

April Friges
In Absolute Space

Nicole Czapinski
always arriving

About the Artists

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 objectness 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.

Nicole Czapinski is an interdisciplinary artist from Pittsburgh, PA. Her work explores illusions within perception through photo collage, scanner technology, video, sculpture, and a series of thread drawings. Since receiving a BA from Bennington College in 2006, her work has been shown nationally. Recent solo exhibitions include The Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Burlington City Arts, and the Vermont Studio Center. She is looking forward to a collaborative exhibition with Centa Schumacher opening at Associated Artists of Pittsburgh in September 2023.

I. Introduction

April Friges: In Absolute Space

What defines photography? Defying conventional notions about photography's qualities, April Friges reimagines the possibilities of photographic processes, creating objects that assert their physicality as sculpture and collage. What becomes possible when we leave behind any assumptions about how a medium should be used?

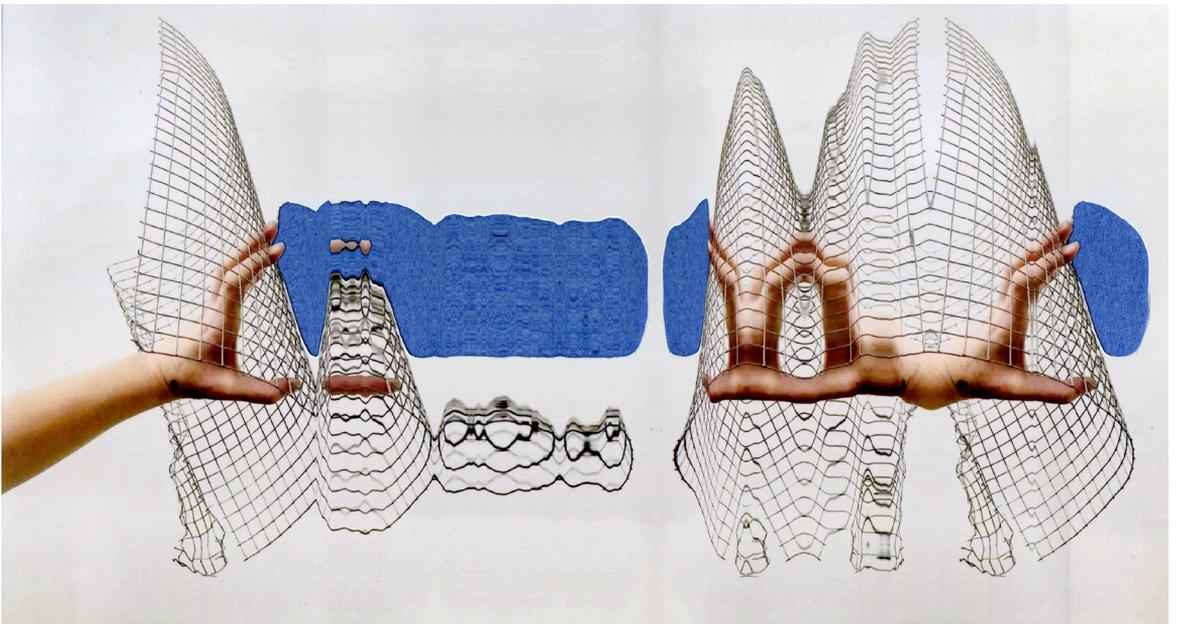
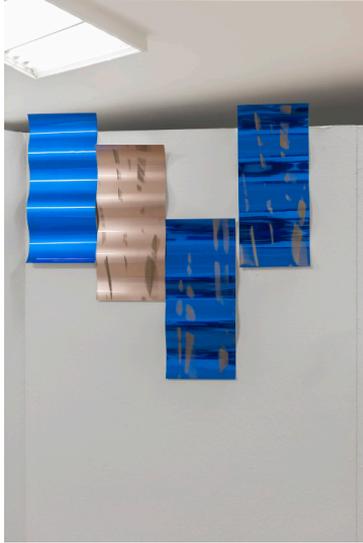
The works in this exhibition speak directly to methods pioneered in photography's early histories. Friges creates work in the darkroom using photosensitive papers or traditional collodion wet plate techniques, utilizing light and chemistry without the use of a camera. Her work connects with the history of mid-19th-century practices—tintypes, contact printing—while advancing their future by experimenting with materials, technology, and site-specific installation.

Friges' investigations challenge our assumptions that photography is about pictures. While developments in early photography focused on stabilizing or flattening the image, this exhibition's three-dimensional objects are alive with performance—shape-shifting inside or beyond the frame. Recent works employing mirror-like surfaces invite each viewer to redefine their personal ideas about what constitutes photography.

