"Art was, in effect, something that was happening to me, happening at that very moment. And the world seemed new again, moved by an invisible impulse. Everything was so relaxing and admirable, it was impossible not to look. Blessed is the morning, I thought."

-Enrique Vila-Matas

As cultural producers, how is our capacity and desire to keep making catalyzed by what Vila-Matas calls the ‘invisible impulses’ that move through the world? In this sense, how is the work we make something of a vital record; a form of transmission; an extraction from the everyday?

Exploratory and observational, the exhibition “The Heart of the Matter” is what curator Carolyn Christov–Bakargiev might call a “veil” or “draft” as opposed to a thematic or analytical exhibition, and it is comprised of 12 artists recently affiliated with organizations funded by the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation. What unites these works—mostly “faces and places”—is some observable manifestation of the artist’s everyday life through closely observed gestures that span intimacy, awkwardness, specificity and inimitability. Some artists in the exhibition engage in some form of locational abstraction – or, abstract works that are rooted in the logic or poetry of place. Others...
are engaging in a deeply emotive type of figuration—the human or animal body rendered with wit, affection or, sometimes, pathos.

At the heart of each work we can perhaps locate, at arms length, the mobilization of some “invisible impulse” or energizing force—it may be an Instagram photo, a magazine, a bottle, studio remnants, rocks, a residency, a friend, a joke, or a llama. In a world saturated and fast, these artists model slowness and divergence, situating themselves and re-situating themselves in relation to the world, as if art is always, “in effect,” happening.

The location of this exhibition within a foundation headquarters prompted several curatorial goals:

First, by alternating between figuration and abstraction, I hope to disrupt the psychological overhead of the office by introducing into the space an orchestrated sequence of interruptions—a nice, steady hum. New “officemates” peering off picture planes; the essences of other places emergent and expressed through abstracted color, pattern or surface.

Finally, I hope to bring to the Donnelley Foundation headquarters the special, quotidian corners of artists’ lived spaces and inner lives through works that feel intimately rendered and tremendously specific, if not emotional, funny, eccentric and sometimes just practical.

-Jessica Cochran

Jessica Cochran is a curator living in Chicago, where she also manages a private family art collection and teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.


2 See “A Powerful Curator’s Idiosyncratic Genius” by Emily Stokes, the New York Times, December 1, 2015.