

There Is a Certain Slant of Light

Curated by
Seph Rodney

Pratt
Manhattan
Gallery

Pratt Exhibitions

There Is a Certain Slant of Light

**Pratt Manhattan Gallery
June 21, 2023–
September 6, 2023**

144 West 14th Street
New York, NY 10011
212.647.7778

pratt.edu/exhibitions
[@prattexhibits](https://www.instagram.com/prattexhibits)
[#PrattAlumni](https://www.instagram.com/PrattAlumni) [#SlantOfLight](https://www.instagram.com/SlantOfLight)

Where the Light Comes In

A long time ago, when I was an undergraduate student, I read a prose poem aloud in class. I think it had something to do with making choices as a writer, or photographer. (At the time, I was beginning my photography training and I imagine that this must have inflected what I wrote in this brief composition.) Of the poem, I only recall the last sentence: “You have to know where you want the light to come in.” I remember that line very well, because after I said it, it seemed a collective murmur wafted through the room. I was surprised. When I had written it, I thought this was a fairly rudimentary observation.

Now it's 2023, and having been invited to curate the Pratt Fine Arts alumni exhibition, I have occasion again to think about light's use and meaning and significance, and the decisions artists make with light. On initially looking through all the disparate works of art of the Pratt Fine Arts alumni, I didn't know what I wanted this show to be and do. On the second and third viewings, I found myself drawn to how certain artists were using luminescence.

Sometime in the late 19th century, Emily Dickinson wrote a poem beginning with the line “There's a certain Slant of light.” This lyric has given me both the title of the show and a way to think through the work of approximately 142 MFA graduates of the last five years of Pratt's Fine Arts Department. Dickinson asserts that for the speaker of the poem, this particular light is oppressive on “winter afternoons,” that it conveys a “heavenly hurt,” although “We can find no scar / But internal difference / Where the meanings, are.” From what I've read, too many interpretations of this verse rely on vague and abstract ideas about despair or religious feeling. In contrast, the work gathered here in *There Is a Certain Slant of Light* is buoyantly inquisitive and insightful.

Many of these artworks are monochromatic. All of them feature the quiet assertiveness of the Dickinson poem—perhaps with a touch of melancholy. There's an ache in this work, a kind of deep emotional register that, depending on the viewer's own psychic orientation, might read as sorrowful, wistful, even despondent. But the artist's—I will call it, sensitivity—to the world is not a flaw or a failing; it is a way to see. In Erik Wangsvick's forlorn basketball hoop photographed in the waning light of the day, in Weijia Lizzy Li's miniature domestic settings that verge on being narrative, in Naomi Frank's evocations of the human spirit realized as a kind of diaphanous web, and in Samantha Morris's clean and well-lit architectural spaces, there comes to the surface of the work a sense that the artist is paying close attention to the vicissitudes of light, to its play and whimsy and its weight.

I recall an instance at Pratt Institute a couple years ago when I was invited to function as a visiting critic for the final critique session for the graduating MFA students. There was one student whose work felt very dutiful. She had made graphic representations of cross sections of ships that had carried African enslaved people across the Atlantic to the Americas. But there were other elements in her work that peeked out from beneath the long, austere skirts of her commemorative mission. Part of her work admitted a fascination with texture and surface and the possibilities of figuration. I said to her and the gathered audience that as an artist she is allowed to be fascinated by these formalist aspects, that along with being a Black woman who had inherited a difficult and fraught history, she is someone who might have a myriad of interests that don't necessarily have anything to do with slavery and its bitter legacy. I find myself fairly regularly telling artists of color that they have permission to pursue whatever their idiosyncratic interests are, that they can ignore the tacit and historic rationale that they are only valid as artists when they take on the role of poet-warrior or activist. In curating this show, I took my own advice and let myself be drawn in by the fantastical play of light in Katelynn Mai-Fusco's lyrical waveform installations that are composed of Tyvek and colored illumination.

Yet I have to admit that it feels odd to give myself permission to be taken in by light. After the national crucible incited by the callous murder of George Floyd, it feels almost extravagant to develop an exhibition that doesn't forthrightly confront our ugly and distressing political realities. This nation is in trouble. Our popular culture is mired in the ethos of vicariously living through celebrities, and a *schadenfreude* that exults in watching them crash and burn; our politics are mostly myopic, tribal, and anti-intellectual; our leaders rarely display integrity or nuanced thinking; and seemingly every week there is another mass shooting, while we earnestly debate whether there is such a thing as toxic masculinity (does this really require argumentation?).

