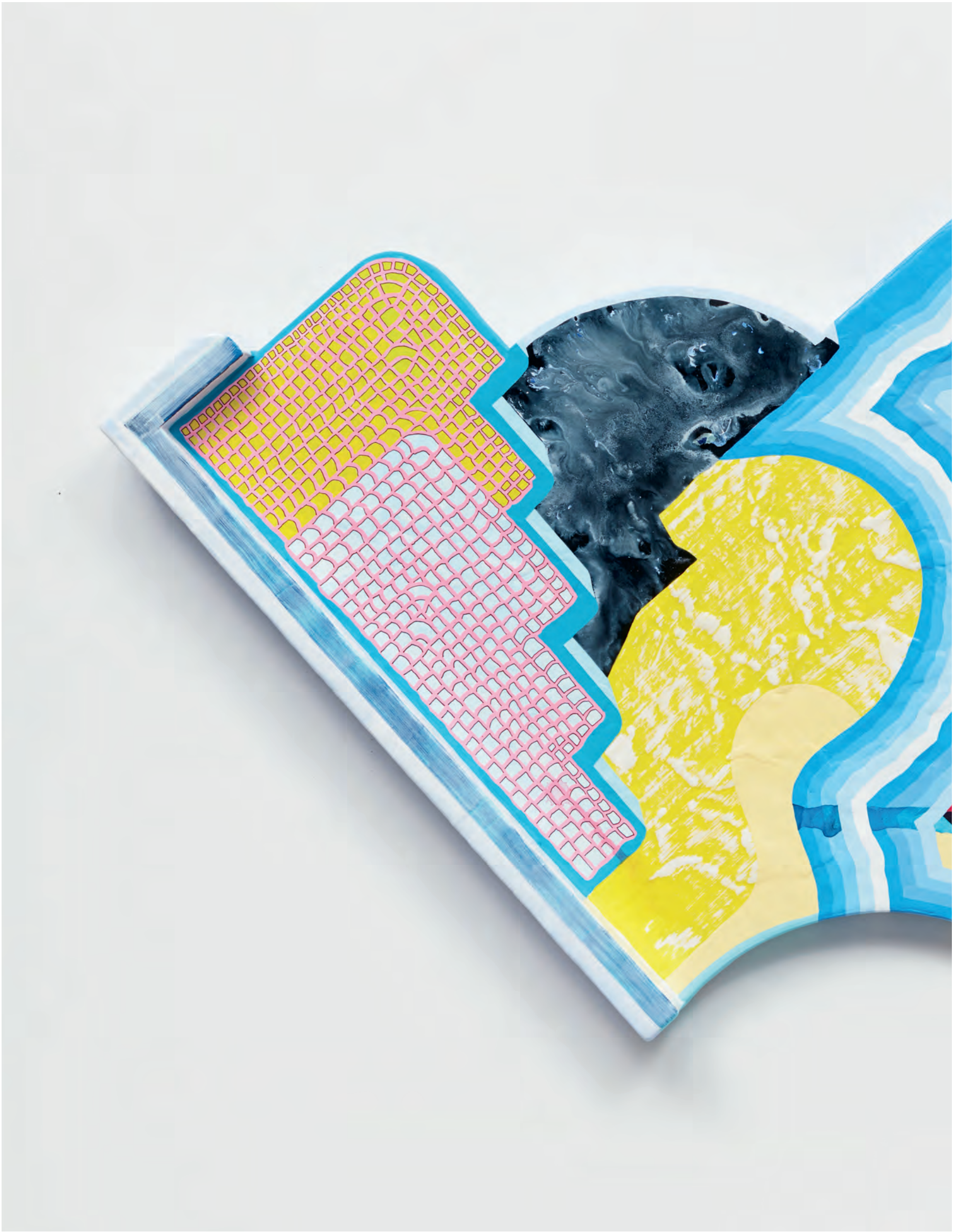
In his titles, Epstein plays with language and deploys phrases to visualize the hybridity and myriad layers his artworks present. *Silks up your sleeve* (plate 7), for example, is formally composed of a panel that is bisected into two quadrants by a rainbow of blues. On the viewer's left, uniform sections fill the picture plane while on the right, vagabond patterns invade one another. Essentially, the work symbolizes conventionally dressed individuals, but up their sleeves is excess or effeminacy that is revealed when and how they please. Though formally *Working lunch* (plate 6) also exemplifies Epstein's exploration of queer space—including a curiously odd appendage that reaches below the rest of the panel—it also indicates his humorous approach to art, as it inquires "What type of lunch do you take?"

In 2016, Epstein participated in a roundtable on queer abstraction where he admitted his work had been criticized by an unnamed curator as "gay abstraction," as opposed to "queer abstraction."[1] That curator saw in his paintings a loud and gaudy extravagance more aligned with gay aesthetics, than a queer aesthetic that is expected to be more liminal and in-between. This distinction feels unfounded, because in Epstein's admittedly loud and gaudy works, gay aesthetics collide with queer structure and material to create a queer visual utopia that exists in an unbridled form.

1 Mark Joshua Epstein quoted in "Queer Abstraction: A Roundtable," *ASAP/Journal* 2.2 (May 2017): 292.

6. Mark Joshua Epstein
Working lunch, 2018
cat. 5

Pages 26–27
7. Mark Joshua Epstein
Silks up your sleeve, 2019
cat. 8



EDIE FAKE American, born 1980

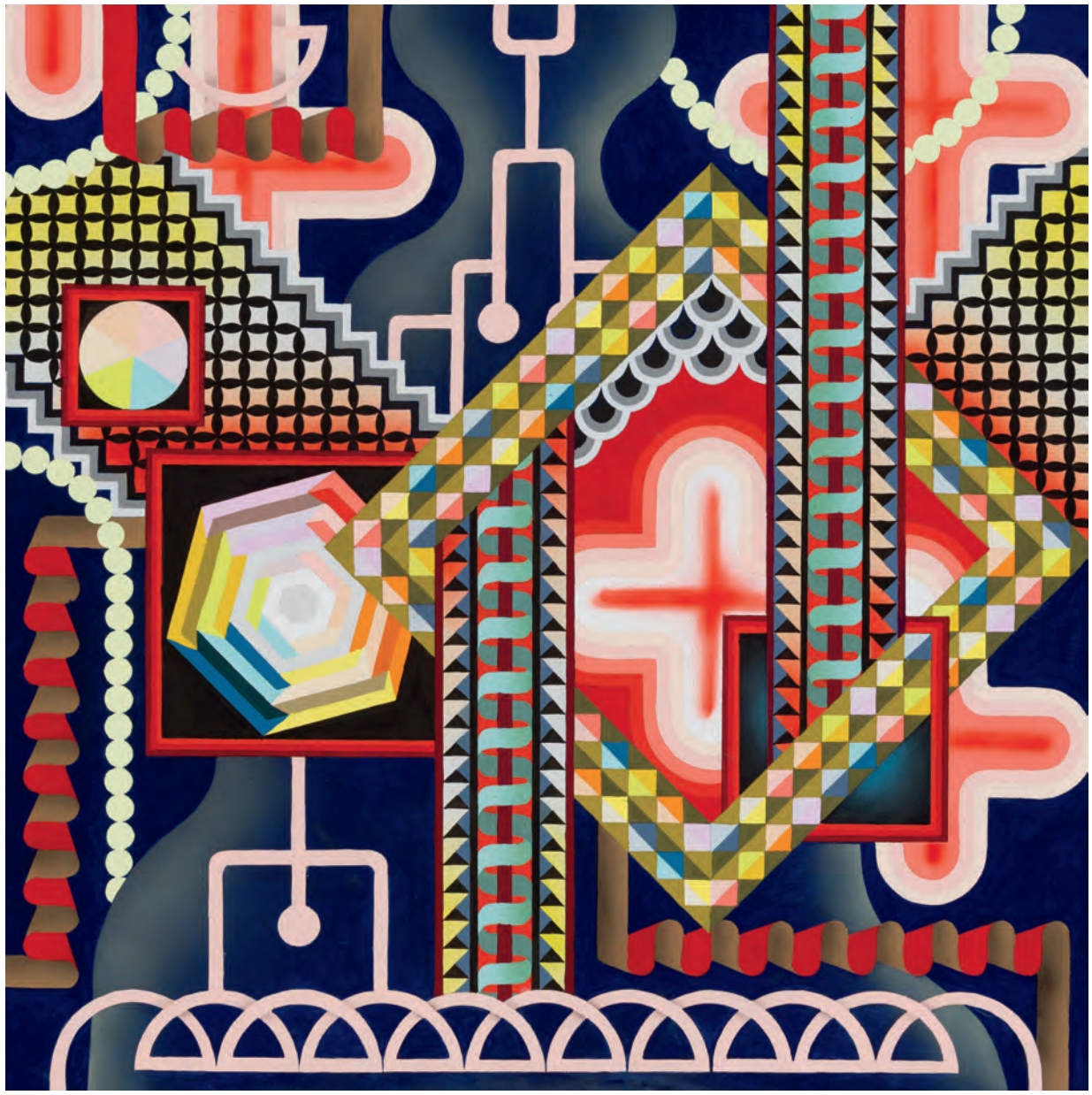
Edie Fake produces extremely detailed, abstract drawings and paintings influenced by the curves and angles of architecture, art deco design, fabrics, and artwork by the Chicago Imagists—a group of artists working after World War II who looked to comics, cartoons, and Surrealism for inspiration. Through a collision of geometric patterns, Fake envisions his work as "what Queer Space can look like, so the finished drawings become these Winchester Mansion–style building-riddles about identity and sexuality."[1] A nineteenth century mansion, the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose, California, is famous for its confusing pathways and stairways that lead nowhere. Fake elaborated, "The queerness is in the nitty-gritty construction."[2] In his art, building structures are metaphors for the body. *The Keep* and *Potential Donor* (plates 8 and 9) both began as self-portraits, focusing on Fake's transgender identity. As the works evolved, they came to reflect not just his reality but that of the transgender community as well.

In *The Keep*, a gate in the foreground guards a mysteriously exuberant world in which bodies cohabit unobstructed from categorization. The painting resembles Fake's earlier drawings of reimagined façades of gay bars that no longer exist. Here, however, the space is not identified for one particular community, it's for all. Fake's pictorial assertion of a safe environment for queer individuals is more important than ever, as dedicated bars—and especially spaces for lesbians, trans, and genderqueer people—are gradually falling victim to the rapid progression of socializing virtually through digital devices. In *Potential Donor*, Fake has pictured the moment a body either accepts or rejects a physical transplant. Abstract pictorial elements effectively communicate the subject matter. The background resembles a detail of a circuit-board—a metaphor for connecting components within a larger body. Laid over it, helix-like patterns, an oblique reference to DNA, invade and disappear into a diamond-shaped structure. As in all of his work, the painting achieves a complexity of abstract forms that is aligned with the intricacies of bodies.

1 Edie Fake quoted in "The Queer Artists of fire Island," *i-D Magazine*, July 14, 2016, https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/bjnwxv/the-queer-artists-of-fire-island, accessed March 9, 2019.

2 Edie Fake quoted in "Edie Fake: Off the grid," *Juxtapoz Magazine*, https://www.juxtapoz.com/news/magazine/features/edie-fake-off-the-grid/, accessed March 9, 2019.

