

# CLOSE AT HAND

October 6  
–November 10, 2017



COVER  
CARLA EDWARDS, *UNTITLED*, 2014, STANDARD AMERICAN  
FLAGS AND NYLON DYE, 144" x 72"

# CLOSE AT HAND

Carla  
Edwards

Roxana  
Geffen

Hedieh  
Javanshir  
Ilchi

Amber  
Robles-Gordon

CURATED  
BY

Blair Murphy

OPENING RECEPTION

October 6, 6pm-8pm

ARTIST TALK

October 27, 6pm-8pm

CLOSING RECEPTION

November 10, 6pm-8pm

LOCATION

DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities Gallery  
200 I Street SE, Washington, DC 20003

*Close at Hand* brings together artists whose work evokes the art historical legacy of modernist abstraction, while drawing its symbolic resonance from the use of found objects, unexpected materials, and outside traditions.

For several of the artists, their handling of material—the pouring of paint, draping of fabric, and use of large blocks of color—owes a debt to the Washington Color School. The artists all utilize these approaches to materiality in work that engages directly with the social and political formations that shape our daily lives. The artists are committed to the significance of materiality both in their attention to craft and process and in their exploration of the social and cultural implications born by physical objects.

The work in the exhibition is not purely abstract. There are figures visible in works by Hedieh Javanshir Ilchi and Amber Robles-Gordon and recognizable objects and materials in the work of Carla Edwards and Roxana Geffen. But the influence of modernist abstraction is visible throughout: in the grids of Carla Edwards' nylon pieces, in Hedieh Ilchi's pours, and in the fields of color in two-dimensional work by Amber Robles-Gordon and Roxana Geffen. To the extent that there are recognizable figures and objects present, however, they serve to heighten the strangeness of their abstract environments. Their presence is not enough to ground the viewer in a recognizable time and space.

This pull between the recognizable and the strange creates the primary tension that the exhibition hopes to mine. The works included force us to experience a sense of estrangement from objects or materials that are, under most circumstances, banal, familiar, or symbolically overdetermined. The artists draw on both the symbolic resonance and the ambivalence the objects embody, what art historian Darby English refers to as the “open-ended intimacy that comes from not knowing, from being left unsure—discomposed—as the case may be—by the things and beings of the world.” In this way, the artists eschew the apolitical stance often associated (incorrectly, English would argue) with abstraction, while retaining the complexity, ambivalence, and strangeness that abstraction can allow.

The very complexity and ambivalence that abstraction can create makes it a poor medium for didactic or straightforward political arguments. Rather, its political possibilities come from the ways it can be used to create new worlds and to present new ways of thinking and seeing. It's expansive, rather than constrictive, creative, rather than reactive. It allows the artists included in *Close at Hand* to take ownership over materials, processes, and symbolic objects, to transform and manipulate them into something new.

1. Darby English, 1971: A Year in the Life of Color (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2016) 71.

# Carla Edwards

Carla Edwards works with found materials, deconstructing and manipulating these physical objects as a way of examining their symbolism. Since 2008, she has worked with American flags, deconstructing, bleaching, and otherwise altering the material to transform it into something wholly new. Although her flag works are often stretched, like canvases, her transformative approach to materials is sculptural. As with the other artists in the exhibition, Edwards sees material objects as inextricable from the social and political worlds they inhabit. By manipulating and altering physical objects, Edwards gains access to and power over the symbols that surround her and impact her life. At the same time, her manipulations create a new thing of beauty, suggesting that her practice is transformative rather than destructive.

*Carla Edwards is a Brooklyn-based artist and a 2017 participant in the Smack Mellon Artist Studio Program. She is an alumna of Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program and was a recipient of the Emerging Artist Fellowship at Socrates Sculpture Park in 2015. Edwards has exhibited nationally and internationally, including exhibitions at the Studio Museum in Harlem (New York, NY), Regina Rex (New York, NY), Nuit Blanche Toronto (Toronto, CA), Field Projects (New York, NY), and Knockdown Center (Queens, New York). She received an MFA from Rhode Island School of Design and a BFA from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago.*

FOLLOWING SPREAD  
CARLA EDWARDS, *THE BLUE*, 2017, AMERICAN FLAGS  
AND NYLON DYE, 41" x 40"



CARLA EDWARDS, *PIXEL*, 2013, AMERICAN FLAGS,  
NYLON DYE, AND BLEACH, 51" x 51"



# Roxana Geffen

Trained as a painter, Roxana Geffen creates 2D works, installations, and sculptures, combining her traditional training with influences from pop culture and the visual detritus of everyday life. Geffen's work is an attempt to both make sense of and celebrate the chaotic world-building that takes place while raising young children. In her more recent sculptural installations, the artist utilizes everyday materials, including building materials, thrift-store finds, and family objects, transforming her experience of motherhood and domesticity into something strange and even unsettling. Her use of the ready at hand draws from the collage and assemblage techniques that are a staple of the modern art canon, while also reflecting a self-conscious embrace of the resourcefulness required to maneuver the chaos of motherhood.

