

Silver Eye

Gallery Guide
Mar 2–Apr 22, 2023



In Absolute Space
April Friges

About the Artist

April Friges (b. 1981, Lorain, Ohio) creates works that explore photographic processes and abstraction to challenge our perceptions about photography and the ways we think about images and objects. Friges makes artwork that begins in various analog photographic darkroom settings, creating direct exposures without a camera, utilizing light and darkroom chemistry. She then applies three-dimensional construct methods with the material, such as assembling and sculpting the photographic prints, or working with heavy duty sheet metal tools to form her tintypes. The fragility of the darkroom papers and the rigidity of the aluminum plates enter into a playful dialogue around the object-ness and material aspects of the medium. Friges received her MFA in studio art from The University of California, Irvine, and is associate professor at Point Park University in Pittsburgh, PA. She has been teaching higher education lens-based courses for over fifteen years.

Friges' work has been included in venues such as LAXART, The Spencer Museum of Art, MOCAD, AIPAD, FilterPhoto and PGH Photo Fair. Permanent public and private collections include The Museum of Contemporary Photography, BNY Mellon and the Duane Michals Estate. Her work can also be found at Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto.

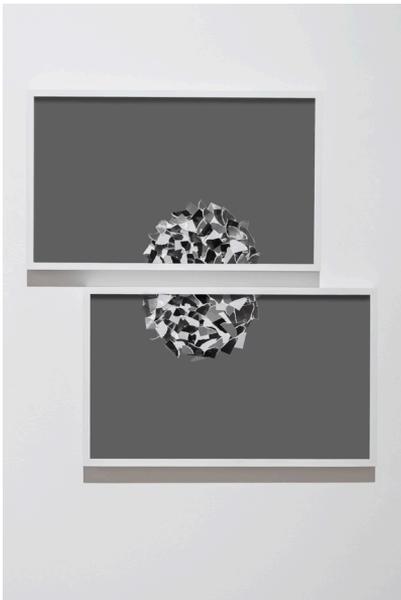
Cover image: April Friges, *Cmy rgb + Untitled Color 5216 Composites*, 2023

In Absolute Space

In Absolute Space

What defines photography? April Friges challenges our perceptions about the essential qualities of photography by dissolving conceptual binaries between photography, sculpture, and collage and rejecting pictorial representation as photography's primary purpose. This foundational resistance against accepted principles is conveyed by *Spectator 1914* and *In Absolute Space 04719 + Spectator 2516*. These works physically disrupt the boundaries of the frame, a device that has traditionally signified photographs as two-dimensional art. Instead, this exhibition asks: what becomes possible when we expand the notion of what a photograph can be? Friges' iterative body of work, featuring techniques and motifs that change as they repeat, serves as both a critique on photography and exploration. Her passionate commitment to expand the boundaries of photography—literally and conceptually—connects with Silver Eye's work to resist fixed assumptions about photography and its role in our lives.

Helen Trompeteler
Deputy Director
of Programs,
Silver Eye Center
for Photography



April Friges, *Spectator 1914*, 2014, *In Absolute Space 04719 + Spectator 2516*, 2016-2022
Courtesy of the artist

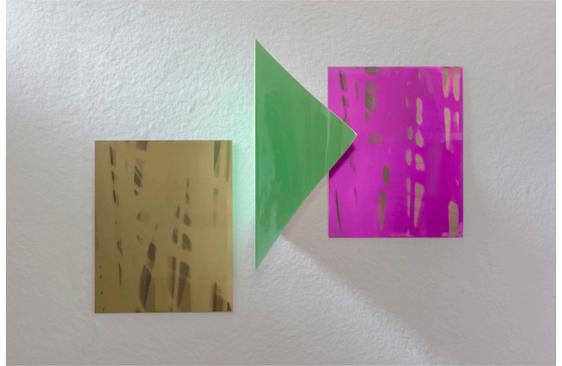
Reimagining photography's past for the future

The works in this exhibition consider how photography's past can be addressed while reinventing its future. Friges creates work in the darkroom using photosensitive papers or collodion wet plate techniques, utilizing light and chemistry without using a camera. She connects with the history of mid-19th-century practices—tintypes, contact printing—while advancing their future by experimenting with materials and technology in novel ways and site-specific installation.

