

The work included in *Exclamation Point.* explores play, joy, rigor, and what it means to make a “painting” in 2021. Though all the artists engage with questions of painting, none work primarily with paint. Some do not use paint at all. Instead, most of the artists in *Exclamation Point.* transform various materials past recognition. From credit cards to faux fur, each artist begs the question, “What *isn’t* an art material?” Though each colorful piece seems playful at a glance, all require immense technical proficiency and innovation. To make these artworks come to fruition, each artist imagines a life for their materials beyond their traditional use and then work tediously through the process of making those visions into physical objects. The title, *Exclamation Point.*, attempts to portray the artists’ rigorous approach to “play,” through which they produce work that is exciting and fun to view while still complex and mysterious.

The work of Nashville-based artist Amelia Briggs was the impetus for this exhibition and her featured “inflatable” works *Bop* and *Harness* perfectly exemplify Briggs’s toy-like aesthetic. The scale of *Harness* makes us feel small and childlike, while its bubblegum hues spark images of a Fisher-Price youth. In viewing her work, we’re reminded of how it felt to open a new toy and proceed to give it an imaginary life. Similarly, Liz Langyher’s work *Miles and miles and miles and then the end*, transports us to our youth through erstwhile landscapes viewed from the backseat of a car.

Marcella Marsella’s work is less about impressions of the past and more about pressing issues of the future. In *Longline*, Marsella memorializes the unintended victims of longline fishing; pointing toward greater issues of global over-fishing. Suchitra Mattai’s work also focuses more heavily on contemporary questions surrounding colonial narratives. She explores these quandaries through fibers, installation, sculpture, video, and drawing, among other mediums. In *Tethered*, she uses saris to weave a net of entangled histories.

As one moves through the exhibition, the smaller works of Jamie Earnest and Katie McColgan serve as punctuation for the larger pieces. Each artist is relentless in material exploration, leaving nothing behind. McColgan uses the scraps of her larger works to create intimate pieces like the yarn pedestals for *Sun Settle* and *Reclining Moon*. Earnest, on the other hand, starts with platters as surfaces, upon which to build conflicting tales of Southern “polarization and altruism.” By placing these small works intermittently throughout the show, they are able to connect to the other pieces, forming conversations about their making.

*All of the work in Exclamation Point. might be called painting, but making a painting is not the point. The point is wandering through making. Exploring through experimentation. Exclamation at unexpected success.*

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, when for so long we could not leave our homes, seeking joy in the mundane has become a necessity. With this show, I want to give viewers back a sense of wonder and fun that may have been hard to come across this year. These artists remind us that we always carry our imagination with us and we need only tap back into it. As we face another year of uncertainty, *Exclamation Point.* has the potential to inspire viewers to look at the scraps around their homes differently, perhaps sparking more original work to be made.

— Alli Lemon