

Aspen Art Museum
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Educator Notes

Cheryl Donegan: *GRLZ + VEILS*

June 29–December 20, 2018



Installation view: Cheryl Donegan, *GRLZ + VEILS*, 2018. Photo: Tony Prikrýl

About the Artist

Cheryl Donegan was born in 1962 in New Haven, CT. She earned her BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and her MFA from Hunter College. She gained critical acclaim for her political, feminist performance and video work in the 1990s, and continues to work in painting, fashion, and other media to investigate gesture, beauty, and perception. Recent solo exhibitions of her work have taken place at: Kunsthalle Zürich (2017); New Museum (2016); White Flag Projects (2013); Rockland County Museum of Art (2009); and White Columns (2001). She is the 2017–2018 Gabriella and Ramiro Garza Distinguished Artist in Residence.

About the Exhibition

This is the first US museum presentation devoted to Cheryl Donegan's painting practice. Made over the last decade, the forty artworks in this show directly reflect the artist's process, calling attention to simple repetitive acts of labor, such as cutting, sewing, patching, and folding. This exhibition puts particular emphasis on familiar patterns, dyed surfaces, and unstretched hanging prints made with web-based, consumer-friendly, digital technologies to independently produce her own fabrics. Colors and textures vary, as the artist works across Abstract Expressionism, ready-mades, and decorative arts.

Gingham plays a recurring role throughout the exhibition. This widely recognized pattern manifests Donegan's interest in layers and is used both as a material and a visual form that the artist manipulates in order to make us more aware of depth and our own perception. The artist created a fashion line, which was featured in a fashion performance at the museum in July. The prints featured on these garments respond to the graffiti marks made into the grills of air-conditioner units that extend from New York windows into the street.

Questions for Discussion

- I The artist has said she admires the modernist painter Henri Matisse—can you see evidence of Matisse’s influence in her work?
- I What patterns or colors do you prefer to wear and why?
- I Generate a list of repetitive movements associated with creating. Who is making the movement?

Suggested Activity

Self-Portrait

Cheryl Donegan’s artwork is uniquely figurative in the way it addresses the body without using the body.

Ask students to create a portrait of themselves without actually being in it. You will need familiar objects, floor space, camera, scissors, tape, matte mod podge, brushes, hardboard, and large pieces of paper.

Invite students to select an object or two from home that best represents who they are. At school, have students gather several more personal objects or belongings, perhaps from their backpack or desk, taking into consideration a variety of colors and textures.

Lay a large piece of paper on the floor for each student. Ask students to arrange their objects on the paper in an interesting way, such as in a grid pattern or a radial design. When the composition is complete, carefully stand above the arrangement and photograph it from above with a camera. This technique will flatten all the objects in the picture plane. Then, print out a color copy of the composition for each student.

Allow the students to hang their self-portraits on the wall. Lead a discussion with the class: is it easy or difficult to tell whose portrait is whose based on the objects selected and without a body?

For a more finished look, have students mount their “self-portraits” on a piece of hardboard using a brush and matte mod podge.

For further exploration, print out more than one color copy for each student. Have students rip, cut, or fold the photocopied images and tape them back together in a new way, creating a more abstract work of art.

Following page: Installation view: Cheryl Donegan, *GRLZ + VEILS*, 2018.
Photo: Tony Prikrýl

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