



*PARTICIPATING ARTISTS*

Deborah Dancy

Mariah Dekkenga

Hong Hong

Daniel Graham Loxton

Sangram Majumdar


Erin Koch Smith

Julie Torres



Different Things and  
in Different Amounts

August 19 - October 11, 2024



**America continues to fetishize desire  
and eat the Chinese body as a distant,  
poetic past (Buddhism, i-ching, incense,  
herbal medicine, etc.), but it remains  
unable to reconcile itself with the  
Chinese presence in the  
now and in the future.**

**I don't care about the past because  
the past is no longer mine. But I do  
want to know that I am real in this  
moment and in the future.**

**I don't want my image to  
be a geopolitical tool.**

**I am sovereign, like a lake and a  
mountain. I am a being who holds the  
deepest and longest sense of time.**

**Inland is a proof of this.**

HONG HONG, 2024 in email correspondence

*Different Things and in Different Amounts* examines the complex lives of images in the work of seven contemporary artists. The artworks, when considered collectively, pose fundamental yet expansive questions about what imagery is and where it comes from.

Many of the artists included in this exhibition are interested in that hard-to-pin-down moment in an artwork's development—where a gathering or layering of materials begins to slip into something we might call an image by becoming, or registering, as more than its constituent parts. This overarching interest in the qualities of emergence, the process of coming into view, results in a sensibility that openly invites the viewer to read the artwork in relation to an external world.

Here, we might begin to think of imagery as the direct result of a viewer's capacity to see more than the material facts in front of them. Perhaps, in this way, images are the things lifted off artworks and, consequently, have no material bodies of their own, existing only in the mind and eyes of a viewer. In the end, these artists and their artworks invite us to bring some magic back to the images and objects we think we understand.

Deborah Dancy's (b. 1949 in Bessemer, Alabama) large-scale, abstract oil paintings describe intimate encounters but render them open-ended, with hands and feet coming and going. Sangram Majumdar's (b. 1976 in Kolkata, India) recent work also deals with figures and fragments—often depicting recognizable shapes and forms dissolving into storms of color and collaged bits and pieces. Hong Hong (b. 1989 in Hefei, Anhui, China) utilizes cartographic, symbolic, and material languages in her monumentally scaled works on paper that gather natural elements from the outdoor environments her work is cast in. Erin Koch Smith (b. 1981 in Richmond, Virginia) looks to the materiality and handling of paint to disrupt any quick or concise read of the stories told in her work. Julie Torres's (b. 1971 in Bronx, New York) paintings treat paint as a structural and thus sculptural material, but still end up offering her viewers a stable image with clearly articulated figures and ground. Mariah Dekkenga (b. 1978 in Marathon, Wisconsin), whose work includes abstract oil paintings on linen and time-based animations, makes physical, even sculptural, objects that convey virtual information. In a similar fashion, Daniel Graham Loxton's (b. 1987 in Montclair, New Jersey) work simultaneously engages multi-dimensionality through illusionistic, two-dimensional space and collage or assemblage approaches to building up the surfaces of his paintings.

This exhibition is organized and curated by artist Douglas Degges (b. 1986 in Shreveport, Louisiana).

*Different Things and in Different Amounts* examines the commitment to abstraction in the paintings of seven contemporary artists whose images and objects are imbued with the politics and magic of everyday life. Most are in the middle of their careers and reside in New England, where they are beloved members of our vibrant cultural landscape. They are dedicated advocates for abstraction, confident of its ability to stir our souls and provoke civic engagement.

Abstraction is emotional, it is a style that captures sensations and experiences that words often fail to articulate. Its lack of recognizable forms stimulates our sensations and our intellect in a search for references and clues amidst the visual world the artists have created. Renowned painter David C. Driskell says that abstract art shows “the essential quality, the bare bones, the structure underneath what we see every day.” Driskell highlights the critical property of abstraction, how it bypasses our intellect, but arouses affective, perceptual, and visceral reactions.

*Different Things and in Different Amounts* presents us with the desires and sensations steeped in political realities that seven artists have vigorously transformed into powerful and unique works of visual art. Hong Hong’s monumental (111 x 120 inches) work on hand-made paper, titled *Inland*, captivates us with the force field it radiates. Hong, who was born in China, makes her own paper from local resources as she travels across the US to partake in artistic residencies. *Inland* was made in Beverly, MA, along the Massachusetts Bay, where the artist lived for three years and found her materials: water from the Atlantic, local yarn, puff paint, glue, ink, and graphite.

