

## **Haptic**

July 7 – August 12, 2016

*Haptic: of or relating to the sense of touch, in particular relating to the perception and manipulation of objects using the senses of touch and proprioception.*

Alexander Gray Associates presents *Haptic*, featuring work by artists Polly Apfelbaum, Amy Bessone, Alexandre da Cunha, Leonardo Drew, Melvin Edwards, Ann Hamilton, Harmony Hammond, Sheila Hicks, William J. O'Brien, Howardena Pindell, Norbert Prangenberg, Jacolby Satterwhite, Hassan Sharif, and Betty Woodman. Together, they simultaneously expand and question traditional craft practices within the context of contemporary art.

### **Ground Floor Gallery**



Leonardo Drew  
*Number 177*, 2015  
Wood, paint  
100h x 6.5w x 5d in

In *Number 177*, **Leonardo Drew** employs paint and small pieces of wood to create a totemic sculpture with irregular edges. Drew regularly uses cotton, rope, charred wood, and industrial waste materials to construct pieces that display themes of decay, rebirth, and evolution. His work is tied to the history of assemblage practiced by a number of black artists and activists in Los Angeles in the 1950s and 60s, which curator Naima Keith explains as a strategy “to aesthetically redress conflict and destruction through artistic forms that bring together fragments from the communities around [the artists].” For Drew, his interest in weathered looking materials is tied to his upbringing near the landfill in Bridgeport, CT, though importantly he buys all new materials, and subjects them to aging processes in his studio before assembling them. As the critic Michael O’Sullivan commented on Drew’s solo-exhibition in the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 2000, “on the one hand, his trash can be viewed as a profoundly sad commentary on wastefulness, poverty, classism and decay, while on the other hand, it also comes across as a joyful celebration of life’s textures.”



Amy Bessone  
*J1*, 2014  
Ceramic and oil paint  
25.5h x 18w x 15d in

In *J1*, **Amy Bessone** considers the female form as a vessel and venerated object. Bessone’s truncated female figure, cropped at the neck and thigh, is reminiscent of the classical female nude both in form and color. Bessone applies broad strokes of black paint to the pure white surface to outline and highlight the anatomical features of the female nude under the male gaze; the small of the back, the cinching of the waistline. The sculpture itself is hollow, recalling both the idea of the female body as a vessel for life, but also the female body as a facade or an arbitrary construct. The fetishization of women’s bodies, more specifically individual parts of women’s bodies, is an integral component of Bessone’s practice.



Norbert Prangenberg  
*Kopf*, 2012  
Glazed ceramic  
9h x 5w x 12d in

**Norbert Prangenberg** began his career as a metal-smith and then as a designer at a glass factory before he turned to painting and sculpture in the late 1970s. *Kopf* is a part of Prangenberg’s final body of work executed during a six week residency at Rutgers University. The works in this series are all small scale clay sculptures that Prangenberg titled either *Kopf* (head) or *Landschaften* (landscape). The artist used glaze sparingly in these works, allowing portions of the fired terra-cotta to remain exposed, highlighting the artist’s hand and finger prints left behind. Touch and texture are crucial to this body of sculptural work, evidenced by the intricately rolled, smooth coils and shiny glazed portions, juxtaposed with the rough surfaces of the untreated terra cotta.



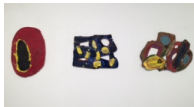
Jacolby Satterwhite  
*Matriarch's Rhapsody*,  
2012  
44 minute digital film

**Jacolby Satterwhite** draws on personal mythology and memories of his childhood to create the video work *Matriarch's Rhapsody*. Satterwhite recalls his mother's predilection for impromptu creativity and he has digitized a selection of her drawings and schematics that detail her own inventions and consumer products visually collaged with archival family photographs. The artist recognizes the similarities in his and his mother's creative processes stating, "our therapeutic and escapist creative practices developed on parallel inclines over the decades and finally merged." The title "Matriarch's Rhapsody" references the musical term for an episodic and single-movement piece brimming with expressivity. The video is silent, but the expression of emotion implied by the title is captured through the use of digitized drawings and photographs. Satterwhite embraces technology as a means to generate creative spaces, blurring the authorship of his works as he utilizes available resources such as family pictures. He reimagines craft within the context of technological advances, both in his digitization of collage, and in his use of touch and in his creation on new environments. He stated in a 2015 interview, "It's about spatial terrain, the freedom to sculpt and craft spaces dynamic enough to combine my mother's work, my live performances, and as much else as possible."



