BIEN

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WHITNEY BIENNIAL 2026

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FOREWORD

Scanning Whitney Biennial catalogues of the past three decades, one would think the world has gone from bad to worse. In nearly every edition, an author—often the Museum's director or the exhibition's curators—remarks that we live in "unprecedented" times, a phenomenon 2026 Biennial co-curator Marcela Guerrero notes in this volume. Each moment feels unparalleled in its darkness and strife, whether due to the aftermath of 9/11, an unimaginably rancorous presidential election, or the COVID-19 global pandemic. In recent Biennial catalogue forewords, we find references to "polarized, desperate times" (2017); "the uncertain, bitter, and divided state of the nation" (2019); and our "desperate need for societal and earthly repair" (2022). The theme has proven so enduring that one might never need write a new foreword, because things will likely feel the same, which is to say even worse.

And yet it is precisely this outlook that has long lent the Whitney Biennial a particular sense of purpose. Apart from being widely regarded as a survey of contemporary American art, the exhibition is most often discussed in terms of how specifically it does or does not reflect its perpetually anguished age. To some, the Biennial may not be "political enough" if it fails to confront global leaders or conflicts. To others, it may be "too political" if it appears literal or strident in its engagement with current affairs. Artists and curators often wrestle with this range of expectations. They might defend obvious topicality as critically urgent, with anything less implying moral failure or lack of nerve. Or they might espouse a more indeterminate position where work that is not self-evidently political is still considered on those terms, and one's ability to perceive it as such becomes its own kind of test. Even seemingly apolitical contributions are often discussed as a willful turn from politics toward other realms, whether due to pessimism or fatigue. This persistent evaluative framework is both instructive and limiting because it can leave unrecognized other forms of both art and political agency that an exhibition or an institution might effect.

As I approach my second Biennial as the Whitney's Director in, dare I say, extremely complicated and difficult times, I am increasingly interested in this latter possibility. The 2026 Biennial lands in a rapidly changing institutional context. Since the last edition, the Whitney has fully implemented a suite of three new free-admissions programs: Free Friday Nights, Free Second Sundays, and Free 25 and Under. These offerings have led to the most dramatic transformation of the Museum's audience in its history. Since their launch, we have welcomed more than half a million free visitors, driving a twenty-percent growth in our annual visitation. Our audience's average age is now eight years younger than it was just two years ago, and our free visitors are fourteen years younger than our historical baseline. The racial diversity of the Whitney's audience has grown nearly thirty percent, and the average household income has lowered. All this means that the 2026 Biennial will reach a new and radically different group of visitors than prior incarnations, and an exhibition that has historically showcased younger artists will be entirely free to every visitor twenty-five years of age and under from anywhere in the world. The Biennial is also the first to appear within a fully bilingual exhibition program, making the Whitney even more accessible and welcoming to the twenty-five percent of New Yorkers who speak Spanish at home.

I do not cite any of these statistics to sound overly Pollyannaish but rather to suggest that there is more than one way to measure how a Biennial meets its fraught moment, or how an institution might more fully understand the efficacy of its work. We cannot yet know—or even imagine—exactly how the exhibition's impact will change and broaden now that it is dramatically more accessible to a much wider range of visitors. But the exhibition will most certainly have a changed and charged capacity to challenge, spark joy, and stimulate new ideas. This is a time—and not the first, as we have seen—that people of all kinds feel their rights, values, and very beings are at stake. The Whitney can and must be a convener, a forum, a platform for artists, and a beacon for those who need us. This depends as much on what we show as on how and for whom we show it.

The work of a Biennial depends more than ever on the collaboration and trust of the Whitney's curators and staff, as well as that of the artists and our patrons. I am enormously grateful to each of them for coming together with a shared sense of purpose—if not always shared views—to bring the Biennial's eighty-second edition to fruition. In particular, I would like to acknowledge co-curators Marcela Guerrero, DeMartini Family Curator, and Drew Sawyer, Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography. Their partnership began shortly after Drew arrived at the Whitney, but they immediately bonded through their desire to let artists and their works guide them more than any preconceived theoretical constructs. They pursued this project with great insight, dedication, and sensitivity, and benefited throughout from the wisdom of Kim Conaty, Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator. I congratulate and commend her on her first Biennial in that role. As always, the artists in the exhibition deserve my utmost thanks for sharing their extraordinary work with the Whitney and the world.

Biennial funders recognize the vital importance of this exhibition and generously and bravely support a concept in advance of its articulation. My sincere gratitude goes to the Hyundai Motor Company for its ongoing support of the Whitney Biennial and the Hyundai Terrace Commission, the annual site-specific project on the Museum's fifth-floor outdoor gallery. Our long-term partnership was conceived with a shared dedication to art and innovation, allowing artists to take risks and explore ambitious new projects. I am also extremely appreciative of Fondazione Bvlgari's recognition of the Museum's flagship exhibition. David Cancel and Stephanie March and Dan Benton provided generous leadership support that allowed us to realize the curators' vision for this Biennial. The

contributions from the Adam D. Weinberg Artists First Fund; Marcia Dunn and Jonathan Sobel; the Holly Peterson Foundation; the Kapadia Equity Fund; the KHR McNeely Family Foundation and Kevin, Rosemary, and Hannah Rose McNeely; and the Whitney's National Committee were essential. Sotheby's also provided fundamental support for the exhibition. My great appreciation goes to the 2026 Biennial Committee Co-Chairs: Paul Arnhold and Wes Gordon, Suzanne and Bob Cochran, Salvador Espinoza and Jonathan Rozoff, Amanda and Glenn Fuhrman, the Further Forward Foundation, Becky Gochman, Christina Hribar, Deepa Kumaraiah and Sean Dempsey, Miyoung Lee and Neil Simpkins, Dawn and David Lenhardt, Sueyun and Gene Locks, George Petrocheilos and Diamantis Xylas, Nancy and Fred Poses, Dr. Jan Siegmund and Dr. Benjamin Maddox, Jackson Tang, Teresa Tsai, and Todd White and Cameron Carani. That gratitude extends to the members of the 2026 Biennial Committee: Shelley Fox Aarons and Philip Aarons; Susan and Matthew Blank; Estrellita and Daniel Brodsky; James Keith Brown and Eric Diefenbach; Yolanda Colón-Greenberg and Craig Greenberg; Christy and Bill Gautreaux; Elaine Goldman and John Benis; Grace Gould and Jonathan Goldberg; Michèle Gerber Klein; Bernard I. Lumpkin and Carmine D. Boccuzzi; Marc S. Solomon, Cindy Levine, and Interlaken LLC; Jamie Watson in memory of Emmett Watson; George Wells and Manfred Rantner; Casey and Lauren Weyand; and Allison Wiener and Jeffrey Schackner. The Keith Haring Foundation Exhibition Fund and the Trellis Art Fund also provided valuable support. I am deeply grateful to the late Emily Fisher Landau, the late Leonard A. Lauder, and Fern and Lenard Tessler for creating endowments that acknowledge the importance of the Biennial as well as the work of emerging artists. Rosina Lee Yue and Bert A. Lies, Jr., MD, graciously provided an endowment that enabled the curators' research and ambitious travel. Support is also provided by the Marshall Weinberg Fund for Performance, endowed in honor of his parents, Anna and Harold Weinberg, who taught him the meaning of giving.

The 2026 Biennial appears just as the Museum inaugurates its first new strategic plan in nearly a decade. This document not only reaffirms our founding vision to advocate on behalf of venturesome artists but also commits to centering audiences and responding to them as never before. The first Biennial of this new chapter offers the perfect opportunity to reflect on these complementary impulses and on the deeper meaning of our mission, about which I wrote in the plan: "The work of an art museum—especially one devoted to often challenging and untested ideas—requires optimism, conviction, and faith. We must believe in the speculative power of artists and art to advance critical thinking, illuminate, and inspire. We must also believe in the capacity of curious and engaged audiences to make meaning from the experiences we share. The Whitney remains committed to both these ideas and to the role we play in the entwined futures of art and contemporary society." I am hopeful that the former will help shape the latter and that our work brightens its time.

Scott Rothkopf, Alice Pratt Brown Director

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since its founding in 1932, the Whitney Biennial has been a space for discourse around the shifting currents of art in the United States, asking not only what is being made but what it means to name something "American" at all. Each edition extends a legacy of experimentation and debate, shaped more by the artists than by any curatorial hand. To take up this task between 2024 and 2026 is to recognize both the weight of that history and the urgency of the present, to ask again how art might reflect, challenge, and reimagine life in the United States today. This Biennial, like those before it, is less a definitive answer than an invitation into dialogue, one made possible by the collective effort of artists, colleagues, and communities who sustain this ongoing conversation.

The 2026 Biennial gathers the work of fifty-six artists, duos, and collectives, whose practices and voices have been our constant guides. The exhibition has taken shape through our conversations with them and the ideas and questions they offered. We are profoundly grateful for their generosity and trust, and we are honored to have the opportunity to cooperate with them.

For this catalogue, we asked each artist to invite someone they admired to act as interlocutor and aid in framing their words and work. These individuals also help illuminate the networks of support and exchange that sustain artistic practice, a flourishing creative ecosystem that has affected the spirit of this Biennial from its start. We are thankful for their contributions to this publication and beyond.

We are indebted to our incomparable project manager, Elizabeth Levy, and our colleagues in Publications, Beth Huseman and Audrey Warne, whose prudence steered this book at every stage, and to our editors—Jason Best, with Diana Stoll and Claire Barliant—whose discernment helped bring clarity to its many voices. For production, we warmly thank Nerissa Dominguez Vales and Sue Medlicott, whose expertise carried the catalogue into print. And for its inspired design, we are grateful to My Linh Trieu Nguyen and STUDIO LHOOQ, whose vibrant vision gives the book its pulse and presence.

The curatorial approach to the Whitney Biennial has often been a kind of call-and-response, not only building on the themes, ideas, and even exhibition designs of the iteration directly preceding it, but also in dialogue with the layered histories of the many others before. Each edition responds to what it inherits—both the urgencies of its moment and the lingering questions of past Biennials—while also setting new terms of engagement for those yet to come. We want to thank the curators of previous Biennials who generously offered their wisdom, including David Breslin, Stuart Comer, Adrienne Edwards, Rujeko Hockley, Henriette Huldisch, Chrissie Iles, Christopher Y. Lew, Mia Locks, Meg Onli, Jane Panetta, and Elisabeth Sussman.

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We extend our deep gratitude to Kim Conaty, Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator, whose guidance and insight have been invaluable throughout this process, and to the Whitney's Alice Pratt Brown Director, Scott Rothkopf, who entrusted us with this legacy and whose steadfast support made this exhibition possible.

The scale of this project could not have been realized without the titanic efforts of our core Biennial team: Beatriz Cifuentes, Biennial Curatorial Assistant, and Carina Martinez, Rubio Butterfield Family Fellow. Other colleagues in the Curatorial Department also lent a hand: Angelica Arbelaez, former Rubio Butterfield Family Fellow; Nakai Falcón, Curatorial Assistant; and Katie Fong, Curatorial Assistant. We are grateful as well to Isabella Marques who assisted us as our intern in summer 2025 and provided support for the catalogue.

Producing the Biennial is a logistical and technical feat that could not have happened save for the prowess of a critical group of colleagues at the Whitney. In Outlook they are known as "B26 Exhibitions," but this mighty team must be named individually: Paula Bauer, Caitlin Bermingham, Diana Carvajal, Aseeli Coleman, Brenna Cothran, Elisa Flynn, Michael Gibbons, Olivia Gregory, Abigail Hack, Maura Heffner, Jared Huggins, Denise Kupferschmidt, Robert Lomblad, Elissa Medina, Graham Miles, Will Neer, Noam Parness, Gregory Reynolds, Joshua Rosenblatt, Lynn Schatz, Elisabeth Skjærvold, Emilie Sullivan, Melanie Taylor, and Eva von Schweinitz.

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From Marcela: Immense love goes to my partner, Tim Shea, and our child, Emilia Shea-Guerrero, for your patience and care throughout this journey. To my family in Puerto Rico, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, thank you for your unconditional support—I'm sorry for the many times I had to take a call, answer an email, or edit a text during our family outings. At the risk of forgetting someone, I want to give a heartfelt shout-out to the friends who shared a drink, a meal, a laugh, a meme, and countless words of encouragement with me: Rebecca Banuchi, Natalie Belisle, Araceli Bremauntz-Enriquez, Liani Cabán, Daisy Desrosiers, Michelle Figueroa, Myrta García, Beatriz Muñiz, Manuela Paz, Laura Pérez, Amy Powell, Yasmin Ramirez, Christopher Rivera, Jeca Rodríguez, Gabriela Salazar, Sofía Silva, Tania Silva, Ingrid Soldevila, Susanna Temkin, and Yaureibo Zenón.

From Drew: I wish to extend my deepest gratitude and love to family and friends who offered support and relief throughout the making of this exhibition. I dedicate this catalogue to my late grandmother, Delphine Damai Podsiadlo, who passed away during its planning. She nurtured my love of art and museums from an early age and embodied a spirit of openness, curiosity, and generosity that continues to guide me.

Marcela Guerrero, DeMartini Family Curator
Drew Sawyer, Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography

CREATURES AKIN

MARCELA GUERRERO

Precious Okoyomon, *I wanted to kill but had nothing to kill* (detail), 2025. Artist-made children's toys with taxidermied bird wings, rope, and motors, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Precious Okoyomon: ONE EITHER LOVES ONESELF OR KNOWS ONESELF*, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria, 2025

THE ROCK IS COMING, THE NEW CHICXULUB, HURTLING THROUGH THE DARK AND THE COLD TO REMAKE OUR FATE. BUT NOT TONIGHT. NOT FOR ME.[1]

T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE

It has become almost obligatory for Whitney Biennial catalogues to say that we are making art in unprecedented times, and the temptation here to do so once again is strong. Yet to insist that the arrival of the 2026 Biennial coincides with an especially urgent moment in history feels trite, self-indulgent, even. The truth is more solemn: in the midst of an ongoing genocide, the effects of a scorching planet, and the depredations of late-stage capitalism, things can always get worse. To say we are living in the end of times is not a revelation but rather a mundane description of the thin slice of history we—along with all other living creatures—currently occupy. It is in this precarious interval, the time right before the end, that I wish to linger.

I side with the matter-of-factness of Timothy Morton and Donna Haraway, whose writings de-emphasize the *anthro-* in the Anthropocene by recognizing a need to live within an ecology of irreversible loss.[2] Morton's blunt insistence that it is futile to speak of the "world," since "the being that we are supposed to feel anxiety about and care for is gone," carries a hyperbolic pessimism that, once the initial impulse to recoil from it subsides, forces us to confront the reality at hand.[3] Haraway's call to grow comfortable with "living in loss" and to learn "how to do without either cynicism or despair, or some kind of lurch to a techno fix or a lurch to denial" offers instead a liberating tone, reminiscent of equanimity—the even-tempered disposition that allows one to see things as they are.[4] To recognize the present for what it is creates an opportunity to give up any pretenses of exceptionalism and to imagine what might be conjured with other kinds of kin—animal, plant, and otherwise—facing the same or worse prognoses of extinction. For the arts, this means turning toward forms of kinship already surfacing within what is often described as the ecosystem of the arts.

I gather that this moment—defined less by an ambition to resolve climate disaster than by attempts to work as mutualistically as possible in pursuit of the continuation of a habitable planet, even without the presence of humans—is not concerned with absolute correctness. Rather, this sliver of time—whether we count from Chicxulub or 2026—ought to account for what Haraway calls "making oddkin," which requires "each other in

Fig. 1. Emilie Louise Gossiaux, *Co-Shaping One Another with the Moon*, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm)

unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles."[5] That is, rejecting individualism in favor of messy conspirations across all species and even with Earth's living systems. This essay, "Creatures Akin," and by extension an important through line of this Biennial, borrows that framework to think of a methodology that rescues terminology long reserved in the hierarchy of the living for debased beings. The relationships examined here are not situated within the discourses of animal rights, veganism, pro-zoo advocacy, or *Free Willy*. Instead, they are rooted in weird entanglements, untested provocations, and irreverent associations—anything that can thrive during these trying times. Beginning with *creature*, the word stems from the Latin *creatura*, "a thing created." *Create, creative, creativity*—all words inherent to art—share with *creature* the same root: *creare*, "the act of bringing into being." My aim with this essay is to underscore the generative capacity of art that attends to mortal critters of all kinds, some bound by filial ties and others simply akin.

KINDRED PLEASURES

The stories I am about to tell you are not fables in which animals speak, though interactions do occur. Nor are they allegories where creatures stand in for human traits and roles. They are not even stories, but analyses of artworks that engage the otherworldliness of

animals as captured in the haunting phrase "animals came from over the horizon," from John Berger's famous essay "Why Look at Animals?"[6] Cartesian thought, Berger argues, brought the ultimate break between humans and other living beings. By dividing the mind from the body, Descartes relegated animals to soulless creatures, part of the realm of mechanics, wholly distinct from humans.[7] Prior to this split, animals were much more, not just closer to humans but also seen as messengers and guides—oracles that unleashed human imagination.[8] In this section, I focus on artists who create affective tableaux and installations that dissolve the sense of self, blurring the boundaries across species, as well as between reality and fiction, life and death, ultimately exposing an emotional kinship among coexisting creatures that points to the liberatory potential of shedding human arrogance.

To encounter the work of Emilie Louise Gossiaux is to sense the dissolution of bodily limits. This is not about their blindness as a limitation—nothing can be further from it. I am referring to their drawings and sculptures in which a human figure representing the artist appears in various states of touching or becoming London, their retired guide dog. In their drawing *Co-Shaping One Another with the Moon* (fig. 1), a zoomorphic Gossiaux and a bipedal London float in a starlit sky. The only thing connecting them is a string—umbilical, perhaps—that binds them. In their interview with Ocean Vuong in this catalogue, the artist reflects on the indefinable kinship shared between them and London: "I think of her in a way as my daughter, my spouse, my mother, and sometimes those roles reverse. Again, it's about blurring the hierarchy, and also recognizing that I'm an animal, too. I find my own animalistic qualities very freeing." Playfully irreverent and bountiful in tenderness, Gossiaux's works depict mutual companionship that transcends the conventional roles of human and cherished "pet." London is neither a mascot nor a good-luck charm symbolic of unconditional love and loyalty to its owner. The footing between canine and human is one of equals, with no single word in human language adequate to describe their relationship.

In *Kong Play* (2024; pp. 206–7, 212), exhibited at the 2026 Whitney Biennial, Gossiaux presents one hundred Kong dog toys in ceramic painted in an array of fifty colors (two toys per color). Typically made from rubber and stuffed with treats like peanut butter, Kongs are safe, chewable, and bouncy oodles of fun. Any resemblance to butt plugs is a question for the makers of the toy, but it is nonetheless a welcome coincidence that betrays the entanglement of corporeal desire, both human and canine. In Gossiaux's presentation, the sheer quantity of Kongs is symbolic of a field replete with exuberant, almost uncontainable pleasure, a sort of heaven on earth.[9]

The work of Jasmin Sian also embraces animals in pre-Cartesian terms. In her series *a forest for Fennel* (2015; e.g., pp. 436–37), the artist made drawings of trees for her parrotlet Fennel to enjoy in his afterlife, as she has for others as well. "Sometimes," Sian says, "I find dead animals, and I make little worlds for them so they have it in the afterlife."[10] Such kindnesses are not a choice for Sian; they are small but necessary acts that will never quite fully redress the imbalance between humans and other living creatures. Her drawings on reused deli-bag paper are no taller than a vintage iPhone, yet these worlds, in which lush vegetation and animal life thrive in the absence of people, are vast despite their smallness—or perhaps because of it. The intimate scale of the paper bags is a proxy for living small and for recycling the castoffs of capitalist culture. The cutout borders, resembling embroidered lace, lend them a devotional air akin to mantillas, the Catholic head coverings exported from Spain to colonies such as the Philippines, where the artist was born. Rather than making zoos that will keep animals captive, Sian imagines worlds for them—and us—on the other side of the horizon.

Kindred pleasures: experiencing the exuberance of life with those creatures closest to us, because not sharing it is simply not an option. From the cherubic winged teddy bears by Precious Okoyomon (p. 15) to Leo Castañeda's epic video game that rewards mutualism (p. 104), inspired by his Brazilian grandmother's paintings of the Amazonian rainforest, to even the vibrant shrines of Agosto Machado that erupt with the joy of a life fully lived (pp. 334–35)—examples of kinships flourishing abound throughout this Biennial.

GESTATIONAL RELATIONALITY

After reading the interview between artist Erin Jane Nelson and curator Margot Norton included in this book, I was inspired to think about other types of kinships, ones that materialize from within, in womblike environments. I am not talking necessarily about the creation of biological kin that results after mammalians' gestational period, but about how gestation can manifest in unexpected ways. Here, I define gestation as the slow process of recording what is created on the inside. Gestational relationality, then, implies a bearing down on interdependent relationships that can happen among and beyond humans, and in the process allowing natural materials the agency to semi-shape themselves when aided by a caring human hand.

I start with Nelson's ceramic pinhole cameras. Sometimes resembling animals, at other times flowers (p. 385), they function essentially as camera obscuras: light enters through a small opening into a darkened chamber and projects an image onto photographic paper placed inside. In the making of the camera and the photograph, a dual process of transmutation occurs—earth turns into ceramic, and light becomes an impression. Take a photograph such as *Egg Bank* (fig. 2), an image of several dozen eggs of an oviparous animal, arranged in a semi-tight grid. The bank in question is located in the Okefenokee Swamp, on the Georgia side, where the artist lived before relocating to Santa Fe. A designated wildlife refuge and the largest blackwater wetland ecosystem in North America, the swamp functions as a vital natural filtration system. In this singular environment, chemistry and ecology converge to create a sanctuary for life. By placing her pinhole cameras in the landscape and letting sunlight enter their cavelike space, Nelson facilitates natural elements' interaction with each other to gestate a picture of, in this case, younglings hatching on the shore.

In her conversation with Nelson, Norton remarks on the link between gestation and creativity, stressing what I outlined earlier in this essay about the linguistic abundance that flows from the verb "to create." Her astuteness lies in identifying the creative act as

Fig. 2. Erin Jane Nelson, *Egg Bank*, 2023. Silk and cotton pigment prints, cotton batting, nylon, foil mat board, 41 ¾ × 56 in. (106 × 142.2 cm)

one long dominated by a patriarchal obsession with what she and Nelson concur is the "outward thrust," or what, in capitalist terms, could also be called the output or product. The process that happens inwards—scientific yet also possessed of a sense of magic, obscure but revealing as well—is an invitation to relinquish our fixation on the senses and suspend disbelief.

Gestational relationality allows space for the uncanny and wonderous. In *Broad's Cast 7* (2025), the seventh episode of a radio broadcast originally aired on Lookout FM, Nour Mobarak recorded with a microphone the inside of her vagina while pregnant (fig. 3). What we hear—ostensibly what the fetus hears—is not the type of saccharine words prescribed by parenting books but a mix of muddled sounds: some mundane and ordinary, others hauntingly abstract and beautiful. What we do not hear, at least not conspicuously, are the biological sounds of Mobarak's body or their fetus. Unlike monitoring devices that reproduce womb sounds, the point here is not to track the gestation of the fetus—that is, the microphone is not an apparatus of surveillance. Quite the opposite: the hours-long recording samples the outside world to the fetus. In bringing life from the outside in, Mobarak gestates a sound environment that dissolves the limits between outer and inner—between the world of the parent and that of the fetus. Yet here, it is sound that

Fig. 3. Nour Mobarak in her backyard in Los Angeles, recording with a microphone inside her body for the series *Broad's Cast* (2024–25)

forms the nexus of this relationship, expanding the basis of kinship beyond blood and genes.

Inner workings that come to life through collaborative partnerships—that is gestational relationality. This principle can also be observed in the broadcasting of seeds, assisted by the reverb of sound, in the work of Ash Arder (pp. 66–67). The idea resonates as well in the sculptures of Young Joon Kwak, where the process of casting body parts from their queer and trans friends becomes a gesture of gestating complicity and protection (pp. 310–11, 313–16). Gestational relationality also emerges in even more unexpected ways, as in Carmen De Monteflores's shaped canvases from the late 1960s (pp. 158–64) and her daughter Andrea Fraser's *Untitled (Objects)* (pp. 174–75, 179), a work made up of five wax sculptures of infants and deeply symbolic of her relationship to her mother's art. Never before exhibited together, these two artists—more specifically, their works—develop a shared conversation around care, value, and love, a dialogue made possible only through the close physical proximity of their works within the space of the Biennial.

FERAL MUSINGS

In 1993, German-born artist Rosemarie Trockel responded to Joseph Beuys's dictum "Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler" (every man is an artist) with her own cheeky rejoinder, "Jedes Tier ist eine Künstlerin" (every animal is a female artist).[11] By switching the main terms in Beuys's aphorism to "animal" and "female," Trockel not only complicates seemingly clear-cut binaries such as man/woman and human/animal, she also adds a layer of irreverence, disobedience, and rebelliousness that I interpret as *feral*. By using this oft-maligned term to describe Trockel's lampooning of Beuys's words, I insist on stressing art's capacity to renounce kinships that reinforce hierarchical models.

The term *feral*, more than *wild*, refuses domesticity and normativity. It sharpens the tension between what is acceptable and what carries risk, or even between what is normal and those deviations often categorized as weird. The video animation *Hound* (fig. 4) by Taína H. Cruz alternates scenes between a female human figure wearing a blazer and a black dog. A text-to-speech voiceover describes the hound's insatiable appetite for raw

meat and "rare new treats." The dog seems to serve as a metaphor for the woman—phenotypically white despite her dark brown skin—who is urged by a lookalike to "not eat the hound" but "eat this instead." The video then cuts to a Black woman with her dog while the voice repeats "woof" insistently. In a burger joint, the blazer-clad woman laughs uncontrollably as another voice chants, "eat more, eat a lot, stuff yourself with meat, eat now and keep eating," like a spell. The sequence culminates in a dance ritual where the women reappear as green-skinned avatars—a demon and a witch—celebrating the hound's primal instincts to eat and cavort. In the closing scene, the main woman appears in Central Park with a glow cast around her while the narrator embraces the hound "to savor life's simple pleasures."[12]

Like Trockel before her, Cruz's carnivorous, dare we say cannibalistic, spellbound hound foregrounds the disruptive power of the animal–female figure to unsettle categories of respectability. The bitch at the center of *Hound* refuses to comply with any sense of domesticated order. Instead, the work unleashes the generative potential to forge new kinships, in this case between woman and dog, while reveling in the pleasures of primordial behaviors. To be feral, like the hound in Cruz's video, is to inhabit a space beyond the confines of normative humanity, a place where instinct, desire, and disobedience take precedence over civility. This ferality recalls Jacques Derrida's assertion that "the gaze called 'animal' offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man."[13] In embracing this gaze, and the destabilizing potential it holds, Cruz's *Hound* proposes a new mode of being—a state in which human–animals no longer ask permission to be weird and odd, especially when faced with the conditions of living on the brink.

ENDLING

The menagerie of creatures discussed in this essay, and that feature prominently in the 2026 Whitney Biennial, can best be described as odd or weird. Cruz's *Hound*, for example, exceeds the limits of what is normally understood as a dog (or female for that matter), demanding therefore a new framework of meaning. As Mark Fisher has observed, "The sense of *wrongness* associated with the weird—the conviction that *this does not belong*—is often a sign that we are in the presence of the new."[14] It is fitting, then, to speak of strange creatures in odd kinships at a time so often characterized as weird. "We're living in weird times" was a common refrain heard in the more than three hundred studio visits made by my co-curator, Drew Sawyer, and me—the platitude ironically draining the word of its force. What did impress on me the eerie mood or tension of this exhibition, however, was a phrase Drew shared midway through our curatorial process (its own kind of a symbiotic intraspecies exchange, I might add), originally said by Charles Addams, illustrator of the Addams Family, and often misattributed to Morticia: "What is normal for the spider is chaos for the fly." But on the eve of this Biennial, in the sliver of time right before the end, one must ask: who is the spider, and who the fly?

Fig. 4. Taína H. Cruz, still from *Hound*, 2023. High-definition video, color, and sound; 5:23 min.

1 T. Coraghessan Boyle, "Chicxulub," *New Yorker*, March 1, 2004, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/03/01/chicxulub.

2 Although the ideas advanced by Morton and Haraway surrounding multispecies relationality have circulated for more than a decade and been taken up by many other scholars, as Drew Sawyer and I conducted our curatorial research, the theme was a preoccupation too present among artists to leave unexamined.

3 Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 6.

4 Donna Haraway, *Making Oddkin: Story Telling for Earthly Survival*, October 23, 2017, video, 1:34, uploaded by Yale University, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-iEnSztKu8.

5 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 4.

6 John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," in *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 4.

7 Ibid., 9.

8 Ibid., 2.

9 Emilie Louise Gossiaux, email communication with the author, May 29, 2025. The evocation of a joyous afterlife would become more poignant with the death of London, at age fifteen, a few months later.

10 Jasmin Sian, quoted in this volume.

11 Trockel's phrase was the title of an artist book published by AB Propexus on the occasion of the artist's exhibition at the no-longer-extant Anders Tornberg Gallery in Lund, Sweden, in 1993.

12 With some of the scenes set in Central Park, it is impossible not to think of the 2020 incident when a white woman, Amy Cooper, called 911, falsely accusing a Black man and birdwatcher, Christian Cooper, of threatening her life after the latter had asked her to leash her dog while in the Ramble, a semi-wild section of the park known as a haven for migrating birds. The tense encounter between the two Coopers happened on May 25, 2020, Memorial Day, the same day George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis. See Sarah Maslin Nir, "How 2 Lives Collided in Central Park, Rattling the Nation," *New York Times*, June 14, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/nyregion/central-park-amy-cooper-christian-racism.html.

13 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 12.

14 Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), 10.

FEELING INFRA-STRUCTURE

DREW SAWYER

Aziz Hazara, *I am looking for you like a drone, my love* (detail), 2021. UV print on paper, 78 ⅞ × 590 ½ in. (180 × 1,500 cm)

Canceled flights, closed roads, stalled trains, and faltering signals. It has become cliché to note that systems recede into the background of our awareness—until they fail. Yet my co-curator, Marcela Guerrero, and I were acutely aware of how the more than three hundred studio visits we made in preparation for this Biennial exhibition were enabled—and at times undone—by the web of public and private infrastructures on which our research depended. Of course, these small inconveniences are nothing in comparison to the greater sense of infrastructural collapse that we currently inhabit—from Israel's destruction of the most basic infrastructures for survival in Gaza (fig. 1) to the dismantling of liberal forms of governance to climate disasters that are ripping open the seams of already precarious systems. This may be why the topic of infrastructure has become so insistently present in recent years, across scholarly discourse and political debate.[1] Noting that we live in "a scene shaped by the infrastructural breakdown of modernist practices of resource distribution, social relation, and affective continuity," the literary critic Lauren Berlant reframes the terrain altogether.[2] Infrastructure, for them, is not reducible to bridges, pipelines, or prisons, nor to the cloud servers that now underpin our work and communication. It is, rather, "the living mediation of what provides the consistency of life in the ordinary."[3] In this sense, infrastructure is both technical and affective; it regulates not only the circulation of goods and bodies, but also social norms and relations.

It is tempting—especially within the context of large-scale contemporary art exhibitions—to view such a moment through the lens of crisis, of temporary upheaval. Yet in many parts of the world (including the United States), crisis is less an exception than the ordinary process of survival: infrastructures fail continually, sometimes by design, and people improvise ways to adjust or simply carry on.[4] And thus I find myself returning to theorist Venkatesh Rao's notion of the "permaweird" as a descriptor for the present moment in history. A pointed alternative to terms like "polycrisis," "permacrisis," and "omnicrisis," the permaweird suggests that both crisis and normalcy are illusions—inventions, it might be said, of magical thinking. For Rao, "an undirected sense of generalized crisis is a kind of nostalgia for an imagined present" when reality is too complex and global for us to be attached to any sense of stability.[5]

This feeling of the dissolution of "the normal" resonates with Berlant's conclusion that the United States now lives without a once-prevalent "national sentimentality": citizens' belief that they had something in common simply by virtue of being American.[6] One of this year's Biennial artists, Michelle Lopez, manifests this sense of collapse with her immersive video installation *Pandemonium* (2025; pp. 320–22), which features a tornado of animated debris and archival material, including American flags and newspaper headlines. In recent years, a slow unraveling of a shared sentimentality has similarly oriented the art world. The usual infrastructures of the art ecosystem—galleries, fairs, biennials, museums, publications, MFA programs—still stand, but increasingly as sites of ambivalence, complaint, and fatigue (fig. 2).[7] For some, the state of these fixtures registers as a kind of crisis; for others, this is just the air we now breathe. Still, as Marcela and I found through our numerous studio visits, artists go on making work—not out of naivete or resolve, but from a kind of everyday persistence.

Fig. 1. Aerial view of damage around the Al-Shifa Hospital, Gaza City, Palestine. April 1, 2024

Like all curators of Whitney Biennials before us, Marcela and I were engaged with a particular set of questions that we carried with us during our travels and conversations, returning to them as an anchor. What does it mean for a biennial—charged with surveying contemporary American art—to take form in such a moment of uncertainty and fracture? Could the exhibition cohere around a sense of incoherence? We began our research by trying to resist the lure of predetermined frameworks, such as a theme or essays, which so often foreclose more than they reveal. Rather, we wanted our encounters with artists to guide us, allowing our conversations with them to shape the exhibition rather than fitting their works into a preexisting container. This is one reason why, in lieu of commissioned essays for this catalogue, we asked each of the Biennial's invited artists to have a conversation with someone they trust, thereby foregrounding the artists' own voices and ideas about their work. These conversations—conducted with other artists, curators, writers, teachers—also reveal another frame: the larger network of relations that make up the art world. Marcela and I fantasized about dismantling other discursive scaffolds. What if the exhibition abandoned didactics altogether, allowing visitors to move through an unmapped constellation of artworks on their own terms and in relation to one another? But the frame—reconsidered and reconfigured as it may be—is still a useful, and necessary, armature.

Fig. 2. Art Basel Miami, Miami Beach Convention Center, FL. December 4, 2024

Fig. 3. United States oil executives and cabinet members, including Secretary of Energy Chris Wright (second from left), at a gas facility in Plaquemines Parish, LA. March 6, 2025

And it is in many ways immutable. This was made apparent toward the end of our curatorial research when, in May 2025, the Whitney canceled *No Aesthetic Outside My Freedom*, a performance organized by Fadl Fakhouri, Noel Maghathe, and Fargo Tbakhi in conjunction with the museum's Independent Study Program (ISP) capstone exhibition. Structured as a ritual of mourning for Palestinians amid the war in Gaza, the performance had, in an earlier iteration, included an introduction in which one of the performers called for those who believe in Israel or the United States in any form to leave the room. The Whitney cited this demand as a breach of community standards.[8] In an era during which political expression is increasingly scrutinized, and under a federal administration that penalizes universities and detains foreign students for pro-Palestinian speech, institutions face growing pressure to manage risk. For the Whitney, the artists' directive crossed a threshold—not of politics, but of emotion and community protocols. (It bears noting that the related ISP exhibition, which remained on view after the canceled performance, included work by Palestinian artists that challenged the war and the Israeli occupation.)

What does it mean to operate independently of institutions, of infrastructures? In the aftermath of the ISP event, Marcela and I encountered a terrain of hesitation and wariness toward the institution; still, we hoped to find spaces for dialogue. Ultimately, understanding persisted and conversations opened. Even as governments and powerful actors dismantle public institutions, many artists have reaffirmed their commitments to these institutions as important, even though imperfect, sites of democratic ideals, recognizing that organizations are also made up of individuals. One such artist, Emilio Martínez Poppe, responds to the accelerating closures of arts organizations under social, financial, and political strain. He poses the question: What if art institutions conceived of their endings as part of their responsibility of care? By imagining the institution's lifespan from the perspective of its eventual demise rather than of perpetual maintenance, his work maps its labor of reproduction—convening conversations with constituents, outlining legal procedures of dissolution, and giving voice to those accountable for its afterlife (p. 356).

While Marcela and I intentionally resisted confining this Biennial to a strict overarching theme, we found that many of the artists we encountered were, like us, drawn to the idea of infrastructure—in both the traditional sense as well as in line with Berlant's notion of "living mediation." Amid the ongoing climate crisis and intensifying forms of resource extraction and deregulation, systems of energy emerged as particularly concerning—systems with extensive psychological, ecological, and political force (fig. 3). Examples include Sung Tieu's sound installation that evokes the violence of fracked gas pipelines in West Virginia and Pennsylvania (p. 451), Akira Ikezoe's playful paintings that reimagine

Fig. 4. Satellite image taken in the aftermath of US airstrikes at Iran's Isfahan Nuclear Technology Center. June 22, 2025

nuclear power-plant diagrams (pp. 270–71, 274–75), Nani Chacon's steel-lattice electrical transmission towers that suggest Diné deities (pp. 118–20), and Ash Arder's solar-powered refrigerators stocked with perishable sculptures (p. 64, 69).

We also observed a growing number of artists engaging critically with the vestiges of civic infrastructure and the idea of "the commons," attuned to the ways in which withdrawal of state funding and the decreasing number of public spaces have altered the conditions for collective life and political belonging. Martínez Poppe's 2025 *Civic Views* project (pp. 350–54) peers through municipal office windows in Philadelphia to bridge the bureaucratic divide between public servant and citizen. Mo Costello has photographed clusters of staples dotting telephone poles across Georgia, each staple a remnant of public address (p. 149). Other artists intervene in the mechanisms through which public space is enclosed and regulated. In his native New York City, David L. Johnson removes rules-of-conduct signs as well as metal spikes affixed to standpipes to obstruct sitting—fragments of hostile architecture designed to discipline public behavior (pp. 294–96, 298–301). Kainoa Gruspe similarly appropriates objects from private golf courses and resorts in his native Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi, incorporating them into sculptures that also function as door-stops—metaphors for openness in the face of increasing privatization (pp. 214–15).

The art historian Claire Bishop has recently charted how the word "intervention" has traveled over the past decades: once shorthand for avant-garde artistic disruption, it has become equally associated with covert US maneuvers to reshape foreign governments.[9] The double meaning is telling, especially in Latin America, where artistic strategies and geopolitical incursions have long been intertwined. This connection surfaces in the work of Ignacio Gatica. Born in Chile, where the United States engaged in extensive clandestine governmental and economic interventions in the 1970s to prevent the rise of Socialist leader Salvador Allende, Gatica's work traces the dissemination of neoliberal ideologies across both Santiago and New York (pp. 190–91, 193–95).

The United States has long coupled the export of economic policies and democratic ideals with the exercise of hard power—a partnership of liberal governance and imperial force. In his 2019 treatise *How to Hide an Empire*, the historian Daniel Immerwahr calls the United States a "pointillist empire": a web of some eight hundred military bases and territories that have enabled not only wars and coups but also communication networks and supply chains (fig. 4).[10] Thinking about this type of infrastructure, Marcela and I brought another question into our research: What would it mean to foreground artists whose practices were developed in locations entangled with the tentacles of US empire—without reducing their perspectives to identity or moral accounting? Could these voices be held within the context of a survey of American art? Alongside artists from the United States, we invited participants from Afghanistan, Canada, Chile, Iraq, Okinawa, Palestine, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Vietnam, and elsewhere—places marked by the reach of US power. Many of these artists' works do not offer clear critique or narrative conclusions; instead, they engage the residues of empire abstractly, poetically, or ambivalently, making space for forms of relation that are intimate, strained, and unresolved.

Mao Ishikawa, for example, was born in US-occupied Okinawa, where she documented the lives of Black GIs stationed near Koza City in the 1970s—a world she knew firsthand, working as a bartender in the clubs they frequented (pp. 278–79, 281–83). Her photographs, both diaristic and intrepid, reveal friendships, romances, and domestic intimacies.[11] Afghanistan-born artist Aziz Hazara's ongoing *Coming Home* project involves shipping several tons of garbage from the former US Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan to the United States (p. 25).[12] By reversing the supply chains of war, the work forces an encounter with the debris and detritus left behind by decades of military occupation.

While the United States continues to assert power through military force and economic policy, the present increasingly runs on infrastructures of exception—territorial carve-outs where sovereignty and democratic governance are suspended to serve multinational corporations, financial elites, and speculative development. As the historian Quinn Slobodian details in his 2023 volume *Crack-Up Capitalism*, libertarian radicals celebrate this fragmentation as a kind of freedom, even as it fuses authoritarian control with radical market deregulation.[13] In 2025, Slobodian was a guest on *Doomscroll*, the artist Joshua Citarella's podcast exploring online cultures and politics, which has also featured journalist Ezra Klein and scholar Catherine Liu, among others (pp. 134–35, 137).

Fig. 5. A new Amazon Web Services facility in New Carlisle, IN, where the company plans to build around thirty data centers. June 3, 2025

Citarella's art practice probes the circulation of radical ideologies online, creating works that map how extremist and fringe political movements emerge, mutate, and organize within the digital infrastructures of social media memes, forums, and platforms.

With particular focus on the infrastructures of tech, the economist Yanis Varoufakis has argued that we are entering an era of "technofeudalism"—a political–economic order in which the exigencies of monopolistic tech giants supplant the dynamics of market competition (fig. 5). In this system, wealth accumulation no longer hinges on profit but on "cloud rent"—secured through control of data, digital enclosures, and platforms.[14] This strange state of affairs takes uncanny form in Zach Blas's 2023 project *Cultus* (pp. 86–87, 89, 92–93), a five-channel video installation—crafted with CGI, motion-capture, and AI-generated imagery—that explores how AI is endowed with godlike powers, supporting beliefs in transcendence and devotion, judgment and extraction. Eschewing moralism, Blas uses humor and campy horror to draw viewers into uneasy rituals, exploring our own pleasure and ambivalence—or willing submission—around these extractive forces.

Marcela and I visited Blas's studio in Toronto early in our research, and his engagement with such affective modes turned out to be a crucial orientation point for our thinking as we continued our work. In the ensuing months, we found ourselves returning less to

questions of theme than to the idea of atmosphere: How should this exhibition *feel*? What might it mean for a biennial to register the "texture" of the present—not through declarative content but through mood, tone, and the inevitably transformative pressures of each work's proximity to the next? The art critic Kristian Vistrup Madsen, in his 2024 essay "Mood over Content," posits that art's current quality lies in its ability to evoke mood—an "excess" that subtly "situates and undoes you for a moment."[15] While Madsen narrows "mood" to what might be categorized as matters of taste, I would expand it to encompass a wider set of artistic and curatorial practices concerned with assembling total environments—ones that have the potential to generate emotions and responses that exceed those elicited by any singular objects on view. For this Biennial, our aim was not to illustrate issues as such but to compose a set of moods that resonate with the turbulent existential weather of the United States: angst, terror, amusement, ecstasy, nonchalance, and ambivalence, among others. The artworks in this exhibition engage senses beyond the visual—sound, scent, touch—creating what we hope are fruitfully discordant environments.

Consider, for example, the turn to cuteness—the diminutive and ostensibly unthreatening aesthetic tendency that circulates easily through global commodity cultures.[16] Several artists in this Biennial mobilize cuteness as a tactic for navigating the contradictions of intimacy, threat, and appeal. The collective CFGNY (which can stand for "Cute Fucking Gay New York," among other things) often incorporates handmade stuffed animals in their work as stand-ins for queer and racialized subjects (pp. 112–13). Precious Okoyomon's installation features dozens of stuffed animals dangling in midair from nooses; handcrafted from discarded toys and adorned with feathers, the creatures appear both angelic and menacing (pp. 390–91, 393, 397). Pat Oleszko's colorful inflatable sculptures are reminiscent of children's toys or parade floats, but they're also grotesquely oversized, unruly, and often anatomically absurd (pp. 398–99, 403). For these artists, cuteness disarms viewers even as it often satirizes power structures, using the charge (and charm) of adorableness to smuggle in influence.

In Berlant's formulation, both affect and infrastructure shape relationality: this notion became a key to our thinking around the Biennial. In the end, Marcela and I invited an intergenerational and international group of fifty-six artists, duos, and collectives, whose works engage with or explore various forms of being in relation—from geopolitical to societal to familial to interspecies (as Marcela discusses in her essay in this volume). Perhaps unsurprisingly, their practices do not cohere into a singular aesthetic or approach. Could we, as curators, resist the urge to resolve contradiction into a unified argument or aesthetic—or, even more problematic, default to taste or fashion? Our collaboration gravitated toward consensus, but Marcela and I also often disagreed, nudging each other beyond the comforts of personal preference and leaning into a productive friction. Listening, both to one another and to the artists, was an important part of our research. And listening, in the literal sense, has also become central to many artistic practices: this year's Biennial includes a number of sound pieces, such as installations by Tieu, Cooper

Jacoby, Jose Maceda, Oswaldo Macia, and Nour Mobarak. Being attentive to new ideas is of course integral to the process; the curatorial collaboration with Marcela helped to ensure that our eyes and ears remained open.

Over the course of our year-plus of planning, the conversations Marcela and I had circled around language for describing modes of being together in difference. Marcela homed in on "oddkin"—a purposeful kinship among disparate elements—while I found myself returning to Andy Warhol's phrase "misfitting together," which the art historian Douglas Crimp borrowed as a term for a mode of cultural and social existence in which fragments and differences coexist without seamless unity.[17] The artists in this Biennial—like the infrastructures and affects they grapple with—refuse to resolve into stability. To inhabit their moods is to allow ourselves the experience of misfitting together.

