



DISARMING GEOMETRIES

hannes bend, Glenn Fischer, Shanti Grumbine, Nicholas Hamilton, Samantha Holmes, Maria Hupfield, Tatiana Istomina, Glendalys Medina, Mitch Paster, Armita Raafat, Martyna Szczesna, Ryan Turley, and Christine Wong Yap

Curated by Gabriel de Guzman

January 15 – March 26, 2017

Opening reception: Sunday, January 15, 2:00–5:00 p.m.

With recurring natural disasters, pandemics, riots, social disparity, and political strife, the world can seem a frightening place. Trying to cope with the constant stream of imagery and data about calamitous or perplexing events can induce enormous anxiety. Artists have used geometric abstraction since ancient times to make sense of the world around them and record their stories. For instance, a landscape mural from c. 6150 B.C. at Çatal Hüyük in the Near East shows a city threatened by an erupting volcano. The artist's depiction employs an economy of shapes, such as squares, cones, and arches; this stripped down technique seems hardly sufficient to convey the horror of the scene, yet there is something calming about the detached sensibility, making the inevitable destruction seem less alarming. Historically, artists have created works that act as "mirrors" to reflect and comment on the issues of the day, and "windows" to frame a vision of the world. Interpreting this view, which today is arguably defined by apprehension, change, violence, and unpredictability, has become a daunting task for contemporary artists. *Disarming Geometries* features artists who apply abstraction and geometry as organizing or fragmenting tools for processing those unsettling characteristics of everyday life. Artists are also employing geometry, without representational imagery, to allude to spiritual concepts in an effort to understand our existence. Others are attempting to forge connections to the natural world by finding common patterns and symmetry in our surroundings.

Several artists in *Disarming Geometries* choose to interrupt images with geometric patterns, cutting away, reconfiguring, and engaging materiality as a way of addressing the instability of our times. **Shanti Grumbine** transforms the *New York Times* print edition—she removes, scrambles, and fractures text and image, often creating abstract patterns on the page that resemble traditional paper-cuts, illuminated manuscripts or digital pixels. The work questions the stability of news media content and confronts how difficult it is to grasp the reality of tragic events. In *Blue Rose*, 2016, the newspaper becomes a vehicle for examining the media's global



Shanti Grumbine *Blue Rose*
(detail), 2016



Glendalys Medina *Black Alphabet*
Series B, 2014

influence and how it shapes and maintains our collective and individual belief systems. By excising the journalistic text and images, Grumbine calls attention to what has been censored and lost in the translation of experience into language. *The Last Color: A Reliquary*, 2015, comprises several folded textiles made from the plastic sleeves of newspaper delivery wrapping, as well as broken tablets bearing the artist's own vocabulary of symbols. In this work, the formal conventions of mass media collide with the more metaphysical aspects of knowing and believing: hands-on craft, repetition, beauty and ritual.

Glendalys Medina's work aims to transcend the symbolic systems of language and image by investigating the role they play in shaping identity. Medina invented her own graffiti tag, *BlackGold*, in 2012, derived from the geometric shapes of the face of a boom box. She then used these shapes to create line stencils for drawings in her *Black Alphabet Series*. Medina, who was raised in the Bronx, is developing a new visual language through refashioned letters based on the Latin alphabet that suggest the rhythm and movement of hip-hop, as well as the compositions and palette of graffiti. The dense arrangements that form each letter give them the appearance of landscape, architecture, city plans, molecules, or galaxies. The artist questions how we relate to a range of associations from the minuscule to the vast. Constantly pulling apart language and image, Medina reconfigures them and makes her own form of communication.

Wrestling with individual and collective memory, **Nicholas Hamilton** examines how remembrance operates in relation to a country's past, particularly that of his native Ireland. His sculpture in the exhibition is composed of parts from a 1940s London taxi cab. One of the editors of *The Great Famine* was traveling in such a vehicle when he lost an important section of the definitive, Irish government-sponsored account of the Irish famine of 1845–52. On his way to an editorial meeting, the author forgot the footnotes to a chapter on the medical history of the famine, which resulted in an incomplete historical report on this watershed moment in modern Irish history. The devastating suffering caused by the famine led to an estimated one million deaths and one million

people emigrating from Ireland to North America and England. Hamilton was struck by the staggering disconnect between the minor act of a historian forgetfully losing his notes and the horrific magnitude in consequence of catastrophic loss of life during the famine. In his sculpture, Hamilton adds his own hollow geometric compositions to the areas of the cab where the writer likely misplaced his notes; this gesture signals the impossibility of representing the gravity of the event. The artist attempts to touch on the invisibility of the past, its lasting effects, as well as the ebb and flow between memory and forgetfulness.

