



DFT 2025

September 24 – December 7, 2025

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

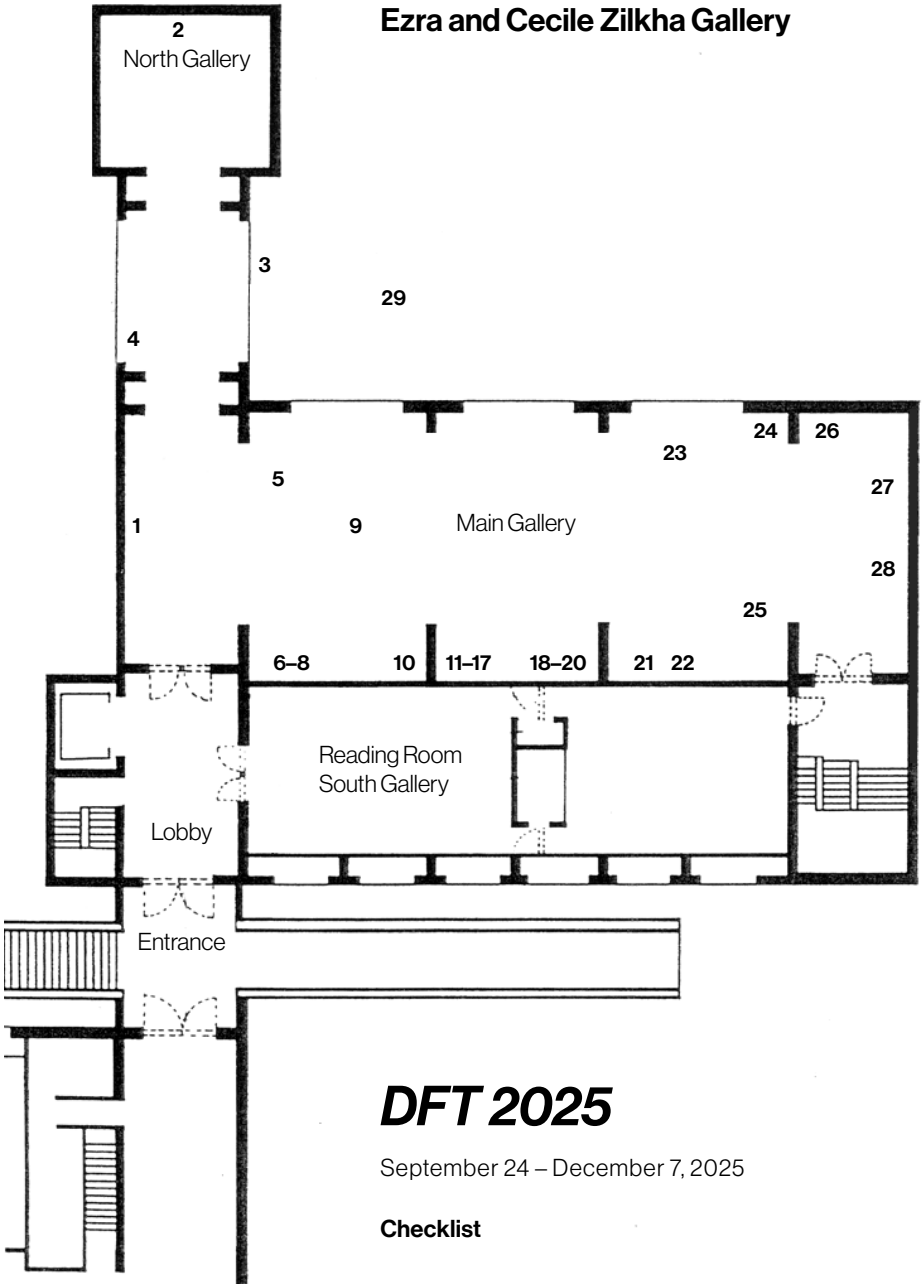
DFT 2025

"Dark Forest Theory" (DFT) states that civilizations hide in an effort to preserve themselves. If they were to come out of hiding, they'd risk falling into conflict and being destroyed by another civilization. The theory is an offshoot of the Fermi paradox, which points to the distance between our lack of evidence of alien life and the (high) likelihood of its existence. Rather than applying the theory to the extraterrestrial, DFT is used here as speculative social theory, as a vehicle to explore contemporary human interaction.

The group exhibition *DFT 2025* incorporates artworks by artists in a variety of media including sculpture, painting, video, installation, performance, and sound. The artworks on view and the exhibition's curatorial strategies toy with core themes of DFT: concealment, elusiveness, and both accessibility and its opposite. The exhibition includes an expansive list of artists and artworks that map a web of relations that extend offsite. Thus the exhibition itself functions as the temporary nucleus of a network, the nodes of which emit multi-frequency transmissions on a spectrum between legibility, hiding in plain sight, and complete concealment.

The exhibition explores how individuals, particularly Black people, may gain agency through concealment. How might a practice of hiding, abstraction (as a tool and strategy), evasion, a refusal of visibility and insistence on privacy, and opting out, facilitate freedom? The artworks and artists included in the exhibition engage with these questions, at once both accessible and clandestine.

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery



DFT 2025

September 24 – December 7, 2025

Checklist

- 1. Emilio Cruz**
Dark Wing Storm, 1985
oil on canvas
84 x 84 inches
- 2. Rodney McMillian**
A Migration Tale, 2014–2015
Single-channel video
10:00 loop
- 3. Michael E. Smith**
Untitled, 2025
Basketball, foam, plastic, pigment, magnet
Dimensions variable
- 4. Michael E. Smith**
Untitled, 2025
Box, foam, blacklight
28 x16 x14 inches
- 5. Michael E. Smith**
Untitled, 2025
Basketball, foam, plastic, pigment
10 x10 x10 inches
- 6. Nikita Gale**,
NOSEBLEED 15, 2024.
C-print on Canson Baryta paper
mounted on Sintra
Framed: 36 ¼ x 36 ¼ x 1 ¼ inches
- 7. Nikita Gale**
NOSEBLEED 6, 2024
C-print on Canson Baryta paper
mounted on Sintra
Framed: 36 ¼ x 36 ¼ x 1 ¼ inches
- 8. Nikita Gale**
NOSEBLEED 9, 2024
C-print on Canson Baryta paper
mounted on Sintra
Framed: 36 ¼ x 36 ¼ x 1 ¼ inches
- 9. Pope.L**
Eraser (drawing), 2015
MDF painted with liquitex acrylic spray
31 ½ x 31 ½ x 13 in.
- 10. Jasper Marsalis**
Radio Meditation, 2024
Radio, microcomputer, cables
Dimensions variable
- 11. Pope.L**
Figment, 2015
C-print
29 ¾ by 17 ¾ inches
- 12. Pope.L**
Flora and Fauna, 2015
C-print
22 ¾ by 13 ½ inches
- 13. Pope.L**
Puppet, 2015
C-print
18 by 11 ¾ inches
- 14. Pope.L**
Loving Nanny, Loving Master, Loving Artist,
2015
C-print
12 ½ by 7 ¾ inches
- 15. Pope.L**
Dressing Up for Longing, 2015
C-print
9 ¾ by 5 ½ inches
- 16. Pope.L**
Servant, Master, Window, 2015
C-print
7 ¾ by 11 ¾ inches
- 17. Pope.L**
The Table, 2015
C-print
23 ½ by 14 inches
- 18. Coumba Samba**
Wifeys, 2025
Pen on paper
8 ¼ x 11 ¾ inches, unframed
- 19. Coumba Samba**
Sadbaby, 2025
Pen on paper
8 ¼ x 11 ¾ inches, unframed
- 20. Coumba Samba**
SleepiMii, 2025
Pen on paper
8 ¼ x 11 ¾ inches, unframed
- 21. Rhea Dillon**
carried on the spirit air., 2024
Sapele mahogany, oil stick and paper
37 ½ x 49 x 9 inches
- 22. Rhea Dillon**
Less than that., 2024
Sapele mahogany, oil stick and paper
37 ½ x 49 x 9 inches
- 23. Daid Puppypaws, BLACKNASA, and the Otis Space Technology and Research Collective**
Betty Crockett, 2023-2025
Recycled building materials, plywood, aluminum, foam, fiberglass, resin
101 x 66 1/2 x 57 inches
- 24. Daid Puppypaws, BLACKNASA, and the Otis Space Technology and Research Collective**
Betty Crockett Launch Videos, 2025
Video
5:04 loop