Tintypes are historically associated with portraiture and mass consumption by an emerging middle class. Invented in the 1850s, they continued to be produced into the first decades of the 20th century. Traditionally tintypes were about 2 x 3 inches in size and created by exposing a negative image on an inexpensive thin iron plate. At the height of their popularity, they became a durable, affordable, and ubiquitous form of collecting. Friges honors their past importance yet subverts our expectations by focusing on the abstraction of color, light, and shadows, rather than depicting recognizable subjects in any conventional sense.

While it is not necessary to fully understand Friges' processes in order to engage with her work, learning more about how these objects are made reveals the complexity and connectedness of this body of work as a whole. Friges makes large-format 20 x 24 inch aluminum plates using an original negative made of strips of digital negatives of various densities. While negatives are often perceived as solely an aspect of technical production, for Friges, they are a vital form of creative expression.

Collodion is then poured underneath the exposed image, a tactile process that can produce unpredictable effects, even as Friges works within rigorous technical parameters. This delicate balance between control and chance, unique object and the seriality of images, reveals itself further in this exhibition. Friges' molding and shaping of her plates often playfully echoes the weightlessness of paper. These highly unique artworks are far removed from the original ubiquity of the tintype form. Yet these works all converse with each other; see how the repetition of abstract patterns of shadow and light across pieces such as *Brake: 12 Aluminum Panels*, *90° In Absolute Space 101* and *In Absolute Space 202/205 + cmy rGb_LG* serve as visual signposts.



Top: April Friges, *90° In Absolute Space 101*, 2023, *In Absolute Space 202/205 + cmy rGb_LG*, 2022
Bottom: April Friges, *Brake: 12 Aluminum Panels*, 2022, Courtesy of the artist

This deep concern with material also reveals itself in Friges' *Untitled Color* series. Here Friges uses collaged color darkroom prints and sculptural interventions to build a finely balanced visual language. Working within the principles of CMY (cyan, magenta, yellow) and RGB (red, green, blue), Friges explores adjacent relationships to color while accepting the color shifts in prints that will occur over time. This vulnerability in accepting these shifting physical consequences reflects Friges' passion for exploring the ever-evolving life of objects.

Toward a medium of experience

Photography is often perceived as a medium that objectively documents or sustains history or memory. Friges defies these expectations to create sensory and emotional encounters with color and form. She uses various machinery and technologies to create artworks that rely on her physical labor and meticulous hand-held control of materials. Recognizing this physical authorship positions these artworks as an extension of her body's expression. This performativity is heightened by Friges' refusal of the historical urge to fix or flatten the photograph. While Friges' practice is informed by firm theoretical frameworks, it reflects a well-honed intuitiveness that, perhaps, can only be achieved by pursuing an iterative physical, creative process.

Recent works employing mirror-like surfaces invite each viewer to engage directly in an embodied way as they see their own reflection. The experiences of early forms of photography, such as the tintype or daguerreotype, were contingent on the viewer tilting the cased image, moving their body physically in response to its surface and light for the image to become legible. So too, within this contemporary context, many of Friges' recent artworks rely on each viewer's physical movements to fully activate their experience. Our daily lives are absorbed by the fleeting experience of reductive representational images through social platforms and mass media. What is the effect of April Friges' turn to abstraction and multi-dimensionality? Do we perceive differently when bodily experience is involved? These artworks encourage us to slow down, look and look again, creating encounters that may feel uncertain but lead us toward new spaces of creative thinking.

Ultimately Friges' artworks strive to reconcile photography's complicated history with other media, honoring characteristics of each element while fully embracing their synthesis. This exhibition culminates with *In Absolute Space 05119 + cMy rgb*. Here, instead of molding the aluminum to echo the characteristics of paper, Friges joins the tintype on black aluminum and unique magenta darkroom print in unison. All of Friges' investigations show that her practice and photography's past, present, and future are never linear - yet continue to inspire and expand each other within a continuum of time. Friges' refusal of preconceived notions of photography and its uses fuels her iterative creative experimentation. How might this narrative serve as a mirror toward life? What generative futures can we achieve when we defy stereotypes and pursue a life of iterative questioning and shared experience?



April Friges, *In Absolute Space 05119 + cMy rgb*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist

Artist Statement

April Friges

When it comes to defining photography, every viewer comes with a different history and understanding. The experiences and certain expectations we have toward the medium can vary. Accessing the formalities of old photographic processes and applying them allows a connection to its history. The richness of collodion, silver, and color dyes are darkroom methods predominately used in the past and contained various limitations. Integrating photographic materials from different eras in combination with technological advancements that were not available or considered is what inspires me to write new narratives.