8. Edie Fake
The Keep, 2018
cat. 12



9. Edie Fake
Potential Donor, 2018
cat. 13

FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES American, 1957–1996

For many artists in *Queer Abstraction*, Felix Gonzalez-Torres is seen as an immense influence for his trailblazing strategy of using everyday materials to create conceptually seductive, abstract artwork imbued with queer subject matter. His aesthetic took shape in the 1980s and continued until his untimely death in 1996 from an AIDS-related illness. Between 1991 and 1995, Gonzalez-Torres produced five sculptures composed from strands of plastic beads and a hanging device. Per his instructions, *"Untitled" (Water)* (plate 10) is to be installed in an opening that viewers must pass through. Typically, it bisects an entryway and delineates two spaces. As with many of Gonzalez-Torres's works, "Untitled" is part of the object's official title, leaving it open to interpretation. But the parenthetical "water" for this beaded curtain steers meaning in subtle ways.

The concept of "water" and the color blue are distinct characteristics running throughout the body of Gonzalez-Torres's work. He acknowledged that the color was related to the blue in paintings by the early Italian Renaissance painter Giotto, but that his is a "blue in the Caribbean—saturated with bright sunlight." He added, "For me if a beautiful memory could have a color that color would be light blue."[1] Gonzalez-Torres connected the color to fond memories of his partner Ross, too, who was also a victim of AIDS: "I love blue skies. I love blue oceans. Ross and I would spend summers next to a blue body of water or under clear, Canadian blue skies."[2] These personal meanings are possibly implied within the abstract

nature of *"Untitled" (Water)*. The themes of queer identity remain camouflaged but the materials themselves along with the installation evoke a queer perspective.

Curator Nancy Spector has written that the metaphor of travel and transition exists extensively in Gonzalez-Torres's oeuvre, and that travel in general "presupposes a displacement of locale, a movement from whatever constitutes 'place' to somewhere 'other' or foreign."[3] Indeed, "place" and "other" are physically evoked in *"Untitled" (Water)*, as it divides, delineates, and invents or discovers new, queer spaces in preexisting structures. At the Des Moines Art Center, the sculpture will partially enclose Tom Burr's *Deep Purple* and will also generate new areas for movement and contemplation within I. M. Pei's architecture, and thereby metaphorically critique the space (figure 8). As José Esteban Muñoz notes, artworks such as Gonzalez-Torres's create queer worlds that "[slice] into the façade of the real that is the majoritarian public sphere. ... They disassemble that sphere of publicity and use its parts to build an alternative reality."[4]

1 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, interviewed by Tim Rollins, in Jan Avgikos, Susan Cahan, and Tim Rollins, *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (Los Angeles: A.R.T. Press, 1993), 15.

2 Ibid., 17.

3 Nancy Spector, "Travel as Metaphor," in Nancy Spector, *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1995), 56.

4 José Esteban Muñoz, "Latina Performance and Queer Worldmaking," in José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 196.

Pages 34–35
10. Felix Gonzalez-Torres
"Untitled" (Water), 1995
cat. 14

HARMONY HAMMOND American, born 1944

Harmony Hammond has been producing abstract art since the 1970s that refers in discreet ways to the body. In borrowing from French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984), she has noted that abstraction is on equal ground with queerness, as its potential is unbound and offers infinite, pleasurable possibilities.[1] Both *Fuse* and *Chenille #2* (plates 11 and 12) are part of a larger body of work that act as fugitive monochrome paintings: "fugitive" in that they are elusive and frustrate the viewer's attempt to determine precisely what is going on. Their surfaces are built of thick layers of paint that reflect light in an uneven manner and are crisscrossed by grommeted canvas straps. Additionally, in *Chenille #2*, squares of canvas likewise applied to the surface coyly address the grids of Mondrian (1872–1944) or Agnes Martin (1912–2004), but also create a rough, textured skin. Upon first glance, the grommet straps in *Fuse* appear to bind or constrict the painting, but they are actually fairly loose, and according to Hammond, embrace the painting and offer an idea of connection, not restriction.

Both *Chenille #2* and *Fuse* are what Hammond refers to as "near-monochromes," relating them to the history of abstract painting. During the twentieth century, the monochrome became a visual strategy that rejected narrative, explored the purity of color, and placed an emphasis on formal qualities—the white paintings of Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) or the works of Robert Ryman (1930–2019) being excellent examples. In Hammond's near-monochromes, there is an intention to disrupt this history. She explains: "near-monochrome, what I do—the not quite monochrome, the becoming or unbecoming monochrome, the disruption of monochrome—is one place that content enters in."[2] Hammond buries her content beneath the surface of her works. Color pierces through fissures, ruptures, orifices, and can be thought of as the queer body. It's hidden, muffled, stifled by the painting's membrane, but it's there. Hammond has observed that the paintings, as near-monochromes, refuse to "look" queer, and oppose blatant visibility. Instead, queerness penetrates moments of vulnerability in a battered, layered skin.

1 Harmony Hammond, in conversation with Ulrike Müller, "Editors and Fugitives," in Christiane Erharter, Dietmar Schwärzler, Ruby Sircar, and Hans Scheirl, eds., *Pink Labour on Golden Streets: Queer Art Practices* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 152.

2 Harmony Hammond, "A Manifesto (Personal) of Monochrome (Sort of)," reprinted in Tirza True Latimer, *Harmony Hammond: Becoming/Unbecoming Monochrome* (Denver: Redline Art Space, 2014), 4.

Left
11. Harmony Hammond
Fuse, 2013
cat. 15

Page 38
12. Harmony Hammond
Chenille #2, 2016–17
cat. 16

Page 39
Harmony Hammond
Chenille #2 (detail), 2016–17
cat. 16

NICHOLAS HLOBO South African, born 1975

Nicholas Hlobo's art is rooted in his identity as a gay, Xhosa man, and the current political climate in South Africa. After apartheid's collapse in 1994 and South Africa's adoption of a democratic constitution, discrimination on the basis of race, sexual orientation, religion, or political affiliation was abolished. Hlobo addresses this eradication of separation by weaving together media to create a hybrid body that serves as a metaphor for healing. South African artist and curator Gavin Jantjes notes that "leather, rubber, and colored ribbon" in Hlobo's work are used "to deconstruct the notion of identity and to reconfigure it to suit realities today."[1] Hlobo chooses these unconventional materials to speak to concerns regarding masculinity, femininity, and sexuality, and combines them to traverse those categories and dissolve boundaries. He titles his works in Xhosa, an indigenous South African language and the artist's native tongue, to maintain his familiarity with it as English is the de facto language of the region. Titling works in Xhosa also appeals to the artist because of a performative double entendre: he asserts his cultural identity over the classification "South African."

In *Phantsi Komngcunube* (plate 13), Hlobo radically incised pieces of canvas and stitched the openings back together using a combination of leather and white ribbon. Both materials carry gender associations: leather as masculine; ribbons with the decorative and femininity. Here, pieced together, they create one distinct entity. The title of the piece roughly translates to "Under the Willow Tree." In Western folklore, the willow tree is considered as a representation of harmony. The synthesis of materials points to the harmonious fusion of gender and sexuality. The democratic freedom to pronounce oneself as a queer individual is no longer denied, but visualized through the sculptural form erupting from the work's core and spilling out like organic matter onto the floor.

1 Gavin Jantjes, "Edge, Seam & Space," in Nicholas Hlobo, Gavin Jantjes, Kerryn Greenberg, and Jan-Erik Lundström, *Nicholas Hlobo: Sculpture, Installation, Performance, Drawing* (Oslo: Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, 2011), 58.

13. Nicholas Hlobo
Phantsi Komngcunube, 2017
cat. 17

JOHN PAUL MORABITO American, born 1982

"Weaving is my language. My voice is queer," states John Paul Morabito, whose works reflect on Catholicism and its condemnation of queer sexuality. Morabito, who prefers to be addressed with the plural pronouns "they/them/their," then suggests "incarnational consciousness of Catholicism creates a very receptive environment for queerness [...]."[1] Indeed, the incarnation of a spirit is believed to have an unfixed nature or selfhood—not entirely human and not entirely spiritual—which seems especially queer. Morabito explores this in their "Frottage" series of more than fifty weavings that consider the queer state of instability, and the artist's devotion to Catholicism.

Morabito's touch is present in every stage of the labor-intensive process of creating the "Frottage" works. The artist first weaves cloth using a floor loom, and then fabricates a charcoal rubbing of the cloth while on their hands and knees. Next, they create a digital scan of the rubbing, and finally generate a tapestry using a computerized jacquard loom where they shuttle the yarn back and forth as they weave. The finished weavings hang from two points on the wall, sagging from their fixtures like the crucified Christ's body suspended by nails. From afar the pieces look like abstract drawings but close inspection reveals traces of Morabito's body in the marks from the rubbing, as in *Frottage 037* (plate 14). The artist leaves disparate threads dangling from the sides of the works, or in some cases, such as *Frottage 068* (plate 15), fringe lines the bottom. These threads dangle in a state of liminality. Not fully integrated into the finished textile but still on display, they add a quality of otherness to the work not unlike queer sensibility.

Morabito's process physically and conceptually relates to the dual definitions of "frottage" as referring to making an artwork through rubbing and to the act of sexual gratification when two bodies rub against one another. By producing a charcoal rubbing while on their hands and knees, Morabito comes into physical contact with the sheet of paper that will soon be scanned. This transmutation of the artist's body into the work metaphorically represents incarnation, as their queer self is transferred into what will become the final piece.

1 John Paul Morabito, unpublished essay, e-mailed to the author, July 30, 2018.

14. John Paul Morabito
Frottage 037, 2016
cat. 18

15. John Paul Morabito
Frottage 068, 2018
cat. 20

CARRIE MOYER American, born 1960

Instead of pursuing a career in fine arts after graduating from art school in 1985, Carrie Moyer applied her skills to help the nascent, radical activist organizations formed in response to the AIDS crisis. She joined Queer Nation, cofounded Dyke Action Machine!, and aided The Lesbian Avengers, producing agitprop for all. When Moyer returned to the studio in the 1990s, she brought her commitment to queer activism to the canvas: "I was still thinking about the sign value of everything in the picture. Even the glitter was used in a self-mocking way, because I was secretly afraid making abstract paintings again might [be] a bit too 'serious' or 'removed' from the real world."[1] Glitter personifies an emphasis on decoration, has strong affiliations with camp, and because of this, a correlation with queerness. Moyer embraces it to disrupt abstraction's "seriousness" and infuse it with queer sensibility. She opted for acrylic paint as opposed to traditional oil for the majority of her work because she "was also actually unconsciously choosing a medium that didn't have a kind of patriarchal baggage."[2] At the time, acrylic was "scorned" because of its low-grade quality in relation to the centuries-long oil tradition. But Moyer trusted her instincts, and developed a synthesized, queer visual language that blends art history with her experience in lesbian political activism, and engages—sometimes humorously—with current politics. "My paintings reflect my own oblique subject position as a lesbian woman in relation to canonical culture," she says. "The position allows me to burrow through decades of stale, over-determined critique and rediscover the pleasurable and liberating aspects of painting."[3]

Fan Dance at the Golden Nugget (plate 16), exemplifies Moyer's integrated, queer style, an amalgam of glitter and acrylic paint and a fusion of techniques that infiltrate abstraction's hetero- and male-centric reputation. The work's title is humorous but also reflects the artist's feminist concerns: it refers to the dancers at the Golden Nugget Casino in Las Vegas, or, more broadly, the concept of "showgirls." Moyer's technique of pouring paint is a style reminiscent of Color Field painters, such as Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011) and Morris Louis (1912–1962). There is also a crisp-edge quality, formed from brushwork that is applied after the canvas has been colored from the pours. Toward the center of this painting is a feathered headpiece typically worn by showgirls; in the top right quadrant is a breast seen from the side with an extending appendage in the lower portion of the canvas. Flying toward the outer edges of the painting and straight at the viewer are strangely turdlike golden nuggets. Moyer reconciles an art history that excluded women and queer sensibility and also addresses the sexualization of women for a voyeur's pleasure.

