

STRAIGHT *FORWARD*



IMAGE DRIVEN

Straight Forward, Image Driven

October 5 - 30, 2021

Beth Barry, Melody S. Boone
Nancy Elsamanoudi, Susan Luss
Shira Toren

Curated by Izzy Nova

THE PAINTING CENTER

547 West 27th Street, Suite 500, New York, NY 10001
Tues-Sat, 11-6 pm, 212-343-1060, www.thepaintingcenter.org



Melody S. Boone
My Black Self, 2012
Mixed media
6 x 6 inches

Straight Forward, Image Driven

Straight Forward, Image Driven is a group exhibition featuring five contemporary artists who are based in and around New York, all of whom graduated from the interdisciplinary Pratt Institute between 1979 and 2013. These artists work across a range of media but are united by themes and concepts – the engagement with light in the work of Beth Barry and Susan Luss, the interrogation of personal and art histories by Shira Toren, Melody S. Boone, and Nancy Elsamanoudi – and by their interest in imagery and repeating motifs that reinforce their message and continued relevance.

In bringing together these diverse, intergenerational artists, curator Izzy Nova, also a Pratt alumna, says, "It is important to me that artworks in this exhibition here have an immediate impact and that the messages behind the work are relatable, even through an abstract lens. Being the youngest member of the group, I walk into this role just like a student, learning all over again from these imprints."

Beth Barry and Susan Luss, respectively the first and last to graduate from Pratt, are both strongly influenced by light, color, movement, and their surroundings. Barry (b. New Bedford, Massachusetts) creates vivid canvases drawing from nature, specifically the coastline of her hometown, and her background in printmaking. Her abstract, expressionistic landscapes are often inspired by real places (*Cappadocia*, 2014), while her "Brainscapes" travel within and are less easily identifiable (*Filtered Light*, 2018).

Light is a central theme in Barry's work, both in her understanding of how it illuminates a scene and as a metaphor for positivity and pleasure. In *Sea Wall*, an installation comprising 20 individual paintings arranged in a grid, the artist explores both ephemerality and timelessness as the waves, the shore and light come together repeatedly and playfully in distinct ways.

Susan Luss (b. El Paso, Texas) responds to spaces by creating installations that interact with their specificities, such as available light, wind, and architecture. During the pandemic, solitary walks in nature helped her face the unknown, and began to reflect in her abstract landscapes – which she created, transported, and even danced with during various steps of the process. In *Pink Moon*, 2017-2021, a pigmented canvas flows from the wall like a waterfall. Elsewhere in the gallery, Luss places assorted found objects and personal memorabilia, chosen, dyed, and staged especially for the site, invoking associations and making each rendition of the work performative and unique.

Images float up from long-gone memories in Shira Toren's (b. Tel Aviv, Israel) artworks. More recently, the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted her to look inward and around from a place of gratitude, resulting in a vibrant mixed media series, "Domestic Paintings (Covid 19 days)". For works such as *Blue Yard*, 2020, the artist used both subject matter and scraps of material from her immediate surroundings within her home, finding new value in both.

This series might be a departure from Toren's landscapes – both former, seen in the 2018 works *Formation #2* and *Formation #3*; as well as in her later explorations of coastlines reminiscent of Barry's *Sea Wall*. What remains constant, however, is the layering of mediums, including graphite, ink, and Venetian plaster, to create imagery from, in the artist's own words, "residues of my visual recollections."

Melody S. Boone (b. Norfolk, Virginia) and Nancy Elsamanoudi (b. Newark, New Jersey) explore multiple histories, especially art history and representation, through hints of humor. The exhibition features several of Boone's mixed-media works spanning more than a decade, which employ aspects of self-portraiture. The artist uses her physical features as silhouettes and imprints, paring them down to abstract, monochromatic shapes which are nonetheless recognizable, as in *Self Study*, 2021 and *My Black Self*, 2012. Boone cleverly employs repetition and caricature to highlight systemic racial discrimination, specifically in the art world.

