

Dirty Abstraction

Dirty Abstraction proposes an abstraction that communicates and contains cultural, ecological, political, and/or spiritual content. It is abstraction that pushes against traditional notions of pure form and into criticality. *Dirty Abstraction* occupies gendered, queer, racial, and ableized space(s). The work here is contingent, intersectional, and coded, interjecting shifting nuance. Meaning is inscribed in the formal properties of the work. Each artist in the show has a different approach to how they make the content of their work legible, to whom, and to what degree they allow their work to be illegible. Each viewer brings their own experience and cultural knowledge to the encounter, and the artists embrace the varying degrees of understanding that are inherently a part of this exchange. The exhibition explores the contradiction of does it matter / it doesn't matter how much the viewer gets.

Three artists from Colorado, Joan Anderson, Anthony Garcia Sr., and Noah Travis Phillips, are joined by three artists living outside of Colorado, Paula Damasceno (NC), Claire Warden (AZ), and Jen Wohlner (MO). The artists work across various mediums, including drawing, digital and cameraless photography, digital and analog collage, painting, garment, video, and an interactive website. Though diverse in range, they have aesthetic connections. This exhibition seeks to tease out these affinities by hanging the work in mixed group constellations, creating something like conversational neighborhoods. These groupings are determined by and emphasize formal qualities, types of gestures or marks, or critical themes found within the work. These neighborhoods create multiple narratives in the gallery space and between the individual pieces.

The spiritual possibilities of abstraction are employed in Joan Anderson's paintings and Paula Damasceno's photography. Anderson is making spirit clothes, which she identifies as garment + being + skin. In this work the body is present and absent; the body is presence and absence; the body is the spirit; the spirit is the clothes. Paula Damasceno's work explores how events from the past are performed in the present/future through the body, both as the self, as the other, and beyond that binary. The performance is not happening now, and it is always happening now. It is the document, the documentation, and it is your experience right now in the gallery with the afterimage of the action.

Abstraction is a language used to obscure and reveal. Claire A. Warden combines biologic matter (her saliva) with the metallic silver of black and white negative film to create cameraless photographs about her experience as a person of color in the United States. This dual residue creates a not-quite portrait, a portrait absent a face, but also an absolute portrait. Warden's work pushes against the boundaries of photography, (racial) experience, abstraction, and portraiture. Jen Wohlner works with precision and endurance, allowing the wobble of the human hand a place alongside attentive accuracy. She nods to her familial relationships or neighborhood through the titles but doesn't intend for the viewer to know the whole story.

Enough substance and complexity are embedded in the marks themselves to keep the viewer looking.

Sometimes abstraction is referential, as with the soft and smooth yet hard and sharp lines of Anthony Garcia Sr.'s paintings and in Noah Travis Phillip's digital collages. The woven geometric patterns of the Zarape blanket and Garcia's background as a graffiti writer are the foundation of his paintings, whether on canvas or as murals. His color palette translates his keen perception of the light of the American West. To create each composition for *The Screaming Weathers*, Noah Travis Phillips started with a portfolio of 100+ drawings, which were physically and digitally altered and then fed through a randomizing program written by the artist. Their authored yet hands-off approach reifies the agency and life force of the phenomenal weather(s) themselves.

The work in *Dirty Abstraction* asks what can and does abstraction do. The work is complicated and complex. It is not easy. This exhibition pushes into the instability of the fixed category, declaring that rather than being fully determined, and thus dead(ened), the dirty is nuanced and lively. This exhibition asks about legibility. Who gets to speak? Who can hear? Does abstraction allow certain truths to be uttered that cannot otherwise be stated? Does abstraction lend itself to counter-communication? Abstraction can be insightful and obscuring, essential and opaque. These contradictions are why and how abstraction with content is dirty.

— Jennifer Lord