



Chris Domenick

Private Figure

January 28 – March 2, 2025

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery | Center for the Arts | Wesleyan University

Chris Domenick

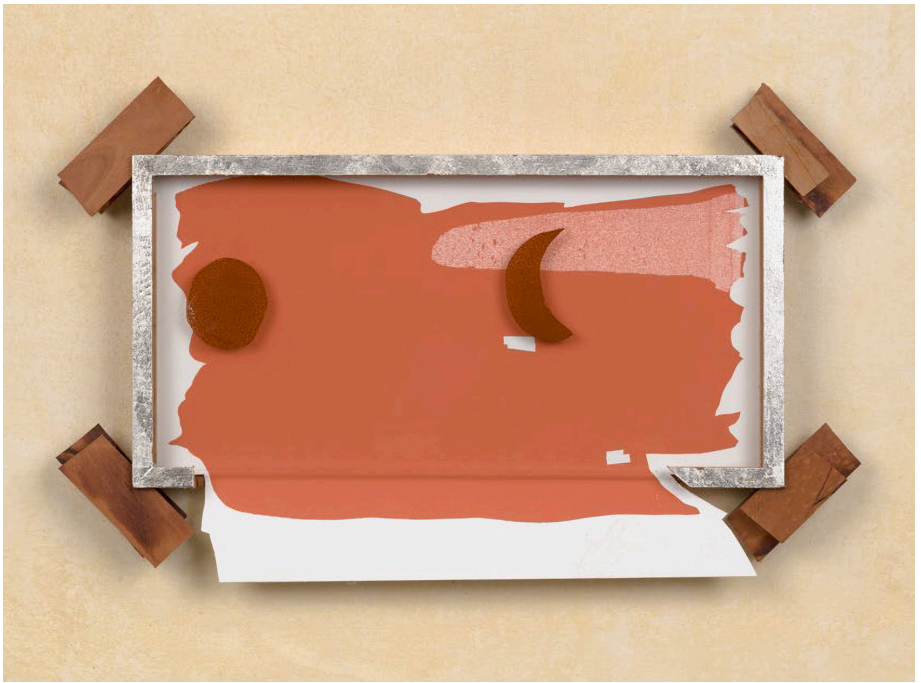
Private Figure

In *Private Figure*, Chris Domenick flirts with designed objects that recall domestic interiors. Lamps fill the gallery, displayed as artworks while also illuminating the space. Drawings, prints, paper fragments, and found images are suspended inside of frames but, in Domenick's practice, the frame acts as a "suspender" and not a "finisher." Rather than clarifying the limits of the artwork, the frame appends its contents, resulting in an assemblage that hovers between two- and three-dimensions. Collapsing categories of distinction is an undercurrent in Domenick's practice, where formed and found objects are often indistinguishable, and authorship waivers between "kitschy" craftsperson and "contemporary" artist.

With his solo exhibition in the Main Gallery of the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Domenick extends his interrogation of the slippage between art and design, building on a body of work the artist has been creating out of his studio in Canaan, Connecticut—a former Subway restaurant. A key tenet of design, as defined by the artist, is its ability to be instrumentalized. His lamps, filled with the viewer's expectations of use, are instrumental in lighting the space and the framed artworks around them. "While this ontological companionship could be framed as the lamp lights the artwork," Domenick explains, "it may be more apt to say that the artwork enables a clearer viewing of the lamp."

Drawing attention

Benjamin Chaffee



Chris Domenick, *Nation*, 2024, Screenprint on paper, glass, artist's frame, 12 x 20 x 1 inches.
Image courtesy of the artist. Photography by the artist.

While in graduate school, Chris Domenick became enamored with the found object. He was interested in the legibility of these objects as indexes of activities, of expressions, and even of symptoms of larger systems. He found that this idea, when applied to making artwork, complicated notions of authorship. In his words, “Found objects embody the systems they navigated without an author.” Exploring further within his studio practice, Domenick worked from scratch to create artworks that retained similar idiosyncrasies to found objects. This resulted in surfaces that bear evidence of particular attention and other moments that feel much more improvisatory and/or provisional. These artworks take recognizable forms such as lamps, kitchen islands, and framed artworks, and yet also disobey these conventions, extending into the ambiguity beyond these forms.