1 Carrie Moyer, interviewed by Katy Siegel, in "Between Suggestive Form and Gesture," Carrie Moyer and Katy Siegel, *Carrie Moyer: Sirens* (New York: DC Moore Gallery, 2016), 10.

2 Ibid.

3 Carrie Moyer, quoted in "Carrie Moyer: Pagan's Rapture and Seismic Shuffle," by Osman Can Yerebakan, *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 4, 2018, https://brooklynrail.org/2018/04/artseen/Carrie-Moyer-Pagans-Rapture-and-Seismic-Shuffle, accessed March 9, 2019.

16. Carrie Moyer
Fan Dance at the Golden Nugget, 2017
cat. 21

SHEILA PEPE American, born 1959

Sheila Pepe is known for her large-scale, drooping crochet installations. Less well known are what she calls her "Votive Moderns," table-top objects composed from craft materials. Beginning in 1994, Pepe has produced close to one-hundred of the objects, which include *Oversewn Object with Different Things Underneath* and *Hard and Soft Thing 2* (plates 17 and 18). Pepe considers all "Votive Moderns" to be one familial unit that shares an investigation—and disruption—of the sculptural tradition.

For the table-top works, Pepe usually begins with a readymade component, and adds casted plaster objects, textiles, or other forms of media that give the work an awkward appearance. It is their strangeness that links the works together and sets them apart from the types of sculpture that have been celebrated and categorized—such as Greco-Roman figurative statues; organic twentieth-century modernist works; or minimal, industrial pieces of the 1960s. "Craft objects," says art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson, "like queer desires, are multiple, crossing beyond the high/low divide: they are props, they are surrogates…they are decorative […]."[1] Not entirely low art with their nod to the readymade, but not exactly fine art with their eclectic accouterments, Pepe's "Votive Moderns" resist classification and, as Bryan-Wilson would agree, perform queerly.

In the apparently statuesque *Oversewn Object with Different Things Underneath*, for example, the multiple appendages do not precisely correlate to human anatomy. Moreover, what exactly lies underneath remains unknown, since the support structure is covered by an excessive amount of fabric sewn together in a crude manner. In *Hard and Soft Thing 2*, one of the earliest of the "Votive Moderns," a rectangular slab attached to a limply hanging piece of fabric cleverly personifies both erection and flaccidity. Both works, though not overtly queer in the sense of figuration, exemplify a queer quality. In discussing queer abstraction and her specific strategy, Pepe asserted that she wants to infiltrate abstract art "with a kind of physicality and materiality and a performance that was queer by fact and not necessarily by stated intention. … The need for abstraction is the need to own, to re-own, to re-fuck up historically existing languages through our own haptic visual nature."[2] In reimagining the sculptural object and radically furthering it, Pepe carves out her own distinct queer position in the sculptural tradition.

1 Julia Bryan Wilson, "Queerly Made: Harmony Hammond's Floor Pieces," *The Journal of Modern Craft* 2.1 (March 2009): 77.

2 Sheila Pepe, quoted in "Queer Abstraction: A Roundtable," *ASAP/Journal* 2.2 (May 2017): 291.

17. Sheila Pepe
Oversewn Object with Different Things Underneath, 2015
cat. 38

18. Sheila Pepe
Hard and Soft Thing 2,
1994–2016
cat. 23

PREM SAHIB British, born 1982

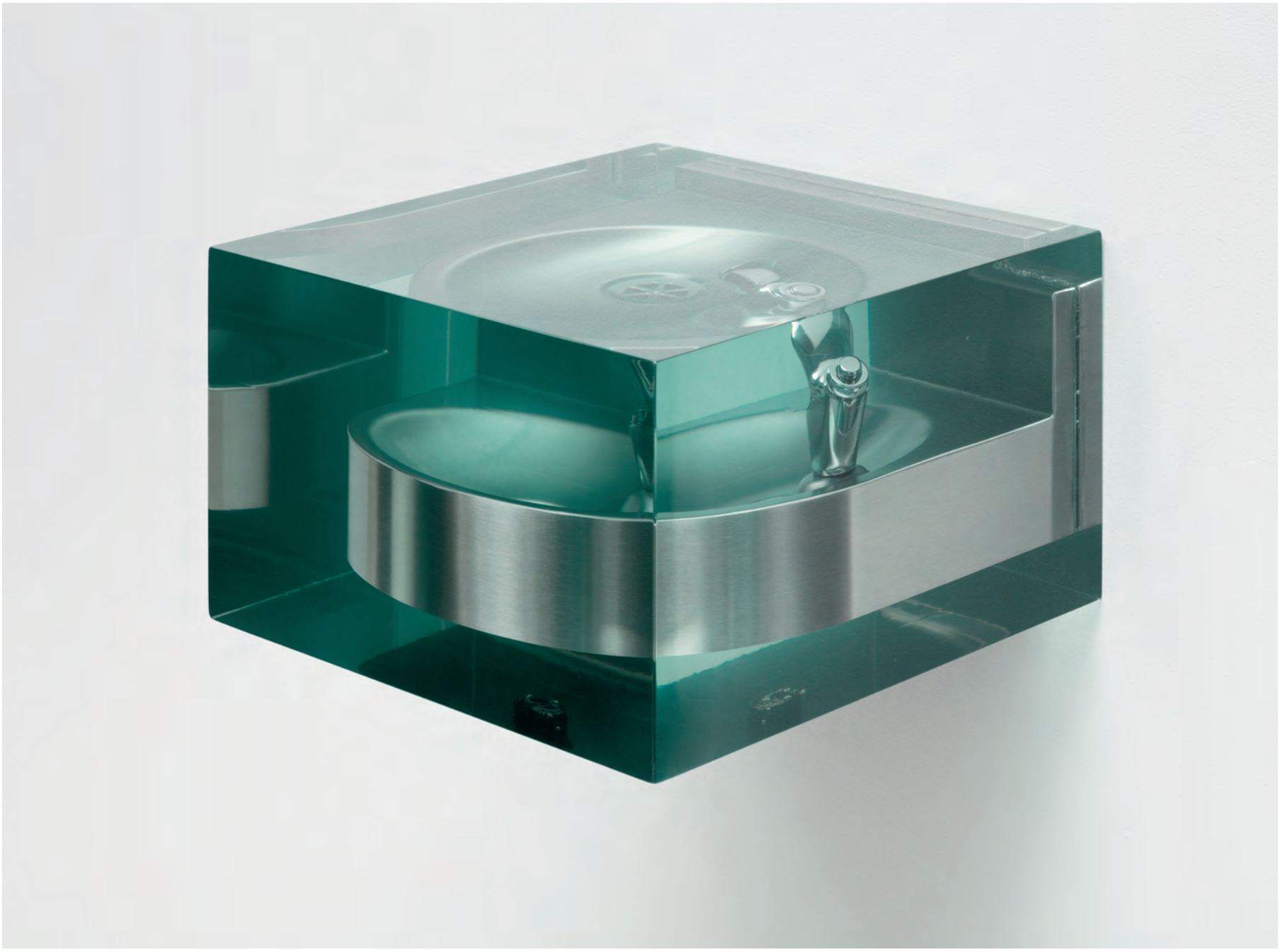
Fig 9 Donald Judd (American, 1928–1994) *Untitled (DSS 154)*, 1968 Stainless steel and light green Plexiglas 6 x 27 x 24 in. © 2019 Judd Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Photography Tom Powel Imaging. Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery, New York

London-based Prem Sahib creates art that is broadly concerned with public architecture and the private, queer desires that can exist within. "I don't feel like I necessarily take on 'queer culture' as a subject matter," he explains, "but I do use my own experience of sexuality as a material and, in doing so, it becomes implicit."[1] These experiences include his engagement with cruising for gay sex in public restrooms and frequenting gay bathhouses that also serve as community spaces. Not unlike the discreet, abstract sculptures of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Sahib's minimalist art appears harmless; its veiled queer references can be missed by those who are not looking for them.

Roots (plate 19), for example, formally protrudes from the wall like the nonreferential stack pieces (figure 9) by Donald Judd (1928–1994). Sahib's sculpture, however, contains a narrative addressing the increasing disappearance of gay bathhouses in major metropolitan areas. The water fountain encased in resin is an exact copy of a fountain that once existed at Chariot's, a gay sauna in London that was long considered a cornerstone of the city's gay community. Sahib's fountain has become a fossil or a relic belonging to another time. He has applied the reductive aesthetic of Minimal Art to discreetly address the vanishing public spaces where queer individuals once felt safe to congregate. *Outer Wear* (plate 20), a sculpture featuring black industrial tiles, reflects upon the distinction between public and private spheres. Its title wittily references the concept, as outerwear in clothing is typically a shell worn to shield our physical bodies from the elements. These tiles are a type commonly used in public restrooms and locker rooms—gendered spaces that can be the site of private, queer desires, thereby generating a subtle, blurred division between public and private spheres. Sahib invites viewers to interact with the work. As they pass through the archways, they catch a brief glimpse of themselves reflected in the glossy tiles lining the insides of the sculpture: a fleeting, intimate, seductive moment before they return to the gallery space.

1 Prem Sahib quoted in "Queer Time and Place," *Frieze,* April 23, 2014, https://frieze.com/article/queer-time-and-place, accessed March 27, 2019.

19. Prem Sahib
Roots, 2018
cat. 45



20. Prem Sahib
Outer Wear, 2015
cat. 43

JONATHAN VANDYKE American, born 1972

In June of 2016 Pulse nightclub, a gay establishment in Orlando, Florida, was the site of a mass shooting that killed forty-nine people and injured fifty-three others. That same month, New York–based artist Jonathan VanDyke was working on a painting that became *In the Month of June 2016* (plates 21 and 22), titled in remembrance of that horrific event.

As a child, VanDyke's first exposures to Abstract Expressionism were the popular depictions of Jackson Pollock spewing paint onto canvas. "It 'dissonated' with me," he admits, "as a young person, because I felt I couldn't be *that*: I puzzled over American abstract paintings while puzzling over my emerging queer identity."[1] Gay sexuality is often equated with sensitivity, and for the aspiring artist, being gay contrasted with the heroism of abstraction. Moreover, during his childhood growing up in the south central Pennsylvania countryside not far from the Amish people, quilting and handicraft were always nearby. Both influences came together for VanDyke, who makes work that confronts Abstract Expressionism's gendered, heterosexual past, and manipulates it through the form of craft.