Notwithstanding these limitations, there are aspects of our culture from which I draw meaning and fulfillment. Despite what Dickinson describes as an "Imperial affliction / Sent us of the air," we daily find sources of light and life, reasons to rise and make a poem, an art exhibition, a good and sustaining meal—all means to stave off death, both spiritual and physical demise.

In selecting and organizing this work, I was pleased to find that I didn't miss the crucial metric of diversity among the artists showing here. When I had gathered the work that most intrigued me, I

found that the majority of artists identify as women, and that there was a range of racial and national identities. I want to always give my attention to this blessing: Our culture is heterogeneous; and in small pockets we celebrate our differences, which go deeper than surface allegiances (such as skin color, political affiliation, language spoken). As Dickinson writes: "Internal difference [is] / Where the meanings, are." I want to have us gather together around these shared meanings that do not subsume our differences, but find brightness in them.

This exhibition is an opportunity for you to let the light in and notice, consider what kinds of luminosity exist around you right now, swirling, pulsing, quiescent in a corner where "Shadows – hold their breath." You really need to know where you want that luminescence to enter your life.

Seph Rodney, PhD, is a former senior critic and opinion editor for *Hyperallergic*. He has written for *The New York Times*, CNN, MSNBC, and other publications. He is featured on the podcast *The American Age*. His book, *The Personalization of the Museum Visit*, was published by Routledge in 2019. In 2020, he won the Rabkin Arts Journalism Prize. In 2022, he won the Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant.

Kate Butler

MFA Fine Arts; MS Art History '19
Born North Carolina, USA; resides Melbourne, Australia

Kate Butler is an artist working primarily in drawing and ceramic clay. She approaches these impressionable mediums as direct means of discovering new forms, a large part of which refer to subliminal experiences of nature. Her recent sculptures, invoking movement through organic wave-forms resembling clouds and other phenomena, speak to the desire to physically connect with the fleeting natural world. Her recent ceramic light-works reference reflected light in nature and the built environment, their forms alternately organic and architectural. Before attending Pratt, Butler studied and apprenticed at the Leo Marchutz School of Painting and Drawing, a "school of vision" based in Aix-en-Provence, France. Since graduating from Pratt, Butler has participated in residencies at Odyssey Clayworks and Anderson Ranch Arts Center while also teaching and exhibiting. After six years in New York, she moved with her partner to Melbourne, Australia, in 2022.



Kate Butler
Tadasana Lamp, 2021
Fired ceramic with white glaze and hardware
19 x 8 x 5½ inches
Courtesy of the artist

Guanqi Chen

MFA Fine Arts '19

Born Guangdong, China; resides New York, USA

Guanqi Chen is a New York-based artist raised in China. He moved to the United Kingdom at a young age, then immigrated to the United States for his bachelor and master degrees. His work presents unique and varied perspectives of space and often alludes to social environments that are considered to be “behind the scenes”—a practice that he claims reflects the insecurity caused by leaving home at such a young age. In fact, he attests, photography offers him a solution to his “teenage troubles,” which centered around the alienation of relocation and the multiplicity of lived narratives. Currently, Chen works as an art director of an automotive group, and his artwork often features cars, modes of transit, and other automotive subjects. He has exhibited in the US and internationally, including at the Guangdong Museum of Art.

