

Erin Washington's work has been exhibited at numerous venues throughout Chicago including Andrew Rafacz Gallery, Zolla Lieberman Gallery, Hyde Park Art Center, Roots & Culture, and The Franklin. She was selected as one of *NewCity's* "Breakout Artists 2016" and has been featured in publications such as *Sports Illustrated*, *New American Paintings*, *art ltd.*, *Chicago* magazine, and *ART CRUSH*. She received a Bachelor of Studio Arts from University of Colorado at Boulder, and a Master of Fine Arts in Painting and Drawing from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Washington lives in Chicago where she is currently a lecturer in the Painting and Drawing Department at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Artist Lecture

Wednesday, November 8
12pm

Exhibition Dates

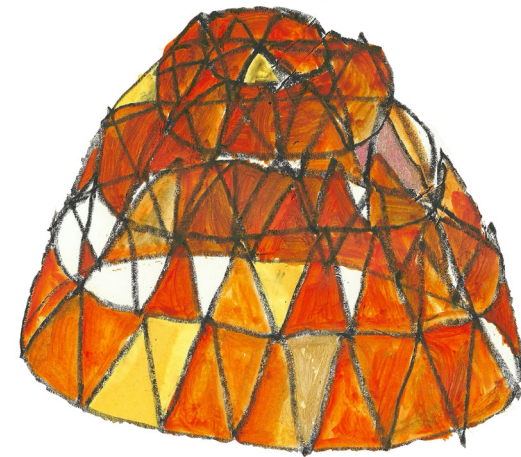
October 21 - December 17, 2017

This exhibition is organized by University Galleries' Curator Jason Judd and is sponsored by the Harold K. Sage Foundation and the Illinois State University Foundation Fund. Programs at University Galleries are sponsored in part by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency. The artist reception is co-sponsored by Hyatt Place, Bloomington-Normal.

University Galleries is located at Uptown Station at the corner of Beaufort and Broadway. Parking is available directly above, and the first hour is free. If you need special accommodations to participate in any event, please contact University Galleries at 309.438.5487 or galleries@ilstu.edu. Please allow sufficient time to arrange the accommodation. Please note that all events at University Galleries are free.



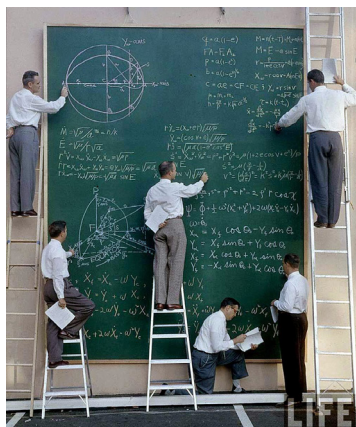
LIGHT
TOUCH



ERIN WASHINGTON

LIGHT TOUCH

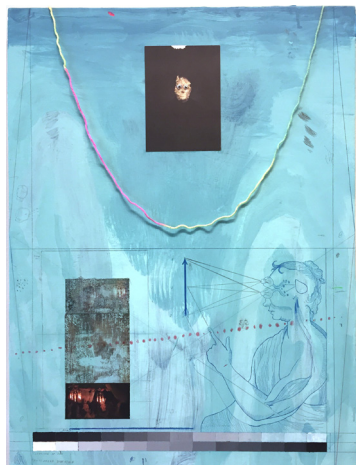
From a silverpoint portrait of the Egyptian queen Nefertiti to a chalk drawing of the presumed shape of a wormhole, Erin Washington's multilayered works consist of a medley of ambiguous scientific diagrams, art historical references, Post-it notes, studio debris, mythological figures, and self-deprecating jokes. Many of the works are produced as handmade chalkboards, with layers of porous acrylic pigment brushed on wood panels, upon which the artist laboriously draws, erases, and redraws images ranging from a broken-nosed head of Aphrodite, to her own hand post-surgery, to the layout of a Ouija board. Washington utilizes her panels in a similar way that chalkboards have been used historically: as an erasable surface to present a lesson, theory, or problem. Though this approach situates Washington as a sort of teacher and the viewer as a student, she undermines this assumed authority by revealing her process: attaching Post-it notes of ideas instead of rendering the final product, writing critical notations on better aesthetic choices instead of changing them, or taping images of what inspired the piece to the surface instead of claiming authorship.



From its appearance in 1801 as a large piece of slate hung on a classroom wall by a Scottish high school geography teacher, the chalkboard has long served as an important pedagogical tool. Throughout the 1950s and 60s the chalkboard was a staple in every classroom and science lab. It exemplified progress and knowledge in a 1961 *LIFE* magazine photograph of six NASA scientists standing on ladders of various heights, diligently filling a 20-foot-tall chalkboard with what appeared to be groundbreaking calculations pertinent to the Space Race. Later, these calculations were revealed to be nothing more than general reference equations for a staged photograph, troubling the notion of truthful representation that the chalkboard symbolized.

Like the conglomeration of individual equations and diagrams on the NASA chalkboard, Washington's work incorporates a variety of references, from both her personal life and her interest in science and art. For example, the panel *light touch* (2017) consists of drawings and collages that relate to visual perception, including: a drawn diagram of Descartes' theory of vision; a hand-painted grey-scale value study; a fluorescent colored thread from a blanket in the artist's studio; a variety of handwritten notes; a film still from *Barry Lyndon* in which Stanley Kubrick used a special camera and NASA lens to capture candle-lit scenes; and a ripped black postcard photo of artist Marina Abramovic's stern face—embellished by Washington with googly eyes.

Washington subverts the myth of the all-knowing teacher, artist, or scientist in works where she positions herself as an "idiot professor." In a four-foot-tall sculpture entitled *Idiot Professor* (2017), an actual sandwich-board-style



Bottom: *light touch*, 2017. Acrylic, caesien, collage, colored pencil, graphite, gouache, high-polymer film lead, oil, and yarn on panel.



chalkboard wears the artist's boots on its two forward-facing legs. While the front panel features a sideways chalk drawing of the goddess Athena over the handwritten phrase "Thinking causes complications," the backside simply bears a taped "kick me" sign. In *Idiot Professor Learn Ikebana* (2017), the artist questions, "What would an Erin Washington Dutch flower painting look like?" The answer is an unlikely botanical mash-up of Ikebana, a Japanese art of flower composition steeped in hundreds of years of Buddhist philosophy; flowers reminiscent of those found among still lifes in the Art Institute of Chicago collection; and Dennis Oppenheim's panoramic view of a flowerbed titled *Flower Arrangement for Bruce Nauman*, a play on Nauman's 1967 video, *Flour Arrangements*.

Throughout *Light Touch*, Washington consistently draws unexpected parallels between material and image, enabling her to approach timeless themes and weighty subjects with a sense of wonder, wit, and wile. Consequently, she does not offer answers or any type of comprehensive pedagogy; rather, she poses questions, reveals unusual relationships, and, in the same manner that chalkboards have been utilized for centuries—she is just trying to figure things out.

—Jason Judd, Curator

Top: *idiot professor learn Ikebana*, 2017. Acrylic, caesien, colored pencil, graphite, high-polymer film lead, marker, metalpoint, and phototransfer on panel.