1 See for example Marina Vishmidt's recent essays "Infrastructural Critique: Between Reproduction and Abolition," *e-flux*, no. 155 (June 23, 2025), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/155/675808/infrastructural-critique-between-reproduction-and-abolition; and "From Speculation to Infrastructure: Material and Method in the Politics of Contemporary Art," *On Curating*, no. 58 (March 2024), https://www.on-curating.org/issue -58-reader/from-speculation-to-infrastructure-material-and-method-in-the-politics-of-contemporary-art.html. See also Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson, *Abundance* (New York: Avid Reader Press/Simon & Schuster, 2025); Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London and New York: Verso, 2014); Michael Truscello, *Infrastructural Brutalism: Art and the Necropolitics of Infrastructure* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020); and Kelly Mee Rich, Nicole M. Rizzuto, and Susan Zieger, eds., *The Aesthetic Life of Infrastructure: Race, Affect, Environment* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2022).

2 Lauren Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 25.

3 Ibid., 20.

4 Berlant points this out in her discussion of infrastructure. Berlant, *On the Inconvenience*, 21.

5 Venkatesh Rao, "The Permaweird," *Contraptions*, January 14, 2023), https://contraptions.venkateshrao.com/p/the-permaweird.

6 See "Why Chasing the Good Life Is Holding Us Back, with Lauren Berlant," *Big Brains* podcast, November 4, 2019, 24:54 min., https://news.uchicago.edu/podcasts/big-brains/why-chasing-good-life-holding-us-back-lauren-berlant.

7 Numerous essays about this lack of coherence have been published in recent years. One of the most widely debated is Dean Kissick's "The Painted Protest: How Politics Destroyed Contemporary Art," *Harper's*, December 2024, https://harpers.org/archive/2024/12/. For a response, see Ajay Kurian, "Make Art Great Again? A Response to the Nostalgia and Backlash in Dean Kissick's Clickbait Manifesto," *Cultured*, December 4, 2024, https://www.cultured-mag.com/article/2024/12/04/critics-table-dean-kissick-identity-art-harpers-response/.

8 "This decision was not about the topics discussed, but because their presentation violated the standards agreed to by all members of our community, including ISP participants." Whitney Museum statement, quoted in Brian Boucher, "Whitney Museum Cancels Pro-Palestine Performance at Its Storied Independent Study Program," *Artnet*, May 19, 2025, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/whitney-museum-cancels-palestine-performance-independent-study-program-2646893.

9 Claire Bishop, *Disordered Attention: How We Look at Art and Performance Today* (New York: Verso, 2024).

10 Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

11 The art historian Joan Kee underscores that Ishikawa's photographs far exceed matters of geopolitics and cannot be reduced to the logics of submission and domination implied by war and imperial power. See Kee, *The Geometries of Afro Asia: Art Beyond Solidarity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 107–22.

12 Part of the project was commissioned for the 2022 Carnegie International, which itself considered the concept of "internationalism" in the context of US interventions around the world; that exhibition was an important precedent for this Biennial's framing as well. See Ryan Inouye, Sohrab Mohebbi, and Talia Heiman, eds., *Is It Morning for You Yet? 58th Carnegie International* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, 2022).

13 Quinn Slobodian, *Crack-Up Capitalism: Market Radicals and the Dream of a World Without Democracy* (New York: Macmillan, 2023).

14 See Yanis Varoufakis, *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2024).

15 The concept draws on Viennese art historian Alois Riegl's 1899 concept of "Die Stimmung als Inhalt der Modernen Kunst," or "Mood as Content." Kristian Vistrup Madsen, "Mood over Content," *Kunstkritikk*, October 18, 2024, https://kunstkritikk.com/mood-over-content/.

16 On cuteness as an aesthetic and affective category in late capitalism, see Sianne Ngai *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Sianne Ngai, ed., *The Cute* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022); and Amy Ireland and Maya B. Kronic, *Cute Accelerationism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2024).

17 Douglas Crimp, "Misfitting Together," in *"Our Kind of Movie": The Films of Andy Warhol* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 102, 109. This idea echoes the critic and curator Mi You's recent assessment in her book *Art in a Multipolar World*, which maps the erosion of the assumed universality of Western-centric narratives, replaced instead by multipolar infrastructures of meaning shaped by shifting geopolitical alignments. What she advocates is less resolution than cohabitation: the possibility that contradictory positions might persist simultaneously, held together without synthesis. It is, in its way, a proposal for peace—not consensus, but coexistence. You, *Art in a Multipolar World* (Kassel, Germany: Documenta Institute and Hatje Cantz, 2024).

IN CONV
ERSATION

Until we became fire and fire us, 2023–ongoing. Multichannel high-definition video, color, and sound, 32 min.; steel panels; sublimation prints on chiffon; and archival inkjet prints. Installation view, *Nebula*, Fondazione In Between Art Film at Complesso dell'Ospedaletto, Venice, Italy, 2024

Right: *May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth: Only sounds that tremble through us*, 2022. Multichannel high-definition video, color, and sound, 34:40 min.; steel and concrete panels; and custom seating. Installation view, *Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou-Rahme: The song is the call, and the land is calling*, Copenhagen Contemporary, Denmark, 2024

BORN 1983
IN NICOSIA, CYPRUS;
LIVES IN BROOKLYN, NY,
AND PALESTINE

BORN 1983
IN BOSTON;
LIVES IN BROOKLYN, NY,
AND PALESTINE

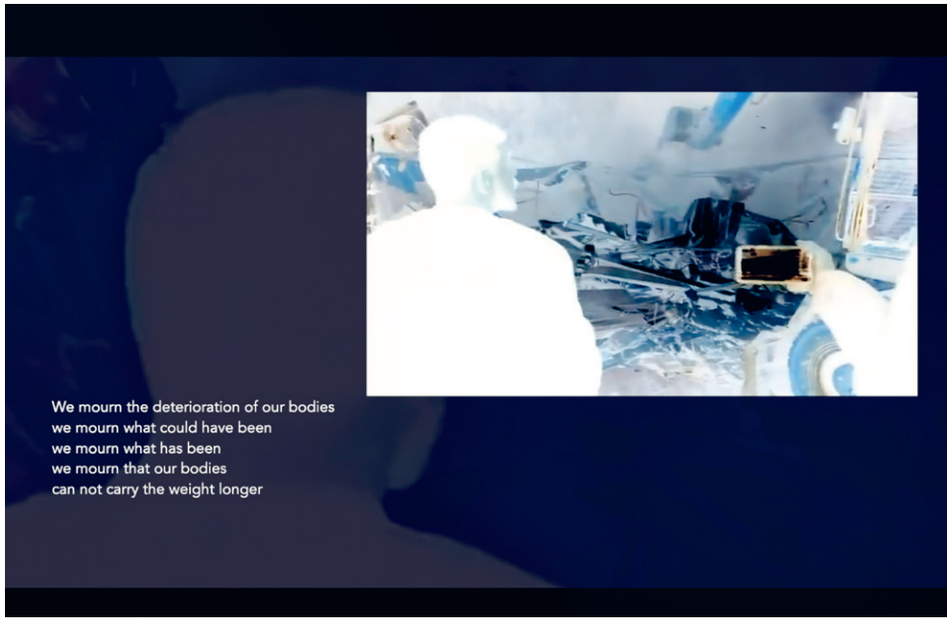
BASEL ABBAS AND RUANNE ABOU-RAHME

NASRIN HIMADA: Your work *After everything is extracted* [2024] is part of your larger project *May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth* [2020–ongoing]. Could you talk about how these works engage the idea of "being in the negative"?

RUANNE ABOU-RAHME: "Being in the negative" comes from the condition of being Palestinian. The dehumanization, the violence of hypervisibility, the denial and erasure put you in a state of being in the negative, of constantly lacking. It's a space of disposability, a space where you're rendered *less-than*, where violence is rendered justifiable. It's understanding those kinds of conditions of oppression, of continued dispossession—and what you do under those conditions. To become the negative is essentially to refuse these terms. [Theorist and poet] Fred Moten would say it's a refusal of that which has been refused to you.

For us, what's critical is the movement from being in the negative to inhabiting the negative space as a site of potential resistance. How can you refuse the terms of a system of racial capitalism and colonialism that is constantly killing you in various ways? The refusal of those terms and that language is very important to becoming the negative.

BASEL ABBAS: *After everything is extracted* came out during the COVID lockdown. Essentially, the idea of resisting your erasure—as a Palestinian, you are born into this form of resistance—became something that other people could relate to through the lockdown, and through a virus that was killing people without any accountability.



Still from *After everything is extracted*, 2024–ongoing. Three-channel high-definition video, color, and sound; 20:24 min.

NH: With your work, I find, the limitations of language end up providing an opening that becomes very generative. Much of your work is conditioned by the process and by many elements that you introduce into it. The color purple, for example, takes over and becomes almost its own being, shaping how we engage with the installation.

RAR: The purple comes from asking, "What would seeing in the negative open up?" When we started to take images and put them in the negative, it felt like we were seeing things that we would not see otherwise. We were looking at things at an almost molecular level. That became an important aspect of how we work with images.

The text in *After everything is extracted* is, in a way, foundational for how we approach the aesthetics and the politics of what we're making, why we're making it, and the way we're thinking about it.

We are the negative unbound. And the work is also constantly trying to become unbound—essentially, to resist colonial capture.

BA: Text is a central element that drives our work, but we are always pushing against the limitations of text through forms like sound and image. In Palestine, sound—with its ability to resonate and penetrate walls, to be unbound—can really open your horizon. Because in Palestine, your horizon is literally severed visually, and sound is a generative way to resist that.

NH: You've said in the past that the work is responding to a call and also putting out a call. I think that's connected to something you once told me, Basel: the main question is, "Why do we do what we do, and for whom?" It's hard to think about that right now.

RAR: To date [August 2025], Israel has killed more than 240 journalists, preventing images, stories, and testimonies and voices from emerging out of Gaza. I think the call becomes clearer, louder, because we cannot separate the destruction of people and places from the material and cultural erasure that is happening. The struggle is waking up every day to the horrors of the genocide and continuing to try to make work that answers the call for liberation. We're so exhausted and enraged and in pain over the genocide that answering that call becomes harder.

BA: I push against limitations by creating the work. But in the circulation of it, there's anxiety about co-option, which we try to resist through the work itself. Virtual spaces become very significant; we are constantly trying to transform the work from virtual to physical and other media.

NH: You've talked about the conundrum of being visible and invisible at the same time. I think we're seeing that even more now, as we think about the circulation and oversaturation of images and how, even from afar, we're all positioned—in an intense way—as witnesses, or spectators. I'm thinking especially about people who work in image-based practices. How does your work cut through that?

RAR: We've always had an issue with the idea of "witnessing": there's something so passive in that. We see ourselves as being engaged in the struggle for dignity and freedom and a liberated Palestine. We're answering a call that comes from our community, including from people who have been killed. In making the work, that call gets amplified.

BA: Multiplied.

RAR: We are accountable to our communities, which are trying to survive this hundred-year project of the obliteration of Palestine.

The call that's been on my mind recently, a call I'm responding to right now, is the last will and testament of the journalist Anas al-Sharif, who was killed by Israel on August 10, 2025. That is a very tangible example of what I mean by "answering a call": al-Sharif implored people to continue in the struggle, despite all the attempts to silence and to erase.

NH: There's also the call of so many Gazans: "It's not enough to feel with us. You have to tell our stories."

You've talked about your projects as part of supporting other people's practices, and entangling your own practice with others—through publication projects, and in how you collaborate in your own installations with dancers and musicians.

Until we became fire and fire us, 2023–ongoing. Multichannel high-definition video, color, and sound, 32 min.; steel panels; custom seating; sublimation prints on chiffon and polyester; and digital prints on metal. Installation view, Sharjah Biennial 15, Thinking Historically in the Present, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 2023

BA: Every project becomes a way of being with community, responding to community, and multiplying the call. It's important to add that when we say "our community," it starts in Palestine, but it expands beyond that. That's another element that we have also insisted on in our practice: not to ghettoize the Palestinian condition, but to open it up and bring others into it. It's about reading the world from Palestine.

RAR: It's important for us to make connections to communities that are dispossessed and to look at a global system of eco-fascism and racial capitalism. The genocide in Palestine is just one very concentrated situation. But of course,

Until we became fire and fire us, 2023–ongoing. Multichannel high-definition video, color, and sound, 32 min.; steel panels; sublimation prints on chiffon; and archival inkjet prints. Installation view, *Nebula*, Fondazione In Between Art Film at Complesso dell'Ospedaletto, Venice, Italy, 2024

just look at Sudan, Congo, and right here in America.

BA: . . . Haiti, Puerto Rico, Hawai'i . . .

NH: How do you feel when your work is shown in the West, in the States, where you are living now?

RAR: Institutions across Europe and America have failed in the face of genocide. What we see are censorship and erasure. This is not the first time—it's a continued failure. Structurally, we have no investment in these institutions, and I don't believe that, in the current structural climate, they can be reformed. It's a situation of complicity. That makes for very difficult terrain for us, because the question becomes, "Should you show, or should you not show?" Showing and not showing are strategic choices that one has to constantly revisit. I don't think it's easy or clear, especially for Palestinians at this historical juncture, where our presence and culture are being more than simply censored. There's force in instrumentalizing one's labor or withdrawing labor from institutions, and this needs to be constantly staged. It's not a moral position but a tactical assessment, given a certain political climate and what kinds of movements are happening. Our guiding principle has been to show work that we stand behind and to hold that space temporarily, without any false ideas of what the institutions are and without compromising our position, which is commitment to our people, our communities.

I think it's important to show work in America, in the heart of the apparatus that is funding this genocide. Is it easy? No. It's not a pleasant or easy situation to be in. In many ways, it would be much easier for us to say, "Okay, we're not doing shows anywhere here."

NH: Something stirred in me when I was watching *After everything is extracted*. It was about breath: an understanding of how hard it could be to breathe, the restriction of breath. But then you take us through to thinking about wind—empowering breath—and then to thinking about mourning, and the melody that's embedded in the land.

BA: I think this comes from our experience of engaging directly with the land in Palestine and thinking about our practice and our work as a form of activation as opposed to a form of documentation. That visceral experience of moving through the land and being with the land in Palestine is what we try to capture in our works.

For example, for our project *Only sounds tremble through us* [2022], we created performances in different spaces around Palestine that were under threat of being taken by settlers. There's a song for martyrs that's sung by Palestinians. At one point during a performance, one of the performers started humming that melody . . . and two birds came and perched beside her—and they started singing with her. Some weeks later, another performer sang that same melody in another location in Palestine, and again two birds came, and they sang with him! That's the kind of engagement with the land that we have experienced: a magic that emerges from listening to the land.

RAR: When we're talking about the land, we're also thinking about birds and insects, and everything that the land contains—everything that's been buried—what it holds, what it remembers. When the birds came to sing along with that melody, it made us remember that it's not just us resisting erasure.

NH: What stirs you right now?

RAR: Right now, we're working on a project about prisoners' writings and songs in Palestine. We're working with a woman who used to sing when she was in prison. Even though she would be punished and put into solitary confinement, she continued to sing; she sang for the other prisoners. That kind of thing shows an incredible will not to be broken in impossible situations.

BA: The immense amount of knowledge that has been created by Palestinian prisoners is a main source of inspiration for me. In Palestine, the prisons are schools—and because they're schools, they are being targeted in a very intense way right now.

RAR: We've been working with a young woman who was imprisoned in so-called administrative detention, meaning there was no charge against her. In prison, she saw that all the pens and paper were confiscated so the prisoners couldn't write—so she composed things in her head and memorized them. And when she got out of prison, she wrote them down.

BA: And she memorized messages and poems and gave them to family members of other prisoners.

NH: I'm speechless . . . I feel like I need to get off this call so I can go cry.

BA: We are constantly crying.

NASRIN HIMADA is a Palestinian curator and writer currently serving as Associate Curator at Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

Monument (Regeneration) (detail), 2024–25. Flame-worked borosilicate glass and weathering steel, 78 × 22 × 22 in. (198.1 × 55.9 × 55.9 cm)

BORN 1983
IN LOS ANGELES;
LIVES IN ALTADENA, CA

KELLY AKASHI

Cultivator (Regeneration), 2023–24. Lost-wax cast crystal, flame-worked borosilicate glass, and rammed earth, 9 ½ × 12 ½ × 13 in. (24.1 × 31.8 × 33 cm)

RINDON JOHNSON: I thought it might make sense to start by talking about time and how I find your work—for lack of a better phrase—incredibly disorienting, temporally as well as spatially, in the most powerful and exciting way! Familiar forms like hands, flowers, plinths collapse materially and spatially, and you do that through language, as well as through image-making and craft. How has your relationship with materials—such as glass, bronze, words, your own hands even—evolved? How do you choose materials, and how do they resonate in your practice?

KELLY AKASHI: Okay, so everything—

Monument (Shelter), 2025. Lost-wax cast bronze, inherited doily, patinated burn-out cast bronze, and weathering steel, 46 × 26 × 9 in. (115.8 × 66 × 22.9 cm)

RJ: It's an everything question.

KA: I will answer by sidestepping your question entirely—ha!—and respond by talking about the form of the spiral, which has appeared since I started working three-dimensionally. Before that, as a photographer, I struggled to bring fixed images into lived space, wanting them to be open to time. The spiral first appeared in hand-formed candles I was making and their armatures. Later, glasswork became entangled and formless. Since spirals kept showing up in my work, my curiosity led me to study spirals created by other beings, in the form of fossils. I was interested in the interplay between materials and the way they "talked back" to me, creating situations where I couldn't fully control materials, balancing control and chaos.

The spiral as a model has helped me materialize abstract concepts like time. Time is a force we recognize through its impact on other materials in our world; spirals function similarly: their shape is recognized not just through their materiality but through the void they create as they wrap around and shape space. The spiral's assertion in my practice models my thinking about mortality, time, aging, and external forces alongside my material choices. Later, this has extended to how objects can operate in relation to inheritance and ancestral memory.

RJ: I wonder, when you talk about control and losing control—is there something in the spiral's shape, its reflexivity, that connects with tracking the passage of time as it moves through or alongside you? Is the work also interested in that reflexivity for you as a person and maker?

KA: Yes, definitely, in different ways. Materially, casting my hands over time creates unique sculptures that index my body's changes. But then, in terms of the way I approach subjects and materials—I move away from something to return to it later, reflecting with new growth, new understanding gained from moving around the spiral's bend. I appreciate the spiral because, unlike the societal push for growth for its own sake, it acknowledges past and future movement, not independent of other twists.

RJ: That makes me think of your work's relationship with the natural world and your dialogue with geological time, stone—

KA: Stone is amazing—it unhinges us from our human perception of time. It was exciting to work with a material that records time materially and to escape our very limited notion of time. Later I expanded to galactic bodies, which just make geologic time feel insignificant. Paradoxically, though, it can make you think of the significance of our interpersonal relationships on Earth, how much the things each of us do affect each other, even when we're no longer alive anymore.

RJ: This sense of deep relation brings me to inheritance and witnessing, particularly the recurring title "Witness" in your Lisson [Gallery] show in 2025.

KA: I had been working with stone and thinking about geological time, and also about my family's history, particularly about their internment during World War II. My friend David Horvitz told me that the surviving trees at the internment sites were planted by internees, and so I decided to go to Poston, in Arizona, where my family was, to visit these trees. I saw them as witnesses, not only of my father's experiences, which in geological time was like a second ago, but also of the duration between his interment and my pilgrimage. The *Witness* series began as works that engage with these trees in different ways—analog photography, bronze casts, 3D scans. I wanted to highlight the absorption of these nonhuman witnesses to events, making them primary records without human intervention, beyond their initial planting. Their nonverbal act of witnessing is important.

RJ: This is where we might slide into the distinction between "memorial" and "monument" vis-à-vis your work.

KA: I titled works in my last show "monuments" rather than "memorials." I think of memorials as being more open to active participation and change, whereas for me, a monument stands as a marker of

something past, an event or person; there's more of a fixed quality. The continued care at the internment site might designate it more as a memorial, for example, while the cast branches, if returned and fixed there, could act as a monument.

RJ: Monuments, in relation to time, feel like both time collapsers and expanders due to their fixedness. A monument has a direct address, whereas a memorial is an open-ended sentence. How do you feel about making such a direct address by naming your works "monument"?

KA: It makes me think of the subtitle of one of my works—*Monument (Shelter)* [2025]—which maintained a lot of intimacy. There was something about making a sculpture that's intimate and has a fixed but charged space. Sometimes they've been called "caverns," but now I see them more as "shelters" because I'm using my own body to create them, which generates an interesting tension. What is an "intimate monument"? Is it possible to feel intimate with a monument? That's exciting to me.

RJ: Absolutely. "Intimate monument" has a sonic intensity! Do you want to say more?

KA: I think monuments are typically supposed to represent a singular message or motivation, which for me can feel alienating. Creating intimate monuments—you know, this is something I've gravitated toward in your work, too. I feel like you take things that could be very alienating, and you give them a personal intimacy.

RJ: It makes me think of my wife calling my kid an anarchist, and me with my very American understanding of anarchist is like, *what?* But it's about flattening things out, letting things be, letting go of all the hierarchical spaces; that's what I think allows for such deep intimacy. That "letting go" makes me wonder how you feel about surprise and improvisation in your work.

KA: I usually have a plan, but I'm willing to ditch it as the work develops. This applies to life as well—looking at reality and adjusting as needed. In my work, I work with different scales of time based on deadlines, and I often start with the elements that I know will take the longest. Closer to the deadline, I leave space for quick gestures based on need. This keeps the work fresh for me; near completion, I see it anew, like others will. It also makes for something that is more open and generous to other people's "baggage." I really like artwork that welcomes "baggage" and can serve as a platform for getting into deeper ideas about existence or the natural world, inheritance, mortality—

RJ: What do you think about mortality in relation to your work? In particular, I have questions about glass and stone—

KA: The ephemerality of life, its precarity—my thinking about it changes as I get older and I'm forced to confront it in a variety of ways. I feel like I'm forced to push through fear and to stand behind the physical manifestations of it. That said, I have a really fun time debating with people the fragile nature of the materials I work with. Most people look at my work and think the glass is the most fragile, but I look at it and say the glass is going to have the best lightfast qualities, better than a lot of painting. So what are the conditions we're talking about? The environment, the engineering of it? Stone, which everyone thinks is so permanent, doesn't withstand fire well. It has nowhere to take that heat; it fractures or totally dissolves. Whereas some borosilicate glass can survive very high temperatures and some structural impact. Bronze is very strong, but it has its own weaknesses—break points, melting points—and its body indexes different impacts. Traditional patinas are bronze's natural protective shell, but some people strip it off since it also indicates undesirable aging.

RJ: As you were talking, I was thinking about your commitment to indexing your hands. How does an index play into questions of mortality?

KA: I've been indexing my hands—in wax, bronze, and in crystal glass—for ten years now, which is a good chunk of time. Hands are one of the faster-changing records on the body in terms of aging; that's why I decided to focus on them. But I've started

Installation view of *Faultline*, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, 2021

Installation view of *Kelly Akashi*, Lisson Gallery, Los Angeles, 2025

Formation, 2021. Chromogenic crystallograph in aluminum artist's frame, 22 ¼ × 34 ½ in. (56.5 × 87.5 cm)

to cast other parts of my body, too, and I'm going to be having surgery soon, so the casts will serve as a record of my body before the surgery, and then after I'm done and healed, I'll be re-indexing my body.

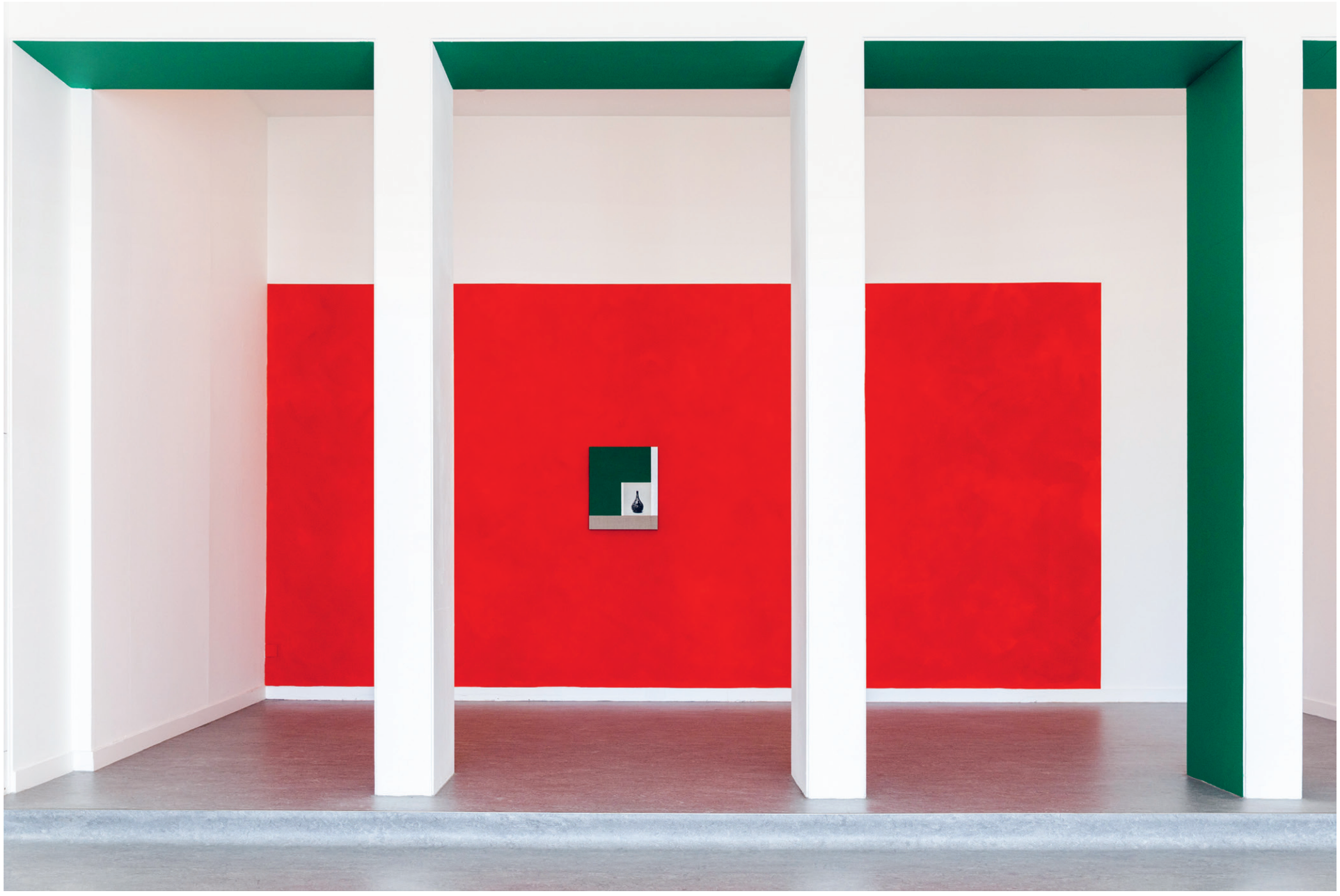
The works started, of course, with this idea about the body changing over time. It's weird to premediate that and then get to the point where, now that it's starting to happen, people are actually going to see the index of my body changing. It's hard to accept that truth in a way; it's getting harder and harder for me to compartmentalize my personal, lived experience and my practice. But this is the path I set out on. I'm at this crossroads where I ask myself, do you really mean this? And the answer is yes. Yes, I do! And I'm excited. I'm excited to continue this until I can't do it anymore.

RINDON JOHNSON is an artist.

Witness (detail), 2024–25. Eaton Fire–patinated lost-wax cast bronze and flame-worked borosilicate glass, 12 × 11 × 5 in. (30.5 × 27.9 × 12.7 cm)

BORN 1978
IN SHIRAZ, IRAN;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

KAMROOZ ARAM



Installation view of *Lives of Forms*, Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Design, and Architecture, Hasselt, Belgium, 2021

MURTAZA VALI: Ornament and the decorative have been important conceptual and formal anchors for your artistic practice. Can you outline how you approach and understand these aesthetic categories?

KAMROOZ ARAM: Although these terms are often used interchangeably, the definitions of ornament and the decorative seem to shift depending on context. Western art history has typically placed the category of decorative arts in a lower position. The modernists feared and despised it.

Beneath the Ruins, 2024. Oil, oil crayon, and pencil on linen, 66 × 76 in. (167.6 × 193 cm)

Opposite: *Domestic Composition (Biruni/Andaruni)*, 2022. Walnut-veneered medium-density fiberboard, glass, oil and pencil on linen, and ceramic objects, 48 × 36 × 8 in. (121.9 × 91.4 × 20.3 cm)

I've taken these words to be malleable, something that I can shape for my own purposes. I would say broadly that the decorative implies superfluous form, a lack of content, an empty gesture. Ornamental, on the other hand, is something I consider to be a formal characteristic; say, a pattern, repeated form, or the conflation of figure and ground as one would see in a carpet. While it can also be decorative, ornament has the potential to carry content. That said, I believe that most artworks, especially paintings, can be decorative at times, the same way that music passively occupies space when it's not actively engaged by the listener. In this understanding, even the decorative is never truly devoid of content, if we consider a mood or vibe to be a type of content.

MV: The grid is a device that you have frequently engaged with, a sort of inescapable cultural inheritance for an American abstract painter such as yourself. Its presence is sometimes invisible, though. What draws you to the grid, and what role does it play in your work?

KA: I consider the grid to be the beginning of pattern and the root of ornament. For me, the grid, like the border in most of my paintings, serves a dual purpose: it is a functional but also expressive part of the composition.

MV: If we think of pattern and ornament as a type of efflorescence, then the grid is the seed. It holds the potential for curves, meanders, and arabesques, which have become so prominent in your recent work. It's almost like a prompt for an unfurling story—the very antithesis of how Rosalind Krauss theorized the grid, as an explicitly modernist formal device because it was anti-literary, anti-narrative. Can you elaborate on the types of marks that emerge from or around the grid in your paintings, and what their relationship is to the underlying structure?

KA: While I don't want to ignore the role of the grid in modern art, it's important for us to think beyond the modern. The grid is ancient. Your description of the potential that the grid holds really resonates with how I think about the process of painting. Each stage of the painting, from the raw linen to the completed work, has a presence that I feel connected to. I prepare the canvases with a thickened gesso applied with a knife, a nod to the technique used for *stucco lustro* [Venetian plaster] and similar decorative painting processes. The primed canvas may initially appear to be flat, but one feels the presence of those marks. The grid is then drawn with pencil on this surface. I draw with oil crayon over this grid, connecting various points

with curved lines. I then erase the drawing with solvent and rags. This erasure leaves traces of the previous drawing and also begins to reveal the gesso technique on the stained canvas. I go back and forth in this process of building and destroying the drawing until I find a composition that I can work with. Often, the traces of the initial drawing remain visible in parts of the completed painting. For me, this process of erasure and rebuilding is a significant part of the content of the paintings. I used to have debates with one of my mentors in graduate school about whether there was room for politics in painting . . . perhaps this is one of the places where I found it.

MV: Though they may not declare themselves as such sometimes, the paintings are palimpsests, which I know is an important concept for you. Can you speak more about this idea, its relationship to time and history, and how that might problematize certain understandings of abstract painting?

KA: A painting is essentially an accumulation of marks on a surface. My paintings tend to reveal the history of their own making, from the texture of the gesso application and evidence of that initial grid to a single drip that might be the only surviving evidence of a color that otherwise has been painted over everywhere else on the canvas.

Over the years, I've come to realize that the process of painting, for me, has to do with history, time, memory, and change. In fact, most of my work has to do with the passage of time: our obsession with the past and how the present can be seen as an accumulation of the past. But what we know of the past is what has survived, what has been archived and remembered. And, of course, we know that memory, whether personal or cultural, is unstable.

The title of my 2010 exhibition, *Generation after Generation, Revolution after Revelation*, was an early indicator of this way of thinking about painting. Each painting undergoes the process of building, erasure, and rebuilding. Each painting struggles to survive the process of being painted, to eventually become something worthy, something complete, something alive.

MV: Over the past decade you have claimed exhibition design as a medium. What inspired this development, and how does it manifest in your work? Has this affected how you approach and view painting?

KA: I started to use exhibition design as a medium around 2017. I guess you could trace it back to the collages I began around 2009 or '10. These are made from the pages of publications documenting Iranian ceramics, usually the type of objects found in encyclopedic museums. All of the books that I used were published before 1978, which is the year that Edward Said published *Orientalism*. I was interested in how the photography and design of the books affected the way we see the objects they document. In the collages, I recontextualize the images with painting. The collages led me to think about the role of design and architecture in museums. The architecture, vitrines, and exhibition design in museums determine how the objects are viewed and understood. While this may seem like a purely aesthetic consideration, there are larger implications.

Museums that propose to be a neutral stage for the objects they display are, of course, not neutral at all. This led me to make sculptural works in which I displayed an object in front of a painting, so that the painting would take a background position to the so-called decorative object on display.

So I was working in these various media—painting, collage, sculpture—and I wanted to exhibit them together. I had seen how architects like Carlo Scarpa, Luis Barragán, and Gio Ponti used color with *stucco lustro*, wall painting, and tilework. These architects engaged decorative painting in a very serious manner; it was a significant part of the architecture. As I began to look more at the history of architectural painting, I felt like I was seeing monochromatic murals rather than merely painted walls. So I extended my painting practice into the architecture,

Composition with Lapis Lazuli, Cobalt, and Ceramic Bottle (installation view with wall painting), 2021.
Oil on linen and wood, marble, and ceramic bottle, panel: 54 × 40 in. (137.2 × 101.6 cm), pedestal: 42 × 8 × 8 in. (106.7 × 20.3 × 20.3 cm)

Installation view of *Privacy, An Exhibition*, Arts Club of Chicago, 2022

often working with decorative painters to complete the wall painting. It was a way of expanding my thinking about painting's part-time role as decorative, while also unifying these various works within the same exhibition.

MV: Some of your recent titles, of both individual works and exhibitions, feature words that feel generic yet capture our uncertain present: *anxious, unstable, indifferent*. You, of course, use these terms to problematize certain canonical art and architectural histories, especially around modernism. Their affective tenor challenges the long-held belief that abstraction and formalism were autonomous. Can you speak a bit about how your work challenges this foundational tenet of modernist painting?

KA: The titles with those specific terms were actually from about a decade ago, so maybe there was something prescient there, but you're right in pointing out that the titles are used as a clue into some of the less-explicit content; I want the titles to guide the viewer without defining the work. This ties back to earlier, when I talked about the process of painting being significant to me.

When I first engaged with abstraction as a student, I had a hard time with the idea that the content of abstract painting was painting itself. That kind of self-referential painting seemed so far from my experience; many of us didn't have the privilege of ever having been perceived as apolitical or neutral. I found that I connected much more with the period of painting after Abstract Expressionism,

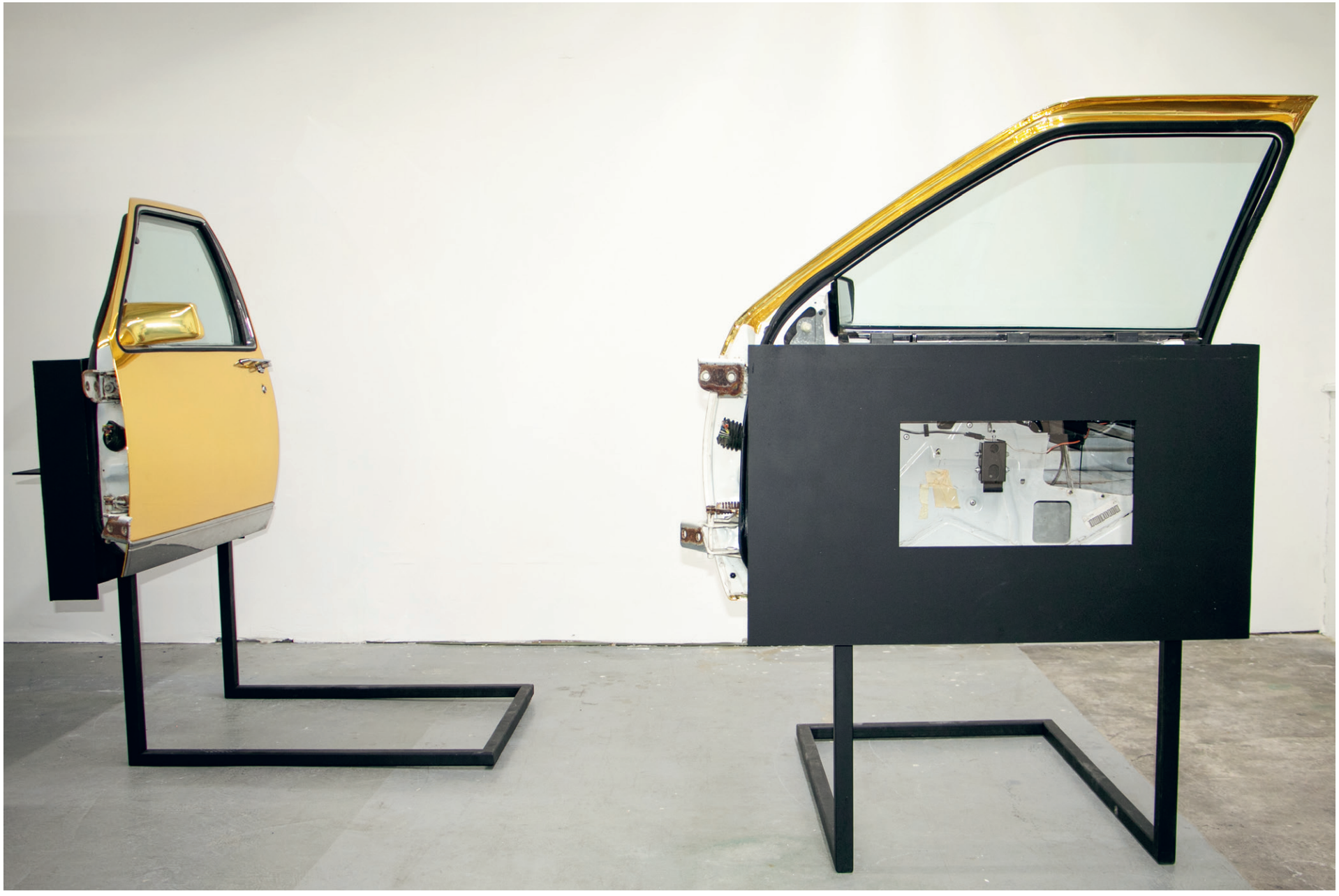
Arabesque Composition for a Distant Garden, 2021. Oil, oil crayon, and pencil on linen, three panels, overall: 96 × 148 in. (243.8 × 375.9 cm), two panels: 96 × 50 in. (243.8 × 127 cm) each, one panel: 96 × 48 in. (243.8 × 121.9 cm)

artists such as Joan Mitchell, Agnes Martin, Cy Twombly. They were working with the language of abstraction in a way that opened it up and went beyond the myth of pure painting. When I moved to New York and encountered the work of Jack Whitten, for example, I started to see that I was not alone, that there was precedent for how I was thinking about painting. Today I'm encouraged to see more artists who seem to be engaged with abstraction as something that existed before, outside of, or parallel to modernism, and continues to exist without being beholden to modern Western art-historical points of reference. There's a frequently quoted statement from Philip Guston, when he turned away from abstraction and returned to figuration. He says that he was reading about the violence in the world and then going back to his studio to adjust a red to a blue, and that this made him question what type of person he was. As a student and young artist, this really resonated with me. But today, as we watch the catastrophes pile up in our news feeds every day and we witness the darkest and most unjust time in our lives, I go to the studio and feel profoundly connected to the process of negotiating colors. It does not feel escapist; I truly believe in it. Perhaps it makes me feel more human in a time when humans feel more and more disconnected from humanity. I don't know what it is, but I actually believe in what I'm doing more than I have in as long as I can remember.

MURTAZA VALI is a writer and curator based in Brooklyn, NY, and Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.

BORN 1988
IN MUSCATAWING (FLINT, MI);
LIVES IN WAAWIYATANONG
(DETROIT, MI)

ASH ARDER



INT. HOME(S) – 1987 – HIGH NOON, 2025. Steel, 1987 Cadillac Sedan de Ville passenger door, vinyl car wrap, video monitor, media player, medium-density fiberboard, magnets, and acrylic, 64 × 45 × 57 in. (162.6 × 114.3 × 144.8 cm)

STEFANIE HESSLER: I thought we could start with the question of solar energy and how that's featured in your work, especially in recent years.

ASH ARDER: Using the sun as a catalyst for sustaining electronics has been a journey for the last decade. It started as a personal prompt, then it turned into a collective question for me and my community about changing our own lifestyles to engage more intentionally with the earth's finite resources.

Consumables (detail), 2023. Display refrigerator, solar-powered battery storage system, shea butter, butter, chocolate, plastic, and light, 19 ½ × 17 ⅜ × 20 in. (49.5 × 44.1 × 50.8 cm)

I've learned by thinking through all the ways the sun shows up as a kind of parent to all living things. Working with solar energy involves technical aspects but also gathering people and educating them and conducting rituals and performances with the sun. It's a reminder that we rely on it for more than just energy, but also for information on how to move through the world.

Some of the first technical things I picked up involved understanding how to harvest UV rays, collect energy, then how to channel that energy into battery storage to power lights, music equipment, electric bikes.

This early work showed me, first, it's possible to change my behavior towards honoring finite resources, and second, to change a small community. If we could do it, then this awareness could be scaled.

Untitled (Notes on Butter – August 4, 2023, frame 7 of 30), from the series *Notes on Butter*, 2023. Inkjet print of 35mm black-and-white film, 43 × 29 in. (109.2 × 73.7 cm)

SH: You mentioned that the use of solar energy started as a personal prompt. A lot of your work comes from such prompts, like conversations with your father and other elders about gardening. Your exhibition *Flesh Tones* [2023] also had a lot to do with your personal history and your family's connection to the history of car manufacturing in Flint and Detroit. Could you talk about the personal histories in your work, especially regarding the solar-powered refrigerator in *Consumables* [2023] and the objects inside it?

AA: My work is really always a process of understanding. I make physical objects and systems the way other artists might sketch in a notebook or fiddle around with riffs on a guitar. If I have a question about something or I'm trying to parse some theoretical concepts, I need to manifest them as physical entities to get at—rarely a solution, often more questions.

So, process and personal history: both sides of my family moved to Michigan from the US South to work in factories. My mother's family came from Mississippi; my father's from Arkansas. Both my parents worked in automotive factories; that's where they met.

For many families who participated in the Great Migration, the plant becomes almost a character, like a family member. There's always been curiosity around this factory character. That dovetails with this journey that's led to using solar-powered refrigerator technology as a microcosm of larger architectural structures.

In the first *Consumables* fridge, I asked my sister for my father's Cadillac emblem, which she kept after he passed. I spent time with it, then replicated it in butter, shea butter, chocolate, materials representing a kind of excess—things not needed for survival but that are nice to have as a treat. My family benefited from a middle-class lifestyle afforded by automotive jobs in the North, which was different from farming in the South. There's some complicated tension around benefiting from the "luxuries

of middle-class life" in Flint, where I grew up. I'm interested in acknowledging those comforts but also gently dissolving or releasing unwanted aspects of that narrative for the next generation. Placing these perishable emblems that would melt in the sun inside a solar-powered fridge creates a framework for thinking about the tension between living entities, industry, climate, earth, sun, and increasingly precarious relationships.

SH: So many tensions and contradictions! The emblem is also a reminder of Cadillac's racist policy of not selling to Black customers, which the company reversed during the Depression to specifically market to Black communities. So there's the history and presence of racism as well, which includes environmental racism.

AA: Absolutely. And the whole name Cadillac comes from the "founder" of Detroit, who stole land from the Anishinaabe people. This history of colonization, exploitation, violence, and inhumane working conditions is related to my ancestors' experiences in the Jim Crow South. I always say that my magic, my work, happens in the sunlight. Some artists are night owls; I'm definitely a sunshine, daylight girl. And so it makes sense to look at the legacy of Black musical traditions born from long hours spent under the sun, by choice or force. Whether I'm in the garden or in my studio, I retrace the steps of ancestors who spent hours under the sun. There's something about the way music starts to trickle into every type of work I make. Work songs, field hollers, and vocal traditions are alternative ways of keeping time, and those all have the sun as both collaborator and sometimes archnemesis.

SH: Maybe we can speak about the work *Broadcast* [2018–ongoing] in this context, the seedbeds—

AA: Of course. The more I started to delve into the history of blues and jazz, the more music brought me to the landscape and to the relationship between humans and plants. I started thinking about the soil as witness, site, and archive, and naturally, it took me to agriculture.

I learned that "broadcast" in agriculture refers to spreading seeds. This double meaning of broadcast—as data transmission and as perpetuation of life—inspired me. *Broadcast* is an ongoing project involving soundscapes I create as experimental archives. I activate the sculpture by playing a soundscape I composed offsite through speakers embedded in wooden boxes resembling a hybrid DJ booth/garden bed; the vibration moves seeds stored inside the sculpture onto trays of soil on top of the sculpture. After the broadcast/performance, the trays are taken and planted. I feel like it's a ritual paying homage to significant plants, like collard greens, important in the Southern diet, at least where I come from. There's something beautiful about seeds as archive and data.

SH: People and community also often play a role, be it by directly involving them or by offering them a work for use. One of your early pieces was *Whoop House* [2022], a solar-powered structure that plays back music and other sounds recorded by the community. This openness and invitation for people to enter the work is central. I'm curious about the role of people and communities in your work, how you work with relationships and design them, or think about glitches or interruptions to the ways one might normally relate.

AA: I'm always working with so many different types of materials and across so many sectors, from labs with lasers to sugarcane mills, soldering microcontrollers to weaving and working with plants. Being in multiple places and wearing multiple hats, I have to be responsive and sensitive to community. I see my artwork as a catalyst for gathering different humans, but also more than humans—plants, wildlife—into spaces to play and just be together.