*Inland* is imbued with fragments from Hong’s personal story – diagrams of hurricane Laura’s circulation when it made landfall on the Gulf Coast, and quotations from Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s poems, which the artist read over and over during production of the work. To make her paper, Hong pours pulp into a unique modular mold, which is later assembled in a grid to make up an enormous quilt that metaphorically depicts her immigrant self imprinted on the landscape. Hong wrote: “I don’t want my (Chinese-American) image to be a geopolitical tool. I am sovereign, like a lake and a mountain. I am a being who holds the deepest and longest sense of time. *Inland* is proof of this.” *Inland* distills Hong’s diary record of political annotations and emotions familiar to every immigrant in this country.

Deborah Dancy is also an arresting artist. Her paintings date from 2011 when, in the words of the artist, “they became an extension of what was happening in my life - whimsical, colorful, and erotic. They are filled with all the richness of love, and the joy of my ability to express it in paint.” Dancy creates a portrait of a couple that focuses on their legs and feet.

Their limbs are either playfully touching, gently rubbing, or running away from each other – we experience the whole gamut of human courtship. Suzanne Baron, director of Mueller Gallery at Caldwell University has written, “Dancy accomplished both having roots in modernist abstraction and latently referencing racial politics, thus addressing her given identity as an African-American woman. The concept of Double Consciousness by W. E. B. Du Boise is implicit in her paintings, which avoid easy definition, positioning themselves between abstract expressionism and feminist color field painting/semi-abstraction and figuration.” Dancy’s playful *Footsie* series softens the still harsh realities of African American lives.

Unlike other styles, abstraction permits profound political commentary to find covert expression in artistic passion. Both Hong and Darby exemplify this connection, and it is prominent throughout the exhibit.

Sangram Majumdar reflects on his historical roots through references to Indian miniature paintings. His use of color reflects history: pale acid yellow, muddy brown, and variations on white warm and cool imply the past or the present. The art critic, John Yau, said “Majumdar equates painting’s site with sight, and identifies it as place of conflict between present and past, reality and dream, memory and desire. Majumdar, who was born in Calcutta, India in 1977 and emigrated to Phoenix, Arizona in 1991, recognizes that culturally speaking he has two sets of memories, and that disruption is inescapable. Their relationship is unstable, and each intrudes on the other, often when least expected.” Mariah Dekkenga first sketches her paintings’ compositions on the computer. In the studio, she carefully transfers the composition onto canvas or burlap, then applies a thick impasto layer. Dekkenga meticulously blends the edges of colors in her geometrical abstractions, striving to eliminate any traces of her hand. She wants the viewer to move away from the questions about how the painting was created and follow its forms and colors, which are reminiscent of Sonia Delaunay’s ray-like shapes. Dekkenga successfully bridge the realms of the hand-made and political, and that of cold calculation and impersonal technology.

Julie Torres’s tiny, cheerful oil paintings, with their encrustations of paint and wry titles (*hambulger*) are a two dimensional image of Claes Oldenburg’s cakes. According to the art critic, James Panero “Much of her work is the result of marathon studio sessions that are part performance and part product. By painting a wall of works in a single day, often in the company of other artists, she tweaks what an abstract artist is supposed to be. Rather than labored, secretive and solitary, her work is ad hoc, transparent and communal.”

In Erin Koch Smith’s paintings, the landscape outside her window takes on another life. For her *Waterbed* series, Smith sought to recreate Manet’s flower paintings, but soon eliminated the flowers, leaving only ambiguous blue space that she filled with the majestic figure of a swan. “The swan bed is from a famous bedroom in a mansion at a park in Richmond, Virginia, which I visited often as a kid,” said Smith. She also explained that she “really enjoys color, and the magical properties of paint and the ways it can change forms, both as a material and a depicted image.” Her imagery avoids direct political reference, but her work exemplifies the politics of the invisible and unpaid intellectual labor that the creative process demands.