Photography at every stage is very delicate; take for example, the lifespan of a color darkroom photograph, limited to 75-100 years (without constant UV exposure) before the print begins to change color, crack, and/or fade. I wish I could live 200 years to watch this slow event in my work take place. I anticipate this in the darkroom and when selecting prints that will best reflect this process. The paper folds, hand pouring of chemicals, and bending my work are also examples of an event, one that must only be imagined as a mark in time, perfectly suited for photography. These works are staged with consideration to their own particular limitations. My hope is that viewers can walk away with a little bit of openness to experiencing photography in a different way, such as taking note of the medium's ability to create spatial experiences, my device to help people slow down in a media-saturated climate.

	April Friges	<i>Spectator 0422</i>	2023 Gelatin silver print and aluminum 20 x 24 x 14 inches \$3,800 Work is etched with signature verso
	April Friges	<i>Spectator 1914</i>	2014 Collaged gelatin silver prints 20 x 12 inches each \$3600 Both works signed on label affixed verso
	April Friges	<i>Color Darkroom Print Viewing Filters</i>	2017 Chromogenic color prints 11 x 16 inches each \$2100 each, \$8400 set Each work is signed on label verso
	April Friges	<i>Slip Roll Curls</i>	2023 Tintypes on blue and antique copper aluminum (bright and satin finishes) 10 x 22 x 3.5 inches each \$2300-\$9600 Work is etched with signature au verso
	April Friges	<i>Brake: 12 Aluminum Panels</i>	2022 Tintypes on magenta, green and gold (bright and satin) aluminum 94 x 24 x 4 inches \$11,500 Work is etched with signature verso
	April Friges	<i>Untitled Color 0319</i>	2019 Unique collaged color darkroom prints 22.75 x 26.75 inches \$6700 Work is signed on label verso

	April Friges	<i>Untitled Color 3219</i>	2019 Unique collaged color darkroom prints 22.75 x 26.75 inches \$6500 Work is signed on label verso
	April Friges	<i>Untitled Color 44/4516 Composites + cmY rgb</i>	2023 Unique collaged color darkroom prints 22.75 x 26.75 inches framed \$6800 Work is signed on label verso
	April Friges	<i>Cmy rgb + Untitled Color 5216 Composites</i>	2023 Unique collaged color darkroom prints 22.75 x 26.75 inches framed \$6500 Work is signed on label verso
	April Friges	<i>Untitled Color 0518</i>	2018 Unique collaged color darkroom prints 22.75 x 26.75 inches framed \$6200 Work is signed on label verso
	April Friges	<i>3116 + cmy rgb</i>	2017 Unique color darkroom prints and pigmented epoxy 8.5 x 42.5 x 13.25 inches \$9800
	April Friges	<i>In Absolute Space 04719 + Spectator 2516</i>	2016-2022 Tintype on black (bright) aluminum, unique gelatin silver print, black (bright) aluminum 24 x 24 x 3 inches \$7200 Work is signed on verso



April Friges

*cMy rgb + Untitled Color
5116 composites*

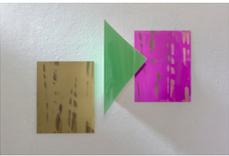
2023
Unique collaged color
darkroom prints
22.75 x 26.75 inches
\$6500
Work is signed on label verso



April Friges

*90° In Absolute Space
101*

2023
Tintypes on purple (bright)
aluminum + purple (bright)
aluminum
20 x 78.25 x 14.14 inches
\$9800
Work is etched with
signature verso



April Friges

*In Absolute Space
202/205 + cmy rGb_LG*

2022
Unique color darkroom print
and pigmented epoxy, tintypes
on gold and magenta (satin)
aluminum
49 x 40 x 4.5 inches (approx)
\$8400
Tintypes etched with
signature verso



April Friges

*In Absolute Space
105/107*

2022
Tintypes on gold and silver
(bright) aluminum
44 x 24 x 11 inches
\$6400
Work is etched with
signature verso



April Friges

*In Absolute Space 05119
+ cMy rgb*

2022
Tintype on black (bright)
aluminum and unique color
darkroom print
8 x 12 x 3 inches
\$2200
Work is etched with
signature verso

**Silver Eye Center for Photography
The Aaronel deRoy Gruber & Irving Gruber Gallery
4808 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15224**

Silver Eye Center for Photography is generously supported by our individual donors and lab members and by the Allegheny Regional Asset District, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Concept Art Gallery, the Fine Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, the Irving and Aaronel deRoy Gruber Charitable Foundation, The Joy of Giving Something Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts, and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.