

The Jewish Museum
Overflow, Afterglow: New Work in Chromatic Figuration
Audio Description Guide

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201. Introduction

NARRATOR: Welcome to *Overflow, Afterglow: New Work in Chromatic Figuration*.

This exhibition brings together a diverse group of seven contemporary artists who are forging new paths in dynamic and highly personal ways. Many of these artists are Jewish, and their identities are multifaceted. They deploy color with exuberance, create overflowing lines, and blur boundaries and categories of all kinds.

These exhibition galleries are organized radially; you enter into a central semi-circular space, and the walls extend outward like the rays of a sun, dividing the rest of the floor into 7 distinct sections. This gives each artist their own wedge-shaped gallery, putting them in dialogue with one another without suggesting a hierarchy. The walls of each artist's section are painted a single color, switching between a light peach-pink, dark purple-blue, and butter yellow.

The order of this tour starts at your left and moves clockwise around the half-circle through each of the artists' sections, however, there is no set path through the exhibition, and we encourage you to move from artist to artist as you desire.

202. Sara Issakharian, *Her Twinkle in Their Eyes*, 2023

NARRATOR: On the left wall of Sara Issakharian's space is a painting titled *Her Twinkle in Their Eyes*, displayed on walls painted a pale peach pink. This piece was made in 2023, and the materials are acrylic, pastel, and colored pencil on linen. This is a monumental work, approximately 6 ½ feet high and 12 ½ feet wide, displayed on a wall by itself. The size asks us to look up and take a step back to fully take in the canvas.

Against a background that shifts from electric aqua to pale baby blue, a tangle of animals, humans, and wheels cascade from left to right. This energetic mass culminates into a large shape undulating up and down, with black, blue and white brush strokes forming lines that fly off away from the tangle. The characters have a cartoonish quality, painted in lively white, peach, neon orange, yellow, and emerald and mint green, with sketchy black and blue lines over the top giving the sense of frenzied movement. Moments of the composition recede into ghostly gray, giving this mass depth.

Prominent in this space are geese, their slightly-too-long necks wrapping around each other, wings spread as they diagonally work their way through the mass. Horses, galloping forward and rearing back, their eyes fierce or tongues out from exhaustion. There are dragon-like lizards curled in on themselves, and cherubic human faces, full of fearful and shocked expressions, and with pink round cheeks. Fleshy peach and pallid white hands reach out from the pile; upwards, fingers stretched, or downwards, at rest.

Here is artist Sara Issakharian.

SARA ISSAKHARIAN: I'm Sara Issakharian, and I'm a painter.

What this group are doing as a whole, is like a kind of a mish mash and you can say it's just something about to burst. So do you see a lot of characters that are entangled, and trying to get out, but they're something else in front of them that they have to pass through. The characters are mostly animals, because it's easier for me to depict the soul of something and get close to it when they're animals, more than humans.

NARRATOR: Sara Issakharian's use of color and imagery illustrates the contrasts that interest her: between light and dark, joyful colors and frenzied lines, clouds of

cartoonish figures and war-like imagery. A colorful and electric composition, that exposes harrowing images the deeper you look.

Sara Issakharian again.

SARA ISSAKHARIAN: Sometimes, I put the figures that are that are hurt most in the front, in the lighter and then I walk into the darker area.

What I experienced most is like the conflict and the paradox of us as a human going between light and dark. And how we're in this conflict, going back and forth and dealing with each other and trying to have a hope for this better world, or this outside of this conflicts world.

And there's this poet, Yiannis Ritsos, a Greek poet that I love so much... And he says, "We smile inwardly, I know that each one of us travels alone, alone to faith and to death. I know it. I've tried it. It doesn't help. Let me come with you." And I thought maybe that, you know. This togetherness maybe helps.

203. Sula Bermúdez-Silverman, *Repository I: Mother*, 2021

NARRATOR: In the center of this gallery is a sculpture by artist Sula Bermúdez-Silverman titled *Repository I: Mother*, made in 2021. This piece is made from isomalt sugar and Himalayan Sea salt, epoxy resin, an LED light panel, and found objects including small wooden pieces. The gallery is dark, painted a deep blue-purple, with the only light coming from blacklights and this piece itself.