This is visible in *Nation* (2024), a work on paper that continues out of the boundary of its wooden frame. The screenprinted image is an abstract shape with an organic quality, at moments looking like a silhouette of brushstrokes. The shape of the paper seems distinct from the image—in one moment on the lower right, the shape seems to follow the shape of the image, but it quickly diverges. The glazing of the frame is also the ground for two screenprinted shapes, which hover slightly above the paper, dropping

shadows below and creating actual depth of image rather than mere pictorial depth. In *Nation*, the logics of each of the components of the work—the image, its shape, the glazing, the frame—seem to derive from their own internal aesthetic decision-making process, almost as if each object had lived its own life before coming together into the configuration we recognize as *Nation*.

The frame is assembled with mitered spline joints. The splines, the thin pieces of wood inserted and glued into the joint, have been left as decorative embellishments at each of the four corners, where, typically, they would have been sawed off by the frame maker. As a result the frame reads as an arrested “do it yourself” project, found and finished by another artist, and it becomes an entity that suspends, rather than finishes, the artwork. In the press release for Domenick’s 2023 solo exhibition at Dunes, Zoey Lubitz explains, “Though frames have the capacity to finalize, these works confound that convention: their frames often come first, and are then filled in with fragments and leftovers from the artist’s studio. Both literally and metaphorically, these frames refuse to perform their function to enclose a picture, even as they point to other formal phenomena.”¹

Domenick’s lamps also gesture towards other formal criteria though they do not



Chris Domenick, *Lamp (column #12)*, 2024,
Wood, milk paint, steel, enamel, screenprint
and collage on paper, lamp parts,
Dimensions variable.
Image courtesy of the artist.
Photography by the artist.

deny their formal function. The lamps light the room and make shadows across the floor. Their colorful power cables are plugged into the gallery's outlets. Each electrical cord is specific for each of the lamps. They are cloth-braided in different color combinations, different lengths, and with different plug hardware. The shape of their draping are like drawn lines across the gallery's floor, creating arcs and curves not unlike some of the organic shapes that appear within Domenick's wallworks. Some of the cords have tags with handpainting or screenprinting. These lamps perform within the formal visual language of designed objects and, as artworks, also pose a problem. What distinguishes them from the utility of a designed object? What separates art from design? In the artist own words, there are three main tenets of designed objects: 1) efficiency, 2) reproducibility, and 3) the object's availability to be instrumentalized towards another purpose.²

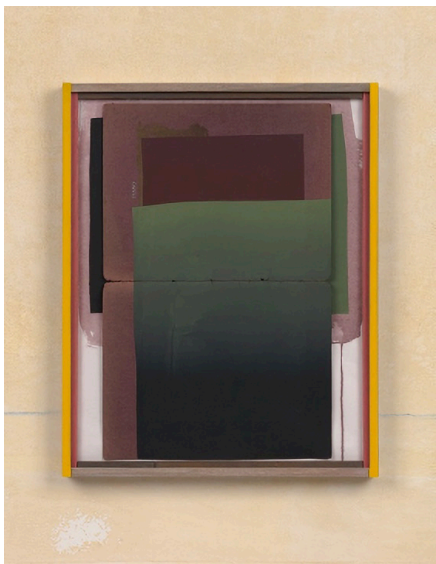
Domenick would assert that these lamps were highly inefficient to produce as they each require many hours of development and production. The lamps are also nearly impossible to reproduce given the (welcomed) eccentricities of the wood and paper used. They are also stubborn objects: they resist telling another story, they resist being bent towards other uses. The answer the lamps pose to the problem of distinguishing between art and design lies within the process of their development, beyond their visual appearance. Even though the resultant object of a design process or production in an artist's studio, a lamp for instance, may be functionally the same, art approaches this objecthood inversely, and in turn, also reframes the object's utility.

As if to set up the possibility and tension of this inversion, Domenick's works also

appeal to convention. A press release for a 2021 solo exhibition described the artist as offering "cues to 'quality' craftsmanship—such as certain joinery techniques or the lack of visible screws."³ These moments of attention to craft exist throughout the works. Domenick sets up the forms "only to undermine these concepts by leaving edges unhewn or presented backwards." Even *Nation*, pictured above, is very carefully not right. The edges of the paper that extend beyond the frame are cut cleanly, lending an intentionality to their peculiar shape. Domenick's objects are also legible as familiar forms—as framed works and as lamps—despite the moments of abstraction that exist within each work. It is this tension between recognizable form and escape from convention that creates moments of delight in his work.