Tatiana Istomina's projects look at the complex interplay between ideological narratives and the lives of ordinary people. In her new series, *Helene's Story*, she investigates the life of prominent Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser or, more accurately, the



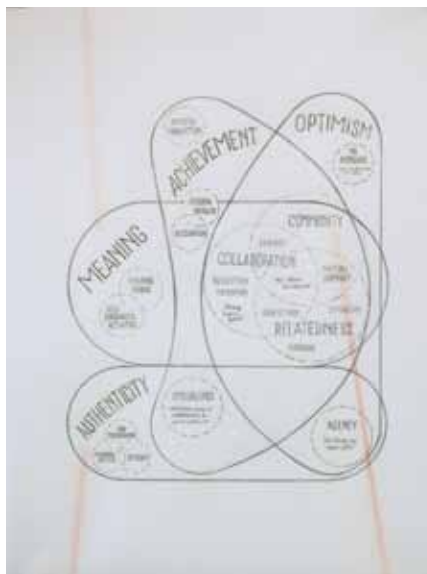
Nicholas Hamilton *Chapter 5, Medical History of the Famine by Sir William P. MacArthur, 2016*

death of his wife Helene Rytman. In 1980, Althusser murdered Rytman in the couple's apartment in Paris. By reason of temporary insanity, Althusser was never tried, but there is continuing debate on how the crime affected his philosophical legacy. Some dismiss it as an accident caused by Althusser's mental illness; others link it to his version of Marxism, which sees individuals as fully controlled by ideology, with family being among its most powerful institutions. Rytman herself was largely forgotten, remaining invisible, lost in the shadow of her famous husband. A devoted Communist and activist, Rytman in fact played a major role in Althusser's conversion to Marxism, providing her husband with practical knowledge about the social and political reality outside of the academic setting where Althusser developed his theoretical concepts. In Istomina's paintings, abstract shapes and gestures allude to recognizable imagery, as if attempting to uncover clues to a crime. The artist tries to flesh out Rytman's story, but the evidence is ambiguous at best. These works ultimately explore the psychological and conceptual links between the theory and practice of revolutionary action and romantic partnership.

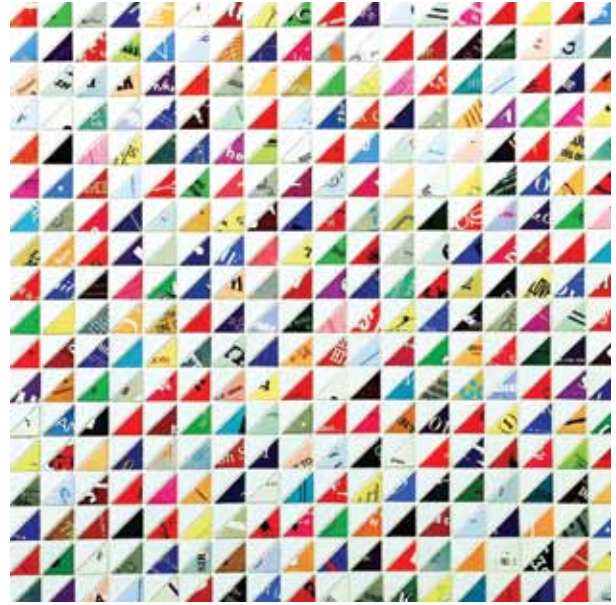
Christine Wong Yap employs basic shapes and diagrams to organize data about subjective concepts such as emotions,



