

Making art is an inherently political act. The nineteen artists in *The Art of Being Dangerous* confront oppressive power structures and dominant cultural narratives, choosing instead to put forth alternatives based on personal histories. This group of artists challenges and engages directly with politics of representation and historicization, rejecting essentialist, monolithic canons in favor of intersectional discourse.

The exhibition takes its title from former director of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum Lisa Yun Lee's eerily prescient essay, "Museums as 'Dangerous' Sites" (2008). Lee wrote the case study during her tenure at the museum (located at historic Halsted and Taylor streets, on the University of Illinois at Chicago campus), to urgently advocate on behalf of the founding principles of the organization. Jane Addams (1860-1935), the revolutionary activist, labored as a suffragette and social justice warrior, and became the first American woman to earn the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. Lee's text dissects the ways that Addams utilized the museum as a site to foster radical change by providing education, public programs, and basic human services to immigrants and other members of the community. Lee suggests ways that museums and other informal sites of learning can—and should—feel a deep, moral obligation to provide civic services and unbiased education above and beyond merely presenting information.



Pooja Pittie, *The Past is Yet to Come*, 2018, acrylic paint, pumice, mica flakes on canvas, 40 x 40 inches

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Lee essay also presents as an indictment of the many museums that perpetuate a limited singular canon (or a historically established standard of defining an artwork as a masterpiece). Lee stresses that museums have an "ethical imperative" to ask themselves, "Which stories are being told and which are not?... Who gains by leaving these stories out and what is at stake in their re-telling?" In a moment when it is fashionable for institutions to pay lip service to democracy and inclusion, few are truly assuming the un-glamorous labor that goes into fostering exhibitions and dialogues that espouse these values.

In the spirit of the Hull-House mission, the artworks and programs accompanying *The Art of Being Dangerous* function as prompts rather than statements. The artists are not asking for your agreement, but rather for you to interrogate what you believe and how you came to believe it. This spirit of conversation and debate permeates the exhibition and is galvanized by Lee's text—which feels as urgent to politics and pedagogy today, perhaps even more than when it was published a decade ago. She writes, "Contrary to the oft-cited sentiment, we do not think 'talk is cheap,' or believe that what we need is 'less talk and more action. Instead, we insist that talking to one another is the cornerstone of a democracy."

It is our hope that this exhibition will serve as an incubator for discussions that will ultimately lead to progress. We welcome discourse, dissent, uncomfortable or unpopular opinions, and ultimately, participation.

Erin Toale  
Curator of *The Art of Being Dangerous*