

ALIVE

Arts preview: Gray Matters

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Wexner Center senior curator Michael Goodson preps his first show

When Michael Goodson, senior curator at the Wexner Center, began his tenure last summer, one of the first things he did was walk the building, placing special emphasis on what he saw and felt in the galleries.

The result is Goodson's first curatorial undertaking, "Gray Matters," a cross-disciplinary show featuring the work of 37 contemporary women artists working entirely in shades of gray.

"It was a native reaction to the space," Goodson said on a walk through the galleries during installation. "The idea came from walking endlessly through these galleries and thinking a monochromatic or, more accurately, achromatic — because achromatic is actually a lot of color — would work well in this light and with these windows and with this architecture."

Among his early considerations was Vija Celmins' "Heater," a 1964 work Goodson described as "one of the first paintings I can ever remember loving." "I always thought, 'One day I'll have that in a show,'" he said.

It wasn't until he had reached out to seven different artists that he realized that all of them were women.

"I would argue that the way the show is gendered feels as organic as [my] reaction to the light. [It] feels like the right thing to do and the right fit," Goodson said. "It was utterly organic."

“The show is predicated on a discipline — artists who have an ongoing practice not to work with color,” he added. “Then we add on this other layer of discipline, that they’re all women. These women are interesting and strong.”

Mediums and themes are varied and compelling and include: Nancy Rubins’ massive sculpture-drawing; Roni Horn’s glass sculpture’s, both mirror and lens; Joyce Pensato’s only-thinly-veiled Batman; Bethany Collins’ blind-embossed piece that is actually crafted from the text of the Department of Justice report on the Ferguson police department; and Marsha Cottrell’s sheets of toner-saturated paper.

Two Columbus-based artists, Ohio State University’s Laura Lisbon and CCAD’s Carmen Winant, are among the artists featured. Winant has created a new, 86-foot-long, site-specific work for “Gray Matters,” a hand-cut collage/overlay of an image of two women kissing, repeated 4,000 times.

“I have a practice vested in a feminist narrative,” Winant said, adding she is examining “that gap between the feminism I grew up with and the feminism my mom sort of helped to innovate.”

“There’s an enormous gap,” she said. “So I’m trying to understand that inconsistency through images.”

Many of the works are significant in physical scope. Goodson noted this theme of severity is additionally striking, given the show’s achromatic foundation.

“Gray is thought of as sort of this soft area, [as] neutral, but this show defies notions of neutrality at every turn,” he said.