Tatiana Istomina *Here Are My Reasons, 2016*



Christine Wong Yap *Inter/dependence (detail), 2015*



Glenn Fischer *Most Popular, 2016*

opinions, and mental states. *Inter/dependence*, 2015, and related projects have their origins in the Artists' Personal Impacts Survey, a 40-question survey that she conducted with 112 visual artists to explore the positive psychological benefits of art practice. Upon reviewing the feedback, Yap noticed respondents' emphasis on relatedness by means of connection, community, and collaboration. Through follow-up correspondence, she explored the practices of a subset of respondents who self-organized activities. Her findings are presented in an essay and nine data visualizations in *Inter/dependence*, a 20-page 'zine. She also summarized the overlaps in the 10 qualitative responses by creating four hand-drawn Venn diagrams and hand-lettered quotes from respondents, which further explicate the results. Finally, she sewed a flag that features a trapezoid shape, which represents how peer artists can comprise an art world that emphasizes participation and inclusiveness.

Rescuing discarded and outdated print materials like textbooks, album covers and magazines, **Glenn Fischer** constructs

geometric, abstract collages to reintroduce the value of print, giving it new relevance in the digital age. In works such as *Most Popular*, 2016, he extracts various characters, text, and illustrations from their original context and recombines them to create new meaning through their interactions. In this way, a playful, non-linear narrative emerges from his compositions. The selection process of materials is often in response to life experiences, both as a child and adult. These memories get restructured, evolving each time, revealing and concealing in a spirited, whimsical manner. Fischer allows his works to be personal, yet open enough for viewers to make their own associations.

Ryan Turley uses the attraction and familiarity of geometric

abstraction to draw in the viewer. In his recent series, Turley has painstakingly altered moving blankets, which are usually used to safeguard personally valuable items, transforming them so that the blankets themselves have become precious objects. Believing that most things fall into the category of gray areas that are difficult to assess, Turley calls into question our value systems, revealing an ambiguous sliding scale. The series also brings attention to the nomadic status of the artist, having to relocate often in search of suitable living and working conditions. It is a clever way of making art that is easily portable and speaks to the necessity of artists to be constantly flexible and resourceful.



Ryan Turley *Moving Blanket 1*, 2015

For several artists in this exhibition, geometric patterns are used for the purpose of unifying disparate elements and to transcend the din of the everyday world, creating new narratives. **Maria Hupfield** seeks a deep connection to the language of abstraction, making sculptural pieces that take geometric form, such as her felt cube decorated with tin cones (used in Native American dress). The silence of the still jingles suggests a greater unknown purpose founded in ancient ceremonies connected with sound and movement. The irregular patchwork pattern of Hupfield's draped felt piece evokes a crazy quilt but lacks the embellishments that are often used in this free-form method of textile art. Hanging like a skin or an article of clothing, the piece is displayed as though awaiting activation in a dance or ritualistic performance.

Sculptures and site-specific installations by **Armita Raafat** combine intricate structures and patterns inspired by both Islamic ornamentation and modern abstraction. Specifically, her sculptures are made up of the architectural element called *muqarnas*. Often used in interior vaults of Islamic buildings, the hexagonal pattern of *muqarnas* resembles a honeycomb or cellular structure. In Raafat's work, a tension is caused by the juxtaposition of traditional and modern elements; the pieces look fragile and fragmented, frozen in moments of deterioration. Her sculpture reveals breaks in the stability of the interlocking patterns, evoking

the volatile relations between the Western world and the Middle East. Emerging in high relief from the wall, the untitled work's deep blue pigment adds an unearthly quality. Through geometric patterning and contrasting colors, Raafat creates an eerie clash between the built environment and its surroundings.