These formal gestures become the content of Domenick's work. The artist thinks of content via form and of their interrelation. Domenick drew the content of these works in relation to the form of the found object, a symptom of the lives it had lived. These gestures take place across a variety of different media: wood and metal-working to create frames and structures, painting, drawing, printmaking, and collage to create images with their surfaces and facades. In Domenick's practice, works move fluidly through many different artistic methodologies.

Collage involves layering elements on top of each other. Similar to the timespace of a painting, it's possible for a viewer to piece together the process of the construction of the final work. The elements on top were added last and the items underneath are from an earlier stage of production, often partially obscured by the addition of later elements. Domenick often uses a combinatory method with



a more confusing timespace, the cut-out. The artist will excise a shape from a screenprinted matboard revealing a layer below. It is unclear from the viewer's perspective how/when that shape arrived into the composition. Was it cut earlier for a different work? Was the layer behind added after the cut-out layer?

The artist traces some of these incidental shapes and remakes them, translating them into shapes he cuts out of other drawings. The cut-outs become graphic entities which find their way into other projects, now separated from their source. They are, as in the found objects mentioned above, embodying the systems from which they arose. The walls of Domenick's studio have some wallpaper shapes still remaining from the process of removing the wallpaper from the former Subway restaurant. In a few areas Domenick left some of the Subway wallpaper attached to the wall. He cut out half-moon shapes of fake brick print and around some outlets he left larger areas, painting the wallpaper a bright orange color.

Figure-ground is a cognitive function allowing a viewer to distinguish between a figure and its background. The ground is also the physical material that supports, or lies under, foregrounded aspects of an artwork. Domenick's use of cut-outs destabilizes the sense of what might be a ground for an image and his studio process creates more potential grounds, even within the free-standing lamps. There are also areas of fusing within the artist's work, moments where he has cut a shape out of the work's ground and replaced it with the same shape of a different material. This draws attention to subtleties of the work's surface even as it creates another image.

By extension this raises the question of what might operate as a figure within the work. If the wall works upset the ground, the lamps most certainly pose as figures, vertical elements which literally stand throughout the gallery floor. In speaking about the relationship between these different works, the artist has identified that the presence of the lamps makes the wall works more legible as paintings. This metaphoric lighting of the artwork seems to go both ways. "While this ontological companionship could be framed as the lamp lights the artwork," Domenick himself explains, "it may be more apt to say that the artwork enables a clearer viewing of the lamp."

Chris Domenick, *Menthol*, 2024, Collage on paper, laminate, screenprint, glass, artist's frame, 22 x 28 x 1 inches. Image courtesy of the artist. Photography by the artist.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://dunes.fyi/bonefolder/>. Accessed December 16, 2024.
- 2 Conversation with the author, July 30, 2024.
- 3 <https://www.rvacollective.org/activities-all/chris-domenick>. Accessed December 20, 2024.

