
CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS CONFRONT MODERN ABSTRACTION IN NEW EXHIBITION

Five diverse visual artists offer critical reframing of Modern Art to credit global abstract legacies.

Arlington Arts Center hosts *In Spite of Modernism: Contemporary Art, Abstract Legacies, and Identity* starting January 29.

DATE: January 13, 2021

ARLINGTON, VA: Opening January 29 and running through March 19, 2022

In Spite of Modernism: Contemporary Art, Abstract Legacies, and Identity features five contemporary artists who challenge abstract styles narrowly associated with Modernism in order to confront the movement's racial and gendered exclusions. It not only highlights the under-acknowledged, diverse narratives present throughout the historic Modern movement, but also the abundance of pre-existing abstract legacies despite Modernism's authority over certain styles.



Julia Kwon, *Homage to the Square Bojagi*, 2016. © Julia Kwon.

Applying approaches stemming from global visual languages, such as geometric abstraction and minimalistic compositions, artists like Paolo Arao, Julia Kwon, Esteban Ramón Pérez, among others, offer a reframing and inclusive reading to what Western Modern artists have conventionally received claim to fame. Their works, ranging from Pérez's large color-block leather textiles to Tariku Shiferaw's paintings of rectangular forms - styles that would be reductively considered "Modernist" - recall the origins of abstract designs from Xicano to African American communities, as well as from Korean to Filipino cultures. By comparison, exhibiting artists, like Arao and Kwon, also challenge the limited readings of Modernism that have neglected the complexities of femininity and queer sexuality. Paying tribute to the remarkable resilience of the various peoples behind iconic abstract styles, the artists' works keenly remind us that we must not merely ensure more inclusive readings of history and its art and artists, but to also empower the living beings behind these visual legacies.

In Spite of Modernism: Contemporary Art, Abstract Legacies, and Identity is curated by **Haley Clouser**, independent curator and deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum Curatorial Fellow. It features five Virginian and national artists including: **Paolo Arao** (www.paoloarao.com), **Asa Jackson** (www.thecontemporaryartsnetwork.com), **Julia Kwon** (www.juliakwon.com), **Esteban Ramón Pérez** (www.estebanramonperez.com), **Tariku Shiferaw** (www.tarikushiferaw.com).

A virtual artist talk between Paolo Arao, Julia Kwon, and Tariku Shiferaw will take place on Thursday, February 3 at 6PM. Additional programming includes panel discussions with invited curators such as Maneula Well-Off-Man, Chief Curator of IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA), as well as community workshops led by Asa Jackson. For more information about programs, visit arlingtonartscenter.org/events.

For exhibition images, visit: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/0mcoyt6uce9f87n/AACTIPBj5gnka2jB8kTmC2Gna?dl=0>

ABOUT ARLINGTON ARTS CENTER

Arlington Arts Center is an independent, non-profit contemporary arts center and gallery that enriches community life by connecting the public with contemporary art and artists through exhibitions, educational programs, and artist residencies. Located at 3550 Wilson Blvd, Arlington, VA, it is open Wed.-Sun. 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m., or by appointment. AAC is free, has on-site parking, is easy to reach by metro and bus, and is accessible. For more information about its other programming, visit: arlingtonartscenter.org. AAC programs are supported in part by The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation; Arlington County through the Arlington Cultural Affairs division of Arlington Economic Development and the Arlington Commission for the Arts; the Virginia Commission for the Arts/ National Endowment for the Arts; the Washington Forrest Foundation; The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia; and generous individual donors.

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