

BOUNDLESS

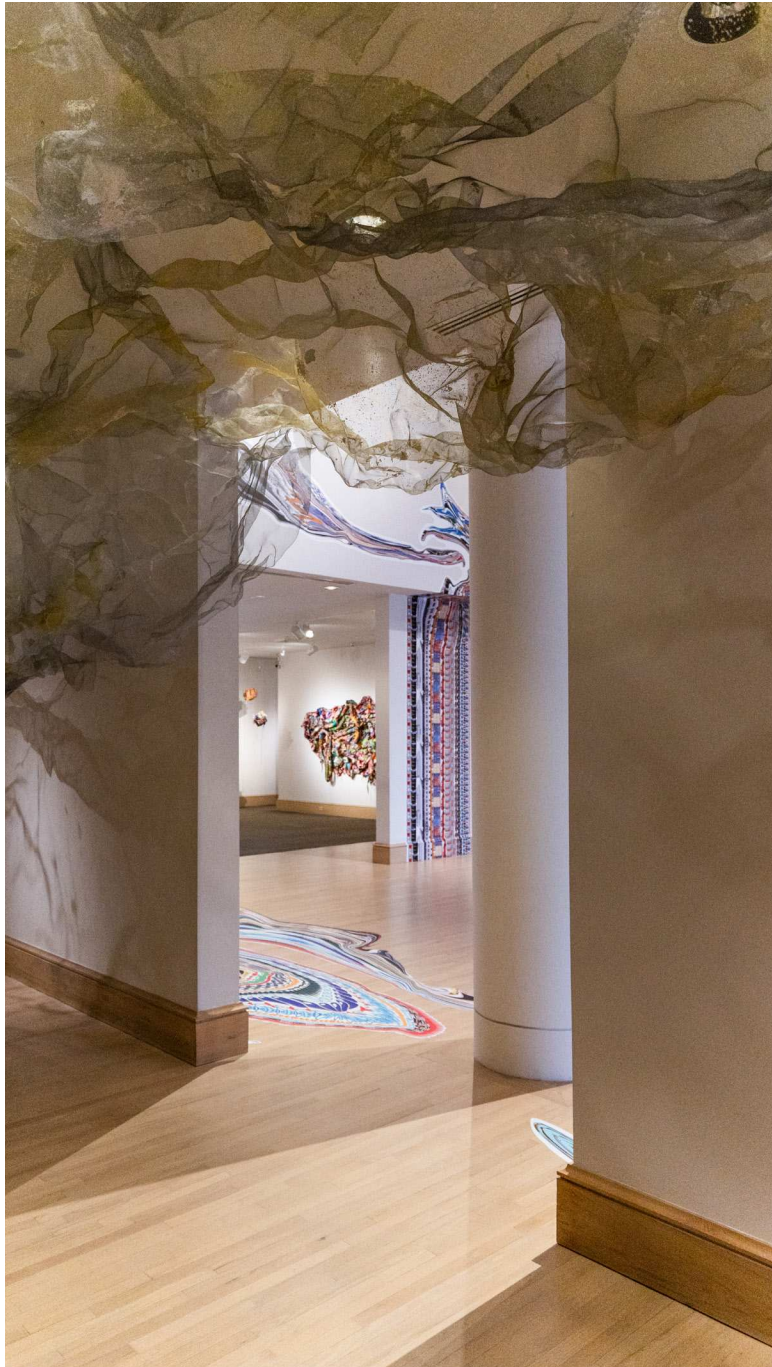


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EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Lillian Blades

An Effort to Make a Connection, 2022

Wood, acrylic, Plexiglas, glass, fabric, paper, found objects, wire, and acrylic paint

Ashley V. Blalock

Keeping Up Appearances, 2022

Crocheted cotton yarn

Dave Eppley

Alabama Swag, 2022

Vinyl and string

Olga Lah

The Near and Bright Expanse, 2022

Acrylic paint, spray paint, and polystyrene mixture on aluminum screen

Melissa Vandenberg

Glorya, 2022

Secondhand and crowdsourced vases, paint drop cloth, acrylic rod, polyfil, polystyrene bean, and hardware

Jamele Wright, Sr.

Roberta's Song, 2022

Mixed media with Georgia red clay on Dutch wax cloth and found wood

All works have variable dimensions and were lent by the artists.