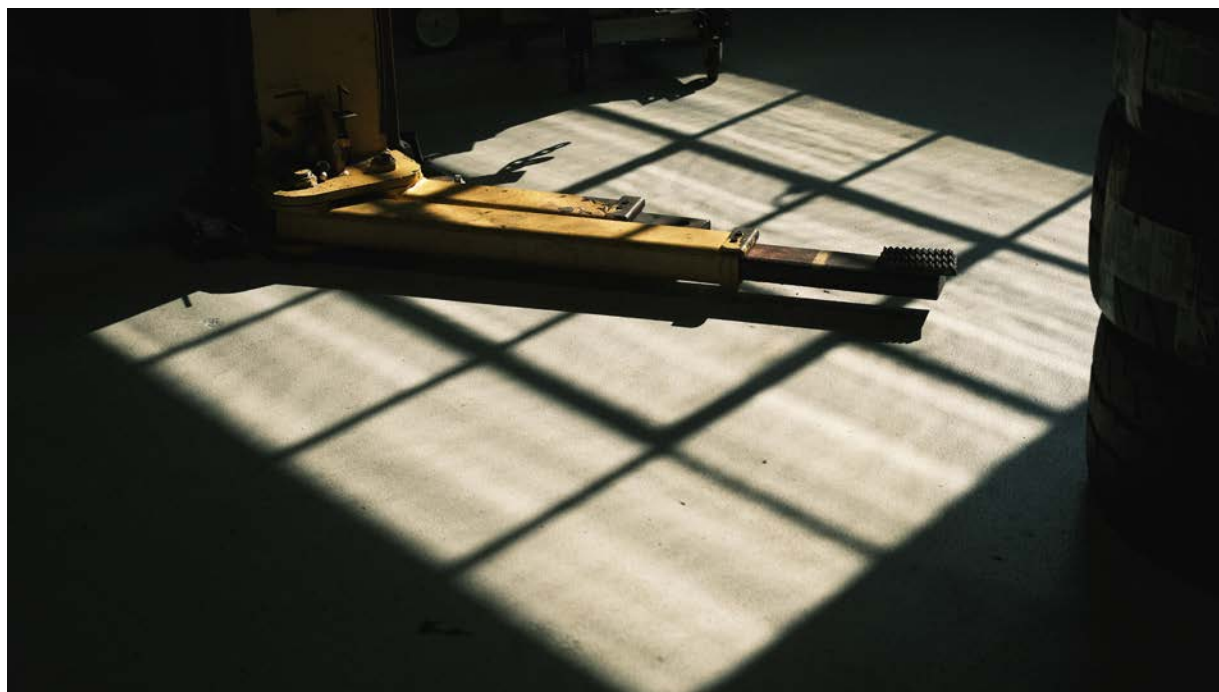
Guanqi Chen

The Lift, 2023

Premium luster photo paper print

16 x 24 inches

Courtesy of the artist



Katie Croft

MFA Fine Arts '20; MPS Art Therapy and Creativity Development '22
Born Ohio, USA; resides North Carolina, USA

Katie Croft is a multidisciplinary artist, art therapist, and educator. Her work is heavily inspired by her practice in art therapy, where she focuses on mental health, equality, and the body autonomy of women. Mythology, historical tropes, hidden images, and religion in Croft's work function to create a multi-dimensional critique of women's beauty standards, healthcare access, and cultural expectations. Her charcoal drawings, such as *Demeter*, explore the themes of healing, touch, and physicality. Her work has been recently exhibited in Spilt Milk Gallery, Site:Brooklyn, Pratt Manhattan Gallery, Winston Wachter Fine Art, and Super Dutchess Gallery. She has also been featured in numerous publications including *New American Paintings*, No. 147, MFA Annual Issue, and the inaugural issue of *AllSheMakes*. In 2022, she was a finalist for the Winter RePaint History Prize.



Katie Croft
Demeter, 2020
Charcoal on paper
36 x 54 inches
Courtesy of the artist