Dan Graham Loxton creates his paintings from bits of broken glass, tile and other elements originally picked from the overflowing trash cans in New York City, where he lived until recently. These trash remnants became a site of experimentation for Loxton after moving away from New York. His pallet is inspired by Giorgio Morandi’s landscapes – a loose reference to the pastoral simplicity of Vermont, where he lives now.

The artists gathered together in *Different Things and in Different Amounts* share in the rich tradition of artists who have claimed abstraction as the most profound representation of reality. The brief history, below, shines a light on the life force that infuses the best non-representational art.

At the turn of the 20th century, abstraction was synonymous with a vision of a new world order. Russian Constructivism became the symbol of communist revolution and utopian society. European Expressionism sought to dismantle bourgeois society and the capitalist order. Futurism celebrated the Industrial Revolution in both benign and not-so-benign ways: it was an aesthetic expression of the beauty of the machine, but it embraced Fascism, war, and ethnic cleansing.

In America, Pollock’s drip paintings evoked the psychological turmoil of the post-war period. Rothko’s color field paintings conveyed a sense of spirituality and transcendence in the face of adversity, and de Kooning’s abstract landscapes reflected the fragmented and chaotic nature of society. During the Cold War abstraction, became a streamlined vehicle of political expression. Links between Cold War cultural politics and the success of Abstract Expressionism are by no means coincidental. In his article “American Painting During the Cold War,” Max Kozloff pointed out the similarity between “American Cold War rhetoric” and the language many Abstract Expressionist artists used to express their existentialist-individualist credos. AbEx was the perfect contrast to “the regimented, traditional, and narrow” nature of “socialist realism.” Abstract Expressionism would be promoted as the ideal proof of the cultural superiority of American democracy.

At the same time, many African American artists were using abstraction as “a shield against racism or as a counter-gesture to the pressure to locate their blackness in their art.” However, even the formal qualities of black abstraction reference both the contemporary and historical black experience. “In moments of grief, emotion seeps onto the canvas in ways that can’t otherwise be conveyed.” said Shantay Robinson, in his article *Black Abstraction: Symbolizing Reality for Meaning*.

Similarly, Abstraction became a safer choice for queer communities. “Like queerness, abstraction derives its force from a lack of fixity. Unlike the standard gender divisions, it refuses to coherently represent anyone or anything. LGBTQ+ artists, or artists whose sexualities are non-normative, have been making abstract art as long as abstract art has existed. Calling their work ‘queer’ is much more difficult when that work doesn’t involve representation at all,” stated critic Evan Moffitt. Thus, social and political rhetoric has been intrinsically linked to an emotionalism that infuses abstraction throughout its varied and complicated history.

What about contemporary abstraction? It seems a fallacy to believe that abstraction today can be apolitical. The artworks in *Different Things and in Different Amounts* are the best evidence of the belief that “attempts to claim that styles of art are politically neutral when there is no overt political subject matter are simplistic.” Each artist deploys rigorous compositions and variations on grids and systemic approaches that explore color interaction and its adjacencies. However, such devices and approaches do not prevent the artist’s inspirations and influences from permeating their visual language and shaping the viewer’s response. Their works convey difficult daily realities amidst a wealth of pictorial splendor and formal fluency: memories stained by racial injustice, concerns about nature in crises, resistance to dehumanizing technology, and the saturation of social media combine here to provoke reflection and inspire engagement, while testifying to the enduring political power of abstract art.

Julia Wintner, Coordinator of Art Gallery and Museum Services, 2024

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** I am deeply grateful to the artists for participating and enlightening us with their work in this exhibition. I would also like to thank my colleagues at Eastern, friends, and loved ones, especially Jim Wintner, for their continued support of my endeavors. Thank you, Leigh Balducci, for designing this smart-looking brochure. Most of all, I express my great appreciation to Eastern Interim Provost Benjamin Pauley, Dean of Arts and Science Emily Todd and President Karim Ismaili for supporting and promoting Eastern gallery. A big thank you to Douglass Degges, the curator of this exhibition, who brought these outstanding artists to our gallery.



