

Adrienne DeVine  
Written Statement  
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Art is a language that I use to create visual dialogues with viewers and conversations between works. The foundation of my art practice is rooted in the relationships between historical memories, social identities and different forms of capital (social, cultural and economic) as they are embodied, objectified and institutionalized in contemporary environments.

I develop my artwork using standard commercial art supplies, found objects, and stuff that I fabricate from raw materials. I transform this matter into paintings, installations, and hybrid forms that are connected by recurring motifs, gestures, themes and subjects. Luminosity, translucence, repetition, layering, tactility and physicality are qualities and devices that emerge throughout most of my work.

At the moment, altered paper, canvas, acrylic polymer, wire and paint are my primary materials. I give a nod to process, as I take manufactured tracing paper and transform it into raw material for my work. Sometimes, I collage fragments of the paper onto itself. It is receptive to layering and in this mode, it becomes a metaphor for fragments of time and fragmented collective memory. In a single layer, it is pliable and almost skin-like. It brings body and volume to the party. It willingly lends itself to manipulation into three-dimensional forms that beg exploration of the space within and around it. Crimped surfaces and hollowed spaces suggest uncharted topography.

Mounted on a wall, it awakens; bending and swaying, dancing against the surface; meandering across the floor; and rustling with the slightest breeze, beckoning your ears to listen

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to the crisp but delicate sounds of its movement. Placed on canvas, a new conversation begins as the translucence and luminosity of the paper intermingles with canvas, paint and other media. I figuratively layer memory into the piece.

Collective memory is said to memorialize and sustain ideas through the continuous production of representational forms. As cultural memory is embodied in texts, objects, and other media of societies, this gives me agency to investigate different forms of symbolic communication from my African heritage. The marks and materials that I use reference this cultural index.

Adinkra symbols have historical and philosophical significance. They were originally printed on cloth which Asante royals wore to important ceremonies. Bantu symbols of South Africa were developed for communication between medicine men, yet an estimated 30 percent of the Bantu people can write in this language and it is mostly women who employ it. Each symbol represents a whole word or a complete idea. Nsibidi, a writing system indigenous to Southeastern Nigeria, communicates spirituality, emotions, knowledge, as well as documentation of civil affairs. Bamana textile patterns of Mali express proverbs and songs, articulate messages, or represent historical events. Magic or healing scrolls from Ethiopia were and still are created to generate live spiritual power in the material world. These pre-colonial writing systems from the African continent are some of my primary resources.

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My interest in text and writing systems is in part related to my background in the graphic arts industry. In that arena, I studied typography, the history of printing, as well as fine art printmaking. Different types of writing systems such as pictographs, which represent objects or actions; ideographs which represent ideas or concepts; syllabaries which are sets of written characters representing a voice sound; and alphabets, letters or characters that represent individual sound elements of spoken language, inform my mark-making and become part of my visual communication vocabulary.

Through the abstraction of writing systems and the incorporation of graphic imagery in my work, I develop personal iconography and weave a common thread among my paintings, collage, assemblage and installations. I am creating imagery that blurs the boundary between traditional function and modern abstraction. I interweave ideas and matter into visual forms that offer physical and conceptual space for viewer engagement.

Using wire, I create contours, set up containments, or contort the industrial material into a cosmic-like framework that I intersperse with symbols and objects composed of earthly materials like raffia and wood. Rusted wire and metal imbue a sense of history and time into my work, and lend themselves to visual expression of collective and cultural memory.

My hand is evident in my work. It is seen as gesture in my paintings and is evident as a tool of labor in my collage work. When working with canvas, I accentuate dimensionality by adding material to the surface, or cutting sections of the canvas out. When I use canvas as a

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substrate for paint, yellow dominates my palette. Whether the painting is abstract or representational, the luminous quality of yellow conveys that there is something greater than meets the eye that may be lying within or even beyond the work. Another horizon. Energy. Optimism. A force that is percolating beyond the image.

My artwork is driven by materials and the pleasure I find in the process of making. I engage in serial relationships with materials, but as I become more disciplined and focused in my artmaking, I am less promiscuous and more selective about the purchased, found, and gifted materials that make their way into my studio. Still, making something out of nothing, or something out of something else is a compulsion that challenges my restraint. When I reach into my toolbox of visual elements, my intent is to create an invitation. An invitation that sparks curiosity, provokes thought, wakes up the senses, and to some degree, provides entertainment and pleasure. I see potential to achieve those attributes in everything around me.

I am curating a library of visual elements that comprise a growing vocabulary for the visual conversations that I create. These conversations evolve from stream of consciousness and intuitive moves; current and historical events with social justice and political themes; pop and ethnic culture. Most often, they manifest a formalist aesthetic within the framework of abstraction, which in and of itself is another conversation.

To achieve more clarity within my practice, I continue to research, explore, and make moves in the studio that get me closer to the essence of what is most important in my work. My

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aim is to be more coherent with my own self so that my artwork speaks more clearly for itself. This is particularly challenging, as I embrace complexity and I have propensity to layer a multiplicity of content, references and ideas into individual works. Going forward, my resolution is to contextualize and distill what I believe is most essential in my process of artmaking.

When I make art, I am immersed in my work. Art happens organically and unconstrained. I am completely engaged in creative process and problem solving where I come to know, and achieve a kind of intimacy with my materials; understanding what they do formally and becoming more aware of what they might imply conceptually.

It is important to me that I make art that is interesting. Palettes that emanate luminosity and depth. Tactility of form and materials. Subjects that address issues that I care about and content that I think is important to share in multiple ways; literally, figuratively, or conceptually. I hope that my work gives viewers pause to contemplate, to resonate, to be curious, to learn, to becoming engaged within a constructed environment, or to find simple pleasure in the act of viewing. The idea of breaking new ground in content and materials is a loftier pursuit that raises the bar of expectations and adds impetus to my artistic endeavors. Ultimately, it is the humble pursuit of living for the daily practice of creative expression that fulfills me as an artist.

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