Abstraction is a foundational gesture of modernist practice, from Kazimir Malevich’s Black Square, Cubism, and De Stijl, to Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, and the recent return to large-scale abstract painting in contemporary art, referred to as “Zombie Formalism.” But what does this long durée of abstraction tell us—about art, society, and histories of perception? Why have so many artists, in various contexts, and for varying reasons, turned to abstraction in the 20th and 21st centuries? This graduate seminar aligns with the opening of the exhibition Out of Easy Reach at the Grunwald Gallery, which features abstract works by 25 artists self-identifying as women part of Latinx and African Diasporas. Utilizing this exhibition as a case study, this course will investigate the underlying theoretical, political, and social questions that have motivated artists to create abstract work, provoked critics to review abstract art (as either political or apolitical), and curators to compose entire exhibitions about it. In addition to class visits to the Grunwald to study the works in the exhibition, and opportunities to meet the artists, weekly readings and discussions will consider key moments in the art historical canon deeply informed by abstraction, as well as pivotal texts from critical race theory, feminist theory, and psychoanalysis that have confronted the stakes of disfiguration, visibility, and unknowability. Taken together, these filters and case studies aim to help students better understand the social risks embedded within the very desire and need to test the limits of perception through abstraction in art.