

Raque Ford:
Where do I start?

Kat Richards:
Shapes of Change

Fall 2023 Exhibitions

**Raque Ford:
Where do I start?**

**Kat Richards:
Shapes of Change**

September 8 – November 11, 2023
The Print Center, Philadelphia

Explorations of Identity Through Abstraction



(Left) Raque Ford, *con•fi•dence 1*, 2017, monoprint, 50" x 38 ½". Courtesy of the Artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: Zeshan Ahmed; (Right) Kat Richards, *Vigil I*, 2023, monoprint, 30" x 22". Courtesy of the Artist.

The Print Center is pleased to present **Raque Ford: *Where do I start?*** and **Kat Richards: *Shapes of Change***, two solo exhibitions in which the artists use the visual language of vivid abstraction to explore issues of identity, personal experience and the human body. The exhibitions are organized by guest curator Lauren Rosenblum, and *Where do I start?* is Ford's first show in Philadelphia.

The Print Center is delighted to welcome guest curator Lauren Rosenblum, along with artists Raque (pronounced "Rocky") Ford and Kat Richards. Both Rosenblum and Richards are former Philadelphians, and we are very pleased to bring Richards' work back to our city. We are equally honored to introduce the exceptional work of Raque Ford. Both artists are working in the forefront of print and abstraction – forging new definitions in the field through innovative approaches.

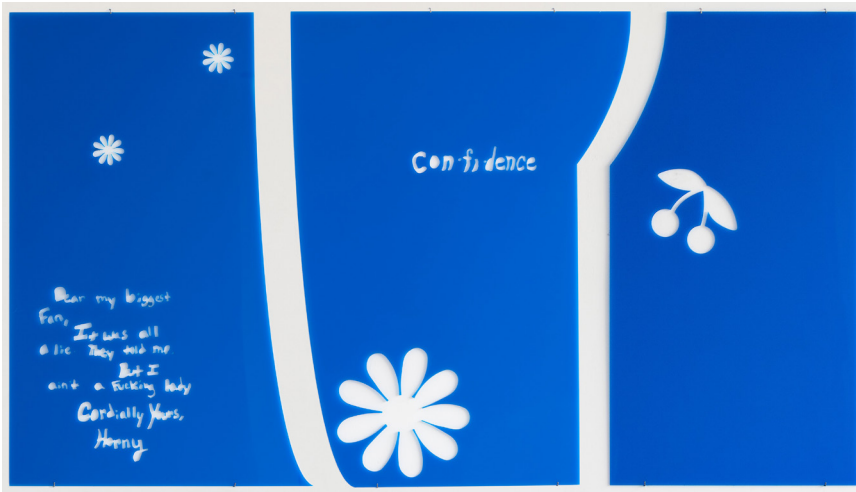
– Elizabeth F. Spungen, Executive Director

In *Raque Ford: Where do I start?* prints and sculptures featuring geometric forms, texts and symbols reveal how identity is crafted from scraps of popular culture. The exhibition presents the full range of Ford's work – demonstrating her capacity to think innovatively about print in multiple dimensions. *Kat Richards: Shapes of Change* presents large-scale, abstract prints comprised of fragmented shapes that serve as metaphors for both an ever-changing human body and the solace we find in ritual. The work represents a fundamental aspect of the artist's ongoing exploration into the boundlessness of gender and queerness.

Ford and Richards both work primarily in monoprint, in which a variety of surfaces are printed upon to make unique artworks (as opposed to most printmaking processes that can produce multiple, identical works). Ford prints on the colorful pieces of acrylic sheeting that remain after panels are cut to create her sculptures. These include small symbols and passages of text, which she rearranges on the printing press and layers with additional sheets of paper. The resulting artworks are collage-like images of contemporary life. Richards' monoprints are derived from an index of shapes, used and reused to create a dense field of colorful forms that refer to the human body, as well as everyday objects.

Raque Ford and Kat Richards are exemplary in their use of the monoprint process, which is otherwise uncommon among printmakers. Not only do they make technically exploratory prints, but their visual dynamism and social relevance is equally impactful.

– Lauren Rosenblum, Guest Curator



Raque Ford, *Lady Con•fi•dence*, 2017, acrylic, 48" x 86". Courtesy of the Artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: Zeshan Ahmed.

Raque Ford: Where do I start?