Let's hear more from the artist.

SULA BERMÚDEZ-SILVERMAN: My name is Sula Bermúdez-Silverman and I'm an artist from Los Angeles, California. I would describe this piece as being a translucent pink dollhouse made out of sugar, stacked atop bricks of Himalayan salt with light coming from within. It's about the size of a small adult. So, it's a regular-sized dollhouse. But because of the bricks, it's kind of stacked taller allowing you to kind of see inside at a somewhat normal height you're looking down a little bit.

It's a like glowing light pink color. And then the stacked column of bricks are a more red, orange yellowish color. And then the salt is pink as well. I liked to use this color because it felt like a light playful color, where the actual piece, since it's a broken-down dollhouse, it's cracked on the sides and then put back together in places. The windows are boarded up with wood pieces. It's like a dilapidated, haunted house. It's empty inside. Using the color pink played with that in a contrasting way. So, using a color that felt less dark and light much lighter than also maybe the themes of the work as well.

There's also a ring around the edge, on the floor, which is powdered Himalayan salt which creates a border around the entire piece.

It's been about three years, so the sugar has become cloudy over time and gone from like a transparent to a translucent quality.

I'm interested in translucency as a metaphor for like, I don't know, it sounds kind of cheesy, but like illuminating like hidden histories and hidden parts of our societal architecture. It's haunting.

So, the dollhouse was my childhood dollhouse. It was made for me by my godmother. I took apart the dollhouse and made everything flat into each wood piece flat basically and created silicone molds of each of these pieces. I think there was probably like nine pieces or something like that. Maybe more than that,

actually. And then poured the hot sugar into these molds to create the dollhouse and then reup those pieces back together using a soldering iron and heat.

My work interrogates different systems of power, usually gendered, racialized, religious or economic systems of power. Basically, all of these materials are connected to global trade and Colonial goods.

But really, I had come to sugar through a research of the beginnings of the New World so thinking about how sugar became the number one commodity in the Caribbean.

So, I was interested in the way that that material or commodity went from this very, very select few to basically everyone. And that is exactly how dollhouses, the symbol, you know, the way that dollhouses changed over time was that they were first just for very privileged elite. And then, obviously they, again, in a very similar fashion, turned into something that like almost everyone has in their houses, is very ubiquitous.

204. Austin Martin White, *(last) Bacchanal ii(pity party) after B. Thompson, 2022*

NARRATOR: This artwork is a painting by the artist Austin Martin White. The title is *(last)Bacchanal(pity party) after B. Thompson*. The materials are reflective fabric, rubber, pigment, vinyl, spray paint, and screen mesh. This large-scale, unframed, rectangular artwork is 96 inches high by 114 ½ inches wide, hung on a butter yellow wall.

This brightly colored painting depicts a scene of seven or more figures clustered together in the center. The figures seem to glow radioactively against a more neutral nocturnal background. The figures include both men and women, some depicted in bright yellow, peach, red, magenta, blue, violet, and crimson. Their poses and costumes are somewhat classical. As they crouch and huddle together, some of the individuals are wielding objects like scrolls and goblets which spew bright red liquid. Arms are raised, others kneel, and the overall scene erupts with ecstatic bacchanalian pleasure or violence. At the feet of these figures, a Grecian urn is visible sideways on the ground, with neon red fluid oozing onto the cool blue floor of the painting. A small, white depiction of SpongeBob Square Pants and a blue iPhone are visible to the sides of the overturned vessel, adding to the uncertainty of the time period and cultural specificity of the scene.

Discontinuous textures seem to agitate the surface. The figures are sketchily outlined in vivid colors like a bright or glow-in-the-dark blue. These linear depictions describe the contours, but overall leave the viewer marveling at the mound of human activity, abstract and vital, a mountain of human physicality with an uncertain end.