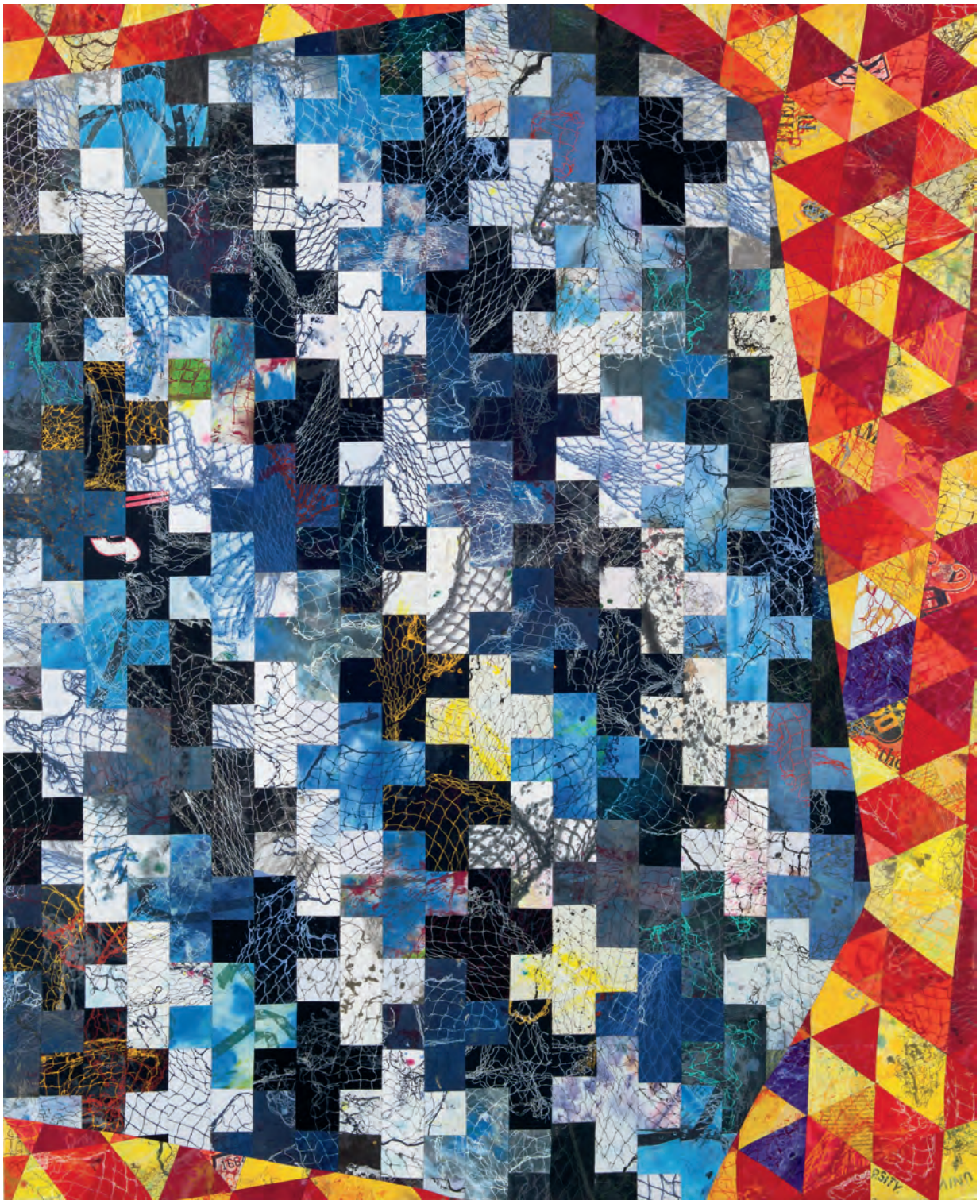
In the Month of June 2016 is composed from t-shirt fabric VanDyke marked with paint, soaked in color, and imprinted with patterns of nets. As with many paintings he has produced over the past few years, it is what VanDyke calls a "net" painting, with the net motif alluding to both the separation of the marginalized from a majority, and the queer state of "in between." VanDyke cut the fabric into panels and sewed them together, forming a variation of a net and a design that fuses a "plus" pattern from the sixteenth century—representing justice and equality—with a triangle pattern sourced from modernist Bauhaus design. Close viewing reveals the craftsmanship underlying the geometric abstraction—an act of looking associated with finding its queer qualities or the eccentricities that separate it from a traditional abstract painting.

The painting is installed attached to a wooden structure so both sides are exposed. The artist adds his own subjectivity into the backside of the work, where the viewer will discover playfully erotic men's sock advertisements. The orientation of VanDyke's painting within the gallery and its exposed backside adds an important, queer positioning to the piece. VanDyke explains: "as a gay man, I am aware that my body turns towards other male bodies in a way that is differently oriented than a normative body. [...] There is a politics in deciding what we turn towards, one that requires noticing what we have turned away *from*."[2] At the Des Moines Art Center, *In the Month of June 2016* will face another "net" painting by VanDyke, thus assuming a specific orientation to its partner. In this way, the paintings become representational for queer identity, even though they remain completely abstract.

1 Jonathan VanDyke, "The Patient Eye," in *The Patient Eye* exhibition brochure, The Columbus Museum, Georgia, April 7–June 17, 2018.

2 Ibid.

21. Jonathan VanDyke
In the Month of June 2016 (recto), 2017
cat. 46



22. Jonathan VanDyke
In the Month of June 2016
(verso), 2017
cat. 46

JADE YUMANG Canadian, born Philippines, 1981

Jade Yumang traces the history of modern gay sexuality and offers it anew in the form of abstract, queer objects. Thirty-two sculptures complete his "Thumb Through" series, in which he conceptually reflects on a 1972 police raid of the former bookshop Action Auction in Middletown, New Jersey. The officers seized gay erotic material from the store, and its owners were eventually brought to trial. An issue of *My-O-My*, one of the magazines obtained from the shop, found its way into the hands of Yumang, who was intrigued by the publication's history in relation to the raid. He scanned the magazine's thirty-two "excitachromes"—its term to describe the vibrancy and excitement of the monochromatic color pages—in this case, featuring two men slowly undressing until near the end they engage in sex. Yumang printed the scans onto yards of cotton, wrapped the cotton around cylindrical forms, and added them to fabric structures where they hang, stand, or point outward. The final shape of the sculptures was determined during the process when Yumang felt it was time to "finish" and move on to the next work in the series. Essentially, Yumang transformed the bodies of the two men that symbolize queer desire into exaggerated, campy sculptures.

The series' titles, such as *Page 5* and *Page 14* (plates 23 and 24). come from the numbers of the pages that were the source of the imagery. The fabrics used are symbolic of the era, including athletic sportswear and fringe that playfully hangs from one sculptural appendage. Constructed with a central spine and a form that appears headlike, *Page 14* emanates a kind of corporeality, as does *Page 5* with its upright support. With its many zippers in different stages of unzipping, *Page 5* discreetly alludes to the slow exposition of the body or, more aptly, undressing before sex. The tubular forms are reminiscent of quills or spikes, and appear dangerous. This tinge of danger personifies *My-O-My* magazine's "threat" to the delicate sensibilities of the 1970s police force. Nonetheless, the sculptures remain foreign-looking, and exemplify an uncertainty that is characteristic of queer form. "I have learned to accept the uncertainty of [queer]," says Yumang, "and that in some way liberated me to make works that are paused moments of transformation."[1] Yumang's excavation of abstraction's far-reaching capabilities not only generates visually compelling structures but serves as well to illuminate a little-known moment in queer history.

1 Jade Yumang, in conversation with Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Fixing or Infecting," in David Evans Frantz, Lucas Hilderbrand, and Kayleigh Perkov, eds., *Cock, Paper, Scissors*, (Los Angeles: ONE Archives, 2016), 101.

23. Jade Yumang
Page 14, 2014
cat. 48

24. Jade Yumang
Page 5, 2016
cat. 49

TEN QUEER THESES ON ABSTRACTION

DAVID J. GETSY

1. Queer abstraction is an abstraction.

"Queer abstraction," like all categories, will fail us in the end even though it has served to make things possible and imaginable. You will be frustrated and fruitless if you go searching for a singular definition of "queer abstraction"—let alone anything resembling a style, an iconography, or a movement. Nevertheless, it has been used as a good-enough shorthand for the many ways in which both artists and viewers have invested abstraction with queer perspectives and priorities.

To nominate something as "queer" is to cast aspersion on it as being unnatural, incorrect, wrong, or abnormal. Anything called "queer" is looked at with suspicion and intensified scrutiny—no matter who or what receives the performative force of this insult. Indeed, it was the fear that this slur could be so easily and widely applied (and spark such distrust in anything so named) that increased its potency and the ferocity of phobic defenses against it. As the most visible and mobile manifestation of the policing of the boundaries of the "normal," the "natural," and "common" sense, the label "queer" was historically used to tyrannize those who loved, desired, or lived differently.

When lesbian, gay, and bisexual activists and thinkers rejected the presumption that they should assimilate and aspire to be merely tolerated, they embraced "queer" as a rallying cry. They upheld as a virtue their failure to fit into the normal. Decrying the assumption that there was only one way to live, to be, to desire, or to love, they challenged the ways in which normativity was policed, proclaimed, and inculcated. While "queer" is often used interchangeably with lesbian, gay, and/or bisexual, the concept as I am outlining here is a self-chosen political and personal stance deriving from a critical suspicion of normativity and of assimilations into it. To reclaim the insult "queer" is to turn it (and the force of its suspicion) back against the presumption that the normal is stable, agreed upon, or desirable. Anything claimed as queer defiantly stands to the side of the normal and demands witnessing of its exclusions and partiality. From this perspective, "queer" is better understood as tactically *adjectival*.[1] It simultaneously performs an infectious transmutation and declares an oppositional stance. Necessarily, its uses and contours shift in relation to the ways in which normativity is constantly and covertly reinstalled, redeployed, and defended. For instance, an action, a mood, a love, a desire that was queer a century ago might not be so today, and vice versa. Something queer in one place is unremarkable in another. Yesterday's queer insurgent can be today's gatekeeper of the new respectability.[2] Queer stances are ineluctably contingent, mobile, viral, and plural. However, the inability to make "queer" a stable noun—that is, to settle on a singular, immediately recognizable definition—is not the deficiency but rather the strength that comes with its deployment as a tactic of resistance.

Historically, when queer activism, art, and thought have sought to unsettle normativity, this has often manifested itself through a strategy of confrontational visibility. The political appropriation of "queer" gained traction in the first decade of the ongoing AIDS crisis, when it became clear that such visibility was a matter of life and death. The "in-your-face" tactics of groups like ACT-UP, Lesbian Avengers, Gran Fury, or fierce pussy disrupted public and art spaces alike, and they remain foundational to an understanding of queer art practices. Working in distinction (but not opposition) to such demands to be seen, some artists have instead explored afiguration and non-representational art for the ways in which they could be used subversively and expansively.[3] What we might call "queer abstraction" addresses the same desire to work from queer experience and queer revolt. However, its priorities often emerge from a

suspicion of representation, from a striving to vex visual recognition, and/or from a desire to find a more open and variable mode of imaging and imagining relations.