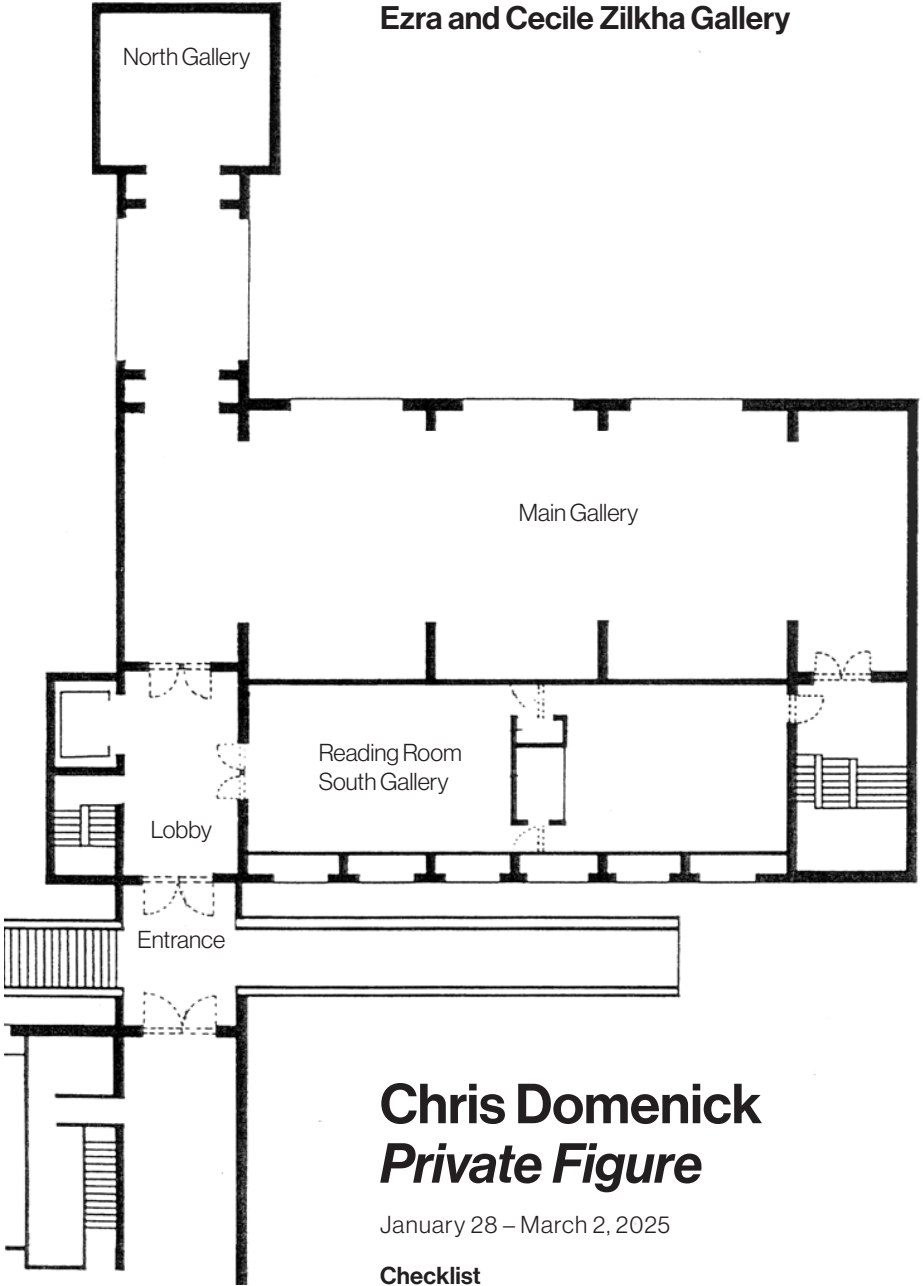


Studio of the artist. Photography by the curator.

Profile

Chris Domenick is an interdisciplinary artist working in painting, sculpture, drawing, and writing. His work explores the poetics of materiality and craft, often engaged with vernacular forms of architecture, design, and the decorative arts. He utilizes abstraction as a means to examine the semantics of surface, shape, and touch. Domenick received an MFA from Hunter College and has received awards from various institutions including the Shandaken Project, the Sharpe-Walentas Space Program, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and Recess Activities. Recent projects include *Detour: cul de sac* at International Waters, *Song-shaped Sill* at the AI Held Foundation, *Flat Moon* at Kate Werble Gallery, *5 O D A Y S* at MASS MoCA, and *Particulate Paper Records of Time* in *Cabinet* Magazine. He has been included in exhibitions at Canada Gallery, the Queens Museum, The Vanity East, MoMA, Essex Flowers, Regina Rex, and Room East, among others.

