

ART=CITY

Highlights from the Creative Capital Retreat: Part One

by PADDY JOHNSON on AUGUST 7, 2015



Creative Capital consultants take the stage at the conference to give thanks for all the work the organization does on behalf of artists.

The Creative Capital Retreat took place two weeks ago now, and I'm still thinking about it. Nearly every year the organization invites grantees from their latest grant cycles to give seven minute presentations on what they have or will do to a room full of professionals. This year, though, was more emotional than usual. Ruby Lerner, Creative Capital's Founding President and Executive Director announced she would be retiring earlier in the year, and it's her vision and guidance that has helped make Creative Capital so unique. With the help of the Warhol Foundation, a strong board and staff, and a robust philanthropic community, the granting agency has done more to help artists than almost any other I know. It's not just that artists receive a \$50,000 grant—though that's certainly helpful—but that they get access to an incredible array of professional development programs. This retreat is their flagship event.

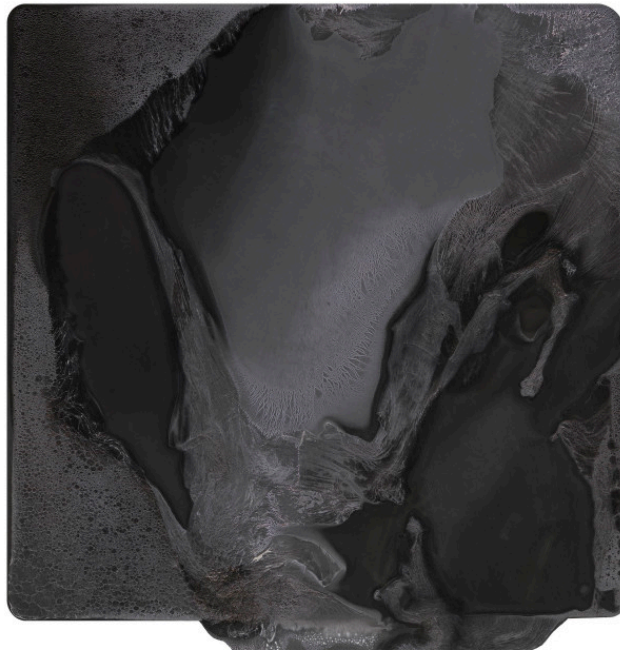
In my experience, Creative Capital grantees often make work that is socially and politically engaged and/or an uneasy fit within the commercial gallery or film world. The exceptions are

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often superstars, funded well before they rose to the top of a more traditional art world circuit. (Theaster Gates and Cory Arcangel are just two examples of many.)

Typically, I spend the next few days frantically posting about every amazing presentation I saw. This year, that wasn't possible, so I'm trying something a bit different: I'm drawing my posting out for as long as possible. Every Friday I'm in New York during the month of August I'll be discussing some of my favorite works. Let's get started.



Brittany Nelson

Brittany Nelson feels like an unusual fit within the Creative Capital ecosystem because her photography is so engaged in materiality. (If this year's conference is any indication, a stereotypical grantee has a socio-political motivation and is hoping, in some small way to make the world a better place.) This particular project probably won't change the world—she uses chemicals to destroy the silver in photo paper—though I did question even that assumption while listening to her talk. She spoke persuasively about how few people there were exploring the photographic process itself as a medium, and explained just how transformative the process actually was; at one point she described a caterpillar walking across one of her photographs and dying in the chemicals. “Oooh, I’m dangerous!” she proclaimed sarcastically. The audience roared with laughter, but actually, those photographs scare the shit out of me. They’re black droppy forms preserved digitally with her scanner that have been put through hell to get that way. It’s like looking at death. I hope Nelson’s wearing some heavy duty protection when she works with this stuff.