In its forgoing of representation and its embrace of afiguration, abstraction makes room for a different kind of sedition against the imposition of normativity. Rather than rendering recognizable bodies, abstraction stages relationships among forms and their contexts, allowing us to see differently the ways in which those relationships can unfold. That is, abstraction is about relations, and a queer investment in abstraction can be a way to allegorize social relations through a playing out of formal relations. Distinct forms of embodiment, deviating desires, and new ways of relating to bodies can be proposed through abstraction. Artists who turn to abstraction as a more open or apt way of subverting the "normal" (or a more pleasurable way of proposing its abandonment) all do so differently. We must attend to the particularities of the ways in which an artwork, an artist, or a viewer deploys queer tactics.[4] How, in other words, do they use the openness of abstraction to do such things as flout proprieties, refuse to aspire to being normal, uphold difference, eroticize capaciously, or disrupt assimilation? Abstraction turns away from the imitation of how the world looks, and instead it creates an alternative in which to imagine and image other ways of being and relating. As the filmmaker Barbara Hammer once wrote, "Abstract or nonrepresentational art appeals to me for several reasons. I have deeper emotions when I'm working beyond realism because there are no limits. […] I am not presenting a statement or an essay, but a more amorphous work which allows the maker and the viewer the *pleasure of discovery.*"[5] Queer abstractions are multitude. The abstract notion of "queer abstraction" is generative because it is not singular, not easily captured, and unforeclosed. It names only an open-ended provocation—one that is more radical to espouse as indefinite, capacious, and unending.

2. Abstraction's queer appeal, for some, is that it models a resistance to the daily experience of surveillance and scrutiny.

Both the long history of structural homophobia and the "politics of visibility" that characterized insurgent history of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer social movements have privileged recognizability.[6] Whether to surveil, to attack, to uphold, or to connect, the pressure to make oneself visible as not-normal has been, itself, the norm. Visibility is politically urgent, there is no doubt. But, as Michel Foucault once remarked, "Visibility is a trap."[7] LGB history has organized itself around metaphors for becoming visible, such as "coming out." This was characterized as both a matter of personal liberation and as a demand for demographic recognition. While such metaphors for becoming visible have been important politically and personally to many, we have to remember that the imperative to make oneself seen is different than loving one's own queer life. The "come out" visual imperative is not equally effective, available, safe, pleasurable, or political for all—especially for subjects living at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities or for those living in contexts different from the United States, Western Europe, and their urban centers.[8] Some would cast tactics of opacity and camouflage as self-denial, self-loathing, or fear. Such a chauvinist disregard for other contexts, for the complexities of other lives, and for the insurgency of these tactics is merely another imposition of normativity, albeit swathed in rainbow. Disclosure cannot be compulsory, for the politics of visibility also benefit protocols of surveillance.

However much the politics of visibility are, have been, and will be a necessary tool in LGBT social and political movements, it must not be assumed to be the only way.[9] Infiltration, camouflage, and opacity must be embraced. It is a matter of survival, of thriving, and of resistance to have at one's disposal tactics of dissemblance, duplicity, masking, camouflage, and code-switching. The experience of being told one is outside the normal produces an activated relationship to resemblance, to recognizability, and to visibility. Consequently, queer practices of "looking like" are endemic and sophisticated. It is for these reasons that abstraction has proven an appealing language for some queer messaging. Abstraction, as a mode of visual poiesis, both conjures new visualizations and rebuffs viewers' impulses to recognize and categorize.

Glenn Ligon once said about his text paintings that dissolve into abstractions, "The movement of language

toward abstraction is a consistent theme in my work. I'm interested in what happens when a text is difficult to read or frustrates legibility—what that says about our ability to think about each other, know each other, process each other."[10] One reason to face abstraction is because it can avoid, circumvent, or delay the visual consumption of the immediately recognizable or readily legible. In figurative art, whenever a human body is represented, we rush to classify it—and taxonomies of race, age, ability, gender, class, and appeal are all brought to bear on that image of a person. This is, of course, part and parcel of how people deal with each other daily. They read clues from fashion, from their kinesic relationality to us, from their evaluation of theirs and others' bodily capacities, and from comparisons to (inevitably flawed) stereotypes of ill-defined groupings such as racial types and forced dimorphisms. For queer folks, such scrutiny is an agonistic daily experience, and many grew up having to conceal or camouflage their mannerisms, their furtive looks, their comportments, and themselves in order to blend into the presumed normal. (Such crushing scrutiny is compounded a hundred-fold for trans subjects who must always navigate others' relentless attempts to read their body as evidence of the past instead of seeing them fully as a person in the present.) Abstraction can be one means to resist the cultural marking of the human body.[11] This is a mode of defense, to be sure, but it is also fueled by an embrace of openness and the not-yet-known. Speaking of the extreme abstraction of the monochrome, Derek Jarman called it "an alchemy, effective liberation from personality. It articulates silence. It is a fragment of an immense work without limit."[12] Or, as Harmony Hammond has said of her works, "In their refusal to be any one thing at the same time they are themselves, the paintings can be seen to occupy some sort of fugitive or queer space and in doing so, remain oppositional."[13]

3. Abstraction that thematizes queer experience and politics can sometimes overlay, but is not equivalent to, abstraction that thematizes trans experience and politics.

In leaning on the term "queer," I make a distinction. For me, this term relates to experiences and lives that resist normative presumptions about relations—that is, about who one loves, desires, partners with, fucks, or chooses as a family or lineage. While such divergences from heteronormativity do trouble gender by complicating the presumed calculus of partnership and kinship, there are many queer lives (in various degrees of political engagement with these issues) that do not fundamentally diverge from cisgender ascriptions or from binary generalities. It is a mistake to equate such queer lives (however hard won, however allied, however political, however in need of upholding) with the experience of those who must combat others' ascriptions of gender to them, of those who must find a way to refuse the dimorphic accounts of their bodies, or of those who reject the ways in which the determined transformation of one's self is pathologized and caricatured. It cannot be forgotten that histories of LGB and queer movements have a troubled past of exiling trans constituencies, of delegitimizing non-binary or transgender experience, and of appropriating trans lives as a disposable symbol of sexual (not gender) revolt.[14] There are many who are doing the foundational work of building and rebuilding the coalition of trans, non-binary, queer, genderqueer, LGB, intersex, and all combinations thereof, but it is work to which we must continually recommit ourselves.

Valuing the difference between trans experience and queer experience is not an end to solidarity, but the beginning of a process of reparation for the appropriation and erasure of trans histories by LGB politics and culture. There are plenty of trans, non-binary, genderqueer, and intersex people who identify with the political stance of queer, but that does not mean their experience is fully or adequately described by that term (or that community). The term "queer" has space for trans or intersex folks who choose to identify with this position about relations, desire, and relationships. But, this can only happen if we defend ardently the understanding that the presence and history of trans or intersex experience is distinct from and (not uncommonly) critical of queer discourse.

With this in mind in relation to this exhibition, one must recognize that questions of visibility, of the endurance of scrutiny, of surveillance, of the surface of

the body as sign, and of opacity are fundamentally different when asked of non-normative genders versus sexualities.[15] This is a question for history, for the present, and for our future.

4. Queer investments in abstraction, like abstraction itself, are not (and need not be) pure. Abstraction need not be all-or-nothing, and there are degrees of hybridity between abstracting visual practices and representational ones. Indeed, one could say that any representation is at least a little abstract and any abstraction, however reductive, can never fully excise the symbolic or the figurative. There are those who would exploit this impurity as a means to disregard or cancel abstraction, as when Michael Fried famously attempted to critique Minimalism by saying that a work like Tony Smith's *Die* (1962), a human-scale six-foot cube, was "something like a surrogate person—that is, a kind of *statue*."[16] But let us embrace the inherent impurity of abstraction (and, while we're at it, mimesis) as a strength. In the decades since Fried's attempted castigation of literalist abstraction, many artists and viewers have lauded precisely this impurity and, with it, abstraction's ability to model relations, evoke personhood, and connect to lived experiences. As the poet and scholar Charles Bernstein once succinctly reminded, "Abstraction is figuration by other means."[17]

It is not a contradiction if an abstraction alludes to a figure, incorporates a found object that is recognizable for what it once was, or twists a recognizable image into a work that operates in relation to histories of abstraction. As well, the appropriation and queer adoption of recognizable images, objects, and artworks have been useful tools to question received meanings and to draw out suppressed possibilities. For instance, in this exhibition, one could look to Prem Sahib's erotic remakings of Robert Morris sculptures or to Tom Burr's *Deep Purple*—a masterful act of questioning mastery. Such queer uses of abstraction are synergistic with, rather than removed from, conceptual practices. As well, queer deployments of abstraction are often allied with, rather than mutually exclusive with, figurative and other representational practices. Impurity and promiscuity can be valued.

5. Abstraction is an easy target, queer abstraction is easier. *Illegitimi non carborundum.* Abstract artworks (or ways of reading them) that claim queer themes will always be easy to criticize (badly). Don't let that get you down. Abstraction seems like a ready target for critics who would demand disclosure, familiarity, and their own certainty. If they can't see it easily, it must not exist. This, we should remember, is also the argument used throughout history to erase and deny the presence and ubiquity of queer lives. (It is for this reason that it is especially pernicious when gay, lesbian, or queer critics use this gatekeeping tactic because they would hope to cast abstraction as removed from politics, as hamstrung by its histories, or as not being queer enough—for them.)[18] The lazy criticism of abstraction or queer abstraction demands instant disclosure and recognition by a skeptical adjudicator (the critic) in order to warrant acknowledgment. Queer reading practices, by contrast, have valued such things as insinuations, chance adjacencies, and alternate perspectives. Historically, such reading practices have been tactics of survival and worlding. They are used in defiance of patterns of erasure, of demands to conform (including those to conform to the critic's idea of a proper "queer"), and of the compulsion to make everything equally visible to everyone. Queer experiments with abstraction's afiguration and its refusal of instant recognizability are related to such practices of locating alternatives and reading against the grain.

This is not to argue that all abstract art is equally interesting or engaging, or that one should not be receptive to constructive criticism about the particularities of a visual work or a text. It is, rather, to call to task those critics who would fall back on generalities they create about abstraction or queer abstraction as their bases for dismissing a specific work. Some would see the category of abstraction as flawed from the start and hopelessly hermetic, but this denies the longer, geographically varied, and contentious histories of non-representational visual practices.[19] Others would caricature abstraction and try to convince that it is all interchangeable. As long as abstract art is practiced, there will be some who point at it and

exasperate "*What?*" They demand that all viewers agree with their inability to accept others' identifications, they lump all reasons for abstraction together, and they warn that anything might be permissible.[20] As with attempts to parody the contingent and viral mobility of the term "queer," abstraction's openness is claimed to be "exposed" because it cannot be nailed down. Faith in exposure, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick so beautifully argued, is characteristic of a paranoia that defensively seeks to make the world conform to its imperialist ways of seeing.[21]

Dispute the cliché of abstraction as everything-and-nothing. Recall that it can be an act of resistance to refuse immediate recognizability. Challenge entitlements to immediate access and compulsory disclosure. Demand particularity. Embrace non-exclusivity in your judgments. Invite new criteria. Model multiplicity in art writing (be it ekphrastic or hermeneutic). Question assumptions about what we expect and the speed with which we expect it. Imagine otherwise. Ultimately, such conversations are more rewarding, and they offer more expansive ways of engaging with those artists, writers, curators, critics, and historians who have looked to abstract art to ask different questions, to avoid the exposure to surveillance, and to visualize their politics and lives in new, unforeclosed ways.

