



Five Questions for Michelle Grabner

ARTSY EDITORIAL

2 DAYS AGO

A past contributor to Artsy (see [her picks](#) from NADA Miami Beach 2013), practicing artist and professor Michelle Grabner is the artists' artist, and the artists' curator. "Although it may be far-reaching to think that a Whitney Biennial could be organized as a curriculum for other artists, aiming at pedagogy seemed a worthy ambition," [she writes](#) of her mission in curating the fourth floor portion of the Whitney Biennial, a biennial in itself. Attempting to present accessible themes, including "contemporary abstract painting by women; materiality and affect theory; and art as strategy—in other words, conceptual practices oriented toward criticality," Grabner presented a floor that as she hoped is "slow and grounded in the 'thingness' of contemporary art." With works like Sheila Hicks' brilliantly colored fiber column pouring from the ceiling to the ground and Sterling Ruby's cavernous ceramic basins, Grabner has certainly brought the emphasis back to the thing, the hand, the artist. We posed five questions to Grabner, encompassing subjects from curatorial tools to Twitter.

Artsy: Can you describe one or two works that are the 'centerpiece' of your floor, or that anchor a theme or underpinning—visual or conceptual—in some way?

Michelle Grabner: [Sheila Hick](#)'s monumental fiber column flowing down from above the ceiling coiffers down to the slate floor is a celebration of verticality, natural and synthetic texture, and color. [Sterling Ruby](#)'s ceramic basins are also a material indulgence, but here his forms are hard, reflective and glassy. The fulcrum of my exhibition balances monumental gestures dedicated to materiality with large-scale work that volleys in criticality, signs, and found imagery. Example would be [Shana Lutker](#), Ken Lum,

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Gretchen Bender, and Philip Vanderhyden. Overall I would say that my section of the Whitney Biennial is slow and grounded in the “thingness” of contemporary art.

Artsy: How do you think this Biennial will be remembered?

MG: 2014 is the year of three Biennials, one stacked on top of the other in the old Breuer Building.

Artsy: Can you offer a Tweetable line about your floor that you would want someone like the *New York Times*' Roberta Smith (or another notable art critic) to release to the (virtual) world?

MG: “The 4th floor generously obliges the viewer with an abundant of glorious material and intellectual affect.”

Artsy: What is your most important “tool” as a curator and why?

MG: My trust in artists. They always know best. Don't let curators, critics, or dealers tell you different.

Artsy: What's next for you?

MG: I am working on my first solo exhibition at [James Cohan Gallery](#) that will open in the fall of 2014.

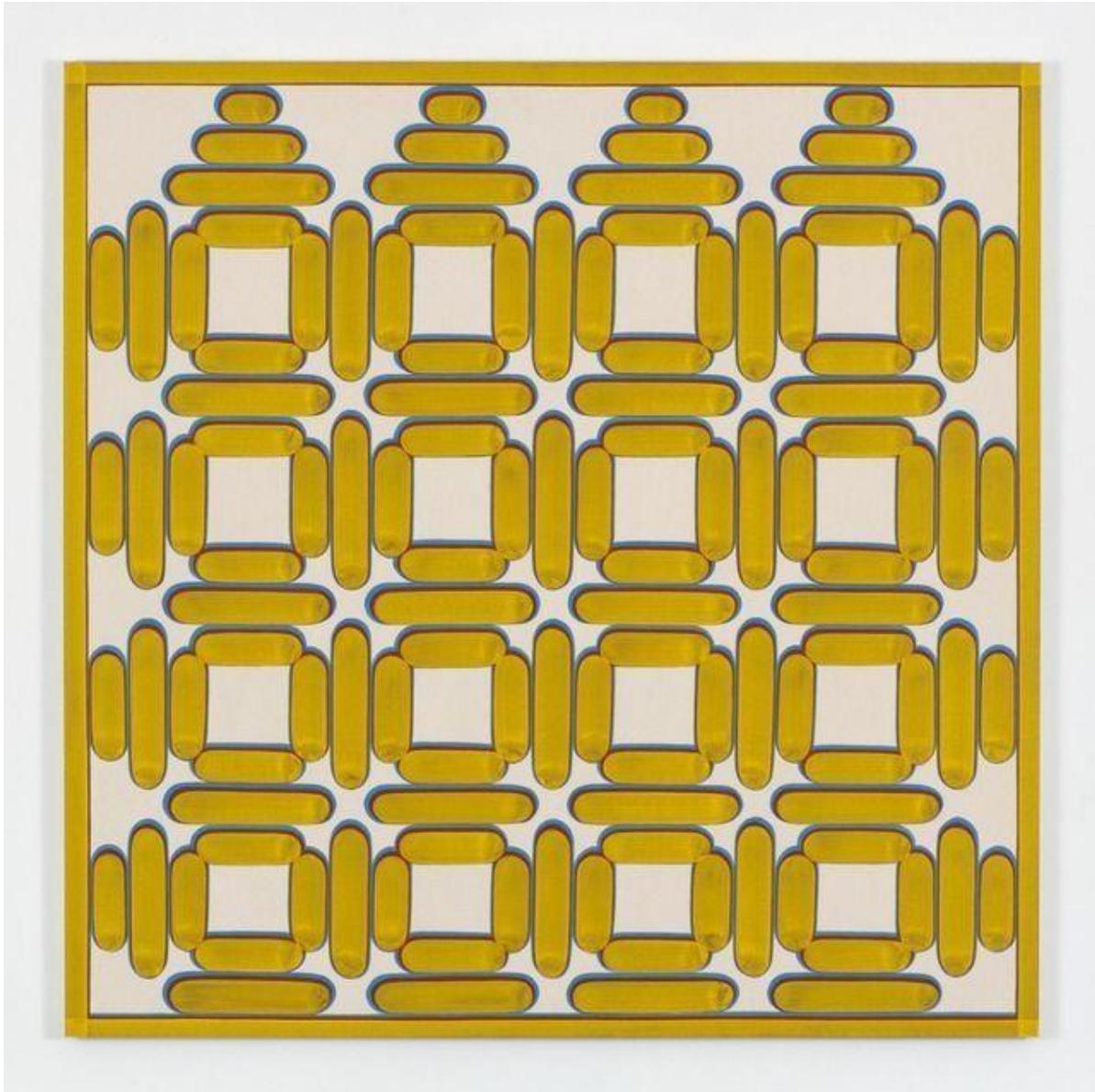
[Learn more about the Whitney Biennial 2014 on Artsy.](#) Information on visiting the Whitney Biennial [here](#).