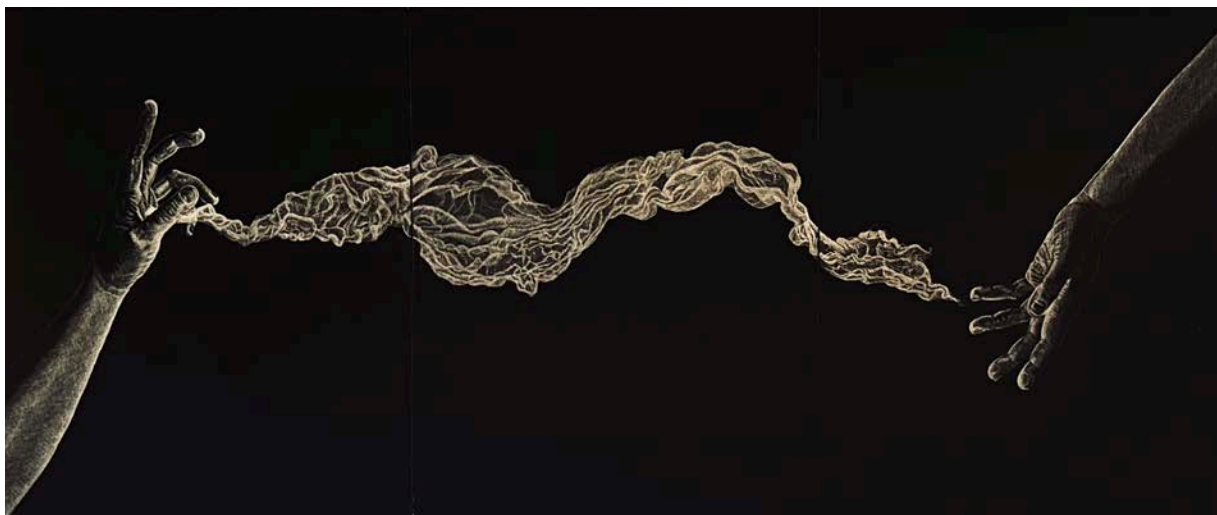
Naomi Frank

MFA Fine Arts '18

Born Adelaide, Australia; resides New York, USA

Naomi Frank is a Brooklyn-based artist raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her artistic practice explores existential anxieties by evoking the visual language of Western religion, spiritualism, and natural history, revealing how these cultural coping mechanisms elide or embrace the fear of death. Frank's work has been shown locally at First Street Gallery, The Boiler, The Gateway Gallery, Bessie's Brooklyn, Trestle Gallery, and Mount Rose Space. Frank has completed residencies at Chashama's ChaNorth, Vermont Studio Center, and Trestle Art Space.

Naomi Frank
Touch Faith, 2019
Scratchboard
18 x 42 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Devin B. Johnson

MFA Fine Arts '19

Born Los Angeles, USA; resides New York, USA

Devin B. Johnson's often-improvisational painting and multimedia work sources imagery from personal and historical ephemera arranged into fictional, sentimental situations. His paintings explore both exterior and interior moments, many of which are inspired by Johnson's walks around Brooklyn. The themes of memory, landscape, and the body are all deeply ingrained into his work. Johnson was named to the 2022 Forbes 30 Under 30 Art and Design list; he was also included in *Cultured's* Young Artists 2021, and was one of 16 artists from around the world selected for the inaugural year of the Black Rock Senegal residency (2020). His work is in the collections of the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Pond Society, Shanghai; the Rubell Museum, Miami; the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio, and many others. He has recently exhibited at Massimo de Carlo; Dak'Art Biennial, Dakar, Senegal; and Nicodim, his representative gallery.



Devin B. Johnson
Nothing Gold Can Stay, 2023
Oil on linen
48 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles
and New York

Kosuke Kawahara

MFA Fine Arts '20

Born Kyoto, Japan; resides New York, USA

Kosuke Kawahara is a New York-based artist who grew up in Kyoto and Shiga, Japan. His work engages a gestural and intuitive practice, focusing on human behavior in shifting environments. His painting *Drifting into the Void* is part of his project "Into Ultrablack," a term he coined with reference to the concept of ultraviolet. Ultrablack indicates an imaginative crevice of absolute darkness, a space where one must navigate the mystery of the unknown. The work embodies the concept of animism as well as New York's "dark history," generating cryptic imagery of the city's evolving environment. Kawahara has exhibited at RAINRAIN, Brian Leo Projects, Smack Mellon, Kunstraum LLC, The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, Trestle Gallery, Paradise Palace, Susan Eley Fine Art, and Super Dutchess Gallery. He has also been awarded the Café Royal Cultural Foundation 2022 Visual Grant and the 2021 City Artist Corps Grant.

Kosuke Kawahara

Drifting into the Void, 2013–18

Oil color, spray paint, paper, and plywood

30 x 24 inches

Courtesy of the artist



Hiu Ching Leung

MFA Fine Arts '22

Born Hong Kong, China; resides New York, USA

Hiu Ching Leung is a multimedia artist whose work addresses political issues in Hong Kong. She explores the in-between state of living in New York after growing up in Hong Kong, the boundary between Hong Kong and China, and the lines that simultaneously connect and separate the viewers between the artist and her work. Leung embeds histories and messages in the materials she uses, such as wood shavings, book pulps, and bricks, giving viewers the task of decoding the meanings of her works—or of finding that there is no meaning to be discovered. Her etchings, such as *18 November 2019* and *1 November 2019*, are part of her project “Protest Diaries.” They depict enigmatic scenes of political unrest and fragmented violence. Leung has exhibited at Northcrackatorium Gallery, Fridman Gallery, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Red Gate Gallery, and others.