# Deborah Dancy

Deborah Dancy is a painter whose abstract work describes odd invented spaces and stacked structures. Subtle tonalities and fragmented lines become descriptive markers in work that suggests familiar yet ambiguous spaces. Dancy works in a variety of mediums, large-scale oil paintings, mixed media on paper, printmaking and artists' books. She has received a number of significant honors and awards, including: a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, Connecticut Commission of the Arts Artist Grant, New England Foundation for the Arts/NEA Individual Artist Grant, Nexus Press Artist Book Project Award, Visual Studies Artist Book Project Residency Grant, The American Antiquarian Society's William Randolph Hearst Fellowship, YADDO Fellow, and Women's Studio Workshop Residency Grants and a Connecticut Book Award Illustration Nominee for her mixed media work in the book, *The Freedom Business*.

She has exhibited in numerous museums and galleries and her work is represented by Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, and N'Namdi Contemporary, Miami.

# Mariah Dekkenga

Mariah Dekkenga (1978 Marathon, WI) is an artist and educator living and working in Vermont and Doha Qatar. Dekkenga has held solo exhibitions at Situations, New York; Eli Ping Frances Perkins, New York; and Spare Room Projects in Brooklyn. Selected Group exhibitions include Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; The Hole, New York; Golestani Gallery, Dusseldorf; Clifton Benevento, New York; Kraftwerk, Berlin; and Suzanne Geiss, New York. Dekkenga has participated in residencies at Kamen in Bosnia Herzegovina; Halka Sanat in Istanbul, Takt Kunstraum in Berlin, and Doha Fire Station in Qatar. She is collected by QMA Qatar Museums, Aishti Foundation in Beirut, the US Embassy in Nogales Mexico and JP Morgan Chase.

Synthesizing traditional painting techniques with computer-based compositional methods, Dekkenga's work explores the intersection of technology and painting as a craft. Questions about how images function as physical objects that convey virtual information are central to her practice, as is how information in such contexts is mediated, communicated and defined.

# Hong Hong

"My first language is Chinese. It is a pictorial language. A written character is a composite made of smaller, graphic components. I think of each word as a distinct ecological system, where various materials or parts continually interact to generate meaning. In Chinese, verbs are not conjugated to indicate past or future. All action unfolds in the present. Time is much more definitive in English: I was, I am, I will be. ...Time and images are both fundamental aspects of painting. Painting the settling of images over a period of time. For me, this process begins as text, which is usually a collection of writing that focuses on a particular theme. Each painting is a poem. The paintings, together, exist as a book. This book is a technology that I'm building. I use it to see deeper (past) and further (future) into the time."

Hong Hong in conversation with the curator, 2024.

Hong Hong is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice sits at the intersection between craft, painting, performance, and earthwork. Born in Hefei, China, she immigrated, with her mother, to North Dakota. Hong has traveled to different locations across the United States to make site-responsive, monumental paper works. In this nomadic practice, traditional processes of Tibetan and Japanese paper making coalesced with feminist rituals and performances.

These projects have been exhibited in solo and group shows at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Georgia Museum of Art, Madison Museum of Fine Art, Jewett Arts Center, Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, New Mexico History Museum, and Real Art Ways. She is the recipient of grants, fellowships, and commissions from National Endowment for the Arts, Yaddo, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Vermont Studio Center, Center for the Arts at Wesleyan University, Virginia Beach Arts and Humanities Commission, Connecticut Office for the Arts, and the Edward C. & Ann T. Roberts Foundation. Her work has been reviewed by Art21, Artnet News, Hyperallergic, Art New England, Hand Papermaking, Two Coats of Paint, and Yale Daily News.