Ann Hamilton  
*near-away*, 2013  
Mixed media  
19.75h x 24.75w x 3d in  
Edition 8 of 26

**Ann Hamilton** repurposed materials from two past installations to create *near away*. Hamilton used paper to craft a glove-like shell and re-bound book fragments to construct a weight. These two objects are hung adjacent to each other on pieces of string and steel wire. Through her exploration of the contrast between the lightness of the paper hand and the heaviness of the books, the artist communicates the kinetic energy and sound implied by a hand's movement as well as the silence and stillness conveyed by text. The link between reading, writing, and fabric is an integral part of Hamilton's practice. She states, "the relationship between a line of thread and a line of text, are central, structuring aspects of my work. The words and the thread come forward together in one making hand. Perhaps it is the words that allow us to travel and the tactile threads that keep us here." Hamilton envisions a link between the tangible nature of the hand-shaped shell and the intangible content of the book fragments. Though the act of reading leaves no physical mark upon the reader, the absorption of knowledge is akin to crafting a material object.



Polly Apfelbaum  
(Left to right)  
*Bundy*, 2016  
Ceramic 18h x 12w in  
*Benjamin*, 2016,  
Ceramic, 15h x 12w in  
*Yoko*, 2016  
Ceramic, 17h x 14w in

**Polly Apfelbaum** is best known for her "fallen paintings;" abstract and intricate assemblages of dyed fabric displayed on the floor, which emerge from her interest in craft and design. She began creating ceramics in high school but did not return to the medium until 2009, expanding on her already extensive exploration of color, texture, and tactility. Apfelbaum references her "flat sensibility" or her inclination to create horizontal works and notes that creating ceramics pushed her to explore verticality as her works "become the wall." The names of the individual pieces in this series began as street names near Greenwich House Pottery where the works were created. As the series expanded, Apfelbaum began including other streets in New York City that shared people's names and eventually, she began using arbitrary names as titles.

## Second Floor Gallery



Sheila Hicks  
(left to right)

*Advancing, Beginning to End*, 1970  
Linen  
10h x 11.5w in

*La Foret Bleue I*, 2001  
Synthetic plaiting,  
rayon, silk, raffia  
14.13h x 14.25w in

For over 50 years, **Sheila Hicks** has expanded the boundaries of the woven form to create a body of work that defies traditional categorization into the fields of fine art, craft, design, and architecture. Her education at Yale under Josef Albers as well as her time spent in South America in the late 1950s influenced her interest in color and textile vocabulary as an artistic medium. *Advancing, Beginning to End* and *La Foret Bleue I* are part of the *minimes* series consisting of intimately scaled hand-woven works created continuously over the entirety of Hicks' career. The *minimes* often reference her engagement with multiple cultures both in their titles and in the materials she utilizes. Hicks is also committed to the integrity of her chosen materials stating, "If it was granite, it had its own laws, and if it was fiber it had its own laws." In *Advancing, Beginning to End*, Hicks highlights the tactile quality of the medium and emphasizes the hand of the artist through the varying tensions of the woven rows. In *La Foret Bleue I*, she juxtaposes the textile's folds with the frayed edge protruding outward in the lower lefthand corner, defying the fabric's inherent flatness. For her, these fiber works made from "supple materials," invoke the tactile quality of the medium and occupy a space between painting, drawing, and sculpture.



Hassan Sharif  
(left to right)

*Rug, Cotton Rope, and Glue*, 2013  
Mixed media  
57.5h x 26.4w x 1.6d in

*Lead No. 4*, 2014  
Mixed Media  
17.3h x 8.3w x 3.1d in

*Rug, Cotton Rope, and Glue* and *Lead No.4*, belong to **Hassan Sharif's** "Objects" series, which the artist began in the 1980s after he familiarized himself with the ideas of Dada and Fluxus during his studies in London. In *Rug, Cotton Rope, and Glue*, Sharif has cut rugs, sourced from local markets, tied them into scroll like forms with cotton rope, and arranged them one on top of the other. The artists considers this a subversion of the form and function of the rug, a transient shelter in the Bedouin tradition. He views weaving as a distinctly Middle Eastern tradition, a way of "imitating and representing the natural. I want the materials to be honest. I do relate my work with the handicraft, but not the kind of handicraft which I make entirely by myself. The objects start with a material used for society. And then I make it useless, again. Furthermore, his use of rugs denies a religious tradition, about which Sharif notes, "when I reject the religious or the cultural, it is my choice. So now I'm protesting, I'm against this convention."