Boone dialogues with Elsamanoudi, whose work tackles art history from a different angle. In "Pink Flowers", 2018 and 2021, as well as *Hand*, 2019, Elsamanoudi was inspired by a quote from Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby's performance *Nanette*, which addresses, amongst other things, the objectification and obliteration of women in Western art history. Elsamanoudi, whose practice shifted from the abstract to the figurative in recent years, highlights the sexualization of women through colorful scenes stretched to the absurd.

Drawing from Gadsby's assertion that women were portrayed in art as though they were mere "flesh vases" for "dick flowers", the artist challenges the male gaze and traditional symbolism by denying labels and blurring gender norms, and thus power.

As our world, including the art world, gradually emerges and opens up again, there is a hesitation, a precariousness – and an opportunity to be more intentional and engaged. In *Nanette*, Gadsby says, "Artists don't invent zeitgeists. They respond to [them]." The times certainly call for perspective, accountability, introspection, pleasure, and light.

Kriti Bajaj, 2021

Kriti Bajaj is an independent editor and writer. She was previously an Editorial Manager at Saffronart, Managing Editor of *Art Radar* and Asia + Europe Copy Editor at *Blouin Artinfo*. From 2016 to 2018, she mentored students and professionals around the world enrolled on *Art Radar's* online Certificate in Art Journalism and Writing course. Kriti's writing has appeared in publications such as *Aesthetica Online* (UK), *The Hindu* (India), *The Calvert Journal* (UK), *Tribe* (Dubai) and *Cotonoha* (Japan), and she has worked on commissions for the Serendipity Arts Foundation (India), the Camden Council (London) and My Art Guides (Venice). She lives and works in Mumbai.



Shira Toren
Blue Yard, 2020
Venetian plaster, pigment, graphite on wood
16 x 16 inches

Beth Barry
Filtered Light, 2018
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 30 inches



Beth Barry graduated from Pratt Institute in 1979. She was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts and started making art as a young child. Exposed to the love of making things by her father, she used to make furniture and clothing for her troll dolls. She continued the making tradition by studying art in college and graduate school. Barry loved printmaking and painting and started painting exclusively about fifteen years ago. Her compositions are personal responses to things she sees and feels in nature. They are expressive and primitive, capturing the feeling of the spaces she sees.



Beth Barry
Cappodocia, 2014
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 36 inches