Hiu Ching Leung
1 NOV 2019, 2020
Etching
30 x 22 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Weijia Lizzy Li

MFA Fine Arts '21

Born Shanghai, China; resides Shanghai, China

Weijia Lizzy Li is an artist who lives and works in Shanghai, China. She works across sculpture, photography, and video; in all of these mediums, she attempts to fabricate imaginary worlds and to “live” in them as a form of escape. Li views her dreamworlds as a method of self-analysis, allowing her to interrogate what it is she is escaping from and where she is escaping to. Her work also explores the dissimilarities between her fabricated worlds and the real one, a process by which she makes her subconscious both conscious and visible. Li has held numerous positions in the arts, including starting her own Los Angeles photography studio, Weijia Lizzy Li Photography. She has exhibited in the US and in China, and currently works on organizing museum exhibitions in Shanghai.

Weijia Lizzy Li
Conversation #3, 2016
Gelatin print
11 x 14 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Katelynn Mai-Fusco

MFA Fine Arts, attended 2017–2018
Born Colorado, USA; resides Colorado, USA

Katelynn Mai-Fusco works primarily in immersive installations, using Tyvek paper and LED light to craft site-specific environments on gallery walls. She describes her installations as “womb-like” in their ability to encase viewers in cascading patterns of color and light and to instill a sense of tranquility and comfort. Mai-Fusco’s spaces seek to connect to all of the human senses and to allow participants moments of inward reflection. Water is one of her main sources of inspiration; both its visual and spiritual qualities are deeply influential in her work. Since attending Pratt, Mai-Fusco has worked on various collaborative installations throughout the USA. She is currently working on a 2,000-square-foot installation at the Denver Children’s Museum, titled *Bloom*, that is set to open August 2023.

Katelynn Mai-Fusco
In Waves, 2023
Cut paper, fabric, and light
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist



Samantha Morris

MFA Fine Arts '22

Born Connecticut, USA; resides New York, USA

Samantha Morris works in drawing, alternative process photography, and book arts to focus on ideas of light and perception in interior and architectural space. In her monochromatic paintings, drawings, and photography, she foregrounds the effects of light and its stillness, pulling from both public encounters and constructed environments. She challenges her viewers' perception of space, reflecting subtle tonalities through illuminated walls encapsulated by darkness. Morris has exhibited at Listhús Gallery in Ólafsfjörður, Iceland; Fountain Street Gallery in Boston, MA; Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia; and b.j spoke gallery in Huntington, NY, among others. Morris's work has also been published in *FreshPaint* and *ArtMaze* magazines. She completed the Listhús Artist Residency in Ólafsfjörður, Iceland, as well as a residency at Kala Art Institute in Berkeley, California.

Samantha Morris
Lagoon, 2018
Oil on panel
48 x 36 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Jean Oh

MFA Fine Arts '19

Born New York, NY; resides New York, NY

Jean Oh is a Brooklyn-based painter and multimedia artist who grew up in Korea. Her work provides an opportunity for viewers to experience sensitive, emotional states. By incorporating what she describes as “off-balanced compositions” into her work, she attempts to create minor visual disturbances. *Wait List II*, a silk piece in which instability and delicacy intersect, offers a glimpse into her exploration of the paradoxical nature of human beings. The work was created through a meticulous process of layering and erasing various fabrics, thus creating irregular volumes and textures. She has recently exhibited at Pratt Manhattan Gallery, Iron Velvet Gallery, NARS Foundation, and Trestle Gallery CICA Museum in Gimpo, South Korea. She has completed the La Pera Projects x NeueHouse residency and the Vermont Studio Center Residency. She was also the 2019 recipient of the AHL-T&W Foundation Contemporary Visual Art Awards-Silver Award.



