

# CATHARINECLARKGALLERY



Above: Mary Muszynski, rendering of *Spectral Compositions of Shade Light in the Smoky Mountains, NC 1997-1955, 2021*.

## ***Open Field: Nine Artists Respond to the Ideals of Black Mountain College***

**Jen Bervin, Lenka Clayton, Ligorano Reese, Mary Muszynski, Reniel Del Rosario, Stephanie Syjuco, Leilah Talukder, Amy Trachtenberg**

On view June 5 – September 11, 2021

Opening reception: Saturday, June 5 from 2 – 5pm; no reservations required, with social distancing and health protocols in effect

**San Francisco, CA:** Catharine Clark Gallery opens its Summer 2021 program with *Open Field: Nine Artists Respond to the Ideals of Black Mountain College*, on view June 5 – September 11, 2021. Founded in 1933 outside Asheville, North Carolina, Black Mountain College fostered experimentation and holistic learning until its closure in 1957. The artists and creative thinkers associated with Black Mountain College – including Ruth Asawa, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Buckminster Fuller – are now considered among the progenitors of the American *avant garde*, and their practices embodied a rigorous commitment to formal innovation and collective consciousness. At the core of its faculty were the artists Josef and Anni Albers, who emigrated to the United States following the closure of Germany's iconic Bauhaus due to the growing

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political pressures of the Third Reich. Through their respective practices, the Alberses encouraged reflection on how we observe our world through color, form, and perception. The work of Anni Albers, in particular, invited a radical reevaluation of the boundaries between fine art and craft, and her experiments with non-traditional and often industrial “art materials” evoked the rarefied and the mundane all at once. Unable to participate in her preferred medium in Germany, Black Mountain College offered opportunities not available to women artists at the Bauhaus.

In an April 2021 *New Yorker* profile, poet Nathaniel Mackey described Black Mountain College as an environment that fostered “an ‘open field’ approach...which included remaining receptive to poetry wherever it might be, however it might help one gain ‘leverage’ on present-day life.” In taking up Mackey’s evocation of the school’s ethos, this exhibition considers Black Mountain College’s direct and implied ideals. Concurrently, the projects on view engage multiple disciplines, forms, and media as a means of asking viewers to think critically and poetically.<sup>1</sup>



Above: Lenka Clayton, *Early Anni Albers (Net) 04/01/2021, 2021*.

Upon entry, viewers encounter Mary Muszynski’s installation *Spectral Compositions of Shade Light in the Smoky Mountains, NC 1997-1955 (2021)*, an immersive sculpture comprised of translucent silk organza printed with photographs taken at the artist’s rural family home in Cold Mountain, North Carolina, a site less than an hour from Black Mountain College. The streaming light from the exterior windows both illuminates and diffuses the printed images, dissolving the details into layered abstraction and evoking the idea of memorial through color and material. As viewers pass through the hanging fabric panels, field recordings of katydids (bush crickets) reverberate from an unseen speaker, creating a sensory experience that, as Muszynski describes, evokes the “ephemeral and eternal aspects of nature” as a space of “refuge for personal invention and creative community.”

Gallery One features a suite of 10 typewriter drawings by Lenka Clayton responding to her encounters at the Josef & Anni Albers Foundation in Connecticut in 2018. Clayton notes that “this latest presentation comprises a series created on a 1957 manual typewriter, a year coincidentally marking the exact midpoint of Anni Albers’s life. Some drawings explore tender moments glimpsed in

the archives; carefully tended house plants, a lifetime of trips to Mexico depicted in one un-itemized receipt, the corners of love letters counting down time, the reverse of a newspaper article archived for decades, as well as some of the beautiful moments that occur when the logic of an archive meet the hugely respected legacy of an artist.” *Empty Folder Folder*, by comparison, depicts a real folder in the archives that had once contained documents related to the Albers’s have now become part of the archives themselves.

<sup>1</sup> Hsu, Hua, “Nathaniel Mackey’s Long Song.” *The New Yorker* (online): April 5, 2021.

