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Shifting Landscapes

28 Apr — 23 Jun 2017 at Sophia Contemporary in London, United Kingdom



Shifting Landscapes, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Sophia Contemporary

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Sophia Contemporary is proud to present *Shifting Landscapes*, a group show of contemporary American artists exploring abstraction through painting, photography and sculpture. Featuring six artists - Afruz Amighi, Iva Gueorguieva, Herman Mejia, Amir Nikravan, Holton Rower and Hannah Whitaker - the exhibition reflects on the evolving nature of American art. Casting a light on the diversity of contemporary approaches to abstraction, the works explore the artists' impact on the landscape of art and American culture, across generations and disciplines.

Through a variety of points of view and artistic practices, *Shifting Landscapes* provides a window into contemporary abstraction in America today. Issues of contemporaneity, materiality and historic legacy in a post-modern world unite the artists exhibited despite their differing artistic strategies, points of references and media of predilection. On a broader cultural level, the exhibition examines the multicultural nature of America at a time of division and isolation within the country. Many of the artists in the show live and work in the US, but were born in other countries including Iran, Bulgaria and Venezuela. By reinterpreting American abstraction through the prism of their own varied cultural backgrounds and artistic heritage, the artists urgently reaffirm the diversity and openness in American culture, at a pivotal point in the nation's history.

Afruz Amighi's (b. 1974, Iran) delicate abstract sculptures refer to a complex array of architectural sources: the meandering arabesques of Islamic mosques, the angular shapes of Gothic churches, the ornaments of Manhattan Art Deco buildings and the gritty urban landscape of Brooklyn. Architecture in its various expressions is a medium for Amighi to investigate the way in which humans across cultures and ages build places which reflects common ideals and aesthetic values in spite of the complexity and precariousness of society. The two sculptures presented in the exhibition represent an evolution in the artist's practice by harkening back to the early American landscape and focusing on the native origins of the American continent before European settlements.

Afruz Amighi is the inaugural recipient of the Jameel Prize for Middle Eastern Contemporary art awarded by the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 2009. In 2013 Amighi's work was commissioned for the 55th Venice Biennale. Her work is included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Houston Museum of Fine Art, Texas; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London and The Devi Foundation, Gurugram, among others. Amighi currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Iva Gueorguieva's (b. 1974, Bulgaria) abstract paintings and sculptures investigate notions of space, illusion and movement. Drawing on the legacy of Abstract Expressionism, the artist's paintings are driven by a sense of urgency, a desire to orchestrate chaos and recreate the complexity of life on canvas.

Composed of intricate arrangements of

painted paper and fabric collaged on the canvas with a feverish energy and dynamism, her paintings seek to investigate the fine line between the intrinsic illusion of the painting's plane and the physicality of its surface. The artist's sculptures echo her painting practice in their exploration of the spatial properties of materials. By combining simple elements such as metal scraps, fabric and stone to create intricate sculptural assemblages, the artist draws her inspiration from the Californian landscape where she resides, whilst referencing the legacy of Neo-Dada and Russian constructivism.

Iva Gueorguieva's works are included in many public and private collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and the Minneapolis Institute of Art. Gueorguieva lives and works in Los Angeles, USA.

Hermann Mejia's (b. 1974, Venezuela) paintings dissolve scenes of daily life into dynamic compositions by blending elements of figuration and abstraction. Inspired by the striking landscape of his native country Venezuela, as well as the urban jungle of New York where he resides, Mejia distorts, deconstructs and abstracts figurative elements through his broad colourful and gestural brushstrokes. Blending elements of street art, cartoon illustration and contemporary abstraction, the artist alters the perception of reality through the prism of painterly illusion. Figurative shapes, faces and bodies evaporate, implode and fragment to create a whole where the referent object is not always visible at first sight. Only through careful consideration of the disparate elements can the eye of the viewer make sense of the subject matter beneath the abstract composition. Hermann Mejia has been featured in many group and solo exhibitions in the USA and internationally. His work has recently been the subject of a mid-career retrospective at the Contemporary Museum of Caracas, Venezuela. Mejia lives and works in New York, USA.