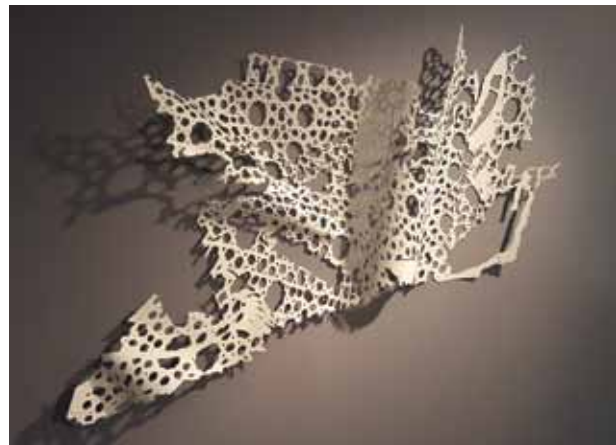


Armita Raafat *Untitled*, 2016

In his book, *A Beautiful Question: Finding Nature's Deep Design* (2015), Frank Wilczek proposes that the world embodies beautiful ideas, which are based on symmetry and economy of means, suggesting in effect, that the world can be viewed as a work of art. Artists in this exhibition are also exploring this concept, finding recurring patterns and geometry in nature but often arriving at different conclusions. **Samantha Holmes**'s work recontextualizes sacred forms and designs within a secular urban landscape, opening canonical forms to new interpretations. Introducing irregularity into patterns derived from aperiodic symmetry, Holmes investigates the disparity between the promise of underlying



Maria Hupfield *From Alpha Alternative*, 2016



Samantha Holmes *Geometric Application XI*, 2015

ing order and the chaos of contemporary living, as well as the precision of geometry and the imperfection of the artist's hand. In her *Geometric Applications* series, steel lattices trace the distorted geometries created by projecting perfect quasi-crystalline patterns onto mundane objects. A pattern found in both the mystic ornament of medieval Islam and the molecular structures of modern physics, the tiling represents the notion of an elemental structure, whether spiritual or scientific, rendered illegible by the disorder of modern life. As the metal lattice pushes forward into space, shadows fall on the wall behind it, tangling with the form itself so that object and space, light and shadow, become indistinct from one another.

hannes bend's work reflects an interest in the relationship of mathematical logic and geometry to spiritual, religious and scientific practices around the world. Through his creative practice, bend expounds on the importance of yoga, meditation and mindfulness to enhancing consciousness and to living a balanced life. *mUltiverseS*, a painting from 2008, plays on the viewer's assumptions of how color and geometric pattern should work. By fragmenting and superimposing circles that appear to (but do not quite) fit with one another, bend subverts the history of modernist abstraction, specifically its association with the qualities of harmony, perfection and infinity. He has since moved away from his painting practice to more collaborative endeavors, working with neuroscientists, physicists, psychologists, computer scientists, and meditation guides. *mYndful*, 2016, is a virtual reality program bend developed in collaboration with researchers from the University of Oregon. The program explores the potential capacities of visual stimuli, primarily geometric patterns, to influence stress reduction, self-monitoring and induce more meditative brain states.

Martyna Szczesna explores both the formal and the enigmatic qualities of photography and site by intertwining texture and representation in her work. Images are broken apart and built into landscapes and sculptural constructs, assembled into a fractured topography that speaks to an inaccessible sense of place and addressing the effects of dislocation on the psyche. Her ongoing series, *ARRAY*, uses the net-like shadows of the urban canopy illuminated by L.E.D. streetlights as the negative space for a series of oversized color photograms (cameraless images produced on light-sensitive paper). *ARRAY I*, 2016, was exposed using the tree-



hannes bend *mUltiverseS*, 2008



Martyna Szczesna *ARRAY I*, 2016

of design and photography. Using newer tools such as photo/design software, he modifies the images by capturing the non-physical subject matter onto film. His video projection, *Xenia*, 2015, for example, is actually a series of still images shown in rapid succession giving the appearance of a moving image. Through a process of defocusing the image in-camera, he morphs the immaterial form into something that becomes a physical application of an ethereal idea.

Basic shapes, forms, and lines have given artists an unending supply of image-making tools to represent everything from the simple to the complex, from the cool to the expressive, from the personal to the universal. The works in *Disarming Geometries* reveal the enduring capacity of geometric abstraction to defuse challenging material. Rather than allow aggressive images or arcane subjects to provoke anxiety or make us inured to tragic occurrences, the artists attempt to make them palatable and comprehensible. ■

— Gabriel de Guzman
New York, NY, 2017

BIOGRAPHY

Gabriel de Guzman is Curator of Visual Arts at Wave Hill, where he organizes the Sunroom Project Space series for emerging artists and thematic group exhibitions in Glyndor Gallery; he also coordinates Wave Hill's Winter Workspace residency program. As a guest curator, he has organized recent exhibitions for Rush Arts Gallery, Carriage Barn Arts Center, Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance (NoMAA), Boriqua College, the Affordable Art Fair, New York, as well as the Bronx Museum's 2013 AIM Biennial. Before joining Wave Hill's staff in 2010, he was a curatorial assistant at The Jewish Museum, where he coordinated exhibitions on Louise Nevelson, Harry Houdini, Joan Snyder, Andy Warhol, and Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and the *Blue Rider*. His writings have been published in catalogues for Wave Hill, the Bronx Museum, Arsenal Gallery at Central Park, Rush Arts Gallery, NoMAA, Kenise Barnes Fine Art, and The Jewish Museum. He earned an M.A. in art history from Hunter College, City University of New York, and a B.A. in art history from the University of Virginia.