Nicole Czapinski: always arriving

always arriving presents new work by Nicole Czapinski, whose long-term explorations of perception combine photography, collage, sculpture, and video. Working with photographs, carefully selected erasures, and layers of colored papers, Czapinski creates scanned images by intuitively moving her hand in response to the light of the flatbed scanner lamp. Each pass produces a unique result. While Czapinski's final images are flat photographic prints, their composition conveys a push and pull between 2D and 3D experience.

These newly created works evoke the distortion of time that we may feel in moments of crisis or lack of control. However, Czapinski's hand in each piece asserts her agency and honors the physical gestures involved in her processes of making. Czapinski's motif invites the viewer to join her in exploring states of continuous transition.



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II. Technology

Technology can allow artists to express themselves in a multitude of ways. April Friges works without camera technology, utilizing light, exposure, and chemistry as the foundation for her artworks. The second stage of her work with **tintypes** or color darkroom prints uses machinery and technology to bend, sculpt and mold each object. Nicole Czapinski has also found ways to work with technology as a tool for creative expression. Working with photographs, carefully selected erasures, and layers of colored papers, Czapinski creates scanned images by moving her hand intuitively in response to the light of the flatbed scanner lamp. This action creates unique and expressive images that may surprise us, given the seemingly fixed technical parameters of their creation.

Questions for Looking:

- April Friges expands the possibilities of photographic processes that were first invented in the 19th century by using modern machinery and technology. How does technology help Friges communicate her ideas?
- How can such artistic experimentation challenge and reshape the role that technologies can play in culture and society? How might artists' use of technology break down accepted distinctions between disciplines, or ideas that technologies must be used only in specific ways?
- Consider Nicole Czapinski's artworks. How does the visual appearance of these artworks refer to and disrupt the technology used in their creation?



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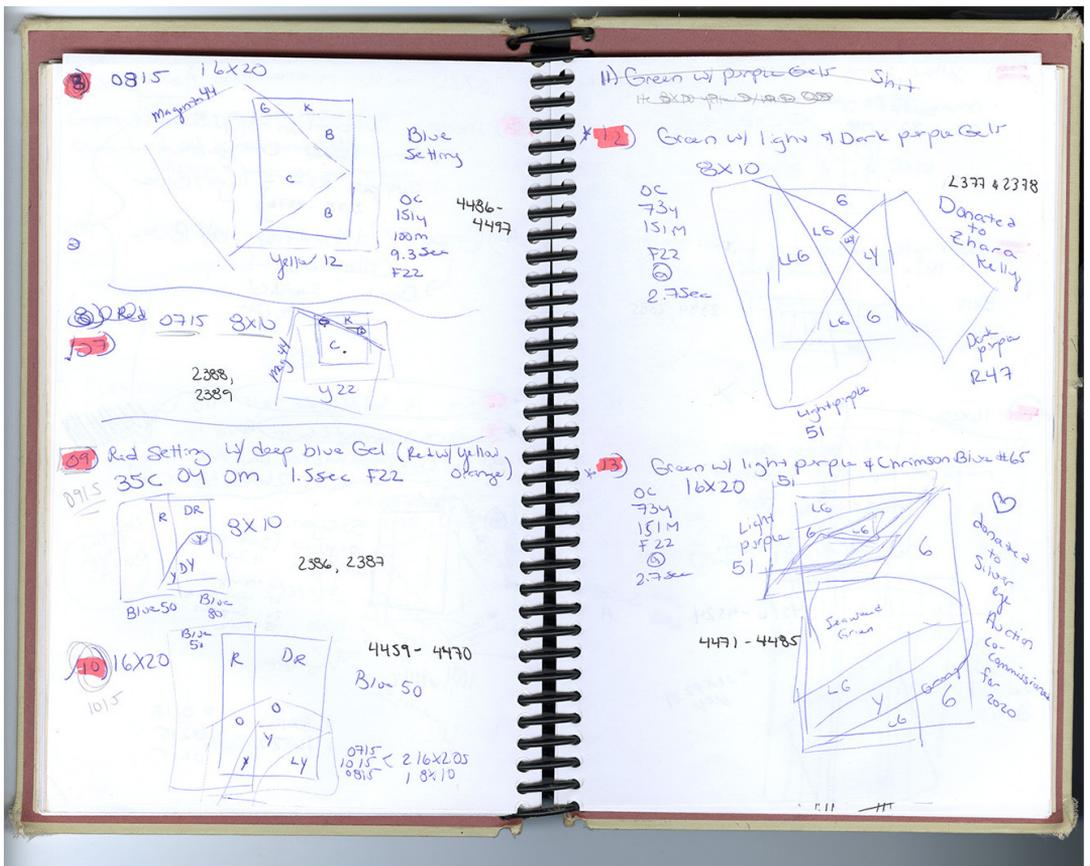
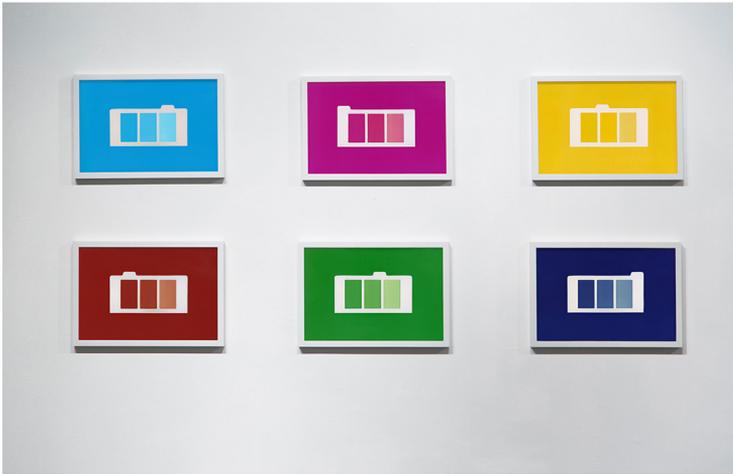
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III. Abstraction