The *Whoop House* is a collaboration with a good friend, Kapish Kishu Singh; she's an architect based in Detroit, but she grew up in Mississippi. We discussed how physical objects live outdoors in natural landscapes and how to scale that and make it interactive. Our conversations led to the

Broadcast #4 (detail), 2024. Wood, plastic crates, Black Bottom Detroit soil, brass, seeds, paper, speakers, mixer, drum machine, audio cables, and sound, 31 × 90 × 41 in. (78.7 × 228.6 × 104.1 cm)

idea of something being a visual, physical, and practical invitation to gather, rest, and reflect. The *Whoop House* can morph into different shapes, but it looks like steps—an exaggerated set of bright blue steps, like those that might lead to a front porch. Embedding speakers and electronics into the porch felt natural, like extending a tradition that exists across the African diaspora, whether Jamaican sound systems or tricked-out cars in various urban spaces. Rave culture in Detroit, techno culture, even the origins of hip-hop in Queens—where you have to figure out electricity, right?

Holding space for people to gather is exciting to me. Solar powering electronic objects in places lacking electrical infrastructure is exciting to me. I'm just adding onto a tradition of DIY and hacker culture that already exists. What really fascinates me most of the time is to set up objects in spaces, and then just get out of the way.

SH: That hacker/DIY ethos is key to the repurposing of things that are already in our environment. Then your work prompts us to think about these objects differently, their histories, their potential uses. On that note, is there anything you'd like to add regarding the work you're making right now?

AA: I was talking recently to a scholar whom I really admire about the tendency

INT. HOME(S) – 1987 – HIGH NOON (detail), 2025. Steel, 1987 Cadillac Sedan de Ville passenger door, vinyl car wrap, video monitor, media player, medium-density fiberboard, magnets, and acrylic, 64 × 45 × 57 in. (162.6 × 114.3 × 144.8 cm)

Consumables (11092024), 2024. Display refrigerator, solar-powered battery storage system, butter, key chain, vinyl, 12 × 11 ½ × 12 in. (30.5 × 29.2 × 30.5 cm). Installation view, *Energies*, Swiss Institute, New York, 2024

for old Black men to tinker with automotive parts, to take car parts apart and then put them back together. And we were speaking about this impulse as something that maybe is a deeper need to repair or to operate upon, in a medical sense. I've been sitting with that and thinking about harvesting car parts from the junkyard for an ongoing project that explores my own family's car as a symbol of progress and status, almost like interactive altars. For so many of us who grew up in car-oriented places, the family car is so much: a body, a vessel, a tool for time-travel. It's a home. It's an immersive soundscape, a babysitter, a family member, a safe space, armor. I feel like I'm trying to salvage the softness within what might be seen as cold, mechanical junk. I'm thinking about my visceral response to music for the first time while sitting in my dad's Cadillac on a hot summer day. It's those kinds of moments that I'm trying to tease out by deconstructing and reconstructing these kind of treasured keepsakes.

STEFANIE HESSLER is a curator and Director of Swiss Institute, New York.

TERESA BAKER

BORN 1985
MANDAN/HIDATSA;
LIVES IN LOS ANGELES

Installation view of *Teresa Baker: Twenty Minutes to Sunset*, American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, 2025

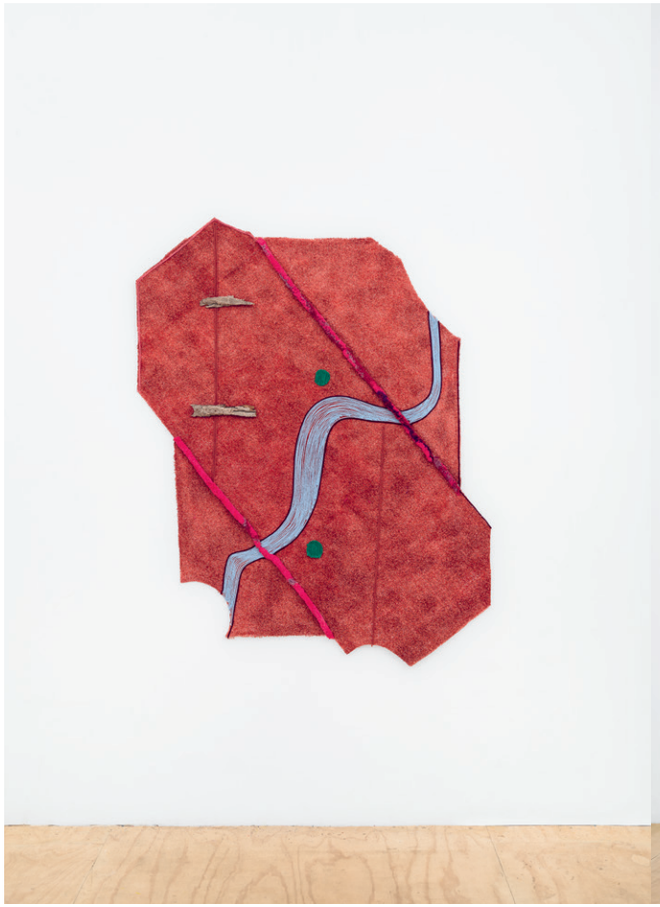
RICHARD KALINA: It seems that immersion in materials—their advantages and limitations—has determined the form and content of your work. You kicked things up a major notch when you discovered AstroTurf. This is now your signature material, and it's pretty much yours and yours alone. How did you get there?

TERESA BAKER: The material is my starting point; it absolutely dictates what comes after. It took me about ten years to get to AstroTurf. I tried painting on canvas; I worked on wood and felt and plastics. And then I came to AstroTurf, really by happenstance.

I was living in Beaumont, Texas, unexpectedly, to help my husband, who was living there to help his grandparents at the end of their lives. It's a very small town in southeast Texas on the Gulf Coast. I was just wandering through Home Depot, still on my search. Every two years I seemed to change materials; nothing was ever the thing that I was looking for. But that search also gave me information. The running series of trial and error helped me understand paint and materiality and composition and form, getting me closer to what I was searching for through what didn't work. So when I finally found AstroTurf, it just made sense. All of a sudden, I found a way that I could draw through material. It comes in all these different colors, and it felt very alien in a way. We don't have AstroTurf where I'm from in North Dakota. We have real turf; we don't need the fake stuff. I was really attracted to the oddness of it.

RK: In terms of cultural relevance, AstroTurf is generally considered a pretty lowbrow, non-art, ahistorical material. Does this figure into your thinking?

TB: Yes, that's definitely intentional. On some level, it's what I'm naturally attracted to. What I like about this idea of a lowbrow material is that it's not precious; it's approachable. That allowed for a real freedom for those initial marks that I was making. I also like the act of heightening



Of This Time, 2024. Acrylic, yarn, and cottonwood bark on synthetic turf, 58 × 46 ½ in. (147.3 × 118.1 cm)

Opposite: *Waking*, 2024. Acrylic, yarn, and buckskin on synthetic turf, 76 ¾ × 144 ½ in. (188.6 × 367 cm)

Installation view of *Teresa Baker: Twenty Minutes to Sunset*, American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, 2025

materials that are seen as unimportant, as underdogs. A lot of the materials I had used up to that point had come from arts-and-crafts stores like Michaels, stuff anyone can buy. You're not making this through some intensive process, because I find that if there's some intensive process to build up the ground, then your mark-making can ruin it. And maybe there's beauty in that. But my interest is that energetic exchange—the initial exchange—the artist makes with the material. So there's something in the lowbrow that's exciting. Also, it's ugly. AstroTurf is ugly.

RK: You can make it beautiful; it's a Cinderella material! AstroTurf seems to satisfy so many requirements: It's the right combination of flexible and stiff. It has an interesting surface. It's easy to store and transport; it's tough and permanent. It accepts paint very well. You can work with color, and you can stick things on it. You can also go big with it—

TB: That's why it's nice to talk to you as a fellow artist, because you understand the plight of what it means to have these materials to move around your studio or haul around. In conjunction with searching for the right ground to be my canvas, that was a big draw. AstroTurf does exactly what you're saying. I can make large six-by-eight-foot pieces and roll them up and stick them in a corner. I don't have to make supports for it; it supports itself. I can just nail it to the wall. Going to undergrad in New York City and moving every year from apartment to apartment, you get really bogged down by stuff. I would go behind the Met Opera House and get discarded materials from the set design. I would end up hauling around things like eight-by-four-foot plywood sheets to my little dorm room. It was ridiculous! But I love large-scale work. I was searching for a material that had to check all these boxes, including practicality-wise. AstroTurf became this kind of magic thing that answered all my problems.

RK: All you have to do is seal off the edges. You don't even have to hem them.

TB: Exactly. It would be too perfect if you hem it!

RK: Your art has moved from sculpture into painting that takes a sculptural space and compresses it, rather than taking a painting space and expanding it to three dimensions. We've talked before about Frank Stella's work from the 1980s and Elizabeth Murray's work that positions itself as painting but is on the verge of being something else. What are your thoughts on that?

TB: I work in process-based ways, and it took me a long time to understand what the materials were teaching me, which is how to paint just like you're saying, the sculptural flattened into the picture plane. Richard Tuttle was a very big influence in the early days. I came from a world in which art was more Western, more representational, and to see what he was doing was so mind-blowing and validating. Seeing his work, I understood what these materials were doing in this conversation, and it was humorous. Frank Stella and Elizabeth Murray—one thing I find really interesting is how they blur that line between what is a little bit ugly, a little uncomfortable, but then everything is just right.

RK: How do you think your art-making relates to the general arena of contemporary and historical abstraction?

TB: Hmm—that's a tough one. I don't know if I can completely answer where I'm at. I just know that I want to push abstraction and to have a voice in that conversation, with my own language.

RK: Well, as we know, abstraction has moved more towards a kind of diminished referentiality, which is to have it say something concrete but not have it be read symbolically.

TB: I think that's been a question for me all along, because of the expectations that are on Native artists to have direct symbolism. I talk about how it took me ten years to find AstroTurf. It also took me ten years to understand the line where my art could do both things—function as abstraction and also referentially—without this one-to-one ratio of answering the questions it's asking.

RK: There's a lot of drawing in your work—I mean drawing in the larger sense of processes that delineate line and form both on a surface and in space. It seems that drawing on the larger pieces consists of edge-cutting and linear additions like yarn or string. What's the place of drawing in the *creation* of your art? Do you do preparatory drawings for the larger work?

TB: I don't do any sketches. A big joy for my making is that there's an unknown; there's solving some sort of puzzle. It would take away the joy of making for me if I were just executing a drawing. I love the back-and-forth play that happens while I'm searching for what a work is going to become. But I do have a drawing practice, and I've been doing it all along. It's actually what I applied to grad school with. They're mainly oil pastel on paper, and pretty straightforward: form, shape, color. There's this energy in them. I mentioned this before, that in discovering AstroTurf but also the yarn and various other materials, it felt like drawing in space, in real time, in large scale. So while I don't sketch for the larger pieces, I feel if you saw the drawings and AstroTurf works side by side, the relationship would be very apparent.

It's this quick exchange that happens and goes back to this idea of not being precious but instead has a sense of freedom.

RK: You mentioned being a Native artist. Do you want to talk more about how you relate to those traditions, or the relationship between your personal history and your work more generally?

TB: I'm Mandan and Hidatsa on my father's side, which are two tribes in North Dakota, and then I'm German American on my mother's side. I grew up in North Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, right up until I went to New York City for undergrad. My father worked for the National Park Service, and what that did for my siblings and me is it gave us a childhood with a lot of time outdoors in these giant expanses of sparsely populated land. I talk about landscape in my work because I think, on a personal level, I'm perpetually trying to capture these spaces. I really credit them a lot for how they've shaped the work: maybe a bit more minimal; details are bigger. And negative space, which is really important to me. That's what takes it away from the dry formal language of, say, Postminimalism. I think the beauty of what the personal can offer is an investigation and interest in art that has more expression, more visceral qualities, more movement.

As for the influence of my culture on the work, I think you can look at [Native] Northern Plains art—the parfleche bags, for example, all those beautiful geometric designs—and see a connection to my work; it's there. Just not directly. There's a lot of ritual and rule-based order that's part of traditional Native art because it's a part of our spiritual practice, and because I respect that, I don't want to intertwine the two. I want there to be some separation. At the same time, I want to push forward what it means to be a Native artist, as well as an abstract artist in the Western sense. And so how do these two things coexist and meet? And how does it propel forward?

Movements of the Land, 2024. Rope, willow, acrylic, and yarn on synthetic turf, 85 × 68 in. (215.9 × 172.7 cm)

RK: Well, if there was an answer to that, Teresa, then you wouldn't have to make art!

TB: Yeah, it's true!

RICHARD KALINA is a painter and art critic and teaches studio art and art history at Fordham University, New York.

Tracing the Memory, 2024. Parfleche, yarn, acrylic, and artificial sinew on synthetic turf, 84 ½ × 68 ¾ in. (214.6 × 174.6 cm)

BORN 1993
IN NEW YORK;
LIVES IN LOS ANGELES

SULA BERMUDEZ-SILVERMAN

ice ting, 2025. Iron ice tongs and hand-blown glass, 6 × 15 ½ × 10 in. (15.2 × 39.4 × 25.4 cm)
Opposite: *trap ii*, 2025. Iron animal trap, hand-blown glass, and steel, 8 ¾ × 5 ½ × 4 ½ in. (22.2 × 14 × 11.4 cm)

SULA BERMUDEZ-SILVERMAN: Hi, Dad!

GEORGE BERMÚDEZ: I just wanted to tell you that I am so grateful to you for the opportunity to connect more deeply with you and your work. There are so many touchpoints! As you know, I've literally seen your work from preschool on up through your adulthood, and I think you'd be surprised how much your work has influenced me and my teaching. What I want to start with, though, is—what is *your* perception of the evolution of your work?

vestige, 2025. Medium-density fiberboard, wood, automotive primer, and spray paint, 120 × 49 × 45 in. (304.8 × 124.5 × 114.3 cm)

SBS: Well, I think most recently, I've started to make work that I actually like.

GB: Ha! That's fair.

SBS: I've allowed my work to become more nebulous and elastic, and I think that's through letting go of some kind of prescriptive meaning or its interpretation. I've started to trust myself more. How do *you* think that it's evolved?

GB: I've seen your work evolve marvelously. One of the things that for me, as a psychoanalyst, has a lot of meaning is how you've tried to make visible what's invisible. Initially it was through these smaller objects, then it evolved into larger things, like the ice-cream mold. The other evolution I've seen is from the intimate biography of your early work to now your larger institutional and geopolitical concerns.

What I've discovered in your work is your enormous capacity to resonate with complex, unconscious ideas that help people get in touch with something that's been invisible for them. I think the nebulousness of your emerging work is probably you trusting your unconscious mind. But what's your sense of what is emerging and forming itself?

SBS: Right now, I think I've become much more interested in exposing the process of making, like using the mold in the work—which I've just realized also relates to history, the history of the making.

GB: I wanted to talk about how your work touches our whole neural system, and it does that through surprise. The structures made out of sugar or salt, for example. Or the mold of the house [*vestige*, 2025]—it's a trompe l'oeil, because I thought it was pewter . . .

SBS: I'm really interested in camouflage and different mechanisms of defense; offense, as well. Especially within insects. But I think it relates back to this idea of using that kind of materiality to expose what's invisible.

GB: That itself is extraordinary. Conceptual juxtaposition, right? How does one represent what can't be seen? It's beautiful, and it certainly relates to my own work. How do we listen to what's invisible to us—our unconscious mind—both individually and collectively?

Next question: how do you situate your work in the context of America and of American art? If you do; you may think of yourself as more universal.

SBS: I think that my work and myself are deeply American. Whether that's a good or bad thing, it just is. The United States is a product of many various layered histories of migration and material extraction, and those forces shape the subjects and materials that I work with. That said, I'm really interested in looking at how objects in American domestic life carry global histories that are often naturalized.

GB: For example?

SBS: The ball-and-claw motif—the eagle claw clutching a globe. The eagle claw obviously represents the United States, but that object's history ties to global exchange. The original Chinese motif of a dragon claw clutching a pearl symbolized the emperor protecting his people, which through global exchange became a lion's paw with a ball, symbolizing British nationalism. The United States stole that and made it an eagle.

GB: I'm thinking of the touchpoints with my work, which includes social dreaming. What I'm looking for there is the sociopolitical unconscious, and that links to your work because you're excavating the past and pursuing its links with the present, and excavating what seems local or national but goes much wider. Similarly, people think of dreams as very private, but what I'm doing is helping them realize we share dreams, and when we're aware of that, we begin to understand dreams are social and global and wider than we thought. Has your work ever been informed by dreams?

SBS: Not that I'm conscious of, but I have had dreams that relate to the works after they've been made.

GB: The work then is somehow stimulating your unconscious to dream—

wow. Would you feel okay sharing one of those dreams?

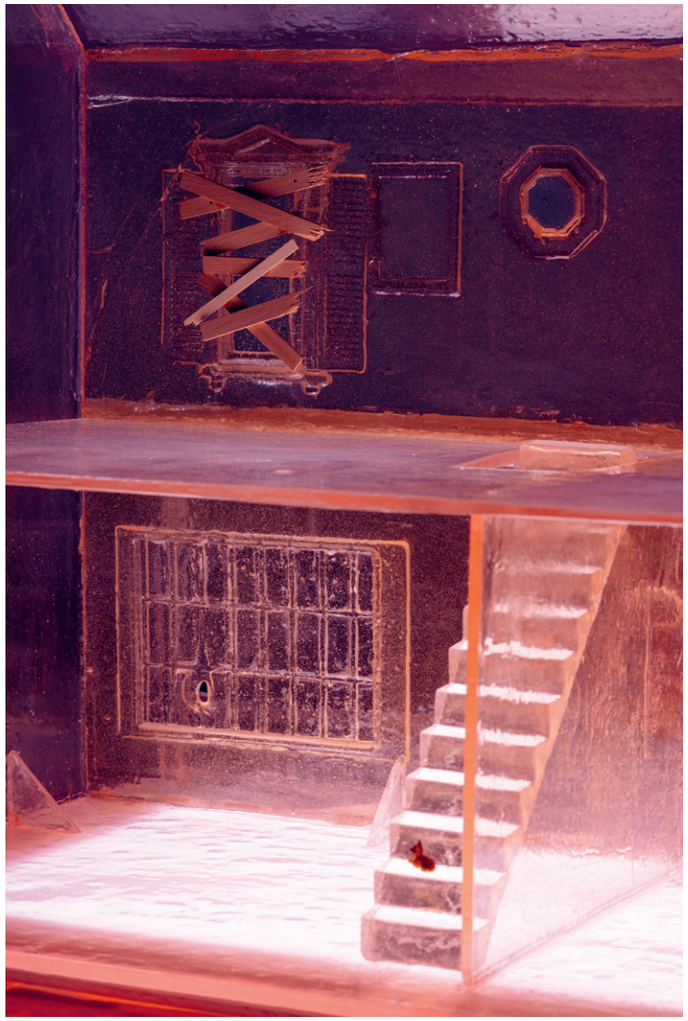
SBS: Six years ago, I started making work with the dollhouse that I had growing up. I started making molds of it, then made the houses into sugar glass. A couple months after [the Altadena fire in January 2025], I had a dream that my dollhouse was life-size, and there was a fire all around me and all the houses were burning down. People were running everywhere, and I could see my dollhouse across the canyon as a real house, and it was burning down.

GB: Oh my gosh, that's so powerful, in terms of the meaning of our home to you and to us. Thank you for sharing that. Something you said just now reminds me of another connection, how you're juxtaposing materials, past and present; memory is brought into proximity with the now, which also touches on my work as a psychoanalyst. I'm constantly helping people link what their experience is now with unconscious memories that they don't realize are informing that experience. Your work is so clearly, so beautifully in touch with unconscious ways of thinking. Freud proposed that there was a whole different way of thinking, what he called primary process. Someone might describe a dream: "I was in my home, but it didn't look like my home; it looked like my mother's home . . ." That's condensation, and you do that in your work. Or there's displacement, where one thing represents another.

SBS: I've been having a lot of those dreams lately where I think it's this one person, but then I realize they're actually a mixture of two people. Or there will be one person, but they'll morph into another person who's a different gender and a different race. It's so weird!

GB: But that's the fluidity of the unconscious, and in your work, you do that! I want to talk about another aspect of your work that touches what I do, which is—I'm a writer. I'm still working on becoming a better writer. What I'm trying to do is make sure my writing attracts attention; I want to make it surprising, stirring, story-driven. Your work attracts attention because it is beautiful. And it sustains the engagement because it's mysterious; it inspires more curiosity. And then it provides insight, which is what I like to do in my writing.

SBS: I do think that the perfect artwork is something that is both formal and meaningful. I think you have to have both the conceptual and the aesthetic.



Repository I: Mother (detail), 2021

Repository I: Mother, 2021. Isomalt sugar, Himalayan salt, epoxy resin, wood, found object, and LED light panel, 44 × 36 × 56 in. (111.8 × 91.4 × 142.2 cm)

blister iii, 2025. Hand-blown glass, iron sheep shears, and steel, 12 × 6 ½ × 15 ½ in. (30.4 × 16.5 × 39.4 cm)
Top: *blister i*, 2025. Hand-blown glass, iron, and steel, 9 ½ × 9 ½ × 13 ¾ in. (24.1 × 24.1 × 34.9 cm)

GB: Beautifully said. Is there anything recently—a work of art or an experience—that's stimulated you, that's moved you into a kind of reverie state where there's something emerging for you?

SBS: I think that the experience of my childhood home—your home—and the neighborhood of Altadena burning down has been a big catalyst for me to rethink my own relationship to material things and also about the broader impact of consumption, which has led me to live more minimally. It also has me reflecting on the symbol of the house as a long-standing motif in my work.

GB: I've been feeling the same way. Your mother and I lost meaningful things, but the most meaningful thing about our home was all the memories we made there. And all of that meaning could never . . . that could not be destroyed.

SBS: Well, that's something that I've been trying to figure out, because I'm such a collector; I just keep objects that I find interesting for some reason or another. But it can become too much. That's how I felt after the fire, and then thinking about our planet in general, what other natural disasters could occur—trying to let go of those objects in some capacity and live minimally.

GB: Objects elicit meaning for us, individually and collectively, right? People share meaning around objects that they use. The meaning is beyond the object; it exists somewhere else.

SBS: Yeah, the thing that's interesting to me about material histories is that the symbol and object changes its meaning over time and through different people.

GB: Carl Jung proposed that the human mind struggles with resolving contradictions, and that the only way it could do that was to find the transcendent symbol—a transcendent function of the mind. And your work seems to do that—by the materials you create, that you use and juxtapose. In terms of history and the present, and the function that you use them for. To build a house out of sugar, for example. Where are your interests taking you now?

SBS: I think, again, I'm sort of trusting myself and letting the works do their own thing. But recently I've really become obsessed with antique animals traps, which I came to randomly, by trying to find iron objects with some kind of negative space that could have glass blown into them. I think they're beautiful—I love their forms—even though they're these deadly objects.

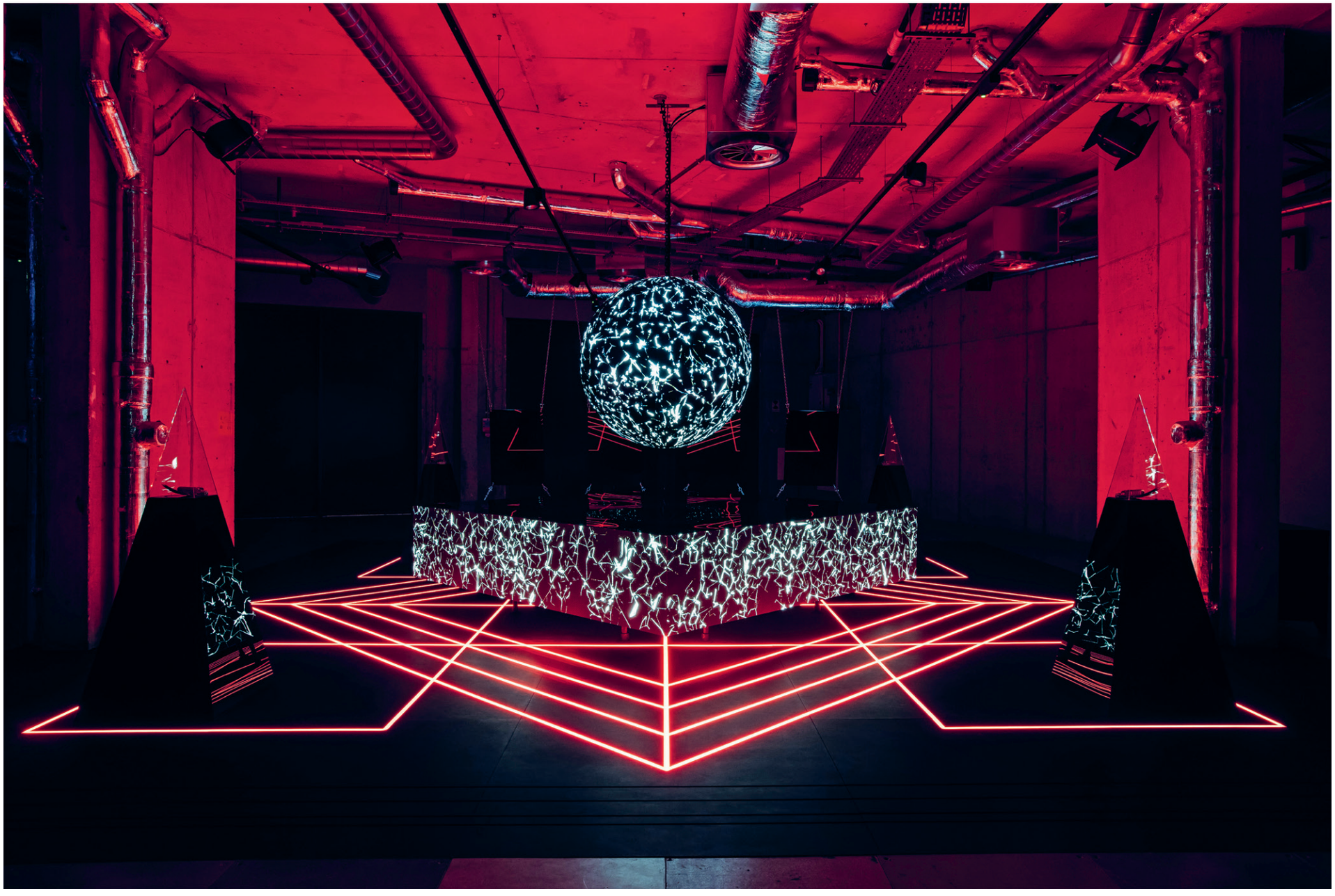
For a while now, I've also been really interested in finding the perfect red, because red is a difficult color to find in glass. It's really finicky; you can't tell what it's going to look like until it comes out. But what's interesting about glass is that the colors come from metal as well, and that kind of links to histories of material extraction.

GB: I love that you are trusting your unconscious because, it seems to me, you have such a gift for being in the unconscious. Freud elicits a lot of mixed feelings in the twenty-first century, but he helped us lean into the mysteries of our human subjectivity. What I'm trying to do in my work—and what your work does—is to show that our personal subjectivities are much more widely linked.

DR. GEORGE BERMÚDEZ is a psychologist-psychoanalyst and Training and Supervising Psychoanalyst at The Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis, Los Angeles.

ZACH BLAS

BORN 1981
IN POINT PLEASANT, WV;
LIVES IN TORONTO



CULTUS, 2023. Five-channel high-definition video, color, and 6.1 surround sound, 49:04 min., looped; LED sphere and panels; programmed LED lights; aluminum; medium-density fiberboard; oriented strand board; acrylic; metal chains; 3D-printed Spanish ticklers; hand-blown glass with sandblasted sigil; and representations of ejaculate, brain matter, tears, and blood; dimensions variable. Installation view, *Zach Blas: CULTUS*, arebyte gallery, London, 2023

AMY HALE: Can you tell us a bit about the gods of *CULTUS* [2023] and how you came to know them and build their temple?

ZACH BLAS: I was trying to make Silicon Valley's power structures experiential—tapping into its political unconscious, if you will—and religiosity is a core aspect of these structures. Today, there are religious organizations invested in bringing AI gods into existence, like the Way of the Future church, founded in California by [former Google employee] Anthony Lewandowski.

Still from *Jubilee 2033*, from *Contra-Internet*, 2018. High-definition video, color, and sound; 30:52 min.

Installation view of *Zach Blas: CULTUS*, Secession, Vienna, 2024

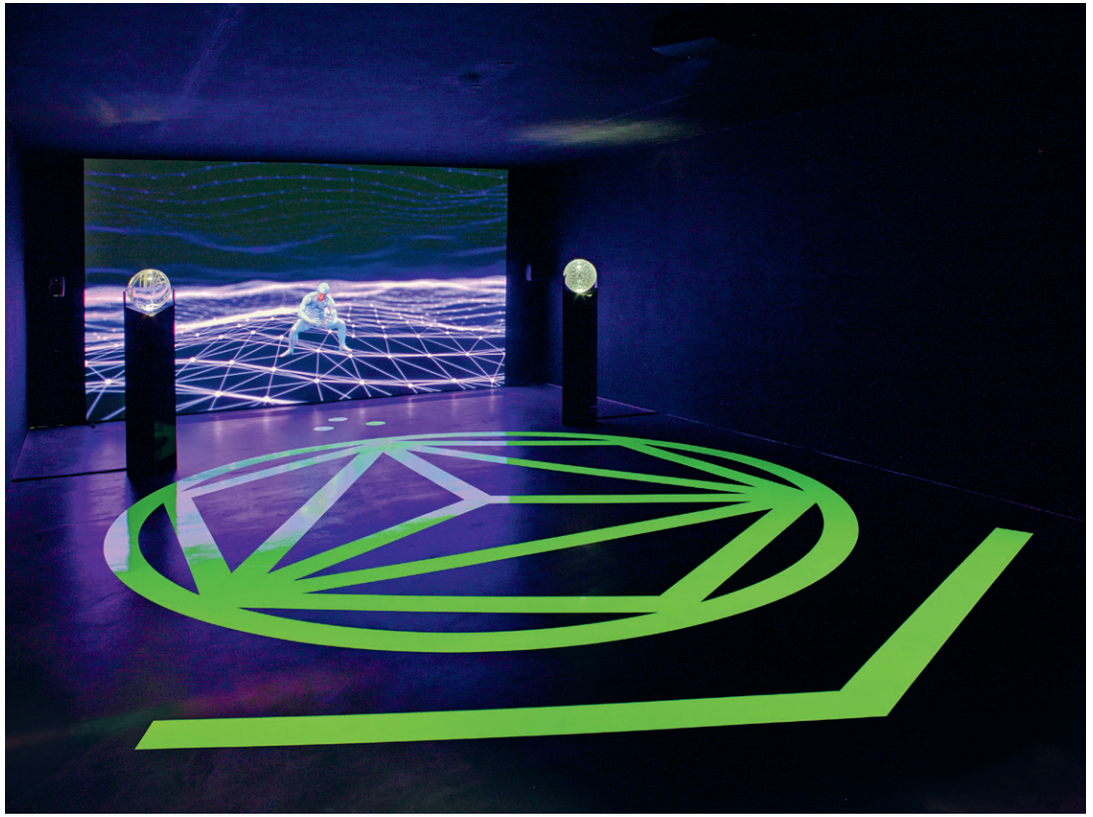
But *CULTUS* suggests that AI gods are already here, already conjured into existence, already being served. So what do these gods represent and demand? What does worship look like? What are the religious and spiritual teleologies and eschatologies of the California tech industry? How do these beliefs manifest through products, corporate visions, and branding symbologies? At the core of *CULTUS* is a non-innocent, compromised use of AI, deploying Silicon Valley's corporate technologies as a means to summon forth these entities. The gods take form through algorithmic governance, extraction, automated decision-making, and the quest for immortality. *CULTUS* accounts for transnational histories of imperial relations between religion, mysticism, and science and technology. An important antecedent here is John Dee, Queen Elizabeth I's mathematician and mystic spy, who used his Holy Table to communicate with angels in order to gain knowledge of God for queen and country. Not unlike Dee's Holy Table, *CULTUS* takes shape as a religious computer that evokes a pantheon of AI gods: a god of surveillance and exposure, a god of automation and judgment, a god of tears and extraction, and a god of immortality. Yet *CULTUS* differs from the Holy Table, as its purpose is to stage a political confrontation, not serve the ruling classes.

AH: As you went through the process of invoking these entities in this work, did you have to navigate relationships with them in any way?

ZB: The AI gods have made appearances in my previous works. With *CULTUS*, navigating complicity and attraction to submission became key. It's about acknowledging and grappling with a politically muddy dynamic, being self-reflexive about the ways that we're implicated in Silicon Valley's belief systems. For instance, we know the political problematics of using corporate social media platforms—but we still use them and find pleasure in doing so. We offer ourselves up, in a way. Similarly, if one takes nootropics, this becomes symbolic of a deeper, spiritual Silicon Valley disposition for attempting to transcend or overcome human mortality. Point being: we all have relations with AI gods, and *CULTUS* presents the ways we're complicit in summoning, contributing, feeding, and worshiping them.

AH: *CULTUS* is part of a wider series exploring the strange, sometimes occulted religiosity bubbling not far beneath the surface of Silicon Valley. Can you talk about themes of these projects and how *CULTUS* emerged out of these concerns?

ZB: It's part of an unfinished trilogy called *Silicon Traces*, which focuses on the ways in which the belief systems, histories, and fantasies that undergird the California tech industry enact domination and control. The prologue is [2018's] *Contra-Internet: Jubilee 2033*, a queer sci-fi film installation imagining alternatives to the corporate internet and the network form itself. Part one of the trilogy, *The Doors* [2019], looks at histories of psychedelia in California; it



Contra-Internet, 2017. High-definition video, color, and sound, 30:52 min.; etched-glass spheres; LEDs; black-mirror plinths; and vinyl; dimensions variable. Installation view, *Zach Blas: Contra-Internet*, Gasworks, London, 2017

attends to our current second psychedelic era, in which microdosing LSD and psilocybin mushrooms transforms psychedelic substances into neoliberal worker productivity drugs, which ties to the rise of the nootropics industry as well. The second work is *CULTUS*. There are noticeably strong overlaps between psychedelia and religion here: at stake is, in part, about who gets to have a transformative vision. While my earlier work, like *Facial Weaponization Suite* [2012–14], is more classically tactical media—an art object that both practically and conceptually intervenes—with *Silicon Traces* I start from a different place: the belief systems, ideologies, stories, and fantasies that undergird not just the creation of a technology but also how it's marketed, sold, and understood as positively advancing society. *Silicon Traces* does not orient around gestures that suggest fixes. Of course, I long for alternatives, but the achievement of any such "fix" is beyond the scope of my practice, or any one individual for that matter. *Silicon Traces* inhabits stories, finds ways to articulate the power structures that constitute them, and demonstrates that they are rife with political antagonisms. Scholar Lisa Duggan, who wrote a wonderful book called *Mean Girl: Ayn Rand and the Culture of Greed* [2019], makes an important point: critiques of neoliberalism abound, but there is a lack of criticism that takes on the ways in

The Doors, 2019. Six-channel high-definition video, color, and sound, 41:25 min., looped; black-mirror screens and pots; artificial greenery; black sand; neon; nootropics and other drugs; fluorescent light; and lizard water dish and heated rock. Installation view, *Zach Blas: The Unknown Ideal*, Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art, Oldenburg, Germany, 2019

which fantasy and fiction have contributed to neoliberalism's historical development and propagation.

AH: Your work has become more and more relevant—even urgent—since the 2024 US presidential election. Do you also have a sense of this? Do you feel like a Cassandra sometimes?

ZB: Back in 2015, when I was making *Contra-Internet*, I would often ask the question, "Can you imagine something beyond the internet as we know it?" Many thought it was a stupid question. Such responses exposed that there was something unthinkable or unimaginable concerning the internet (itself a historically contingent, highly specific material configuration of corporate, state, and institutionalized protocols and technologies) as something other than an inescapable totality that has no chance at being reconfigured, never mind imagining the creation of alterative infrastructures. Now, as Silicon Valley billionaires more brazenly expose their techno-fascism in the age of Trump, I've never seen so many people articulate desires to leave corporate, mainstream social media platforms. The desire for a "beyond" the-internet-as-Big-Tech-totality is intensely palpable.

AH: You've turned the vulnerability of our relationship to technology—our willingness to submit to technologies and algorithms—into a religious metaphor. In experiencing *CULTUS*, the joyous devotion that one might experience at a temple feels genuinely grim: offerings of bodily fluids to deities that are created to exploit our bodies and minds. Can you talk more about these themes of submission in *CULTUS*, and in your work in general?

Installation view of *Zach Blas: CULTUS*, arebyte gallery, London, 2023

ZB: I first started exploring this in *SANCTUM* [2018], which suggested that regimes of surveillance and security have appropriated aspects of BDSM and integrated those practices into their dynamics of power and subjectivation. The work shows that submission and dominance are spectacularly at play, for instance, in airport security—a premiere site of "security theater." But submission and dominance also blend into one another, morph, and intertwine in new ways in *SANCTUM*. Pleasurable and horrifying submission are both at play in the power dynamics of security and surveillance. Today in the US, we see people violently subjected to these dynamics; there are also those who find pleasure in submission. Importantly, the two are not mutually exclusive. Again, it's about attending to complicity in a non-moralist sense, which my earlier work didn't hold space for. With installations like *CULTUS*, there's an element of allure and seduction, which tries to get at attraction to—but also resistance to—power. It's a dark work. Yes, *CULTUS* requires human fluids and matter to operate. But there is an immense amount of humor in the horror—another way I find agency and possibility in all this.

AH: It is dark, but it's also extremely beautiful and compelling and delightful.

ZB: I'm glad you said that. I love this trope in horror where once you look at the monster and name it, you take some of its power away. *CULTUS* gives us this opportunity.

AH: You do have a glitch in the system; tell us about this liberatory figure within *CULTUS*, the Heretic.

ZB: There is an opening for queer and feminist esotericisms in *CULTUS*; that is, there is the articulation of resistance inside AI religiosity. The Heretic enunciates that resistant forces are very much at work. Because in the end, AI religiosity is not a totalized system in which we have no kind of power or agency. Political antagonisms are alive and well! Every worship singer and performer of an AI prophet in *CULTUS* also plays the Heretic, which establishes it as a collective presence. Working with a primarily queer cast, I wanted everyone to be able to hold positions of both complicity and resistance, which feels accurate to lived reality. The Heretic visualizes itself as glass shattering, fracturing the computational system. Glass has been a theme in my work—from the black glass of our phones as portals, to the transparent glass of new Silicon Valley architecture. Working with reflective black surfaces in *CULTUS* signals dramas of transparency and opacity—in surfaces that capture and reflect, surfaces that are black boxes, surfaces that dazzle and draw one closer. But of course, the LED sphere is not really glass and it's not really breaking—we're watching a simulation. Again, it's inhabiting the story, the fiction, to tell it differently. And then, the installation loop is the glass healing. We're back to where we started, or it's just that the struggle continues. The Heretic is the entity that announces political antagonisms thriving within the religious stories and imaginaries of AI and the tech industry. This is an unresolved struggle—so it's unresolved in the work.

AH: I want to ask you about the more specific context of American religious history in which this piece is situated, touching on the New Thought Movement and various prosperity theologies—these are uniquely American.

ZB: I would say that my work is resolutely American. The focus is American configurations of power in global contexts. I have lived in both LA and in the San Francisco Bay Area. Being from West Virginia and growing up in rural Appalachia, California was fascinating to me, and I quickly became taken with analyzing its culture and studying its history. In so many ways, California felt like an inverse of West Virginia—from coal to silicon, from opioids to nootropics. These two places powerfully articulate poles of American power and dispossession. Once I complete the *Silicon Traces* trilogy—surely some years from now—West Virginia will feature in future work.

AMY HALE is Honorary Research Fellow at Falmouth University, UK, and an ethnographer writing about contemporary art and magic.

ENZO CAMACHO AND AMI LIEN

BORN 1985
IN MANILA;
LIVES IN BERLIN

BORN 1987
IN DALLAS;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

Still from *Langit Lupa*, 2023. Digital video, color, and sound; 57 min.

LISA ITO-TAPANG: It seems the best place to start is to talk about how your collaborative practice came to be deeply informed by the cultural context of the Philippines as an agricultural country and the realities that entails—of food insecurity, landlessness, social inequality.

ENZO CAMACHO: I grew up in the Philippines but had a very privileged upbringing; my mother's family is part of the large landowning class from the agrarian sugar-plantation island of Negros. So I was aware of these issues, but I didn't really understand them in any meaningful way until Ami and I started visiting Negros together around 2017, with the specific intention to learn about that plantation context.

AMI LIEN: My parents immigrated to the US from Taipei, where they had grown up during the US–backed KMT [Kuomintang] White Terror period of authoritarianism. I was born in the US and raised mostly in Tucson, Arizona. Growing up in middle-class suburbs, I had a feeling that my family's path had been severed and grafted onto an artificially claimed landscape. When I started collaborating with Enzo, I had the opportunity to visit the Philippines for the first time, and that initial exposure showed me a deeper and more piercing facet of American Empire. The period of US colonial occupation continues to have an enormous impact on the Philippines today.

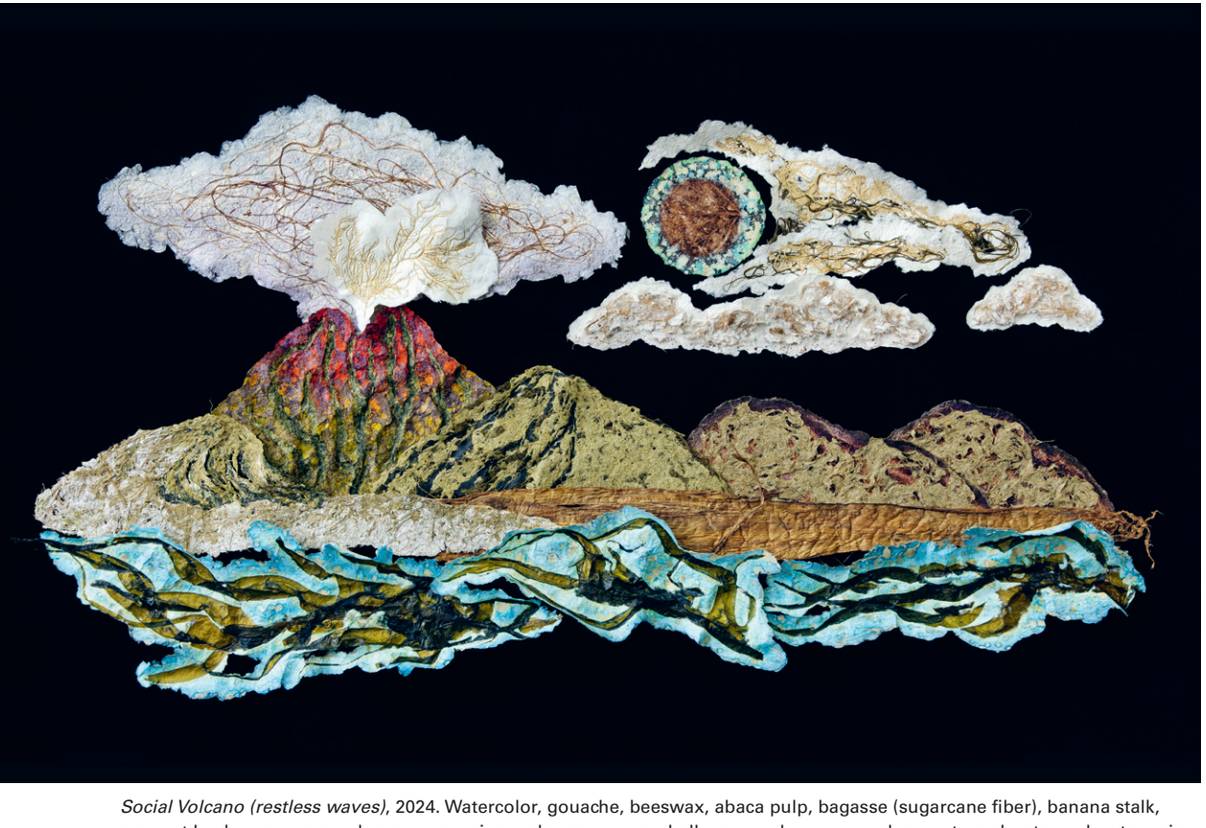
LIT: I think it's extremely important that we are triangulating each other's respective class backgrounds, because all of this connects to larger histories of empire and geopolitical configurations. Agrarian unrest has been a long-standing feature of Philippine history, from the Spanish and American colonial period to the present. Solidarity with the question of land brought us all together as arts workers, and it shaped the direction of your collaboration.

EC: We have learned so much from artists and artist organizations in the Philippines that act in solidarity with the agrarian struggle and who are working alongside farmworkers and peasants to collectively craft a progressive and liberatory cultural agenda. They have pushed us to rethink what culture can do; what it *should* be doing. Our ongoing relationship with SAKA [Sama-samang Artista para sa Kilusang Agraryo (Artist Alliance for Genuine Agrarian Reform and Rural Development)] has been especially formative.

AL: Initially, we were utilizing art opportunities to travel to different places and look closely at localized manifestations of globalized capitalism. But every social struggle links back to the question of land,

Still from *Langit Lupa*, 2023. Digital video, color, and sound; 57 min.