*Roxana Geffen is a DC-based painter and a resident artist at Arlington Arts Center. Recent exhibitions include Say What Gallery (Tannersville, NY), Flashpoint Gallery (Washington, DC), OllyOlly (Fairfax, VA), School 33 (Baltimore, MD), DC Arts Center (Washington, DC), and First Street Gallery (New York, NY), among others. Geffen has been a resident artist at Vermont Studio Center and a semi-finalist in the Bethesda Painting Awards. She holds an MFA from Boston University and a BA from Columbia University.*



ROXANA GEFFEN, *BLOCKHEAD*, 2014, PAINT AND SPONGE  
ON WOOD PANEL, 26" x 40"



ROXANA GEFFEN, *DUSK AT THE MOTEL*, 2015,  
PAINT AND COLLAGE ON INK JET PRINT, 26" x 40"



# Hedieh Javanshir Ilchi

Hedieh Javanshir Ilchi combines the influences of modernist abstraction with the traditions of Persian art, specifically the detailed ornamentation of Tazhib painting. Utilizing methods, processes, and visual tropes from both traditions, Ilchi creates paintings that evoke intrusion, evasion, and cultural contamination. Her method combines the precise handwork of Tazhib with the strategically loose and chance-driven techniques of the Color School and other mid-century painters. The two approaches reflect different processes, while also drawing on the artist's own roots in the cultures of both artistic traditions. The combination of the two techniques invigorates both, questioning the binary divisions—control vs. chaos, chance vs. precision—we might associate with each.

*Hedieh Javanshir Ilchi was born in Tehran, Iran and lives and works in the Washington DC area. Her solo exhibitions include Hemphill Fine Arts (Washington, DC), Randall Scott Projects (Baltimore, MD), Shirin Gallery (New York, NY), and Southern Center for Contemporary Art (Winston-Salem, NC). Recent group exhibitions include School 33 (Baltimore, MD), Creative Alliance (Baltimore, MD), and Rush Arts Gallery (New York, NY). Ilchi received her MFA from American University and her BFA from the Corcoran College of Art + Design. She is represented by Hemphill Fine Arts in Washington, DC.*







HEDIEH JAVANSHIR ILCHI, *DOWNRUSH*, 2017, ACRYLIC AND WATERCOLOR ON PANEL, 18" x 24". COURTESY HEMPHILL FINE ARTS



HEDIEH JAVANSHIR ILCHI, *AFTERGLOW*, 2017, ACRYLIC AND WATERCOLOR ON PANEL, 24" x 18". COURTESY HEMPHILL FINE ARTS

# Amber Robles-Gordon

Amber Robles-Gordon is a mixed media artist who works in painting, collage, sculpture, and installation. In her recent work, the artist uses collage to both appropriate existing imagery and create fields of color. The resulting works shift between abstraction, figuration, and landscape, creating symbolic spaces that are fantastical, but grounded in historical references. They are dreamscapes, settings that celebrate past liberation struggles and envision the possibility of freedom for women, Black people, and, ultimately, humanity as a whole. In the surreality of these landscapes there is an undercurrent of skepticism and frustration, as well as a dedication to the idea that envisioning liberatory possibilities is an essential step towards making them real.

*Amber Robles-Gordon, is a mixed media visual artist based in Washington, DC. Her recent exhibitions include Delaware Center for Contemporary Art (Wilmington, DE), American University Museum at the Katzen Art Center (Washington, DC), African American Museum in Philadelphia (Philadelphia, PA), Honfleur Gallery (Washington, DC), Corridor Gallery (Brooklyn, New York), and Skylight Gallery (Brooklyn, NY). She has created temporary and permanent public art for DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, Northern Virginia Fine Arts Association, Humanities Council of Washington, D.C., Howard University, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the Washington Projects for the Arts. Robles-Gordon holds an MFA from Howard University.*

FACING PAGE  
AMBER ROBLES-GORDON, *INTERDIMENSIONAL REALMS I*, 2017, PAPER  
COLLAGE ON CANVAS, 72" x 72"