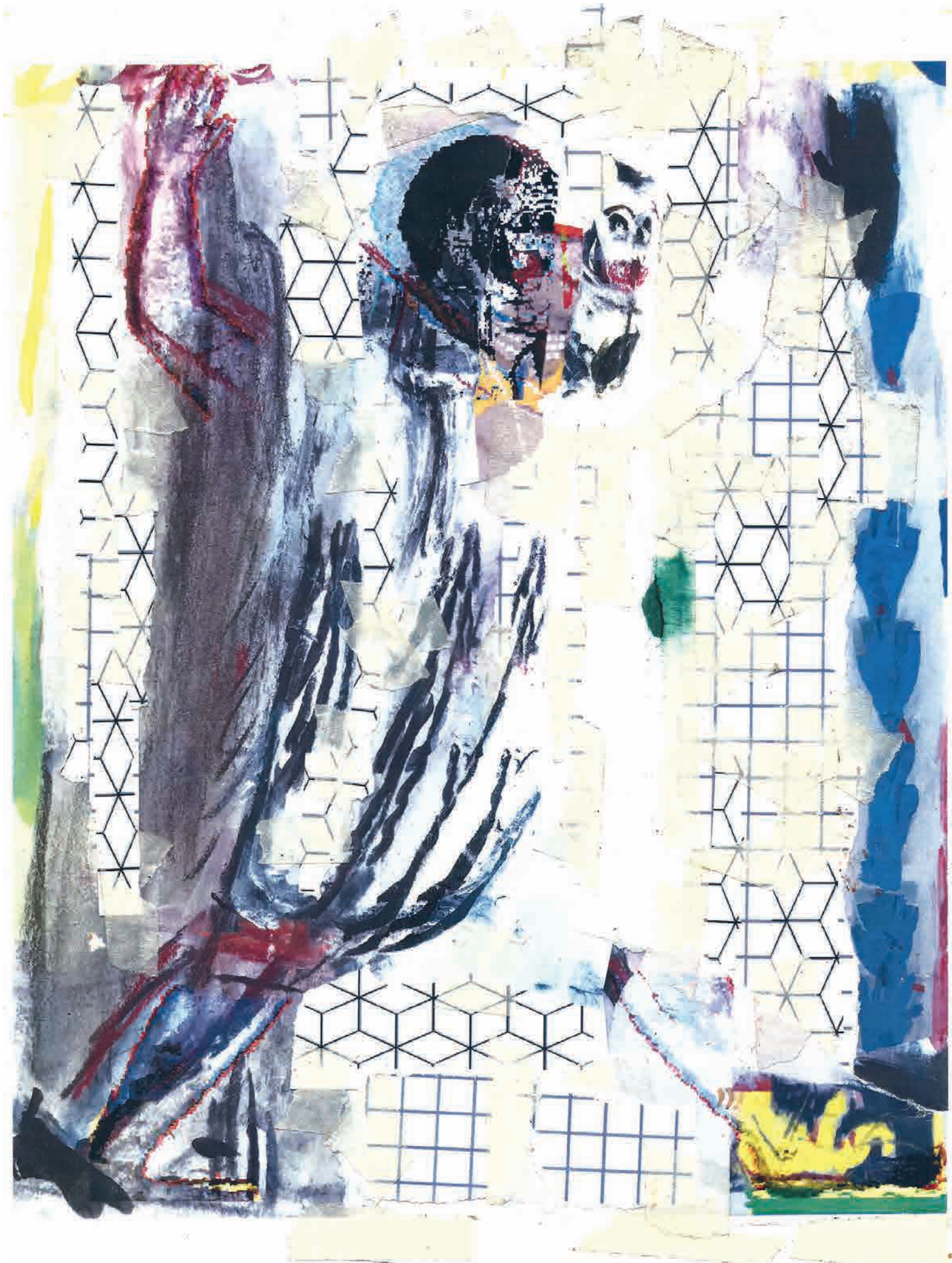
Hong Hong, 内陆 /Inland, 2023, hand-formed paper made with water from the Atlantic, repurposed paper products, yarn, puff paint, glue, ink, graphite, and white lilies, 120 x 111 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

# Daniel Graham Loxton

Daniel Graham Loxton (b. 1987) received his BFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York City in 2009. He has shown widely in the U.S. and Europe, including recent solo shows at Louis Reed in New York, NY (2022) Claas Reiss in London, UK (2021) and Jir Sandel in Copenhagen, DK (2021), which included a book of drawings by the artist with an introduction by Los Angeles-based curator, Chris Sharp. The Patron Saint of Turning at Claas Reiss was Loxton's first solo show in the UK, followed by a presentation of new paintings with the gallery at Art Brussels in 2022. Recent group exhibitions include, Renaissancestrasse, at Envy 6011 in Wellington, NZ (2023), A Minor Constellation at Chris Sharp Gallery in Los Angeles (2022) and Seeds, Voids, and Tailored Cloth, organized by Claas Reiss and hosted by Conceptual Fine Arts in Milan (2022). ACK in Kyoto, Japan (October 2023) with Claas Reiss, hosted by Hagiwara Projects marks the artist's latest collaboration with the gallery. Loxton lives and works in Cold Spring, NY.



