Places You Aren’t Supposed To Go: [Don’t Play Me] Do We Still Call It Abstract Art?
Lisette Morel

April 7 - May 26, 2018
Gallery Aferro Main Gallery
73 Market Street, Newark

OPENING RECEPTION
April 7th, 2018
7pm - 10pm

GALLERY HOURS
Wednesday - Saturday
12pm - 6pm
and by appointment

Lisette Morel is a painter of Dominican decent who is infatuated with the color black. Ms Morel is not just in love with this color; she is questioning it. With every manipulation and stage of her work she is asking “If I do this, what will happen?” This element of uncertainty makes the work unpredictable and unending like the color itself. For the artist, black is layered with memories of looking at the night sky with her mother and viewing the tarred tops of other buildings as a child. Her mother always said if she stared long enough she would see another shade of black—blue black, red black and soft grey blacks would emerge. Her mother wanted her to be aware of nuance and depth. Morel didn’t understand this fully, until much later, as an adult who uses this constantly in her paintings. For Morel the color marks territory as it also points to “places you aren't supposed to go” like extremely dark alley ways or metaphoric places like dark thought.

But Ask Me If We Can... In The Same Place? (detail), house paint and oil on sheetrock, 48x48, 2018
In her work, Morel literally marks her territory by considering and invading space that is not limited to the gallery walls or traditional canvas. She paints on found sheetrock that is hung on the wall and frequently bunches fabrics or allows canvas to run onto the floor. Her mark making extends to the gallery walls in a sense of urgency and permanence. This is where Morel's artistic world takes flight, from a starting point of the forbidden and a mother wanting her to see more. Morel's work is layered with not just tradition abstract expressionism but also matriarchal abstraction that uses mop heads to make aggressive marks and holds scratches in the same high esteem as the nuanced relationship of matte black or semi gloss black to lush brush strokes of a muted brown. As an artist of color, it is not lost on Morel that her work would be more “commercial” if she spoke to her heritage directly and didn’t cloak her feminism in abstraction. Yet, the freedom from limits that abstraction offers is where Lisette Morel wants the viewer’s eyes to wander, through her darkness where paint marks territory and erasure with definite marks. Morel was the inaugural recipient of Gallery Aferro’s Sustainable Arts Fellowship for studio residents who are also parents.

Morel is investigating as she paints which leads to her performative work. In that work she is performing that investigation with paint for an audience. The process becomes the work. Performative elements of mark making began to weave into Morel’s work in 2013. For this exhibit, the last in a 2017-2018 quartet of solo shows by women artists of color from different generations organized by the gallery, she will complete a new solo work at the opening. In thinking about object-making versus art-objectives in her practice, Morel steps into a process outside of painting. Performance art is not an object/objective based medium. This is not like making abstract work, but it is being in the abstract work itself; this is about ‘being,’ ‘creating,’ and ‘thinking’ while usually painters are about the ‘result.’ It is an act of vulnerability for Morel to create openness/possibilities in her performance without the safety of a resulting object or the barrier of canvas between the audience and herself. “For me performative pieces are an extension of my body and a vulnerability. While some of the performances express power; they are also fragile; there is a duality. And when I allow the performances to become public or invite the public it’s not me…I pray and ask for cojones…so that my most authentic inner self [emerges]."