25. Pope.L

Eraser (fold), 2015

MDF painted with liquitex acrylic spray

31½ x 31½ x 13 in.

26. Jasper Marsalis

Face 15, 2025

Max/MSP patch, computer,

LED screen, camera, and tripod

Dimensions variable

27. Kaari Upson

Untitled, 2009

Smoke on oil panel

96 x 48 inches

28. Emilio Cruz

Single Bird in the Eye of a Diva, 1984

oil on canvas

84 x 84 inches

29. SoiL Thornton

*gumbo of privilege, marginalization,
ecoterrorism, pleasure, violence and all other
things we know*, 2017–2025

My personal Subaru Baja 2007 in custom
pink paint vandalized and attacked during my
inability to drive or move the vehicle,

Dimensions variable



Emilio Cruz, *Single Bird in the Eye of a Diva*, 1984.
Courtesy the Estate of the Artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago.



Emilio Cruz, *Dark Wing Storm* 1985.
Courtesy of the Estate of the Artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago.

Emilio Cruz

Emilio Cruz
Single Bird in the Eye of a Diva
1984
oil on canvas
84 x 84 inches

Emilio Cruz
Dark Wing Storm
1985
oil on canvas
84 x 84 inches

Courtesy of the Estate of the Artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago.

Over his decades-long career, Cruz developed an interdisciplinary practice spanning painting, sculpture, music, poetry and writing. In 1969 he wrote an essay called "Inter-Planetary Slavery" which was later published in the journal *Confrontation*. Cruz's writings prefigure Afropessimism at the time of the rise of Afrofuturist ideas:

"We can all of course sit back and feel at last a new dawn has begun to show its first signs promising a different future. And

we can point our fingers towards signs everywhere. Yet I do not wish to leave you with the feeling of self-satisfaction, complacently pleased with your racial tolerance complemented, but call your attention to new dangers that rise with the red glow of a technological synthetically produced sunlight of slavery, yes, inter-planetary slavery. Black slavery was introduced to carve out a brave new world...What now will happen as the...great powers of the world push forward to new unconquered worlds? What will be the cry when there is a labor shortage on the Moon or perhaps Mars?"

Cruz was interested in African Art receiving respect of its own accord and not just for when it "furthers the ambitions of a western artist in the mind of a white westerner." He endeavored to find a relationship through the history of African symbolism for a future apart from the trajectory of Modernism. Cruz linked Modern Art, as we understood and understand it, with the institution of slavery.

The works featured in *DFT 2025* demonstrate Cruz's figurative expressionism, his range of mark making, compositional rigor, and the coding that pervades his entire practice through symbols, hieroglyphs and pictograms. Each work contains layers of symbolic and visual imagery painted, etched, and buried into their surfaces. *Single Bird in the Eye of a Diva* and *Dark Wing Storm* operate auratically. They communicate directly and indirectly, open yet, simultaneously, with a distinct point of view.

Born in the Bronx, Emilio Cruz (1938-2004) was a central figure, alongside Bob Thompson, Lester Johnson, Red Grooms, Mimi Gross, Jan Müller, and others, in the emergence of figurative expressionism at the dawn of the 1960s in New York City. In that period, he showed at Martha Jackson Gallery and Zabriskie Gallery, as well as the cooperatively run Delancey Street Museum. In 1969, musician Julius Hemphill invited Cruz to direct the visual art program at the Black Artists Group (BAG), in St. Louis, and 18 months later he landed in Chicago, where his work transformed dramatically, retaining a lifelong investment in figuration but expanding in both imagery and media. Cruz wrote and performed in a series of plays, some of which incorporated members of BAG and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Music (AACM); in the early 1980s he toured with his piece "Homeostasis," the music for which was composed by Henry Threadgill. Cruz returned to New York at that time, where he lived and worked until his death in 2004. Emilio Cruz was recently the subject of Corbett vs. Dempsey's 2022 exhibition, *Inter-Planetary Slavery: Paintings and Fiberglass Sculpture, 1970-1979*.

Kyle Dancewicz

Kyle Dancewicz is the Deputy Director of SculptureCenter, New York. Dancewicz and his team curated the first institutional iteration of Dark Forest Theory at the SculptureCenter in 2023 as part of their *In Practice* program. Continuing the collaboration between Dancewicz, Salim Green, and the Dark Forest Theory project, he designed the window text for *DFT 2025* featured on the entry doors of the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery.



Rhea Dillon, *Less than that,*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.



Rhea Dillon, *carried on the spirit air,*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

Rhea Dillon

Rhea Dillon

carried on the spirit air.

2024

Sapele mahogany, oil stick and paper
37 1/2 x 49 x 9 inches

Rhea Dillon

Less than that;

2024

Sapele mahogany, oil stick and paper
37 1/2 x 49 x 9 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening,
London.

Dillon originally produced these works for her exhibition *The sombre Majesty (or, on being the pronounced dead)* which opened in 2022 in London. The works for this show were a result of the artist's meditations on race, identity, ethnicity and nation coupled with her interest in the work of Stuart Hall, particularly Hall's *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*.

The language of Dillon's work cannot be separated from its material presence.

carried on the spirit air. and *Less than that;* are each composed of oil stick drawings depicting the symbol of a spade housed within a sapele mahogany container which rests on the floor and leans against the wall. The boxes are reminiscent of drawers—storage places for personal possessions and histories.

The larger body of work by Dillon, including this series, addresses ideas of containment, storage, and movement as the artist considers the migration of Caribbean people, particularly the Windrush generation, who migrated from the Caribbean to the UK between 1948 and 1971. Dillon uses cultural symbols and material signifiers of movement and migration (barrels, drawers, cabinets, etc.) The gestural drawings of the spades themselves contrast these more ubiquitous ideas and render the image more personal to the artist.

The term spade has historically been used as a derogatory term to describe Black people including those specifically associated with the Windrush generation.

In this context, Dillon has repositioned the spade to act as a shield rather than an insult. Through metaphor, poetics, and re-contextualization, the idea of the spade here acts to reimagine the familiar, creating space for new possibilities.