We often understand photography to be about representational pictures. April Friges challenges this assumption to create works based on the tradition of **abstraction**. Using her love of light and shadow as a source, Friges created a singular image using a collage of digital negatives of different densities. She then created many works using variations of this distinct image through adaptations in color, sculptural forms, and modes of presentation. In doing so, Friges explores the tension between a unique original object and its mass production and reproduction.

Questions for Looking

- How does April Friges' decision to remove representation affect how we engage with her use of materials?
- Do you notice similar shapes and patterns across different artworks in this exhibition? How does this element of repetition make you feel?
- Many artists move away from representation as a way of resisting familiar or widely accepted ideas. Does April Friges' use of abstraction encourage you to consider any new ideas?



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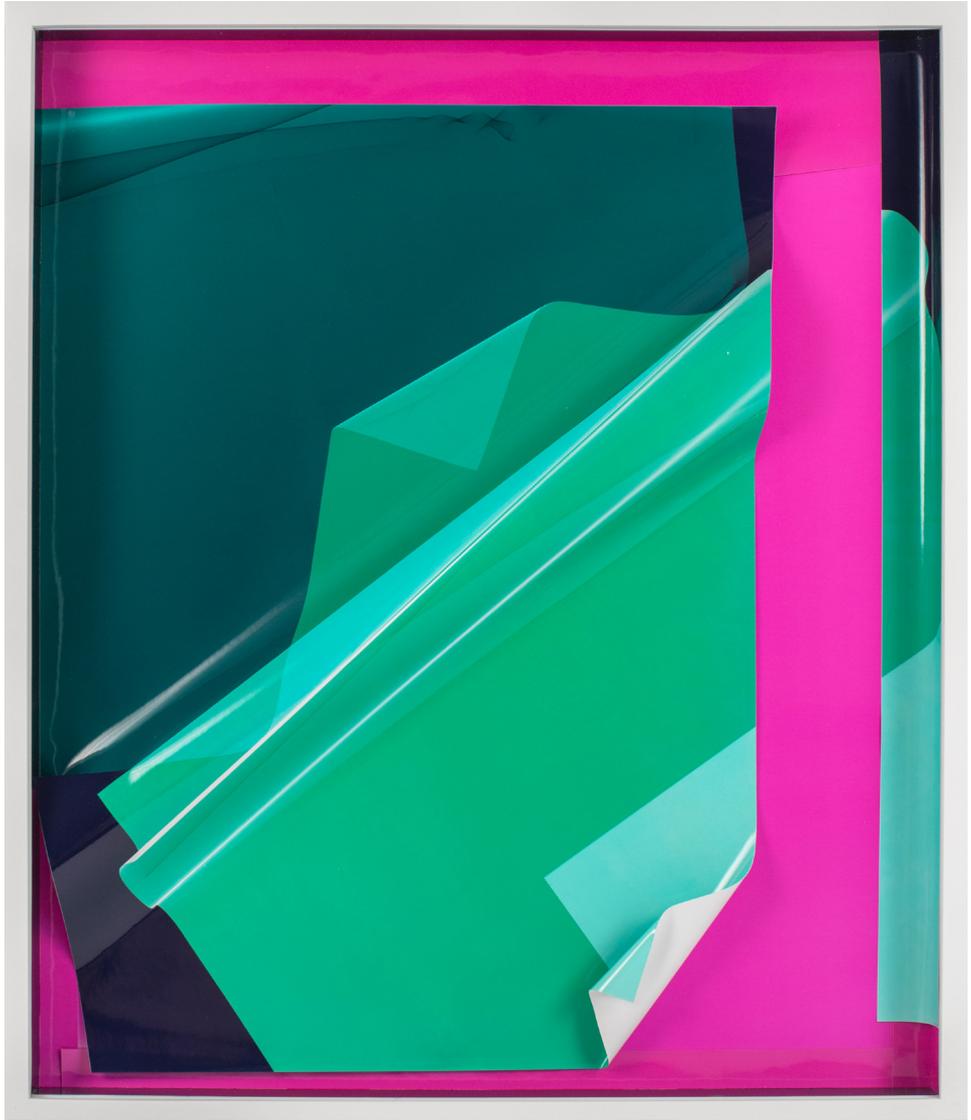
IV. Color