ORGANIZER

Organized by the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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FOREWORD

Angie Dodson
Director

Each time I walk through the Museum's contemporary galleries, even if just for a moment, I'm transported back to my one and only scuba diving trip, to the moment when I was hovering just a yard or two beneath the surface of the water, waiting for a small smack of jellyfish to clear so that I could return to the boat. I remember—vividly—the look and feel of the current and the chop of the sea. Tuscaloosa-based artist Jamey Grimes' *Roil* (2017), from the Museum's permanent collection, with its long layers of reclaimed, corrugated plastic suspended overhead to give a sense of roiling waters, is the work that takes me back to that September 1997 trip to the Florida Keys. Art has that power, especially large-scale, three-dimensional works, ones that welcome—even command—viewers to experience them wholly, in body and mind.

Like Grimes' *Roil*, the six colossal works in *BOUNDLESS* invite visitors into immersive experiences. Created specifically for the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, these installations by six artists from across the country transform the Museum's galleries. They break free from the constraints of traditional frames and pedestals by spanning across walls into the rooms themselves, projecting into the galleries, or hanging from the ceilings. Each artist combines everyday objects and traditional materials, drawing not on paper but in the space itself. These installations playfully engage us while exploring concepts like memory, identity, consumerism, and notions of home.

MMFA Curator Jennifer Jankauskas identified and collaborated with the participating artists—Lillian Blades, Atlanta, Georgia; Ashley V. Blalock, El Cajon, California; Dave Eppley, New Paltz, New York; Olga Lah, Long Beach, California; Melissa Vandenberg, Richmond, Kentucky; and Jamele Wright, Sr., Decatur, Georgia—to realize this especially engaging exhibition. To this task, she brought the same eye, intellect, and imagination that made her *Material Transformations* (2013) and *Uncommon Territory: Contemporary Art in Alabama* (2017) exhibitions the exceptionally well-remembered shows they are.

In addition to appreciating Jennifer's contributions to this project—and that of each of the six artists—on behalf of the staff and Board, I extend our thanks to our generous sponsors and everyone who helped us realize this project for the good of the greater community.

In closing, we urge you to accept these artists' invitations to explore and celebrate boundlessness, the unbridled nature of imagination. In doing so, a memory of a past experience might return to you; perhaps your sense of wonder from childhood will be stirred; you may be able to solve a long-stuck problem. Encounters with creativity and creatives can do that for us...when we let them.



BOUNDLESS

Jennifer Jankauskas
Curator

“The world of reality has its limits; the world of imagination is boundless.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Swiss, 1712–1778)

Boundless: having no boundaries

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Over the last few years, our world has undergone tremendous upheaval and, in a sense, a narrowing—as we retreated into our homes to limit contact with each other during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conceived in part as a reaction to the limitations of that period, the exhibition *BOUNDLESS* demonstrates how artists and their works of art can expand our imaginations and our understanding of each other. Art also has the capacity to evoke a sense of joy—becoming a needed balm for the continued challenges we all experience. This joy is apparent in all of the stunning works of art in *BOUNDLESS*. They invite wonder and delight while also asking us to stretch our boundaries and imaginations and think about our place in the world.

Making or viewing art can provide solace or transform us by igniting innovative ideas and unearthing memories. Using this power of transformation, each of the six artists from around the country featured in *BOUNDLESS*—Lillian Blades from Atlanta, Georgia; Ashley V. Blalock from El Cajon, California; Dave Eppley from New Paltz, New York; Olga Lah from Long Beach, California; Melissa Vandenberg from Richmond, Kentucky; and Jamele Wright, Sr., from Decatur, Georgia—created a site-specific installation. Responding to the architecture of the Montgomery Museum

of Fine Arts' galleries, these artists' installations push beyond the frame, bounding into room-sized pieces that surround or immerse the viewer in the work of art itself. This immersion encourages us to look anew at our surroundings and unleash our imaginations. Additionally, the artists found inspiration in common materials, including yarn, house paint, glass vases, fabric, and other everyday items. The resulting works of art transcend these materials' ordinary roots to become catalysts that invite us in, engaging our minds and bodies if we open ourselves to the experience. Vacillating between abstraction and representation, the installations are visually intriguing, but also encompass and explore different issues such as consumerism, identity, memory, and place.