AMBER ROBLES-GORDON, *INTERDIMENSIONAL REALMS II*, 2017,  
PAPER COLLAGE ON CANVAS, 72" x 72"





AMBER ROBLES-GORDON. *IN MEMORY OF THE DREAM*, 2017.  
COLLAGE ON PAPER, 14" x 18"

Curator  
Blair Murphy

Blair Murphy is an independent curator and writer based in Washington, DC and the Managing Director of DC Arts Center. She was a Helena Rubinstein Curatorial Fellow of the Whitney Independent Study Program from 2014 to 2015. Her past curatorial projects include exhibitions at Flashpoint Gallery (Washington, DC), The Kitchen (New York, NY), Arlington Arts Center (Arlington, VA), Field Projects (New York, NY), Washington Project for the Arts (Washington, DC), VisArts Rockville (Rockville, MD), and DC Arts Center (Washington, DC). She holds a BFA from Maryland Institute College of Art and an MA from Georgetown University.

SPECIAL THANKS to Zoma Wallace and the rest of the staff of the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities for their generous support. A huge thanks as well to Calder Brannock, for his master installation skills and Sally Maier, for her wonderful catalog design. My deepest appreciation to the artists, for making the exhibition possible.

LIST OF WORK

CARLA EDWARDS, *UNTITLED*, 2014, STANDARD AMERICAN FLAGS AND NYLON DYE, 144" x 72"

CARLA EDWARDS, *PIXEL*, 2013, AMERICAN FLAGS, NYLON DYE, AND BLEACH, 51" x 51"

CARLA EDWARDS, *THE BLUE*, 2017, AMERICAN FLAGS AND NYLON DYE, 41" x 40"

HEDIEH JAVANSHIR ILCHI, *ETHEREAL TRANSGRESSION*, 2015, ACRYLIC AND WATERCOLOR ON MYLAR, 64" x 39". COURTESY HEMPHILL FINE ARTS

HEDIEH JAVANSHIR ILCHI, *AS I CLOSE MY EYES*, 2014, ACRYLIC AND WATERCOLOR ON MYLAR, 54" x 32". COURTESY HEMPHILL FINE ARTS

HEDIEH JAVANSHIR ILCHI, *AFTERGLOW*, 2017, ACRYLIC AND WATERCOLOR ON PANEL, 24" x 18". COURTESY HEMPHILL FINE ARTS

HEDIEH JAVANSHIR ILCHI, *DOWNRUSH*, 2017, ACRYLIC AND WATERCOLOR ON PANEL, 18" x 24". COURTESY HEMPHILL FINE ARTS

AMBER ROBLES-GORDON, *INTERDIMENSIONAL REALMS I*, 2017, PAPER COLLAGE ON CANVAS, 72" x 72"

AMBER ROBLES-GORDON, *INTERDIMENSIONAL REALMS II*, 2017, PAPER COLLAGE ON CANVAS, 72" x 72"

AMBER ROBLES-GORDON, *NIGHTWALKING*, COLLAGE ON PAPER, 2017, 14" x 18"

AMBER ROBLES-GORDON, *A DREAM OF YELLOW BRICK ROADS, 40 ACRES, AND A FUCKING MULE*, 2017, COLLAGE ON PAPER, 14" x 18"

AMBER ROBLES-GORDON, *IN MEMORY OF THE DREAM*, 2017, COLLAGE ON PAPER, 14" x 18"

AMBER ROBLES-GORDON, *WHEN WE MARCH AND CONGREGATE*, 2017, COLLAGE ON PAPER, 14" x 18"

ROXANA GEFFEN, *MTW*, 2014, GOUACHE ON YUPO, 20" x 26"

ROXANA GEFFEN, *BLOCKHEAD*, 2014, PAINT AND SPONGE ON WOOD PANEL, 26" x 40"

ROXANA GEFFEN, *DUSK AT THE MOTEL*, 2015, PAINT AND COLLAGE ON INK JET PRINT, 26" x 40"

ROXANA GEFFEN, *RIFT*, 2017, MIXED MEDIA, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE

*This exhibition is supported by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities an agency funded, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts.*

*This exhibition is the first to be supported through a new grant and exhibit space opportunity for District-based curators from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (CAH). Curators were invited to submit proposals as part of an open call; applications were reviewed by a CAH advisory review panel, with the final selection made by the CAH Board of Commissioners. This new annual initiative seeks to support local curators in the development of innovative exhibition proposals that have robust educational, cultural, and/or conceptual components.*