Rhea Dillon (b. 1996, London) works in sculpture, painting, performance, and poetry, using wide-ranging materials to articulate an aesthetic of diasporic Blackness grounded in nonbeing. Her charged exhibitions and writing use poetics, abstraction, and everyday objects to produce distinctive arrangements of sense and affect. Dillon lives and works in London. Dillon's first institutional solo exhibition *An Alterable Terrain* was recently held at Tate Britain with an accompanying publication. Recent exhibitions include Lismore Castle Arts, Lismore (2024); Kevin Space, Vienna (2023); Sweetwater, Berlin (2023); Soft Opening, London (2022); Gladstone Gallery, New York (2022); Bold Tendencies, London (2022); The Kitchen, New York (2022); Soft Opening, London (2021); Division of Labour, Salford (2021); Peak Gallery, London (2020); and Almine Rech, London (2020). Dillon was an artist in residence at Triangle - Astérides, Marseille and previously at V.O. Curations, London. The artist presented *Catgut –The Opera* as part of Park Nights 2021 at the Serpentine Pavilion.



Nikita Gale, *NOSEBLEED 15*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York.



Nikita Gale, *NOSEBLEED 15*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York.



Nikita Gale, *NOSEBLEED 15*, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York.

Nikita Gale

Nikita Gale
NOSEBLEED 6
2024

C-print on Canson Baryta paper mounted
on Sintra
Framed: 36 1/4 x 36 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches

Nikita Gale
NOSEBLEED 9
2024

C-print on Canson Baryta paper mounted
on Sintra
Framed: 36 1/4 x 36 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches

Nikita Gale
NOSEBLEED 15
2024

C-print on Canson Baryta paper mounted
on Sintra
Framed: 36 1/4 x 36 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery,
New York.

These photographs were originally part of a series of works produced for Gale's 2024 exhibition *NOSEBLEED* at Petzel Gallery in New York. As explained in the press release for that exhibition, the images in this series operate from the "worst seat in the house" and reconsider that location's poor reputation imagining it as a site where an observer is able to be both "above and among the action."

Through *NOSEBLEED*, Gale presents an uneasy social arena, refracting the spectacle of performance and visibility onto the audience. Privileging the nosebleed perspective, wrought with culturally stratified ways of seeing and being seen, the artist considers the stadium as both a site of heightened connection and amplified vulnerability.

Through these works, Gale considers the privileges and vulnerabilities that exist

when one is part of a social-whole yet still at the periphery. These works examine the implicit risks of visibility questioning the ways shifting vantage points within social systems might offer an individual new or changed experiences of vulnerability, power, or other.

Nikita Gale is an artist living and working in Los Angeles, California. The artist holds a BA in Anthropology (emphasis in Archaeological Studies) from Yale University, and an MFA in New Genres from UCLA. Gale's work explores the relationship between materials, power, and attention. A key tenet of the artist's practice is that the structures that shape attention determine who or what is seen, heard, recorded, remembered, and believed. Gale's practice examines the ways in which silence, noise, and visibility function as political positions and conditions. Gale's broad-ranging installations—often comprising concrete, barricades, video, and automated sound and lighting—blur formal and disciplinary boundaries, engaging with concerns of mediation and automation in contemporary performance. By approaching reproduction as a mechanism that connects humans to a desire for extension and amplification through both biological and industrial processes, the artist's work points to the ways that technology not only functions as an extension and amplification of the body but also as a means by which labor and violence are displaced and concentrated.

The artist's work has recently been exhibited in the 2024 Whitney Biennial; Chisenhale; LAXART; 52 Walker; MoMA PS1; Kunstraum Kreuzberg; Swiss Institute; California African American Museum; The Studio Museum in Harlem; and in "Made in L.A. 2018" at the Hammer Museum.

Jasper Marsalis

Jasper Marsalis

Face 15

2025

Max/MSP patch, computer, LED screen,
camera, and tripod

Dimensions variable

Jasper Marsalis

Radio Meditation

2024

Radio, microcomputer, cables

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Kristina Kite
Gallery, Los Angeles.

Face 15

Face 15 is a sculptural system constructed to abstract the role of the artist, the art viewer, and the art object. The work consists of 8 LED screens mounted to a truss. This set of screens is connected to a camera installed elsewhere in the gallery. The hardware system is programmed with a facial recognition software algorithm allowing the camera to identify viewers and display their faces scaled up on the screens. Due to the lack of proximity between the screens and the camera, the work denies the audience's ability to perform for the camera and to see themselves on screen at the same time. The audience can leave their post as passive onlookers in the gallery and, instead, become a spectacle for others. As a result the showgoers become a means of the show's production, oscillating their labor between the seemingly opposed positions of audience and performer.

In the context of *DFT 2025* and beside Nikita Gale's *NOSEBLEED* works, Marsalis' *Face 15* continues metaphors for the social arena. The work operates as a sort of jumbotron highlighting unsuspecting attendees but also disconnecting them from their reproductions.

Radio Meditation

The audio in this work begins with available analog radio. As the radio receives broadcast waves present in the Zilkha Gallery, they are funneled into a mini-computer which the artist has programmed to expand those frequencies into a droning noise audible in the gallery through connected speakers. The work is a sort of sonic funhouse mirror: it actively reflects the local radio waves available to the analog radio and simultaneously abstracts those frequencies, stretching them into a meditative, site-specific event. The work pulls from the various transmissions that surround it and refracts them, offering the audience a new coded interpretation of the mundane and familiar.

Jasper Marsalis (b. 1995, Los Angeles) lives and works in London. Working across painting, sculpture, music, and text, Marsalis elaborates a parallel between the space of painting and a performer on stage, both of which entail an experience of being consumed by audiences. Glaring spotlights are depicted throughout his work, obscuring their intended objects and acting as obstacles to vision. The tension of impermeability is mirrored in the sculptures whose surface fractures seem to chisel at opacity. By troubling perception, Marsalis interrogates the ocular centrism of visual art and the associated role of spectacle and access. Marsalis has exhibited at Kristina Kite Gallery, Aspen Art Museum, Kunsthalle Zurich, and Midway Contemporary, Minneapolis. His work was featured in the exhibition *Alice Coltrane: Monument Eternal* at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.



Jasper Marsalis, *Face 2*, 2023. Installation view in *Jacket and Shadow and Jacket and Shadow and Jacket and Shadow*, 2023, Kristina Kite, Los Angeles.



Rodney McMillian, *A Migration Tale*, 2014–2015. Courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Gallery, Los Angeles.

Rodney McMillian

Rodney McMillian

A Migration Tale

2014–2015

Single-channel video

10:00 loop

Courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Gallery, Los Angeles.

A Migration Tale, named in reference to the Great Migration, follows its protagonist, a person dressed in a black cloak and silver mask, from a porch in South Carolina, hundreds of miles north to Harlem, New York. We follow the character's journey as they pass various landmarks, ride the subway, dance with community members in a block party-like setting in New York, and more.

This work was exhibited in the New Media Series at The Saint Louis Art Museum in 2016. The exhibition text explained the work:

"Allusions to science fiction appear throughout McMillian's work, offering

both an alternative approach to examine modern social structures as well as exploring history, in a non-linear form. This present-day depiction of the Great Migration raises many questions regarding the role of the 'other' in our society and considers the many ways that location, landscape, and material objects continue to construct and inform our understandings of racial and class disparity."