At first glance, the only trait these works seem to have in common is their large scale. Upon closer inspection, several themes emerge that connect the works in the exhibition. All of the artists employ assemblage and accumulation in some format, and they are all interested in how repetition can create complex patterns that form rhythmic, dynamic movements. While each work of art has many points of entry and interpretation, three artists—Blalock, Blades, and Wright—have the



issue of identity at their core. Blalock's *Keeping Up Appearances* (2022) calls into question how we portray ourselves through the objects we use to adorn our spaces. By recreating old-fashioned doilies on a massive scale and in vivid red, Blalock shrouded the gallery to encompass the viewer while challenging them to consider how the way we decorate our homes reflects how we want others to perceive us. The installations by Blades and Wright are more introspective and embody autobiographical elements. One of her largest pieces to date, Blades' mixed-media assemblage, *An Effort to Make a Connection* (2022), is an oblique self-portrait. The work combines elements referencing cultural traditions from her homeland, The Bahamas, and her ancestral background in West Africa into lacy tapestries. These influences are also visible in her color palette, which is inspired by island colors and the bright shades found in the costumes of the Caribbean Junkanoo festival and her chosen fabrics, which include African textiles. Like Blades, Wright also referenced the African diaspora

while alluding to the Great Migration in the United States in his installation, *Roberta's Song* (2022). His sculptural, painted assemblages incorporate found materials—many of them personal items, including his clothing—combined with Georgia red clay and Dutch wax fabric. Bringing these objects together in large canvases and sculptural pieces, Wright evoked the land where he currently lives and the place from which his ancestors came. Wright's installation, layered with meaning, explores family and cultural traditions, such as carrying gris-gris bags, linkages between Africa and the American South, and, through his exuberance in making lively and colorful work, the concept of Black joy.

Personal experience also informs the installations by Olga Lah and Melissa Vandenberg. Each artist independently constructed a work of art that references, in part, what they dealt with during our recent COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Lah's site-specific, immersive installation suggest concepts relating to human existence, spiritual transcendence, and personal and collective memory. Made

from commonplace objects—aluminum mesh, popcorn ceiling material, and paint—manipulated into a long repetitive form, Lah’s installation provokes an overwhelming experience of the space and our surroundings. Like much of Lah’s work, this piece alludes to our understanding of experience and perception. The gray aluminum mesh of *The Near and Bright Expanse* (2022) conjures up the haze and collective disorientation that characterized the pandemic and for the artist, the difficulties of watching friends and family succumb to the virus. At the same time, the addition of bright yellow paint across the surface symbolizes a moment of hope, contemplation, and stillness in the ongoing ambiguity of these strange times.

Also responding to the pandemic, Vandenberg’s installation *Glorya* (2022) not only functions as a meditation on mourning—the empty flower vases were perhaps used in sympathy arrangements—but it is an indictment of our consumer culture. Vandenberg’s use of glass vases, sourced from the community, also allude to the female form through their curved shapes and the idea that women’s bodies are traditionally perceived as vessels for procreation. She links this shape with objects in our popular culture while initiating conversations about manufacturing, consumerism, and (over)abundance. Vandenberg is aware that, as an artist, the art she creates can contribute to the surplus of objects and materials in the world. To offset this, Vandenberg consciously chooses to use existing objects—recycling and relying on community involvement to secure her materials. As a result, *Glorya* is an environmentally-responsible and sustainable project. Following *BOUNDLESS*, the artist will gift the vases

to florists, event venues, and others who have a use for these vessels here in Alabama.

Similarly, in *Alabama Swag* (2022), Dave Eppley explores consumerism, planned obsolescence, and the mass accumulation of objects in our society. Here, unlike his previous installations of bold strips of color, Eppley introduces representational imagery to highlight the sheer mass of what we use and discard. He photographed the “stuff” of our lives, printed it in repeated patterns on vinyl, and applied it to the gallery walls. The mass of images streams down the walls and puddles on the floor in a blur of objects—demonstrating the enormity of our refuse while also alluding to its environmentally destructive nature. To craft his installation, Eppley used geometry and sign-making materials to investigate and intervene in the architectural space, drawing out the intricacies of the gallery and finding connections between details in the space.

It is this sensitivity to the architecture—shared by all the artists in *BOUNDLESS*—that aided them in making works of art that become sensory encounters that challenge our perceptions of the spaces we occupy. Because each artist crafted their installation in response to the Museum’s galleries, the artworks will never embody these same forms again. They are specific to this particular time and place, and their value lies not only in our experience of them but in what we take away.



