

Keywords for *About Things Loved*

The following definitions were written by student curators of *About Things Loved*, in order to provide additional context for and discussion of the most frequently used terms in the exhibition.

Abstraction - Through the abstract artworks in this exhibition span nearly five decades of artistic production, the artists are united by broad shared concerns with multiplicity of expression and experiences. In removing didactic narratives from their artworks, these artists emphasize the primacy of aesthetic experiences in art alongside the ambiguity and multiplicity of their conceptual content. Abstraction does not necessarily constitute a settled mode of communication even for the artists who deploy it; in 2005, Mehretu posed a series of questions she was grappling with in the context of her own artistic practice, asking “How can abstraction really articulate something that’s happening? When you make a picture of a condition, how can it make sense of that condition?... Before I was interested in how these individual agents would come together and create a whole and affect some kind of change. Now it’s also, how did these bigger events happen by the gathering of all these marks?” How do the artists using abstraction in this exhibition, including Mehretu herself, answer or address her questions? What do you think these artists are trying to articulate, and why do you think they choose not to use figurative representations?

Antiblackness - Antiblackness operates in overt and unseen ways, intertwining with histories of racial capitalism, transatlantic slavery, and nation-state formation. In this exhibition, antiblackness offers a framework for understanding violence and oppression that targets Black peoples, and their experiences, practices, and epistemologies. The meaning of antiblackness is inseparable from *blackness* and more broadly, racialized systems of global Black displacement. Fred Moten and Frank B. Wilderson III differentiate Blackness from a marked identity or a “conscious social actor,” and instead theorize Blackness as a constant state of dispossession. Antiblackness functions through a lens of ontological fungibility, meaning the exchangeability of Blackness as disposable property with corporeal consequences for Black bodies. While closely related to antiblack racism, antiblackness refers to deep structural marginalization and widespread operations that devalue Blackness. Antiblackness is often embedded in legal systems and institutions, targeting black peoples through socio-economic discrimination. White supremacy in modern contexts particularly benefit from the societal policing of Black bodies which reinforce conditions of poverty, discrimination, and landlessness. (Sexton, Jared. "Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts." *Lateral* 1, no. 1 (2012).

Identity - Identity can be understood as a construction and an expression. The multiple scales in which we can interpret “identities” are varied, from social and political contexts, to internal understandings of the self and the other (or as the other). While identity is a defining term, it is

also important to reflect on how it is fluid and unstable. According to Edward Said, identity is an 'imaginative geography and history', which helps 'the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the difference between what is close to it and what is far away'." (SAID, 1985: 55) Identity, thus, is relational. Steven Vertovec explains identity as "suggest ways in which people conceive of themselves and are characterized by others" (VERTOVEC, 2001: 573), pointing for the social understanding of identity beyond a private and individual notion of the self. Stuart Hall, deepens this connection of identification as a variant dependent on contextualization, placing the understanding of self in contrast to the surrounding circumstances, and demonstrating how this can be perceived as an extremely violent process: "the place of the Other, fixes us, not only in its violence, hostility and aggression, but in the ambivalence of its desire". (HALL, 1990: 233). These complex and complicated relations are exacerbated in a diasporic context, as "diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (HALL, 1990: 235).

Embodiment - Embodiment manifests within and beyond the body. It nuances the lived experience of inhabiting a body, while at the same time that it signals to the possibilities that lie beyond the corporeal. Within the context of this exhibition, the notion of embodiment- as it is related to the black experience- takes on new valence through an emphasis on multiplicity and materiality. Responding to the legacies of colonial racism, artists in this exhibition explore the capacious and resilient nature of black embodiment through modes of representation and creative expression that reclaim meaning and subjectivity. Through this lens, embodiment is an affective phenomenon that activates the site that it inhabits, but never becomes fully tethered or defined by its materiality. As such, the concept of embodiment is taken up as a means to explore alternate ways of being and belonging that resist the reductive logics of racism.

Belonging - Belonging is a feeling of fit in one's environment. A sense of belonging is tied to feelings of safety, security, and the impression that one is a part of something larger. But belonging can also refer to an object that is owned, a possession. Our show explores blackness's relationship to belonging, historically and in the present moment. Blackness shares a special relationship with both senses of the word. Under slavery, black people were figured as belongings, owned as property by other people. At the same time, the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade created diasporic communities who have created and continue to create their own unique ways of belonging—to local communities, to nation states, to a distant homeland, to a shared diasporic identity. The show also suggests the possibility of creating a sense of belonging through belongings—through things loved. Some of the works shown here were not intended for gallery walls, but were once belongings of these diasporic communities. Other works take and transform quotidian objects and refigure them into new creative possibilities. Still other works have been belongings of the museum that have not been shown since their acquisition. Through the act of curation, we question how the various belongings of the museum can be

leveraged to create a sense of belonging for visitors who might historically feel excluded from the museum.

Multiplicity - The word “multiplicity” or “multiplicities” appears in many of the exhibition’s panels. Webster’s Dictionary defines “multiplicity” as the quality or state of being “multiple” or “various.” So how does multiplicity relate to blackness? Stating that blackness is a multiplicity rejects the notion that blackness has a singular definition or single way of expressing itself, and by extension, escapes essentialist notions of identity. The word “multiplicity” allows for the conceptualization of blackness as a pluralistic way of being that challenges colonial and white supremacist constructions of what being black means. “Multiplicities” is deployed in response to a “transnational, diaspora aesthetic,” meaning that black art and aesthetics cannot be tied to any one movement, school, or nation. When used in the “Abstraction” panel, “multiplicitous” speaks to the way abstraction artists were challenging figuration and social realism as the only way to capture black life. Instead, these artists posited that there are multiple aesthetic strategies that can work through understanding not only the complexity of the human spiritual and intellectual experience, but also of the black experience. “On Blackness and Belonging” discusses the multiple ways artists evoke a sense of belonging. Whether through works referencing the power of community or in works that imagine safe spaces for the self, the shifting configurations of blackness all have space to exist.

Blackness - can never be singular. It is defined by multiplicities; a term that requires an understanding that it is many things. While blackness may stem from a (diasporic) relationship with Africa, it is not a genetic or biological marker but rather an understanding of difference that is always historical situated and always changing.” Blackness is not an essential fixed identity but it is constantly under transformation. Artistically speaking, blackness thus takes on an endless array of mediums and forms to articulate a “kaleidoscopic proliferation of meanings” around the term. Blackness requires an understanding of pluralities, which can be explored through the act of representation(s). Artists who produce representations of blackness can therefore never capture one true or “authentic” blackness, because there is not one. This begs the question or reveals the conundrum, incredible weight, and perhaps impossibility of visualizing the African Diaspora?