Science fiction allows space for the construction of new logics founded in the ones that govern our daily lives. That literal and figurative space, when traveled, forces non-linear thinking and allows our understandings of the established social order to revert to a more malleable state. *A Migration Tale*, and the *DFT 2025* exhibition more broadly, focus on the malleability offered by science fiction and how this can have tangible effects on how we understand our contemporary society through our lived experiences.

Rodney McMillian (b.1969) addresses intersections of power, race, class,

and culture in paintings, sculptures, installations, and video. Reflecting the conviction that history is always present, McMillian explores the impacts of historical events on policy, the effects of politics on the body, and the experience of class and race in contemporary U.S. society. He uses political texts and found, often domestic, materials such as house paint, cast-off furniture, and thrifted bedsheets, among others, to create works that address political urgencies. He has recently focused on landscape paintings where the bedding becomes a conceptual placeholder for absent bodies. As such, McMillian reviews the history of landscape painting and suggests a direct relationship between the landscape and the body—a relationship ripe with historical and political connections.

McMillian received an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in 2002. His installation *In this land* (2019) was exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and he had a solo exhibition at the Underground Museum in Los Angeles in 2019. His solo exhibition *Against a Civic Death* was at the Contemporary Austin in 2018. In 2016, McMillian had solo exhibitions at the ICA Philadelphia, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and MoMA PS1. Other recent solo exhibitions include "Landscape Paintings," Aspen Art Museum (2015); "Sentimental Disappointment," Momentum 14: Rodney McMillian, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2009); and *The Kitchen*, New York (2008). McMillian's work was featured in the 2015 Sharjah Biennial, curated by Eungie Joo. His work has also been included in group exhibitions at The National Portrait Gallery, London, MASS MoCA, North Adams; the CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco; the Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway; The Institute of Contemporary Art,

Boston; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; the Contemporary Art Museum Houston; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art among many others.



Pope.L. *Eraser (drawing)*, 2015. Installation view in Pope.L., *Desert*, at Steve Turner Gallery, Los Angeles, 2015.

Pope.L

Pope.L

Eraser (drawing)

2015

MDF painted with liquitex acrylic spray
31 1/2 x 31 1/2 x 13 in.

Pope.L

Eraser (fold)

2015

MDF painted with liquitex acrylic spray
31 1/2 x 31 1/2 x 13 in.

Pope.L

Figment

2015

C-print

29 3/8 by 17 9/16 inches

Pope.L

Flora and Fauna

2015

C-print

22 3/4 by 13 1/2 inches



Pope.L., *Loving Nanny, Loving Master, Loving Artist*, 2015.

Pope.L

Puppet

2015

C-print

18 by 11 3/4 inches

Pope.L

Loving Nanny, Loving Master, Loving Artist

2015

C-print

12 1/2 by 7 3/4 inches

Pope.L

Dressing Up for Longing

2015

C-print

9 7/8 by 5 1/2 inches

Pope.L

Servant, Master, Window

2015

C-print

7 7/8 by 11 7/8 inches

Pope.L
The Table
2015
C-print
23 1/8 by 14 inches

Courtesy of the Estate of the Artist and
Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

In 2015 Pope.L had two companion shows in Los Angeles: *Forest* at Vielmetter and *Desert* at Steve Turner. The prints, *Servants*, as well as the *Erasers* were both originally featured in *Desert*. Pope.L was cited in the exhibition's press release stating that, "*Desert and Forest* explore an 'in between,' a space, both figurative and literal, between art works, ideas, bodies, and institutions. I emphasize the poetic, social, and material qualities of this space in a network of hinges which all trigger on something going away, coming up missing, lacking, or distanced, and the meanings stirred as a result. Sometimes it is as simple as loneliness. From erasers with holes to blacks who are blacked to photos re-photo-ed to deserts that flourish in absence as presence."

The *Servants* series are re-photographed and manipulated 19th century photographs of Black caretakers into which Pope.L inserted his likeness. The process of creating these works is a humorous and critical reflection by the artist on the nature of representation, re-representation, and manipulation. The "neither here nor there"-ness of these works is vital in describing the attitudes inherent to *DFT 2025*: the show and its transmissions are in a constant state of becoming and unbecoming triggered by the ways in which they are interacted with, thought about, and remembered.

Desert and Forest were linked by a GPS driving tour that shuttled viewers between the two spaces. Similar to the maps

connecting Vielmetter and Steve Turner, networking and mapping have become core engagements of *Dark Forest Theory* exhibitions in the past. These works were thoughtfully proposed for this exhibition by Dave Lloyd, a longtime studio assistant to Pope.L.

Pope.L (b. 1955, Newark, New Jersey; d. 2023, Chicago, Illinois) was a visual artist and educator whose multidisciplinary practice used binaries, contraries and preconceived notions embedded within contemporary culture to create art works in various formats, for example, writing, painting, performance, installation, video, and sculpture. Building upon his long history of enacting arduous, provocative, absurdist performances and interventions in public spaces, Pope.L applied some of the same social, formal, and performative strategies to his interests in language, system, gender, race, and community. The goals for his work were several: joy, money, and uncertainty—not necessarily in that order.

Daid Puppypaws, BLACKNASA, and the Otis Space Technology and Research Collective

Otis Space Technology and
Research Collective

Betty Crockett

2023-2025

Recycled building materials, plywood,
aluminum, foam, fiberglass, resin
101 x 66 1/2 x 57 inches

Otis Space Technology and Research
Collective

Betty Crockett Launch Videos

2025

Video

5:04 loop

Courtesy of the artist, BLACKNASA, and
the Otis Space Technology and
Research Collective.

Puppypaws' personal practice cannot be
divorced from their work as an educator
and their work within their community.
The rocket featured in *DFT 2025* was
originally constructed and launched with
Puppypaws's class at the Otis College of
Art and Design.