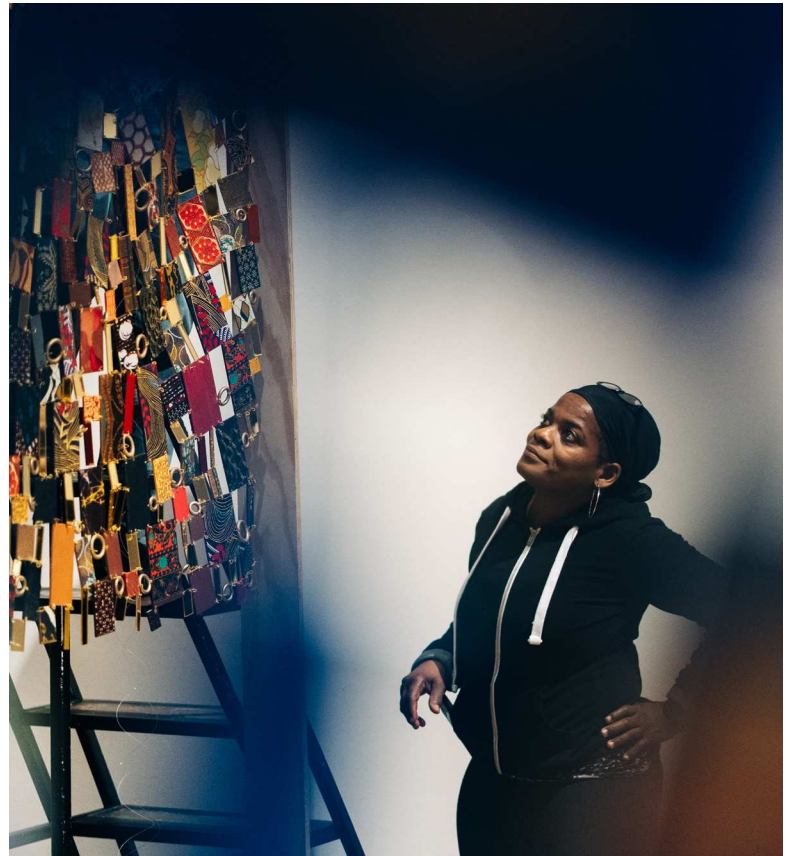


AN EFFORT TO MAKE A CONNECTION

Lillian Blades

For her installation, *An Effort to Make a Connection*, Blades joined fabric-covered wood panels, clear, colored, and mirrored acrylic sheets, acrylic paint, and an assortment of found objects into shimmering veil-like assemblages. Hanging from the ceiling and appearing to float in space, her flexible translucent lace-like panels form spaces that reflect and refract light, casting colorful shadows on the surrounding walls and floor. Each swath features gradations of color, dense on the bottom and becoming increasingly transparent as they progress upward. Blades plays in space, fluidly painting in the air.

Resonating with meaning, Blades' selected materials allude to African, Caribbean, and African-American cultural and ancestral visual traditions. Some of her inspirations come from the woven Kente cloth from Ghana; Lukasa memory boards of the Luba people of Congo; the ornate, colorful costumes of the Bahamian Junkanoo parade; the quilts of Gee's Bend in West Alabama; and Abstract Expressionist paintings. Blades aims to connect not only with her personal history but also with the many foundational cultural histories that weave together the story of our country.









KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

Ashley V. Blalock

This installation is the most recent incarnation of Ashley V. Blalock's ongoing series, *Keeping Up Appearances*. The project began in 2011, and throughout its lifespan, has transformed and shifted in response to the architecture of each space in which it has been installed. At the MMFA, Blalock's enormous and vibrant red crocheted doilies stretch across the walls from floor to ceiling, activating the gallery space in three dimensions. Blalock created an almost cathedral-like space, with the crocheted loops of yarn echoing patterns seen in stained-glass windows.

Although usually a dainty, ornamental object associated with the arrangement of décor from an earlier era, the doily is an object that evokes domestic refinement. With this installation, Blalock investigates perception versus reality, specifically how people arrange and decorate their domestic spaces to present a façade to the world that may not be a true reflection of their identity. With her gigantic doilies, Blalock punctures this concept, demonstrating the futility of "keeping up appearances" by constructing a space where the doilies loom over the viewer, causing disorientation and uneasiness.

Blalock reinvigorates and elevates the time-honored craft of crochet into fine art; her meditative approach is also a balm for today's fast-paced, technologically-driven society. *Keeping Up Appearances* not only alludes to the past but also asks us to consider how we represent ourselves in today's social media-driven world.