Martin White uses screen mesh, like that which you might have in a window, as the base for this painting, and the textured surface is visible throughout. The figures are matte, while parts of the background behind also include reflective material outlined in white and blue paint. The background gives the impression of clouds or islands on a map.

Here's curator Liz Munsell on White's process.

LIZ MUNSELL: Austin Martin White is doing the reverse of what a lot of painters do. He is pushing paint through the back of his canvas, first punctuating and permeating the canvas to create a series of holes in a carefully arranged pattern and then pushing the paint through the back of the canvas and really in ways that are really allowing the paint to take its own shape based on the force of his hand

from behind the work. So, there's a huge degree of planning and process that goes into the work, but then there's also just the behavior and the interaction of the paint itself really being a main protagonist of Austin's paintings.

NARRATOR: This work is also an homage to a 1964 painting by Bob Thompson, the extraordinarily prolific Black painter of boldly colorful figurative compositions. Thompson's canvases were themselves homages to Renaissance and Baroque masterworks, infused with the avant-garde energy of free jazz, the music of his own era.

205. Rosha Yaghmai, *Afterimage, Past Skies*, 2023

NARRATOR: On the right-hand wall of Rosha Yaghmai's space is *Afterimage, Past Skies*, made in 2023. The materials are acrylic and ink on organza, displayed in a thin dark wood frame. The overall dimensions of this rectangular artwork are sixty inches high by 43 inches wide and 2 and three-quarters inches in depth.

We are looking at an abstract painting made from somewhat unconventional materials. The acrylic and ink pigments have been applied to layers made from multiple sheets of organza. This layering of fabric has produced a painted surface with a striking depth and a design and an overall vibration of thin lines that appear to move as you do. This is caused by the *moiré* effect, a tight wave-like pattern created from light playing off of the combined layers of organza. The colors that bloom, as if stained on the surface, are a sea of mauves, pinks, teals, and a vibrant fuchsia. While the painting is abstract, there are four bands or sections that divide the vertically oriented pictorial space. The top section presents a lighter pink area underlined by a thin band of aqua. Another two bands of aqua continue this division beneath. Centrally located, a luminous organic orb of color appears diffusely, like the sun hidden behind a rich jewel-toned cloudscape. A larger teardrop shape of bright aqua paint drips down the left central side of the painting. Overall, there doesn't seem to be a dominant shape or series of lines occupying the foreground, letting your eyes languidly wander around the composition.

Rosha Yaghmai made these works by selecting images from images in the Iranian *Shahnameh, the Book of Kings*, removing the figurative elements and abstracting the backgrounds. She then airbrushed these colorful images onto the fabric, layering them to obscure the original image even more. This ethereal work is also reminiscent of color-field abstract expressionist painting from the 1940s. Equally reminiscent of trippy backlit posters or aura readings, there is psychedelic quality. Shimmering and mystical, the image appears like an apparition, conjuring mysterious photographs, alchemical mixtures, and unknown landscapes.

206. Ilana Savdie, *Cow*, 2023

NARRATOR: This exuberantly colorful painting titled *Cow* is by the artist Ilana Savdie. The piece is 65 ½ inches wide and 80 ½ inches high and is covered in abstract forms made of oil paint, acrylic paint, and beeswax on canvas stretched on panel. The background of the painting shows a variety of textures, surrounding a more detailed but still abstract oval-like composition in the center. The painting is unframed and hung on a pale peach-pink wall. Let's hear from the artist.

ILANA SAVDIE: My name is Ilana Savdie. I am originally from Colombia. I was raised between Colombia and Miami, and I'm currently based in Brooklyn. I'm a painter and sculptor, and I primarily make fairly large-scale oil, acrylic and wax paintings that are very brightly colored and deal with themes around theatricality and performance as modes of subversion and as rooted in the body. There're different modes of mark-making throughout the piece, sometimes highly textured, other times smooth or highly reflective they combine luscious thick gestures with layers of transparency. And there's moments of gestural abstraction colliding with moments of realism. It's very much about the sort of intertwining of disparate modes of existing, modes of making modes of metabolizing the materiality of paint.