In the artwork of **Raque Ford** (she/her), an ebullient iconography of pop feminism—including peace signs, flowers, cherries and references to Beyoncé—celebrates this discounted aspect of contemporary culture. Expressionistic gestures, the transcription of found texts and the citation of her own diaries and poetry, obliquely reference Ford's experiences as a Black woman. *Where do I start?* highlights Ford's distinctive visual language and growing interest in monoprinting, by presenting her prints alongside visually and materially related sculptures, all of which are made from her signature material—colorful sheets of Plexiglas.

Ford's monoprints were made at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop in New York, the oldest and longest-running community printshop in the US. In 2018, Ford enjoyed a fellowship there, designed to immerse artists in the world of printmaking, which led to an ongoing collaboration with the studio's master printer, Justin Sanz.



(Left) Raque Ford, *con•fi•dence 3*, 2017, monoprint, 50" x 38"; (Right) *Restless words exist*, 2022, drypoint & watercolor monoprint, 46 ¾" x 30 ¾". Courtesy of the Artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photos: Zeshan Ahmed.

Prints from the "con•fi•dence" series (2017) are early explorations into the monoprinting technique. Ford started by cutting and etching into a colorful acrylic sheet, just as she had for the related sculpture *Lady Con•fi•dence* (2017), then inked the surface and ran it through the press. The three unique impressions of the series, all pulled from the same matrix, establish a printerly vocabulary: interplay between positive and negative forms, aggressive mark-making and vibrant coloration.

Ford's growing interest in the potential of printmaking is evidenced by increasingly layered images and the use of more complex techniques. In her most recent prints, the artist employed multiple printing surfaces that were rearranged directly upon the matrix for each impression, introduced the drypoint etching process, employed selective inking and experimented with the addition of non-traditional printing papers. The resultant collage-like images range in visual legibility. In *Restless words exist* (2022), clearly defined shoe



Raque Ford, *Love Loser* and detail, 2021, ink and acrylic on paper and acrylic, 36" x 48". Courtesy of the Artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photos: Zeshan Ahmed.

impressions and peace signs hover atop colorful squares that hide lines of text, and small flowers appear much like those that had been laser-cut out of the aforementioned sculpture *Lady Con•fi•dence*. The variable addition and subtraction of symbols and texts in each unique impression records the artist's ongoing navigation of a world saturated with directives and gives voice to an inner monologue.

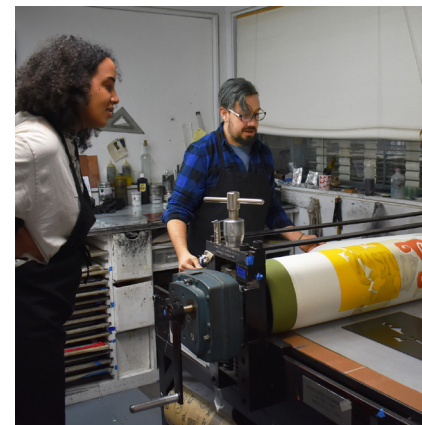
The exhibition includes four sculptures – three mounted on the wall and one suspended from the ceiling – composed of various colors of Plexiglas. Ford is drawn to the visual dynamism of the colorful acrylic, to which she applies non-traditional marks, such as the scuff of shoes made by dancing, or which she manipulates by cutting with a jigsaw to clear away space for lines of poetry or decorative elements. The sheets of Plexiglas are continually repurposed, moving from the floor to the wall, and from being the substrate to the actual artwork itself.

Ford's work personalizes the political. Her simultaneously exuberant and austere sculpture recalls a Minimalist pursuit of politicized abstraction, as found in Melvin Edwards's steel sculptures of the 1970s that evoke the racial politics of the civil rights movement, as well as Felix Gonzalez-Torres' go-go dancer platform from 1991, about collective expression during the AIDS crisis. Her own dance



Raque Ford, *Blind* (detail), 2023, acrylic, laser print on vellum, rubber and nails, 72 1/4" x 48". Courtesy of Good Weather, North Little Rock/Chicago.

floor is reconfigured into the wall-work, *Blind* (2023); the highly reflective Plexiglas forces viewers to see their own faces staring back at themselves. The sculpture *e* (2017), a chain of metal links intertwined with colorful mylar, hangs from the ceiling like an oversized necklace.



Raque Ford and master printer Justin Sanz at the EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop.



Kat Richards, *Pull Through*, 2019, monprint, 22" x 30". Courtesy of the Artist.