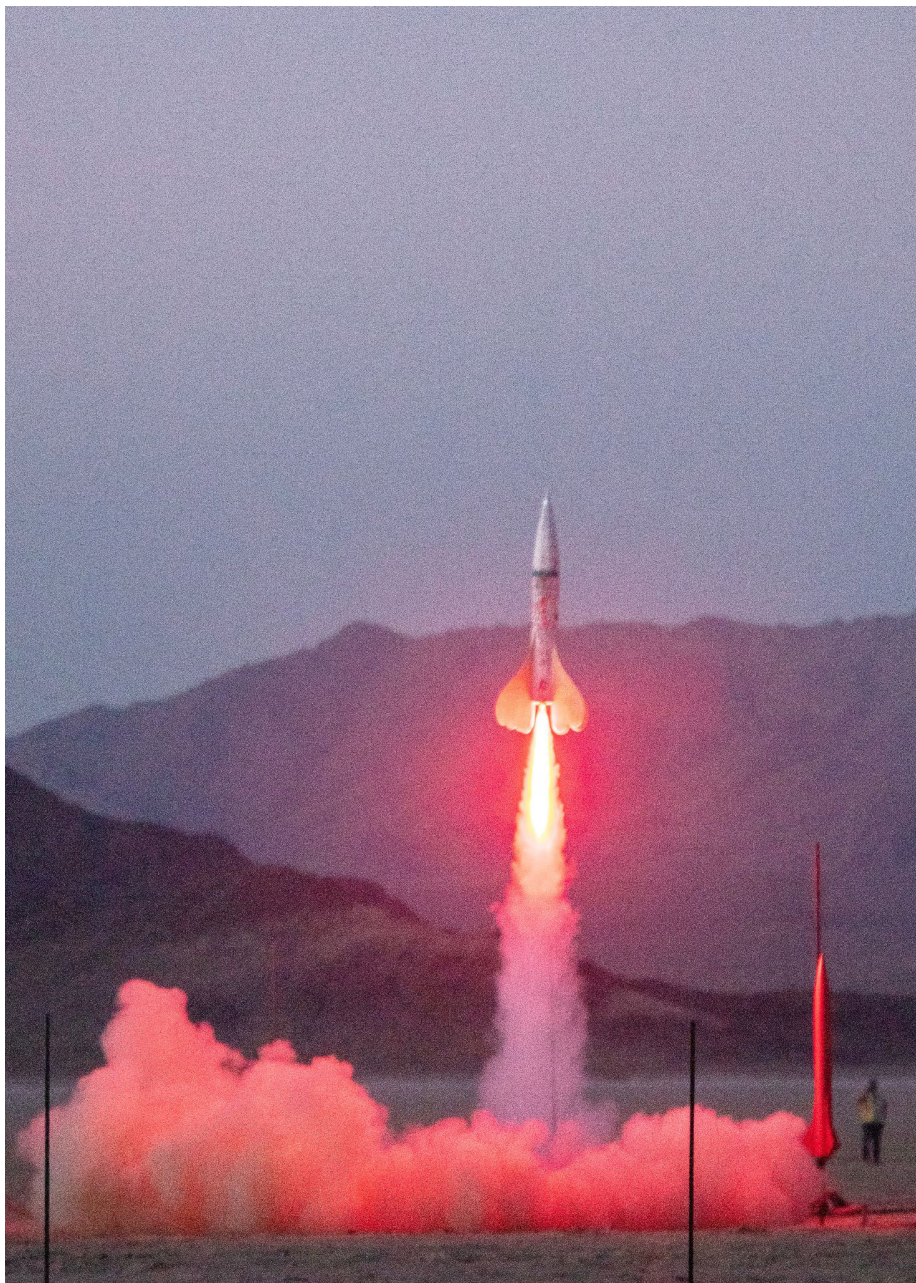
The rockets that Puppypaws and their
classes construct often come equipped
with cameras to document their journeys
skyward at times reaching over 700 feet.
The documentation of this particular
rocket's journey accompanies the object
in the gallery. The rockets do not however
come equipped with parachutes. With
that in mind, each exploratory voyage
meets the ground, in this case, returning
to the dirt and sands of the Lucerne Dry
Lake in California. The rocket wears its
history. Puppypaws' BLACKNASA project
and their continued work as an educator
teaching rocketry speak to the artist's
commitment to the idea of discovery.
There's a willingness within the artist's

practice to prioritize the act of looking
rather than seeking or finding.

With *DFT 2025*, positioned as a temporary
hub for ideas related to hiding and
communication across potentially-hidden
communities, Puppypaws' rocket acts
as a sort of symbolic flare launched
not to communicate any one thing
specifically but to engage the possibility
of being contacted.

Daid Puppypaws (b. 1986, Los Angeles)
is a multidisciplinary artist and educator
known for their sculptures, paintings, and
photographs. They received an MFA in
sculpture from Yale University, where they
were a recipient of the Yale School of Art
Social Justice Initiative Grant (2020). They
also hold a BFA in Photography from Otis
College of Art and Design.

Puppypaws' work is guided by the
declaration that art is a practice of
freedom inseparable from everyday
life. Puppypaws' sculptures draw on the
visual language of rocket science, as they
deploy durable materials common to the
aerospace industry such as fiberglass,
resin, and kevlar. The sculptures also
circulate through videos, paintings, and
drawings, wherein Puppypaws documents
physical components of the rockets
and their launches. In 2016, Puppypaws
founded BLACKNASA, a space agency
aimed to teach rocketry and the ideals of
space exploration to underrepresented
youth groups. Animated by Puppypaws'
sculptural practice, BLACKNASA views
rocketry as a science, a creative practice,
and a universal language. Puppypaws
also takes up photography, sound,
and various other media that meditate
on contemporary American identity,
collective thought, and possible futures.
Traversing mediums, Puppypaws' work is
united by the principle that art and life are
endlessly intertwined.



Launch photograph of Otis Space Technology and Research Collective, *Betty Crockett*, 2023-2025. Courtesy of the artist, BLACKNASA, and the Otis Space Technology and Research Collective.

Coumba Samba

Coumba Samba

Wifeys

2025

Pen on paper

8 ¼ x 11 ¾ inches, unframed

Coumba Samba

Sadbabyy

2025

Pen on paper

8 ¼ x 11 ¾ inches, unframed

Coumba Samba

SleepiMii

2025

Pen on paper

8 ¼ x 11 ¾ inches, unframed

Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London.

Recent press on an exhibition by Coumba Samba in the United Kingdom explained, "Coumba Samba's enigmatic work explores the lived impact of institutions on human lives." Past works by the artist focused on infrastructural elements such as blinds or radiators, or in a recent exhibition at the Kunstverein in Hamburg, Samba used the shipping container form, the ubiquitous symbol of the flow of international goods and capital. Samba often uses colors sampled from photographs to create post-minimalist sculptures which, upon closer viewing, intertwined her personal narrative with colonial capitalism.

The hybridity of these objects parallels a similar appropriation which Samba applies to pictures taken by her own family members. She uses these to explore the intersection of survival, familial relations, and memory. The artist made the three small scale drawings in *DFT 2025* from high school photographs of her sister which she found in her possession on a



Coumba Samba, *SleepiMii*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London.



Coumba Samba, *Wifeys*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London.



Coumba Samba, *Sadbabyy*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London.

flash drive. Her sister had recently stolen Samba's identity and committed credit card fraud in her name. As Samba explains, after all of this they are still siblings, "it feels like their story is also my story."

Coumba Samba (b.2000, Harlem) is a Senegalese American artist. In 2025 she presented a solo exhibition, *deutschland*, at Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany. She has upcoming exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland; Maumaus Lumiar Cité, Lisbon; and ETH, Zürich, Switzerland. In 2024 she presented four solo exhibitions: *Dress Code*, at empire, New York; *Red Gas* at Arcadia Missa, London; *Tokyo karaoke* at Galerie Tenko, Tokyo; and *Capital* at Cell Project Space, London. In 2023 she presented the solo exhibitions *This is Money*, Drei, Cologne; and *Couture*, Galerina, London. Recent group presentations include *118 1/2*, Emalin; *World as diagram*, *work as dance*, Emalin, London; *Ways of Living #3*, Arcadia Missa, London; and *Slow Dance (3)*, Stadtgalerie, Bern. Recent performances as NEW YORK have been held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2023); UCLA Broad Art Center, Los Angeles (2023); and Lewben Art Foundation, Vilnius (2023).

Michael E. Smith

Michael E. Smith

Untitled

2025

Basketball, foam, plastic, pigment

10 x 10 x 10 inches

Michael E. Smith

Untitled

2025

Box, foam, blacklight

28 x 16 x 14 inches

Michael E. Smith

Untitled

2025

Basketball, foam, plastic, pigment, magnet

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Modern Art, London.