Sharif used lead, copper, rope and wire to construct *Lead No. 4*. Through his combination of natural and fabricated materials, Sharif recognizes the relationship between materials and their ingrained meanings. On this combination Sharif remarks, "Materials carry individual narratives. With some materials you can create a story. The material remains as a wire, it remains as rubber, or cotton ropes, but in the end it is also a vocabulary. It's like an alphabet. When you mix wood and wire it gives you two alphabets together. It's not any more wood, neither is it any more wire."



William J. O'Brien  
(left to right)

*Untitled*, 2014  
Glazed ceramic  
and steel  
83h x 24w x 24d in

*Untitled*, 2015  
Ceramic  
20h x 15w x 15d in

**William J. O'Brien** weaves many narratives into his multi-faceted ceramic practice, embracing both folk and outsider art, as well as the traditional art historical canon. In *Untitled* (2014), O'Brien creates a totem composed of stacked ceramic vessels with grotesque and face-like imagery. O'Brien is explicitly interested in subjective notions of beauty, as well as the balance between control and improvisation. In this piece, he utilizes steel and clay to create a balance between rigidity and fragility. He states, "I am fascinated with using materials in their traditional, historical forms, but also with refuting their logic in experimental forms. Different types of materials have different natural qualities affecting how they can be manipulated." In *Untitled* (2015), O'Brien has created a seated human body, cropped at the neck and knee, awash in a multi-colored glaze. He incised the body with gashes, handprints, and grooves, emphasizing the roughness and spontaneous nature of his creative process, and the presence of his hands in the making of the object. The artist's use of clay has often drawn comparisons to traditional craft-based practices and he adds that he is interested in the possibility for continuous "experimentation and improvisation" in his practice and choice of materials. The artist notes, "tactility is almost radical now because it requires a rudimentary rejection of technology."



Melvin Edwards  
*Beyond Cabo Verde*,  
2006  
Welded steel  
19.75h x 19.75w x  
6.75d in

Since his first trip in 1970 to Ghana, Togo, Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin), and Nigeria, **Melvin Edwards** has consistently traveled to Africa. He eventually established a studio in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. While working in his Dakar studio, Edwards has continued to incorporate everyday materials he encounters. The rakes in *Beyond Cabo Verde* are ubiquitous in Dakar and used to combat the dust that accumulates in the city. During his time in Dakar, Edwards began mounting his sculptures onto iron grid structures like the one seen in this work, which can be found throughout the city. These grids are crafted by local metalworkers as window bars, a functional purpose that the artist feels is as important to the work as the aesthetic value. Edwards has only made works of this composition in his Senegalese studio, allowing him to collaborate with local craftspeople. The work's title refers to the island nation of Cabo Verde, located off the African continent. Positioned along the routes to and from Africa, Europe, and the Americas, it was a prosperous center of the slave trade. Throughout his body of work, materials, titles, and references unfold multiple meanings as they relate to Africa, the wider Diaspora, and Edwards' own experience.



Howardena Pindell  
*Untitled*, 1975  
Mixed media on canvas  
56h x 95w in

**Howardena Pindell** uses unstretched canvas, paint, and hole-punched paper scraps to create textured, skin-like surfaces. In her 1970s works, *Untitled* in particular, she demonstrates an interest in experimentation with rough and uneven painted surfaces. Pindell's painting practice centers around a dichotomy of destruction and reconstruction, involving painting or drawing on paper, hole punching the paper, affixing the traditionally discarded paper dots to the canvas, and then using the hole-punched paper as a stencil through which to pour paint. The hole punch has become a hallmark of Pindell's work over the last four decades. As she explained in a 1985 interview, the hole punch allowed her to utilize "very small points of color and light." As her process evolved even further, she began adding sensory elements to her paintings including perfume, an explicit reference to the body and female identity.



Betty Woodman  
*Kamin Posing*, 2009  
Glazed earthenware,  
epoxy resin, lacquer,  
acrylic paint  
35.5h x 98.5w x 7.5d in

**Betty Woodman's** ceramics demonstrate an intermingling of fine arts and the domestic sphere. *Kamin Posing* is a functional set of oversized vases with winged-panels that contain both representational scenes on the front and abstract designs on the reverse, a synthesis of fine art, the decorative, and the domestic. Woodman stated in 2010, "the centrality of the vase in my work is certainly a reference to a global perspective on art history and production. The container is a universal symbol—it holds and pours all fluids, stores foods, and contains everything from our final remains to flowers. The vase motif connects what I do to all aspects of art." Woodman began making ceramics in high school but eventually felt limited by the label of artisan, striving to make works in a fine art context that fused traditional decorative techniques with commentary on the domestic sphere.