NARRATOR: This play with materiality and gesture is seen throughout the painting. Let's start with the background. The left-side of the canvas is a tumbling gradient of saturated color, beginning with pink at the top, moving to orange, primary yellow, bright green and blue, to a wisp of dark purple at the bottom. The colors here are transparent, leaving no harsh lines between them, and giving the layered impression of a watercolor painting or the moving swirls of ink dropped into water. The background on the right side is an opaque, shiny, deep brick-red, with slight variations of color seen in the thick horizontal brush strokes.

This surrounds a bulbous egg-like shape stretching from top to bottom. The base has a curve of deep indigo blue, giving weight to this centerpiece. Above it are two large swoops painted as if they are wrapping around this shape to meet in the middle. From the right there is orange, and from the left yellow accumulations of wax dripped onto this section of the canvas. An oval is painted onto the center of the yellow to reveal a circle of tightly clustered red orbs, like peeling away pomegranate skin to reveal the jewel-like fruit inside. Elongated swoops of paint surround it and extend downwards.

Here's Ilana Savdie.

ILANA SAVDIE: So, a big part of the making of the painting is about responding to the more sort of process-based decisions that the material itself made. And then there's areas like the yellow, very textural area in the center, that is wax pigmented with an encaustic and it's brushed onto the canvas and it layers into this texture. I'm very expressive in my application of the material as I'm working so that it really behaves in this almost uncontrollable fashion and then it becomes about trying to control this thing that does not want to be controlled.

NARRATOR: Above and spilling out over the yellow and orange is a mix of greens, blues, purples and pinks, pieced together like a collage. Some parts are painted with that transparent quality of watercolors, some solid blue, and some like spikes or feathers crowning the top. There is a solidity and wave to this top section of the painting, giving the impression of fabric or flesh folding over itself as a body bends. A fleshy pink hand or foot zigs down on the right side, stretched out like bubble gum.

ILANA SAVDIE: This piece came from an encounter I had with a Susan Rothenberg painting entitled *Mary III*, in which a centered human figure crouches in an almost all-fours position. The grotesque and action-oriented animalistic posture felt powerful in that piece. Yet the act of behaving as an animal or languaging a human through animalist terms has historically served as a mode of degradation and debasement. So I became fascinated with the idea of inverting this idea of the degraded, the debased, and reclaiming the power of this posture, of this performance. Its exertion of submission and dominance through a mode of performance is interesting to me. So, this piece actually ended up becoming almost a self-portrait, like I used myself as a model, which I don't often do. There was something extremely powerful about making a self-portrait and calling it Cow.

207. Chella Man, *Autonomy*, 2024

NARRATOR: In this section we are looking at an installation by artist Chella Man titled, *Autonomy*. In the center of this wedge-shaped, golden room is a large pedestal, about the size of a double bed, holding a life-size, hyper-realistic, silicone replica, or clone, of the artist's body. It is positioned so the figure's head is towards the entrance, feet towards the back wall. The pedestal is covered in layers of red waffle-textured blankets that cradle the body at points. There is an empty surgical table to the right when you enter, along with a metal rolling tray holding latex gloves, silicone, tattoo equipment, and small metal instruments. This clone was created in early 2024 and then intervened with during a performance on May 2nd, 2024.

Here is artist Chella Man describing the piece while in the process of creating it.

CHELLA MAN: My name is Chella Man. My pronouns are they/them. I am an artist, director, speaker, activist, and author. I also identify curious, determined, stubborn, hopeful and just to add all the labels on there, also Deaf, trans-masculine, gender-queer, Jewish and Chinese.

This piece is the continuous documentation of what it takes to gain autonomy over my body and over my mind. Additionally, I question many perspectives of the medical-industrial complex and how it's affected my view over my body as a broken one. But at the moment, I'm in the process of casting my entire body in silicone to create essentially a hyper-realistic clone of myself.

So, I am around five-foot-ten, masculine-presenting I would say trans-masculine, half-Asian, half-Jewish. Dark brown hair. Double incision surgery scars on my chest. And various tattoos around my body, which will be visible.