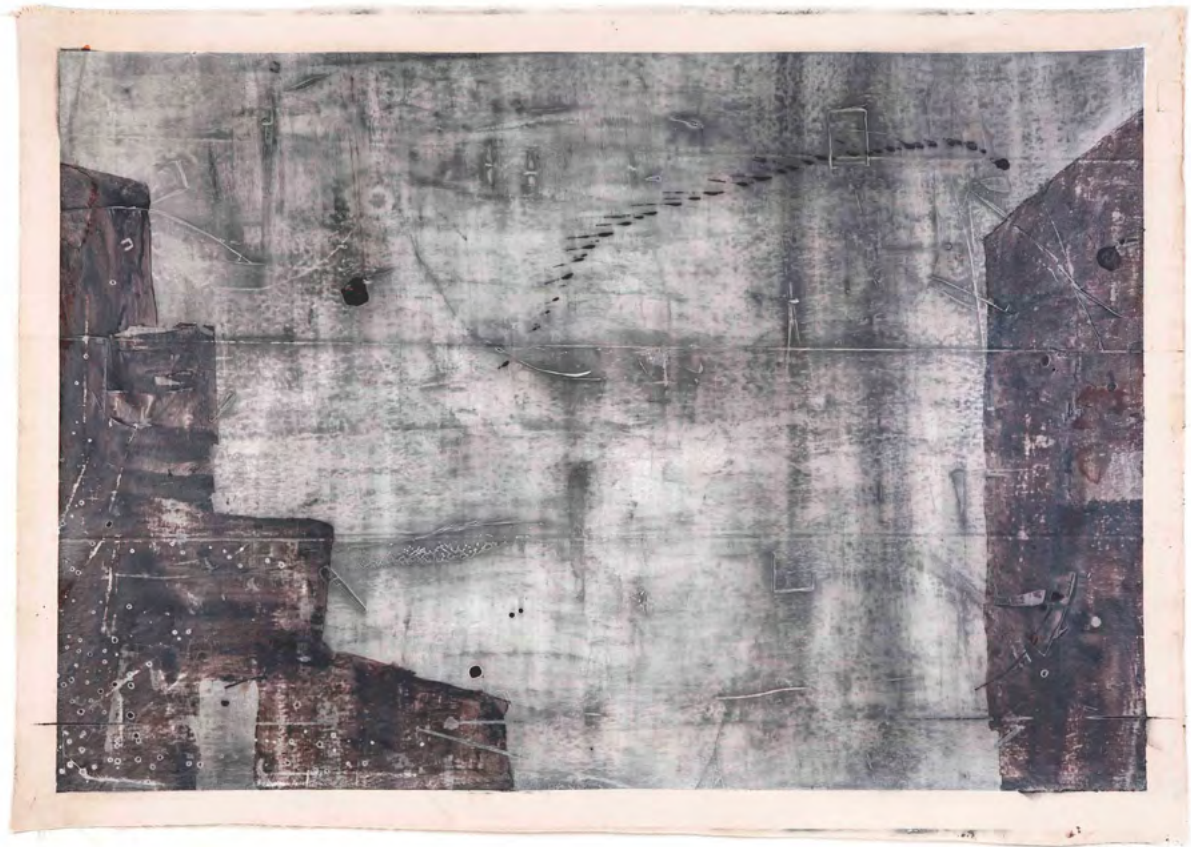


Beth Barry
Sea Wall, 2019
Acrylic on panel
2 ft x 10 ft (6 of 20 panels shown above)