During her undergraduate studies, April Friges first became interested in color theory and color field painting. Color field painting was a style of abstract painting that was pioneered in the late 1940s, and consisted of large-scale canvases dominated by expanses of color. Friges found female role models within this discipline such as artist Helen Frankenthaler, whose techniques involved staining hues onto unprimed canvas to create sensory art works that often alluded to landscapes or natural elements.

Friges uses a calculated sense of color palettes in her own practice, based on the principles of CMY (cyan, magenta, yellow) and RGB (red, green, blue). In her *Untitled Color* series she shapes and sculpts the photographic paper inside the frame to explore proximal and finely balanced relationships to color. This playful and expressive way of working can be seen in the work opposite which Friges made in 2015, and then sculpted in frame in 2020.

Questions for Looking

- Can color express or inspire human emotions? What colors are you personally drawn to in this exhibition and why?
- As part of her practice April Friges uses notebooks to document her experiments, recording successes as well as failures. How might this practice of journaling encourage the development of the artist's intuition over time? Has a practice of journaling helped you creatively or personally?
- Many of Friges' artworks utilize mirror-like silvers and golds with bold colors, prompting us to question what role the viewer has to play. How might the viewer be a participant or collaborator in these artworks?



April Friges, *cMy rgb + Untitled Color 5116 composites*, 2023

V. Community Perspectives on photographs by April Friges

Community Perspectives is an ongoing series where people from diverse disciplines and backgrounds respond freely to images in our exhibitions.

Anastasia James responds to *In Absolute Space 05119* + *cMy rgb*, 2022

I am inexplicably emotionally drawn to April Friges' series *In Absolute Space*, a group of photographic installations that she began making in 2019 with the collodion wet plate process. Also known as wet plate or tintype photography, the collodion process is an early photographic technique that involves coating, sensitizing, exposing, and developing the photographic material within a short time span. Friges practice repeatedly demonstrates a genuine interest in the intersection and hybridization of varied mediums in a way that feels playful and exciting—this series is no exception. For the works that comprise *In Absolute Space*, she pushes the boundaries of the medium by swapping out the traditional polished black aluminum with highly reflective, and seductive, colorful aluminum and then manipulating and sculpting the plates with industrial machinery.

Creating these works in a darkroom without a camera and reliant on only light and shadow, Friges was inspired by one of my favorite works by Pittsburgh-born Pop Artist, Andy Warhol – *Shadows*. Created between 1978–1979, *Shadows* is an environmentally-scaled single painting in 120 equally sized parts that explores the concept of a single shadow, derived from a photograph taken by Ronnie Cutrone, then Warhol's assistant. Much has been said about *Shadows*, and rightfully so, they are truly remarkable—both as works of art and as a significant turning point in Warhol's career when he was increasingly exploring the notion of abstraction—but what I love most about them is the sheer joy and pleasure one experiences in their presence. Sometimes that is more than enough.

Anastasia James is a curator of contemporary art. Most recently she was Deputy Director and Curator at the Bechtler Museum and Curator at the Lucas Museum. She has curated over 40 noteworthy exhibitions and edited numerous monographs including Billy Name: The Silver Age, Brigid Berlin: Polaroids, and Cary Leibowitz: Museum Show. Her work has been widely reviewed by The New York Times, Art in America, ArtNews, Hyperallergic, Vogue, The New Yorker, and The Los Angeles Times. James holds a MA in Curatorial Studies from The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College.