Flame Garden (nitrates), 2024. Watercolor, ink, beeswax, abaca pulp, bagasse (sugarcane fiber), banana stalk, bugnai leaf, calophyllum (bitalog) leaf, cilantro, coconut, cogon grass, fennel, kale, leek, onion skins, parsley, pine leaf, primrose petals, rice hull, sargassum, seashell, seaweed, spring onion, statice blossoms, taro shoots, and wild grass, with artists' frame, 31 ¾ × 48 ¼ × 4 ½ in. (80.6 × 122.6 × 11.4 cm)



Social Volcano (restless waves), 2024. Watercolor, gouache, beeswax, abaca pulp, bagasse (sugarcane fiber), banana stalk, coconut husk, cogon grass, lemongrass, pineapple crowns, seashell, seaweed, sugarcane leaves, taro shoots, and water spinach, with artists' frame, 36 ¾ × 60 ¾ × 4 ½ in. (93.3 × 154.3 × 11.4 cm)

who controls it, and toward what ends. When we started working in Negros, we had the opportunity to gain deeper insight into how peasant activists are challenging these conditions, as well as challenging our understanding of what art can be.

LIT: Let's talk about your recent project *Offerings for Escalante* [2024–25]. I'm particularly curious how it resonated as it moved and was received across transnational borders.

EC: That show focused on a particular historical incident that took place in Negros, in the small city of Escalante, where a political massacre happened in the mid-'80s. There was something that felt very challenging but also meaningful about bringing the story of this specific event to all these different places, from the premiere in Hong Kong to Berlin, Glasgow, New York, then back to the Philippines. We knew we would need to explain what a semi-feudal context even is in the contemporary present, which is why we put a lot of focus on programming events to accompany the show and to bring you, Lisa, and other activists from the Philippines to give talks and workshops to provide more context. Even though translation was a challenge, it felt that was the work that needed to be done. We had a very clear objective with this show, which was to raise awareness about what is going on in the Philippine countryside, not just during the dictatorship period but what is still happening today: the massacres, killings, aerial bombings, and enforced disappearances that are still rampant.

AL: As the show traveled internationally, we noticed resonances with other social struggles and movements. In Hong Kong, we saw how our film landed in a very particular way with audiences, amid increasing authoritarian repression there after the banning of political protests. Our show was also traveling during a period of political repression and censorship around the genocide in Gaza. It was important for us to organize our public programs in solidarity with Gaza, because these situations are clearly related.

LIT: What I especially valued about your film about Escalante [*Langit Lupa*, 2023] is that it dialectically addresses a meaningful event—the reenactment as memorial—that needs to be symbolically defended, theorized, and valued. At the same time, it challenges Philippine artists to look at what cultural traditions of resistance are here—repressed and undervalued as they may be—and to find strength in the solidarities that are built across the whole transnational journey of the work.

EC: Absolutely!

LIT: Both of you have talked about the term *people's culture* in relation to social movements. How has that idea shaped your attitude towards the role of art?

AL: After working and having our work circulate in the globalized art world, it's

Screening and discussion of *Langit Lupa* at a sugar workers' rally site, Bacolod City, Philippines, on January 11, 2024

become clear to us that most institutions are compromised and unfree because their structural dependencies on the capitalist class leads to a culture that serves those class interests. Through our relations with activists in the Philippines, we were able to integrate among farmers and fisherfolk, and to recognize the value of collaborating on a culture that truly supports and elevates the needs of the working masses.

EC: Over the past several years, both of us have gotten more deeply involved in political organizing in support of the Filipino liberation movement in our respective cities of residence, and our practice has shifted accordingly. I think anchoring our practice in this people's movement made a lot of other questions easier to deal with. How to engage with an institution, for example, or even whether to engage at all. What can be gained? What are the risks and what are the restraints? Artists, of course, have always asked themselves these questions. But I do think you can address them with more clarity when your decision-making is guided by the concrete needs of a living movement.

AL: There is a great deal of variation in the expression of the works coming out of the people's movement, so long as the work is guided by the movement's primary interest—to liberate itself from the violences of empire—along with the recognition that cultural education is an important mobilizing tool for that.

LIT: Right now we're conducting this interview from three different time zones. I'm wondering how you navigate the distance that we have as collaborators—and, maybe we should say, comrades—towards the larger project of finding a truly democratic world order. What are the possibilities of being located transnationally, even as we all strive for a solidarity beyond borders?

EC: I've been living in Berlin for about thirteen years now. Some years ago, I cofounded a political organization here that organizes the Filipino diaspora and operates as part of the anti-imperialist and antifeudal National Democratic mass movement of the Philippines. Of course, the fight for the national and social liberation of the Filipino people is rooted in the Philippines, but it does have this transnational character because of patterns of forced migration. Landlessness, food insecurity, and poverty force about six to seven thousand Filipinos every day to leave the Philippines to look for work in other countries. This is a terrible reality, but it does create rich opportunities for solidarity-building with other communities and struggles.

AL: When I went to the Philippines for the first time and had my eyes opened to the damage, I was forced to recognize myself as an American, meaning that despite coming from an immigrant family with our own struggles in this country, I am still a person from this empire, and this empire violently extracts from people and places all over the world. As ashamed as this made me, what it eventually helped me to recognize was that I could find belonging in this connection and take back my agency as an American, through contributing to the collective struggle against imperialism. After showing *Offerings for Escalante* at MoMA PS1, I joined a solidarity organization called the New York Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines. There is a lot of work that we can do here, within the heart of empire, that contributes to the movement in the Philippines. In return, the Philippine mass movement also informs and helps to shape progressive organizing in the city. For example, New York is the home of finance companies that are actively invested in the alarming military-industrial buildup on the Philippine coastlines. As a human-rights collective, we can investigate and confront these chains of corporate–military collaborations that form the backbone of imperial aggression. Doing this work also helps us see, specifically, how the military–corporate alliance is plundering resources from the American people, which could have been spent on health care, education, and improving the conditions for our own people.

LIT: I know that Escalante is a place that's dear to both of you. It's a place that's in your heart. I wonder what your messages are for the people there who inspired your art?

EC: We've spent years unpacking the militarized repression that folks in Escalante are facing. The current situation there is dire. A lot of people have been arrested or killed. But we should remember that Escalante became a focal point for the state's so-called counterinsurgency efforts precisely because there is such a strong tradition of resistance among the people there. And there are still people there who are waiting for the right moment to rebuild. I would want these folks to know that it is because of people like them that I truly believe the movement will win.

AL: I would just add a thank-you to the people in Escalante and Negros who trusted us with their stories. I am so grateful for this experience.

LIT: Escalante will not be forgotten.

LISA ITO-TAPANG is a curator, writer, and cultural worker who teaches at the College of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines Diliman.

3D rendering of *Camoflux Biomes Video Game Installation*, 2025

BORN 1988
IN CALI, COLOMBIA;
LIVES IN MIAMI

LEO CASTAÑEDA

HANS ULRICH OBRIST: How did you come to video games as a medium? Was there a specific game or moment?

LEO CASTAÑEDA: Growing up, I was a gamer. Playing *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* at ten was a profound and cinematic experience, and it made me see games as art. In college, I chose conceptual art at Cooper Union, hoping to fuse it with entertainment design. I was going through a kind of artistic block in my third year. I realized that if I adapted the structures of progression—levels, the figure of a boss, characters, world-building—I could integrate many interests together, and it would give me a lot of freedom.

Still from *Camoflux: Levels & Bosses (Igapó)*, 2023–25. Ultra-high-definition video game, color, and sound, dimensions variable

HUO: You have a long and very personal connection to surrealism—your grandmother is a well-known surrealist painter. Can you talk more about her and your other art historical influences?

LC: Yes, of course. My grandmother Maria Thereza Negreiros is a Brazilian painter who creates abstractions of the Amazonian rainforest. I grew up in her studio in Cali around her artist friends, one of whom was Hernando Tejada; he was a folk surrealist who inspired me to create participatory artworks where everything could be touched. My primary painting influences are my grandmother and Roberto Matta. Their work has a weightlessness. My grandmother has a series called *Igapós*, where the water goes up into the forest, creating this kind of illusion where you don't know what's solid and what's liquid, what's the sky and what's the ground. That mirrors the way that a video game is made, where physics is an illusion created by numbers given to objects.

HUO: When I met Matta, he talked about futuristic matter. When I play video games, I think of matter, psychological landscapes, the unconscious, but also the cybernetic dimension. One of the things that fascinates me so much about video games is this idea that they're kind of living organisms that evolve. Ever since you started working with video games, there's a kind of overarching game that you've been working on. Can you tell us about that?

LC: Sure, it's called *Camoflux: Levels and Bosses* [2015–present]; it's a hand-painted stealth-exploration game where bodies, landscapes, and technologies fuse. You play as the Other, camouflaging and channeling environmental energy to reshape a cyclical cataclysm. Through episodic gameplay and multimedia installations, players traverse surreal lands, resolve conflicts, and unearth neo-primordial survival skills. Paintings and drawings become heightmaps and textures, influencing the world of the game.

HUO: Why bring video games to a museum?

Camoflux Council Other, 2023. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 96 × 47 ½ in. (243.8 × 120.7 cm)

LC: Museums are supposed to be spaces where everyone in a community should feel welcome, and they offer a broad range of audiences to interact with the game. I think the fine-art context expands entry points to the world-building into a range of physical and digital mediums—paintings, furniture design, cosplay performance, digital artworks—which encourages audiences to move like characters in the game. I'm also interested in bridging audiences, so, yes, having shows at museums but also having museum-quality shows at gaming conferences, so that gamers also feel like the art is coming to them, even if they're intimidated by the fine-art context of a

Still from *Camoflux Mangrove Village 360°*, 2023. 360-degree video, color, and sound; 6:10 min.

museum. Curiously, when I'm teaching art in Miami, I've noticed many of my students attend gaming conferences more than traditional art spaces.

HUO: The idea of crossing audiences is a really exciting perspective, as is the idea of mixed reality. Speaking of, when I was in your studio, I saw hundreds of beautiful sketches, and it reminded me of something Ian Cheng once said. I asked him, "Why are you making all these doodles? Why are you not developing digitally?" And he said, "It goes much faster when I make a sketch."

LC: Yeah, super agree. Sketching is the fastest brain-to-idea connection. I can sketch interaction systems quickly, which takes longer digitally. Sketching has been second nature since I was, like, three years old. I create maps, character designs, interaction designs, and storyboards of what some of the worlds will evolve into.

HUO: Your concept of exponential reciprocity seems key. In exponential reciprocity, a relationship grows exponentially as a reciprocal response to another's behavior, implying a feedback loop. It's a term that you invented, though; it doesn't really exist in the world of video games. Can you explain what exponential reciprocity means concretely in your practice?

LC: Exponential reciprocity expresses in my work in the way the landscape responds in an intensified and reciprocal way; it also relates to the overarching narrative and the first boss, who represents a future version of the player. The boss's reaction exponentiates the player's actions. So if you're kind to the landscape and calmly address its needs, then the boss cares for you and lets you pass through. But if you're destructive, confrontational, and aggressive, the boss throws the entire landscape towards you. The game has a spectrum of interactivity where it encourages sustainable interactions, but it also allows for destructive interactions. The boss is also at the center of a cataclysmic explosion, which is the other main narrative event in the game. That's the source of energy of many of the beings. But it's also the source of much of their destruction. So, in a way, the player's decisions end up being your future as an evolved being, but also your future as a being that is completely intertwined with the structure of that world.

HUO: How do you see this concept evolving? What are your unrealized projects?

LC: My main unrealized project expands the game through user-generated content, decentralizing the narrative and allowing community reimaginings of sustainable interaction systems and worlds. Collaborating with other artists is a current step. For example, I'm working on an environment with my grandmother, and I've worked with different musicians and writers to give a collaborative world-building edge to some of the environments. Another project is an opera with performance art and live streaming, bridging museum and gaming conference audiences.

HUO: We haven't addressed how your work connects to the US art world in the context of the Whitney Biennial. Do you find national and geographic categories useful? I think the very specific context of Miami is interesting in relation to video games.

Hyper Object (Amazon 01), 2012. Ink and graphite on paper, 12 × 9 in. (30.5 x 22.9 cm)

LC: Miami is a great hub; there's a lot of support for artists. And it's interesting in terms of its Latin American roots. I speak Spanish with a lot of people here; Spanglish is almost a second language.

In terms of the overall sense of American art—it's definitely very charged at the moment. What's the meaning of America? Is it the land beneath our feet? Is it North and South America? Is it a place built by Indigenous communities and immigrants and multicultural at its core? Is it a place that has freedom of speech, where artists can truly express themselves? Right now, all those things are oscillating between authoritarianism and democracy. Gaming is a global medium that allows for subversive interaction systems in the world to be filtered through as entertainment. People also get to choose hybrid identities. So, back to exponential reciprocity: we're in a time of AI, of relating oneself to larger power structures that transcend the individual. There's a lot that I'm thinking about in terms of how the archetypal entities of the game are going to build over time in relation to this moment, where you have climate change, AI, political unrest—where you have people questioning the very role of the human and of sentience in the world. What does it mean to think? What does it mean to be a being?

HUO: Are you using AI in your work?

LC: Currently, I use AI for organizational planning. I tried image-generation, but then I realized that I'm faster than AI in drawing. I anticipate using AI for coding, and I'm interested in AI intersecting with non-player characters for relational depth. I'm always researching AI as something that is broadening our sense of what is a being in the world, what is intelligence in the world.

HUO: One of the reasons I think video games are such an essential medium for the twenty-first century is that we live in a world that's very divided. I think video games can go beyond this separation, whether from the environment or from other humans or from other beings. And video games bring different disciplines together, going beyond disciplinary separations.

LC: Video games are basically an extension of film, theater, and architecture, mediums that have many mediums built within. It can be a bit overwhelming to direct how the interaction system relates aesthetically to the written concept of the game, to the character design, or to the sound design.

That takes us back to surrealism: how to build a world where gravity doesn't matter. Gravity is an illusion. Energy is an illusion. There are spreadsheets behind all those choices, and one could really create worlds with very few limitations, because the worlds could be whatever one wants them to be like, or one could create an energy system. The main limitation would be the amount of processing power that the game has, how many computers can run the game, and how much energy it's taking up in the world.

HUO: Many young artists I know want to work with video games. What advice would you give them?

LC: The medium is very accessible, with many online tutorials and free tools such as Unreal Engine and Blender. But the primary advice would be to build on what you're good at. So if you're good at drawing, have that be the driving force, or if you're good at coding or math, have that be the driving force.

HUO: Thank you so much, that could not be a better conclusion.

HANS ULRICH OBRIST is Artistic Director of Serpentine, London, and Senior Advisor at LUMA Arles.

DANIEL CHEW, TEN IZU, KIRSTEN KILPONEN, AND TIN NGUYEN
FOUNDED 2016;
BASED IN BROOKLYN, NY

CFGNY

Process image for *Surface Trend*, Seward Park, New York, 2019

KYLE DANCEWICZ: I think a lot of people who know CFGNY have a sense of one part of what you do, which relates to clothing and fashion.

DANIEL CHEW: I would say that we are artists who make garments. None of us are trained in fashion. Our interest in making clothes is to intervene in this material that mediates everyone's relationship to each other. Style is often used to announce your affiliation with some type of subcultural community or a community in general, and that can bleed into a racial community or aesthetics associated with a specific racial category. We use clothes to intervene in that space.

TEN IZU: All of our clothes are made on a tourist street in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. It's an industry that has developed post–American War. Part of the project utilizes the specific area as a kind of readymade, which allows us to spend time in Southeast Asia to practice and to be in dialogue with local people. Another part of our interest in fashion is aesthetics—Comme des Garçons, for instance, which was visible to us when we were younger, how we related to it as Asian Americans. We're interested in the way in which fashion can be read racially and how that has shifted over the last ten years, through social media and alongside the shift in production of garments and aesthetics from Japan to Korea to China to Vietnam.

KD: Do you think that casting is the most important artistic skill set of our time? I ask because of the exquisite job you've done with this in your fashion shows.

Continuous Fractures Generating New Yields, 2025. Wood, polyethylene sheeting, mirrors, tempered glass, eight porcelain sculptures, and one soft sculpture, 120 × 216 × 336 in. (304.8 × 548.6 × 853.4 cm). Installation view, *CFGNY: Continuous Fractures Generating New Yields*, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada, 2025

Paul in Look 07 from *CFGNY: Fashion Max 2*, Japan Society, New York, 2023

TIN NGUYEN: Casting is integral to what CFGNY has become over the years. The project is about relationships. The main reason we continue to host fashion shows is because of the people involved. It brings a certain type of energy to our practice that art itself can't.

TI: All I can think of right now is that we actually just cast a lot of porcelain in our work—

KD: You're casting that, too!

TN: Yeah, we cast the negative space between found objects—like vases and things thought of as cheap Chinese goods—which forms the basis of the sculptures. They're ghostly imprints of different facets of things that exist. We think of it as the space between the four of us, and they take four of us to make.

KD: The four of you are artists, and you each make work in different ways. How do you describe how CFGNY functions right now?

TN: A lot of what CFGNY does is create a conversation internally between us as members. There is an output through those conversations—exhibitions, writing—but a big part of what we do is a kind of day-to-day conversation with one another as a social check-in where we consider our desires, needs, and contexts in which we live.

DC: Learning from each other is a big part of it. The beauty of working together is that we all have different skill sets, which we teach to each other. We're able to be mercurial because with each new project, we come up with different ways of working, tailored to a specific context.

TI: I also think that, as a group, there's this shared delusion when approaching a project that, by yourself, would be too big to bite off. Together, the shared delusion becomes a reality.

DC: We also push our imagination of what we can accomplish, too.

TN: A lot of that imagination comes from experience in different industries. For example, we have experience being in fashion, and when we approach sculpture-making or exhibition-making, we come with that experience. We're able to weave the practices into one another.

KD: Do you see that as antidisciplinary, or as a kind of intervention? An antagonistic relationship to the context you're working in?

KIRSTEN KILPONEN: If we existed in a prior period in time, I could see that version of CFGNY being considered antagonistic. But in 2025, what we do now is a lot more openly received. If we were in an environment where it wasn't openly received, then, yeah, of course, I'd be like, we're being so antagonistic.

TN: We're not trying to question these industries and the way in which they separate themselves; we're more interested in utilizing the parts that conceptually fit the project. As creative people, we are always looking for other outlets.

DC: To think about being anti-something is to think of yourselves as outside that system. More recently, everyone's come to the understanding that everything is somewhat co-opted. Power isn't about trashing the system but surviving in it, navigating it. One way we've figured that out is through collaboration.

TI: And when you're collaborating so deeply, your own humanness is intimately revealed through constant contact. Your lives are so pressed up against each other that you understand yourself as a fallible person in relation to other fallible people.

DC: Institutions are made up of people, so working with institutions is working with people. Our way of working together extends to the relationships we have with people who make up institutions, and we hope that influences how institutions are able to think or act.

KD: CFGNY has used the term "vaguely Asian" to describe your concerns. I'm wondering if you want to speak about that phrase and if it's changed meanings for you over the years.

KK: Using that term has remained relatively the same. Whether we explore additional subject matter or disengage with other themes, that one is constant. It's very specific to us as Asian Americans and to the experience of being Asian American or labeled as Asians in America.

KD: And the word "vaguely"?

KK: "Vaguely" comes from how others conflate us into vague categories and assign us unimaginative, cliché narratives, even though we all have distinct backgrounds. One example is people assuming we're all first-generation Asian Americans, when we're not.

TI: "Vague" also has this ironic relationship with the word "Asian" itself. "Asian" describes a general geography, but it's also a racial term that's been so historically in flux it can be traced to seventeenth-century "scientific" racism. "Vaguely Asian" is a way for us to be flexible.

DC: It's purposefully expansive. Built into that term is the ability to always redefine it in new ways.

TN: Racialization cannot be conceptualized by an individual; groups of people experience it collectively. Our work reflects ways in which we're racialized, and that will continue to shift throughout the life of our practice.

DC: A lot of our projects circle around being situated in America, but I like to think the project can extend beyond purely personal contexts. One thing we've thought about is the movement of foreign students who study in the West and then bring back a discourse of diaspora to Asia.

KD: What have been the most motivating contexts, ideas, or things happening in the culture spaces that you're working in more broadly that have guided some of what you're doing?

TI: Our show at Japan Society in New York really affected our trajectory materially, thematically, and as a platform for our work. We went into Japan Society's archives to investigate its institutional history and found that it's been a business and cultural organization that has been producing ideas about what Japan is for an elite American audience for the past hundred years. We then went to different sites that the organization occupied before its permanent home and sculpted parts of those facades out of cardboard and translucent construction materials.

KK: The architectural elements are very midtown Manhattan, made in Neo-Renaissance, Neoclassical, Beaux-Arts, Gothic Revival, or Art Deco styles.

TI: We made those to contrast with the timeless Japanese aesthetic of the building, to show that the institution is structurally American and so are the ideas that it has been producing about Japan—and, by proxy, Asia—throughout its existence. We also made a fake gala banquet hall to mirror how visiting dignitaries and high-society people would meet, eat luncheons, and continue producing specific versions of racialization. We included ceramics throughout the banquet hall as placeholders of objects or attendees, to talk about the space between policy, lived experience, and literal bodies. The show then traveled to the Hammer in LA, where it expanded in size. In contrast to Japan Society, California has a very different history of Japanese people working and living there. In LA, we focused more on photography to look at archives and gaps and deliberate omissions—contrasting Japan Society's attempt to produce a singular version of a people with the fractured archive of California.

KD: You just finished a bit of a West Coast tour, and you recently made a large new work in Vancouver [*Continuous Fractures Generating New Yields,* 2025] that holds many aspects of your collective practice together at once: a provisional, semi-opaque architectural structure; eight porcelain casts; and *Family Member, LXXX* [2025], an over thirty-foot-long handmade, plush figure that's very cute, however much it wants to push on that term's connotations.

KK: One of our main interests in engaging with cuteness is the ambivalence that cuteness often provokes. Objects that are cute inspire both disgust and empathy all in the same stroke; your reaction vacillates between a want to destroy and a need to take care of. We are trying to ask how that complicates the association of cuteness with Asian cultural exports.

DC: As you walk around the work, you see through different sightlines and catch reflections from mirrors installed inside; things are hidden but also doubled. Working slightly "overseas" (Canada), we were also thinking about imports, status, and collecting, finery and cheapness, exoticism, foreign labor—all contributors to a generalized North American anxiety about Asia, for some.

TN: In the installation itself, the soft sculpture's body winds through the architectural installation, acting as a sort of subtext to the exhibition. Above it sits the porcelain casts on a platform that spans the whole structure. Porcelain also has its own storied history, with attendant associations with Asianness, and together the installation looks at the way commodities flow and influence the way in which we conceive of other places and peoples.

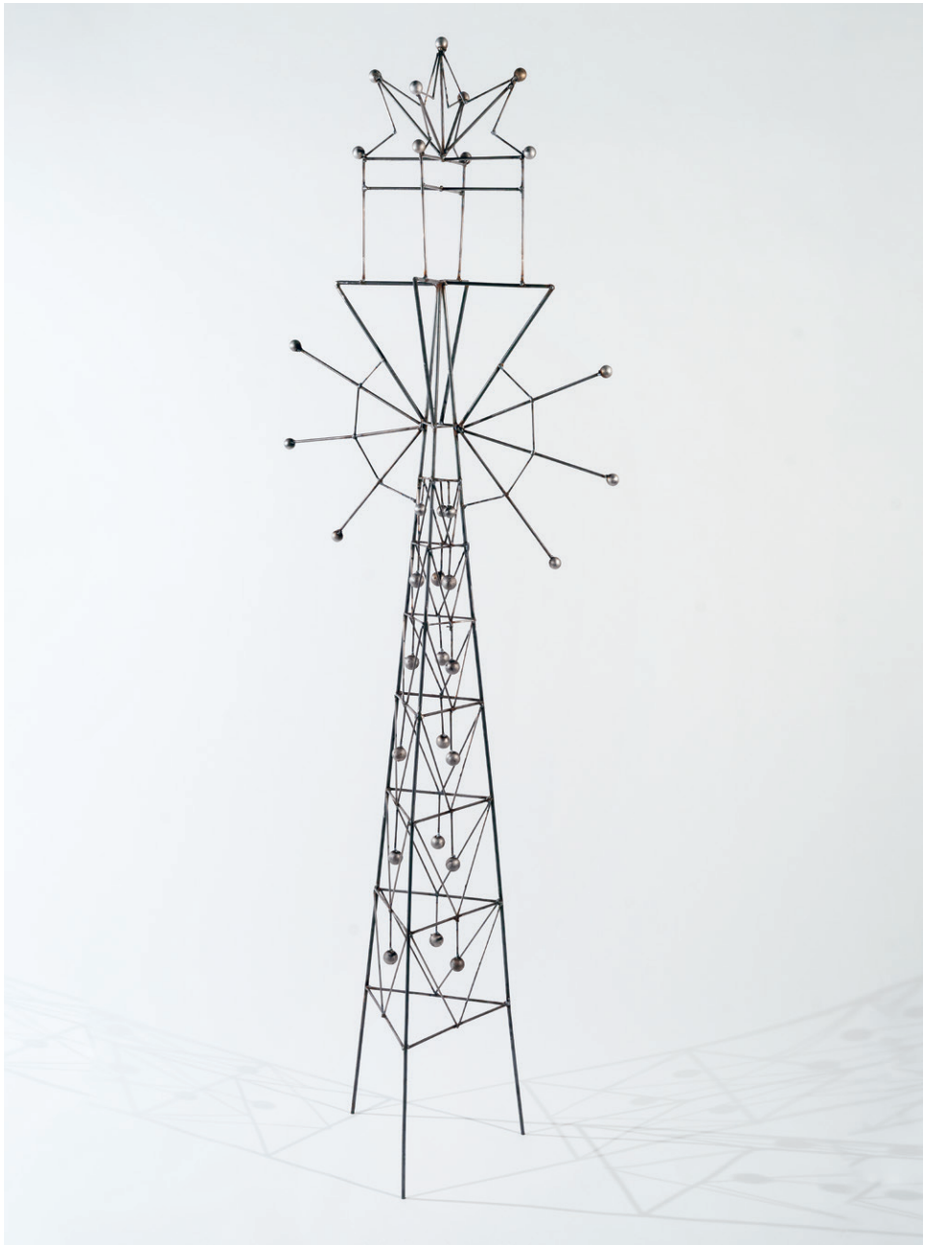
KYLE DANCEWICZ is Deputy Director of SculptureCenter, New York.

Installation view of *Refashioning: CFGNY and Wataru Tominaga*, Japan Society, New York, 2022

Below and opposite:
Prototypes for *Our Gods Walk Among Us* (2026), 2025

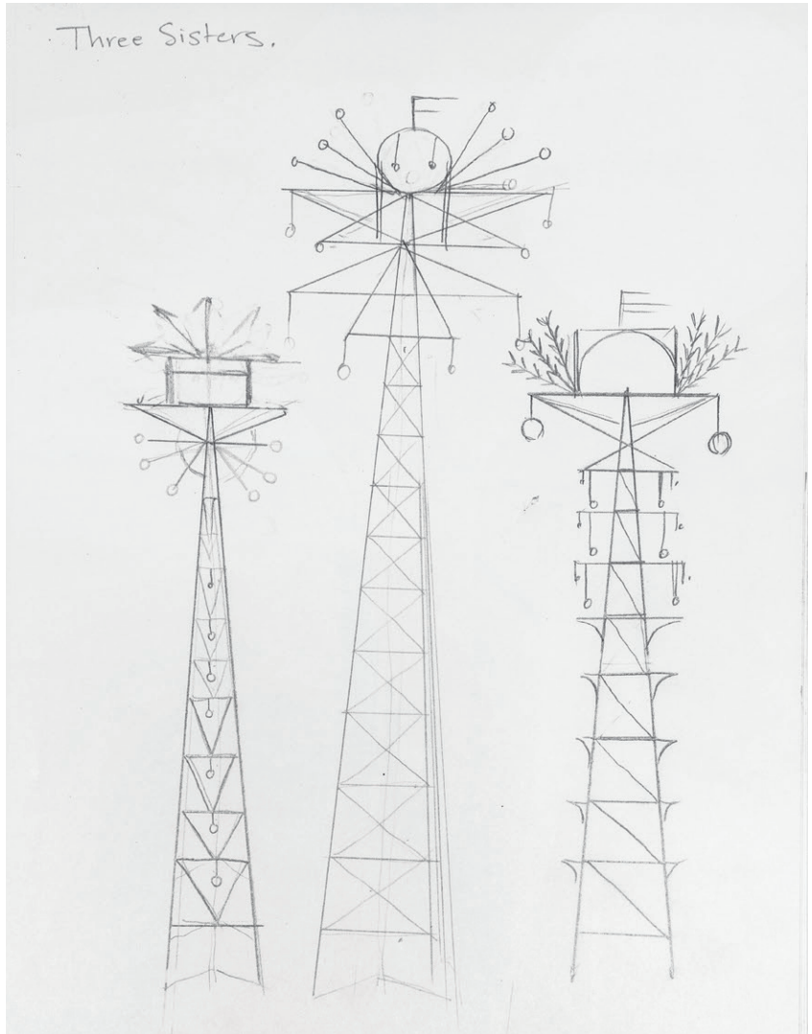
BORN 1980
IN GALLUP, NM;
LIVES IN ALBUQUERQUE, NM
NAVAJO NATION

NANI CHACON



BRANDEE CAOBA: I want to open with a little bit of gratitude and say, it's a gift to be in conversation with you about your work.

NANI CHACON: Thank you, Brandee—and, of course, you know how I feel about you.



Sketch for *Our Gods Walk Among Us* (2026), 2025

BC: So . . . your practice blends painting, muralism, installation, and Indigenous storytelling in what are these increasingly ambitious public interventions over the past few years. Can you tell me how your approach to these forms has evolved? Maybe some things have shifted for you, in terms of focus, or medium, or motivation even?

NC: Public art has always been a key. It widens the conversation in a way that isn't always accessible when we take art out of the public sphere and privatize it. Making art in public spaces brings us back to the rudimentary, innate feeling we have to create art, which is to share it.

I also think it's become important to me to take *time* creating projects. Sometimes we're under the confines of deadlines. It's become more and more important for me to step back and take the time to integrate community—community voices, histories—in a way that's very deliberate and respectful.

BC: Let's unpack a little bit more about public art and accessibility, because so much of your work engages with cultural reclamation and actively resists erasure. You're reclaiming geometric design, the wall, the street, and the urban setting, not only as surfaces for image-making, but as sites of sovereignty, visual storytelling, and community presence.

NC: A lot of my work is informed by Diné iconography, and I look at that as a form of visual storytelling. The design elements that are incorporated into our traditional forms of art are also ancient forms of thinking that are abstracted. Something that I think has happened within urban landscapes is homogenization—a homogenization that works for capitalism and for the idea of convenience, which is a mechanism of making money. Capitalism is actually what drives our immediate aesthetics within the cityscapes that we encounter every day. So I do think of all the different forms of my public work as being interventions, as breaking through that homogenized grid and providing an opportunity to think about something outside those systems. To reference something from the past, that perhaps creates something that is relevant in the present but also could speak to the future.

BC: I love how your work connects and responds to place and uses storytelling, scale, and conversation to provide a level of representation that doesn't exist in the capitalist urban landscape.

NC: What drives that is that the work is always informed by the land, and that the narrative has to shift beyond myself, especially being community-engaged work. I lend my ability but also work as a conduit within communities for a larger story that exists within that landscape. Whether it's a mural, painting, installation, sculpture—we're deriving a story from the landscape itself. Across cultures, stories are always tied to place, and that becomes increasingly powerful. It's what creates politics; it's what creates memories and adhesion to the places that we call home and that we're willing to fight for, because there's memory—stories and histories—placed within that land.

BC: How do personal and communal forms of knowledge come together in your creative process, and how do you navigate the space between individual and shared experience?

NC: A lot of my work right now is driven by my taking an intentional approach to learning Diné creation stories. There is a community aspect to hearing your own cultural creation stories as oral tradition; part of the practice is to take part in that exchange with another person. It's an intimate exchange that is open to interpretation, to the storyteller and to the receiver. When these works are created, even though they are based on my own explorations, the process still takes on the approach of bringing in other people's time and histories, which is very important to me as a collective process.

BC: Your practice has always challenged dominant narratives and centered Indigenous and Chicana feminist voices. Given that your work speaks from this totally different

cultural paradigm, how do you navigate or challenge the framework of what we call American art?

NC: I do feel like the confines of American art are very limiting, being that when we think about American art, we think about North American nationalism, which has only been around for 250 years or so. The narratives that I speak to and make work for—these are histories of people who have existed for thousands of years. I'm speaking to the people who have witnessed and felt these histories, and then to a broader audience, challenging them to investigate that, to learn from it, and to experience it also from their own perspectives. My work precedes the idea of America. If we are to truly think about the scope of American art, it has to begin with Indigenous art.

BC: One of your pieces that really struck me was the interactive mural *PAHTIA* [2023], which was sound activated by the frequency of somebody's body touching the wall. We had a really interesting conversation when I visited it, about how different healing practices have existed since time immemorial. I wonder if you might talk a little bit about that in reference to American art.

NC: Yeah, central to that conversation, I think, is the Western gap in understanding the relationship of art and science within the Indigenous intellect—which is, there is no compartmentalization. There's no compartmentalization among art and science and healing and being and eating and loving and caring. Our relationship to water, stars, land—everything—is seen very holistically. Western American culture aims to pull these things apart and to find the genius in each of them.

The sculpture work that I'll be exhibiting at the Navajo Nation Museum later in the year, for example, will have a transmitter embedded in it. I'm interested in these kinds of technological integrations because I see it as a dialect that we as a people, collectively, engage in now. We're constantly interacting with the technological forefront. I think we see this as something new. However, the more that I investigate—again, creation stories, traditional teachings—I see that this process of technological integration has always been, from knowledge of our star systems to wavelengths to frequency healing. Now we can Google "frequency healing." But the evidence of that history is the *feeling* of it. When you hear music, when you hear drumming or chanting, the mechanisms of those things were to penetrate into our molecular structure. Those are the gaps that I'm talking about. The gaps that fail to account for Indigenous technologies, Indigenous knowledge in a contemporary context, and also in an artistic context. My explorations add to my own understanding, broadened by traditional contexts, but also broaden the conversation in a more holistic sense, in the same ways that my ancestors did.

Nani Chacon with Leah Buechley, *PAHTIA*, 2023. Sound installation, aluminum, tin, copper, carbon paint, and acrylic, 9 × 45 ft. (2.7 × 13.7 m). Installation view, National Hispanic Cultural Center, Albuquerque, NM, 2023

BC: Your new sculptures also speak to a lot of this. Thinking about them, I have all these ideas reeling through my mind—[Diné] deities, sand painting, power lines you see in the landscape—

NC: As I was researching our creation stories, I also began to look more seriously at our traditional sand paintings. For this past year I was fortunate enough to be a research fellow at Diné College and to study our sand-painting archives. It's almost a disservice to call them paintings, because they're actually prayers. I was astonished and moved by the intentionality of the mark-making, the placement of every single line or dot; every part of it means something. I began to think how much more transformational our work would be if we carried that kind of intentionality, that kind of precision to it. That's like this relationship between these power lines and Yébîchai in these sand-painting motifs. The power lines are made with mathematical precision, not that they're recollections of gods or anything like that—

BC: I see what you mean, but the power lines look so similar to the Yébîchai in the sand paintings—

NC: Yeah, but the power lines were made as mathematical formations. They were made in that design because that is the math and science of a structure that would enable it to hold the power of electricity running through it and allow it to exist in these landscapes with high winds. I feel the relationship between these two shapes

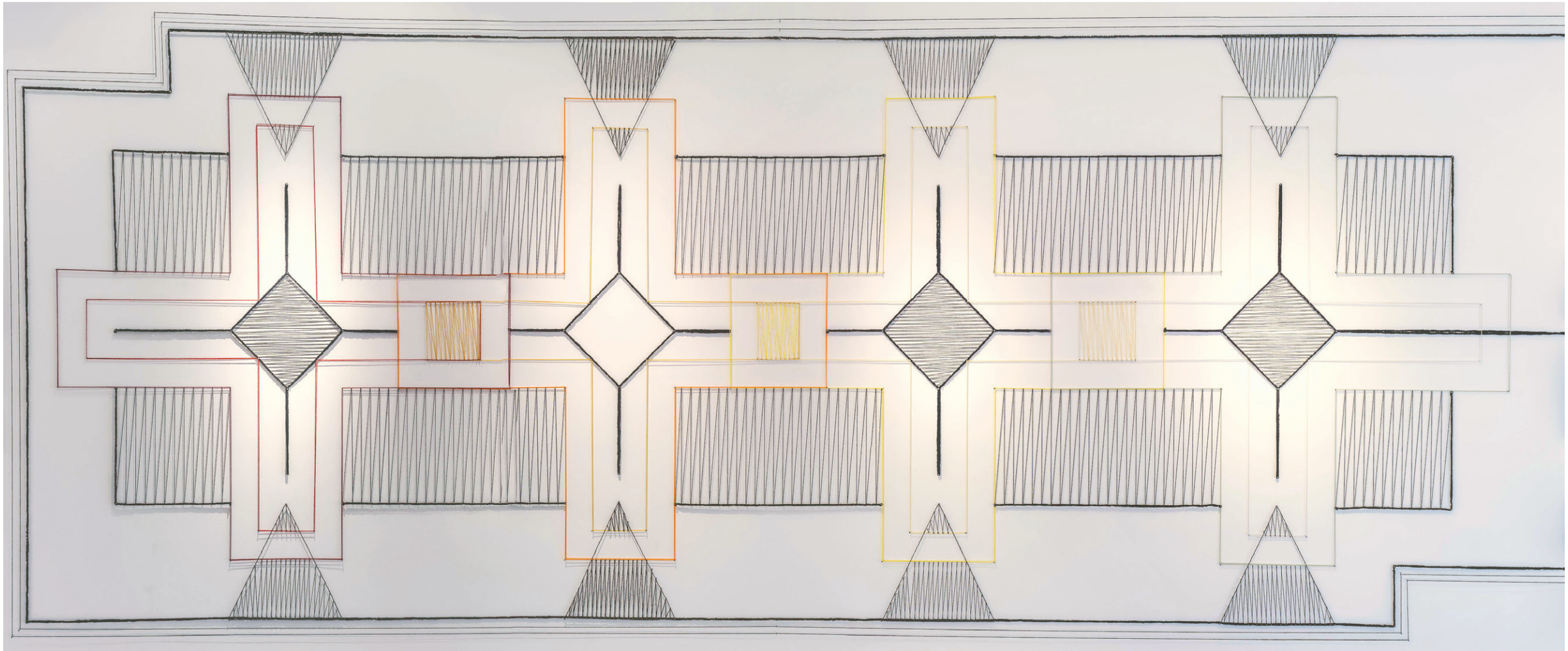
is actually a reflection of the mathematics of God. My ancestors understood these mathematical formations, as do engineers of today. In my sculptures, I understand the relationship of these designs and formations; I incorporate the similar and distinct shapes and forms. Then the sculptures can be a reflection of the landscape with power lines, but also a prayer. That is a reflection of healing, of health, of us, of history, of our Gods and our philosophies.

BC: Right. Can you tell me, though, were the similarities in design [between the power lines and the representations of Yébîchai in sand paintings] something you've always noticed, or was there an aha moment when you drew the parallel?

NC: Growing up on the reservation, I didn't think of those as power lines when I was little; I thought that they were Yébîchai. As an adult—becoming politicized and thinking about our relationship to landscape and what those power lines actually represent—that was very jarring. They aren't anything that represents something sacred and beautiful and harmonious. What they really represent is ecological exploitation and industrial blight. How do we begin to reframe something that is an industrial scar on the land and make it into a mechanism of beauty? Ultimately, I think, the framework and thinking in Diné philosophy is: we hold the idea of Hózhó, of completeness, as our highest form of being and living and seeing the world. So how do we begin to reframe all things within that, even if that thing was meant to destroy the land? How do we begin to think about it in a different capacity, to make that something our own again?

BRANDEE CAOBA is an artist, writer, curator, and visual activist.

Our Gods Walk Among Us (String adaptation), 2022. Cotton, polyester, and blended natural fibers, 12 × 25 ft. (3.6 × 7.6 m). Installation view, *SPECTRUM*, SITE Santa Fe, NM, 2022



MAIA CHAO

BORN 1991
IN PROVIDENCE, RI;
LIVES IN PHILADELPHIA

Maia Chao and Ethan Philbrick, *Agents of Deterioration*, 2024. Performance view, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, October 5, 2024

MIRA DAYAL: Let's start with the tone of your work. I'm often drawn to its absurdity—whether in *Creative Management* [2023], with the tangle of office chairs, or in *Waste Scenes* [2024] and *Agents of Deterioration* [2024]—which relates to the chronic, the unexpressed, the frustration that cannot be released. Could you share more about why those emotions have become central to your practice?

MAIA CHAO: I often think about the feelings that drive my making, and lately I've been thinking about my practice in relation to this term "moral injury," which refers to the injury to the conscience and the spirit that occurs when one is continually having to participate in systems of exploitation and oppression that contradict one's values. We all, to different degrees, are living in this constant state of moral injury. It manifests for me in feelings of dread, melancholy, paranoia, and a diffuse but constant feeling that I should be doing or feeling something else. I also think about "minor feelings," which Cathy Park Hong articulates in relation to Asian American identity—these subtle, noncathartic states where action is blocked or suspended, and frustration can't be released. You see this quality in a lot of the institutions and objects I'm working with: the waiting room, the museum, the discarded self-help books at the dump. A lot of times, I'm contending with how they let us down—and yet, how we remain attached to them. In the landfill, for example, I was drawn to aspirational self-help books, whose promises of the good life felt especially absurd in a dump. In a doctor's waiting room, we're promised care or treatment but have to wait—disproportionately so for those with fewer resources, in a system driven by profit. I became interested in the art that adorns waiting room walls, how it's used to naturalize the clinical experience. And then there is the way that museums tout progressive missions

Maia Chao and Ethan Philbrick, *Agents of Deterioration*, 2024. Performance view, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, October 5, 2024

Maia Chao and Fred Schmidt-Arenales, still from *Waste Scenes*, 2024. Two-channel digital video, color, and sound; 40:39 min.

while their budgets—which are the actual moral documents—reveal different priorities. There's also the temporal suspension of the permanent collection, preserving an artwork in the hope of making it permanent, against all the natural forces of deterioration over time. These are all places or objects that are filled with contradiction and feel coded to me in states of suspension or anticlimax.

MD: Of course, your work is not just about processing these feelings; it also proposes intervening in systems that create that sense of moral injury and models disruption.

MC: I think this ties to your point about absurdity. I'm often working in this oscillation between the meaningful and the meaningless—studying regimes of value and where they collapse—and that frequently involves absurdity. For instance, in *Waste Scenes*, an opera singer harmonizes with an I-beam scraping against a dumpster, or in *Creative Management*, office workers maneuver a set of tethered office chairs in a fountain outside city hall. I don't set out with the intention of absurdity, but it often emerges through experimentation. I think of David Graeber's assertion that what lies behind the appeal of bureaucracy is fear of play. I'm inclined to leverage play within that polarization.

MD: Some of your projects echo how institutions measure their value and set goals; in others, the goal is to create a breakdown. I wonder if you could speak more to how you understand the relations between intervention and efficacy.

MC: When I started making art, I collaborated with Josephine Devanbu on *Look at Art. Get Paid.* [2015–20]. The premise was to pay people who don't ordinarily visit art museums to visit as guest critics of the art and the institution. We asked, how do we reverse flows of knowledge and money between the museum and the public it neglects to serve? That project was very much about measurable outcomes, but in the process I also feared becoming an underpaid DEI consultant coming in to "fix" the museum. Not to mention contributing to the phenomenon of institutional critique wherein an art institution hires POC artists and gains cultural capital by paying lip service to a critique without implementing lasting structural change. I think there's been an evolution in my practice that might also evince some kind of pessimism or cynicism about affecting change in our institutions, or maybe it's a humbled sense of what's possible or worthwhile. I'm still thinking a lot about intervention, but less about tangible,

Creative Management, 2023. Performance view, Love Park, Philadelphia, May 18, 2023

measurable impacts and more on an affective level. I think there's a lot to be said for relieving one's artistic practice from having to do it all and for pursuing direct action outside of a given artwork.

MD: A lot of your work feels forward-looking, including by involving a younger generation, but not always in a utopian way. Could you talk a bit about social change with respect to your practice, and how you situate your practice in relation to past, present, and future? I think this relates to these feelings of despair and waiting we've been talking about.

MC: The dump [*Waste Scenes*] was a particular space of waiting—trash waiting for processing—and a lot of that trash that [my collaborator] Fred Schmidt-Arenales and I were working with was from the past, from the 1990s and early aughts. We used some of those materials as found scripts and brought them through performative experiments to moments of collapse, where the speech of the actors dissolves into drivel, or the harmonies sung by the choir fall apart. That led me to *Agents of Deterioration*, with my collaborator Ethan Philbrick, which is my most explicit engagement with tenses of time. It's a choral performance, and the libretto samples the language of art conservation. The piece is sung by the Children's Chorus of Washington, and the children start out by quoting the art historian Claire Bishop, who talks about how permanent collections require us to think in several tenses simultaneously: the past, the present, the future. "This was important"; "This is important"; "This will be important"; but also, she posits, perhaps most interestingly, the future perfect: "This will have been important." I see this tense being used a lot now, politically: "What side of history *will you have* been on?" Using the future to mobilize the present.

MD: Thinking about the present and future often involves envisioning a particular group of people. Could you share more about your practice not as "social practice" but as a *social* practice, as you often work with a range of people?