6. Abstraction as a mode of resistance to visibility is not limited to queer perspectives. Intersectional accounts of abstraction and visibility are necessary and expansive.

There have been artists working from many different marginalized positions who have used abstraction as a mode of resistance to visibility, scrutiny, and surveillance or who have utilized it as a means of worlding, of poiesis, or of futurity. These are articulated in response to the daily experience of others' categorizing gazes and to the persistent cultural marking that any representation of the human form calls forth from viewers. Such employments of abstraction gain their political and affective resonances because they are drawn from the anger, exhaustion, and facility that come with navigating the ways in which "marked" positions of difference are opposed to (and defining of) a supposedly unmarked "neutral." Of course, any unmarked position only gains its contours by policing boundaries of difference, and power is dispensed across these borders between the "normal" and the "other." We know well these unmarked positions that attempt to mask themselves as somehow natural; among the most insidious are Whiteness, heteronormativity, ability, and the doctrine that genders are binary and static. Abstraction's resistant capacity can be used against this hegemonic positing of the invisibility of normativity and the visibility of difference.

In thinking about the wide range of deployments of non-representation and afiguration, it is the power-laden relationship to visibility that is the key variable. For instance, there are long and complex histories of Black artists who have used abstraction in relation to the virulent force of racism, whether to call out its workings or to circumvent the speed with which race becomes a primary factor in the visual categorization of persons.[22] These and other invested ways of using abstraction should be understood in relation (and, at times, precedent) to those practices that seek to render or allegorize how queer persons suffer under and attempt escape from normative categorizations. Respect the different ways in which surveillance is endured. But of course, marked positions also imbricate and intersect, and many people live at the margins of multiple identities. Sometimes, this intersectionality is addressed head-on by artists or writers and, at other times, there is a usefulness in focusing on one aspect of identity or on only some of them. Many individuals pivot (sometimes hourly) between the positions they inhabit in a system of cultural marking and categorization. They deploy an array of survival tactics in order to navigate visual taxonomies, surveillance, and compulsory visibility.[23] An understanding of the differences between these positionalities (and the categories they navigate) is a precursor to a more complex intersectional analysis of their connectedness.

Abstraction as a visual strategy is particularly useful as a means of discussing questions of difference, intersectionality, and power because it asks the linked questions "What is visible?" and "What are you looking for?" These questions, simply put, *mean differently* when asked from or of positions of cultural difference

such as queerness, Blackness, gender non-conforming, differently abled, and *intersections thereof*. These questions generate multiple, interdependent answers that unfold into contention and connection.[24] The conversation about how these questions are confronted across different positions, identities, and intersections can be the basis for alliances, for a productive skepticism about those alliances, for synergies, and for more wide-ranging critical resistance. Indeed, abstraction's openness might be generative of surprising ways to visualizing such intersections, solidarities, and critiques.

7. Abstract art sometimes resembles other abstract art. Resemblance does not mean equivalence. Resemblances can be strategic.
The expunging of the recognizable image or the refusal of representation in a painting, sculpture, film, or photograph (to name a few) is both freeing and constraining. Abstract works can easily come to look visually approximate to other abstractions. (This is especially the case if simplicity, unity, or reductiveness is put in the mix.) The art historian Erwin Panofsky appropriated the term "pseudomorphosis" to account for such approximations and resemblances.[25] Pseudomorphic works might, at first, be mistaken for being the same, being related, or coming from the same source. Pseudomorphosis is a feature of any formal vocabulary, but abstraction has a higher susceptibility to being so misrecognized. For this reason, suspicious viewers might lean on pseudomorphism as a means to denigrate abstract work as derivative, meaningless, or hopelessly arbitrary. We need to remember that while pseudomorphoses happen, they don't produce equivalence.

Pseudomorphosis can also be strategic. Isn't it what we call, in other conversations, such tools as camouflage, passing, impersonation, and infiltration? "Looking like" is a tactic that has long been practiced as part of queer life—as well as of other lives who have similarly had to navigate visual policing of the "normal." With this in mind, we must embrace pseudomorphosis not just as an everyday occurrence (which it is), but also value it for the ways in which it might be employed.

Again, abstract art asks the questions "What is visible?" and "What are you looking for?" An intentional pseudomorphosis exposes the deeper connotations and effects of these questions, and it challenges the viewer looking for *difference* with *appearing to be similar*. So, rather than decry simplicity, similarity, and pseudomorphosis, why not see them as ways to challenge the idea that difference must necessarily be made visible? Isn't it presumptuous of the viewer to expect that an artwork should make its complexity and particularity fully and immediately available for inspection? Turning away from that demand to be recognized is a queer stance and an embrace of opacity that values non-disclosure, code-switching, and the ability to infiltrate. Practicing dissemblance can be unsettling and mutinous.

8. Abstraction might lend itself to a queer engagement inadvertently.
While it is tempting for many to try and nail the slippery idea of a queer abstraction down to queer artists who intend to thematize queer experience in their work, this is only one possibility. There are, of course, artists both historical and present (such as many in this exhibition) who have engaged with queer experience as a resource in developing the conceptual and formal stakes of their work. In addition, there are artists who might identify as queer, as lesbian, as gay, as bisexual, or otherwise with a non-normative sexuality who might demur against the appellation "queer" for their work. Reasons for this are many, including the desire to avoid being seen singularly as only representing that experience (a problem for any artist who works from a marginalized identity), a wish to keep the work open to viewers who might be blocked by that naming, an intention to infiltrate through a tactical camouflaging, or because their other political, personal, or ethical priorities seemed more urgent to emphasize at that point. Artists working from non-normative and marked positions are under no obligation to make that a key theme of their work, even though their experience cannot help but be infused with their endurance of normativity.

Queer engagements, however, have never been delimited by intention. Queer reading practices and

patterns of interpretation have always identified objects of love, desire, and engagement far and wide. Fighting historical erasure has required the adoption of images, objects, and narratives that were not intended to be queer for the ways that they can repay affection and identification. (The reception practice that is Camp, for instance, embraces devalued objects of culture and revalues and exalts them. This works just as well—if not better—when there was no intention to speak to Camp in the first place.)

Queer readings are sometimes forensic, tracking the traces buried or exposed by a queer maker. Queer readings can also, themselves, be creative by identifying those capacities in a work's form, content, or context that make room for the otherwise, that question the artificial bounds of the natural, that eroticize sameness, and so on. "Reading into" is often declared to be a bad thing, but for queer readers it can be a lifeline.[26] Subverting the "common" sense interpretation of a text is, after all, a very queer thing indeed. Reception can be just as engaging as creation for queer investment, and reception (and its dissemination) can be tactical.[27]

For abstraction, this is especially important because of its capacity.[28] Many abstractions contain inadvertent logics and sites of cathexis for queer viewers looking for ways to see otherwise. Such a claim will no doubt infuriate those critics who ask if this somehow dissipates queer or, more to the point, ask if anything at all can be queer. The riposte to that criticism is a defiant "yes"—queer possibility can be located (as well as hidden) anywhere. As the critic Kenneth Baker wrote in a prescient account of the feeling of undefined embodied intimacy in Ellsworth Kelly's work, "To be satisfied with the feeling of recognition and not the act is a kind of test of one's willingness to trust one's experience."[29]

9. Capacity and openness are not the same as ambiguity. Refuse ambiguity.[30]

Abstract art is often considered "ambiguous" due to its openness and capaciousness. Even though this sometimes sounds like a compliment, it is not. More often, it is used to avoid confronting the particularities and complexities proposed by an abstract form and others' investments in it. The same intransigent form can and does mean differently for different viewers. To call this situation "ambiguous" is to fall back into hopeless subjectivism and avoidance. Instead, let's call this situation "competing" to show how much it is in the viewer's incomplete attempt to classify that differences emerge and that supposedly stable taxonomies unravel amidst contestations and divergences of reception.

Nominations of ambiguity are nothing more than declarations of resignation. We call something ambiguous when we give up on it and when we avoid committing to learning about all that does not fit into our categories. Objects, people, texts, events, and acts are not themselves ambiguous. They are particular, inassimilable, unorthodox, unprecedented, or recalcitrant. To invoke "ambiguity" is to flee from the confrontation with something that does not easily fall into one's patterns of knowing. This act of exhausted reading disrespects the particularity of that which is before us and instead writes it off as being at fault—as being unknowable, indiscernible, and incompletely categorizable. "Ambiguity" is safe to invoke, because it places blame for our own limitations elsewhere. It is a method of deflection and scapegoating. It enables us to throw up our hands and beat a hasty retreat from confronting how limited our categories and systems are. After all, what do we really mean when we say something or someone is ambiguous? We mean that *we* cannot read, cannot identify, and cannot classify. Instead, I want to uphold the particularity and inscrutability that the backhanded slur "ambiguous" attempts to manage. I want to see that particularity as a challenge to systems of knowing.

"Ambiguous" as an invocation or description merely signals the limitations of the one who would deploy that term. This does not mean I want everything clear and in its place. Quite the opposite: I want to embrace the radical particularity that always exceeds and undermines taxonomies. This is a queer stance, for it denies the applicability or the neutrality of those taxonomies as adequate representations of the world's complexity. Rather, they are artificial impositions of normativity more concerned with policing boundaries than with engagement. To take this term to task is to demand that we see the greater structural limitations that its

invocations hope to mask. “Ambiguity” as a description is not just lazy. It’s chauvinistic. More to the point, its deployment keeps us from recognizing and embracing the chance to see beyond the categories that are nothing more than blinders forcing us to stay on a narrow path.

Especially today, we cannot afford ambiguity. We must attempt to embrace inscrutability and particularity, and we can defiantly exceed or jam the taxonomic protocols that seek to delimit and define us. The undertow of ambiguity is complacency and surrender, and it is misapplied to acts of refusal and self-definition.

10. We’re not always in the mood for queer abstractions.

To my fellow queer readers: We need to keep the option of abstraction, but it can never be the only option. Sometimes we need radical visibility. Sometimes we need polemically clear agitprop and political art. Sometimes we need figurative art that enfleshes queer sexuality through particular bodies. Sometimes we need rainbows, glitter, and the rest. Sometimes we need art that speaks to histories of trauma directly. Sometimes we need work that gives voice to queer separatism. Sometimes we need unflinching representations of sexual practices that others call “perverse.” Sometimes we need history paintings about queer families and their love. Sometimes we need to stand up and be counted. Sometimes we need a break from being queer for others. Sometimes we need to be inscrutable. Sometimes we need to use metaphor. Sometimes we need to say it frankly, bluntly, and crassly. Sometimes we need to see each other. Sometimes we need others to see us. Sometimes we need to imagine how we might see differently. Sometimes we need to vex sight itself. Abstraction can sometimes navigate these and other needs, but it is a misstep to think that it can do everything or that it, alone, represents queer experience. Nevertheless, a queer engagement with abstraction can remind us of how we must remake the forms we encounter through our own particularity, our own history, and our own ways of surviving the daily experience of falling outside of the normal.