Jean Oh
Wait List II, 2021
Sewing on nobang fabric
76 x 18 inches
Courtesy of the artist

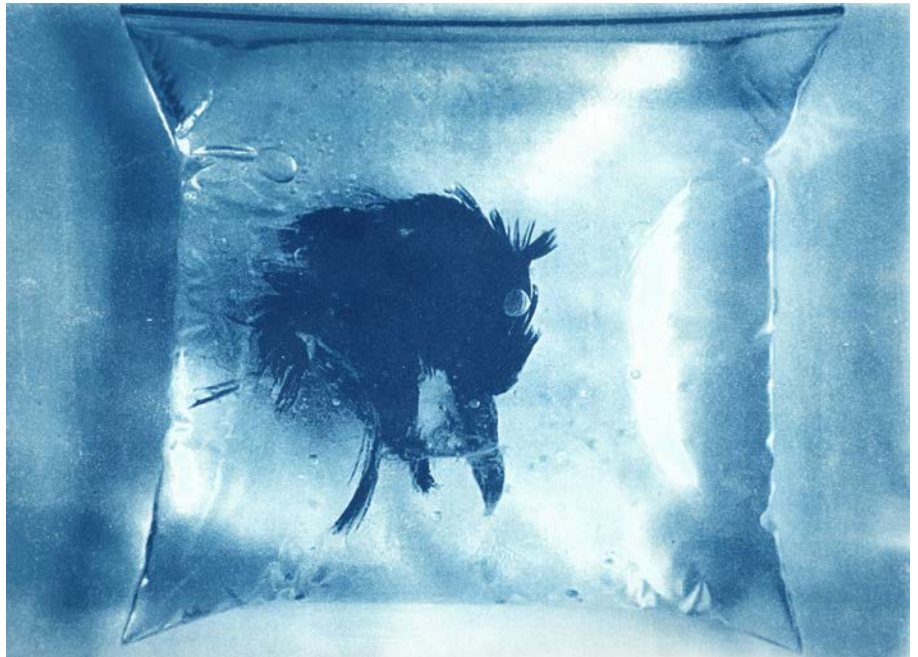
Natalia Petkov

MFA Fine Arts '21

Born New Jersey, USA; resides New York, USA

Natalia Petkov explores the concept of interconnectivity through interventional processes. Her studio practice begins with observational walks on which she collects materials, such as grass clippings and waste. She then experiments with various methods of artistic intervention such as photography, video, and installation, transforming collected materials into art. The themes of decay and transformation are integral to her processes and conceptual framework. *Birds #26* is a pigment print of a cyanotype photograph of a dead bird; the archival process allows her to both preserve and transform the imprint of the decaying animal. Petkov is a dual recipient of the Stutzman Foundation Fine Arts Award in 2020 and 2021. She has been featured in the *ArtAscent International Art and Literature Journal* as well as in the *Irish Arts Review*. She has exhibited at the Elliott Museum in Florida, the Limner Gallery in New York, the Greenhill in North Carolina, and the Burren College of Art in Ireland, among others.

Natalia Petkov
Birds #26, 2022
Archival pigment print of
cyanotype
12 x 17 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Rob Redding

MFA Fine Arts '22

Born Atlanta, USA; resides New York, USA

Rob Redding describes himself as a constructive expressionism (ConEx) abstract artist, a style that blends geometric forms with expressive smears of paint. He first developed “smear painting” in 2000, a psychedelic and color-focused style of abstraction somewhat inspired by the work of Jackson Pollock. Redding later began incorporating constructivist elements into his paintings, blending his smeared style with reductive geometric forms. Black paint and darkness are featured prominently in his work: “Like life,” he says, “my monumental canvas paintings are shaped from the darkness.” Alongside his artistic practice, Redding works as a professor, author, journalist, and talk show host. He has exhibited widely, including at NoHo M55 Gallery, Midoma Gallery, Ortuzar Projects, Ouchi Gallery, and Bortolami Gallery, among others. He has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Upscale Magazine*, and *Consciousness Magazine*. His award-winning website, ReddingNewsReview.com, is a leading source for Black news on the internet. He has won an award from the Associated Press and three consecutive Black Web Awards.



