

Abstraction & Social Critique

Miya Ando
Abigail DeVille
Modou Dieng
Richard Hunt
James Little
Al Loving
Angel Otero

Jamaal Peterman
Rewind Collective
Clare Rojas
Raymond Saunders
Brooklin Soumahoro
Cameron Welch
Jack Whitten

October 23–December 23, 2021
Opening Reception October 23, 2021, 5–8 pm
835 W. Washington Blvd.

Kavi Gupta proudly presents *Abstraction and Social Critique*, an intergenerational group show of artists whose aesthetic positions declare the continued relevance and influence of abstraction.

The artist James Little, whose masterful geometric paintings are included in the exhibition, offers this personal elucidation of why he chose to pursue abstraction in his work: “Abstraction frees me to do whatever I want.”

Artist Clare Rojas echoes that sentiment when asked what she is talking about when she talks about abstract art. “My main concern is creating my own sacred construct, one I have freedom to alter,” she says. “It’s about feeling that freedom and empowerment.”

Mimesis oppresses the artist by relegating where to begin or where to end, while abstraction serves the changing and unpredictable needs of the individual creative being.

It could be argued that abstract art is thus inherently political, because it is an expression of personal

freedom. It could also be said that abstraction is inherently anarchic, because it invites every point of view. Yet, every point of view has not always been welcomed into the conversation about what abstraction is, and what it means to contemporary culture.

Voices of BIPOC artists and artists identifying as women or LGBTQ+ have been systematically quieted through their exclusion from nearly every level of the contemporary art field, particularly in the United States. Many academies and institutions have long served and upheld cultural canons that lean heavily cisgendered, straight, and white, marginalizing all other artists. Relegated to the sidelines, showing their work in galleries that are mostly ignored by the art press, these artists have largely been left out of mainstream critical conversations, rendering their efforts and achievements all but invisible to those who write, edit, and study the art historical record.

Kavi Gupta’s mission is to amplify the voices of diverse and underrepresented artists to expand the canon of art history. Though their approaches are varied and



Installation view, *Abstraction & Social Critique*, Kavi Gupta | Washington Blvd., Chicago

idiosyncratic, the artists spotlighted in *Abstraction and Social Critique* are connected in the sense that their practices allow for a fully actualized conception of abstraction.

Some works, like those of Angel Otero, Abigail DeVille, and Richard Hunt, convey social critique through their methods and materials. Others, like those of Raymond Saunders, Cameron Welch, Miya Ando, Modou Dieng, Jamaal Peterman, and Rewind Collective, introduce personal and social narratives, though in abstracted terms. Paintings by Jack Whitten, James Little, Al Loving, Brooklin Soumahoro, and Clare Rojas can be read in purely formal terms—the combination of the artist’s lived experience and their intentions infusing the works with political relevance.

Within the exhibition, we see artists engaged in an effort to subvert systems of aesthetic oppression and control that attempt to define and thus limit what abstract art is and can be. Their presence here testifies to the changing needs of the contemporary art field, and broadens participation in the ongoing debate about the scope and influence of abstract art.