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Clayton's drawings are presented in dialogue with *Mixed Signal Flags* (2019), a collaboration with Phillip Andrew Lewis including flags made from squares cut from various signal flags rescued from shipwrecks. The flags which had once communicated warnings from one ship to another are now pieced together in a patchwork using traditional sewn flag seams. The newly composed flags transmit scrambled messages back and forth.

Presented on a vitrine, Jen Bervin's artist book *Draft Notation* (2014) draws inspiration from Anni Albers's typed studies, which were rendered as a way to imagine new patterns for her weavings. As Bervin notes, "the title of this edition of visual poems refers to the pre-weaving design diagrams a weaver creates or consults—a kind of written score for a woven textile." Following her own extensive research into advanced cloth structures woven on a loom, Bervin reimagines Albers's typed works in four unbound, khadi books with a total of fifty-seven typed studies reproduced in letterpress; a unique typing mounted on red board; a glassine envelope with digital facsimiles of studies made on different typewriters; and a typed process note and colophon.



Above: Leilah Talukder, studio shot of garments in-process.

Bervin's artist book is complemented by *On Weaving* (2021), a suite of new video works that reference Anni Albers's process in three mediums: writing, printmaking, and weaving. Bervin's playful experiments explore selected texts from Anni Albers's landmark book *On Weaving* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1965). Each short video study is typed on cloth using an IBM Wheelwriter 35 typewriter (which prints like a weft thread is woven) using the typewriter's pre-programmed memory mode.

Produced while the artist was in isolation in the Santa Cruz Mountains, Leilah Talukder's garment installation evokes the material constraints of artists at Black Mountain College. Fashioned from foraged, reclaimed, and recycled materials sourced within her immediate environment, Talukder's garments and jewelry draw upon the aesthetics of Anni Albers's weaving practice; at the same time, they also direct attention to the importance of resourcefulness and utility that was central to the values of Black Mountain College. Talukder's work reflects a commitment to sustainability and a conscious choice to opt out of cycles of commodity and industrialization that have real human and social consequences.

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Above: Amy Trachtenberg, *When I see you the sky is blue – when I don't see you the sky is blue*, 2021.

Amy Trachtenberg's suspended sculpture *When I see you the sky is blue – when I don't see you the sky is blue* (2021) draws viewers into Gallery Two. For this ambitious and site-specific work, Trachtenberg invited members of her community to donate bras, which Trachtenberg then disassembled in order to reveal the skeletal, bone-like structures that were originally intended to conform to the wearer's body. Trachtenberg then painted and treated these deconstructed elements, knotting them into a large-scale net that at once both references organic matter and industrial forms.

The net-like structure hangs in front of a wire grid with knotted stained glass, a juxtaposition that evokes a complex interplay between materials and perceptual space. In drawing on Anni Albers's assertion that "the interlacing of discordant lines suggests both control and mayhem," Trachtenberg's installation and related-mixed media works powerfully suggest that harmony and dissonance are not at odds with one another but are fundamentally in-balance.

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Above: LigoranoReese, *Second Movement*, 2021.

*Listening to the material*, a new suite of works by LigoranoReese, emerged from a proposition to discover the music and sound concealed in Anni Albers's work. In studying Albers's weavings and prints, Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese recognized that the patterns and designs could be reinterpreted as graphic music compositions. As the artists evocatively describe, "There is a robust musicality in all textiles, from their warp and weft to the shuttle of the loom that weaves them together. Albers herself often talked about the importance of listening to the material 'as a means of communication.'" In this new suite, LigoranoReese transpose Albers's compositions onto punch cards, which are then played as music scrolls on artist-designed music boxes fabricated in collaboration with woodworker Seth Janofsky. The punch cards reference the history of the mechanical jacquard loom as well as technologies of data visualization. In gesturing towards these material histories, LigoranoReese ask viewers to consider that patterns and graphics often contain embedded information that is unseen but not neutral. The artists's installation is accompanied by related works on paper that reference these punch card designs.