Michael E. Smith's practice is defined through his careful spatial and material studies as much as it becomes about the specific artworks he produces. Smith is a respondent, cautiously participating in dialogues between his personal history, the history of the materials, and the objects that comprise his sculptures and, ultimately, the spaces in which those objects will be installed. The installation of his sculptures plays a crucial role in their completion. All of these considerations by the artist are stimulated during the act of viewership. As stated in *Frieze* magazine, "[t]he artist's mannered compositions prompt a strange empathy between viewer and object, while their considered placement both responds to and activates the gallery's architecture." This activation happens not through transformation or domination but by the artist's quiet consideration of space, placement, and light. Smith cultivates these qualities through his careful observation of, and long hours spent in, the gallery itself.

In *DFT 2025*, Smith asks the audience to consider the fluidity of the gallery. The work hides and even seems to try to escape the gallery through its installation. The artist chose to affix one of his sculptures to the backside of a blackout curtain, sandwiched between the curtain itself and the gallery window it covers. In turn, the work only allows itself to be seen from a vantage point through other windows on the opposite end of the gallery or from outside the gallery in a grassy enclave.

Michael E. Smith (b. 1977, Detroit) lives and works in Providence, Rhode Island. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions that include Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York; Modern Art, London; Kunst Museum Winterthur, Switzerland, 2024; Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 2023; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, 2021; Secession, Vienna, 2020; Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, 2018; SMAK, Ghent, 2017; Kunstverein Hannover, 2015; De Appel, Amsterdam, 2015; Sculpture Center, Queens, 2015; La Triennale di Milano, Milan, 2014; Power Station, Dallas, 2014; CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, France, 2013; and Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, 2011; among others. Smith's work was included in *May You Live in Interesting Times*, the 58th Venice Biennale. He participated in *Quiet as It's Kept*, the 2022 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the 2012 edition of the Whitney Biennial. His work is held in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; SFMoMA, San Francisco; MCA Chicago; SMAK, Ghent; and Ludwig Forum, Aachen, Germany; among others.

Paul Thek

Paul Thek
Untitled (Linnie/Paulie)
1970

Watercolor and graphite on paper
Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum
Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut

Bequest of Samuel Robb Peterson,
2022.28.22

Untitled (Linnie/Paulie) by Paul Thek is a watercolor and graphite work on paper specially installed at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut as a collaboration between *DFT 2025*, the Wadsworth Atheneum, and Jared Quinton, the Emily Hall Tremainé Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at the Wadsworth.

Paul Thek's non-linear interdisciplinary approach to artmaking, and his embrace of the ephemeral, the queer, and the sacred, led to the creation of an expansive and diverse body of work during his lifetime. Working in painting, sculpture, environment, and installation, his career and legacy have inspired many artists including Mike Kelley, Eva Hesse, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

Thek's career ebbed and flowed during his lifetime but when he passed in 1988 due to AIDS complications his work had largely fallen out of the mainstream contemporary art conversation. Posthumously however, with the help of retrospectives at museums and institutions like the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Hammer Museum, ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art, and more, Thek's practice has been reinvigorated and continues to be a reference point for artists today.

Installing Thek's work at the Wadsworth as a part of *DFT 2025* nods to his career

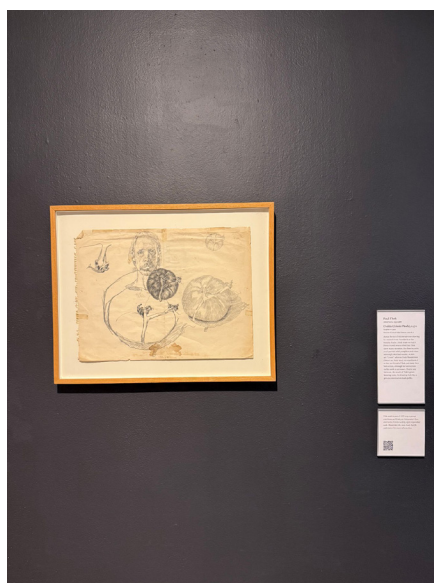
as well as the conceptual underpinnings of the show. Thek's work has been separated from the physical gallery space at Wesleyan and instead hides in plain sight at the Wadsworth Atheneum, the oldest art museum in the United States. The work exists as part of a network of ideas, communications, and artworks that all work together, however subtly to act out the strategies of Dark Forest Theory.

Paul Thek (November 2, 1933 – August 10, 1988)

Beginning his career in New York primarily with painting, drawing and sculpture, Thek eventually became known in the 1960s for his immersive installations. From 1967 to 1976, Thek lived in Europe, where he began pioneering room-size environments. His works, often marked by fragile or ephemeral materials with regard to the personal, mystic, and spiritual, have been a source of widespread influence to artists such as Mike Kelley, Tony Oursler, and Robert Gober, amongst numerous others.

He studied at the Art Students League, the Pratt Institute, and Cooper Union School of Art in the early 1950s. In 1954, Thek moved to Miami and first exhibited his works in 1957 at Mirrel Gallery. He was the recipient of the Fulbright Fellowship in 1967 and National Endowment for the Arts Grant in 1976. Thek's work has been shown at numerous exhibitions internationally, including The Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago; The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; P.S.1 Center for Contemporary Art, New York; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Tate, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Reina Sofia, Madrid; Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm. From 2010 through 2011, his retrospective traveled from the Whitney Museum of American Art to the Carnegie Museum of Art and the Hammer Museum. His work is in

the collections of major American and European institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C.; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Centre Pompidou, Paris, and the Ludwig Museum, Cologne.



Paul Thek, *Untitled (Linnie/Paulie)*, 1970. Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut. Photo by Jared Quinton.

SoiL Thornton

SoiL Thornton

gumbo of privilege, marginalization, ecoterrorism, pleasure, violence and all other things we know, { In psychology, the color pink symbolizes calm, nurturing, compassion, and tenderness, promoting feelings of relaxation and emotional healing. Different shades evoke varied responses: soft pinks create a tranquil, romantic atmosphere associated with innocence and affection, while vibrant or hot pinks can be energetic, confident, and stimulate action. Pink has even been used strategically in environments like prisons and locker rooms for its calming effects.

Pink can be associated with passivity, and an unwillingness to take matters seriously. We think of pink as the color of inexperience and associate it with weakness and inhibitions. Pink can also be associated with timidity or a tendency to be overly emotional },

2017–2025

My personal Subaru Baja 2007 in custom pink paint vandalized and attacked during my inability to drive or move the vehicle

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Maxwell Graham Fine Art.

SoiL Thornton's work has focused recently on the remnants and traces left in the wake of social events. In *the rest* (2025), a recent exhibition at Simian, Copenhagen, they staged a rave in the gallery space and used the residue of the party (the beer cans, trash, sweat, etc) as the content of the resultant exhibition. Thornton admits to having an interest in pursuing some fundamental questions through their artwork, such as 'what produces basic ideas?' and 'what constitutes an artwork?' In question as well is the distinction, or

relationship between, artist labor and lived experience.