MC: I'm really interested in art in an anthropological sense—how art is defined, used, and valued across different cultural contexts. For example, in *A Picture of Health* [2021], I collaborated with twenty-seven doctors in Philadelphia to curate an exhibition of artworks from their offices. More recently, I've been shadowing sanitation workers in Times Square, who submit reports on issues like graffiti or chained bikes that need to be removed. A central part of their work is photography; they document a brief moment when things meant to disappear are visible. In that case, I'm thinking about those utilitarian photographs as artworks. So there's both a desire to think about art in "non-art" contexts and vice versa—to explore the contingency of meaning. This naturally leads me to collaborate with people who have very divergent definitions of what art is and what it can do.

I sing in a queer choir in Philadelphia, so naturally choral singing has found its way into my work. My choir director and fellow choir singers have appeared in my films. Some of my most moving artistic experiences have come from singing in groups—it's this ancient mode of connection that I find deeply healing. It feels like a true practice of being together. It's a vital antidote to the administrative and analytical modes of my practice.

So, for me, working with people is at the heart of my process and my desire to make. It often puts me in a beginner's mindset, where I'm learning someone else's process or mode of inquiry or making that isn't my own. That mindset in turn helps me to believe that no matter how shitty the outcome of that collaboration, it's still deeply worthwhile to be learning together.

MD: Ha, that's great. It reminds me of how you've talked about your projects as a kind of rehearsal—like, maybe we're not actually ready to do this, but let's rehearse a reality in which we do address this. The rehearsal becomes a cover for the real thing, or maybe the artwork trains an audience or institution or group to do something you hope they'll repeat in the future. Do you want to talk more about rehearsal and repetition in your work?

MC: There's something endlessly engaging to me about repetition, including the boredom that comes from it. I'm a fan of semantic satiation, where you repeat something so much that the word breaks down and starts to become just a sound. Right now, in a project I'm working on with choreographer Lena Engelstein, I'm thinking a lot about looping gestures, these short fragments of a gesture repeated—what kind of meaning opens up in that process? And what differences emerge through repetition?

I like the idea of an artwork as a space to rehearse different ways of being, and I'm drawn to the rehearsal as a hypothetical form that defers finality. Something I struggle with in my practice is this attachment to potential—to what could be. I think it intersects with a certain perfectionism, which can be really immobilizing under the pressure of a final product. Every choice involves loss. And yet, that attachment to potential is also paramount to making work that attempts to imagine otherwise. The frame of rehearsal offers a way to inhabit that tension differently. It holds open the future without delivering it. It's maybe anticlimactic and noncathartic, like those protracted minor feelings. A rehearsal can hold multiple outcomes or paths forward. It can be a structure that supports uncertainty and ambivalence, and refuses closure.

MIRA DAYAL is an artist, writer, and editor based in New York.

JOSHUA CITARELLA

BORN 1987
IN NEW YORK;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

Still from *Doomscroll 23: Catherine Liu*, 2025. Ultra-high-definition video, color, and sound; 1:20 min.

JOSHUA CITARELLA: Today, my practice exists primarily on social media platforms. A decade ago, it took place in mostly brick-and-mortar institutions. We used to upload our lives to the internet, and now we download reality from online. A core part of my project over the last few years has been to trace this important cultural transformation through a series of in-depth interviews. I wanted to speak to you, Josh Kline, to better understand how American art has transformed during this critical period.

In September 2013, you opened a solo exhibition, *Quality of Life*, at the Lower East Side gallery 47 Canal. The same week, I had my first solo show on view, at Higher Pictures uptown. We spent one day visiting each other's exhibitions, talking about art and that strange moment of creative life in New York.

My peer group of post-internet artists were very much inspired by the "older classmen" around 47 Canal, such as Michele Abeles, Anicka Yi, Stewart Uoo, and others. Influential exhibitions like *Pro Bio* at MoMA PS1, which you curated earlier that year, gave my generation something to aspire to, with important works by Dis, Tabor Robak, Antoine Catala, Ajay Kurian, Carissa Rodriguez, Ian Cheng, and more.

Anything and everything felt possible. We didn't know it at the time, but creative life was about to change. Soon, social media and real estate would massively transform the culture and economics surrounding art. To begin, I wonder if you could tell us what it was like starting out in New York when you did?

Still from *Doomscroll 18: Ezra Klein*, 2025. Ultra-high-definition video, color, and sound; 55:29 min.

JOSH KLINE: My peers and I were reacting against the art and art world of the 2000s—the heyday of $100,000 MFAs. Most of the doors into New York's art world were through

pedigreed MFA programs, West Chelsea galleries, and through the Whitney Biennial and Greater New York. The curators of these museum surveys would pick up artists from summer group shows at Chelsea galleries or MFA thesis shows or open studios, and vice versa for the New York gallerists scouting for young talent. If your work wasn't in one of these places, it was almost impossible to catch a break. I was working as a video art curator. Anicka Yi was working as a bookkeeper. Margaret Lee and Antoine Catala were artist assistants. We didn't have rich parents or MFAs, and no one would work we were making.

After the financial crisis, the Chelsea galleries stopped having summer group shows full of young artists, and all of a sudden, there was a lot of empty real estate in Manhattan. A few artists found ways to get access to some of that real estate, like Margaret Lee at 179 Canal. I pitched her a three-day group show that would include our work along with that of our peers—Anicka, Antoine, Trevor Shimizu, Amy Yao, Alisa Baremboym, and others—all of whom would become the core of 47 Canal's early program. The show, which opened on May Day 2009, was titled *Nobodies New York*.

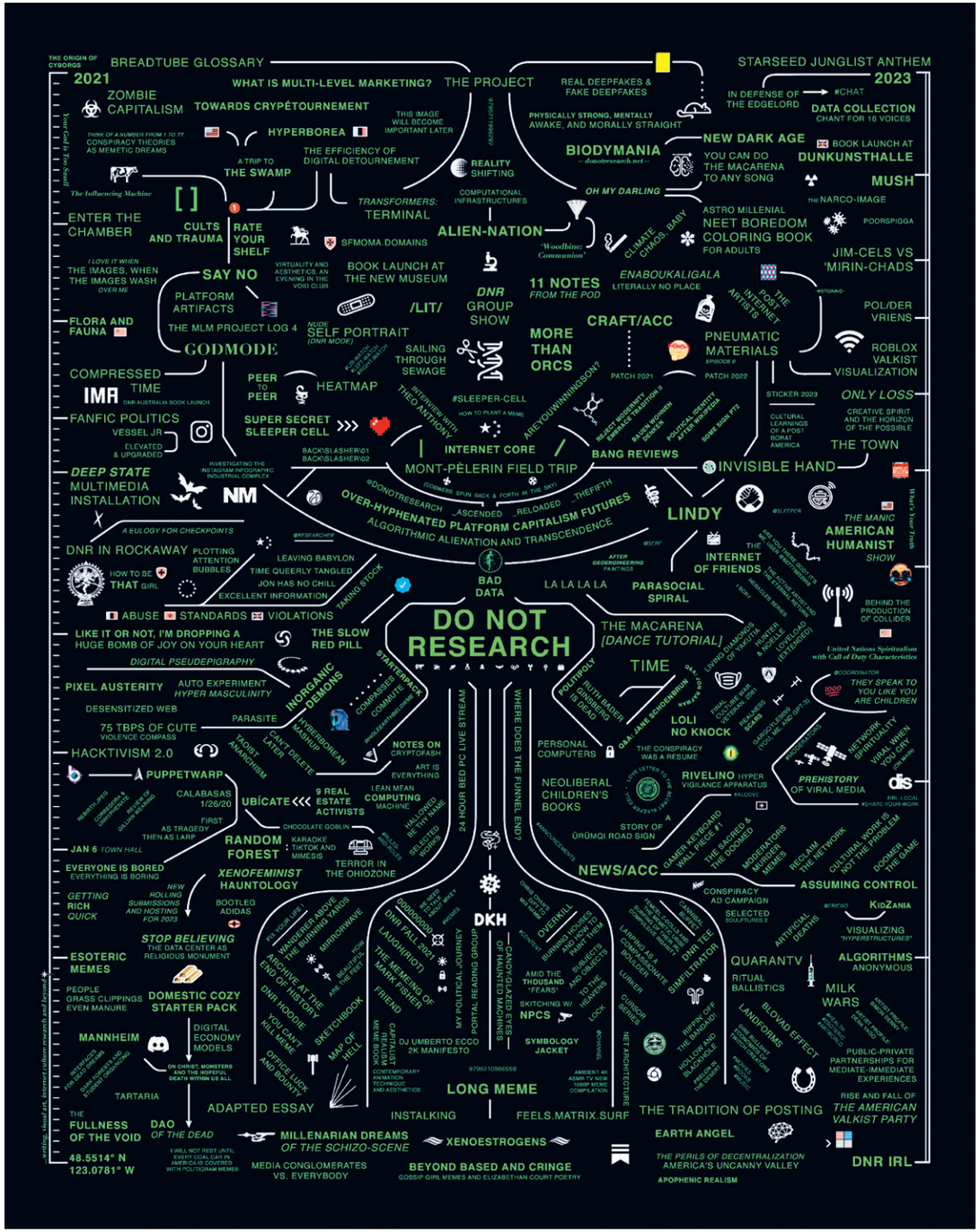
At the time, I remember thinking that the art world was incredibly conservative. So much of the art that was in favor was focused on the past, reinhabiting or reenacting various moments from twentieth-century modernism (all while ignoring the wars that America was prosecuting in the Middle East). We wanted to break from that kind of art, to carve out space for new forms, new materials, new ideas about what art could be in the twenty-first century. It's weird to be saying this now: American contemporary art today feels even more conservative than what was going on in the 2000s.

JC: I always think of Ryan Trecartin's work as a powerful example of how the art world used to lead culture in that period. He anticipated the style of TikTok and YouTube ten to fifteen years early. Now it feels like social media is leading culture, and the art world merely responds to it.

Politigram & the Post-left: Final Version, 2021. 134-page softbound book, 9 × 6 × ⅜ in. (22.9 × 15.2 × 0.9 cm)

One way to understand that is, after social media, the culture we started to produce became more so "the discourse" than discrete art objects. I think that's part of how I find myself here today making a video podcast. Social media had the effect of turning all the lectures and panel discussions around art into "content." On the podcast, I find myself discussing many of the topics that I used to explore in the art world.

Back in 2013, PS1 hosted several left accelerationist speakers, including Nick Srnicek, in a program organized by Triple Canopy within *EXPO1: New York*. Your influential *ProBio* show opened there a few months later. It was a heady moment when bold new ideas demanded


BREADTUBE GLOSSARY
2021
ZOMBIE CAPITALISM
WHAT IS MULTI-LEVEL MARKETING?
TOWARDS CRYPÉTOURNEMENT
HYPERBOREA
THE EFFICIENCY OF DIGITAL DETOURNEMENT
A TRIP TO THE SWAMP
THE PROJECT
REAL DEEPFAKES & FAKE DEEPFAKES
PHYSICALLY STRONG, MENTALLY AWAKE, AND MORALLY STRAIGHT
BIODYMANIA
STARSEED JUNGLIST ANTHEM
2023
IN DEFENSE OF THE EDGELORD
#CHAT
DATA COLLECTION CHANT FOR 16 VOICES
NEW DARK AGE
BOOK LAUNCH AT DUNKUNSTHALLE
YOU CAN DO THE MACARENA TO ANY SONG
MUSH
the NARCO-IMAGE
REALITY SHIFTING
OH MY DARLING
COMPUTATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURES
TRANSFORMERS: TERMINAL
ENTER THE CHAMBER
CULTS AND TRAUMA
RATE YOUR SHELF
SFMOMA.DOMAINS
ALIEN-NATION
ASTRO MILLENIAL NEET BOREDOM COLORING BOOK FOR ADULTS
POORSPIGGA
JIM-CELS VS 'MIRIN-CHADS
SAY NO
VIRTUALITY AND AESTHETICS, AN EVENING IN THE VOID CLUB
BOOK LAUNCH AT THE NEW MUSEUM
ENABOUKALIGALA
LITERALLY NO PLACE
11 NOTES FROM THE POD
DNR GROUP SHOW
CRAFT/ACC
PLATFORM ARTIFACTS
THE MLM PROJECT LOG 4
NUDE SELF PORTRAIT (DNR MODE)
/LIT/
FLORA AND FAUNA
GODMODE
SAILING THROUGH SEWAGE
MORE THAN ORCS
PNEUMATIC MATERIALS
POL/DER VRIENS
ROBLOX VALKIST VISUALIZATION
COMPRESSED TIME
IMR
PEER TO PEER
HEATMAP
#SLEEPER-CELL
PATCH 2021
PATCH 2022
STICKER 2023
ONLY LOSS
CREATIVE SPIRIT AND THE HORIZON OF THE POSSIBLE
FANFIC POLITICS
VESSEL JR
ELEVATED & UPGRADED
SUPER SECRET SLEEPER CELL
INTERNET CORE
BANG REVIEWS
THE TOWN
INVISIBLE HAND
DEEP STATE
MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION
NM
MONT-PÈLERIN FIELD TRIP
OVER-HYPHENATED PLATFORM CAPITALISM FUTURES
ALGORITHMIC ALIENATION AND TRANSCENDENCE
LINDY
THE MANIC AMERICAN HUMANIST SHOW
A EULOGY FOR CHECKPOINTS
DNR IN ROCKAWAY
PLOTTING ATTENTION BUBBLES
LEAVING BABYLON
TIME QUEERLY TANGLED
JON HAS NO CHILL
EXCELLENT INFORMATION
BAD DATA
LA LA LA LA
PARASOCIAL SPIRAL
INTERNET OF FRIENDS
ABUSE STANDARDS VIOLATIONS
LIKE IT OR NOT, I'M DROPPING A HUGE BOMB OF JOY ON YOUR HEART
THE SLOW RED PILL
DO NOT RESEARCH
THE MACARENA [DANCE TUTORIAL]
TIME
DIGITAL PSEUDEPIGRAPHY
PIXEL AUSTERITY
AUTO EXPERIMENT HYPER MASCULINITY
INORGANIC DEMONS
DESENSITIZED WEB
PARASITE
75 TBPS OF CUTE
VIOLENCE COMPASS
HACKTIVISM 2.0
PUPPETWARP
NOTES ON CRYPTOFASH
ART IS EVERYTHING
LEAN MEAN COMPUTING MACHINE
9 REAL ESTATE ACTIVISTS
UBICATE
CALABASAS 1/26/20
PERSONAL COMPUTERS
NEOLIBERAL CHILDREN'S BOOKS
THE CONSPIRACY WAS A RESUME
RIVELINO HYPER VIGILANCE APPARATUS
LOLI NO KNOCK
PREHISTORY OF VIRAL MEDIA
NETWORK SPIRITUALITY
VIRAL WHEN YOU CRY
THEY SPEAK TO YOU LIKE YOU ARE CHILDREN
STORY OF ÜRÜMQI ROAD SIGN
GAMER KEYBOARD WALL PIECE #1
THE SACRED & THE DOOMED
MODERATORS MURDER MEMES
RECLAIM THE NETWORK
CULTURAL WORK IS NOT THE PROBLEM
DOOMER THE GAME
NEWS/ACC
CONSPIRACY AD CAMPAIGN
ASSUMING CONTROL
SELECTED SCULPTURES 2
ARTIFICIAL DEATHS
VISUALIZING "HYPERSTRUCTURES"
KIDZANIA
RANDOM FOREST
KARAOKE TIKTOK AND MIMESIS
TERROR IN THE OHIOZONE
XENOFEMINIST HAUNTOLOGY
BOOTLEG ADIDAS
EVERYONE IS BORED
EVERYTHING IS BORING
GETTING RICH QUICK
NEW ROLLING SUBMISSIONS AND HOSTING FOR 2023
STOP BELIEVING
THE DATA CENTER AS RELIGIOUS MONUMENT
ESOTERIC MEMES
PEOPLE GRASS CLIPPINGS EVEN MANURE
DOMESTIC COZY STARTER PACK
DIGITAL ECONOMY MODELS
MANNHEIM
ON CHRIST, MONSTERS AND THE HOPEFUL DEATH WITHIN US ALL
TARTARIA
THE FULLNESS OF THE VOID
DAO OF THE DEAD
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MEDIA CONGLOMERATES VS. EVERYBODY
ADAPTED ESSAY
INSTALKING
FEELS.MATRIX.SURF
LONG MEME
XENOESTROGENS
BEYOND BASED AND CRINGE
GOSSIP GIRL MEMES AND ELIZABETHAN COURT POETRY
THE TRADITION OF POSTING
EARTH ANGEL
THE PERILS OF DECENTRALIZATION
AMERICA'S UNCANNY VALLEY
APOPHENIC REALISM
DNR IRL
DKH
OVERKILL
BURNING HOUSES AND HOW TO PAINT THEM
NO SUBJECTS NO OBJECTS NO THE HEAVENS NO LOCK
SKITCHING W/ NPCS
SYMBOLOGY JACKET
AMID THE THOUSAND YEARS
DNR TEE
SIMELITRATOR
QUARANTV
RITUAL BALLISTICS
MILK WARS
ALGORITHMS ANONYMOUS
LANDFORMS
BLOVAD EFFECT
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS FOR MEDIATE-IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCES
RISE AND FALL OF THE AMERICAN VALKIST PARTY
DOOMER
THE GAME
CULTURAL LEARNINGS OF A POST BORAT AMERICA
SOBE SIGN PT2
POLITICAL IDENTITY AFTER WIKIPEDIA
REJECT MODERNITY, EMBRACE TRADITION II
BEHIND THE PRODUCTION OF COLLIDER
United Nations Spiritualism with Call of Duty Characteristics
THE ORIGIN OF CYBORGS
THINK OF A NUMBER FROM 1 TO 77. CONSPIRACY THEORIES AS MEMETIC DREAMS
The Influencing Machine
I LOVE IT WHEN THE IMAGES, WHEN THE IMAGES WASH OVER ME
'Woodbine Companion'
CLIMATE CHAOS, BABY
THE POST INTERNET ARTISTS
BEHAVIOR
BACK\SLASHER101
BACK\SLASHER102
INTERVIEW WITH THEO ANTHONY
AREYOUWINNINGSON?
HOW TO PLANT A MEME
INVESTIGATING THE INSTAGRAM INFOGRAPHIC INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX
@DONOTRESEARCH
_ASCENDED
_RELOADED
_THEFIFTH
SPUN BACK & FORTH IN THE SKY
@SLEEPER
@SCAV
AFTER GEOENGINEERING PAINTINGS
THE KANE MEETS HD EXTENDED VERSION
NEW YORK TIMES SQUARE'S THE EVENING SERIES
THE KANE MEETS HD EXTENDED VERSION
@RESEARCHER
HOW TO BE THAT GIRL
LOVE LETTER TO THE INTERNET
REALNESS SCORE
DARKSTREAMS (TOUCH ME AND DIP 3)
@COORDINATOR
1009
THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL
THE SACRED & THE PROFANE
THE SACRED & THE DOOMED
THE SACRED & THE BANDIED
THE SACRED & THE HOLLOW AND BLOODIED
THE SACRED & THE SMEARED
THE SACRED & THE BLOODIED
THE SACRED & THE BLOODIED
THE SACRED & THE BLOODI

Class Fantasy (detail), 2024. 90-card deck in matte-print rigid box, 3 ½ × 2 ½ × 1 ½ in. (8.9 × 6.4 × 3.8 cm)

urgent discussion. Soon after, the internet picked up the themes of left accelerationism and transformed them into hyperbolic memes like "Fully Automated Luxury Communism" or even "Fully Automated Gay Space Communism." In the years following, these hyperbolic "e-deology" labels began to emerge from the internet itself and then trickle into the institution. Somewhere around 2015, the flow reversed. We stopped looking to art to find new ideas and instead began browsing online.

As a young person, the art that I admired always had a good conversation or a lecture around it. Before the domination of big social media platforms, can you recap what the art world was like? Was there more or less discourse at that time?

JK: I think the amount of discourse has remained the same or maybe increased. But in the market—in galleries—the discourse is thinly disguised connoisseurship around decorative painting. At least in the United States. The people who support art are no longer interested in radical experimentation or in art driven by ideas. In institutions, there's a lot of discourse, but it's entirely about art's content. What's declined is the number of artists proposing new ways of working or advocating for new forms or new media. I think social media is one of the main reasons that the art industry has become so focused on painting and other handmade forms. The glut of spam, slop, memes, etcetera, has cheapened the image and conceptual gestures.

JC: My peer group saw the internet not just as a communication network but as a profoundly new method of organizing society, and that included thinking about social media in a very serious way. Fifteen years later, I still feel that way but without any of the optimism. This transformation has been realized in mostly the worst way possible, to largely disastrous effects.

Through long discussions in peer-organized reading groups at the time, I began to understand the internet as the early digital infrastructure for neoliberalism. Platforms offered the possibility to create transnational or noncontiguous societies linked together through markets. Before social media, I understood the artist lecture and the art object as being bundled together: The artist lecture created the value, and that value was held in the artwork as a token object. After social media, those two things were disintermediated or de-bundled. Platforms found a way to disempower gatekeepers and to optimize separate markets for art discourse and art objects. Now artists have dedicated outlets for conversations, such as podcasting, while artworks have become purely formal and serve a separate audience. What we used to say in museums, we now say on Substack. Did the art world as a whole benefit from this earlier model of gatekeepers, or has this disintermediation been a net benefit to art?

JK: I don't think gatekeepers were enforcing that earlier paradigm you're describing. Or that artist lectures or artist writing were required as part of the exhibition of Conceptual art. It's just the way that a number of artists were working. I worked with Seth Price at Electronic Arts Intermix at the beginning of his career. Nobody forced him to write *Dispersion* [2002–ongoing]. At the same time, Bernadette Corporation were not giving artist lectures.

JC: *Dispersion* was a key text for our generation.

JK: Seth was influenced by this earlier generation of artists who worked with EAI. He was following the model of people like Bruce Nauman or Dan Graham, Conceptual artists whose work went hand in hand with writing. There are still artists who write. You all are still writing. It's just that there's no longer space within the commercial side of the American art industry for artists like you. There will be no gallery shows on offer unless you figure out how to merge your ideas with painting.

JC: One of the other things that you and I have discussed a lot recently, which you explored as well in a piece for *October*, is the rising cost of living in New York. This has had a major impact on art.

JK: There are two main ideas in the essay. The first is that New York real estate and the cost of doing business here—which includes the cost of living—have pushed American art into a deeply, deeply conservative space after the pandemic. The second, which leads back to the first, is that the structure of the American art industry forces most American artists to be present in New York in order to start and then to maintain an art career. All the gatekeepers are here.

JC: Is this crisis something the art sphere itself can address, or is it much broader?

JK: I think that it's only artists who have the power to solve it, and the way they solve it is probably by abandoning New York and its art institutions. They can build their own art worlds in spaces where the cost of living is more affordable.

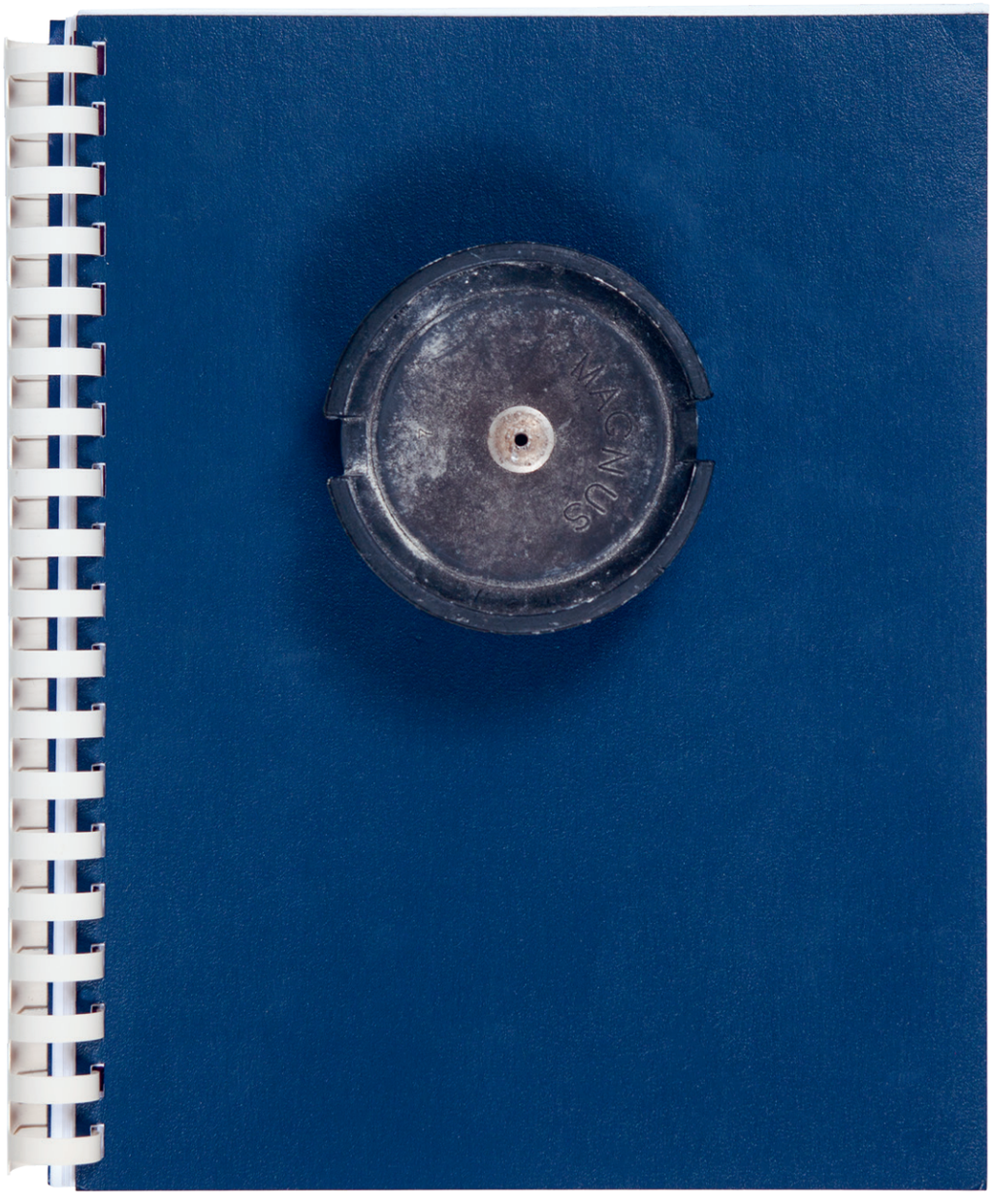
Boomer artists, curators, and collectors built their own institutions in New York, and those institutions championed their art: PS1, Artists Space, Dia, The Kitchen, White Columns, Electronic Arts Intermix. None of our generation's artist-run project spaces were able to turn into institutions.

JC: This is why we're pursuing 501(c)(3) nonprofit status for Do Not Research. Institution-building is critical now because of this upward drift in age for artists who participate in the established museums, art fairs, etcetera.

We both agree that the ideal conditions for making art is a society in which the cost of living is low, the wages are high, and you can work part-time while you go about your decommodified art practice. Ideally, you work three days a week in the service industry, and you can make your weird experimental video art on the side. You can pursue these things absent the pressures of the market. Those are the ideal conditions that create an enormous, explosively experimental art scene that is so exciting.

JOSH KLINE is an artist and writer based in New York.

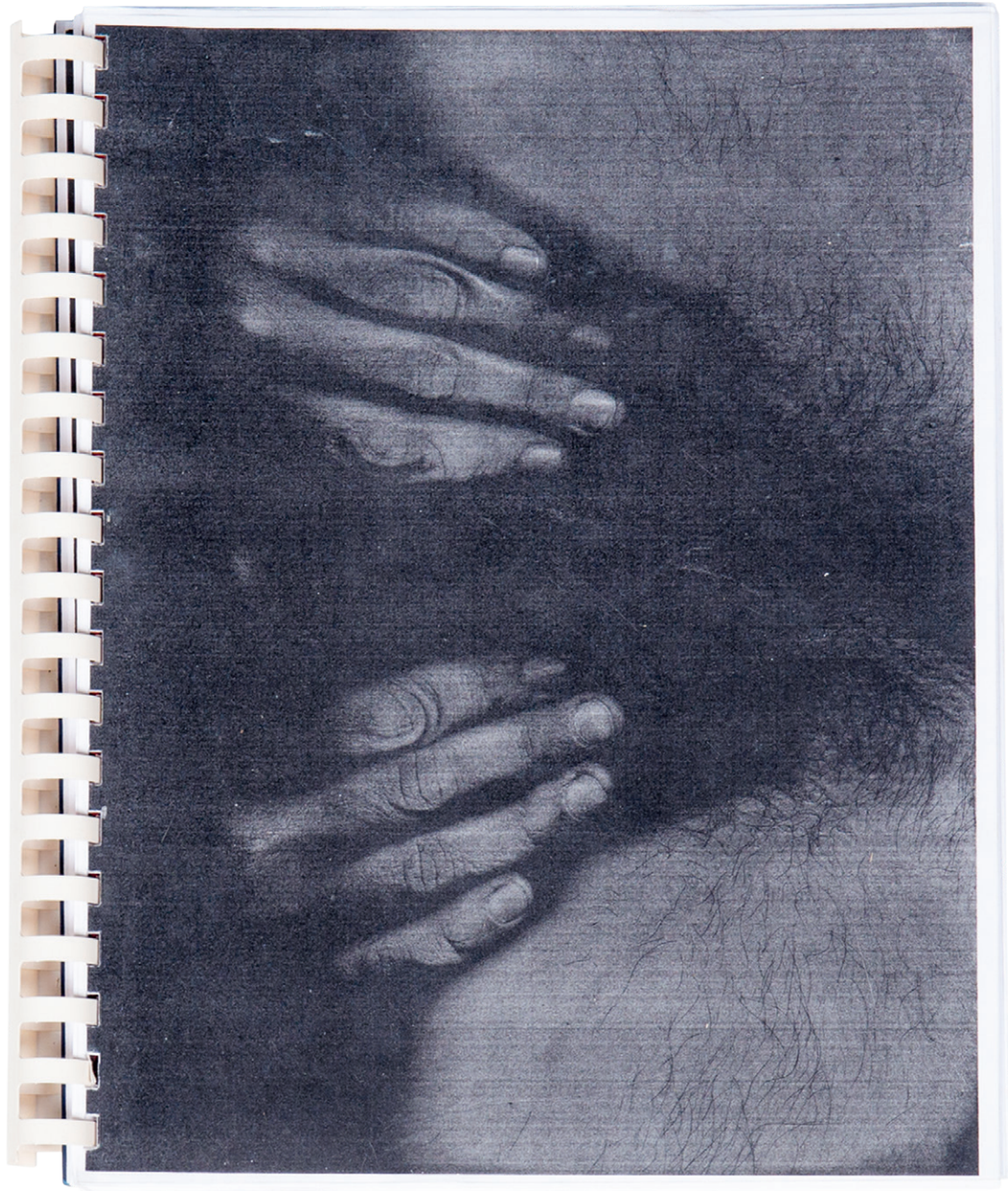
Untitled (Magnus), 2023. Comb-bound reader with text and image reproductions on paper, toner, ink, exposed ortho film, gelatin silver contact print, self-inking stamp, glue, Magnus speaker, and other found materials, 11 ½ × 9 ½ × 3 ½ in. (29.2 × 24.1 × 8.9 cm)



Opposite: *Untitled*, 2020. Comb-bound reader with text and image reproductions on paper, toner, ink, exposed ortho film, and self-inking stamp, 11 ½ × 9 ½ × 1 ½ in. (29.2 × 24.1 × 3.8 cm)

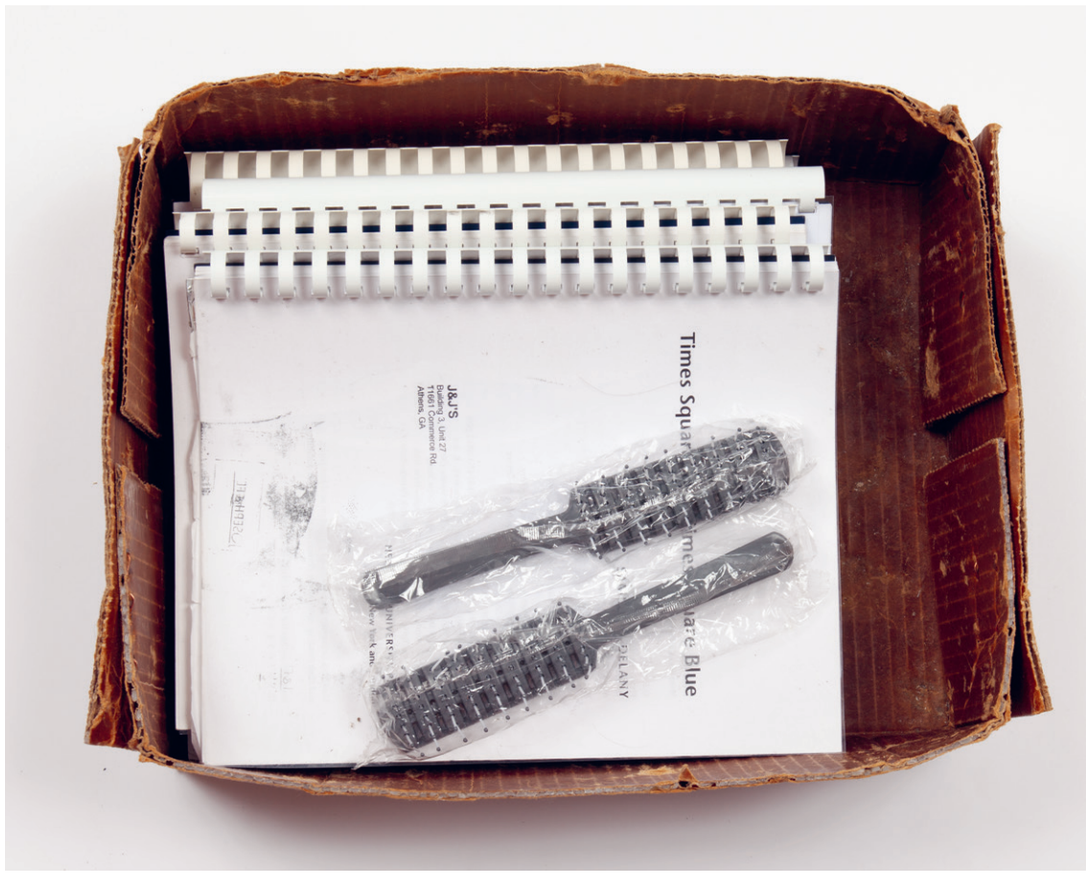
BORN 1989
IN SEATTLE;
LIVES IN ATHENS, GA

MO COSTELLO



ANDY CAMPBELL: Let's start with your *Readers*. Could you describe how they started for you, and what they look like and feel like?

MO COSTELLO: The *Readers* are made up of a combination of text-based materials, photographs, and other found materials such as coupons, flyers . . .



Untitled (Readers and Combs), 2025. Comb-bound readers with found objects in cardboard box, 5 × 15 × 12 in. (12.7 × 38.1 × 30.5 cm)

AC: . . . combs, napkins . . .

MC: . . . things gathered from my immediate environment. For the most part, the *Readers* are provisionally bound with comb-binding. Comb-binding is flexible, it welcomes change! It welcomes disruption!

AC: You've definitely changed how I see comb-binding. I always saw it as somewhat annoying, because pages slip out of it, the combs go under the paper, the combs go over it. I love the way you make use of that.

MC: Mm, yes, I find comb-binding incredibly erotic. "The combs go under . . . the combs go over . . . the pages slip"!

AC: Opening, closing. . . . [*Laughter*]

MC: Comb-binding is a useful tool for gathering disparate materials into conversation with one another in the nonlinear process of living and reading. Occasionally, a *Reader* begins as a single essay. Then, maybe a coupon is added, or a flyer, or a copy of a flyer, or another essay—the object becomes slightly unruly in later iterations. In many ways, the *Readers* are living, material archives of shared urgencies. Traces of what I'm reading, or what friends—both real and imagined—are reading, and where we're reading, at any given moment.

AC: I associate the idea of readers with classroom pedagogy: the "semester reader." Did they start in part from the experience of being in a classroom?

MC: They grew out of the classroom in many ways, specifically out of teaching. While the classroom is a complex site, a contested—and highly regulated—site, it is also a place where the simultaneity of learning and sharing is clarified. A place where the sociality of text is engaged as both means and end. Reading and rereading, alongside others, in order to read, and learn, differently.

AC: We've moved away from physical readers in the classroom, too. It's precisely at this moment of its obsolescence that the reader, as a form, has this potential to bring another world into being.

MC: The *Readers* emerge out of a deeply material relationship with text—text as calories, as subsistence—and also as companionship. At the same time, it's helpful to understand them—and maybe my practice more generally—in relation to the speculative and in relation to longing.

The classroom has become increasingly untenable for me, due to the ongoing pandemic alongside my fluctuating capacities to work as a chronically sick person. As early as 2015, I'd begun to circulate text in other contexts. Initially, in and around a roughly two-block radius of Atlanta's South Downtown, where, for a brief period of time, a handful of artist-run spaces—Eyedrum, Mammal Gallery, Downtown Players Club, Murmur—existed alongside several small, family-owned local businesses: a dentist, a dry cleaner, two pharmacies, a shelter, and an Islamic center. By 2018, rising rents imposed by landlords in response to the prospect of development forced the majority of tenants to either relocate or, painfully, close down. I began, with a kind of abandon, making copies and more copies of Samuel R. Delany's book *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* [1999]. Distributing them, like pamphlets or flyers, across South Downtown in an effort to tenuously navigate an impossible situation.

AC: This comes through in the fact of choosing Delany's text for reproduction and dissemination. That text is so much about the importance of contact, particularly interclass contact, but we could also think about it in a more immediate, physical—and even photographic—way.

MC: Yes, yes! Contact, collision, contamination—critical forms of sociality for our emotional, psychological, and physical survival. In many ways, the *Readers* are unabashedly utilitarian. At the same time—and this is maybe where the erotic comes in—there is also, always, something that exceeds utility. Something closer to the nonsensical, to incantation and to prayer. Over the past few years, I've been circulating *Readers* in and around Athens, among a constellation of convenience stores and gas stations, as well as at the local flea market, and at Krystal on Prince Avenue—a

fast-food chain with drive-through service. And more recently, from our front porch.

AC: The place where you live has become something more: your house plays a role as the place where photographs are made and even developed—with light-sensitive paper frequently taped, nailed, or otherwise adhered to windows, doors, and other surfaces! [*Laughter*]

It is also a gathering space. You organized a show of the late artist Beverly Buchanan's work that was presented at your home and at the neighborhood pharmacy that you and she shared. You've additionally reproduced several of Buchanan's texts, drawings, and photographs, found in local collections, into *Readers* of their own. As an artist, Buchanan focused on the pragmatics of survival, which I see throughout your work as well. Could you say a little about that?

MC: Before rising rent costs became prohibitive, the house we rented, in the increasingly unaffordable Boulevard neighborhood, had been my primary workspace. Which for me is also, always, a sick space: working surfaces—such as tables, chairs, the floor—are never too far from, and often include, my bed. In the final two years of our lease, our house, or more specifically the front porch, was a distribution site for aid moving between Atlanta, Athens, and south Georgia—efforts led by friends developing critical, local infrastructure for disaster relief.

In 2023, I organized a presentation of Buchanan's work at her longtime pharmacy, Hawthorne Drugs, and at my house, located just a few blocks from her former residence. Many of Buchanan's works permanently reside in the homes of the late artist's friends, caretakers, doctors, and pharmacists and suggest a complex web of dependence and care.

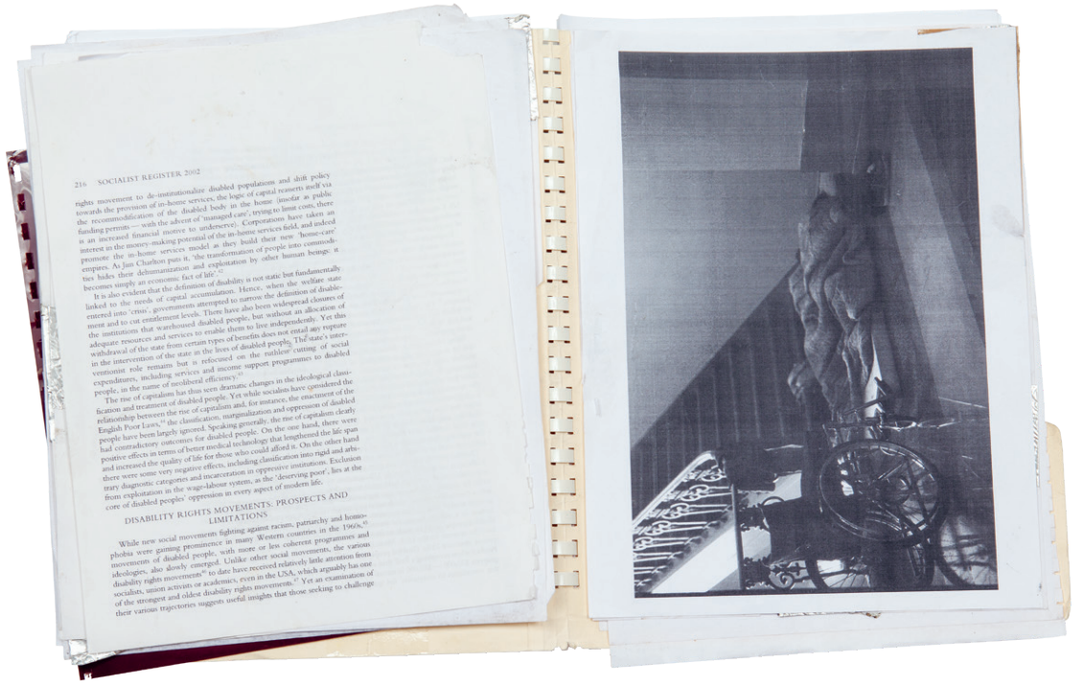
Since then, at the invitation of Katie Geha, the former director of galleries at the University of Georgia's Lamar Dodd School of Art, I've been working alongside artist, writer, and close friend Katz Tepper to prepare an institutional presentation

Untitled (Ramp and Chairs), 2024. Gelatin silver print, 6 × 4 in. (15.2 × 10.2 cm). Edition of 3

of Buchanan's work at the University of Georgia's Athenaeum. It's a project that is in some ways an extension of these earlier efforts to make Buchanan's work more accessible on a local level, though in other ways it's distinct and has taken on a life of its own. The now multiyear collaboration with Katz has brought us into conversation with a number of others who are doing critical and meaningful preservation work—including yourself, as well as writers Bryn Evans and Patricia Ekpo—in service to Buchanan's expansive and prophetic legacy.

AC: In your practice, you consistently put a lot of care into thinking about how one comes into a place and is able to stay in a place—it could be the space of your exhibition, the house show, or the *Readers*. Could you

Untitled (Front Porch, Hurricane Helene), 2025. Gelatin silver print, 6 × 4 in. (15.2 × 10.2 cm). Edition of 3



Untitled, 2021–ongoing. Comb-bound reader with text and image reproductions on paper, toner, ink, exposed ortho film, self-inking stamp, foil tape, packing tape, and manila folder, 11 ½ × 9 ½ × 2 in. (29.2 × 24.1 × 5.1 cm)

talk about those moves? I'm thinking about your exhibition at Atlanta Center for Photography [ACP] in 2025, which consisted of a selection of photographs alongside an access intervention in the form of a raised-curb ramp leading into the building's interior gallery—which is now a permanent fixture at ACP.

MC: At the invitation of Executive Director Lindsey O'Connor, and with the support of José Ibarra Rizo and Makeda Lewis, I approached that exhibition with a few guiding questions: What is a center? What are the responsibilities of a center? How do we assemble, in what forms, and with whom?

One of the first things I observed of the center's new home on Edgewood Avenue was the fact that the building's two primary entrances were slightly above street level. Consisting of a three-inch and five-inch rise, the entryways more or less excluded anyone dependent on mobility aids—including wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers—from entering the building.

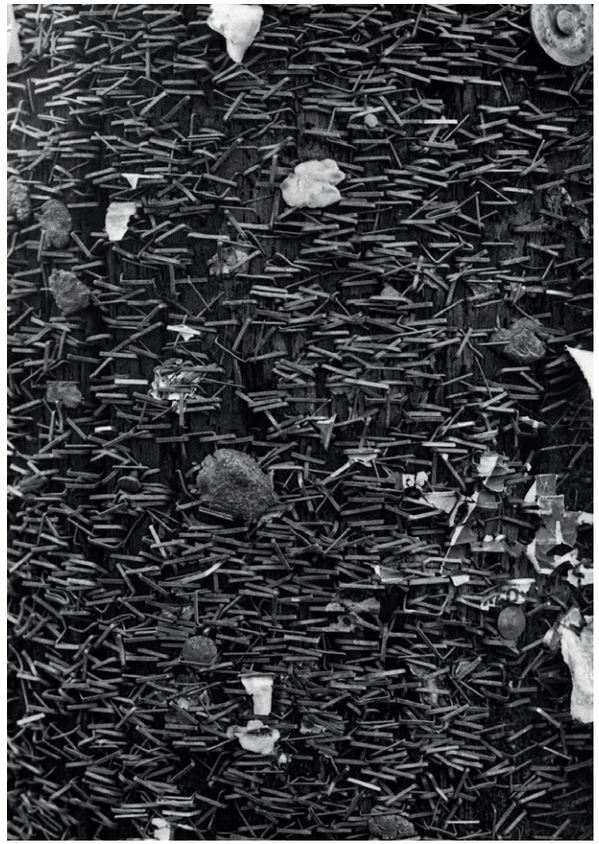
A modest intervention into the building's inaccessible entryway was conceived in close conversation with, and eventually fabricated by, a team of welders at Fred Martin Welding, located directly across the street from ACP. The resulting ramp was bureaucratically unpermitted: there was no waiver, or notarized affidavit, or performance bond, or lengthy permit process. Rather, a partial solution—more are always needed!—emerged messily, imperfectly, joyfully, and with the resources at hand.

