

5-PLUS-1: RETHINKING ABSTRACTION



10:00 am

Registration

10:30 am–11:00 am

Welcoming Remarks

Hoor Al Qasimi - President, Sharjah Art Foundation

Introductory Remarks

Salah M. Hassan - Goldwin Smith Professor and Director, Institute for Comparative Modernities, Cornell University, Ithaca, US

Welcoming Remarks on Behalf of Frank Bowling and Family

Benjamin Bowling – Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, King's College London

11:00 am–12:30 pm

Session 1

Between the Dream and Its Materials: The Art of Frank Bowling

Gilane Tawadros - Chief Executive, Design and Artists Copyright Society, London

This talk investigates the space between Frank Bowling's canvases and the physical world from which he has drawn to create compelling abstract paintings. It reflects upon the relationship between the visual and the linguistic and the ways in which artists like Frank Bowling and writers like Wilson Harris have prised painting and language away from the arena of the colonial and the figurative to generate radical new spaces of the imagination.

Some Thoughts on Artists and Abstraction

Kellie Jones - Professor, Department of Art History and Archaeology, Columbia University, New York

In 2005, as Kellie Jones prepared for *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964–1980*, the 2006 show she organised for the Studio Museum in Harlem, she had her last conversation with painter Al Loving. He was excited about the exhibition and pledged to help out in any way possible. He also thanked Jones, not so much for organising this particular show, but for signing up for the work of organiser, writer and interpreter for artists of colour, and specifically those who chose to work abstractly—those who were, at that time, more underknown than not. In 2018 we can happily say, at least for Al Loving and his cohort (of largely male artists), active from the mid-twentieth century onwards, that they are now recognised for their work, as seen in shows from Los Angeles to New York and London to Sharjah.

Inspired by her dialogue with Loving over a decade ago, Jones' paper considers the work of Jack Whitten. While his paintings have commanded quite a bit of attention over the last decade, his sculpture has garnered attention only recently. Additionally, Jones will discuss the paintings of Candida Alvarez, who began her career in New York in the 1980s and will have her first monograph published in the next year. She was a student of Whitten's at Fordham University, New York in the 1970s.

Discussant: Zoe Whitley - Curator, International Art, Tate Modern, London

Moderator: Salah M. Hassan - Goldwin Smith Professor and Director, Institute for Comparative Modernities, Cornell University, Ithaca, US

12:30 pm–2:15 pm

Lunch

2:15 pm–3:45 pm

Session 2

'Disregard': Tom Lloyd and the Art of Refraction

Krista Thompson - Professor, Department of Art History, Northwestern University, Evanston, US

Tom Lloyd was among the first wave of artists working with light and electronic technologies in the United States in the 1960s. Lloyd's early centrality in the mainstream 1960s New York art world is belied by the bare archival and material traces that remain of his work. Lloyd was particularly interested in the concept of refraction, the process in which a light wave bends when it interacts with a medium. This paper considers refraction as a critical artistic, archival and art historical practice.

To Be Young, Gifted and Black: Reflections on Gender and 'Soul of a Nation'

Zoe Whitley - Curator, International Art,
Tate Modern, London

Reflecting on research conducted in preparation for the exhibition *Soul of a Nation*, which premiered at Tate Modern in 2017 and is travelling in the United States throughout 2018 and 2019 (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville; Brooklyn Museum, New York and The Broad, Los Angeles), this presentation revisits the contribution of African American women artists to abstraction. The paper recentres artists such as Betty Blayton (1937–2016), Emma Amos (born 1938), Virginia Jaramillo (born 1939) and Camille Billops (born 1933) alongside research into the oeuvres of Alma Woodsey Thomas (1891–1978) and Mildred Thompson (1936–2003). Whitley's talk addresses issues of exclusion within art historical discourses of abstraction and women artists' roles within the predominantly male circle of African American artists experimenting with the genre of abstraction. Although the contributions of these Black women artists have now been acknowledged, their unique aesthetics and nuanced engagement with abstraction have not been fully addressed in the scholarly or curatorial arenas.

Discussant: Kellie Jones - Professor, Department of Art History and Archaeology, Columbia University, New York

Moderator: Hoor Al Qasimi - President, Sharjah Art Foundation

3:45 pm–4:00 pm

Break

4:00 pm–5:30 pm

Remembering '5-plus-1' Roundtable

Courtney J. Martin - Deputy Director and Chief Curator, Dia Art Foundation, New York

Melvin Edwards - Sculptor

Frank Bowling – Painter (participating remotely)

Closing Remarks

Salah M. Hassan - Goldwin Smith Professor and Director, Institute for Comparative Modernities, Cornell University, Ithaca, US

5:30 pm

Closing Reception