CHECKLIST

hannes bend

mUltiverseS, 2008

Acrylic on canvas

61 x 61 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

mYndful, 2016

Virtual reality program, VR goggles, smartphone, and headphones

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the Artist

GLENN FISCHER

JUST A GLIMPSE, 2016

Collage on paper

36 x 36 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

MOST POPULAR, 2016

Collage on paper

36 x 36 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

SHANTI GRUMBINE

THE LAST COLOR: A RELIQUARY:

BLUE ROSE, 2016

De-acidified New York Times news-

paper, matte medium, UV spray

coat, nails, magnets

24 x 22 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

ASEMIC PRAYER #2, 2016

New York Times plastic delivery

sleeves, nails

6 x 10 feet

Courtesy of the Artist

A RELIQUARY, 2016

Carved fiberglass reinforced gypsum,

ink transferred images of graffiti

from Brooklyn and Israel, ink, bones

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the Artist

NICHOLAS HAMILTON

*CHAPTER 5, MEDICAL HISTORY
OF THE FAMINE BY SIR WILLIAM P.
MACARTHUR*, 2016

Glass, metal, cotton, and wood

5 x 14 ½ x 6 feet

Courtesy of the Artist

SAMANTHA HOLMES

GEOMETRIC APPLICATION XI,
2015

Steel

38 x 74 x 8 ½ inches

Courtesy of the Artist and

JHB Gallery

MARIA HUPFIELD

FROM ALPHA ALTERNATIVE, 2016

Felt and vinyl

24 x 36 x 3 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

JINGLE CUBE, 2016

Felt and tin jingles

10 x 10 x 14 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

TATIANA ISTOMINA

CLASS STRUGGLES, 2015

Oil on canvas

54 x 36 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

HERE ARE MY REASONS, 2016

Oil on canvas

60 x 48 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

GLENDALYS MEDINA

BLACK ALPHABET SERIES B, 2014

Pen and paint marker on paper

36 x 24 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

BLACK ALPHABET SERIES C, 2016

Pen and paint marker on paper

36 x 24 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

BLACK ALPHABET SERIES D, 2016

Pen and paint marker on paper

36 x 24 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

MITCH PASTER

XENIA, 2015

Video projection: color, sound

Running time 9:20

Courtesy of the Artist

ARMITA RAAFAT

UNTITLED, 2016

Plastic, resin, paint, mirror, metal

68 x 20 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

MARTYNA SZCZESNA

ARRAY I, 2016

Metallic C-print photogram

7 x 12 x 1 feet

Courtesy of the Artist

RYAN TURLEY

MOVING BLANKET 1, 2015

Hand cut, hand sewn/altered moving
blanket/pad

78 x 70 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

CHRISTINE WONG YAP

INTER/DEPENDENCE, 2015

Mixed media installation

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the Artist

Cover: **Mitch Paster**, *Xenia* (video still), 2015

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the artists for participating and contributing their compelling work to this exhibition. Shanti Grumbine in particular helped me conceptualize the exhibition topic early on, and my conversations with all of the artists generated ideas that shaped our project. I would also like to thank my colleagues at Wave Hill, friends, and loved ones, especially Brian Dorr, for their continued support of my endeavors. Thank you, Deborah Rising, for designing this brochure. Most of all, I wish to express my great appreciation to Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs—David, Noah, and Karen Dorsky, and Chelsea Cooksey—for giving me this wonderful opportunity and for their advice, support, and professionalism during every phase of organizing this exhibition.



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11-03 45th Ave., Long Island City, NY 11101 | T: 718 937 6317 | F: 718 937 7469 | E: info@dorsky.org | www.dorsky.org

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