Access comes from social relationships. This includes partners, friends, caretakers of differing levels of intimacy. It also, in my experience, often involves less likely—even unlikely—alliances.

AC: Inside ACP's gallery, you installed a suite of your photographs of hundreds of staples on telephone poles throughout Athens and Atlanta. On the subject of the exhibition, Tepper writes: "The material intervention to the space's entrance combines with the documentation of accumulated public offerings to suggest the conditions for possibility." One particular sentence of Tepper's is now forever burned into my brain: "There's a revolution on that lamppost, there's no show without a ramp, and there's no ramp without a neighbor."

That little encapsulation of the show and its dependencies is one of the closest-to-the-bone descriptions of the political and ethical center of you and the people you work alongside. It seems that, as you insist on the ongoingness of the conversation, the ongoingness of the work, there are always others who are willing to join you. They're right next door.

ANDY CAMPBELL is a writer, curator, and teacher in Gardena, CA.



Untitled (Cleveland Ave.), 2025. Gelatin silver print, 6 ½ × 4 in. (16.5 × 10.2 cm). Edition of 3

BORN 1998
IN NEW YORK;
LIVES IN NEW HAVEN, CT

TAÍNA H. CRUZ

Hound, 2023. High-definition video, color, and sound; 5:23 min.

CHARLOTTE YOUKILIS: You've often described your work to me as hovering between becoming and disappearing, and tracing things that linger and things that get erased. Which brings to mind this concept I've been thinking about of latency—the state of something existing while not having fully developed or manifested. Latency also describes the delay before a data transfer. Which seems very apt for your practice, because you integrate cybernetics and the internet with these more ancestral concepts. Could you expand on that transitional or liminal state in your work?

TAÍNA H. CRUZ: I find so much within those moments that feel present but are just out of reach. That sense of *almost* knowing fuels me constantly. To me, becoming and disappearing are almost the same.

El Bronx Nunca Duerme, 2024. Oil on canvas, 75 × 75 in. (190.5 × 190.5 cm)

You can't always tell which direction things are moving, and I really enjoy capturing those moments when I paint. I think those moments get highlighted because of my spiritual background. I grew up with my mom speaking in tongues to access certain levels of spaces and fields. She's a trained hypnotist, so she understands the value of just staying within the moment to achieve a totally altered space. I like to bring that back in as something that grounds me.

Growing up, I witnessed the evolution of the internet. I was able to view the portals and environments it created. It was exciting to create a glitch within the display of images, and it allowed me to step back and look at the back end, the code. The delay has shaped my thinking about how to capture a specific moment of time. My work is trying to live within that period of suspense.

CY: In your recent paintings and drawings, beauty seems to emerge as something that's simultaneously grotesque and also quite tender. To me, a lot of these works are representative of the contemporary media landscape. I'm thinking of digital distortion, deepfakes, commodification of the body. I'm curious how your background in computer science and '90s-to-early-2000s internet culture plays into that.

THC: Distortion just feels honest to me, and the grotesque is another way of saying what's real. When a figure looks broken or shifting, that's where tenderness enters, because you're forced to stay with what's fragile. Growing up, distortion was all around me, not just online, but in the city: the Times Square and SoHo billboards with faces stretched across entire buildings, and the ads on the train during my hour-long commute to school. Those images were overwhelming, seductive, and a little unsettling. They made me aware of how easily beauty slips into the grotesque, how desire and distortion are bound together. In my paintings, drawings, sculptures, and videos, I use distortion as an illusion that flickers between beauty and the grotesque, or between desire and unease. I want the work to stay within that unstable place where the viewer isn't sure if they should lean in or look away.

CY: I've been thinking a lot about this essay, "Making Kin with Machines," which considers Indigenous epistemologies and how nonhuman kinship networks extend to the natural world—rocks, plants, mountains. With the rise of machine technology, there's this question of, okay, can we extend kinship networks to that? What would it look like if we really integrated that into our nature?

THC: I don't think of the machine as separate from me, maybe because it is part of my toolbox. When I'm working on 3D animation, the computer keeps opening up these new paths. They help me stretch that sense of wonder. When I'm building my mechanical kinetic sculptures, I remember attending the Swedish Cottage

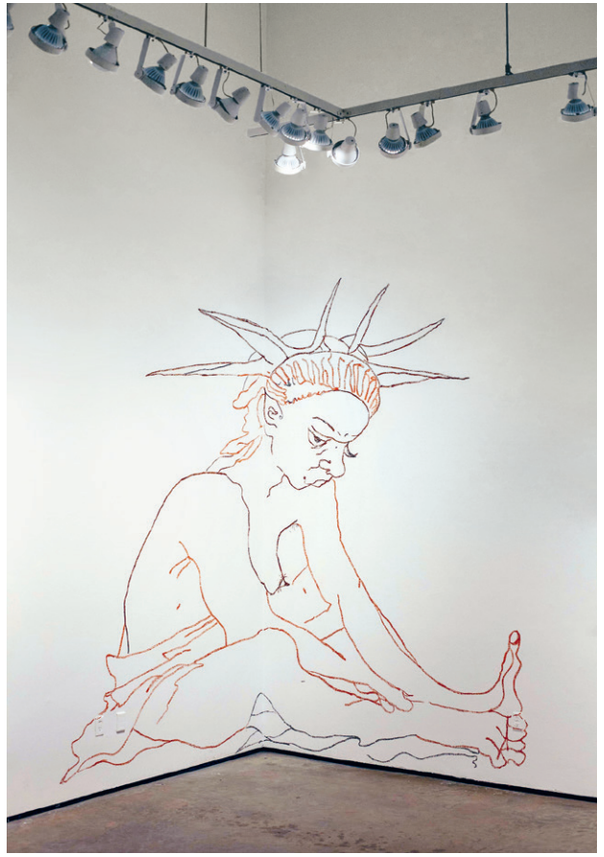
Marionette Theater in Central Park. They would animate the wooden puppets into life, and that resonated with me, to have something so still be completely animated into the sense of story. A lot of my ancestral knowledge wasn't something I could find on Google. It was passed down through stories and casual moments over dinner. Through dreams. In Taíno cosmology, kinship, as you said, extends beyond people to animals, plants, stones, weather—forces that move with us and shape us. Bringing that way of thinking together with the digital feels like these two different kinds of memories are colliding. That mix of combining the stories that I've inherited and the tools that I'm exploring pushes me to create work that hovers between the past, present, and future.

CY: I'm also curious about the objects in your work, whether it's your kinetic sculptures or curio cases. How do you differentiate between things that are left behind—sort of misused or overlooked objects—versus things that are passed down? Because, oftentimes, these are the same objects.

THC: I don't separate what's discarded from what's inherited. In my family, everyone loves collecting objects. I was never in a house with a minimalist interior. I always saw objects as a way of preserving your own personal interests. A handmade broomstick or Taíno figurines, each had its own history.

CY: Are these objects what led you to start thinking about curio cases?

THC: I interned at the Museum of Natural History growing up. I gravitated toward the vitrines in the ocean life section, which felt like small theaters. It was staged, contained, yet the worlds still suggested a type of movement. When I built my own curio case, I knew I wanted to have one that was tall, that resembled a high-rise. It carried that same sense of energy, stacked lives and memories. I also have a lot of fun making the subjects within my work speak to one another. So, when the lights are off in the space, in the gallery, in the museum, what are they whispering to each other? What is the gossip, the *bochinche* that is happening when the viewers are no longer staring at them?



Statue of Rest, 2024. Tempera paint stick on wall, 130 × 150 in. (330.2 × 381 cm)

CY: I'm curious to hear more about your relationship to varying traditions derived from African American, Caribbean, and Puerto Rican cultures, and also how you see those elements of your practice relating to New York City and, more broadly, to the United States and to American art.

THC: My practice is grounded in New York, especially the Bronx and Harlem, where I was raised. Where African American and Puerto Rican cultures, the Nuyorican cultures, were woven into my everyday life. But I had access to the entire city, from the top all the way to the bottom. My parents

Installation view of *Power Line*, Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT, 2025, with (from left) *Morningside Heights*, 2025, broomstick, candle stick, and curio cabinet containing High John the Conqueror oil, Puerto Rican flag, Taíno figurines, drawings, paintings, animatronic creature, pink salt bulb, street lamppost, and dirt, 66 × 31 × 14 in. (167.6 × 78.7 × 35.6 cm); *I'm on the list*, 2025, tempera paint stick on wall, 120 × 80 in. (304.8 × 203.2 cm); *Uptown*, 2025, oil on canvas, 216 × 60 × 21 in. (548.6 × 152.4 × 53.3 cm); and *Yerrr*, 2025, oil on canvas, 24 × 16 in. (60.9 × 40.6 cm)

Root Check, 2024. Oil on canvas, 48 × 60 in. (121.9 × 154.2 cm)

put me in a lot of after-school programs across New York: art classes, dance and acting classes, travel soccer, computer-programming camps, and so on. The city became this extended studio, a playground for my imagination. New York showed me that things can be layered, broken, reused, and alive. That wonder drives my work. Within the context of American art, I think of my practice as a conversation across geographies. There's New York City, its density, the chaos; and there are the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and the woods of North Carolina, where I spent many summers with my grandparents and extended family. Puerto Rico has a different sort of presence for me. As both a homeland and an occupied territory, that contradiction shows me how something can be claimed and erased at the same time, yet still endure. The work speaks to American art not by smoothing over those tensions, but by putting them directly in the room.

CY: The feeling of childlike wonder that never goes away reminds me of how you started drawing on the walls. I'm curious where that desire emerges from.

THC: Childlike wonder will forever stay with me. Drawing on the walls is new, but it's something that I've been developing for what seems like eons, whether that was sketching on the subway during my hour-long commute or watching my older brothers do graffiti. I was used to that idea of quickly tagging something on the wall. But with the wall drawings, it was now a conversation with the building. Instead of my art just being inside the building, my art was now becoming the building. I want my drawings to be larger, something that viewers can really delve into.

CY: Have the wall drawings changed the way that you think about scale and perception? You often pair these larger-than-life figures with something very small, such as figurines or miniature objects.

THC: I can put a giant image in a corner, and it's suddenly flattening that space. I want the senses to be activated. I realize that when you're going closer to something, if something feels larger, you start to feel a sense of, "what is happening?" How can I bring forth something that isn't so easily grasped? When I'm drawing on the wall, I have this creamy crayonlike texture that feels really satisfying, and then I have these characters that look like you don't know what's happening all the time, or there's something that makes you want to be a part of that conversation with them. I think that's where a really fun conversation starts to flow.

CY: You have a painting with the title *Crispy Skin Branzino with Fennel Ash, Yuzu Emulsion, and Pickled Sea Grapes* [2025]. How does food and gastronomy influence your work?

THC: It's so funny hearing you read out that title to me. Because usually I'm giggling in the studio. With that title, I wanted to hint at a sensation, something crispy, soft, acidic, melting—these words that describe food. It's definitely less about the food, the color, the meal itself, and more about how can I coax my paintings into having the same intensity as when we're tasting or smelling? I want the five senses to always be somewhat involved in my work. And it helps create a bit more play. Play is inherent to my survival, so to have that sense of strangeness in the title of *Pickled Sea Grapes* helps me achieve the connection between it all. I see this connection developing for years and years and years to come, way beyond my existence. For me, it's about making my images feel alive, to feel that they exist beyond myself, and that slips into the senses.

CHARLOTTE YOUKILIS is Curatorial Assistant at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Below: *Via Crucis IV*, 1967. Acrylic on canvas, 79 × 60 in. (200.7 × 152.4 cm)
Opposite: *Big Mami*, 1966. Acrylic on canvas, 79 ½ × 60 in. (201.9 × 152.4 cm)

BORN 1933
IN SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO;
LIVES IN BERKELEY, CA

CARMEN DE MONTEFLORES

ANDREA FRASER: Hi, Mami!

CARMEN DE MONTEFLORES: Hi, sweetheart!

Four Women, 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 83 × 112 in. (210.8 × 284.5 cm)

AF: I want to start with some background. You were born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1933. Your father was from Catalonia, and your mother was Puerto Rican of mixed African and European ancestry.

CDM: Correct.

AF: You started drawing as a child in Puerto Rico.

CDM: I took an art class after school. With the nuns. We did a lot of drawings, copying other artwork, all European. And I did cartoons. I loved comic books. And some painting, too. I wanted to paint my surroundings in Puerto Rico, but I didn't find any models for that.

AF: And then you went to Wellesley?

CDM: Yes, when I was 16 and a half.

I wanted to study art in Puerto Rico, but my father wouldn't have it, because after World War II there were veterans taking courses in the local art schools. So, I settled on going away to college—

AF: A women's college.

CDM: —and taking art history.

AF: And after graduating from Wellesley, you went to Paris?

CDM: I turned twenty-one in Paris. I went to a lot of museums and galleries. I took classes at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts. I was very interested in sculpture. Then I realized that, as a woman, it would be very difficult for me to do big carvings or bronzes. I was totally intimidated. I went back to Puerto Rico, but I realized I couldn't stay there. I wanted to continue studying art.

AF: So you arrived in New York in 1954 and started studying at the Arts Students League?

CDM: Yes, I was in a studio class with George Grosz and with the painter Morris Kantor. I painted in the morning and then worked as a translator in the afternoon. And I went to museums and galleries, especially the Museum of Modern Art. I was immersed in Abstract Expressionism.

AF: Then you married my father, who was from Billings, Montana. He was in New York studying philosophy at Columbia. And then you started to have children.

CDM: Yes, in 1956. For a while, I was just parenting, being a housewife. Then we moved to Montana. First to Billings and then to a ranch.

AF: In one of the least populated counties in the US.

CDM: I started painting again in 1960 at the ranch. I would put the three kids into this big car and drive around. The kids slept in the back, and I sketched landscapes. Then I made paintings from those sketches. I noticed, looking back, I was already flattening things out and using bright colors. I found something I wrote about a painting I made in the early '60s, which is based on a memory of the tropical garden of my childhood home in Puerto Rico: "I have a natural inclination toward clear shapes and unmixed colors."

AF: Even in the Montana range, where the landscape is pretty monochrome.

CDM: But the spaciousness of the Montana range influenced my desire for larger canvases and large flat areas of color.

AF: We put together a list and realized that you made, like, a hundred paintings between 1960 to 1965. You were incredibly prolific, especially given that you had three, four, then five kids. You must have been very committed to your artwork.

CDM: I did as much as I could, mostly during naps. I was very disciplined.

AF: And were you able to keep up with what was happening in New York and elsewhere?

CDM: Yes, through magazines and books. Then in 1963 we traveled to Puerto Rico. Along the way, we stopped at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, where I saw an exhibition by Diebenkorn that had a big impact on me. Then we went through New York, and I visited a lot of galleries. I wrote an article for the Billings Arts Association about everything I saw. A lot of Pop Art. That's when I realized that Abstract Expressionism had waned.

AF: And then you started making paintings with multiple panels and negative spaces. But the big change in your work was around 1965, which was, coincidentally, the year I was born.

CDM: I know, sweetheart, it's so interesting to me.

AF: The last of the five children you gave birth to.

CDM: Yes. I was done having children, and I think that released a lot of creative energy, not to mention time. I did the *Big Mami* in 1966. That was the first shape painting.

AF: It's a portrait of your mother. How did that develop?

CDM: I had been making boxes for assemblages, so I was working with wood.

AF: I remember some of them. There's one from 1965 called *Mother and Child*. It's a white box with a self-portrait in chicken wire over a cutout of a head of a crying baby, which would have represented me. It's pretty grim.

CDM: Then I made two abstractions with pieces of wood stuck together and painted in bright primary colors. Then I made the *Big Mami*, which is black and white.

AF: There were two major shifts in your work at that point. You started to make shaped paintings, and also your work became more graphic, with fields of color within lines that delineated figurative aspects. When people see those paintings, they often think of Pop Art.

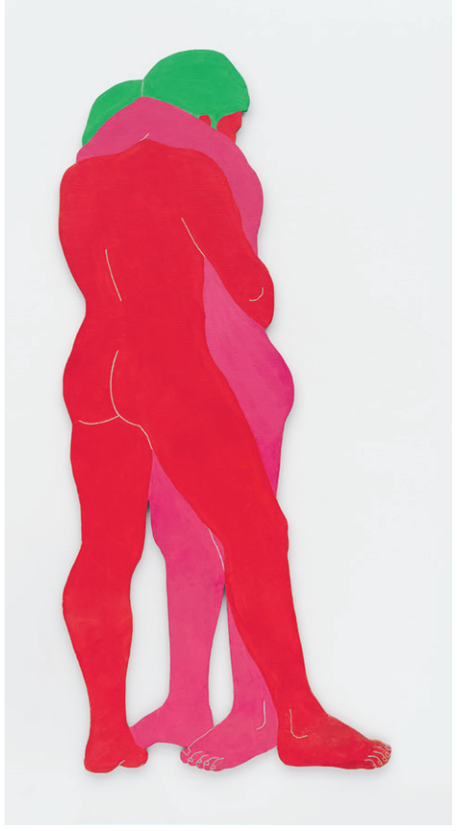
CDM: Definitely, Pop Art and comics. But I was always drawing. I mostly made paintings from drawings, whether it was landscapes or children or other figures.

AF: Line is very important in your shape paintings. The figures and elements of figures—a mouth, a nose, an eye—are delineated by painted lines. But the lines are very organic, very sensuous, very corporeal, without the commercial, mechanical quality of most Pop Art.

CDM: Yes, I think that comes from doing life drawing. I was always interested in catching the outline of a body in various poses. In 1966, I wrote, "It is at the *edges* of things that the real visual drama starts. This is the point of becoming, where one thing leaves off and another starts . . ."

AF: That's wonderful.

So, there's the connection to Pop Art, but I wonder about connections to other developments in painting at that time. You've mentioned Frank Stella.



Man and Woman Standing, 1968. Acrylic on canvas, 82 ½ × 35 in. (209.6 × 88.9 cm)

CDM: Definitely. From Stella, I got that sense of the sculptural aspect of painting and of breaking out of the rectangle. There was an authority to his work that I didn't find in Pop Art.

AF: I think your paintings bridge Pop Art and aspects of Minimalism and Color Field painting. The scale is part of that. Some of them are over nine feet tall. Huge!

The paintings after *Big Mami* have increasingly strong color. You were always a great colorist, Mom. But with the shape paintings, the color gets really wild, even psychedelic.

Man and Woman Sitting, 1968. Acrylic on canvas, 84 × 83 in. (213.4 × 210.8 cm)

CDM: This was also after we moved to Berkeley in the fall of 1967. Suddenly, I felt I could do whatever I wanted with color. Even color that, growing up copying European paintings, I had thought of as garish.

AF: You were liberated from the color of the Montana grassland and started to reconnect with the colors of your childhood in Puerto Rico.

CDM: That was before I embraced being a woman of color and a Puerto Rican, but I was embracing something of my background with the color, in an unconscious way.

AF: I love your painting *Philip* [1967], of my older brother, which is a big head. The hair is a kind of acid lime-green, and the face is an ochre color with pink lines, and there's some blue. To me, it's very much a painting of a Puerto Rican boy, of a brown boy looking back at you with wry defiance.

CDM: I think you're right. There was something rebellious in that painting, which also reflects the process that I was in, a process of freeing myself pictorially. In Berkeley, we got hit by the counterculture, by liberation. It was an incredible transition.

AF: I joke sometimes that we all went from having crew cuts to long hair in a matter of weeks.

The first shape paintings were heads. Then you started making paintings based on drawings that you were doing in life-drawing sessions.

CDM: Right. I put together different sketches, then I blew that up on big pieces of butcher paper and cut the outlines. I used those to cut the stretchers out of plywood with the jigsaw and attach them with Masonite. At first, they were very contained and easy to cut and shape.

AF: Then the shapes became very complex. Also the perspective. The surfaces of the paintings are very flat, but in the drawing, and reflected in the shapes of the paintings, there is often a strong sense of perspective. You have crazy perspective on some of the figures. You're really manipulating the perceptual experience.

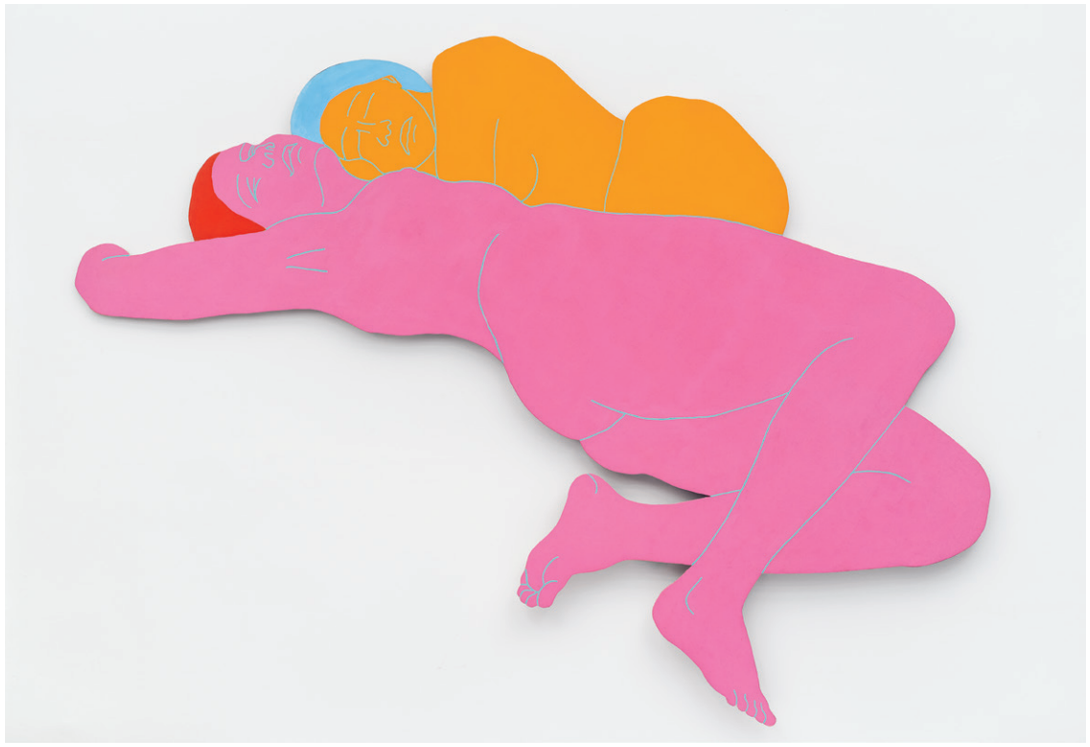
After the heads, there was the *Man and Woman* series [1968], with one male and one female figure.

CDM: Yes, that was part of my life. Men and women.

AF: You know, Mom, some of those paintings are really sexy. I look at them, and I think, wow, there must have been a lot of sex happening!

CDM: I think it was my longing for sex after years of having kids. I mean, you were just teeny-tiny. A lot of my sensual life had gone into kids. I think there was a longing for a fuller sexual life.

AF: It also was the era of sexual revolution, of changing attitudes towards sex. Then, there's the series of just women.



Two Women, 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 119 × 66 in. (302.3 × 167.6 cm)

CDM: The sequence did follow my engagement with feminism. In Berkeley, I became active in second-wave feminism and even started a feminist group. *Three Women* [1968], with the raised fist, is an ode to feminism. It also followed my becoming more cognizant of my attraction to women. *Two Women* is so clearly, you know, lesbian. Even though I was not labeling myself until later.

AF: I also think of them as a feminist response to the use of the female nude in Pop Art.

And then you stopped painting in 1970?

CDM: I think it was more like 1969. We moved to Berkeley in 1967 for two reasons. Your father was going to go to the Unitarian school for the ministry. And I had been promised an exhibition by an art critic—Frankenstein was his name. He saw my artwork in Billings, and he said, "Oh, you should come to San Francisco, you can have an exhibition." I thought, oh my God! I called him when I arrived, and he never answered. He did send somebody to see my paintings. I think someone from the Triangle Gallery. The guy said, "I don't know why he sent me. I don't show these kinds of paintings." And then I tried different galleries in San Francisco. I kept being turned down. But the other piece is that I had started becoming interested in happenings, what was later called performance, and in assemblages. I told myself that I wanted my art to come off the wall. And there was the element also of all the turmoil in my life, you know, the older kids just sort of going wild. And I was also becoming aware of my attraction to women. Anyway, it was a lot of things.

AF: And yet, you made more than twenty-five of these large-scale shape paintings in just two and a half or three years. With five kids and no help. It's pretty astounding.

CDM: I was ambitious. In fact, I faulted myself for being too ambitious, because I stopped after I was rejected. And I fault myself for having, in a sense, abandoned painting. But the fact that there was not a welcoming context for my work had much to do with it. The lack of support for women's art, and probably some amount of racism. Not anything very obvious but, I mean, I clearly was not your regular American housewife.

AF: And then you got a PhD in psychology and wrote five novels.

CDM: Yes. And now, looking at these paintings again, and reading what I wrote about them as I made them, trying to get myself back into that, has been both illuminating and difficult emotionally. I've processed a lot of this stuff in various contexts. But it was a trauma. And talking about my relationship to art and why I stopped, it still brings . . . brings some of that back.

ANDREA FRASER is a Whitney Biennial 2026 artist.

Carmen de Monteflores interviews Andrea Fraser on page 174.

Carmen de Monteflores working on *Big Mami* (1966) in her studio, with Peter Ford, Billings, MT, 1966

BORN 1994
IN BAGHDAD, IRAQ;
LIVES IN LOS ANGELES

ALI EYAL

And Look Where I Went, 2025. Oil on linen, 84 × 144 in. (213.4 × 365.8 cm). Installation view, *Made in L.A.*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2025

KAELEN WILSON-GOLDIE: After years of living and working in Iraq, Lebanon, and Europe, you now have a studio in Los Angeles. Has being in LA changed your work in any way?

ALI EYAL: When I was living in Europe, I moved from residency to residency; that's how I survived. I was producing only small pieces—and some pieces I had to destroy because I had just two suitcases and couldn't carry around large paintings. When I landed in LA in 2022, I started making paintings at a different scale, which has allowed me to navigate more, to see another universe. So, yes, LA has been an influential place for me. Also, I like to see gardens around me, trees, the sun, colors . . . LA gives me that.

KWG: You've made films and installations, and you've done performances. At this moment, do you consider yourself a painter first? Or a storyteller? Or something else?

AE: I'm a storyteller. I feel like I have a book with me, an open book—and every work I make has a number on it, and I keep adding more. I don't know when I'm going to close that book. It's still open.

Painting keeps me safe . . . and painting sometimes puts me in danger. It has saved me at times. There were times when I was able to pass through Baghdad by showing my paintings to checkpoint soldiers. They had a respect for intellectual things.

When ISIS invaded in 2014, I left Iraq. I would have become a refugee in Turkey if I hadn't been accepted into a residency program at Ashkal Alwan, an independent organization in Beirut that runs an art school known as the Home Workspace program. It was supposed to be ten months, but Ashkal Alwan's director, Christine Tohmé, extended my residency. They gave me a studio for three years, in a city that was accessible to creators from around the world. Really, if it hadn't been for my art, and for Christine's generosity, I wouldn't have the career I have.

KWG: How old were you when you started painting?

AE: When I was around four or five years old, I was making Disney-style drawings. This was around 2001—so it was the old Disney, when it was more dark, not the turbulent Disney. Schools in Iraq were having initiatives for kids to make work in honor of Bin Laden. They saw I had talent, so they asked me to make drawings in support of the regime. This is how I met the world: the oil hoses, the Arab Gulf prisons. . . . Iraq was like a cow with milk that other countries wanted.

Where Does A Thought Go When It's Forgotten? (detail), 2022. Oil, colored pencils, pen, and ink on envelopes, paper, and cardboard boxes, dimensions variable

Don't let the beautiful colors fool you, who would draw Goofy inside the rooms of grownups? And, 2021. Installation (acrylic on canvas, sofa, carpet, lighting, and plants, dimensions variable) and performance; 56 min. Installation view, Sharjah Biennial 15, Thinking Historically in the Present, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 2023

With the war, the Disney world was gone for me—and I felt like I lost something of myself. But the colors of Walt Disney are still there in my work. I'm still there in some ways.

KWG: I'd like to ask about language and the way you write, both in explaining your work and also *in* the work. You've said that text comes from a sense that "painting is not enough." When I stand in front of your work as a viewer, sometimes I feel overwhelmed by what the painting is doing and how much is going on in it. I wonder if text for you is a way to ground the possibilities of the paintings, which seem so vast.

AE: Yes: text comes from the sense that painting is not enough. I have made videos, performances, sculpture, installations, and I've written long texts, most recently a short book for the Kayfa ta publishing house.

KWG: Kayfa ta—founded by Ala Younis and Maha Maamoun. They make beautiful, small books that are "how-to" manuals: *kayfa ta* is a play on "how-to." What are you writing for them?

AE: Well, we're still working on it—hopefully we'll publish it soon. It's a book about how to ignore the dusk. I'm "duskophobic"—maybe because of all the violent attacks that happened in my hometown when the sun went down. When I see the sun setting, it's just too bleak, too gloomy. After I landed in LA, it took me two years to make friends. I was floating, and the

Paper, pen, map in a pocket and, 2023. Oil and conté crayon on canvas, 84 × 132 in. (213.4 × 335.3 cm). Installation view, *Crystal Clear*, Bayt AlMamzar, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2024

Look what I remember, 2025. Oil on canvas, 42 × 33 in. (106.7 × 83.8 cm)

scope of my world was basically from my house to the supermarket. So I thought, why not write something about the dusk and sunset? The book is about my memories of the things that have happened during the sunset. I think I'll include a few illustrations in it.

KWG: How much drawing and sketching or preparatory work do you do before a big painting?

AE: It starts with outlines of the whole scene, and outlines of heads. I sketch it all out on a piece of paper. When I start to paint, there's something magical . . . I don't know how to describe it. Things start emerging on the canvas—a hand covering the light of an oil lamp, or a god sitting on a chair, observing the whole scene. It's like magic. And it's out of my control.

KWG: In your work, there's a handful of places—mythical places, or places that may or may not be real—that repeat. One of them is a farm. Is that still in your work?

AE: I created the farm in honor of my cousins, who disappeared during Iraq's sectarian conflicts, around 2006. I did one of these projects for the 14th Mercosul Biennial in Brazil [2025], curated by Raphael Fonseca. It's titled *But Let Me Finish, Please. Let Me Say Something*. It's about my cousin Hissam, who was a missing person. In the work, I present Hissam as a painter who makes a large portrait of one of the Iraqi warlords. His painting is so big that there's no way to hang it, so it lies on the floor, and it gets walked on every day. It's a fictional story of course—and ultimately the project includes fifty-eight drawings of warlords. I like to represent Hissam in a different scenario.

KWG: I assume you don't give the names of the warlords, or any kind of sociological explanation. I think an important part of your work is that you don't *disclose* in an expository or journalistic way. You don't spoon-feed your viewers. You're trying to do something different.

AE: Yeah, maybe—or I'm just protecting myself! You read the story without knowing the names . . . but you might recognize the eyes or the mouth or the hairstyle, even without being given the name.

KWG: So if you know, you know.

What was it like to leave Baghdad and arrive in Lebanon? How was your time in Beirut?

AE: Well, before Beirut, I was introduced to contemporary art practices through Sada, an independent arts organization founded by the writer and curator Rijin Sahakian in Baghdad; it opened in 2011, and then closed in 2014 when ISIS came in. If it hadn't been for Sada, I probably would have abandoned art. That's really what put me on the path. It was when Sada closed that I decided to apply to Ashkal Alwan to study art. Ashkal Alwan was an intensive program, and more theoretical than practical training.

KWG: At Sada and Ashkal Alwan, was being with other artists helpful?

AE: Well, yes. How shall I put it? For me, both schools broke the academic chain. At Sada, we did a lot of online seminars and lectures with Iraqi professors and some of the greatest Lebanese artists—I met Jalal Toufic, Walid Raad, and Akram Zaatari. It was a turning point in my art practice and career.

KWG: Then you went to the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam?

AE: Yes. I stayed in Europe for three years. After Amsterdam, I moved to Paris, which was an intense time—it was during the pandemic. I stayed in Paris for ten months, and then I moved to the United States. I was following the sun.

KWG: Do you still have a phobia of the sunset?

AE: I'm working on it, trying to find a good routine I can live with. But it can be hard, especially as I'm away from close friends in Baghdad or Beirut, and my mom.

KWG: Does your mother ask you about your work?

AE: Always! I even created a website for her with a fake biography, about an artist who paints one color on the wall. His online CV includes things like, "I painted my grandmother's kitchen. I painted my primary school." It's just to have some fun, and it's only online. But she knows what's going on . . . because we both made the same journey, and it was hard on us. She is my mom, but it feels like we're friends. So whenever I paint something, I share it with her, and she knows what I'm talking about.

Right now, I'm working on a small painting about a bed shaking in a haunted house. My dad disappeared in 2006; after that, our house was really creepy. When the sun went down, it was very dark: we had no power, just an oil lamp. And one night, the bed began to shake and float upward with my mom on it! She asked me to check under the bed to see what was going on. . . . I felt the ghost of my dad holding the bed with his arms, and there were other ghosts running after him to stop him, telling him it's too scary. So the painting shows a kid holding the bed, with a scared mom. And there are two heads of people sleeping on the mattress on the floor—my two sisters. We used to sleep that way, on a mattress on the floor. Sometimes I just paint the head; I feel like it's enough.

Every head is like a universe of its own—a world opening into another unseen world. On the surface of everything, there's a hidden world, invisible to others. But I can see it now.

KAELEN WILSON-GOLDIE is a journalist and critic.

BORN 1965
IN BILLINGS, MT;
LIVES IN LOS ANGELES

ANDREA FRASER

Installation view of *Andrea Fraser: Untitled (Video, Audio, Objects)*, Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris, 2024

CARMEN DE MONTEFLORES: Sweetheart, I was thinking about what I would want to ask you. And the question that hit me was, what made you decide to explore getting my paintings shown? Two and a half years ago you first asked me about it and asked me to bring all of my slides to LA so you could scan them and start working on an inventory.

ANDREA FRASER: It was a moment when there were a number of artists in their 80s and 90s, often women and women of color, who were being "discovered" after decades of nonrecognition.

Still from *Welcome to the Wadsworth: A Museum Tour*, 1991. Performance and standard-definition video, color, and sound; 26:12 min.

It went back to the *Radical Women* exhibition at the Hammer Museum in 2017, a great show that focused on Latin American women. A few years after that, I did a piece called *This meeting is being recorded* [2021], based on an anti-racist group for white women that I convened and participated in. That led me to think more about my identity as a white woman in relationship to your identity as a brown woman and also an artist. And then my relationship to the art world started shifting. In 2012—actually, around the last time I was in the Whitney Biennial—I had stopped working actively with commercial galleries. I didn't want to participate in the art market, which was booming, in part as a consequence of wealth concentration. Paintings, especially, were becoming financial instruments. So, you know, the idea that exposing your work to those conditions could be a positive thing was alien to me. But that started to change around 2022, when I decided to work more actively with commercial galleries again.

CDM: I didn't think of myself as a visual artist after I stopped painting. And I didn't assume that my having been a painter had influenced you. Maybe it was my own inattentiveness that made me minimize the impact that my paintings in the house had on you. It wasn't until your talk at the Marian Goodman Gallery in Paris about *Untitled (Objects)* [2024], your sculptures of toddlers, that I heard that my being a painter had influenced your becoming an artist. I have been feeling very cared for through your efforts to catalogue my work and get it shown. So, my second question is, did caring for me through promoting my painting give you a greater insight into your own desire and need to be cared for and valued?

AF: Wow, that's a lot. It's surprising to me that you thought that you hadn't influenced me as an artist. I definitely mentioned that before 2024. It's in *Official Welcome* [2001].

CDM: Well, I may have thought about it abstractly. Maybe, like I said, I was too cut off from my being an artist to think I had influenced you.

AF: You know, when you were working so intensively and ambitiously on the shape paintings, those were the first years of my life, which are the most formative.

CDM: I know, but again, what's the influence?

AF: Mom, being in your studio is one of my earliest memories. You were working on your paintings, and I was there with my blocks, building things. After you stopped painting, you still offered art classes to neighborhood kids, and I participated in those. And your paintings were always there in the house. I grew up with them, along with your art books. Before I left home—when I was sixteen, like you—to go to art school in New York, I was more design- and craft-oriented. I appreciate aesthetics, certainly, but in many ways, I still think of you as more of an artist than I am. When I started art school, my paintings were influenced by yours. They weren't shaped, but there were fields of color, often complementary colors, and figures. When I was eighteen, I went to the Whitney Independent Study Program and stopped painting—which, in a certain way, was a repetition of how you stopped painting. And then I started doing institutional critique. I think one of the things that resonated for me with institutional critique—well, obviously there was the authority-questioning, anti-institutional climate of our hippie counterculture family. But the other thing is that these institutions—this art world, and this art history that you wanted to be a part of—rejected you. That hurt my Mami. So, they must be bad.

CDM: Yes, you were carrying my . . .

AF: You carried and held a love of art and a belief in art, even after you stopped painting. I was aware of your ambition to be recognized as an artist and become part of art history. I inherited that. But I also had the sense that art history, art institutions, and the art field weren't to be trusted. I think I kept a distance so I wouldn't be hurt the way that you were hurt. And maybe I wanted to take revenge on the art field for hurting you.

Still from *Untitled*, 2003. Project and standard-definition video installation, color, and sound; 60 min.

CDM: Very good insight, very important.

AF: The figure of the mother, if not you specifically, appears in a lot of my work, starting with my first work of institutional critique, *Woman I/Madonna and Child 1506–1967* [1984]. I refer to you and my Puerto Rican heritage specifically in writing shown with the museum tour *Welcome to the Wadsworth* [1991]. And in the first versions of *May I Help You?* [1991], I quote your first novel, *Cantando Bajito/Singing Softly* [1984]. Actually, for the Wadsworth Atheneum, which was my first museum exhibition, I proposed an exhibition of your work and a tour of it to the curator. She said no, probably thinking that you were an amateur.

CDM: I am very moved by all of this. It is going to take time to process it. I also wanted to ask—you have talked at some points about a sense of illegitimacy, which is interesting to me because I'm writing a memoir of my mother. She was illegitimate. My grandmother was never married to my grandfather. Anyway, the whole issue of legitimacy ties in with race.

AF: Well, when I got to New York as a sixteen-year-old half–Puerto Rican high-school dropout from a hippie family and then a lesbian-feminist household, with an aspiration to be recognized by the art world I heard about from you, encountering its institutions was crushing. My way of managing that anxiety was learning to pass in various ways: as older, as someone who graduated from high school and maybe even college, as white. When I started doing performances in museums as an upper-class patron type, I was performing

Untitled (Object) III (detail), 2024. Microcrystalline wax, aluminum, and steel, 5 ⅞ × 35 ⅜ × 15 ¾ in. (14.9 × 89.9 × 40 cm)

the passing that I had been performing socially ever since I got to New York. I wanted to put that in the context of how those institutions produce aspirations for the legitimacy they define and impose.

CDM: That makes so much sense. I want to ask you about the *Untitled (Objects)*, your sculptures of toddlers. What made you decide to make those?

AF: I had the idea in Venice. I came across a small sculpture, the head of a child, by Medardo Rosso, whom I've always loved. I had been trying to think of something new for the show I was having in Paris. I had decided to show the video of *Untitled* [2003], in which I have sex with the collector, and I thought I would *do* a new work with a critique of the art market. Then I thought: But that's not honest; I do want them to sell my work to a wealthy collector. I asked myself why I wanted that. And what came to me was the desire to make things that would be wanted and valued and cared for the way that paintings and sculptures are but that videos and performances are not.

CDM: Right.

AF: When I became a conceptual artist, at eighteen, I thought about all those paintings you made that no one wanted, that you ended up storing for years. But then I realized that I felt a certain loss at not having made more things that exist in that way, physically in time. And because I had been putting together the inventory of your work, I was reminded of how intensively you were working on paintings during the formative first few years of my life. So that was the connection that I made. As I wrote for the show's press release, for me "there is no escaping the equation of artworks and children. They exist, psychologically,

This meeting is being recorded, 2021. Ultra-high-definition video installation, color, and sound, 99 min., and six chairs. Installation view, *Andrea Fraser*, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2023

in a continuum of attention and care." You know, you had your kids, and you had your artwork. You made us, and you made them.

CDM: I was very busy making, yes.

AF: And then I thought of the parallel between the metaphor of artist as prostitute, in *Untitled*, and of artwork as offspring. I also thought about the psychological and emotional component to the critique of speculative art-collecting, which is broadly held among artists. That is, wanting one's work to be wanted and loved for itself.

CDM: Good point.

AF: Not for its market value or for the financial return it affords a collector. The interpersonal parallel is wanting to be loved unconditionally.

CDM: Not for what one accomplishes.

AF: I started thinking all of that in connection to my early childhood experience of you and your paintings, and of my experience, more broadly, within our family, of being valued or not and cared for or not.

CDM: Can I, as an aside, ask you to forgive me for however, in whatever ways, I've hurt or neglected you?

AF: Yeah. There was definitely a component of neglect, you know, in our family life.

CDM: Yes. Definitely.

AF: But you were always very encouraging. When I made anything, you would always say "Oh, that's brilliant! That's genius!" You always used superlatives. But that may have been a projection of your ambition.

CDM: Maybe you had a sense that I was valuing what you could produce rather than valuing you as a person.

AF: When I started working on the *Untitled (Objects)*, I joked with my psychoanalytic friends that they just had to be good-enough babies, like Winnicott's "good-enough mother." I'm not a sculptor; I'm a conceptual artist! But I worked on them fourteen hours a day until the last moment before the opening, when they were sealed in their vitrines. I wanted them to be perfect babies.

CDM: Even in the photos, they look very childlike. I mean, I feel for them as little children. And yet, they're in plexiglass boxes.

AF: They have to be because they're made out of a wax that never completely hardens. Which, of course, also isolates them and makes them untouchable.

CDM: That protectiveness is also a metaphor.

AF: I think of them as allegorical figures of art work. As soon as you start referring to them as babies, you become a character in that allegorical narrative. It's inescapable. Like, I'm in the gallery, and someone says, "This collector is considering buying your baby."

CDM: Oh, I know, sweetheart, it's such a rich number of connections and metaphors and everything around them. I think they're fascinating. And such a departure.

Which brings me to another question. There's so much in what you have done that's breaking rules, or breaking expectations. Where did that come from? I'm passive and avoid conflict and all that stuff, and yet you have this courage!

AF: Mom, you left Puerto Rico when you were sixteen. Then you went off to Paris when you were twenty, and then New York, and that was after being educated by nuns. Then you land at an isolated ranch but manage to develop a rigorous painting practice, with five kids. And then you land in Berkeley in '67. And then you become an active feminist in '68. And then you come out as a lesbian in '72 and become active in gay rights. And then you write five novels. That's a lot of courage, Mom.

CDM: Okay, well, I guess in some ways, yes.

AF: And you got a PhD at forty and became a clinical psychologist. Which also had a big influence on me. Did you ever watch my piece *Projection* [2008]? The one based on the psychotherapy sessions? Well, at one point, the psychiatrist makes an interpretation that, on some unconscious level, I believe that I destroyed your creativity. That I destroyed your life as an artist.

CDM: How?

AF: Well, by being born.

CDM: Oh, my god! Right, okay.

AF: So, for me, part of this process of trying to get your work shown has been about trying to give your life as an artist back to you.

CDM: I have not, in some ways, dared think that. I have to say that in this process that we've been going through for the past two years with my paintings, I've been feeling very cared for. Sweetie, thank you.

AF: Thank you, Mami.

CARMEN DE MONTEFLORES is a Whitney Biennial 2026 artist.

Andrea Fraser interviews Carmen de Monteflores on page 158.

BORN 1980
IN PORTLAND, ME;
LIVES IN LOS ANGELES

MARIAH GARNETT

Mariah Garnett with Holland Andrews, *Dreamed This Gateway*, 2022. Five-channel high-definition video (16mm transfer), color, and sound; 25:13 min. Installation view, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 2022

SUZY HALAJIAN: Your feature films *Trouble* [2019] and *Songbook* [2024] each evolved over the course of five years—a significant amount of time that suggests a deep entanglement with both material and process. How has this extended creative journey shaped not only your approach to storytelling but also your thinking around form, installation, collaboration, and the emotional labor embedded in working with personal and historical narratives over such a long duration?

MARIAH GARNETT: I had experimented before with multiple ways of installing one film. The first time I did that was with *Encounters I May or May Not Have Had with Peter Berlin* [2012], which is structured in three parts. The first part I showed projected off a disco ball, a two-channel, 16mm loop; the second part was looping on a monitor, with the sound on a separate loop; and the third part was installed outside, facing the wall.

So I'd been interested in how films can function differently in space—how they can activate space, how they can be presented spatially—and also how they can function as a single-channel screening experience. All of which inform how I embark on a project, in these kinds of multiple tangents or iterations that might show up as an installation or as a short film. With *Trouble*, it was also practical—I was making it one small artist grant at a time. And I'd never embarked on something that long-term before.

The starting point was this 11-minute documentary made by the BBC, which could also be viewed as the starting point for my life, because it propelled my dad out of Northern Ireland—he never would have met my mom otherwise. The first thing I did in Belfast was to reenact that film shot for shot, and I installed it as a two-channel installation. I included maybe two minutes of that recreation in the feature film.