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Sterling Ruby
Basin Theology/Butterfly Wreck, 2013
Whitney Biennial 2014

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Dan Walsh
Threshold, 2013
Whitney Biennial 2014



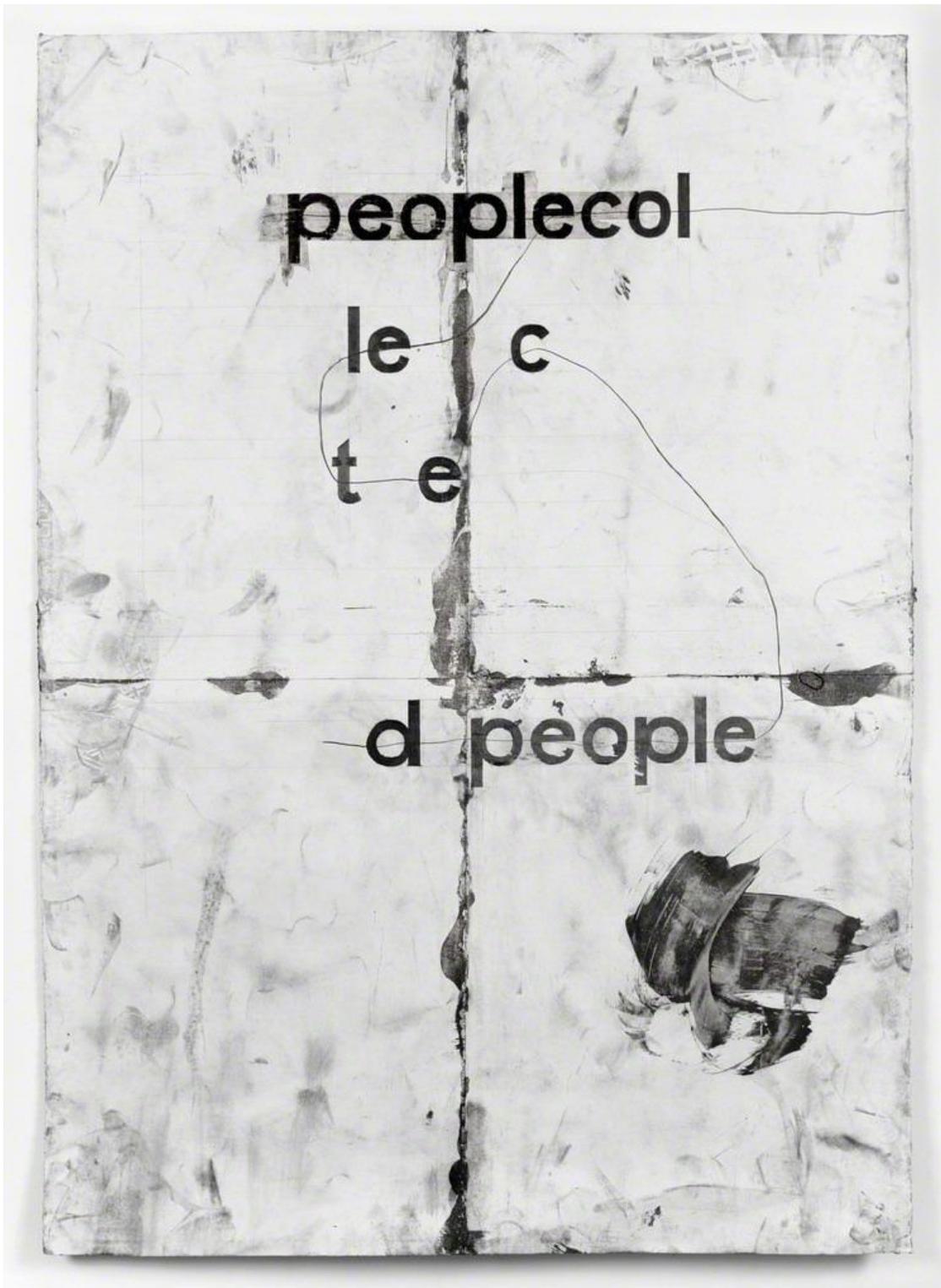
Alma Allen
Untitled, 2013
Whitney Biennial 2014

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Dawoud Bey

Maxine Adams and Amelia Maxwell (from The Birmingham Project), 2012
Whitney Biennial 2014



Tony Lewis
peoplecol, 2013
Whitney Biennial 2014

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