

## Brink

Aaron Angell, Henry Gibbs, Simone Griffin, Miranda Keyes, Elise Nguyen Quoc and Claire Oswalt

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Herald St presents *Brink*, a group exhibition featuring six artists – Aaron Angell, Henry Gibbs, Simone Griffin, Miranda Keyes, Elise Nguyen Quoc and Claire Oswalt – whose practices centre on a fluid form of abstraction that is intrinsically informed by the physical process of their creation. Through distinct approaches, each engages so intensely with form that figurative elements are obscured and transformed – dissolving into gestures and organic compositions.

Among humanity's earliest art forms, ceramics occupies a space where craft, ritual, and imagination intersect. Self-taught in the medium while at the Slade School of Fine Art under Phillida Barlow, **Aaron Angell**'s practice stems from a fascination surrounding global traditions of quotidian ceramics and particularly how Anglo-Japanese ceramic techniques have been underexploited for sculpture. Indeed, critic Oliver Basciano has noted that Angell's practice represents a 'commitment to the craft and its long history, without adhering to the rules of form.' Rooted in extensive research – from studying out-of-print Japanese texts to visiting ancient kiln villages such as Bizen and Shigaraki – Angell's sculptures draw upon traditional methods of firing and the use of ash glazes particular to regions in Japan, Korea and China. Working often with forms developed from highly rusticated tea-wares from the Momoyama period, Angell's works are visually dense and formally complex. His sculptures often evoke strange, folkloric, or dreamlike landscapes – sometimes incorporating recognisable paleontological artefacts like shells, fossils and ammonites among architectural forms like bell towers and assorted flora and fungi.

His latest works are applied with the historic Oni-Hagi ('demon-hagi') glaze, originally conceived from ash created by burning the stalks of rice plants to create an unusual pearlescent, 'broken' white glaze. Angell believes these examples on view at Herald St represent the first time this glaze has been utilised for sculpture outside of Japan. Also on view are examples of the Oribe glaze, a similar historic reconstruction made by soaking the copper fired pieces in acid resulting in a vivid emerald green colour. Describing the unpredictable nature of his process, Angell says: 'It's hard to control, there are lots of strange things that happen. You put it in the kiln, something happens in the dark, something comes out. Good or bad, it's frustrating either way: if it's bad, it's annoying; if it's good, it's infuriating because it's very hard to replicate.' Angell's ceramics are held in numerous important institutional collections, and he co-curated a major exhibition surveying the medium at Tate St Ives in 2017. His London studio, Troy Town, serves as a collaborative site where artists often experiment for the first time with clay to realise sculptural projects under his mentorship.

**Henry Gibbs** is interested in the slippage between the real and the manufactured, and in how our awareness of self-projection online may be altering the ways we behave in reality. His works emerge from a multi-stage process: photographs he takes are first abstracted through digital editing tools such as halftone, blurring and layering, to create a more painterly image. The results are painstakingly transcribed onto canvas using graphite and charcoal. Gibbs then employs a brush to manipulate the image further forming shadows and expressive marks dictated by the digital composition.

'I'm becoming a printing machine by inscribing these images onto canvas. Each mark is a gesture in itself. I often describe these dots and marks as pixels, glitches, or fragile gestures because everything that comes from a person has a fragility to it that a machine can't quite replicate,' Gibbs observes.

The Futurist movement has been a significant influence on Gibbs – particularly the way its artists interpreted and depicted movement through dynamic, gestural forms that were nevertheless highly calculated. *Unique Forms of Continuity in Digital Space* (2025) directly references Boccioni's seminal 1913 bronze masterpiece of a figure in motion. Conceptually, the Futurists valorised technological advancement, and explored the visual depiction of progress through the replication of image and gesture – an impulse Gibbs sees as acutely relevant today. In an era defined by the blurred boundaries between the fake and the real, authentic and performed expression, Gibbs attempts to record these realities of our contemporary condition.

**Simone Griffin**'s practice draws deeply from the dual threads of her heritage: her paternal lineage connects to the Koa, Wangan, Jagalingou, and Wakka Wakka peoples, the traditional custodians of South East Queensland, Australia; while her maternal heritage traces to Italian roots grounded in automotive production and its commercial and industrial painting techniques. This convergence of cultural and material lineages informs an approach that is at once grounded in place and attuned to the fluidity of form and perception.