Kat Richards: Shapes of Change

The abstract forms in **Kat Richards'** (they/them) large-scale, flamboyantly colorful monprints reference the artist's experiences as a self-described Trans-Queer person: observing the changing body, commemorating moments of celebration and recognizing these occasions as inextricable from those of solemnity. For *Shapes of Change*, Richards presents a world of images – people floating in vast color fields and their sites of collective communion – ultimately offering a glimpse into a surreal realm in visual flux.

Richards employs shape as a metaphor for a transforming corporeal figure. The artist often reconfigures the same shape to multiple ends, a form that suggests a leg or mouth can also represent a finger, nipple or foliage. This material instability of the human body is also depicted as an alternatively expanding or contracting set of limbs. In *Flock* (2020), small blue spheres loosely coalesce to construct a stretched-out person, with arms and legs extending out beyond

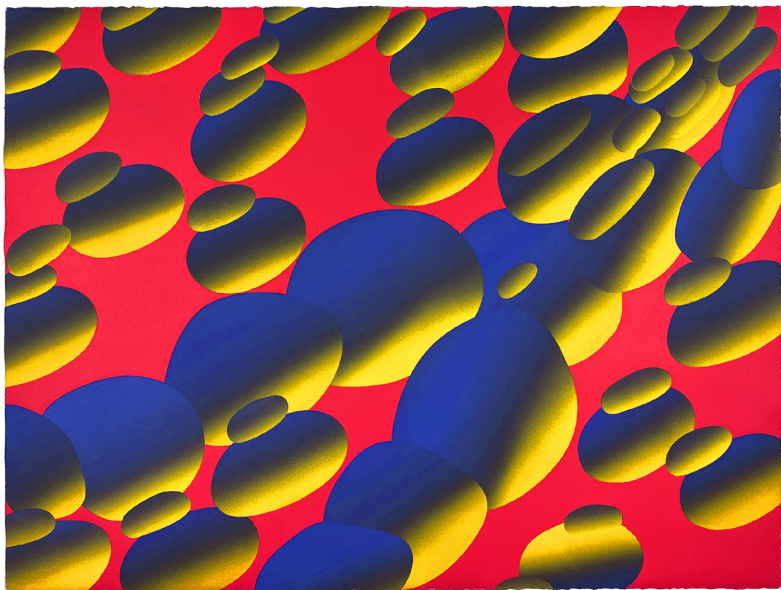


Kat Richards, *Vigil IV*, 2023, monprint, 30" x 22". Courtesy of the Artist.

the paper's edges. *Pull Through* (2019) shows a bifurcated body hovering in an atmosphere of squiggles and dashes.

For the "Vigil" series, numerous contoured vases and ornate candelabras decorated with playful patterns stand together on shelves in a place-less space defined by a gradated background. These prints acknowledge the cycle of change and rebirth at the heart of the artist's queer experience, with the vessels bearing witness to a memorial marked by mourning and bereavement. For the artist, however, the vigil is simultaneously a moment for optimism. If the life cycle holds the joys of birth and the commemoration of death, it also includes instances of rebirth that are equally worthy of celebration.

To create their prints, Richards cuts stencils to the proportion of a digital drawing they rendered in Photoshop, and then the image



Kat Richards, *Flock*, 2020, monprint, 22" x 30". Courtesy of the Artist.

is manually reconstituted to create a matrix. Thus, the monprint showcases a digital visual language of saturated flatness and surreal color combinations, while also registering slight imperfections inevitable in handwork. The use of watery pigments causes further visual slippages in the compositional illusion, as a break akin to the instances of queer joy and self-progression that punctuate an often dysphoric existence. The prints are activated by the viewer's curiosity about digital accuracy, analogous to conversations about Trans-Queer identity politics, also centered on authentication.

The printing press mimics the body, its metal parts and gears paralleling the artist's own, as the two move in tandem during the editioning process. Richards provocatively describes the use of various print techniques as an extension of their queerness, gender and body, analogizing the press as a theoretical, genderless prosthetic that replaces the labor of anatomical procreation with its mechanical means of limitless reproduction.



Kat Richards, *Close Ground*, 2018, monprint, 46" x 34". Courtesy of the Artist.

My work is about queering the body, investigating new possibilities and different realities. Through a monprint stencil technique, I reimagine the body by conceptualizing it in parts, using an index of abstract, fragmented shapes. The ambiguous shapes gain meaning through contextual placement, begging the question: what part of the body is being viewed, and what is its function?

— Kat Richards



Kat Richards at the Women's Studio Workshop, Kingston, NY. Photos: Eliza Clifford.