Rob Redding

Kenosha 7: Pow, Pow, Pow, Pow, Pow, Pow, Pow
and *Jacob Blake's Life is Changed Forever*, 2020

Acrylic on canvas

40 x 40 inches

Courtesy of the artist

Erik Wangsvick

MFA Fine Arts '19

Born Colorado, USA; resides Colorado, USA

Erik Wangsvick is an artist, craftsman, and musician. Taking inspiration from everyday life, he engages with elements of chance, experimentation, and critical observation to create artworks that uncover magic in the mundane and question the norm. For Wangsvick, process and product are of equal importance. He strives to maintain skilled craftsmanship and pull from a diverse set of materials, constantly experimenting and evolving his practice. His photographs *Marcy, Brooklyn, NY* and *B-ball Court, Charlotte, NC* capture moments of stillness in the urban environment; in the absence of human presence, viewers note the subtle plays of light on the city landscape. He has exhibited his work extensively in New York and Colorado, and has performed sound art widely across the US. His discography includes 32 full-length albums and EPs.

Erik Wangsvick
B-ball Court, Charlotte, NC, 2022
Giclee photo print
12 x 18 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Additional Artworks Exhibited

Kate Butler
Shutters Lamp, 2022
Fired ceramic with white pigment, brass hardware
17 x 8 x 7½ inches

Guanqi Chen
JOSHUA, 2022
Premium luster photo paper print
16 x 24 inches

Guanqi Chen
Heartbreak Anniversary, 2018
Premium luster photo paper print
16 x 24 inches

Katie Croft
Hell Hath No Fury, 2020
Charcoal on paper
47 x 34 inches

Katie Croft
Daphne, 2020
Charcoal on paper
38 x 34 inches

Naomi Frank
The Spirits Take Form IV, 2022
Scratchboard
18 x 14 inches

Devin B. Johnson
To Be a Man is to Blossom, 2023
Oil on linen
24 x 30 inches

Hiu Ching Leung
18 NOV 2019, 2020
Etching
30 x 22 inches

Weijia Lizzy Li
Conversation #9, 2016
Gelatin print
11 x 14 inches

Samantha Morris
A Beam of Light, 2022
Platinum palladium print
9½ x 6½ inches

Samantha Morris
An Encounter, 2022
Platinum palladium print
7 x 5 inches

Samantha Morris
Cast Shadow, 2022
Platinum palladium print
9 x 6½ inches

Samantha Morris
Ephemeral Passages, 2021
Graphite on paper
38 x 25 inches

Samantha Morris
Diffusion, 2022
Graphite on paper
38 x 25 inches

Samantha Morris
Light Spills, 2022
Graphite on paper
38 x 25 inches

Jean Oh
Wait List I, 2021
Sewing on nobang fabric
66 x 59 inches

Natalia Petkov
Birds #27, 2022
Archival pigment print of cyanotype
12 x 17 inches

Natalia Petkov
Birds #30, 2022
Archival pigment print of cyanotype
12 x 17 inches

Rob Redding
Untitled, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
20 x 24 inches

Eric Wangsvick
Marcy, Brooklyn, NY, 2023
Giclee photo print
12 x 18 inches

Acknowledgments

There Is a Certain Slant of Light showcases the outstanding talent of Pratt MFA Fine Arts alumni who graduated between 2018 and 2022. I am grateful to Seph Rodney for undertaking the challenging task of curating a small selection of artwork from the abundance of exceptional alumni work that is available. It is truly exciting to witness the return of our recent alumni to Pratt Manhattan Gallery and to celebrate their achievements as professional artists. My thanks go to these artists for generously sharing their work.

This exhibition and its successful implementation would not have been possible without the dedication of the Department of Exhibitions staff: Ted Holland, Assistant Director; Shoshi Rosen, Gallery Coordinator; Travis Molkenbur, Installation Manager; and Peter Schenck and Scott Whipkey, Installation Technicians, along with our student assistants. I would also like to express my gratitude to Jane South, Chair, and Dina Weiss, Assistant Chair, Fine Arts, for their collaboration and co-organization of this remarkable exhibition.

Sincerely,

Nick Battis
Director of Exhibitions

Design

David Frisco, Director, Pratt Institute Creative Services
Stephanie Greenberg, Associate Director of Project Management
Marcela Albuquerque, Designer
Robert McConnell, Senior Designer

Kate Butler
Guanqi Chen
Katie Croft
Naomi Frank
Devin B. Johnson
Kosuke Kawahara
Hiu Ching Leung
Weijia Lizzy Li
Katelynn Mai-Fusco
Samantha Morris
Jean Oh
Natalia Petkov
Rob Redding
Eric Wangsvick