Amir Nikravan's (b. 1983, United States) process-based work explores the illusionistic properties of painting by deceiving the viewer's perception of form, surface and texture. Nikravan builds up layers of materials such as rock, concrete and paint onto a wood panel to create an ephemeral sculpture. The sculpture is then covered in fabric, vacuum-packed and spray-painted, allowing its three-dimensional surface to be captured onto the surface of the fabric, which is stretched over aluminium. The resulting painting is a perfect photorealistic image of an imperfect surface that confounds the perception of sight and touch and questions the nature of painting itself. Nikravan's 'Rational Designs', his latest series of paintings and sculptures presented in the exhibition further pushes the boundaries of the artist's practice by investigating the legacy of Modernism through carefully delineated geometric forms and flexible panels that collapse form and content in an interactive fashion.

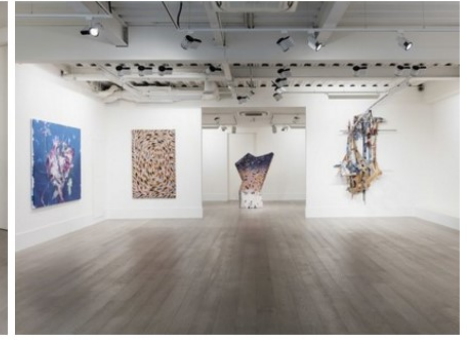
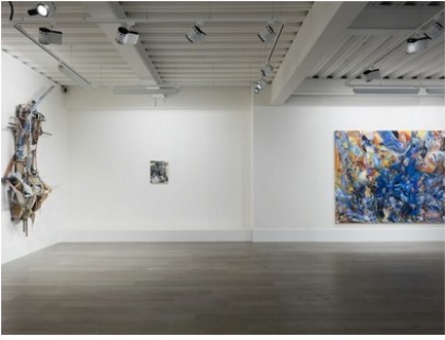
Amir Nikravan has presented his work in many solo and group exhibitions, including Various Small Fires, Los Angeles; Nathalie Karg Gallery, NY; ABC Berlin, Germany; Brand New Gallery, Milan and Arndt Gallery, Singapore. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles, USA.

Holton Rower's (b. 1962, United States) process-based abstract paintings and sculptures are concerned with notions of materiality, accumulation and perception. His recent works result from a rigorous process whereby the artist selects a colour scheme and order for paint, which he then applies in successive layers onto a base. When the paint has solidified into a block, Rower carves into the material to create networks of painterly marks and pathways. The resulting artworks reveals condensed layers of paint beneath the surface akin to geological strata, and create intricate patterns of bold colours and dizzying shapes. Rower's practice investigates the limits of materiality by considering how far the medium and material of painting can be pushed. By creating repetitions of hypnotic patterns, the artist aims to stimulate and overwhelm the viewer's perception in order to reflect on today's cultural obsession with excess.

Holton Rower grew up in New York, where he currently resides, in a family of noted artistic legacy: his grandfather was acclaimed modernist sculptor Alexander Calder. His work has been the subject of many solo and group exhibitions, including recent exhibitions at Venus Los Angeles; The Hole, New York and the Dubai Moving Image Museum, among others.

Hannah Whitaker's (b. 1980, United States) practice blends abstraction with figurative elements while exploring the process of photography. At first glance, her photographs look both painterly and digital, resulting from cut and paste collages. However, the artist creates her images entirely by camera on a single sheet of film, favouring analogue experimentation to digital manipulation. Whitaker's complex process consists of creating hand-cut paper screens to conceal parts of the film, exposing one section at a time until the entire sheet of film has been covered. The resulting photographs interrogate the medium by creating experimental imagery within the confines of analog photography, thereby challenging the structural limitations of the medium through her rule-based process.

Hannah Whitaker's selected exhibitions include M+B Gallery, Los Angeles; Galerie Christophe Gaillard, Paris; Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio; Tokyo Institute of Photography; Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles; and Rencontres d'Arles where she was nominated for the Discovery Prize. Whitaker currently lives and works in New York.



Captions

1. Shifting Landscapes, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Sophia Contemporary
2. Shifting Landscapes, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Sophia Contemporary
3. Shifting Landscapes, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Sophia Contemporary