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery



Chris Domenick *Private Figure*

January 28 – March 2, 2025

Checklist

- 1. Chris Domenick**
Sophie's Lamp, 2024
Wood, enamel, dyed paper, steel,
lamp hardware
31½ x 13¼ x 13¼ inches
- 2. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (column #13), 2024
Wood, milk paint, steel, screenprint on paper,
lamp hardware
80¾ x 30¾ x 13 ⅞ inches
- 3. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (column float), 2024
Wood, laminate, flashe paint, milk paint, paper,
lamp parts
78 x 16¾ x 16¾ inches
- 4. Chris Domenick**
 Cenote, 2024
Screenprint on paper, collage, enamel, glass,
artist's frame
16⅞ x 30½ x 1 inches
- 5. Chris Domenick**
Menthol, 2024
Collage on paper, laminate, screenprint, glass,
artist's frame
22 x 28 x 1 inches
- 6. Chris Domenick**
Linda, 2024
Laminate, paper, collage, found book jacket,
found folder, museum glass, artist's frame
25¾ x 18½ x 1¼ inches
- 7. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (column #5), 2024
Wood, stain, screenprint on paper, lamp parts
54 x 16 x 16 inches
- 8. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (column #2), 2024
Wood, stain, steel, enamel, screenprint and
collage on paper, lamp parts
88¾ x 16½ x 16½ inches
- 9. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (column #3), 2024
Wood, milk paint, steel, enamel, screenprint
and collage on paper, lamp parts
64⅞ x 11⅞ x 11⅞
- 10. Chris Domenick**
Spigot, 2024
Flashe paint, screenprint on paper, matboard,
collage, glass, artist's frame
20⅞ x 20½ x ¾ inches
- 11. Chris Domenick**
Heart, 2024
Matboard, colored pencil on paper, enamel,
collage, glass, artist's frame
24 ⅞ x 24 ⅞ x 1 inches
- 12. Chris Domenick**
Banquette, 2024
Ink on paper, matboard collage, glass,
artist's frame
18⅞ x 25¾ x 1¼ inches
- 13. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (column #10), 2024
Wood, stain, steel, enamel, collage on paper,
lamp parts
76 x 17 x 17 inches
- 14. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (float #1), 2024
Steel, screenprint on paper, lamp parts
27 x 29 x 23 inches
- 15. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (column #12), 2024
Wood, milk paint, steel, enamel, screenprint
and collage on paper, lamp parts
68¼ x 15¼ x 12¼ inches
- 16. Chris Domenick**
Blow up, 2025
Enamel, milk paint, flashe, leather, matboard,
collage on paper, glass, artist's frame
81½ x 55⅞ x inches
- 17. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (float #2), 2025
Steel, flashe on paper, collage, wood,
lamp parts, dimensions variable
- 18. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (column #7), 2024
Stained wood, glass, lamp parts
70 x 24 x 23¾ inches
- 19. Chris Domenick**
Plume (E's for Emily), 2025
Screenprint on paper, matboard, wood,
flashe, enamel, glass, artist's frame
61¼ x 42 inches
- 20. Chris Domenick**
Primavera, 2024
Collage on paper, glass, artist's frame
34 x 31 x 2 inches
- 21. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (column #4), 2024
Wood, stain, steel, enamel, screenprint on
paper, lamp parts
64 x 19¼ x 18¾ inches
- 22. Chris Domenick**
Nation, 2024
Screenprint on paper, glass, artist's frame
12 x 20 x 1 inches
- 23. Chris Domenick**
Lamp (column #1), 2024
Wood, milk paint, steel, enamel, collage on
paper, lamp parts
79½ x 34 x 17 inches

Related Events

Opening Reception

Tuesday, January 28, 2025 at 4:30pm
Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Lunch and Learn

Monday, February 3, 2025 at Noon
Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Make As You Are: Breakup/Breakdown

Friday, February 14, 2025 at 4:30pm
Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Artist Talk with Chris Domenick

Thursday, February 20, 2025 at 4:30pm
Reading Room, South Gallery, Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Curated by Associate Director of Visual Arts Benjamin Chaffee '00 with Exhibitions Manager Rosemary Lennox and Preparator Paul Theriault. Special thanks to Exhibitions Interns Noah Shacknai '25 and Safiya Sikkem-Miles '25. Thank you to Chris Domenick, Rani Arbo, Andrew Chatfield, John Elmore, Lynette Vandlik, and Joshua Lubin-Levy. Support for this exhibition and related programs were provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Art Studio Program of Wesleyan University's Department of Art and Art History, and the College of Design and Engineering Studies IDEAS (Integrated Design, Engineering, Arts, and Society) Program at Wesleyan.



The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

Cover image: Exterior of Chris Domenick's studio, Canaan, Connecticut, September 2024.
Photo by the curator.



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