The work on view just outside of the Zilkha Gallery, *gumbo of privilege, marginalization, ecoterrorism, pleasure, violence and all other things we know*, is new work intimately connected to the rave. The work consists of the artist's custom pink painted 2007 Subaru Baja and its vandalization which took place during a period of time while Thornton was unable to move the vehicle. Over time, the car's initial point of vandalization prompted its further destruction. The car was even used as a skate spot for local skateboarders who began to make videos of themselves skating on and around the car. Eventually the Subaru was towed and stored in a lot on Long Island.

For *DFT 2025*, the car was towed in its current condition from New York to Middletown and parked just outside the gallery. As a sculpture, the car, its history, and its visible damage become its form, content, and narrative. The nature of the work and its production are urgent. As Thornton put it: "this is a work that could only be made right now." In an article in *Flash Art*, the artist states, "It's useful at times to use yourself as a guinea pig to explore or analyze societal precarity, oppressive infrastructures, or even complex pleasures, but how easy is it to begin to talk yourself into perpetuating ideas of narcissism and vanity play, slippages abundant? The fine line."

SoiL Thornton was born in the USA in 1990, they* live and work in New York. Thornton initially focused on painting, then, their work has expanded to installation and sculpture. The quest for identity is at the heart of their work as an artist. Thornton's cryptic paintings are enigmas that explore a visual dialogue between a figurative



SoiL Thornton, *gumbo of privilege, marginalization, ecoterrorism, pleasure, violence and all other things we know*, 2017–2025

language, made of signs, which tries to communicate with an abstract territory, by incorporating painting, drawing, collage, and “ready made” objects recovered. Thornton is a graduate of the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York. Their work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Modern

Art, London, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, and group exhibitions such as *We paint!* at the Beaux-Arts de Paris 2022, at the Whitney Biennial 2017, at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Birmingham Museum of Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.



Kaari Upson, *Untitled*, 2009. Collection of Wesleyan University.

Kaari Upson

Kaari Upson

Untitled

2009

Smoke on oil panel

96 x 48 inches

Collection of Wesleyan University.

The smoke painting by Kaari Upson featured in *DFT 2025* is from *The Larry Project*, an ongoing series of artworks that occupied a large part of Upson's artistic production before her passing in 2021. Upson's work famously walks the line between the imagined and biographical. Upson's first posthumous retrospective is installed at the Louisiana Museum through October 26, 2025. The artist is quoted on the museum's website, "There are no fixed boundaries in my art, it's more like a fragmented narrative full of cracks and openings that you can enter and leave wherever you wish."

"Larry" is the name Upson assigned to a former neighbor of her parents, a person that the artist herself never met. She named the memory of that neighbor after his passing. After a fire impacted Larry's home, Upson was able to enter the property, secure some of his personal belongings, and start to stitch together a narrative around who he could have been and who she imagined him to be.

Arising out of this longer project, Upson made these series of 'smoke paintings' by holding oiled canvases over open fire. All resultant gestures and pigment on the artworks were created by the fire and the traces of its ash and smoke. The residue and remnants become a way of making sense of something fleeting. The artist obscured her own subjectivity through the medium of the performed identity of another.

Within the context of *DFT 2025*

Upson's smoke painting emphasizes the evanescent and ephemeral nature of a buried, hidden, or heavily-mediated narrative.

The painting was not originally framed by the artist. This work was exhibited unframed in *Chinese Box*, a 2009 group exhibition at Overduin & Kite, Los Angeles.

Kaari Upson (1970–2021) worked in a wide array of media including sculpture, video, drawing, and painting. For nearly two decades, she constructed a singular artistic universe that melded autobiographical and collective traumas, fears, and fantasies, and often illuminated what might be called "Americanness" or the "American psyche." The Los Angeles-based artist's artful conjuring of abject imagery targeted viewers' psychological comfort zones, confronting them with visceral and affecting evocations of loss and instability. The bulk of Upson's career was devoted to a single series titled *The Larry Project*—paintings, installations, performances, and films inspired by a collection of one man's personal items she found in 2003. *The Larry Project* was exhibited at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles in 2008, as part of their program *Hammer Projects*. Her work resides in the public collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and is known for exploring themes of psychoanalysis, obsession, memory, and the body. She had lived and worked in Los Angeles.

Zine

DFT 2025's companion zine—sharing its title with the exhibition—brings together art historians, literary theorists, artists, and others to explore its core ideas.

Through text and image the attitudes and sensibilities present in the gallery, as well as in *DFT 2025*'s larger conceptual framework, have been repackaged for broader circulation as a publication.

Darby English

At the University of Chicago, English is the Carl Darling Buck Professor of Art History and the College; he is also an associate faculty member in the Department of Visual Arts and the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture. English's teaching and advising address subjects in cultural studies as well as modern and contemporary American and European art produced since World War I. In 2010, English received the University of Chicago's Llewellyn John and Harriet Manchester Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, the nation's oldest such prize.

Darby English's research probes art's interaction—at the levels of its production, description, interpretation, and analysis—with instituted forms of historical subjectivity and experience. Recent research has focused on artistic and other cultural manifestations of optimism, discomposure, and intercultural. More theoretical formulations of English's work examine the difficulty of studying the foregoing themes at once as historical objects in themselves and negotiating their implications as sources of anxiety about historical change. For this work, English has been the recipient of fellowships and awards from the Clark Art Institute, the Institute for Advanced Study, the

National Humanities Center, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Creative Capital Foundation, the Getty Research Institute, and the College Art Association, among others.

English's short-form writing has appeared in *Art Bulletin*, *Artforum*, *caareviews*, *The Guardian*, *The International Review of African-American Art*, and other venues. English is the author of *1971: A Year in the Life of Color* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), and *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (MIT Press, 2007). He is co-editor of *Art History and Emergency* (Yale University Press, 2016) and *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress* (MIT Press, 2002 and Rizzoli, 2007). A monograph, *To Describe a Life: Essays at the Intersection of Art and Race Terror* was published by Yale University Press in 2018. The book synthesizes material first presented as the Richard D. Cohen Lectures at Harvard University in November 2016. In 2014, English gave the 26th Annual Hilla von Rebay Lecture at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and in 2015, the Israel Rosen Lecture at Johns Hopkins University. In 2017, English gave the FORART Lecture in Oslo.

English also serves as Adjunct Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. During a two-year hiatus from the University of Chicago, where English first taught from 2003 to 2013, he was Starr Director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark Art Institute.

Boz Garden

Boz Deseo Garden (b. 1997) is an artist and academic working between Los Angeles and Paris. Garden's practice works within the material and conceptual impasses between Atlantic slavery and

Western thought. Through sculpture, video, and critical writing, Garden positions transatlantic slavery as the unconscious binding thread across institutional forms of knowledge production; modernist correlatives of form and matter, truth, and fiction; and psychoanalytic theories of enjoyment.

Selected solo presentations include *Liste*, Basel (2025); *Timeshare*, Los Angeles (2024); *Petrine*, Paris (2023); and *Jargon Projects*, Chicago (2022). Selected group exhibitions and workshops include *Rockbund Art Museum*, Shanghai (2025); *Petrine*, Paris (2025); *Project Space*, London (2025); *Final Hot Desert*, London (2024); *Heidi*, Berlin (2024); *Fellows of Contemporary Art*, Los Angeles (2023); and *Bergen Kunsthall*, Norway (2022). They received their BFA from California Institute of the Arts, their MFA from University of California, Los Angeles. They are currently at University of California, Irvine pursuing a PhD in the Culture and Theory Program. They are the Program Director for the Morning Star Research Center for the Afterlife of Slavery in Los Angeles.