My left leg will be bent slightly, about 90 degrees, and my right leg will be straight out at 180 degrees. And my two arms will be about 45 degrees out, laying with my palms open and up. It will lay resting and in peace.

So, these cochlear implant scars are visible, more so when my head is shaved, because hair doesn't grow there, where the scars are. So, the silicone clone of myself will have a wig that is cut to mirror the hair that I will have on the day of the performance. And I'll be taking a razor blade and recreating the scars and where my hair doesn't grow on that wig, on the clone.

The room will be lit very boldly in yellow light, to represent golden hour lighting, which is basically a motif that has occurred throughout various of my experimental performances, signifying autonomy, essentially. Like the claim over my body, over my mind.

NARRATOR: The highly personal tattoos on the clone are all Chella's own designs. They include, on the left side of Chella's body, a complex line-work piece on the neck, the phrase "Deaf AF" on the ribs, an abstract face on the forearm, the words "I love everyone" on their thigh, and on the right, three circles on the hip, and a geometric linear design down the arm.

Here is Chella Man on the process of casting their body in silicone and creating this piece in performance.

CHELLA MAN: To create *Autonomy*, I had to be stripped naked, laying on a cold floor in the middle of winter and stuck in goo [laughs] for hours, hours on end. Laying on the cold ground for five to six hours, pain begins to kind of set in because you're just unable to move at all. It really took so much constraint for me to be liberated, and that mirrored my own trajectory in this world. It allowed me to go through that trajectory in the span of just hours. And when I emerged from the goo, I just couldn't stop laughing.

I'm excited at the prospect of making people very uncomfortable, in the best way. I think we often aren't presented with the imagery of a nude trans body, and mine happens to be penis-less, flat-chested, and I'm so proud of my body.

And I want to be able to show my body resting in confidence, in comfort, in autonomy.

208. Sasha Gordon, *Ferment*, 2022

NARRATOR: Near the entry to Sasha Gordon's space is a small 24 by 20-inch painting titled *Ferment*, painted in 2022. It is an oil on canvas self-portrait of the artist, rendered almost entirely in a bright shiny blue, cropped to intensely focus on her rounded face and features, neck, and braids on either side of her head and a bright green ring over the face. The walls in this space are painted deep purple-blue, and the canvas is unframed.

Here's artist Sasha Gordon.

SASHA GORDON: I'm Sasha Gordon. I'm a painter based in Brooklyn, New York.

So, *Ferment* is a portrait of a girl with these very playful braids. She's backlit by an ambiguous light source. The whole painting is pretty much this Cerulean blue. She's very symmetrical. I almost want her to look like a paper cut out, and very, very round and soft. I think I want the viewer to feel very calm when they look at this painting. So, she has these very like trusting eyes, a very like relaxed gaze in her eyes. The pupils and the irises are these marble-like spheres. The shiny bits in the eyes look like they're moving around. Like the little particles you see in your eyes when you close them. And her expression is pretty soft and also a little ambiguous. To me, she looks like she is very calm and serene, but at the same time, could be mischievous.

The rest of the figure is shaded in this bluish-black tone, but a bit lighter. There's a green circle going around her eyes and her mouth that's in between lime green and Kelly green. It's very neon. And the edges are softened into the Cerulean blue, so it almost looks like tie-dye or like a spectrum of light. And it's a pretty saturated painting. I think the blue and the green are fighting each other. But, because of how they're placed, it's actually pretty soft.

The figure and the background are the same color. It's this Cerulean blue. And the blue also is in her hair. The edge of her hair and the shoulders are backlit by this white light. And there's white strands of hair that show the details of where her head ends.

I guess I was painting naturalistic flesh for a while. Which I really enjoyed doing. I was very satisfied with that. But I also think there are moments or emotions and experiences that can't be expressed with just these like neutral skin tones. I just wanted to push it further to show these feelings I had that I almost couldn't put a

label or put into words. I thought by having gradients and having these radioactive neon colors, could express something that I was having trouble expressing with my other color palettes.