About the Exhibition

Black, White, & Shades of Grey features the artwork of several local, national and international artists of various ethnic backgrounds, colors and creeds that utilize mostly white, black, gray or sepia tones in their selected work to express their particular point of view. All address topics of the current socio-political, racial and ethnic, gender-based and cultural issues concerning many US Americans — and the world — today.

Artists

Tracy Keza, from Rwanda, Africa, Mark Steven Greenfield, a local LA-Based artist, and African American, and Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, East-Coast based, Indian-Born American, each address the often historically-misjudged, ethnic stereotyping of already marginalized groups, with issues involving cultural appropriation, and systemic racism against Black Americans, Muslims, Indigenous Americans, Asian Americans and others, in their work. Through a juxtaposition of visual cues, images and concepts, these works may create “unease” — an unease most often caused by our own past misunderstandings and/or miseducation about the past, and thus, the present.

This “disquiet” is not to absorb, contemplate and perhaps, embrace — because often, perspectives are based primarily on the place, and position, in which one stands at any given time in history.

In unison with these three artists, and as an Indigenous American artist of the local Cahuilla tribe in the Anza Valley of nearby Riverside County, Gerald Clarke reflects on his work, and goes on to further recognize “immigration” as it relates not only to the current day zeitgeist, but to our past American history as of a place that is, and formed by, a “nation of immigrants.”

Bryan Ida & Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, both Central and South American, respectively, observe the effects of both forced and “elected” migration, while also tackling its root causes: poverty, lack of socio-political and environmental justice, creating a historical network of various interrelated circumstances and conditions. Their focus, in turn, is on the immigrant and migratory worker experience and how it affects the natural resource, environment, war, and women and children.

Also advocating for children and innocent victims, is local LA-Based, Japanese-born artist, Keiko Fukazawa her juxtaposition of pure white, delicate and florally-embellished porcelain used to make guns and assault weapons, address the gun violence that permeates America through mass shootings in schools, places of worship, offices and shopping centers. Repetitive multitudes of Glocks, made of the same pristine porcelain, are an embodiment of the numbers of gun deaths, per day, by gun violence. Also in tune with contemporary events, Mariona Barkus, a White LA-based feminist-artist, with an exhibition history that goes back to the 1970’s, acts as a center for women artists, acts as an advocate for women artists, and as an organisation that promotes the arts, and through it, the needs of women artists.

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About Brown: An Interesting Color

In the process of developing this show, several have asked me, as Curator, “Why include sepia tones?” The answer to this is both simple, and as complicated as the exhibition’s intent. The title of this exhibition is purposefully intended to be both literal and metaphorical. Literally, the show is comprised of many different colors, races and ethnic backgrounds including: Black, Brown, White and the many “Pink-to-Brown” skin tones in between.

The term “POC” or “People of Color” used so prevalently today, is utilized with caution in the art world because we recognize that neither “Black” nor “White” — nor shades of “grey” for that matter — are actually colors. Instead white (in the form of visible light) is made of all hues on the light spectrum, combined, and is therefore described to be “the presence of all colors,” in variation. “Black” results from the absence, or complete absorption, of visible light. Both are achromatic, without hue, as are infinite shades of true “grey.” Grey, in turn, may have varying degrees of both black and white. But this is only when we speak of colors formed by visible light (as on a TV or computer screen, projected image, phone or digital camera).

When it comes to pigment — as in ink toner from a printer for a photograph or print, or on a wall painting, the color pencil drawing, or the pastel — “Black,” “in theory” is the mixture of all colors. But in reality, depending on the various shades of colors combined, you actually get a brown — many shades and qualities of brown, depending on the amounts and proportions in the mix.

Meanwhile, white is formed by using the purest form of white, without adding any additional pigment. Pigments in paint traditionally come from ground minerals found in the earth, and in more modern times, synthetically, human-made, and often from non-biodegradable materials.

Assembled here are the selected bodies of artistic work of a small, yet powerful, group of ten: five men, five women. Some are local, LA-based artists. Others live in other parts of the US. Some reside in other countries, but have lived, worked and studied, at one time or another, in the US. They are all of different color. They are each of Latino, Asian, European, African/Black or Indigenous descent, or any combination thereof. Yet they together represent a spectrum of different combinations of skin tone, none of which is neither purely black, nor purely white, nor, for obvious reasons, grey. Instead, these artists’ skin tones range from pinkish-blush tones to “buff” (used in White culture), mocha to “cafè con leche” (used in Latin American culture), “chocolate” (used in Black American culture) along with various hints, tints, shades and degrees of “Brownness.” They each likely have varying tones of yellows, blues, and reds — essentially, the three primary colors — in their skin tones. And with further irony, when each of these primary colors is combined equally, we get the color brown.

Brown sepia tones are often found in black and white (and grey) photography, particularly older ones. It is sometimes intentional in contemporary photography as a style characteristic for something antique, or classic. In essence, black and white photography is rarely ever purely black or white. So, sepia, as part of photographic history, and as an artistic choice, simply “just keeps on.” And in an effort to be all-inclusive with all forms of art media, “shades of brown” are both literally, and metaphorically part and parcel of this show.

As a campus with a very diverse student body, this exhibition is intended as a response to a polarized climate, in order to contribute to the dialog, and create an opportunity to influence and empower people of all ages, shades and colors by seeing artists like themselves represented. By showcasing visual voices that are not all-inclusive with all forms of art media, “shades of brown” are both literally, and metaphorically part and parcel of this show.

Thank you to a wonderful group of participating artists, who make all the difference:

Mariona Barkus  Chesx Broduck  Claudia Casarino  Gerald Clarke  
Keiko Fukazawa  Mark Steven Greenfield  Bryan Ida  Walterio Iraheta — Tracy Keza  
Annu Palakunnathu Matthew

Michaele Cairella Fillmore, Curator
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