Griffin's paintings oscillate between total abstraction and fleeting figurative suggestion, their surfaces sometimes resembling topographical maps that open up multiple spatial and temporal entry points. Within these expansive visual fields, macro and micro perspectives intertwine, suggesting both aerial and cellular ways of seeing. Her unique use of commercial airbrush methods simultaneously acknowledge the 'dot' techniques associated with Indigenous artists of her ancestry while concurrently recalling the optical precision of the European Pointillists. Through this synthesis, Griffin constructs works that shimmer with layered ambiguity – fields of diffused colour and particulate detail that evoke the blurring of time, the soft haze of memory, or the indistinct focus of a camera attempting to locate its subject.

'Glass isn't always taken seriously, maybe because it's so seductive,' **Miranda Keyes** once remarked of her intricate, majestic, and ethereal sculptures. Self-taught in glass blowing, Keyes initially began her formal sculptural training working within the bronze lost wax casting tradition before turning to the medium for which she is now best known. Compelled by the forces of heat, Keyes was led to mix elements of both the lampwork and furnace tradition, working within a relationship to historic interpretations of the glass vessel.

Rose Dodd, writing in *AnOther* magazine, observed how Keyes 'employs an intuitive and synergistic dance with spontaneity, persuading the temperamental material into sinuous sculpted vessels. Fragile and yet often functional, warped with an ominous and enchanting fluidity, her pieces have something otherworldly about them.'

She fosters an intense and intuitive dialogue with the material throughout the process of creation. 'What I love about the glass I work with is that you don't have to plan everything before you start,' she explains. Though static, her forms appear as if liquid suspended in air – frozen in time – while retaining the tactile imprint of the artist's hand. Almost invisible yet glistening in shifting atmospheric light, the resulting works, though abstract, evoke domestic vessels.

Beginning with photography, **Elise Nguyen Quoc** seeks to restore the materiality of overlooked and elusive traces she observes in daily life that she names 'leftovers'. Through a hand-driven process of repetition, where her body is almost working automatically and unconsciously with her chosen mediums of ballpoint pens and drypoint paint, Nguyen Quoc arrives at dense, multifaceted compositions. Her works evoke at once rays of light, muddled tracks, signals, impulses, and both micro and macro elements of the cosmos. 'I take photos of fragments which dwell at the periphery of a big subject, caught within the flow of time, [focusing on] human or non-human marks that I think have the potential to become an inscription,' Nguyen Quoc says of her process.

Nguyen Quoc seeks to restore materiality to images that have become 'dead'. As she explains: 'What I remain faithful to is what I cannot see in reality, because we never see an image the way photography does. We stop time, and in doing so, we can observe everything'. Working through the hand and her body, she gives each image 'all the time it requires', transforming the residue of encounters into artworks that conjure a 'sense of gravity'.

Furthermore, she adds 'what we perceive in my work is the rhythms of passing life and the movements of my body across the surface'. Through her generative process, the works accumulate such a force and quantity of labour that what was once unnoticed and fleeting becomes stable and monumental. When creating in succession, her works evolve from each other, with residue from earlier works informing encounters that spark new moments of significance and images. For instance, *Open Pulpe* (2023) stems from a photo of the residue of a paint tray; while *A gaze which possesses without being exposed. Which can take without risking being seen, hurt, or rejected, is always a violence to the world.* (2025) depicts the marks of her passing in and out of the entryway of her previous Paris apartment, highlighting an overlooked space of transience. This enmeshed process allows for a continuous dialogue between the pieces and compounding energetic impact.

**Claire Oswalt's** practice is concerned with philosophy, literature, science, music and the unique landscape of Central Texas, where she lives and works. Whether working with paper or on large canvases, her process always involves acts of construction and deconstruction, emphasising spontaneity and chance. Her works on paper are composed through the rapid assemblage of torn fragments, while her canvases are stitched together in a patchwork-like manner around their stretchers – referencing traditions that include Minimalism, Colour Field painting, textiles and craft. 'I want to honour the original feeling of collage,' Oswalt explains of works such as *Graft in Blue* (2025). 'When I then move to sewing the work, the execution is honouring that moment of spontaneity and coherence – a mystical moment of creation where I have no idea where I'm going, and then a beautiful discovery happens as something starts to appear. I live with the idea of variation and how it becomes symphonic harmony.' The resulting works play with shadow and light, creating an interplay of concave and complex forms that oscillate between two and three-dimensional planes. 'That's an overarching theme for me,' Oswalt has observed. 'This push and pull – finding the balance between two systems or modes of working.'

– Text by Laurie Barron