With *Songbook*, I already knew that I could tease out ideas through installation. I began working with the archive of my great-great-aunt Ruth's opera, and again, it was practical: I'd never heard the music, because there aren't recordings of it, so I was like, "Let's make a video of part of the music." It was about establishing rapport and tailoring things aesthetically to the two performers: Chris Craig and, specifically, Breanna Sinclairé—I knew my work had to reflect just how amazing she looks and sounds. Then I made this piece with Holland [Andrews], *Dreamed This Gateway* [2022]. It's a five-channel installation, all shot in an art studio in two days. It's

Still from *Trouble*, 2019. High-definition video, color, and sound; 82 min.

The Pow'r of Life Is Love, 2021. Two-channel video installation, high-definition video, color, and sound; 13 min. Installation view, *Mariah Garnett: A Heart of Opal Fire*, Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, 2021

on 16mm, but it's not highly produced at all. That, to me, was more about working through process, working collaboratively, and how to transform this archive. Those two modes blended together in *Songbook* with, of course, many other elements. I did a research trip in 2021 to Cairo, where I met a few more collaborators, and that's represented in the film, mostly through on-screen text. I also did that in *Trouble*. It's kind of an inversion of what you might expect. You would expect a filmmaker's subjectivity to be a voice-over, rather than directly showing up on screen.

I think the extended timeline, like a long-term project, has influenced my approach partially with these iterations but also, both of those films dealt with so much in terms of history and my own personal investment—all kinds of problematic elements that I'm trying to resolve in both, and how media functions in all of this. It's actually a more painful process than short ones.

SH: Both *Trouble* and *Songbook* involve deeply personal family histories. What drew you to these histories, and how do you navigate the intimacy of these narratives alongside larger political, social, even aesthetic frameworks in your practice?

MG: It's interesting, because when I show these works, I almost always get the question, "How did you find out about this?" I suppose the films may appear to present my discovery of this material as if I hadn't known about it before, but that's not actually what's happening. I've known about these stories my entire life. I became interested in them because of how they intersect with broader political, social, and aesthetic frameworks.

Songbook, 2024. High-definition video, color, and sound; 55 min. Installation view, *COLA 2024*, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, 2024

I became interested in Ruth's story in 2020 because, even though there had been this reconsideration of colonialism that had been gaining momentum over the last couple decades, in 2020 the decolonial movement really came to a head and became part of our popular consciousness in a way that it hadn't before. It's something I was thinking about as I was working on *Trouble*, which is also about the impacts of colonial violence on my family. *Songbook* is about the impacts of colonial violence, but how my family might be complicit in it.

SH: Ruth's diaries record spirit communications she was having while she was developing her opera. I would love to hear more about how you engage with these texts not just as historical materials but as generative, possibly unstable forces in your creative process. And how do you negotiate your own relationship to spirituality as you work with such speculative content?

MG: I think that's one of the reasons I was drawn to it. Because, now, there's this surge of "New Age" content online. Some of the things Ruth is saying in her diaries sound like, you know, an Instagram influencer talking about manifesting abundance or whatever. There's a moment in *Songbook* where I say, "I don't believe in ghosts, but I also totally do." That's a good way of describing my personal relationship to spirituality. I think, in general, making an artwork is a kind of spiritual practice; there's a point where it feels like you are plugged into something that's coming through you, as opposed to from you. A lot of people right now are experimenting with spirituality as a framework for reimagining history, or as a way of accessing something beyond the historical

Stills from *Songbook*, 2024. High-definition video, color, and sound; 55 min.

record, particularly people from legacies that have been intentionally erased from that record. One of my collaborators, [Egyptian composer] Nancy Mounir, is explicitly working in that way to rescore and reimagine music from Egyptian pop singers from the 1920s.

SH: You don't just express your queer perspective in your films—you also literally put yourself on screen, like when you play your dad in *Trouble*. That blurs the lines between performance, identity, and personal story in a really interesting way. What does this kind of self-performance let you explore that you might not be able to if you stayed behind the camera? And how do you think this approach challenges or pushes back against more traditional filmmaking?

MG: I began doing it from a pretty clear ethical approach to the way that I make films: I don't want to ask anybody to do something that I wouldn't do for my own work. It's also a formal gesture that reminds audiences that this is a reflection of my subjectivity, not an objective statement of truth. When I was in college, I took a class with Tony Cokes called "The Problem of Documentary," which explored how all documentary films are framing devices for the subjectivity of a filmmaker. We kind of know that now—it's become embedded in almost all media in a way—but that hit me really hard as a twentysomething, and I think I've tried to push that idea as far as I could.

Also, the way that I approach using multiple modes of cinema is a way of using queerness as a formal device, like removing these binary genre conventions. Something we talked about a lot in the Modern Culture and Media Department at Brown was the "hegemony of Hollywood cinema," and a lot of us really took it up as our mission to break that. Of course, I went and worked in Hollywood for five years before doing that. [*Laughs.*] I think the way I approach making films is almost opposite to how Hollywood directors are expected to. I position myself as subordinate to my subject. That's kind of queer, I think. It's sort of like bottoming as a director.

SH: I would love to hear about how you navigate the ethical responsibility of working with histories that are not your own. While some are family histories, you have also engaged with stories outside your direct experience—especially when these histories touch on questions of power and identity.

MG: That question is particularly relevant to this new body of work around the opera and around *Songbook*. I was working mostly with Black American performers or artists from the MENA region, and I'm engaging with histories that really have nothing to do with me—like Black American appropriation of Egyptian symbology and culture, or modern Egyptians' relationship to ancient Egypt. I'm interested in those things, but they're not something I want to appropriate or embody. The way that I tried to engage was by inviting these collaborators into the process to change and shape the material and the project, and also through the interviews with them that appear both in the film and elsewhere. And I think what happened is that the film became a reflection of some of the ideas that *I* was responding to in the original archive—not just about Ruth but ideas around how do you sustain an artistic practice as an artist who's working at the margins? How does spirituality factor into that? How do you navigate colonial damage and fears around violence? But it also became a reflection of the answers coming from this group of collaborators. So, in a way, this film isn't even about Ruth. It's about the now, about how music and spirit can weave a kind of web that can hold a group of people together, with their many differences and also similarities. In some ways, it's like the most utopian film I've ever made.

SUZY HALAJIAN is Executive Director and Curator at JOAN, Los Angeles, and cofounder and coeditor of the journal *Georgia*.

IGNACIO GATICA

BORN 1988
IN SANTIAGO, CHILE;
LIVES IN NEW YORK
AND SANTIAGO, CHILE

Still from *Sanhattan*, 2025. Digital video, color, and sound; 18:57 min.

PAMELA M. LEE: You've long been invested in what we could call subterranean histories of neoliberalism as they've impacted Chile, both in the present and in the not-so-distant past. It's hard to think of your work and not be reminded of the protests in 2019, when folks all over your country were carrying signs that read, "Neoliberalism was born in Chile and will die in Chile." Could you tell us a bit more about how your art makes these histories present and material for viewers who may not know those histories well? For example, you take up many different subjects and objects in your work—book covers, car design, credit card terminals, LED signs—to sort of flag the depredations of neoliberal policy. I would love to hear a bit about the kind of object life that you have elaborated in your work, and how that brings to the surface these larger histories that you're in dialogue with.

IGNACIO GATICA: When I'm making art, I often think about the history of painting, and I try to create work through the scope of landscape.

Stones above Diamonds, 2022. Microcomputer, custom software, Wi-Fi router, LED screens, live financial data, custom credit cards, magnetic stripe card reader, steel frame, and aluminum shelves, diameter: 100 ½ in. (255.3 cm). Installation view, *Operational Excellence*, Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2022

So, for example, there were the works I did in 2015/2016 where I turned book covers by Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, etcetera, into carved, cement-cast objects. When I zoomed in on these authors, who visited Chile in the '70s and '80s when neoliberalism was imposed as a major economic shift, I also had in mind a tollway that was built in Santiago in the early 2000s called Costanera Norte. I visualized it as a metaphorical scar of cement in the middle of the city where I was born. It was personal to me and at the same time resonated with Chile's architectural boom of the 2000s. For me, it's all correlated. Cement was being used in an almost Brutalist way by architects and developers in Santiago, representing a globalized status. I realized landscape can inform the materials, and these can narrate specific changes or different contexts. For example, you mentioned the LED screens. When I decided to use LED screens, I had in mind Wall Street, and how the ticker display was created in that environment. Then it traveled the world, right? It occurred to me that this was kind of a, let's say, key ideological technology that cut through borders; at the same time, its nature is semantic, and I'm interested in that, too—in language and poetry.

PML: It's interesting that the first genre you seize upon is landscape. What you're underscoring is the extent to which we have to think about landscape in more architectural or even infrastructural terms.

IG: Yes, totally. Including the personal infrastructures that surround us, quotidian objects that become prostheses, like credit cards.

PML: I think also about the book covers or the allusions to car manufacturers.

Installation view of *Playa Privada*, Galeria Patricia Ready, Santiago, Chile, 2025

It's suggestive that they all telegraph very individual kinds of relationships. We're not getting the kind of image of globalization that many of us might associate with neoliberalism; it's brought back to the viewer in terms of the everyday kind of prostheses, as you put it, that manage our neoliberal lives.

I wanted to ask you also about the place of this work within the context of the Biennial. Historically, the Whitney Biennial was devoted to American art, but the exhibition has changed radically in the last twenty years to have a much more capacious understanding of not just America, but the Americas. This seems so central to your project in a way, because one of the things that you do in a number of your works is to surface a relationship between Santiago and New York. Twin cities in a way. You use the portmanteau "Sanhattan" to talk about this sort of financialization of Santiago vis-à-vis New York finance. Could you tell us a bit more about that relationship, particularly as an artist who lives and works in both Brooklyn and Santiago?

IG: It's interesting that you mention how the Whitney Biennial is now working with a broader idea of the Americas. Lately, I've been reading about "glocalization." Sanhattan is a good example of this idea because Sanhattan was a financial district built right after the neoliberal shift in Santiago, imitating the aesthetics of Manhattan. The Chilean district has a completely different layout from its counterpart, and the buildings—they are just imitations; we have different weather conditions here. These connections are interesting to me; I also somehow live between them. The resonances remind us

Preface for an Automated Stratosphere, 2023. Microcomputer, custom software, LED screens, World Bank data, and aluminum-and-steel frame, 126 ½ × 6 5/16 × 6 5/16 in. (321.3 × 16 × 16 cm). Installation view, *Ignacio Gatica: Sujeto Cuantificado*, Von Ammon Co., Washington, DC, 2023

how connected we are, and how disconnected we are, too, across the Americas.

PML: That's really helpful. The term *glocalization* actually answers, at least in part, a question I had about where your work sits now relative to what could only be described as the radical paroxysms that we are seeing unfold with neoliberalism. Because on the one hand, you have this sort of hyperbolic notion of neoliberalism as we've traditionally understood it—mass deregulation of social programs, wide-scale efforts to privatize formerly public entitlements and labor sectors—but then, on the other hand, a kind of globalization, or at least a cliché of globalization, that seems to be in retreat and has to do with the sort of neo-nationalism that is everywhere ascendant, including in the US. Is there anything in your work that speaks to these kinds of contradictions?

IG: It reminds me of the phrase you describe in your book *Chronophobia* [2004], "Cold War hangover." Now, it is something like a "globalization hangover," or maybe more like a daze, like when you come out of a rave and you're still tripping from the lights and stuff. That mental fog creates an abstraction of reality. I find a similar dizziness when trying to understand the language used in speculative finance and political discourse, big rhetorical constructions that often don't mean too much because they don't refer to something we can really grasp. That's when art becomes for me an interesting tool to graft onto these situations. Poetic meaning has a lot to do here. With a small phrase, we can say so much, but in political rhetoric we have so many phrases and say so little. It's interesting in terms of the context of this daze and confusion that we're living in now.

PML: Would it be fair to say then—particularly as you've characterized it in terms of prostheses and of a kind of neoliberal landscape or worldview—that the way your installations and sculptures come together, the way you juxtapose certain things, it's flagging precisely these very discrete and even personal relationships? Is that one way we can appreciate what you're doing?

IG: I really like that. I was thinking of something in your book *Think Tank Aesthetics* [2020] that was very inspiring to me: the discussion of the teleological versus other ways of telling stories. It's interesting to think of the economy of how something is supposed to be told, read, and then presented. Let's say, imagining credit card terminals that read poetic axioms or list stars and minerals, or an oversized book cover that reflects back the room you are in, like a ghostly portal.

PML: Yes, that sort of reference to auto poetics, autopoiesis, and systems discourse. I appreciate that.

I was wondering—if we are, indeed, in this kind of globalization hangover—if you as an artist have encountered anything that is perhaps more contemporary than some of the mid-century investigations I've looked at that move you in directions that may well answer to some of the historical feedback loops that we seem to be caught in at the moment.

IG: The work of Juan Downey, I think. He had drawings mapping out the connection between Santiago and New York but also had an interactive video work that showed this auto poetic relation with a TV screen and the viewer that's meditating in front of a TV screen [*PLATO NOW*, 1973].

PML: Absolutely, Juan Downey was central to thinking about the expanded networks vis-à-vis the Americas. Downey came to the United States, was in DC and New York, in part because of the political situation in the Southern Cone in the late 1960s and '70s. I wonder if you have any reflections about what it means being a Santiaguino in New York, at a moment when the very notion of what constitutes the Americas, and the US in particular, seems to be under extraordinary pressure?

IG: That's a very deep question. Having been born in Santiago and now having lived in New York for almost ten years has certainly given me a different, let's say, lens, to measure the world around me. And I think the experience of speaking Spanish and being in New York, too, has opened me to other people who have different stories. It's beautiful being able to be in contact with different communities of people who have not been born here and have families in other countries. I think that a form of personal perspective is most important. And also the ability to always still be surprised and to have a kind of dysmorphia at the size of things. It's helpful for me to try to decipher that on my own and then to transform the elements and configure them into a landscape that's particular to each place.

PAMELA M. LEE is the Carnegie Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at Yale University, New Haven, CT.

Fantasmas, 2019–23. Digital card reader and media console, 9 ⅛ × 8 ⅝ × 2 ¼ in. (23.1 × 21.8 × 5.6 cm)

BORN 1991
IN QUEENS, NY;
LIVES IN NEW YORK
AND PHILADELPHIA

JONATHAN GONZÁLEZ

De La Preference Du Corps (Body Preferences), 2024. Performance view, David Zwirner, New York, August 29, 2024

LAUREL V. MCLAUGHLIN: Jonathan, in your practice you propose embodiment as an "anti-theatrical" method of knowledge production—you use terms like "ensembles," "abstraction," "improvisation," and "rehearsal." How do these compose embodiment for you?

JONATHAN GONZÁLEZ: I'm engaged with a lineage of people who work at the intersections of performance. It's a question of somatics—something that science- and body-based theories, practitioners, and modalities try to tap into—and how to work with that. It's about anti-theatricality and the body as material in a world that tends to accumulate and hold on to things in conscious and unconscious states.

That's the methodology; then come the techniques. "Authentic movement" is essential to me: learning how to perform from an internal place, utilizing the psychoanalytic dimension of what the body wants to do, and then considering the frame, the architecture, and the body as a context. As a choreographer, I'm examining how the relationships among witness, subject, and object can evolve. In practice, this means working in a way that invites hypersensitivity—as an ensemble, the group feels itself form on a cellular level—while working in site-specific architectural contexts.

To use *Spectral Dances* [2024] as an example, it extended into past and future possibilities in the site of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York, querying memory as a kind of immaterial thread through infrared sound and sculptural choreography to register that which remains in the air. I tuned a subwoofer installation to a frequency that could rattle the interior of the museum, and I worked with the cast on conditioning the psychic dimension, which, for me, is different from theatricality. In fact, it's political—going to the interior psyche rather than to the dimension of the surface, the artifice.

LVM: *Spectral Dances* was first presented at the Academy of Arts and Letters. Could you talk more about that site and the intervention you were making through the durational ghostly performances?

JG: With *Spectral Dances*, it's essential to acknowledge the idea of "hesitant doing," which comes through W. E. B. Du Bois and his [1905 essay] "Sociology Hesitant," and also from [theorist] Fred Moten's interventions into this arena, and how these methodologies helped me think about Harlem, the poet June Jordan, and composing a work that bridges Black geography to the site of the Academy of Arts and Letters. It's a question in our practice: how to approach activity and being together with hesitancy. And it extends through the research of [scholars and writers] J. T. Roane, Katherine McKittrick, Toni Morrison, Clyde Woods, Richard Iton—there's a long history of Black thought moving across the literary, the sonic, the performative, the culinary—all trying to understand the ways that we fit together.

In my projects *Spectral Dances* and *(r-black)2 + z2-LIFE = 1STILL* [2021], the question of performing at the limit of representation becomes important. Where I'm coming from, in terms of racialization and performance, the representational is bankrupt. And Blackness and abstraction feel entangled with the land, so I return again and again to particular sites and architectures.

Insurgency is part of it: using time and space to construct slippery—and in that way, defiant—narratives. They have a "deadpan" quality, a quality of "inexpression," to borrow the terms of [cultural theorist] Tina Post. Or the narratives propose something formal to swerve around—the constriction of race and performance—while applying pressure to the notion of being racialized and performing.

Body Configurations, 2025. Chromogenic print, 24 × 36 in. (61 × 91.4 cm); and metal engraving, 3 × 2 × ½ in. (7.6 × 5.1 × 1.3 cm), that reads: "lay your exposed stomach on the ground for 5 audible breaths to become the density of the ground"

Spectral Dances, 2024. Performance view, American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, October 5–27, 2024

It's a conundrum, a dialectical bind in Black thought that nurtures the ways I work across mediums . . . and it's rife with contradictions.

LVM: You've called some of your works "frictions." In *(r-black)2 + z2-LIFE = 1STILL*, you propose quantum speculation; in *Lucifer Landing I* [2019], utopian architectures exist alongside dispossessed nonbeings; and in *Black Holes Ain't So Black* [forthcoming], you're proposing practices of refusal. For the Whitney Biennial, you're also identifying how histories of coloniality erected the vertical plane and the vista. How do these theoretical "frictions" become vibrational in the body?

JG: The work *(r-black)2 + z2-LIFE = 1STILL* is about the physical architecture of entangled atoms: two people, myself and Katrina Reid, performed on a hillside on a path people walked along. Some sat and watched; others came upon us while we were performing. I'm thinking through perspectives and landscapes, visual cultures, skin and contact, and intimacy—scaling up to the affective and back down to the cellular. The bodies aren't primary; they're on the same frequency as the site.

140'

6.1 seconds

Spectral Dances—Score for Section IV: Chorus, 2024. Chromogenic print of choreographic score, 8 × 5 in. (20.3 × 12.7 cm)

Lucifer Landing I follows the spirit of CHARAS, the Puerto Rican Action Collective that was founded in the early '70s in New York's Lower East Side and continued through El Bohio Community Center. Early on, they met with Buckminster Fuller and worked as a group to construct a geodesic dome in a vacant lot under the Manhattan Bridge. Their larger intention was to step in as artists and community activists to propose new possibilities in places that had been deemed unworthy of preservation or new life. I've been working through a particular history of artists—including June Jordan—who stepped in as architects, out of a need to address concerns about staying power and livelihood.

Lucifer Landing I takes off from the work and devotion of CHARAS: we made a similar geodesic dome and created performative responses—including curators Alex Sloane and Taja Cheek activating an installation of simulated self-immolation at MoMA PS1, followed by a performance, *Lucifer Landing II*, that took place at the Abrons Arts Center on the Lower East Side; it sought to exhaust the apparatus of the proscenium stage.

Black Holes Ain't So Black, a collaboration between me, the architect Mario Gooden, and the filmmaker Thuto Durkac-Somo, explores the concept of architecture on a celestial scale. It draws from Stephen Hawking's writings on black holes and a line from [his 1988 book] *A Brief History of Time*: "It is like running away from the police and managing to keep one step ahead but not being able to get clear away." You're almost there; you never get away. Mario and I have worked together for several years now—an architect and a choreographer and artist—to bring structural forms into dialogue.

LVM: Let's talk about lineages that your work inhabits or conjures. Placing it within a canon of "American art" or "national identity" would seem like a misalignment. Your practice might be said to dwell on the margins of a canon—or in the waters around the Americas, without borders in cultural dissemination—referencing literature, sonic studies, and performance theory in constellations. Maybe your work reaches back beyond "American art," especially as you often talk about a "long durée."

JG: The idea of the long durée comes out of Black studies, overlapping with Indigenous studies, sprawling into different forms—music, performance, ritual practices, secular actions. I'm indebted to Black studies across media—literary, sonic, and dance. They have allowed me to understand form differently.

My own trajectory is as a diasporic person with Cuban and Dominican heritage. I'm multilingual. I grew up in New York City, where things felt global. The political orientation I have to "Americanness" is one in which America is in flow with the world and must question its status.

LVM: The canon is shifting to consider diaspora, reorienting us to the world.

JG: In choreography, the experience of exchange reveals borderlessness.

LVM: Your book *Ways to Move: Black Insurgent Grammars* was published by Ugly Duckling Presse in 2025. It's a kind of travel document through fields of study and networks of geographies and transmission; it gestures poetically toward this exchange of borderlessness. How does this book project convey your continued reorientation?

JG: Yes, parts of *Ways to Move* are a travelogue. There's a section where I'm distinctly speaking through travel, leading to geographic movement across space, trying to offer an opportunity to think about old things in a new way, and new things in relationship to those things. It examines questions of spirituality, insurgency, and Black performance. It considers the mystical practice of obeah as it pertains to the American dance canon, which required some archival digging and speculation. There are short glyphs of moments meditating on materials like soil or sand, or on George Washington Carver, or on music and its capacity to awaken consciousness. . . . It's oblique, which makes sense with my work. My work isn't narrative, and it doesn't directly respond to the problem. It responds obliquely, speaking on other terms.

LVM: It's poetic and circuitous—not didactic. It brings you through the experience, much like dance transmission.

A recent, perhaps pivotal, moment in your work is *Frequencies of Black Assembly and the Mythic* [2023], a collaboration with the artist Marguerite Hemmings that you performed during the "Magical Thinking" symposium that manuel arturo abreu and I convened in dialogue with Lisa Dent at MASS MoCA. Could you describe that work and talk about how it informs your forthcoming performance, sonic composition, and print series *suite for a minor meeting*? The work was commissioned by Tufts University Art Galleries for the upcoming exhibition *Magical Thinking, of Systems and Beliefs*, in partnership with the Museum of African American History, Boston/Nantucket, to take place at the African Meeting House, Boston [in February 2026].

JG: *Ways to Move* includes a chapter on Anselm Kiefer's *The Women of the Revolution* [*Les Femmes de la Révolution*, 1992/2013], which I had the chance to see at his estate in Barjac, France, and which was also installed at MASS MoCA during the "Magical Thinking" symposium. The work consists of flat structures—beds made of lead—which accomplish a great deal. Seeing that work offered me a rare opportunity to contextualize questions I had about physical proneness: I had been thinking about lowness, the beauty of coming close to the ground, and walking lightly on the earth. For *Frequencies of Black Assembly and the Mythic*, I invited Marguerite to engage with a score, moving primarily at a low level through the huge white cube at MASS MoCA, across various works by Kiefer, beginning with *The Women of the Revolution*. At the same time, I read out loud the chapter on Kiefer from my book, and circumnavigated the space. The choreographic score involved a constant shifting of attention to how one is perceived globally, working with art historical and perspectival elements, as well as the figure in the landscape, and the history of German pastoralism and Romanticism, applying pressure to these conventions. It was a moving, mythic work. Reaching toward the limit, that's what was happening there.

That intention continues with the new work, *suite for a minor meeting*. It's a performance, composition, and print series primarily for voice that takes audiences through the historic space of the African Meeting House—the first Black school in the country and a former house of worship: grounds for African American self-making. With *suite*, a trio of original prints traverse the original architectural schematics by Asher Benjamin and new motifs made by hand. These prints also serve as musical scores to be interpreted by three vocalists. In this way, the prints, which hang in the gallery, construct a relationship between architectural schematics, handwritten cyphers, and a notation system for performance. When the work is activated through live performance at the meeting house, three Black performers, with different voice parts—a small chamber ensemble—are tasked with figuring out what will create an eccentric juxtaposition, what will resonate through the walls.

Jonathan González in collaboration with Marguerite Hemmings, *Frequencies of Black Assembly and the Mythic*, 2023. Installation and performance view, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, November 11, 2023

LAUREL V. McLAUGHLIN is Curator and Director of the Collective Futures Fund at Tufts University Art Galleries, Boston.

BORN 1989
IN NEW ORLEANS;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

EMILIE LOUISE GOSSIAUX

Kong Play (detail), 2024. Acrylic on 100 individual ceramic sculptures, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Emilie Louise Gossiaux: Kinship*, Kunsthall Trondheim, Norway, 2024

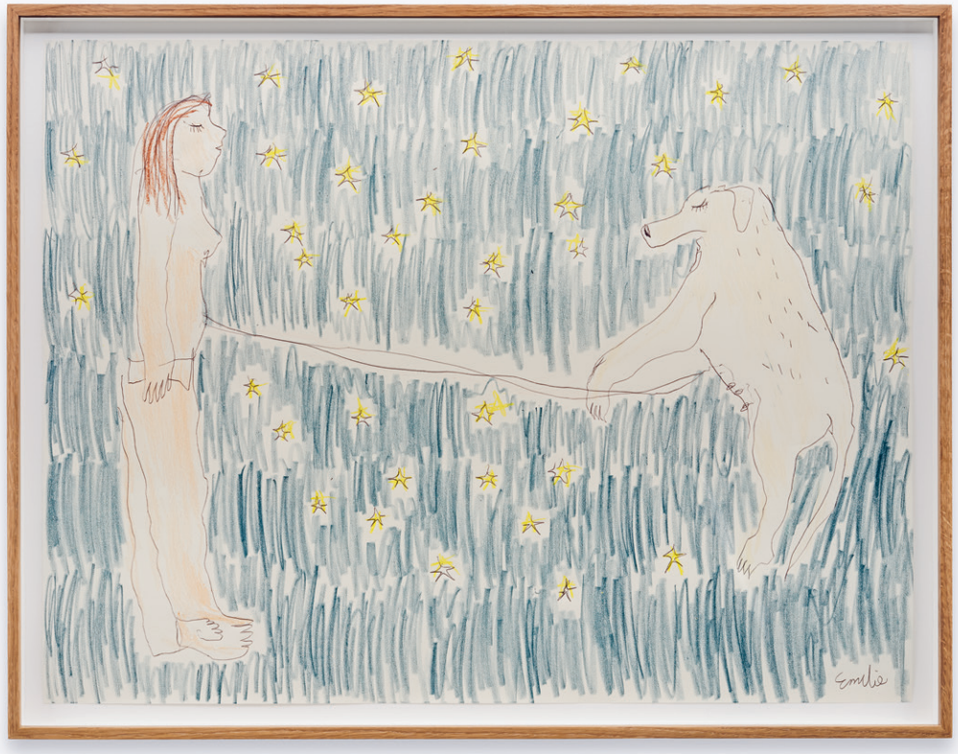
OCEAN VUONG: I've come across your work many times, and it's just so stunning; I get so emotional seeing it. Not even just in the context of your personal story, but because the work itself elicits what I would call a joyous elegy. There's something elegiac and about the Anthropocene, and how you center animals, in particular your dog London. There's profound grief for what we've done to animals, yet it's presented with a wondrous, playful aesthetic. It reminds me a lot of Miyazaki's work, that "charming" aesthetic that you realize, "Oh, it's that way because there's a very deliberate amelioration of all the harm we've done to the world—"

EMILIE LOUISE GOSSIAUX: Thank you, Ocean! I feel the same way about your work. I basically reread every chapter of *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* [2019] twice.

OV: That's so kind of you. One of your sculptures that really struck me is of the person with udders holding the dog upright [*True Love Will Find You in the End*, 2021]. It wasn't until I had a dog that I realized, "I think I could be a murderer"—I mean, if someone hurt my dog. But I'd never seen a visual representation of that feeling. In my work, I'm also interested in upsetting fixed hierarchies between people and animals. Western art often fetishizes verisimilitude, but there's a lot of Indigenous art where verisimilitude isn't important, where animals are allowed to be upright or of equal scale.

ELG: Sure, yeah, I've made a couple sculptures of London where she is in human scale, which I think confronts viewers with the humanistic qualities animals have and the animalistic qualities humans have. It's really about asking viewers to recognize that there's something powerful in an animal's agency. I also sculpt London dancing a lot, a freedom of movement that further erases hierarchies.

OV: There are also multiple versions of London holding the leash, which automatically reverses the power dynamic. And what's the leash attached to? A white cane—but it's cast as a Maypole, which is central to a ritualistic celebration of time. It all just destroys the hierarchies about where power should be. Who is leading whom? You thought there would be a sentient subject who would be leashed. I think of it as a semiotic displacement: you're helping us unthink what a leash is, ejecting it from the



Dogs and Humans Figure a Universe, 2022. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 17 ½ × 23 in. (44.5 × 58.4 cm)

The Gift, 2024. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 17 ½ × 23 in. (44.5 × 58.4 cm)

traditional connotations of possession, ownership, enslavement, and turning it into something, if not fantastical, entirely new. Am I close?

ELG: Ocean, you're spot on. That's precisely how I think about my relationship with London. This bond opened my worldview, not just about animals, but also about disabled people having their own agency and freedom of movement. Making the white cane central, a Maypole, with London dancing—I feel like I'm demanding space while also demanding recognition of the powerful connection you can have with an animal. There's a lot of love, trust, compassion, empathy that goes into building this type of marriage London and I have together.

OV: That's beautiful. It's almost like a third relationship or third space. To me, that relates to a lot of ideas about displacement and rupture, and in my case, geopolitical violence or diaspora. People will often say, "Do you speak Vietnamese according to the homeland? Do you speak English according to America?" Well, neither, in fact. The ultimate truth is a third place that is broken, and I don't want it to be resolved.

ELG: Yeah, London exists for me in a space that is more than just my guide dog, more than an animal. She's actually retired now, so we really are in this third space. Who is she to me? Her role has changed so many times throughout our life together. She didn't come to me as the perfect guide dog. She came to me as a person who had her own histories, her own background. We had to figure things out.

OV: I love that you refer to her as a person. Is that a conscious linguistic choice?

ELG: Definitely—it's about trying to create this language to explain who my dog is to me, because I think of her in a way as my daughter, my spouse, my mother, and sometimes those roles reverse. Again, it's about blurring the hierarchy, and also recognizing that I'm an animal, too. I find my own animalistic qualities very freeing.

OV: I love that you don't have one fixed word. We don't have a language that goes deeply into that kind of relationship beyond "guide dog" or "service animal." It makes me think of Wittgenstein's credo, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." I immediately think that's so true, but then I think that's an ableist assumption—whose world? Because then you're breaching new ground, expanding these "limits." Many able-bodied people never have a chance to develop a relationship like you have with a person–animal like London. I wanted to ask, how do you relate to vision? Do you refute it, metaphorize it? Are you disinterested in it?

ELG: Well, you know, I was a visual person. In fact, because I started losing my hearing very young, I depended on vision all through childhood. I have a lot of visual memories; I also dream in color, and my dreams are very influential to the art I make. When I read books, I can visualize everything. My inner vision is so powerful I think that sometimes I don't even feel like I'm blind. It's this third space, where I'm blind, but I'm still a very visual person. It's funny, because you brought up Miyazaki before. I love his films, and when I read your books, I imagine Miyazaki characters.

OV: Ha! I think there's a symbiotic relationship among all three of us. I'm flattered. His work is so influential in so much of what you and I are interested in, which is upsetting dogmatic ideas of what's important. *Spirited Away* [2001]—one of my favorites—right away, this anthropomorphizing of the dream world becomes a place to consider ethics of consumption, of afterlives, of hauntings, all done in an aesthetic that is approachable and accessible to all, similar to your own work.

It's so interesting to talk to you because I never talk about this, but for most of my life, I've had really poor vision. My mother knew something wasn't right when I stood, like, two inches from the television—

ELG: I used to sit two inches from the TV, so I could hear it!

OV: Yeah! I've never really found a place to comfortably say it, but I think I prefer a blurry vision. I have glasses; they get me to 20/20 vision. But it's too startling, too clear. I prefer to be in the world in this kind of blurriness, and when I'm working, my dream vision, my internal vision, is much clearer to me. I think that ties to the beautiful point you just made about being blind but very visual, and I would love for you to elaborate on that further.

ELG: I sometimes think that maybe what I'm imagining in my mind is more beautiful than the real thing. Not my art, though. I feel like the way it turns out mirrors what I see in my mind. How I access the visual world is through description. Like, when I go to museums or galleries, my partner Kirby describes the work to me. It's very intimate, and it's like a translation.

OV: How do you perceive your own work once it's done? Or is it completely removed from your own perception?

ELG: It's all through touch. The drawings I make are really tactile. The ballpoint pen I use allows me to create a kind of engraving into the paper, and then I use crayons to color, so I feel the waxy texture against smooth paper.

OV: Wow, so what's it like releasing the work, when the final perception is so different for you than others?

ELG: Like leaving it up to others to see it and then describe it back to me—

OV: Yeah, so beautiful—a collective process. It reminds me of publishing, where I'm like, "Would anyone care about this weird scene of me being sad in a tobacco field?" And it turns out, a lot of people are sad in tobacco fields!

ELG: Oh, I know what you mean.

OV: Keats had this wonderfully useful term, *negative capability*. He was talking about how the poem speaks through absences, right? That line break on the margin is a cliff. It's literally collaborating emptiness and rupture. The idea being that the poem's power is as much about what it elicits through negative space, and I feel like so much of your work redefines and extends that idea of negative capability, not as loss, but as a deeply capacious place of knowing. It has such a deep, significant impact as a disruptor of meaning—without being oppositional. That's what I really love about it. Opposition is important; we can't afford not to be. But in art it would be such a loss if we only corrected power, right? What I find so inspiring about your work again and again is that it's completely vexed with history, politics, embodiment, but it doesn't give power to that. It corrects on its own terms. And it's such breaching, exploratory work. I'm so honored and privileged to know it.

ELG: That's how I feel about you, Ocean. Thank you. I've had this date marked on my calendar for so long, and I'm so thankful for this conversation. I could keep talking.

OV: Likewise.

ELG: Okay, unrelated question. Vegetarian or vegan?

OV: Vegetarian . . . mostly. It's been a struggle with my family and fish sauce.

ELG: Right? I'm vegetarian, too, and fish sauce was a challenge. I became vegetarian in 2020, and so every time I meet another vegetarian, I get so excited to talk about food.

OV: Oh! We'll share recipes. It's such a privilege to be vegetarian now; you don't have to think about it as often. Perhaps that means the Anthropocene is evolving.

ELG: That's how I feel, too.

OCEAN VUONG is a writer, photographer, and professor, and is the author of *The Emperor of Gladness* (2025).

Opposite: *Kong Play* (detail), 2024. Acrylic on 100 individual ceramic sculptures, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Emilie Louise Gossiaux: Kinship*, Kunsthall Trondheim, Norway, 2024

Right: *On a Good Day You Can Feel My Love for You*, 2022. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 17 ½ × 23 in. (44.5 × 58.4 cm)

BORN 1995
IN LOUISVILLE, KY;
LIVES IN HONOLULU, HI

KAINOA GRUSPE

welcome to here—doorstops, 2025. Salvaged stone; kiawe wood, haole koa wood, and Douglas fir; and cement from property on O'ahu currently occupied by those who might have helped cause or are currently upholding extractive and imperialistic dominion, including military bases, golf courses, and hotel resorts; dimensions variable

AMBER KHAN: To diffuse the weight of the interview, let's acknowledge where we are: we're in a backyard on O'ahu, Hawai'i. Who are you bringing with you into this space?

KAINOA GRUSPE: One person I'm bringing with me is my grandpa, Francis Napoleon—an inspiring guy. Legend. We're sitting in the back porch of his house in Waiau, where I spent the first few years of my life. And now I'm living here.

Kainoa Gruspe and Ricky-Thomas Serikawa, stills from *Welcome to Here*, 2025. Digital video, color, and sound; 6:17 min.

AK: You moved back home in 2023, after getting your MFA at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. How did your experience there shape your practice today?

KG: It has been interesting in a couple of ways. It's partly the classic thing of moving away from home, thinking there's more out there to see and do—but when you get there, you realize how much you had in the place you came from, you see it through a different lens. I've come to realize that Hawai'i is a vast place, and there's so much to learn, so much work to be done. And it's a place that aligns with everything I care about. It's about finding the community that you fit into, where we're all striving toward the same thing.

AK: I'm curious about the shift from art school to real-life application. What are your thoughts on that?

KG: "Art" is a terrible word—it doesn't mean anything. And it's a word that excludes things that aren't considered "art": it separates things out. What we call "art practice" is just an extension of life, and it can bleed in both directions. Painting itself is an interesting thing to think about, but for me it has stopped feeling meaningful *enough* in the context of the world today. "This color looks super interesting against that color" . . . maybe there are ways for ideas like that to be political, but for me it has to be rooted in something real.

AK: You refer to yourself as a "painter," yet your process and materials are far removed from conventional ways of painting. You use rocks, cordage, animal skin, shells . . . and your works are often shown freestanding, not hanging on a wall. The lines between painting and sculpture are blurred.

KG: I started off making paintings, so that's where my mind naturally goes. I like the way you can have all these ideas that interact with each other on a flat plane, so you're looking back and forth and reading them as symbols together. Then I became more interested in the tactile quality of the material. It started with finding colors that can't really be made with store-bought paint, or going to the hardware store and finding a kind of cement that has an

early fires—when god landed—"before had england, before even had Jesus," 2025. Fabric, wood stretcher, thread, strawberry guava wood, kiawe wood found at Pu'uloa (Pearl Harbor), teak, cardboard box from firewood package, roofing tar, paint, and zip ties, 40 × 48 × 2 in. (101.6 × 121.9 × 5.1 cm)

adze to untie the track, 2025. Forged steel from the Oahu Railway & Land Company's train track found at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (formerly Kahakupōhaku fishpond), *'aha* (coconut cordage), and strawberry guava wood, dimensions variable

interesting texture and color. Realizing that you don't have to paint a rock, you can tie the rock itself to the painting.

AK: I'm curious about your use of organic materials versus manmade or synthetic things. And objects you find and use in their raw state.

KG: It comes down to interacting with the truth of things in their original form. But it's also about investigating the histories of materials, where they come from.

One of the most interesting objects for me recently is the train track [*adze to untie the track*, 2025]. I found the material for this work by accident and began researching where it came from. What was the institution or situation that put that object there? What did that object affect in our world? It's a track from the O'ahu Railway & Land Company, OR&L, founded by Benjamin Dillingham and continued by Walter Dillingham, his son. They put the train track on O'ahu, running from 'Ewa in the south to Waialua in the north, carrying sugar back and forth. Sugar plantation owners were among the biggest actors in the annexation and the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

Many of today's issues in O'ahu stem directly or indirectly from the Dillingham company. Waikīkī used to be mostly *lo'i* [wetland], where taro was grown; it was dredged by the Dillingham company and built into an overcrowded tourist mecca. Their Ala Wai Canal and many other unnatural water diversions have disrupted ecosystems and relationships that Kānaka and local people have had with the land.

I have a personal connection to this train track, too: I *exist* because of this train track. My great-great-grandparents from Japan worked in these plantations. And my grandpa, whose house we're sitting in, was in the military and most likely rode the train back and forth from the military base. So I hate it, but I owe myself to it. That's really strange for me.

AK: So how does that play into your work?

KG: I found the train track next to the military base and carried it home. It's not an easy thing to manipulate; you need heavy-duty tools and machines. I'm still learning how to do that. Also, the process of changing it feels relevant: cutting it, heating it up, hammering; it fights back because it's so resistant. It's a violent process, and that violence feels necessary.

AK: Is that a metaphor?

KG: Maybe. For me, it's not really activism. There are so many people who are doing way more productive and dangerous forms of activism concerning the military and the United States' role here. I want to be in that space. What I'm doing—I don't think it's activism, but it's me presenting a hope for the future where what's here doesn't *have* to be. Where we just start taking things apart.

AK: How do you feel your work translates beyond Hawai'i?

KG: I think it's a part of the story of America's tentacles. It's a lens onto how this tentacle is interacting with a certain group of people in a certain place. I think that is relevant to anybody who is under one of these tentacles anywhere . . . which is maybe the entire world.

AK: You recently worked with Meleanna Aluli Meyer on her installation *'Umeke*

Meleanna Aluli Meyer in collaboration with Kainoa Gruspe and Amber Khan, *ʻUmeke Lāʻau: Culture Medicine*, 2025. Mahogany plywood on Douglas fir framing; audio recording of the names of more than 38,000 people who signed the 1897 Kūʻē petitions protesting the annexation of Hawaiʻi by the United States (8 hrs.); *ʻike kupuna* (ancestral wisdom); lei; *moena lauhala* (pandanus leaf mat); and *laulima* (many hands), 96 in. × 22 ft. × 22 ft. (243.8 × 670.6 × 670.6 cm)

Lāʻau for the Hawaiʻi Triennial 2025. How did that experience change how you approach your work now?

KG: It was kind of life-changing. Meleanna asked me to help her bring this idea to life. A giant *ʻumeke*—a calabash wooden bowl—twenty-two feet in diameter. *ʻUmeke* have been traditionally used to contain food, poi, salt, medicine to share among community. Meleanna's work does the same thing on a large scale: bringing people together. The healing comes from the energy within the space that the *ʻumeke* offers for meditation and reflection. For context, it was installed in this government building, Honolulu Hale, the city hall, where the mayor's office is and where legislature happens and people go to pay their property taxes. It was positioned in confrontation with the building's history. Meleanna's intuition that it was something the community needed was spot on. This aligns with my interest in utilizing art practice as a form of service. There was almost no money involved. It was all agreed upon over beef stew, poi, and with hugs. Seeing something that immense being created purely out of love . . . it's something to aspire to.

doorstop #86.94, 2025. *Koʻa* (coral) and *niu* (palm midrib) found at Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikīkī Beach Resort (formerly Kālia fishpond), and fishing line, 10 × 8 × 7 in. (25.4 × 20.3 × 17.8 cm)

AK: What are you taking from *ʻUmeke Lāʻau* and applying to your current work?

KG: Well, for one thing, I feel like the *ʻUmeke* was a little sneaky. It was a deeply political act placing this bowl of healing—but also of resistance—within the space of legislature. Its political intentions were very clear, but they were hidden behind its abstracted beauty.

AK: Can you elaborate on your *Welcome to Here* project?

KG: Yeah. So the short of it . . .

AK: No need to do the short of it, you can do the long of it.

KG: What I'm trying to do starts with trespassing, so sneaking into places that can be defined as being in opposition to the idea of *Aloha ʻĀina*. That's usually translated as "love of the land" or "love of country," but it goes a little deeper than that. The etymology of *ʻāina* is "that which feeds"—as in "sustains." But the places where I am going in my work—specifically military bases, golf courses, and large hotel resorts—are places that "feed" like parasites. So feeding in the opposite direction: taking away. I go to these places looking at the history of how they came to be here, what exactly they displaced. The majority of these places used to be either *loʻi*, or fishponds: areas that sustained entire populations. And now they're reduced to being military areas, or playgrounds for people who just come in, do their thing, and leave.

AK: What do you do with the stuff you find there?

KG: Once I'm there, I fill up a wheelbarrow, bring it back to the car, and drive away. The objects I'm taking are mostly broken parts of building materials, sometimes landscaping rocks and plant material. I bring them back to the studio and catalogue them as an archaeologist would: location of origin, date, specimen number, material. And then they go onto a shelf.

One of the things I've been doing is making doorstops and hosting doorstop workshops, which are fun. That definitely comes from working with Meleanna—looking at what can be made from a community effort, rather than just one person's little art project. Bringing people together and sharing their stories of how they interact with these places.

AK: How are you hoping people see these doorstops?

KG: Doorstops keep your door open. Keeping the door open is a gesture of community connection, in contrast to privatization: the fence you have to climb over to retrieve these objects on government property. "No Trespassing" signs line both sides of the highway where there is military housing. Bringing attention to that is interesting for me. The artwork has a function. I think that's what I'm looking for in the way I'm making my work. It's not a very clear political statement—to me, nothing's ever clear! So, what I hope to do is always keep it a little confusing and loose. Maybe I don't understand it fully, but things are happening there.

AMBER KHAN is an artist based in Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi.