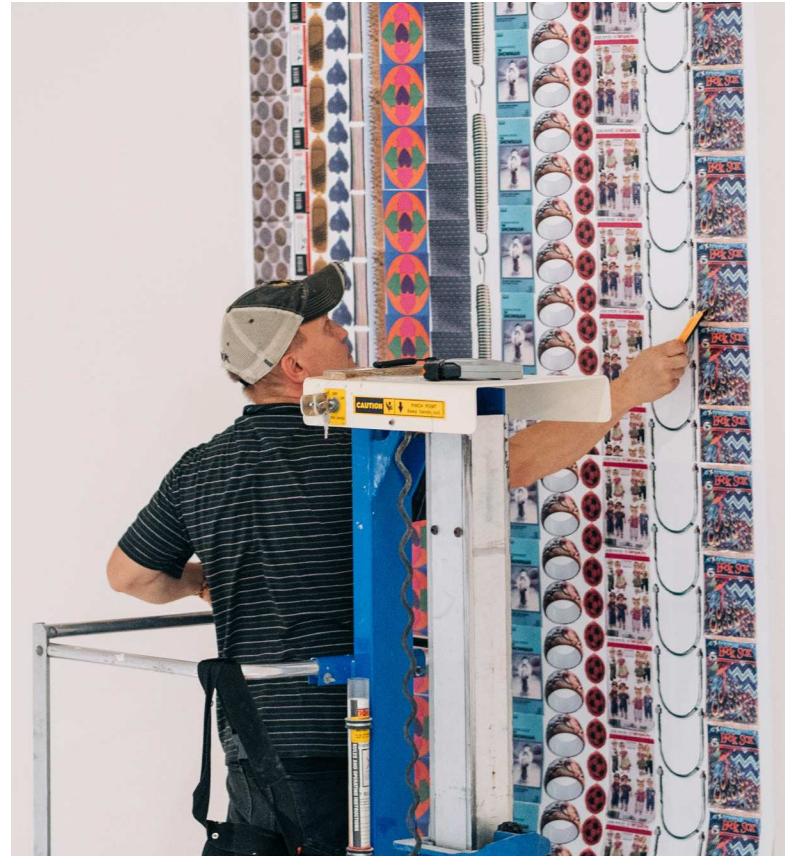




ALABAMA SWAG

Dave Eppley

Using vinyl applied to the gallery walls and floor, Dave Eppley's *Alabama Swag* features columns of "film strips," photo-collages of ordinary things. Eppley photographed items he found intriguing, such as food labels, sewing patterns, book jackets, fishing lures, and other consumer items—both big and small—alongside images of the landscape and wildlife. The piece's columns are symbolic totems, portraying everyday objects as sacred representations of a materialistic society. With *Alabama Swag*, Eppley links consumerism and our "throw-away" culture to the destruction of our environment. With clear depictions of each object at the top, the columns blur and merge as they descend the wall into puddles and tree root forms that spread onto the floor, again connecting these objects to the earth. Further playing with our perceptions and in homage to the Minimalist artist Fred Sandback (American, 1943–2003), Eppley ran strings around the wall at the top of the wall, displacing the patterns. This, along with added lines of color, causes the bare white walls to shift optically.