About the Artists



Ford. Courtesy of the Artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: Curtis Wallen.

Raque Ford (Brooklyn, NY) received a BFA from Pratt Institute, New York and an MFA from Rutgers Mason Gross School of the Arts, New Brunswick, NJ. Recent solo exhibitions include 321 Gallery, Brooklyn; Good Weather, Chicago, IL; Greene Naftali and Shoot the Lobster, both New York, NY; and CAPITAL, San Francisco, CA. Significant group shows include Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY; MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY; and SculptureCenter, Queens, NY; as well as Morán Morán, Mexico City; Division Gallery, Montreal and Roberta Pelan, Toronto, both Canada. Ford's work is in the collections of the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA and The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. Ford is represented by Greene Naftali Gallery.



Richards. Photo: Alec Logan Smith.

Kat Richards (Portland, OR) received a BFA from University Of Kansas, Lawrence and an MFA from Tyler School of Art and Architecture, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. They have been included in recent exhibitions at The Momentary, Bentonville, AK; Charlotte Street Foundation, Kansas City, MO; Ladies Room Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; 550 Gallery, New York, NY; and Mount Analogue Gallery, Seattle, WA. Richards has been a visiting artist and taught at institutions including the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville; University of Kansas, Lawrence; University of Nebraska-Lincoln; University of the Arts, Philadelphia; and Women's Studio Workshop, Rosendale, NY. Richards was a Semifinalist in The Print Center's 94th ANNUAL International Competition and is Assistant Professor of Art Practice in Printmaking at Portland State University School of Art and Design, Oregon. Richards is represented in The Print Center's Gallery Store.

About the Curator



Rosenblum.

Lauren Rosenblum (Brooklyn, NY) is an independent curator and doctoral candidate in art history at The Graduate Center, CUNY, with a specialization in modern and contemporary printmaking. She has held curatorial positions at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; and Print Center New York, among other arts organizations and galleries.

The Print Center thanks EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, Good Weather Gallery, Chicago and Greene Naftali Gallery, NY for their support and loans to *Raque Ford: Where do I start?*

Programs

Gallery Talk & Opening Reception

Thursday, September 7, 2023

5:30pm Gallery Talk with Ford and Rosenblum

6 – 7:30pm Reception

Conversation with Raque Ford

Thursday, October 5, 6pm

In-person and on Zoom

Ford will be joined by Rosenblum and Justin Sanz, master printer, EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop

Artist Talk with Kat Richards

Thursday, November 9, 6pm

On Zoom

For more information and to register for Zoom, visit printcenter.org. All of The Print Center's exhibitions and programs are free and open to the public.

About the EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop

The Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, a program of the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA RBPMW), is the oldest and longest-running community printshop in the United States. A cooperative printmaking workspace that provides professional-quality facilities to artists of every skill level, EFA RBPMW is committed to inspiring and fostering its diverse artistic community. It is with this spirit of openness and inclusion that the vision of Robert Blackburn—the influential teacher, celebrated collaborator, and pioneering artist—is sustained in a welcoming, creative environment that continues to serve as the backbone of the workshop today.

About The Print Center

Mission

For more than a century, The Print Center has encouraged the growth and understanding of photography and printmaking as vital contemporary arts through exhibitions, publications and educational programs. The Print Center has an international voice and a strong sense of local purpose. Free and open to the public, it presents changing exhibitions, which highlight established and emerging, local, national and international contemporary artists. It mounts one of the oldest annual art competitions in the country, now in its 98th year, provides the Artists-in-Schools Program to Philadelphia public high school students and its Gallery Store offers a carefully selected array of contemporary prints and photographs onsite and online.



Funders

Support for The Print Center is offered by: Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation; Forman Family Fund; Sheila Fortune Foundation; Freeman's; Fund for Children; Harpo Foundation; Allen Hilles Fund; Phillip and Edith Leonian Foundation; Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Foundation; Christopher Ludwick Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts; William Penn Foundation; Pennsylvania Council on the Arts; The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage; Philadelphia Cultural Fund; The Philadelphia Foundation; Rosenlund Family Foundation; University of the Arts; Henrietta Tower Wurts Memorial; and our Board of Governors, Luminaries, members and friends.



Notes

THE PRINT CENTER

1614 Latimer Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215.735.6090
info@printcenter.org
www.printcenter.org

Free and open to the public
Tuesday — Saturday, 11am — 6pm

 /printcenterphilly
 @ThePrintCenter