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Quartet (or, A Basket of Roses)

7/14/23 – 8/19/23

Grant Wahlquist Gallery is pleased to announce “Quartet (or, a Basket of Roses),” a group exhibition of works by **Tad Beck, Joe Mama-Nitzberg, Matthew Metzger, and Abbey Williams**. The show runs from July 14 through August 19, 2023.

“Quartet” is an investigation of the relation between sight and sound through works that in various ways deal in or with “abstraction.” Arriving at a moment in which certain forms of “abstract art” appear newly ascendant, the exhibition performs an imminent critique of abstraction as strategy for addressing cultural transmission and its interruption, grief, and absence. Linking the heterogeneous practices of four exceptional mid-career artists by focusing on works that think in, with, or alongside sound and/or music, “Quartet” refuses the notion that abstraction merely means “non-representational,” but instead considers it as an approach that opens space for reconsideration and consolation.

Matthew Metzger’s paintings often engage with recognizable modernist tropes to conceptually subvert, critique, personalize, and open them to potentially liberating ends. Ever mindful of the ways in which all forms of aesthetic expression are conditioned by cultural and political power structures, Metzger refuses the current moment’s demand that artworks—and the artists that make them—conform to a certain “standard” of legibility and instead embraces the complicated ethics built into forms of expression today. “Quartet” includes three gray paintings that resemble ester foam, which has acoustic dampening properties and when hung in a space literally dampen sound. Also on view is a large abstract painting from the artist’s ongoing series “On Holiday” which interrogates the politics of “covering,” both in music and in painting. This version of “On Holiday” is derived from a close-up photograph taken by the artist of grass growing on top of Billie Holiday’s gravesite.

Abbey Williams’ videos and works on paper have frequently engaged with music, from her single channel portraits—though silent, they have at times adopted images from popular music—to more recent single channel videos in which music and sound, often collaged together, function in tandem with the (found) image to render blackness—which is to say Blackness—the opposite of an erasure, a redaction, or a ground, but instead as a marker of presence and possibility. The exhibition includes one work from the artist’s “Gems” series, in which pages from 1960s travel books depicting Black skin are cropped and framed by a matte border to memorialize the image’s subject. It also features two video works—one on view here for the first time—that address a kaleidoscopic range of subjects and model an equally broad range of affects: the fragility and resiliency of the body, the joys (and griefs) of motherhood, and the beauty and precarity of the natural world, all interconnected through the possibilities of improvisation.

Joe Mama-Nitzberg’s works in various media draw on a wide range of cultural icons and sub-cultural attitudes, distilling and combining them in an approach equally indebted to fine art and mass produced cultural objects. His recurring engagement with abstraction has contended with both its formal and social aspects, from the ever-present operation of the figure-ground relationship, to the vicissitudes of creative economies, to its capacity to speak to historical calamity. “Quartet” presents two essential artworks by Mama-Nitzberg, grisaille

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paintings abstracted from the iconic covers for the Germs' (*GI*) and New Order's *Power, Corruption & Lies*, the latter of which originally reproduced an image of Henri Fantin-Latour's *A Basket of Roses*, 1890.

Finally, Tad Beck's "Blanks" use an innovative form of re-photography to transform faint reflections into abstract documentation of architectural space. In a fashion inspired in part by Alvin Lucier's 1969 composition *I am sitting in a room*, Beck begins with a blank sheet of photographic paper and dilates the photographic moment until the studio itself functions as an apparatus for the creation of a new abstract space. Demonstrating Beck's interest in examining notions of artistic lineage, "Quartet" exhibits "Blanks" Beck made in the historic studio of Winslow Homer in the state where they were made for the first time. Visual representations of the "resonant frequencies" of Homer's studio (to borrow Lucier's term), these works manifest art history as decaying echo.

Tad Beck (Vinalhaven, ME) received an MFA from Art Center College of Design. His work has been exhibited at venues including: Grant Wahlquist Gallery; LACMA; Nathalie Karg Gallery; the Center for Maine Contemporary Art; the Wadsworth Atheneum; the Addison Gallery of American Art; the Portland Museum of Art; the Worcester Art Museum; and Fotofest.

Joe Mama-Nitzberg (Catskill, NY) received an MFA from Art Center College of Design. His work has been exhibited at venues including: Grant Wahlquist Gallery; Galerie Catherine Bastide; Marc Foxx; the Salzburger Kunstverein; the Renaissance Society; Gavin Brown's Enterprise; the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art; White Columns; and David Zwirner Gallery.

Matthew Metzger (Chicago, IL) received an MFA from the University of Chicago. He attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. His work has been exhibited at venues including: the Renaissance Society; Regards; Corbet v. Dempsey; Arratia Beer; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; and the Fondation CAB, Brussels.

Abbey Williams (Brooklyn, NY) received an MFA from Bard College. She attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Her work has been exhibited at venues including: the Baltimore Museum of Art; TATE Britain; the Museo Reina Sofía; the Hammer Museum; the Studio Museum in Harlem; MoMA PS1; Bellwether Gallery; Foxy Production; and Sargent's Daughters.

The gallery is located at 30 City Center, Portland, Maine. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm, and by appointment. For more information, visit <http://grantwahlquist.com>, call 207.245.5732, or email info@grantwahlquist.com.