



Alex Gardner, *Recap*, 2019.
Photo: Craig Smith

Recap is a work that revels in omission. Two jet-black figures—one sitting, with the other reclining in their lap—wear nondescript white clothing. The recumbent figure cradles their own featureless head in their arms, locked into their spot through the reassuring grip of the seated person. Positioned as they are, the sitter provides both protection and place as together the couple sinks firmly into the ambiguous squish of opalescent fabric.

The skin of this pair appears otherworldly, denoting at first glance that this scene, while familiar, exists in an invented space of the artist's own creation. Unlike the works of Kerry James Marshall or Amy Sherald, where black and gray-toned skin specifically denotes Blackness, Alex Gardner uses black as a neutral. His figures are raceless, genderless, nameless avatars to be identified only if viewers choose to fill in the blanks. In this way, *Recap* depicts a moment of quiet, albeit recognizable intimacy somewhere between the real world and a nebulous expanse of wide-open possibility.

However, even among these informational voids, Gardner's work emphasizes connection. For the reclining figure, the affectionately created spot of the sitter's lap becomes a shelter to safely revisit the events of the day; there is catharsis in this figure recapping their struggles to their partner in this intimate setting. For viewers, witnessing that silent exchange of protection becomes an invitation. In the quietness of paint, Gardner omits just enough information to make space for onlookers to connect and add their own voices to the waiting void.

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