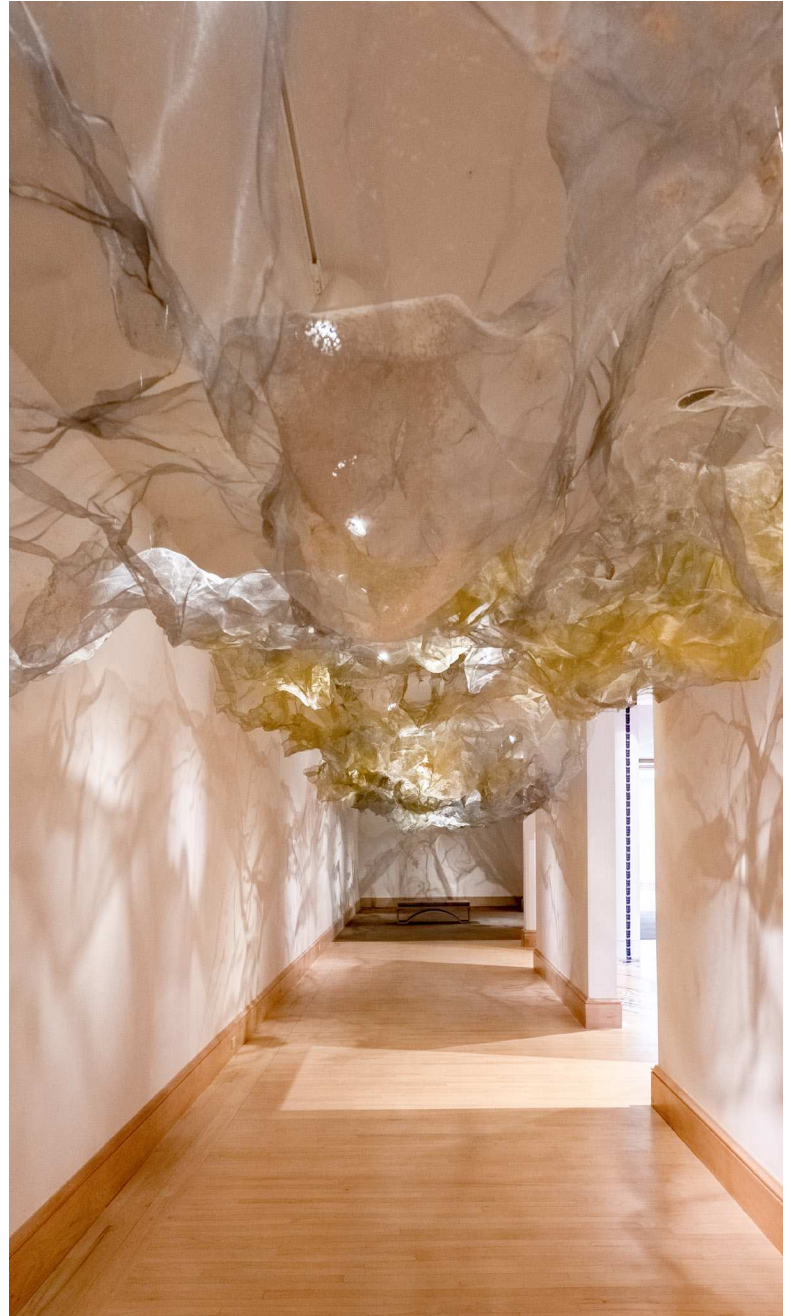
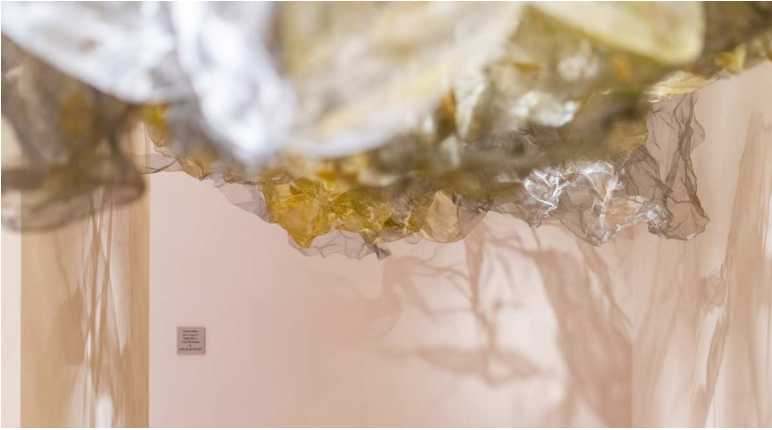


