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'OLD BLACK' AT TEAM GALLERY By KEVIN GREENBERG

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Installation view, 'Old Black,' Team Gallery, New York, 2013.

Sometimes the only way to truly understand a medium is to push it to its limits. Or, as is the case in the works on display in “Old Black,” a powerful group show currently at Team Gallery, to know a medium is to drive it beyond its limits, transforming it into something entirely new, by whatever means necessary. The binding element of “Old Black,” which presents works by seven artists working in a diverse range of forms, is the “abuse, distortion and misuse of standard methods of making,” according to the show’s debut curator, Todd von Ammon.

Von Ammon named his show after one of Neil Young’s guitars—a 1953 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop that Young modified extensively over the course of its long life. The works on display demonstrate similar signs of wear, tear, and (at least in some cases) loving abuse. The tone of the show is set by two large-scale, linear installations. The first is Banks Violette’s *Not Yet Titled* (2011), a black, powder-coated section of corrugated steel highway safety railing, one end of which is gnarled at acute angles—seeming evidence of a violent impact. A subtle, but hardly less imposing counterpoint to Violette’s sculpture is Harold Ancart’s *Untitled* (2013), a massive wall piece dominating the gallery’s north wall, in which charcoal is applied to a masked edge, leaving a sooty signature on the wall below. Ancart’s piece invokes “abjection first of all,” according to von Ammon, who notes that “the inherent delicacy of the residue has an almost photographic tendency.”

On the walls, Mariah Robertson’s *16* (2013) is a lush, psychedelic abstraction that might pass for an aerial photograph of a mineral-rich hot spring. Robertson creates images like *16* by manipulating photochemicals. The results are striking and beautiful, but closer inspection reveals the toxicity that lends the technique its power. Adjacent to Robertson’s piece is Robert Janitz’s *Collateral Damage* (2013), a nice match for *16* in size and technique. Like Robertson, Janitz treats his paint chemically prior to application, and then lets the resulting processes finish the work he started. Janitz paints as a window washer might, according to von Ammon. The result of his technique is an almost phantasmagorical translucency.

Other pieces by Edith Dekyndt, Donald Moffett, and Jack Pierson bring similar techniques to bear, each allowing one gesture or manipulation to transform their chosen medium into something new, at once both grotesque and alluring.

Von Ammon has chosen a representative passage from Cormac McCarthy’s 1985 novel *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West* to accompany the works in “Old Black.” McCarthy’s novel famously employs violence as a metaphor for transformation, and the author’s lush descriptions of landscape present an unknown frontier that is at once both beautiful and teeming with menace and imminent death. Von Ammon has provided a suitable complement in “Old Black,” assembling a suite of works whose dark edges hint at seductive, dangerous depths within.

“Old Black” runs through July 26 at Team Gallery, 47 Wooster Street, New York. Images courtesy of Team Gallery, New York.