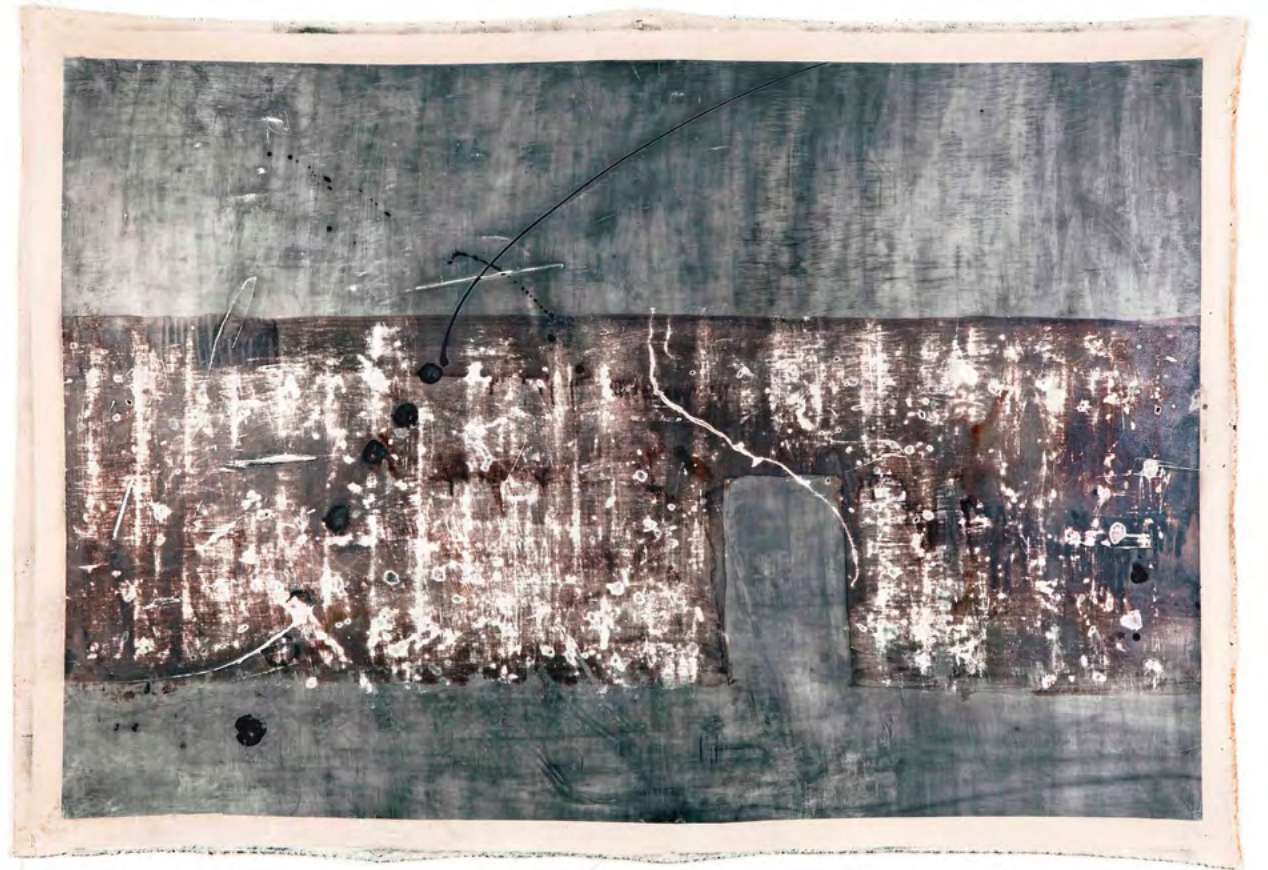


Shira Toren
Alone, 2018
Venetian plaster, ink on upholstery linen
18 x 19.5 inches

Shira Toren graduated from Pratt Institute in 1981. She was born in Tel- Aviv. She moved to New York City to study fine art and design. Toren received her B.F.A. from the Pratt Institute and an Associate Degree in Art Therapy from The New School. She attended classes in Paintings and Printmaking at The Arts Student League in New York. She is currently working in her studios in Bushwick, Brooklyn, New York. Toren exhibits her work nationally and internationally.



Shira Toren
Formation #2 (Unstretched), 2018
Venetian plaster, graphite on canvas
42 x 60 inches



Shira Toren
Formation #3 (Unstretched), 2018
Venetian plaster, graphite on canvas
40.5 x 60 inches



Melody S. Boone
She Is Me (Composition #2), 2009
Graphite on wood panel
48 x 36 inches

Melody S. Boone graduated from Pratt Institute in 2009. She is a mixed-media artist, currently living and working in South Orange, New Jersey. With her understanding of both African American and art history, Boone creates abstracted narratives to dispel the notion of race as a label. She has worked with several professional artists and has received artist fellowships and grants to assist in her art practice. As her work continues to develop, Boone maintains the use of her “home” as an inspirational source, works to gain a deeper understanding of herself and continues to investigate her family history.



Melody S. Boone
Self Study (left), 2021
Mixed media
4.5 x 4.5 inches



Melody S. Boone
Self Study (right), 2021
Mixed media
4.5 x 4.5 inches



Nancy Elsamanoudi
Pink Flowers, 2019
Oil and oil stick on panel
36 x 36 inches

Nancy Elsamanoudi graduated from Pratt Institute in 2013 with an M.F.A. in drawing and painting. She was born in New Jersey and moved to Ohio. She lived near Cleveland Institute of Art and Cleveland Museum of Art, where she referenced her drawing practices, at the time. Originally an abstract artist, Elsamanoudi has recently expanded into figuration and drawing elements, on the topic of flipping misogynist painting norms.



Nancy Elsamanoudi
Pink Flowers, 2018
Oil, acrylic and gesso on panel
36 x 36 inches



Nancy Elsamanoudi
Hand, 2019
Oil and oil stick on panel
36 x 36 inches



Susan Luss
Foreground: Untitled Installation, 2021
Canvas, dye, twine, rope, wood
Size variable at installation

Susan Luss graduated from Pratt Institute in 2013 with a B.F.A. in Studio Arts. She was born in El Paso, Texas. She is a transdisciplinary artist living in New York City, maintaining a studio in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Luss works with a range of found and other materials. She intermixes and assembles these, creating site responsive, yet adaptable works, which incorporate the architecture of space, the outside environment, and changing light. Luss received her M.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts, New York.



Susan Luss
Pink Moon, 2017-2021
Dye, pigment, watermark on canvas
11 ft x 11 ft - Size variable at installation



Susan Luss
Pink Moon, 2017-2021 (Primitive, Early Edition of Work)
Dye, pigment, watermark on canvas
11 ft x 11 ft - Size variable at installation

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