In late August, the gallery collaborates with **BOXBLUR** to

present *Tone Grove*, a live performance by composer Phyllis Chen in which Albers's designs are reimaged as a special music-box sound piece to be performed by LigoranoReese. Details are forthcoming; BOXBLUR thanks the Robert D. Bielecki Foundation for generously supporting this new work.

The gallery's Media Room features an expanded presentation of Stephanie Syjuco's video work *Ornament + Crime (Redux)* (2013), including a sculptural model related to the animation which is being presented for the first time in San Francisco. *Ornament + Crime (Redux)* is a 22-minute HD video animation and accompanying architectural model which takes as its starting point architect Le Corbusier's 1931 iconic Modernist building, Villa Savoye, located outside of Paris. Using a free digital model from SketchUp's open-source library of 3-D objects, Syjuco creates a haunting, animated walk-through of the Modernist structure overtaken with disruptive black-and-white graphics of folk patterns culled from France's prior colonial era: Moroccan, Algerian and Vietnamese textiles, many of which subsequently informed motifs in Western Modernism including Albers's patterning. The digital model in the animation is full of inaccuracies, as many of SketchUp's open-sourced models are produced by anonymous amateurs who do their best at rendering the forms based on casual observation. As a historical mash-up of publicly sourced files, this new version of Villa Savoye attempts to transcribe the colonial and cultural history of a Western icon back upon itself,

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infecting the visual cues of its colonies onto a form of empire. In dialogue with the video is a blank wooden architectural model that Syjuco commissioned a professional model maker to produce from observing the inaccurate 3-D model, thus looping back into itself the stutters and mistakes of the layers of mistranslation.



Above: Reniel Del Rosario, *Joseph's Square*, 2021.

In the gallery's Viewing Room, Reniel Del Rosario conceptualizes a new vending installation titled *Exist Through The Gift Shop*. In follow-up to similar installations at venues such as the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, Del Rosario's installation of ceramics — all available for immediate purchase — is a glimpse of Black Mountain Gallery's history via the lens of commodity, comedy, and ceramics. The artist writes that “anecdotes, artworks, people, and more have been selected as the inspiration for the apexes of consumerism—the souvenir that is to be taken home and treated as a stand-in for the art and the site-specific location it originates from and the bootleg that aims to challenge authenticity. Though the real objects may be lost in time (whether it is contemporary taste shifting, recorded history being dismissive to the othered, or just actual lengths of time), they are now immortalized through ceramics, recontextualized with specially branded packaging, and displayed as a product with the ritual of buying.”

*Open Field* is complemented by historic and contemporary works throughout the gallery that directly reference Black Mountain College and its influence, including sculptures and multiples by **Anni Albers**, **Ruth Asawa**, **John Cage**, **Larry Edman**, **Kota Ezawa**, **Lonnie Holley**, and **Alison Saar**. In conjunction with the exhibition, BOXBLUR presents a newly commissioned dance work by Emma Lanier, the granddaughter of Ruth Asawa, on August 20 and 21 (with complementary films selected by the San Francisco Dance Film Festival); and special artist symposium and evening of poetry curated by author, editor, and scholar Vincent Katz on August 28; additional details and programming will be announced in the coming weeks.

On June 26 and 27 at 8pm, BOXBLUR presents encore performances of *Dances for Doing*, an original, site-specific dance by Catherine Galasso, with dancers Karla Quintero, Phoenicia Pettyjohn, Galicia Stack Lozano, and Santiago Stack Lozano. Galasso employs the form of the duet to create intricate combinations of everyday gesture, resulting in otherworldly forms both familiar and strange that experiment with a range of scale, narrative, and architectural response. Composer Catherine McRae creates a haunting original score using violin, cello, and kalimba that accompanies Galasso's choreography. Tickets (\$30 - \$40) are [available here via Eventbrite](#).

*Open Field* opens on Saturday, June 5 with a reception from 2 – 5pm. The opening reception is open to the public; no advance reservations are required, but masks are.