Emelia Gertner

Emelia Gertner is a painter and writer who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She graduated from Wesleyan University in 2020, and from Pratt's MFA program in 2024.

Steven Shaviro

Steven Shaviro is an American academic, philosopher, and cultural critic whose areas of interest include film theory, time, science fiction, panpsychism, capitalism, affect, and subjectivity. He earned a BA in English in 1975, MA in English in 1978, and a PhD in English in 1981, all from Yale University.

Shani Strand

Shani Strand is a multidisciplinary artist, writer, and one half of Sucking Salt. She explores the unstable intersections between contemporary diasporic culture and historical narratives; between systems of violence and the administration of individual freedom.

Strand holds a BA from Oberlin College (2017) and an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles (2023). She has recently exhibited in *SLIPPERY 4L* (Harkawik, Los Angeles); *Procession* (Rachel Uffner, New York); *Walk Good, Act Bad* (Deli, Mexico City); *Extra Terrestrial* (Rachel Uffner, 2021); and *100% Salt* (HOUSING, 2020). She has performed with Miho Hatori at The Broad (Los Angeles, 2022), and has been published by *CARLA* (2025, 2024), *The Avery Review* (2023), and *Pin-Up Magazine* (2021). She has lectured at Santa Monica Community College (2024), Wesleyan University (2024), and Harvard Graduate School of Design (2022).

Samantha Topol

Samantha Topol is a writer, artist and founder of UM Studio, a venue for the research and production of functional ceramics and other overlaps of art and design.

Locally Grown

Locally Grown is a grassroots, pirate digital broadcasting network by and for the people. This platform and its format act as one of the handful of transmissions extending the reach of *DFT 2025* beyond Wesleyan's campus. Tune in to locallygrown.tv to see their programming.

Jamil G Baldwin

Jamil G Baldwin (b. 1988) was born in Lancaster, California and raised in and across the Inland Empire and Los Angeles. Baldwin's work explores the ability of the photographic document to reconstitute the histories of images and material into value systems of care. Images of either his geography, neighbors, or family are housed within or made into objects that reward curiosity and patience. They aim to highlight practices of connection with respect to locales and communities.

He also co-founded LocallyGrownTV, a radically-centered digital TV initiative that utilizes broadcast to foster collective memory across communities. It was featured in *WIRED* magazine and mentioned in *The New Yorker*.

He received his BS and BA from the Wharton School of Business at University of Pennsylvania. He is currently pursuing his MFA in visual arts from the University of California, San Diego.

His images have exhibited at PioneerWorks, Band of Vices, Belfast Photo Festival, and Lagos Photo Festival; and included in publications such as *The New York Times*, *Aperture*, *Matte Editions*, *JRNL*, and *Callaloo*. His work has also been acquired by the Kinsey Collection.

DFTradio

DFTrad.io is an online experimental audio archive launched alongside the *DFT 2025* exhibition. The site was designed and coded by Charlotte Strange '19.

Luisa Bryan '21

I'm Calling You!

3:00

Digital Audio

Luisa Bryan is a New York based art director, videographer, designer, fabricator, and musician working and living in Brooklyn, New York. She is half of the experimental electronic music duo Jumplink. Her work, and the audio piece she's contributed to DFTradio, are inspired by the principles of speculative design and human connection in the post-internet age.

K.O. Asante

PHLEGM—A SONIC JOURNEY BY KWABENA

1:07:13

Digital Audio

K.O. Asante is a cultural synthesizer operating at the intersection of personal expression, rhythm, design, and cultural identity. As a first generation Ghanaian American hailing from Dallas, Texas, he merges the sounds, design sensibilities, and cultural histories laid out by the generations preceding him with a wide array of contemporary and avant garde influences that he metabolizes through his practice. Through that merging, Asante is able to create products, events, and movements that are honest to his roots, his playful and forward-facing perspective, and his commitment to pushing the boundaries of each industry he touches. Among the array of ongoing projects Asante is a part of, he's one of the founding members and resident DJ's at

VIM, a touring Afrobeats beats party and experience. Expanding on the ethos of VIM, Asante has contributed a new mix to DFTrad.io.

Erica Enriquez and Kevin Holliday

Big Mac

4:02

Digital Audio

Erica Enriquez (b. 1997, Newburgh, New York) is a multidisciplinary artist based in New York City. Enriquez received her BFA in Sculpture from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2019, and an MFA from Columbia University School of the Arts with a concentration in Sculpture: Expanded Practice in 2024. Enriquez has shared her work internationally in spaces such as museums, galleries, film festivals, music venues, theaters, comedy clubs, parks, wrestling rings, and dumpsters. Her work considers sculpture, video, photography, painting, and sound as collaborators for performance. She is also the leader of New York City's No.1 Train Themed Rock Band CHOO CHOO, which is available on all streaming platforms.

Kevin Holliday '19 (b. 1996, Brooklyn) is a New York-based independent artist known for his genre-defying music, blending alternative, R&B, and other sounds, drawing inspiration from artists like Prince.

Big Mac is a commissioned audio work made collaboratively by Enriquez and Holliday for *DFT 2025*.

Aili Francis

Aunt Clarita's Voicemails

6:08

Digital Audio

Aili Francis '19 is a Swedish-American filmmaker and musician from New Orleans, Louisiana. Francis' research centers the rapidly changing environmental and human

landscapes of her upbringing, often using local folktales from the Gulf Coast and Scandinavian forests to investigate the ways our interactions with the environment mirror the complexities of our own personal connections.

For *DFT 2025*, Francis created a soundscape combining field recordings of various natural environments in Louisiana with voicemails from her late Aunt Clarita. The work illustrates the artist's attempts and struggles to make sense of personal and geographic histories simultaneously and, in the end, collapsing the space between the two in the process.

Teo Halm and Salim Green

start/end #1

20:22

Digital audio

Teo Halm is an artist and musician. Sullivan Fellow in Art Salim Green '20 is an artist.

Ben Chaffee '00

Untitled

TBD

Digital Audio

Chris Lloyd

Untitled

13:39

Digital Audio

Charlotte Strange '19

Charlotte Strange is a writer and editor concerned with new media, technology, sense, and sensitivity. Strange designed and coded the DFTrad.io website for this exhibition.

Shani Strand

i eat rice n peas with my curry bc im greedy and decadent

30:02

Digital Audio

Related Events

Opening Reception

Wednesday, September 24, 2025 at 4:30pm

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Lunch and Learn

Monday, September 29, 2025 at Noon

Monday, November 3, 2025 at Noon

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Student-Led Exhibition Tours

Saturday, October 4 through Saturday, December 6, 2025 at 2pm

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Curated by Salim Green '20 and 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, and to Chloe Duncan-Wald '26. Thank you to everyone who contributed to every aspect of the exhibition and its extensions. Thank you to Rani Arbo, Andrew Chatfield MALS '19, John Elmore, Lynette Vandlik, and Joshua Lubin-Levy '06. 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 Patricelli Center for Entrepreneurship.



Andy Warhol

The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts



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