

Being, Between, Becoming: Cicely Carew and Kate Holcomb Hale's Constant Construction

Leah Triplett Harrington

Both trained in paper-based processes (printmaking and drawing), Cicely Carew and Kate Holcomb Hale take the dexterity of their hands into large-scale sculptural and graphic installation that defies strict categorization. Both artists are intensely physical with their work, the mark of their hand apparent throughout their surfaces but also in the structures that uphold them. In other words, their mark making makes their compositions, and their gestures make their construction. *Is It Wednesday Yet?*, the pair's first presentation together, articulates this constant becoming (or un-coming) and betweenness (or preciseness). Throughout, the work installed at LaiSun Keane Gallery dances between dimensions, scale, color, and material. Here, Carew and Holcomb Hale demonstrate a faculty with installation as a mode of being, becoming, and being between.

The collaborative centerpiece of *Is It Wednesday Yet?*, created over several all-day, midweek work sessions, exemplifies this approach. Conceived as a painting, this large-scale installation is a dialogue of mark-making that the two made intuitively. Starting with large sheets of yupo paper (an expendable surface that can be used for many processes, techniques, and materials) laid on Carew's studio floor, Carew and Holcomb Hale convene with the surface and their gestures, coming in and out of making, balancing creation with day-to-day responsibilities of living and mothering (both have young sons). The results are a lyrical essay in brushwork and line all spelled out in washes of saturated color. This work is not meant to hold or say just one

thing, however; installed in the gallery, this work incorporates the many worlds—esthetic and otherwise--that coalesce in the pair's individual works.

"Over the course of a day working together, not only are we painting, but we are discussing so many aspects of life that we are juggling alongside the making," says Holcomb Hale. "It's almost funny how much life unfolds over the course of one Wednesday: zoom calls, calls from school, work being dropped off, texts pinging, etc. And yet we both kept working, pausing for interruptions, and then going back to the paint."

Holcomb Hale could be describing the life of any artist who is also a caregiver or mother, any maker who creates outside of cultivating and keeping home. She's long been interested in the oscillations of identity and femininity, but Holcomb Hale's solo works in *Is It Wednesday Yet?*—works that integrate surfaces and remnants from her home—are some of the most personal, interior works of hers. These are departure from the willowing paper, paint, and charcoal-based installations that creep up and dangle off of walls. Here, Holcomb Hale seems more interested in the containment of feeling, of what's expressed and preserved within a household relic, than its spreading. A slipcover and tablecloth are surfaces for such feeling, as in the impressions of a door hinge or linoleum tile in paper clay. "I'm trying to create moments of home to replace the ones I lost or left behind," Holcomb Hale tells me, sharing that these were created after the death of her parents and sale of her childhood home. "How do you prepare the residue that you will leave behind?"

Carew's work is similarly invested in the future, of reclamation and restoration. Her methods and manners of painting are devoted to making and remaking and are inspired by her belief in the possibility of radical joy to transform the world. Materials that can be bought off the shelf

at hardware stores, alongside everyday household items, make their way into Carew's work, to be magically metamorphosed into a beauty beyond their original purpose. Chicken wire, window screen, construction netting and tinfoil are rendered into vibrant webs of color and sparkles of light. Dynamism is always a tenant in Carew's work, as her pieces always have an internal vibration made via her instinctive collaging of color and unexpected materials together in prismatic layers.

"What I have learned about myself through my work is to embrace and employ the unstructured within the structured," wrote Carew recently. This rings true for me as I see the loose billows of painted mesh tightly corralled into sculptures that blossom off the wall.

Getting off the wall (or pedestal) is a working approach long employed by Feminist artists dedicated to subverting structures of display and commodification. Like Feminist artists of the 1970s and 1980s, Holcomb Hale and Carew both embrace domestic materials in an effort to remake space, defy expectations, and create between the demands of caregiving.

"We're talking and moving around each other, but it's like this dance and there's not a lot of conversation about what is being done in the moment, which feels fluid and organic," says Carew. When they do speak, the pair is focused on how the installation will adjust and alter the space, expanding their viewer's perception of the gallery space.

The gallery will be a container or structure for the work to become or unbecome, to be in process and commune with its audience, to take up space across the walls and floors. Both Carew and Holcomb Hale see the act of taking up space as Feminist. "Feminine in the energetic sense of the word, in that it is creating, changing, and birthing a new vision into existence," says Carew, her active language here apt to the betweenness and becoming of

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The logo for LaiSun Keane, featuring a horizontal line above the name "LaiSun Keane" inside a light gray square.

LaiSun Keane

Is It Wednesday Yet?. Together, Carew and Holcomb Hale are in a constant state of constructing and making space, embracing the push-pull and between of their lives. For them, it's always Wednesday.

Leah Triplett Harrington is a curator, writer, and editor. As curator for Now + There she facilitates the Public Art Accelerator and organizes large-scale public art commissions, most recently What Do We Have in Common? by Janet Zweig, Ambrosia by Cicely Carew, The Shape of Play by Sari Carel, and ¡Provecho! by Justin Favela. She is also a founding editor of publication and platform The Rib and editor-at-large for Boston Art Review. Her writing has most recently appeared in those publications and Sculpture, Public Art Dialogue, Flash Art, Hyperallergic, WBUR's The Artery, Big Red & Shiny, and The Brooklyn Rail. As an independent curator, she has organized projects for Boston University Art Galleries, Trestle Gallery, Herter Gallery, and others. In 2021, she was the inaugural curatorial mentor for Praise Shadows Art Gallery and taught in the MFA program in Painting at Boston University.

Is it Wednesday Yet? Will be on view at LaiSun Keane, 460C Harrison Ave C8A, Boston MA 02118 from May 6 through 29, 2022.