I’m not always in the mood for queer abstraction, but there are moments when it seems the only egress. I think of it like poetry. I live in a world of prose, both short and long, but I turn to poetry to see words and the spaces around them differently. I can’t imagine speaking in poetry all the time, but I also can’t imagine not being able to turn to poetry. Queer abstraction is like that, for me at least.

1 For a more extensive discussion, see my "Introduction: Queer Intolerability and its Attachments," in David J. Getsy, ed., *Queer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), 12–23.

2 Indeed, the popularization and commodification of the word "queer" as shorthand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and (sometimes) transgender is itself evidence of the ways in which normativity absorbs challenges to itself and is constantly redefining. But, we should not be placated by this circulation of the word, for it also reinstalls a new "normal" that comes with its own exclusions and policing. Homonormativity, respectability politics, pinkwashing, and resurgent assimilationism are among its ramifications. Even after the word "queer" has lost its current (but waning) affective force, there will still be the need for escapes from and rejections of the "normal" and the "natural" as unceasingly imposed criteria. This is more than a lexicological concern. Such shifts register, synecdochally, political contests over newly reified forms of normativity—and homonormativity. For a useful range of discussions, see the prescient account in David Halperin, "The Normalization of Queer Theory," *Journal of Homosexuality* 45.2–4 (2003): 339–43; D. Gilson, "Colby Keller for President," in *I Will Say This Exactly One Time: Essays* (Little Rock, Arkansas: Sibling Rivalry Press, 2015), 74–87; and the work of the Against Equality collective in Ryan Conrad, ed., *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion* (Oakland, California: AK Press, 2014).

3 It should be said that there are artists who pivot between both modes, as with the core members of fierce pussy (Nancy Brooks Brody, Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard, and Carrie Yamaoka), all of whom include forms of abstraction in their individual practices. On fierce pussy, see Lauren O'Neill-Butler, "Labor of Love," *Artforum* 57.6 (February 2019): 126–33, 200.

4 See, for instance, the statements on abstraction by Amy Sillman, Mahmoud Khaled, Prem Sahib, and Gordon Hall in Getsy 2016, 56–61, 191, 194–96.

5 Barbara Hammer, "The Politics of Abstraction," in Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar, *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 73.

6 For a more extensive discussion of this history, its relation to trans history, and abstraction, see "Appearing Differently: Abstraction's Transgender and Queer Capacities: David J. Getsy in Conversation with William J. Simmons," in Christiane Erharter, Dietmar Schwärzler, Ruby Sircar, and Hans Scheirl, eds., *Pink Labour on Golden Streets: Queer Art Practices*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 38–55.

7 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], trans. A. Sheridan, 1977 (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 200.

8 See, for instance, Marlon Ross, "Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm," in E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, eds., *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 16–189; José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); C. Riley Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed To Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); and Katherine Schweighofer, "Rethinking the Closet: Queer Life in Rural Geographies," in Mary L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson, and Brian J. Gilley, eds., *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 223–43.

9 As Judith Butler argued, "Can the visibility of identity *suffice* as a political strategy, or can it only be the starting point for a strategic intervention which calls for a transformation of policy? Is it not a sign of despair over public politics when identity becomes its own policy, bringing with it those who would 'police' it from various sides? And this is not a call to return to silence or invisibility, but, rather, to make use of a category that can be called into question, made to account for what it excludes. […] If the rendering visible of lesbian/gay identity now presupposes a set of exclusions, then perhaps part of what is necessarily excluded is the *future uses of the sign*. There is a political necessity to use some sign now, and we do, but how to use it in such a way that its futural significations are not *foreclosed*?" Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in Diana Fuss, ed., *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 19.

10 Glenn Ligon quoted in Hilarie M. Sheets, "Glenn Ligon: The Writing on the Wall," *ARTnews* 110.4 (April 2011): 89.

11 Abstraction is, of course, not the only mode in which such resistance to recognition can be located. In particular, I have found very useful the discussions of surveillance and its rejections in Herman Gray, "Subject(ed) to Recognition," *American Quarterly* 65. 4 (December 2013): 771–98; Toby Beauchamp, "Surveillance," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, 1–2 (2014): 208–10; Shaka McGlotten, "Black Data," in E. Patrick Johnson, ed., *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 262–86; and the foundational Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* [1990], trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

12 Derek Jarman quoted in Tony Peake, *Derek Jarman: A Biography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1999/2011), 515. This is in reference to Jarman's astounding 1993 *Blue,* in which he further proposes, "From the bottom of your heart, pray to be released from image." See also the discussion of plurality and resistance in Tim Lawrence, "AIDS, the Problem of Representation, and Plurality in Derek Jarman's *Blue*," *Social Text* 52/53 (Winter 1997): 241–64.

13 Harmony Hammond, "A Manifesto (Personal) of Monochrome (Sort of)," reprinted in Tirza True Latimer, *Harmony Hammond: Becoming/Unbecoming Monochrome* (Denver: Redline Art Space, 2014), 4. See also Latimer's essay in that same volume (pp. 7–27), which compellingly argues for Hammond's pivotal importance.

14 For treatments of this history, see Viviane K. Namaste's writings on this topic, including "Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity," in Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason, eds., *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 183–203; "The Use and Abuse of Queer Tropes: Metaphor and Catachresis in

Queer Theory and Politics," *Social Semiotics* 9.2 (1999): 213–34; and *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000); as well as those of Susan Stryker, including "Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity," *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 145–57; "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin," *GLQ* 10.2 (2004): 212–15; and *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, second edition (New York: Seal Press, 2017).

15 See, for instance, two recent books in transgender studies that have made the question of visibility central: Toby Beauchamp, *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019) and Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton, eds., *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).

16 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5.10 (Summer 1967): 21.

17 Charles Bernstein, "Disfiguring Abstraction," *Critical Inquiry* 39.3 (Spring 2013); 488.

18 This is not to say that we should not have abundant skepticism for the commodification, co-option, and over-use of "queer." Both the willful slipperiness of the term and its tactical, adjective, and multiform mobilities demand an attention to particularity about how normativity is resisted or the otherwise is visualized. For a useful discussion of the problems of "queer" as a label in the art world, see Ariel Goldberg, *The Estrangement Principle* (New York: Nightboat Books, 2016).

19 For instance, Joaquín Torres-García reminded his peers that abstraction had long predated its European emergence: "Every age has what is usually called 'modern art.' It is the art that—abandoning the misleading road of imitation of reality—reaches the depths of the abstract." Joaquín Torres-García, "The Abstract Rule" [1946], translation in Mari Carmen Ramírez, ed., *El Taller Torres-García: The School of the South and Its Legacy* (Austin: Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery and University of Texas Press, 1992), 168. See also the essays collected in Kobena Mercer, ed., *Discrepant Abstraction* (Cambridge: MIT Press and the Institute of International Visual Arts, 2006). More recently, Charles Bernstein, chaffing against an invitation to participate in a symposium on "Inventing Abstraction," pointed to such longer histories and wrote "Abstraction, that is, is not invented but rediscovered, over and again. Those reinventions are themselves the signposts in the history of art." He also warned against a totalizing characterization of abstraction, reminding that, "Abstraction is plural and multiform. The relation of one approach to abstraction to another is not underlying unity but incommensurability." Bernstein 2013, 487 and 491.

20 Linda Besemer has discussed the patterns of criticizing abstraction and offered alternatives, writing "abstraction is not locked in an historical dead end, nor do all the forms it produces 'collapse' back into a pseudo universal subjectivity. Rather, multiple—even conflicting—forms and histories cross over and through one another, 'mutating' into unexpected and paradoxical forms and subjects." Linda Besemer, "Abstraction: Politics and Possibilities," *X-TRA* 7.3 (2005): 14–23.

21 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–51.

22 See, for instance, Kellie Jones, *Energy/Abstraction: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964–1980* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2006); Mercer 2006; Adrienne Edwards, *Blackness in Abstraction* (New York: Pace Wildenstein, 2016); and Darby English, *1971: A Year in the Life of Color* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

23 For a text that discusses intersectionality and positionality in relation to the visual and to recognition, see C. Riley Snorton, "'A New Hope': The Psychic Life of Passing," *Hypatia* 24.3 (Summer 2009): 77–92.

24 For an excellent example of such a forum see the special issue of *ASAP/Journal* on "Queer Form" edited by Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez, and, in particular, their introduction: "Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social," *ASAP/Journal* 2.2 (May 2017): 227–39.

25 See Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on Its Changing Aspects from Egypt to Bernini* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1964), 26–27, 52–54. For a discussion of the limitations of ascribing intention or equivalence based on pseudomorphosis, see Yve-Alain Bois, "On the Uses and Abuses of Look-alikes," *October* 154 (Fall 2015): 127–49.

26 As Jennifer Doyle has adroitly summarized, "That complaint about 'reading into' usually displaces a conversation about desire with a complaint about identity—it mistakes the effort to expand on how pleasure works for a taxonomical project, turning the queer reading into the abject shadow of art history's most conservative projects." In "Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation," *Art Journal* 72.4 (Winter 2013): 61.

27 Such receptions can be proposed by other artists, and I would point to the examples of Gordon Hall, Jonah Groeneboer, Amy Sillman, Tom Burr, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Prem Sahib as just a few examples. A superlative example of how a deep engagement with abstraction led to an unfolding identification and adaptation can be found in Hall's 2018 *The Number of Inches Between Them* at the List Visual Arts Center at MIT, which took an abstract artwork by Dennis Croteau as its catalyst. This project is documented in the artist's book and critical anthology of the same title, released by Hall in 2019. See also Gordon Hall, "Object Lessons: Thinking Gender Variance Through Minimalist Sculpture," *Art Journal* 72.4 (Winter 2013): 47–56. In addition, a guiding example for me of an artist's reviewing of the history of abstraction has been Amy Sillman, "AbEx and Disco Balls: In Defense of Abstract Expressionism, II," *Artforum* 49.10 (Summer 2011), 321–25. For examples of texts by historians or critics writing about queer and transgender capacities of artists' abstract practices, see J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Jonathan D. Katz, "Agnes Martin

and the Sexuality of Abstraction," in Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly, and Barbara Schröder, eds., *Agnes Martin* (New York: Dia Foundation, 2011), 170–97; Jeanne Vaccaro, "Felt Matters," *Women & Performance* 20.3 (November 2010): 253–66; Lex Morgan Lancaster, "The Wipe: Sadie Benning's Queer Abstraction," *Discourse* 39.1 (Winter 2017): 92–116; and the essays in Gilbert Vicario, ed., *Sheila Pepe: Hot Mess Formalism* (Munich: DelMonico Books and Phoenix Art Museum, 2017), to name a few. See also Erharter, Schwärzler, Sircar, and Scheirl 2015.

28 In another context, I have discussed the methodological usefulness of the concept of "capacity" as a means of addressing how non-binary genders erupt and proliferate in unexpected, ubiquitous, or inadvertent ways. For me, this term was developed in relation to abstraction (but is not limited to it), and I have found it a useful framework within which to discuss how one proposes potential (be it non-binary, non-dimorphic, non-hegemonic, or queer) in a work of art—whether it be proposed by the maker and/or the viewer/reader. See David J. Getsy, "Capacity," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1.1-2 (2014): 47-49.