Daniel Graham Loxton, *Untitled (with P.K.)* 2022, oil, wax, Japanese watercolor, collage and adhesive on linen, 9 x 12 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.



# Sangram Majumdar

"In the studio, I am often moving between body-sized paintings and the letter-size drawings that directly refer to them. So, the idea of an image or even imagemaking is constantly shifting. I begin paintings from a mashup of image fragments that can come from a range of sources, including previous works, discarded sketches, digital variations, thematic imagery from historical artworks, on-site drawings, and personal photographs. When I print out my paintings in progress to work on them, the scale change helps me see the paintings differently. It detaches my bodily connection to the paintings....Finally, as each painting comes into being, there must be a distinct sense of visual unit while simultaneously retaining the particular image, mark, line, and shape fragments that make up the work itself. In this way the painting pushes against a singular read and leans into the slippage of meaning and recognition that is at the core of my work."

angram Majumdar in conversation with the curator, 2024.

Sangram Majumdar (b. 1976) lives and works in Seattle, Washington. Born in Kolkata, India, Majumdar has an MFA from Indiana University and a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. Recent solo exhibition venues include Galerie Mirchandani+Steinruecke, Mumbai; Geary Contemporary, NY, Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, NY, and Asia Society Texas Center. Selected group exhibition venues include Shoshana Wayne Gallery, LA, The Landing Gallery, LA and James Cohan Gallery, NY. Selected awards include a Gottlieb Foundation Individual Support Grant, Mellon Faculty Fellow in Arts, NYFA Grant in Painting, Purchase Award from American Academy of Arts and Letters, NY, a MacDowell Fellowship, a residency at Yaddo, the 2009-10 Marie Walsh Sharpe Space Program Grant, and a MICA Trustees Award for Excellence in Teaching.

In 2019 he was inducted into the National Academy of Design. His work has been reviewed in Artforum, The Brooklyn Rail, Hyperallergic, among others.





# Erin Koch Smith

“My paintings emerge from drawings and paintings ... I make a lot of drawings quickly to find images interesting enough to use across different paintings, and I typically riff on this initial idea, hoping it will change in interesting ways spatially in the painting. In this show, three of the paintings were variations on bouquets. Toggle was an earlier iteration, where the vase and flower shapes were more visible. Waterbed started with a vase and flowers, but both were mostly eliminated as the painting changed, focusing more on the water in the vase until a swan emerged ... The swan bed is from a famous bedroom in a mansion at a park in Richmond, Virginia, which I visited often as a kid. By the time Crowbed was painted, I didn't care about the vase or flowers anymore ... I was inside the vase now, and let new images emerge. Often, they were related to things in the home: beds, nightstands, lamps. The process of painting is slow ... but also by accident, emerging from shapes and line until they become something nameable ... ”

Erin Koch Smith in conversation with the curator, 2024.

Erin Koch Smith (b. Richmond, VA) is an artist and educator based in Connecticut. She earned a BFA in Painting and Printmaking from Virginia Commonwealth University and an MFA in Studio Art from the University of Connecticut. Her work has been exhibited in various group and solo exhibitions around the country, including the Contemporary Art Galleries in Storrs, CT; Collar Works Gallery in Troy, NY; The Painting Center, IPCNY; the Ely Center of Contemporary Art and Indiana University Southeast. She is a current recipient of a Connecticut Artist Fellowship Award and will be an Artist in Residence at The Sam and Adele Golden Foundation this coming year.



# Julie Torres

"I seek crude outcomes that push against the expectation of what a painting is, or does. Acrylic comes straight out of the tube and is left undisturbed, or is mixed directly on the surface. Failed attempts are forever fused within the work to be resolved later. 2D paintings often become 3D objects that stand or lean, weighted under years of paint."

Julie Torres

Julie Torres is a Hudson, NY artist and curator. She has enjoyed recent exhibitions at NADA, New York; Tappeto Volante, Brooklyn and Pocket Utopia on the Lower East Side. Torres' artwork and curatorial projects have been featured in the Wall Street Journal, Huffington Post, Hyperallergic, Brooklyn Rail, Two Coats of Paint, Chronogram and on NPR and PBS. She co-directs LABspace gallery in Hillsdale, NY with her partner, artist Ellen Letcher.