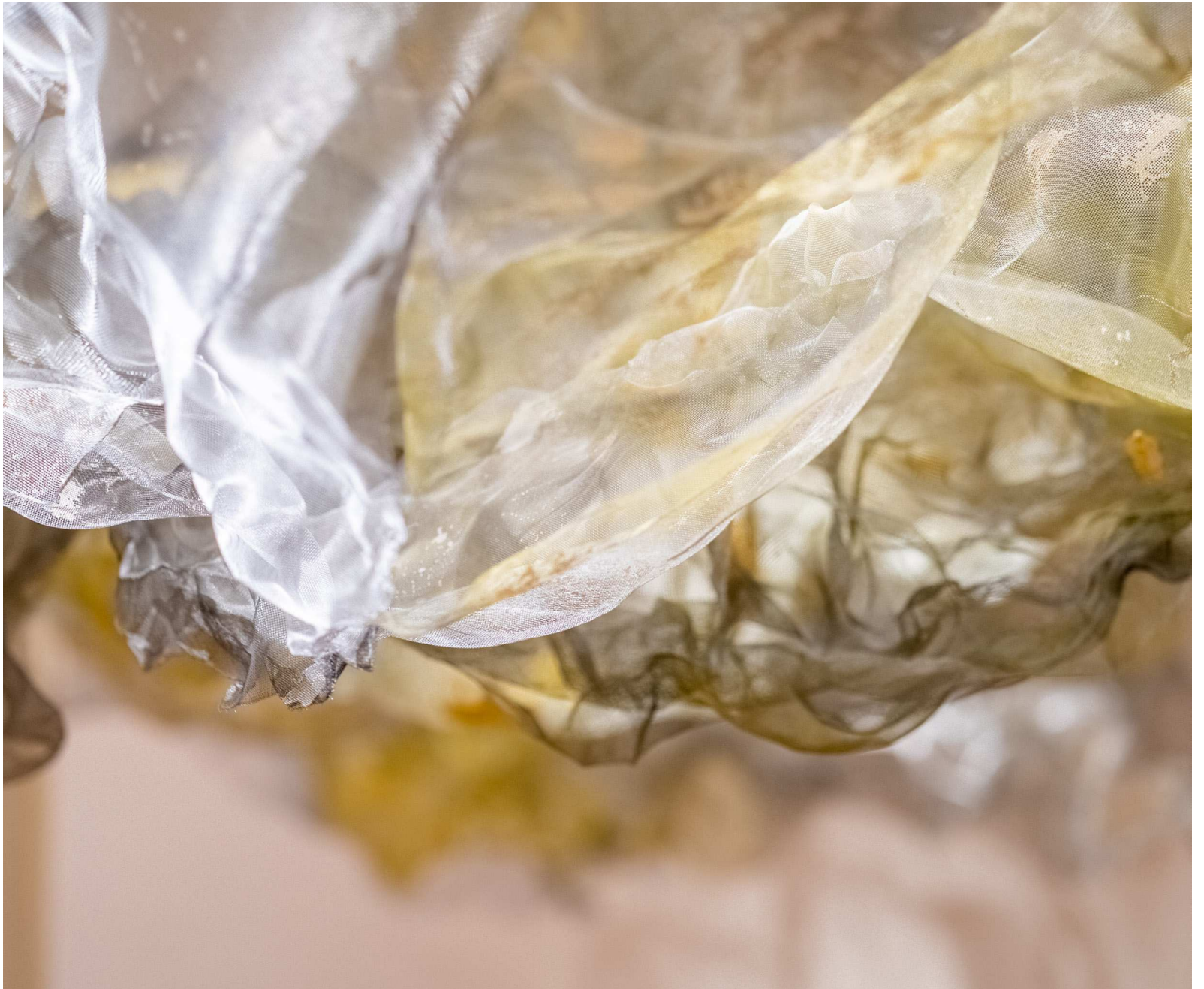
THE NEAR AND BRIGHT EXPANSE

Olga Lah

Finding beauty and elegance in transforming the mundane, Olga Lah utilizes common, inexpensive materials from big-box hardware stores. For *The Near and Bright Expanse*, she manipulated hundreds of feet of aluminum mesh into a shimmering swath that spans the gallery. Dotted with a popcorn ceiling mixture and bright yellow acrylic and spray paint, the mesh becomes both opaque and transparent. Against the smoky appearance of the material, Lah's contrasting application of vibrant yellow "constellations" emanates a sense of growing lightness.

This installation, which hangs from the ceiling, undulating at various heights and rippling across the surface like water, is overwhelming in its monumentality. Unable to view and experience the entire form from one vantage point, the viewer must look up and reorient their body in the gallery, allowing for a new perspective in the encompassing, cocoon-like environment. Are we underwater or peering into a stormy sky looking for patterns? Meditative and reflective, Lah's work summons the haze of collective disorientation, sadness, angst, and frustration experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic while also conveying awe, wonder, and hope for the future.









GLORYA

Melissa Vandenberg

In *Glorya*, Melissa Vandenberg grouped and stacked hundreds of secondhand and crowdsourced clear floral glass vases in clusters within the gallery. They rest both on the floor and on soft, oversized circular pillows sewn from well-used painter's drop cloths. Vandenberg surrounded the vases with a series of clear acrylic flag poles extending off the gallery walls. Each pole raises a swath of conjoined drop cloths into an enduring surrender flag. Never intended to be decorative, the paint drips and spills on the drop cloth call to mind Abstract Expressionist canvases, while the vases in the installation recall art historical Greek vessels found in many museum collections.

These mass-produced vases evoke the female figure and are a familiar form. They suggest moments of celebration, commemoration, and mourning. Yet, *Glorya's* vases are empty. Devoid of flowers, they become symbols of care, a memorial to those no longer with us. Born out of the pandemic, *Glorya* evolved as the COVID death toll increased and as news reports filled with protests, violence, and dissent—growing roots into communal mourning. This piece becomes a memorial for our present moment while echoing the past. Reinforcing this idea is the title of the installation, *Glorya*, an amalgam of Glory and Gloria. This evokes both Christian hymns like "Gloria in Excelsis Deo" and contemporary ballads by musicians Patti Smith, Van Morrison, The Cadillac, and Laura Branigan (all with songs called "Gloria"), songs titled "Glory" by Liz Phair, and Common featuring John Legend, along with "Glory Days" and "Gloria's Eyes" by Bruce Springsteen, and "Glory Box" by Portishead.