Jason Snyder responds to *Brake: 12 Aluminum Panels, 2022*

Convention can be creativity's enemy. We should challenge ourselves to find our unique experience. It is both in the creation of, and the taking in of that experience that we must challenge ourselves to keep this open mind. It should not solely be up to the artist to dictate this path.

It is in this way that this piece immediately confronts our perception of a conventional photograph. We are presented with a linear experience and content that forces us to look more closely. The positioning of the elements helps provide a sense of order, but the textures tell a different story. The use of the photographic method (not convention) allows us to categorize it as such—and it is true these visual shapes are created with the presence of actinic light on a light sensitive substrate.

Much of what we accept as convention now is only made possible through experimentation. Take *The Niépce Heliograph* (1827) as an example, which paved the way for a process which we now know resulted in the Daguerreotype. Ongoing use of the photographic process in a less conventional manner allows us to better 'see light'—which in turn allows us to challenge convention.

Jason Snyder is a photographer based in Pittsburgh, PA. He has been working in the wet collodion photographic process for nearly 10 years.



Barbara Weissberger responds to *Untitled Color 3219*, 2019

When we look at a photograph, we may forget that at some moment in the past light touched film or sensor. We can lose ourselves in image or narrative but light and touch are always there in color and in tone. April Friges' image-objects do something else entirely. They amplify the effects of light, its ever-present touch. In *Untitled Color 3219* stripes and blocks of warm colors touch one another. The faces of two pieces of photographic paper, in an act of concealment, touch each other. The top paper folds in on itself bending toward its own surface and is pressed inward where it touches the glazing of the frame that contains these expansive prints, color and shape spreading to all edges of the paper. By manipulating light Friges teases color from photosensitive paper. Every part of this work speaks of transformation and hybridity; photograph is collage is sculpture. Paper is body, color is physical, light is memory.

Barbara Weissberger is an artist who stages photographs and sews shaped quilts from said photographs along with other materials to consider bodies, objects, the weird, and the everyday. Weissberger's work has been supported by a Guggenheim Fellowship, numerous artist residencies in the US and Europe, and is exhibited widely. She is currently on the faculty at the University of Pittsburgh.



Glossary

Abstraction

Abstraction in art refers to modes of expression in which artists use shapes, colors, forms, and textures to convey their intention rather than representing depictions of recognizable subjects.

Chromogenic color prints

Also known as a C-print or C-type print, April Friges use this type of print in her practice. Chromogenic prints consist of multiple layers of emulsion that are sensitized to different wavelengths of light in which dye colors (either cyan, magenta and yellow or red, green, and blue) form a full-color image. This technique was the dominant photographic color printing process throughout the 20th century and is still used today. However, it is a difficult and toxic process and is used less since the advancement of digital printing methods.

Collodion wet-plate process

This photographic process was invented by Frederick Scott Archer in 1851. The original collodion wet-plate process used a clean glass plate, which was then coated with collodion and made light-sensitive with additional chemicals. An exposure was then made, and then the plate was developed and fixed. The difficulties in this process is ensuring an even surface when pouring the wet collodion and exposing the image quickly while the plate is still wet.

Photogram

April Friges' *Spectator* series are black and white works made using the photogram process. A photogram is a type of photographic print made by laying objects directly onto the photographic paper's surface and exposing the paper to light. This technique of making photographic prints without a camera dates from the beginning of photography. In the mid-twentieth century, it gained renewed popularity as a tool for experimental and innovative art.

Tintype

A tintype, also called a ferrotype, is a form of collodion wet-plate process that produces a positive photograph. Collodion solution is applied on a thin, black-enameled metal plate instead of glass, immediately before exposure. The black of the metal plate allows for the darkest shadow details, which was especially useful in portrait photography, which historically has been the most common use of tintypes. With modern advancements in sheet metal materials, April Friges produces her tintypes on polished black aluminum.

Reading List

Charlotte Cotton, *Photography is Magic* (Aperture, 2015)

Mary Statzer (editor), *The Photographic Object 1970* (University of California Press, 2016)

Carol Squiers, Geoffrey Batchen, George Baker, Hito Steyerl, *What is a photograph?* (International Center for Photography / Prestel, 2014)

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This guide serves as an education supplement to our exhibitions and contains information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion as well as room for student responses. To schedule a tour of this exhibition for students, go to: silvereye.org

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.