Alexandre da Cunha  
*Net I*, 2014  
Vest, golf ball and  
acrylic on canvas  
18h x 14w x 3d in

In *Net I*, **Alexandre da Cunha** utilizes a golfball and vest mounted on canvas to create a wall-based sculpture. In his work, da Cunha examines ordinary mass-produced objects, such as brooms, mops, and pots, and their relationship to everyday life, architecture, and traditional craft practices. Growing up in Rio de Janeiro, da Cunha was surrounded by examples of modernist design sparking an interest in repurposing found objects. He also engages with the visual legacy of Formalism, and has remarked that his "pieces talk about the playfulness that might be hidden behind the severe look of those historic, iconic works. I also wanted to explore questions of authenticity, authorship, and uniqueness." His whimsical pairing of modernist and sterile white acrylic with the undulating strands of fiber are interrupted by the similarly colored and mass produced golfball affixed to the canvas. For da Cunha, the golfball symbolizes tourism and the exotic, and exists within his work as what curator Jens Hoffman has called "tropical ready made," a reference to the skewed stereotypical view he feels outsiders have of his native Brazil.



Harmony Hammond  
*Fraggle*, 2014  
Oil and mixed media  
on canvas  
48.5h x 58.5w in



Harmony Hammond  
*Bag X*, 1971  
Cloth And Acrylic  
47h x 18w in

*Fraggle* belongs to what **Harmony Hammond** calls her “near monochrome” paintings, which simultaneously engage with and challenge the narrative of modernist painting. Near monochrome, Hammond insists, invites content and positions the painting as a site of negotiation between what exists inside and outside the picture plane. She often describes the painted canvases as skins, and her color choices in *Fraggle* reference the human body. In this context, Hammond explains, “the grommets are wrapped around the painting as objects and body (suggesting bandage, bondage, binding) but do not cinch or constrict. The straps do not hold the painting together; the paint (and therefore the act of painting) does.” Hammond creates her paintings from the center outwards, building the surface slowly and organically through layers of paint. She incorporates the hand-made straps into this process by placing them on the canvas and painting over them. The grommets, Hammond explains, “Literally open up the painting surface, alluding to layers or space below.” They also reference bodily orifices, functionality, and the possibility of tying down or connecting. Hammond’s use of these materials, uneven layering of paint, and physical manipulation of the work by scraping and incising results in “fugitive” color and surface that are fluid, destabilized, and difficult to locate.

In *Bag X*, one of a series of bags from 1971, Hammond abstractly paints strips of used fabric sourced from the streets of New York as well as from her circle of female friends, and attaches them to a cloth bag. Her process of repurposing existing materials and building up a surface of paint on a central sculptural form emphasizes what she describes as a “gendered understanding of materials” and the historical connection between cloth, weaving, and femininity. Bags are perceived in a Western context as gendered objects and Hammond undermines this label through the traditionally male practice of abstraction. Hammond states, “Abstraction enables the artist (and viewer) to grapple with questions of representation on multiple levels, engaging with the ideological implications of high-art discourse as well as the politics of craft and constraints of embodied norms.”

### About the Artists

**Polly Apfelbaum** (b.1955) was born in Abington, PA and lives and works in New York. **Amy Bessone** (b.1970) was born in New York and lives and works in Los Angeles. **Alexandre da Cunha** (b.1969) was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and lives and works in London. **Leonardo Drew** (b.1961) was born in Tallahassee, FL, and lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. **Melvin Edwards** (b.1937) was born in Houston, TX, and lives and works in New York, and Dakar, Senegal. **Ann Hamilton** (b.1956) was born, and continues to live and work in Ohio. **Harmony Hammond** (b.1944) was born in Illinois and lives and works in Galisteo, NM. **Sheila Hicks** (b.1934) was born in Hastings, NE, and lives and works in Paris. **William J. O'Brien** (b.1975) was born in Eastlake, OH, and lives and works in Chicago, IL. **Howardena Pindell** (b.1943) was born in Philadelphia, PA, and lives and works in New York. **Norbert Prangenberg** (b.1949– d.2012) was born in Rheinland, Germany, and died in Krefeld, Germany. **Jacolby Satterwhite** (b.1986) was born in Columbia, SC, and lives and works in New York. **Hassan Sharif** (b.1951) was born, and continues to live and work in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. **Betty Woodman** (b.1930) was born in Norwalk, CT, and lives and works in New York.