ROBERTA'S SONG

Jamele Wright, Sr.

Jamele Wright, Sr. wants to conjure magic with his work. Working abstractly, he combines fabric scraps, personal clothing, Georgia red clay, and found objects in a process he likens to the musical improvisation and sampling employed by jazz and hip-hop musicians. Wright's installation *Roberta's Song* (named for his Montgomery-born grandmother), connects three bodies of work that explore ideas of process, place, history, identity, and migration. First, two wall works use a literal framing device—a wood enclosure for found objects. Playing with ideas of formalism, Wright joined these disparate items through the use of cohesive paint.

Facing these works are a series of 15 compact, box-like forms hanging from the ceiling or floating on the wall. Each box is a tightly-bound grouping of found objects and personal clothing. These sculptures evoke Wright's ancestors, who hurriedly left their homes during the Great Migration, only able to take small gris-gris bags filled with their most treasured and essential items. Wright's two large, abstract, draped constructions of painted and sewn fabrics read as if the boxes snapped their bounds and unfurled their treasures, exploding and rippling across the walls in a riot of color, line, shape, and texture. Through his art, Wright explores his familial history and how that forms his identity. His use of Georgia red clay and paint layered on Dutch wax fabric and other regional African textiles links him to the land, stretching back to the prehistoric connection between the Americas and Africa on the supercontinent Pangea.





ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Lillian Blades (Bahamian, born 1973) currently resides in Atlanta, Georgia. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) and a Master of Fine Arts in painting from Georgia State University. In addition, she has studied at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine and Caversham in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Blades has exhibited in both solo and group exhibitions throughout various galleries in the United States, The Bahamas, Trinidad, Germany, and South Africa. The locations of her public commissions include Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and Jean Childs Young Middle School in Atlanta, Georgia.

California-based artist **Ashley V. Blalock** (American, born 1978) holds a Bachelor of Arts in painting and printmaking from San Diego State University, a Master in Fine Arts in sculpture from the San Francisco Art Institute, and a Master of Arts in art history from the University of California. She was a resident at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Wassaic Project, and the Vermont Studio Center, as well as a visiting teacher at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts. Blalock has exhibited her installations at venues that include Franconia Sculpture Park in Shafer, Minnesota; the Hunter Museum of American Art in Chattanooga, Tennessee; and the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno, Nevada.

Based in New York, **Dave Eppley** (American, born 1974), holds a Master of Fine Arts from Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) and has installed site-specific artworks at such institutions as the Des Moines Art Center in Iowa, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Wisconsin, OBORO in Montreal, Canada, and the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College in New York. Eppley's public commissions are located at Bloomberg L.P.'s New York headquarters and Memorial Sloan Kettering Brooklyn Infusion Center New York.

Olga Lah (American, born 1980) lives and works in California. She received a double Bachelor of Arts in studio art and art history from the University of California, Riverside, and went on to receive her Master of Arts in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary. Lah has exhibited extensively at the Orange County Museum of Art in Newport Beach, California; Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles; Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions; and Los Angeles International Airport. Her awards include an Artist Fellowship with the Arts Council for Long Beach, the Korea Arts Foundation of America Biennial Award, and the Goldman Fellowship for residency at the Djerassi Resident Artist Program.

Melissa Vandenberg (American, born 1977) is a multidisciplinary artist, educator, and curator living in eastern Kentucky where she is a professor at Eastern Kentucky University. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the College for Creative Studies in Detroit and a Master of Fine Arts from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Vandenberg has exhibited her work internationally and throughout the United States, including at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, Poland and the Birmingham Museum of Art in Birmingham, Alabama. She is the recipient of numerous grants, including a Kentucky Foundation for Women grant, the Al Smith Fellowship, and a Great Meadows Foundation grant. She was also shortlisted for the Luxembourg Art Prize in 2016.

Originally from Ohio, **Jamele Wright, Sr.** (American, born 1970) has called Georgia his home for almost 30 years. Wright graduated from Georgia State University with a Bachelor of Arts in art history with a concentration on African and African American contemporary art and a Master of Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan, New York. He completed a fellowship at Project for Empty Spaces in Newark, New Jersey. Wright has shown his work at the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston, South Carolina, and the Zuckerman Museum of Art in Kennesaw, Georgia.

BOUNDLESS

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