



BLACK, WHITE, & SHADES OF GREY

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, grey 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-misguided, 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 world, its peoples, and history. This “disquiet” is important to observe, 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 union 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 upon the same topics within his work, and goes just steps further to 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”. **Walterio Iraheta** and **Claudia Casarino**, 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, created by a historical network of various interrelated circumstances and conditions. Their focus, in turn, is on the immigrant and migratory worker experience, and the consequential effects on the environment, local natural resources, 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 Glockes, made of the same pristine chinaware, 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 Woman’s Building (a center for women artists formed in the 1970s), further advocates for the rights of women, our bodies, and that of Mother Earth. Her decades-long work, graphically documents over forty years of environmental abuses on our planet extracted from newspapers and other news media outlets over a pivotal, perhaps irreversible, time in our history. She acts both as an oracle, and an investigative archivist for environmental and social justice.

Bryan Ida, a storyteller, or chronicler of sorts, is an American of Japanese descent based in Los Angeles, who combines visually-verbal narratives together in a technique that is very unique—as unique as the people chronicled in his portraits. In a meticulous and fixated way, he transcribes a “personal story” about each individual depicted, who collectively personify diverse cross-sections of the varied cultures, races and religions existing in America. With their personal histories and embedded voices on display, these ghostly figures act as sentinels within the gallery walls, and stand as guardians, and custodians, of the space.

Peppered throughout each room of the exhibition, are the hand-drawn renderings by artist, and psychotherapist, **Chess Brodnick**. He too, is based in LA, and a White male. These largescale, exquisitely detailed images of the “White gaze” upon the rest of the artists’ works throughout the space, unveil his male countenance, often contorted and abstracted, broken and spliced, in ways that represent the greatest pain and angst felt by many in “White American” society today. The vestiges of the face are there, but they are more reflective of something turned inside-out—with the “internal façade” exposed for all to see—troubled, and sometimes even lost. It is an angst perhaps we can all relate to as humans, whether you are “White”, or a “Person of Color”. Alternately, if you are White—male, female, or even a “Karen”—it is easy to see the undercurrents of the societal reckoning going on today within Brodnick’s self-portraits. None of these works is intended to make excuses for Whiteness, or maleness, or even humanity, with all their/its faults. Nor is the work intended to target, or blame, White people for the dark parts of American history. Instead, these flustered faces are intended to spark a conversation about what sometimes feels like a “no-win” situation. But as any therapist might tell you, this disconcerted way of thinking, if reversed, can make all the difference: listening, learning, understanding, and action, can be a great way to start. And that is what this exhibition is about.

The nuances of each of these artists featured further the dialog into areas that reflect the societal impact on all of us. Some of their ways are subtle, and not done in a preachy or confrontational way, while others are more forthright in their intention. As we have learned through our own American history—recent or otherwise—confrontation, at times, can be a recipe for a better life (*i.e.*, the

Declaration of Independence, entering World War II, the Works Progress Administration); and when misused, can be an ingredient for lawlessness, and inciting violence. It is in the violence—not in the thoughts or words of intervention, nor peaceable assembly or protest—that we encounter problems that cause further division and vitriol. It is with the absence of violence and vitriol, and the presence of listening and peaceful dialog, we can make our perspectives clearer, hear and see others better, give voice to the often “voiceless and unheard”, in order build awareness, think more profoundly about our own personal actions and histories—and perhaps doing so in ways that are enlightening, self-reflective, and allow for respectful and meaningful growth.

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 includes artists 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 unison. “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 a wall painting, or color pencil drawing—things are quite the opposite: 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 qualities of each combined color 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. 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 “café con leche” (used in Latin American culture), “chocolate” (used in Black American culture) along with various hints, tints, shades and degrees of “Brown-ness”. They each likely have varying tones of yellows, blues, and reds—ironically, 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) photographs, 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 an artistic style choice, simply just “seeps in”. 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 always seen nor heard, this exhibition is intended as an opportunity to have this dialog.

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

Mariona Barkus · Chess Brodnick
Claudia Casarino · Gerald Clarke
Keiko Fukazawa · Mark Steven Greenfield
Bryan Ida · Walterio Iraheta · Tracy Keza
Annu Palakunnathu Matthew

Michele Cairella Fillmore, Curator
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