29 Kenneth Baker, "Ellsworth Kelly's *Rebound*," *Arts Magazine* 51.1 (September 1976): 110–11. This remarkable two-page article offers a theory of embodied viewing that, without naming Kelly's sexuality as a source for the work, sought to unpack the intimate capacities of his abstractions.

30 This section contains excerpts from a text that first appeared in Carlos Motta, John Arthur Peetz, and Carlos Maria Romero's *The SPIT! Manifesto Reader*, a chapbook that accompanied their performance at London's Frieze Projects in 2017.

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

1. **Math Bass** (American, born 1981)
Newz!, 2019
Gouache on canvas
44 × 42 in. (111.8 x 106.7 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
Plate 2

2. **Mark Bradford** (American, born 1961)
Killing the Goodbye, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
120 × 120 in. (304.8 × 304.8 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase through a gift of Komal Shah and Gaurav Garg
Plate 3

3. **Elijah Burgher** (American, born 1978)
New Horny Sun Vision, 2019
Acrylic and ink on canvas
118 1/8 × 157 1/2 in. (300 × 400 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Western Exhibitions
See plate 4

4. **Tom Burr** (American, born 1963)
Deep Purple, 2019
Wood and water-based stain
78 × 984 × 17 in. (198.1 × 2499.4 × 43.2 cm)
Edition 2 of 2
Courtesy of the artist
See plate 5

5. **Mark Joshua Epstein** (American, born 1979)
Working lunch, 2018
Mixed media on artist-made foam and epoxy clay panel
25 × 23 × 2 1/4 in. (63.5 × 58.4 × 5.7 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
Plate 6

6. **Mark Joshua Epstein** (American, born 1979)
Clouds at icy altitudes, 2019
Mixed media on artist-made foam and epoxy clay panel
27 × 16 × 2 in. (68.6 × 40.6 × 5.1 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

7. **Mark Joshua Epstein** (American, born 1979)
Dreams and false alarms, 2019
Mixed media on artist-made foam and epoxy clay panel
16 × 18 × 1 1/2 in. (40.6 × 45.7 × 3.8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

8. **Mark Joshua Epstein** (American, born 1979)
Silks up your sleeve, 2019
Mixed media on artist-made foam and epoxy clay panel
20 × 40 1/4 × 2 1/4 in. (50.8 × 102.2 × 5.7 cm)
Private collection
Plate 7

9. **Edie Fake** (American, born 1980)
Vanity Mirror, 2013
Gouache on paper
18 × 5 in. (45.7 × 12.7 cm)
Private collection

10. **Edie Fake** (American, born 1980)
The Retention Pond, 2015
Ink, acrylic, enamel, and gouache on hand-dyed paper
30 × 22 in. (76.2 × 55.9 cm)
The Progressive Art Collection

11. **Edie Fake** (American, born 1980)
Egg Palace, 2016
Gouache and ink on paper
22 × 25 in. (55.9 × 63.5 cm)
Everson Museum of Art

12. **Edie Fake** (American, born 1980)
The Keep, 2018
Gouache and ink on panel
28 × 28 in. (71.1 × 71.1 cm)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Purchased with funds from the Keith W. Shaver Trust, 2018.40
Plate 8

13. **Edie Fake** (American, born 1980)
Potential Donor, 2018
Gouache and ink on panel
20 × 20 in. (50.8 × 50.8 cm)
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Purchased with funds from the Keith W. Shaver Trust, 2018.41
Plate 9

14. **Felix Gonzalez-Torres** (American, 1957–1996)
"Untitled" (Water), 1995
Strands of beads and hanging device
Variable dimensions
The Baltimore Museum of Art, Purchase with exchange funds from Bequest of Saidie A. May, 1995.73
Plate 10

15. **Harmony Hammond** (American, born 1944)
Fuse, 2013
Oil and mixed media on canvas
90 1/4 × 72 1/2 in. (229.2 × 184.2 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York
Plate 11

16. **Harmony Hammond** (American, born 1944)
Chenille #2, 2016–17
Oil and mixed media on canvas
88 1/2 × 72 1/2 in. (224.8 × 184.2 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York; Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects
Plate 12

17. **Nicholas Hlobo** (South African, born 1975)
Phantsi Komngcunube, 2017
Ribbon and leather on canvas
Four elements, each 47 1/4 × 35 1/2 × 7 in. (120 × 90.2 × 17.8 cm)
Detroit Institute of Arts, Museum Purchase, Contemporary Deaccession Fund, 2018.72
Plate 13

18. **John Paul Morabito** (American, born 1982)
Frottage 037, 2016
Cotton and wool
42 × 60 in. (106.7 × 152.4 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
Plate 14

19. **John Paul Morabito** (American, born 1982)
Frottage 064, 2017
Cotton and wool
76 × 43 in. (193 × 109.2 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

20. **John Paul Morabito** (American, born 1982)
Frottage 068, 2018
Cotton and wool
62 × 42 in. (157.5 × 106.7 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
Plate 15

21. **Carrie Moyer** (American, born 1960)
Fan Dance at the Golden Nugget, 2017
Acrylic and glitter on canvas
78 × 66 in. (198.1 × 167.6 cm)
Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York
Plate 16

22. **Carrie Moyer** (American, born 1960)
Jolly Hydra: Unexplainably Juicy, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
84 × 78 in. (213.4 × 198.1 cm)
Collection of Sid and Shirley Singer, New York
Plate 1

23. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Hard and Soft Thing 2, 1994–2016
Cast plaster with inserted sewn fabric; reupholstered in 2016
30 3/4 x 1 3/4 × 4 1/8 in. (78.1 × 4.4 × 10.5 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
Plate 18

24. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Different things, 1994
Ceramic
15 × 8 × 5 in. (38.1 × 20.3 × 12.7 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

25. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Different things, 1994
Ceramic
15 × 8 × 5 in. (38.1 × 20.3 × 12.7 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

26. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Different things, 1994
Ceramic
15 × 8 × 5 in. (38.1 × 20.3 × 12.7 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

27. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Different things, 1994
Ceramic
15 × 8 × 5 in. (38.1 × 20.3 × 12.7 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

28. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Different things, 1994
Plaster
15 × 8 × 5 in. (38.1 × 20.3 × 12.7 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

29. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Different things, 1994
Wood, gesso, plaster, and ceramic
15 × 8 × 5 in. (38.1 × 20.3 × 12.7 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

30. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Different things, 1999
Plaster
8 × 8 × 7 in. (20.3 × 20.3 × 17.8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

31. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Different things, 1999
Plaster
8 × 8 × 7 in. (20.3 × 20.3 × 17.8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

32. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Different things, 1999
Plaster
8 × 8 × 7 in. (20.3 × 20.3 × 17.8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

33. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
thing (oil can), 1999
Plaster, oil can, rubber bands, wires, springs, and mixed media
10 × 5 × 3 in. (25.4 × 12.7 × 7.6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

34. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Grey Thing with Dangly Bit on Chain, 2010
Painted fabric, metal, wood, and wire
10 1/2 × 8 1/2 × 3 1/2 in.
(26.7 × 21.6 × 8.9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

35. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Women Are from Mars with Crocheted Thing, 2010
Painted fabric, metal, and wood
H. 7 in. (17.8 cm)
Collection of Gail English, Boston

36. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Urban thing X, 2010
Sewn fabric on armature
12 × 6 1/2 × 9 in. (30.5 × 16.5 × 22.9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

37. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Votive Modern, 2010
Painted fabric, metal, and wood
16 × 9 × 9 in. (40.6 × 22.9 × 22.9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

38. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Oversewn Object with Different Things Underneath, 2015
11 × 8 1/2 × 7 1/8 in. (27.9 × 21.6 × 18.1 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
Plate 17

39. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Glitter Dome (for Carrie), 2015–17
Found ceramic, sewn fabric, and paint
8 1/4 × 4 × 3 in. (21 × 10.2 × 7.6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

40. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Fin Job, 2016
Glazed stoneware with portions of white slip underglaze
9 × 7 × 10 in. (22.9 × 17.8 × 25.4 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

41. **Sheila Pepe** (American, born 1959)
Say Campania: Mom, 2017
Wood parts, paint, fringe, and fabric over metal
10 × 5 × 5 in. (25.4 × 12.7 × 12.7 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

42. **Prem Sahib** (British, born 1982)
Taker X, 2014
Aluminum and resin
39 3/8 × 27 9/16 in. (100 × 70 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Southard Reid

42. **Prem Sahib** (British, born 1982)
Beyond I, 2015
Aluminum and resin
39 × 27 in. (99.1 × 68.6 cm)
Private collection, London

43. **Prem Sahib** (British, born 1982)
Outer Wear, 2015
Wood, ceramic tiles, and grout
88 × 94 × 11 in. (223.5 × 238.8 × 27.9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Southard Reid
Plate 20

44. **Prem Sahib** (British, born 1982)
Andreas, 2017
Aluminum and resin
39 3/8 × 31 1/2 in. (100 × 80 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

45. **Prem Sahib** (British, born 1982)
Roots, 2018
Steel drinking fountain and resin
9 × 15 × 15 in. (22.9 × 38.1 × 38.1 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Southard Reid
Plate 19

46. **Jonathan VanDyke** (American, born 1972)
In the Month of June 2016, 2017
Acrylic paint and ink on cotton fabrics, backed in linen, with embroidery and photographs printed on verso
83 1/2 × 68 1/2 in. (212.1 × 174 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Loock Galerie Berlin, 1/9unosunove galleria Rome, and Scaramouche New York/Milan
Plates 21 and 22

47. **Jonathan VanDyke** (American, born 1972)
In a Different Voice, 2019
Water-based paint and inks on cotton t-shirt material; verso: backed with dyed linen and archival photograph prints on canvas (Iraq war falling soldier image by David Leeson for *The Dallas News*, 2004; portrait photo of CPL Andrew C. Wilfahrt, 1979–2011)
82 3/8 × 63 7/8 × 1 5/8 in.
(209.2 × 162.2 × 4.1 cm)
Courtesy of the artist, Loock Galerie Berlin, 1/9unosunove galleria Rome, and Scaramouche New York/Milan

48. **Jade Yumang** (Canadian, born Philippines, 1981)
Page 14, 2014
Scanned gay erotic page printed with archival ink on cotton, polyurethane foam, chicken wire, felt, dress pins, and fringe
17 1/2 × 19 × 19 in. (44.5 × 48.3 × 48.3 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
Plate 23

49. **Jade Yumang** (Canadian, born Philippines, 1981)
Page 5, 2016
Scanned gay erotic page printed with archival ink on cotton, polyurethane foam, woven wool, zippers, and acrylic on hemlock
36 × 14 × 6 in. (91.4 × 35.6 × 15.2 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
Plate 24

50. **Jade Yumang** (Canadian, born Philippines, 1981)
Page 15, 2016
Scanned gay erotic page printed with archival ink on cotton, polyurethane foam, vinyl, faux fur, buttons, zipper, and high-density foam
18 1/2 × 20 × 13 in. (47 × 50.8 × 33 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

DES MOINES ART CENTER ENTIRELYUNEXPECTED

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Cover
Carrie Moyer
Jolly Hydra: Unexplainably Juicy (detail), 2017
Collection of Sid and Shirley Singer, New York