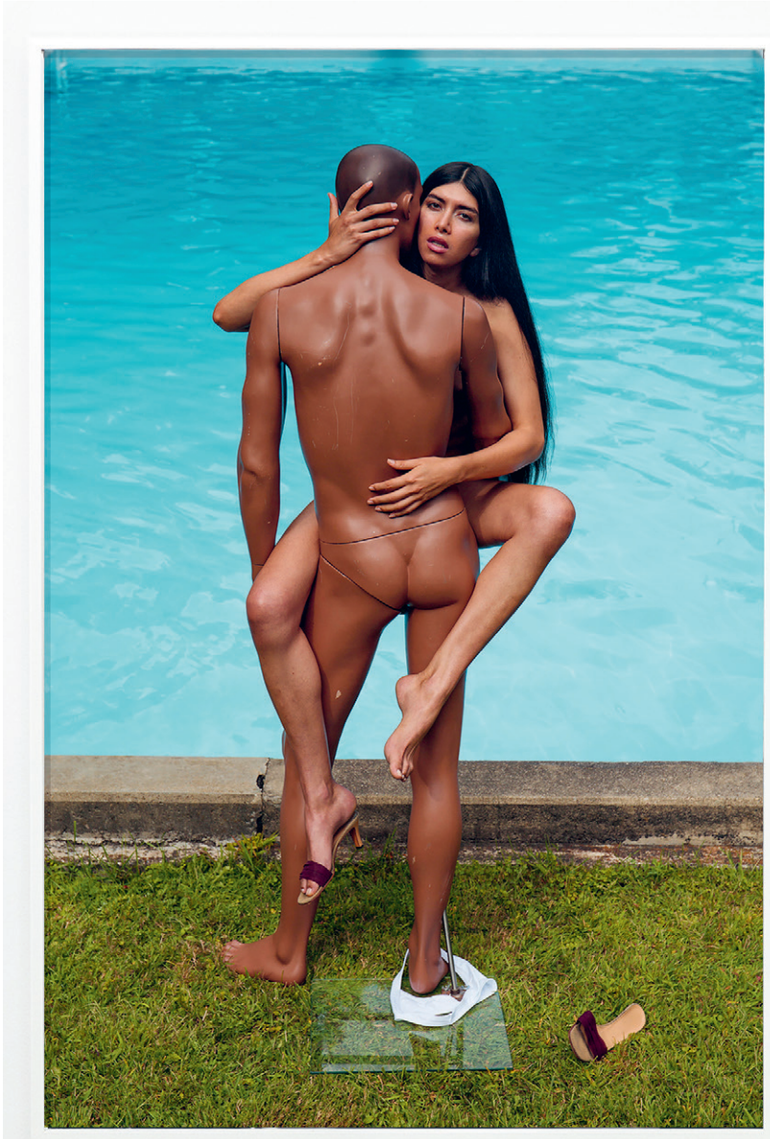
MARTINE GUTIERREZ

BORN 1989
IN BERKELEY, CA;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

Circle, 2019. Performance view, Performance Space, New York, November 20, 2019

JULIO TORRES: What do you say when someone asks, “What do you do?”

MARTINE GUTIERREZ: Ugh. God.



Body En Thrall, p120 from Indigenous Woman, 2018. Chromogenic print, 48 × 32 in. (121.9 × 81.3 cm)

JT: So, we’re at a party and someone asks, “What do you do?”

MG: I usually roll my eyes, but I’ve learned to control my face—because of friends like you who position me in front of a camera. I try, in earnest, to say . . . well, it depends on the venue.

JT: I have two settings. The first is a house party. It’s pleasant enough, but it’s on the cusp of, “Is this going to be fun, or are we going to leave in five minutes?” And you’re getting a little glass of wine, and this polite person is earnestly trying to make a connection with you and asks, “So what do you do?”

MG: Usually, that person has a reference point for me. If they know you, they’ll say, “You’re an actor? I’ve seen you in Julio’s thing.” And I’ll agree, “Yes, I’m an actor.” Or, they’ll say, “Whose runway did I see you on? You should walk for so-and-so”—and I nod—“Yes, I see you in the magazines.” But if I don’t feel sexy that night, we will talk about photography, and I may even admit I take pictures. Funnily enough, calling myself a photographer feels the most LOL. Maybe best to say artist. Artist just doesn’t feel like a real career.

JT: Well, artist comes with follow-up questions.

MG: Yes. I’ve also started to say muse.

JT: Professional muse!

Second venue. You’re going through customs in a country that you’re visiting. You hand over your passport, and the customs agent asks, “What do you do?” This person is completely disinterested. Just needs to put it in the form. What do you say?

MG: I always say model.

JT: Okay, why “model” as the most accessible answer?

MG: Because then the follow-up questions are all quite clear. They say, “Oh, so you’re here for work.” It’s not vacation; they aren’t interested in what’s in my bag. Traveling internationally with art is a pain in the buttocks. If I’m a model, they just assume, *Oh, this poor young Russian girl* . . .

JT: Never mind that they have your passport in this scenario, so they know that you’re not Russian, but, okay.

MG: Oh, you’re right, I’m using my American passport. But you can’t tell customs you’re a muse. I’ve tried.

JT: The customs agent kisses your hand.

Okay, I’m going to read to you what I wrote for the next question. “You have this proclivity to enchant and deflect. Were you a mysterious child?”

MG: Yes, I think it started really young. It must have started out of preservation. I prompt others to ask more questions than I’m able to answer. I was always faced with big questions: Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I here?

JT: Maybe you didn’t have the answers to some of these questions when they were being asked of you.

MG: I knew I was confusing, but I wasn’t confused. I’ve always identified with people who feel misunderstood, because I always was.

JT: What you do is so uniquely you. It’s not like anyone can say, “She’s a photographer, she’s an actor, she’s a performance artist.” They’re all extensions of a very unique artistic practice. Which is something that I can relate to. What haven’t you done that could be extensions of this practice? Releasing a fragrance, running for office?

MG: I do plan to release a fragrance. I don’t know if it’s too early to drop the name.

JT: We can redact it later.

MG: It’s called Cupid. QPD©

JT: QPD, okay, love it.

MG: But you pronounce it like Cupid. I made the commercial years ago.

JT: We just need the product!

MG: I had been working with a glassblower on the bottle. Then I kind of lost momentum.

JT: We just need the fragrance.

MG: It’s going to smell how I smell. It’s all about falling in love with yourself.

JT: Love it. Okay. I’m going to skip to something that relates to what you were saying. I think you’re like an octopus. And I think I’m a bit like an octopus, too. We collect little things and slither away when we don’t want to be a part of something. I feel like you

Still from *Martine Part VI*, 2012–16. Digital video, color, and sound; 5:55 min.

do a little wiggle and release a cloud of ink. Do you feel like an octopus?

MG: I do. It breaks my heart to see them in captivity. I can't eat them. But I love that they can escape almost any cage. I love watching videos of them escaping from mason jars. Have you seen those? So Houdini. I watch and I think, *That's right baby, get out*.

JT: Escape is so important to me. Is escape important to you?

MG: I don't think I enter into anything without a route out.

JT: I'm exactly the same. One of the things that made me fall in love with New York was feeling like I could leave any situation at any time, day or night. Okay, next. You are so keenly aware of your body. It actually reminds me of Tilda [Swinton] a lot. Would you say that your physical body is your primary medium? And is your artistic practice whatever can be done with your body?

MG: Love Tilda. Very [Virginia] Woolf's *Orlando*. I love thinking about my body that way. I will have to adopt your statement. There really is nothing immutable about the human body: it blooms, it rots; not everyone gets to change gender, but the body changes, with or without our intervention. I no longer have trouble contending with it; I think my trouble is with boundaries.

JT: Can you elaborate? What do you mean by "trouble with boundaries"? Because when I hear "boundaries," I can only hear the green-juice version

Supremacy: Corporate Retreat, 2023. Performance view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March 8, 2023

Ardhanarishvara from ANTI-ICON: APOKALYPSIS, 2021. Chromogenic print mounted on hand-distressed, welded aluminum frame, 55 × 38 ¼ in. (139.7 x 97.2 cm)

of that. "Oh, that violates my boundary, can you not XYZ."

MG: Boundaries, as in, how my friends always become my lovers. How I make my mentors my parents. Boundaries, as to say, it's all my fault. I've always felt so out of place. That's what's so liberating about playing a character. I think in a lot of ways a character gives permission to be a version of yourself that's been masked behind self-image. It's a reinvention. Vanesja, the character I play in *Fantasmas*, the HBO show you created, is a perfect example; *she* is purple.

JT: Yes! Which is why being in control of your presentation is important to you. Your acting moments have been rare moments of releasing control. You never hand over your body for someone else to decide what to do with it.

MG: Our collaborations have been huge for relinquishing control. Because before I saw it as my strength, and I looked to other artists, like Marina [Abramović] or Cindy—

JT: Crawford. [*Laughs*]

MG: Yes, Cindy Crawford—and Sherman. They have so much control over their image and their audience. But being in control began to feel like the Achilles heel of my practice. It became more and more difficult to venture outside the structure that I created, like reinforcing my own cage to escape from.

JT: That can be stifling.

MG: I don't want to feel like my practice is some Google-able summary. There's a world of experimentation and risk I have yet to take. When someone tells me I can't do something, I'm always inspired to prove them wrong.

JT: Were you raised around art?

MG: Yes! My very first camera originally belonged to my mom, and she passed it on to me. She's an architect and art historian, did her semester abroad in Paris, and traveled through Europe.

JT: And found this little orphan named Martine. [*Laughs*]

MG: That is what the stewardess thought when I had a baby passport. My father is from Guatemala. So, we're on the flight to meet and greet his side of the family after I'm born, and the flight attendant congratulates my mom on adopting her Guatemalan baby—as I'm literally nursing from her breast. Imagine, having to prove the child you birthed six months ago is your own?

JT: Nope!

MG: It's been this way ever since I can remember, with both my parents. I'm just unbelievable. For most of my life, I really never looked like either side of my family, or either gender. But I have Mom's hands. And it was really my mom who was always making things, always reusing things other people were getting rid of. She saves everything; she has the power of transformation—the old sheet becomes the new cloak. I remember once she came to pick me up from school as a witch. I was so excited. She had turned my hula skirt into hair, and bundled sticks together, I think around a mop; it was this grotesque—

JT: Broom.

MG: Yes, a spooky bouquet, with a stuffed-animal black cat tied around the end with fishing wire. It was just amazing.

JT: This is where you get your resourceful, crafty, DIY spirit.

MG: It really is. From scratch. That was our household.

JT: From scratch. That's a beautiful ethos. From scratch.

MG: If you hold onto something long enough, it comes back into style. Or you turn it into something else! If you don't have the thing you want, you learn to make it. Because once you get it, it's never what you need.

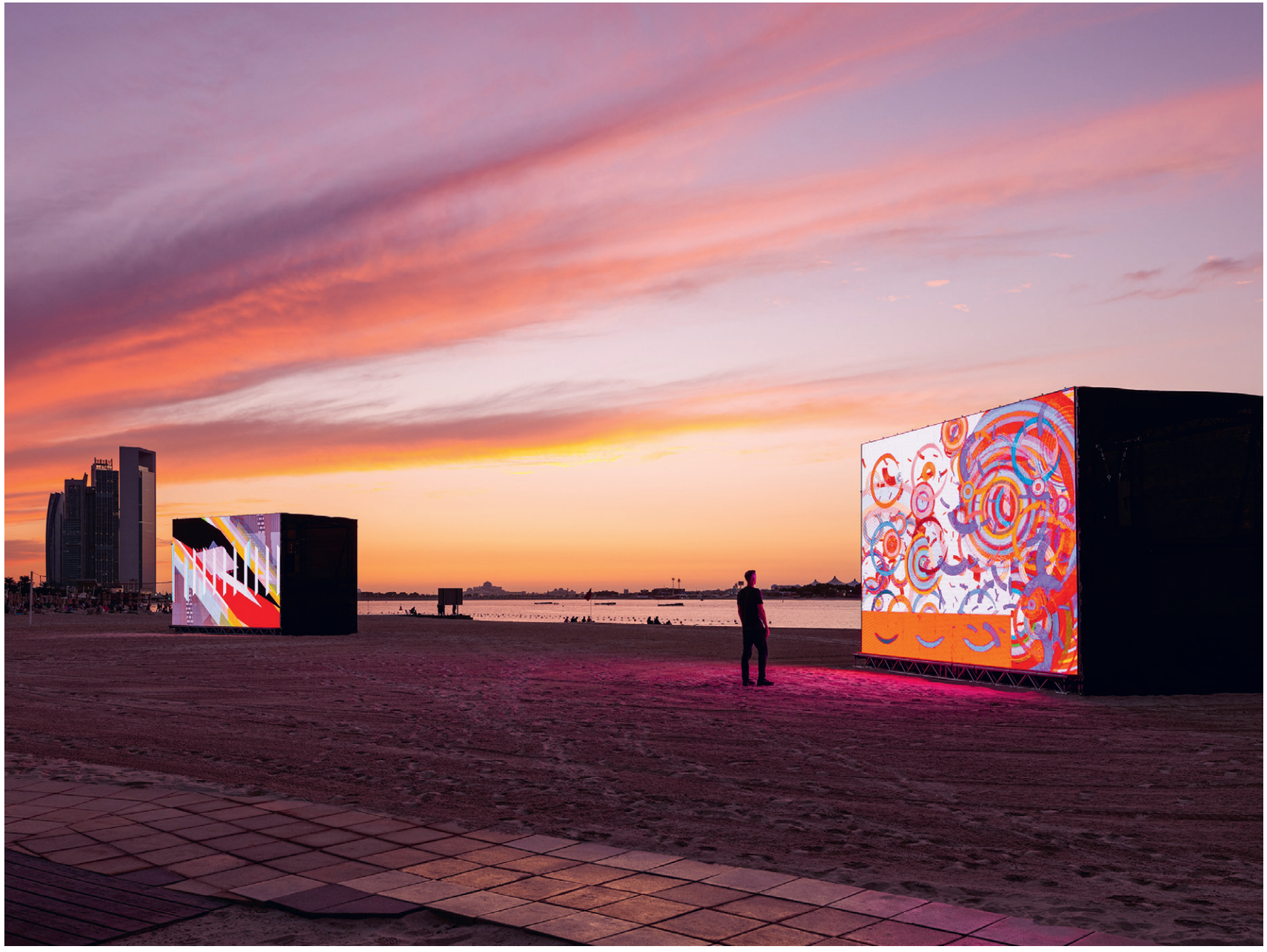
Hit Movie Poster, 2022. Chromogenic print, 42 x 72 in. (106.7 x 182.9 cm)

JULIO TORRES is a Whitney Biennial 2026 artist.

Martine Gutierrez interviews Julio Torres on page 454.

BORN 1936
IN PALESTINE;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

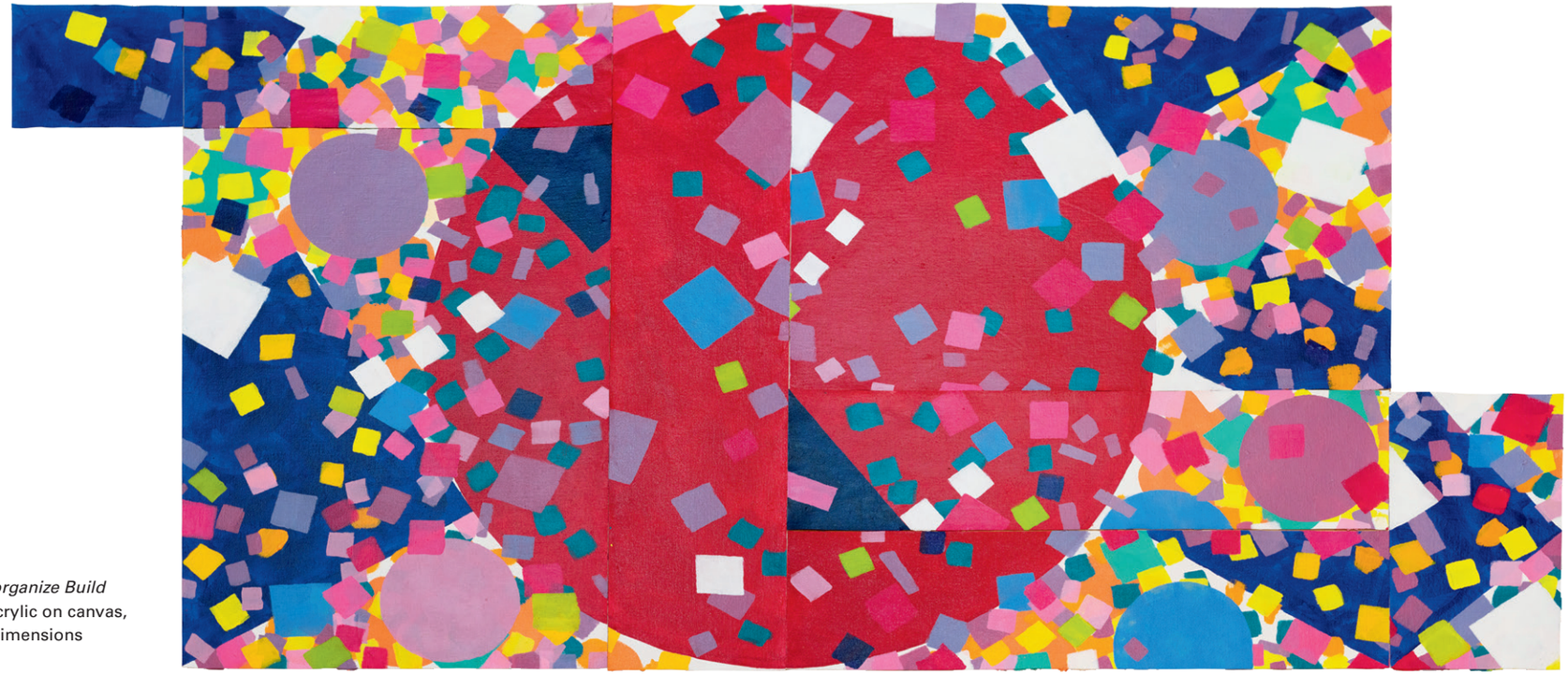
SAMIA HALABY



Yafa, 1992–2019. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and sound; 7:10 min. Installation view, *Manar Abu Dhabi*, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 2023

HANNAH PRISCILLA CRAIG: Samia, it's really exciting to see your work featured as part of the Whitney Biennial in 2026. You're showing digital artwork—can you speak about the current significance of this art form?

SAMIA HALABY: My first reaction is, "Oh, should I be embarrassed that my art wasn't made recently?" While the Whitney Biennial seeks to capture current thinking, my work is advanced thinking from an earlier time, which has become contemporaneous in its consumption.



Organize Reorganize Build Win, 2024. Acrylic on canvas, eight parts, dimensions variable

Four decades ago, I closed my studio door to the New York art world, which had rejected me, and I turned to the personal computer, then new. It was a child of the awesome mainframes: scary big machines you needed a programmer to access.

Because of my admiration for Soviet Constructivists and the Bauhaus, I sought to understand the nature of the medium and taught myself how to code. I did not want anyone between me and the computer. The minute I executed the first graphics command and watched it unfold, something clicked in my brain about the visual language. Coding came to occupy my aesthetic being completely.

One day someone asked, "What were you thinking when you were coding in the '80s?" I said I was thinking, "Don't bother me, go away." But something else nagged at me then: I worried how would people react when I tell them my painting is a small app, and you have to push a button to see it.

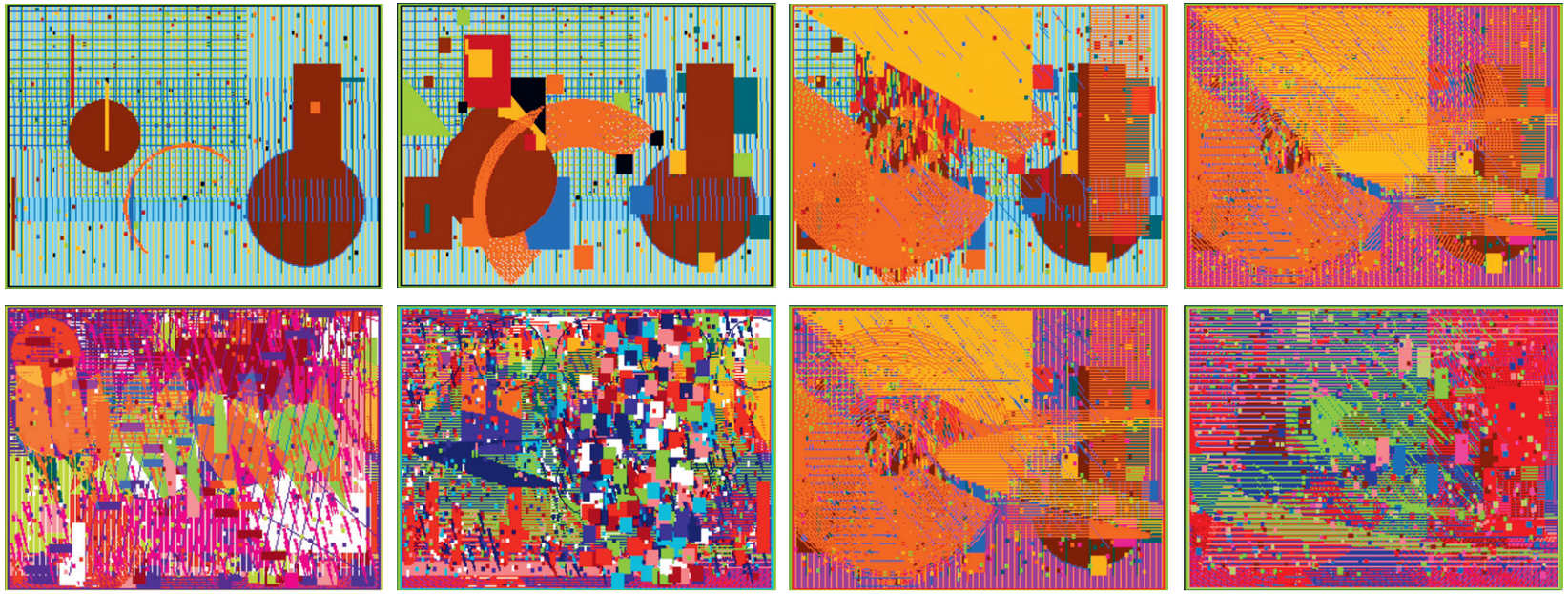
HPC: Your digital work is important to this exhibition and to your body of work as a whole—but you also have a lot of work in painting. Could you talk about how digital work and painting connect? And what you mean by "abstraction in motion"?

SH: You've caught me at one of my buzz phrases, "abstraction in motion." The uniting factor between digital and pigment on canvas is algorithmic method. A painting that can be distributed and reconstituted, as you saw in the Havana Biennial, is algorithmic. But simultaneously, it pertains to time. Time as a dimension in pictures is ultimately the uniting factor between my kinetic and my still pictures.

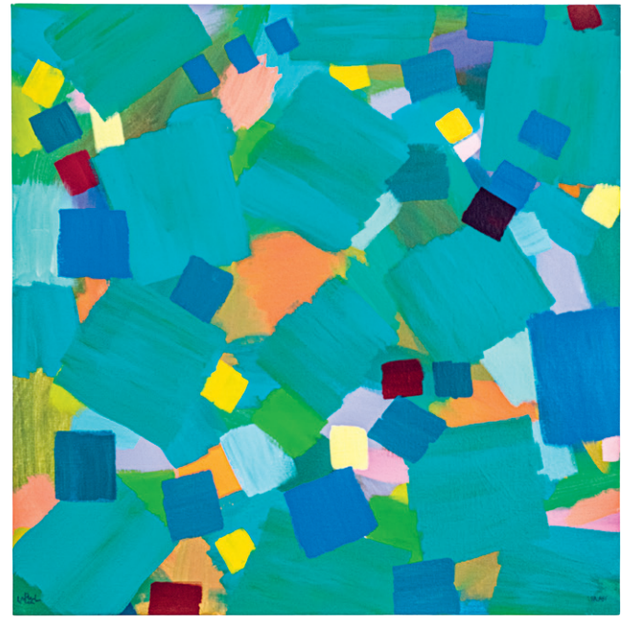
The digital brings challenges because it is as easily duplicated as it is easily erased. But more important is the expansion of the visual language of painting. At points, people used to look down on artists labelled as formalists. My response was always, "That's fine, call me what you like. I still know what really matters." The form does not make the content; it creates the vessel in which new social content can fit, content that could not be contained in earlier forms. We can't contain rocket science in Renaissance painting.

The formal language of painting has been expanded by a medium that allows flat abstraction to move. The relativity of space and time in abstraction are put to motion. The closest relative is time-lapse photography. You remember films where filmmakers timed a camera to shoot a bud every minute as it opened its petals? We saw how nature grows. This motion is unlike film, where a thousand photographs creatine measurable motion. When we see a car or a human being, we recognize the scale of things. We are moving in measurable space in real time.

Kinetic abstraction is a thousand abstractions creating relative motion, as well as bringing in the relativity of light, color, and space. Thanks to Einstein, we learned about the relativity of space. It is unique in the history of pictures. It is unique to our present time and is the essence of abstraction in motion.



Stills from *Central Park 8*, 1986. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and sound; 3:47 min.



Green Hamra, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 36 in. (91.4 × 91.4 cm)

HPC: Let's talk more about abstraction and its perceptions. Your work is considered abstract, which institutions have sometimes used as a shield to stray away from explicit politics. To you, does abstraction communicate an abstract political message, or do you see it differently?

SH: I see abstraction as very political. As a Palestinian, I'm often asked, "Where is Palestine in your work?" I ask, "Who is asking that question?" Each has their own motives. To the young revolutionary, I say posters and banners will describe our goals better. To those who want to put me in a subcategory, I immerse myself in the great arts that emerged during the working-class revolution, and that is abstraction.

To solve all those questions and oppressions, I've decided to make three types of art. I do make blunt political banners. I also make documentary art about Palestinian experiences under occupation. And I make abstract painting, both still and kinetic, acrylic or digital, for what satisfies my love.

The abstraction really is the most political. It's the most politically advanced, both aesthetically and historically. Art is a craft. Picture making has always accompanied us, growing and developing and giving birth to technologies that serve us: writing, perspective, photography, film, video, graphing, signage, mapping. This is how I came to apply my art, my skill, to three distinct disciplines.

HPC: I'm interested in this division of three categories, especially the idea that abstraction might be the most political. Could you expand on that?

SH: Abstraction is the most advanced painting language of our time. You can talk postmodernism, but that's verbal. I'm a painter, not a philosopher. I studied and wanted to emulate the most advanced periods in art history. Beginning with the mid-nineteenth century and the Communist International, I took note of how the Paris Commune injected new life into French painting. The Impressionists gave modern painting forms that allowed for creating notions of the general—an historic innovation.

This was followed by the birth of twentieth-century abstraction by the Constructivists during the Soviet revolution. Some decades later, the New York Abstract Expressionists developed painterly abstraction, riding the wave of optimism created by motion in the unionizing working class. For this reason, I consider abstraction not Western art, but a revolutionary transition to working-class culture. All the movements I adored shared the same engine: working-class motion.

Being an Arab, I also studied Arab art during its feudalist period. I noted that pure abstraction as high art was created by Arabs. This understanding and my intuitive love allowed me to commit myself to abstraction.

Abstract painting is not devoid of subject matter. We do not have to narrate pictorial stories or serve religion. As picture makers, we serve all equally. We serve curiosity and knowledge. We serve the future. Optimism and hope are the central spirit of abstraction. In this context, I remember the irrupting joy of the Futurists as they declared "simultaneity" as a new form in painting. When I read their writing, that word electrified my aesthetic being.

HPC: That highlights the responsibility artists have in all of these moments in history, to be part of building the future. Your work has been featured around the world in many different social and political contexts. What are the most memorable experiences you've had exhibiting your work?

SH: Without hesitation, the most memorable was the *Tercera Bienal de La Habana*, the Third Havana Biennial of 1989. I was Palestinian and the first artist from North America to be in the Havana Biennial. I exhibited *Centers of Energy* [1989]. The uniqueness of this major show was amazing. It was democratic and committed to equality. They treated us artists with dignity.

Performing Abstraction: Samia Halaby and the Kinetic Group, 2025. Performance view, Tate Modern, London, February 6, 2025

We were not at the bottom of the ladder in importance. I felt that I was relearning the true meaning of a world of art.

In the 15th Havana Biennial in 2024 came my opportunity to create something in the spirit of my multipart painting *Worldwide Intifadah* of 1989. I made a set of eight canvases that could be brought together as one piece or spread over the wall to paint between them. I would then group them in a new way afterward. I was thinking of how people live in a city. Large shapes were given attributes like centers of meetings or congresses. Smaller shapes represented people, cars, buildings, or pieces of the sky. When I walk about in New York, I see parts of the sky grow thinner and smaller or expand between buildings. Everything is in motion, and this brings time into the artwork. In a way, this painting was as algorithmic as anything I did in programming. I called the work *Organize, Reorganize, Build* [2024].

HPC: You have been active in art-making and political movements. What does it mean to you to be making work now as a Palestinian artist during this genocide? How has your practice been affected by the current situation in Gaza?

SH: The genocide has been the 500-pound gorilla in every room. The occupation has been impacting me since I was eight or nine, sitting by the radio in Palestine with my family, listening to news of the growing Zionist occupation. I went into painting because that was my love. Resisting occupation is not a profession. We are not born victims; we're born with full membership in the sum total of humanity. We resist because we know who we are.

Our culture is being genocided as well as our children. Universities, studios, churches, and mosques have been demolished. I take note of the pattern of killing special and talented Palestinian youths—football players from Gaza, for one example.

I witnessed and documented much more throughout the years of occupation than I am able to say in a few sentences here. I want to point to the book that I wrote about the 1956 massacre in Kafr Qasim. I wrote it to inspire young Palestinian artists and historians to explore our recent history and document it. This is valuable material that makes us who we are, the keepers of millennia of heritage. Palestine is our home. I can't do less than what I've done, and I should be doing much more.

Worldwide Intifadah, 1989. Acrylic on canvas, fifteen parts, 66 × 180 in. (167.6 × 457.2 cm)

HPC: Many artists around the world are grappling with how to continue, to make work in solidarity with the people of Palestine in the midst of this genocide. Is there anything you would want to add?

SH: I want to add optimism. When I started studying art history, I didn't study the history of Palestine. It's important, but when someone asks, "Where is Palestine in your work?," I used to say that if you need a doctor, are you going to look for one who only specializes in Palestinian medicine? No! Our society is international. Palestinians are very aware of the world. I advise young artists to study the history of art of many different places, not just the West. Give it all equal balance.

I learned from exploring pictorial art throughout the world. I saw patterns in different times and geographies. I developed my own view of the history of pictures. This is what gives optimism, knowing our history. I urge all young artists to disregard identity politics and to study and question history and propaganda and to question who has a right to govern us and who doesn't. Take optimistic control of your work.

Disregard the art world's propaganda. Art is not about you and your belly button. Art is about the community. Art may not change things immediately, but it enriches viewers and contributes to technology. Optimism is the banner I follow.

HANNAH PRISCILLA CRAIG is Director of Culture and Communications at the People's Forum and a founding organizer of Artists Against Apartheid.

RAVEN HALFMOON

BORN 1991
IN OKLAHOMA CITY, OK;
LIVES IN NORMAN, OK
CADDO NATION

Installation view of *Raven Halfmoon: Neesh + Soku (Moon + Sun)*, Salon 94, New York, 2024

CANDICE HOPKINS: I wanted you to share more about how you got into art-making. What were your initial inspirations? Who were some of your first teachers?

RAVEN HALFMOON: I've always been a maker, drawing horses and killer whales as a child, then moving to people, always painting and drawing, using charcoal. The first person who I actually worked with clay with was Caddo elder Jeri Redcorn; she revitalized Caddo pottery. That was my first time touching clay; I was thirteen. My family was always telling me to keep making, and I grew up going to concerts and national parks and traveling.

Because both of my parents work in Indian country—my mom has been a cultural museum director and worked at multiple history museums, and my dad works for the Cherokee Nation—we visited a lot of museums, galleries, and institutions. A Fritz Scholder exhibition in Santa Fe at the Institute of American Indian Arts when I was nine blew my mind, especially his *Indian/Not Indian* work. I consider him and T. C. Cannon my teachers. I also had great professors at the University of Arkansas, and I have a couple of fairy godmothers working in the field who have done a lot for me.

CH: You studied anthropology and art, and initially equine science. I love this phrase you had early on, about Caddos having a long history of clay. That history seemed present even in your MFA work.

RH: My first touch of clay—it was just joy. Love. My family said it made sense because Caddos have a really long history—thousands of years—with clay, making vessels for ritual ceremonies or for cooking. There's something about leaving your mark; you can literally see my fingerprints. I haven't found another material that captures a moment like that, instantaneously.

Installation view of *Raven Halfmoon: Neesh + Soku (Moon + Sun)*, Salon 94, New York, 2024

Flagbearer, 2022. Stoneware and glaze, 145 × 54 × 48 in. (368.3 × 137.2 × 121.9 cm). Installation view, *Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers*, The Contemporary Austin – Laguna Gloria, TX, 2025

Looking at my pieces years later takes me back to that moment. Even clay as a material, it comes from such different places. Caddos—our clay is red and dark chocolate-brown, from the Red River that divides Oklahoma and Texas. And everything we fired had to be super gritty and strong because we did pit firing, which is really hot, really fast. Some of these elements, especially the imagery and iconography from Caddo pottery, are still in my work. I don't wheel-throw; I build by hand using dark clays. When I was in school, it was very high-contrast from pit firing: jet black or hot red, with stark white designs from *sgraffito*. That influenced my color palette: high-contrast black, white, and red. I was obsessed with black-and-white appaloosas, killer whales, and Michael Jackson's black-and-white outfits. My name, Halfmoon, and our origin story about light and dark also had a great impact on my use of clay, history, and palettes.

CH: That was an amazing answer, because something that has always struck me about your work is this sense of immediacy, urgency, and a kind of fearlessness. I can see it in your handprints, the marks you make, the glaze drips. Do you feel that sense of urgency in what you're doing? Do you think of your sculptures as statements in some way?

RH: I do. I think of my sculptures as my family, my statements. There is an urgency, an immediacy to how I work as well. I don't live in the studio full-time; there are a lot of elements to my life. So when I'm in the studio, it's like, this is what I get to make; I need to make the statement. You can really feel that with the finger markings. I don't spend two weeks thinking about the anatomy of, like, the perfect cowboy hat because, to me, that's not what it's about. [The works are not] supposed to be these serene, perfect things: they're my family; they're my lived experiences. And those are not perfect. Work on something for too long, and it doesn't have the same sense of life to me.

CH: There's an embodied knowledge of form in your sculptures that I think comes from generations of family—many figures have multiple faces, representing generations. *Flagbearer* [2022], your largest sculpture to date—it's this huge woman made of three parts, almost fourteen feet tall—has stuck with me. Given the upcoming anniversary of the revolution in the US, what history does it bear, and why that title and scale?

RH: Working at that scale is so powerful. Living in Montana and going to these national parks makes you feel humble, like you're part of something bigger. I also want to instill within my work these quieter moments, where people can feel totally safe while giving themselves up to something else. I've had people say that about my shows—it feels like a church, a quiet space where you can reflect with other people. That's exactly what I want.

Flagbearer—I had to travel to another place that had an eight-foot kiln to make her; she took my blood, sweat, and tears. I had many people helping me full-time, but she was hard to make. Then to see her come out of the kiln, she was perfect. The first time I set her up, the day before my exhibition opened, I had to spend an hour alone in the gallery with her. That's when I realized what her name was going to be. She was the flagbearer for the show. She was the most powerful woman that I had created. To me, she looked like a flag of a new people.

CH: There are almost no monuments to Native women, which is not just about erasure, it's also about violence. What do we need to heal, for women's lives—Native women's lives, in particular—to be held in reverence?

RH: I agree. Talking about my family's experiences, learning about what my grandmother and great-grandmother went through, is really hard. Even reading my tribe's history and knowing I'm still here feels powerful. I feel like I'm helping to heal generational trauma as I make. People have told me they feel that in my work, not just Native people. I give my best self to these women I'm making; bless my pieces; imbue them with love. Their job is to heal, share, and educate. It is my hope that having these pieces out in the world, in museums and institutions, helps heal. Especially now, with the current administration and the upcoming 250th anniversary, I think it's really important, more than ever, to come from a place of love.

CH: Something you said that has really stayed with me is that you carry a lot of people with you. It's not singular, not just about you.

RH: It's hard as an artist, especially as an Indigenous artist—I feel like I have to do everything the right way, be respectful of my history, my tribe, be careful what to share and not share. It's a big responsibility to share everyone's story correctly, with love. It's not just my personal experiences; it's everybody, all my family who stand with me, supporting me. I feel like I'm the face of this lifetime, the hands, and then someone else will come after me.

CH: People sometimes don't realize the protocols we have to follow as Native artists. If you get out of line, your aunt's going to be the first one to tell you that you stepped out of line. It's not just protocols of being in a community, it's also about the responsibility that we carry into our practice. You've said what you do is make the human experience visible, which is remarkable.

RH: Thank you. As artists, we have an important role to capture what's happening now. I feel like we're cultural preservationists, capturing the human experience, because when people go to museums hundreds of years from now, that's what they are going to look at. It's important, especially in my work, to capture how I feel, that urgency. The human experience involves many emotions—it's anger, it's

Installation view of *Raven Halfmoon: Neesh + Soku (Moon + Sun)*, Salon 94, New York, 2024

love. Having all those emotions in the work is important. That's what I'm here to show.

CH: Has this present moment changed the way you work?

RH: Yes. I'm making pieces right now that feel ancient but are more contemporary to my personal experiences, especially with the works coming up: I have cigarettes, cowboy hats, more horses, reflecting where I live, in Oklahoma, a red state with thirty-eight tribes. My women in these pieces are "country." I grew up in Oklahoma, I have horses; it's politically conservative, but there are also big, powerful Indigenous women. I'm from Oklahoma, too, and proud of it! Right now, it's changed my way of making just to share that Native people are here, have been here a long time, and also to share a bit more of my personal experiences. It's hard for me, but I think it's necessary right now to share what we're going through.

CH: As a lot of my friends are saying right now: "Well, as Native people, this isn't the hardest thing we've ever had to deal with."

RH: Yeah, it's so funny, my family and I talk about it all the time: everyone else is freaking out, but it's like, Native people have been dealing with harder things for a lot longer. I think right now, my most important job is to continue to share my experience, our experience, what we've been going through—

CH: And to be uncompromising, especially when there's pressure to take up less space, or talk less. Your work, being larger and louder, taking up more space, sets a great example.

RH: I try to make everything in a good way. Fighting fire with fire is tough. I commend the artists who do it. My role right now is to continue to make and take up space and share.

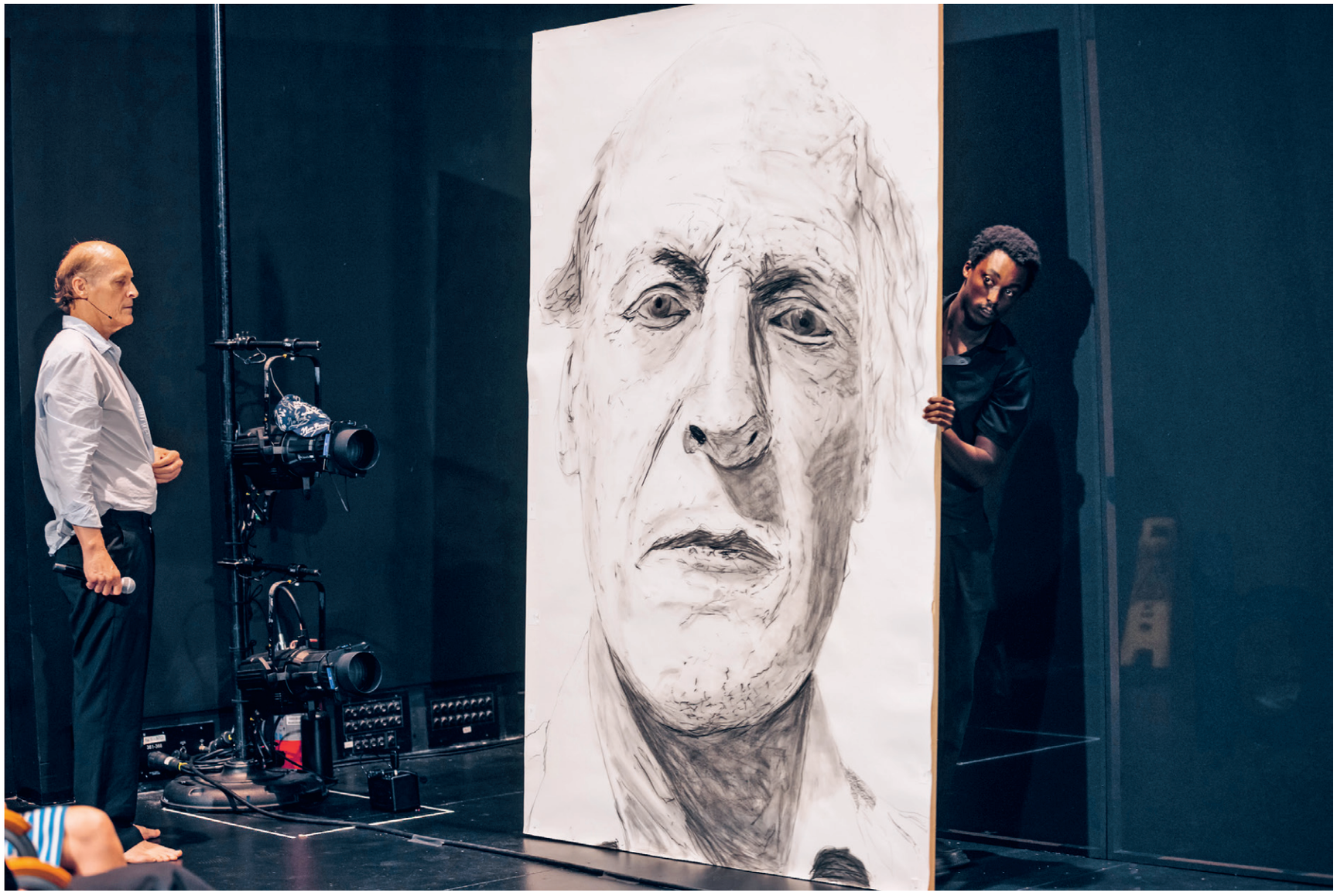
CANDICE HOPKINS is a citizen of Carcross/Tagish First Nation and Executive Director and Chief Curator of Forge Project, Taghkanic, NY.

The Guardians (detail), 2024. Bronze, 108 × 47 7/16 × 43 13/16 in. (274.3 × 120.4 × 111.3 cm). Edition of 3

BORN 1995
IN MIAMI;
LIVES IN BROOKLYN, NY

BORN 1996
IN PORTLAND, ME;
LIVES IN BROOKLYN, NY

NILE HARRIS WITH DYER RHOADS



minor b, 2024. Performance view, The Shed, New York, August 9–10, 2024

DANIELLA BRITO: I'd love to talk about the site-specific nature of your work, and also its relationship to American art and to American history in general.

NILE HARRIS: I feel like the work is best served or best received when it's in response to an environment. I never feel like I'm approaching anything in a vacuum; we're building on conversations and histories.

Nile Harris, *this house is not a home*, 2023. Performance view, Abrons Art Center, New York, July 14–16, 2023

That said, I'm always trying to find the juiciest questions for whatever context that I'm invited into. As for American art, it's a loaded conceptual framework—maybe even a nonexistent identity. What is American culture? What is America? I'm an American, but as a Black-American, why do I have a hyphen in my identity marker?

DB: I feel like American nationalism has historically played a big role in the way that you perform and the identities that you embody.

NH: I've always been trying to ask questions around place and systems of power, and that's generated this weird interest in—not reclaiming nationalism, because I think that's corny, but trying to, let's say, reappropriate the aesthetics of nationalism in order to ask questions around who or what is America.

DB: I love that; it makes me think about *this house is not a home* [2023], the MAGA hat of it all. Something that I really want to home in on are your dramaturgical strategies—in particular, I'm wondering about the role the surreal plays in your work.

NH: I've been writing lately about how the work blurs the lines between fiction and reality, so in a way that does suggest the surreal: It's not a completely fictional world; it's a distortion of the real. I'm always trying to unnerve the subconscious, all our deep-set beliefs around identity, nationality. So, in that way, I'm using the absurd, the surreal, the stream of conscious to get past analytical logic, the top layer of thinking.

DB: On that note, can you talk about the role that spectatorship plays? The audience frequently becomes a character itself.

NH: The spectator is half of the work—I mean, we're required to meet each other for the work to be complete. I like to say that I work in theater as opposed to performance art, because of its codified relationship to spectatorship. But I also think often about the role of the clown, as a character or an affect, or another strategy. The clown exists in one hundred percent service of the audience; without the spectator, the clown doesn't exist. I'm always trying to figure out what's going to unnerve, comfort, cajole, seduce, entertain the specific room I'm in. I really only get pleasure from the doing as I'm being witnessed. There's vulnerability and a little bit of shame that comes with that, but it goes both ways—we're looking at each other; there's no fourth wall where the audience is sitting comfortably in the dark. So there's a sort of counter-spectatorship: who's really being spectated?

DB: Can you talk about the intersection between clowning, jestering, coonery, and institutional critique in relationship to your practice?

NH: A friend was telling me recently about how, in the medieval era, court jesters occupied a kind of privileged position, in that their job was basically to make fun of the king but without ever being punished for it in the way that a regular person might. I've been thinking about that as a framework for this ongoing and maybe impossible question: can you critique a thing from inside the thing? It's the Audre Lorde quote, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." I'm keenly aware of trying to be, you know, inside the institution, while trying to make some sort of reflection that the institution can't dismantle. In that way, clowning is to skew the power structure. I'm often thinking about the spectacle of, like, just being alive and being a Black body on stage, and then that brings me to these strategies of performative subversion, the vaudeville of it all, the minstrelsy of it all—how do you twist that to get to that deeper layer of subconscious I was talking about, and the racial paranoia that's present in all of us as Americans?

DB: Absolutely. I think that intersects with what it means to cause discomfort in an audience, reflecting a mirror back to them that makes them reckon with uncomfortable things. You often achieve this by being very referential in your work—not only self-referential or referencing the institution itself, but also referencing popular culture, history, performance strategies. Can you speak a bit to how quotation and annotation informs your work?

minor b, 2024. Performance view, The Shed, New York, August 9–10, 2024

NH: I find the referential really helpful around blurring the lines and bringing a present tense–ness to the work. There's that Biblical quote Toni Morrison often used, "nothing new under the sun"—my mom essentially said that to me as a child, and it made me cry. I thought she was saying I was uninventive. But now it brings me comfort, knowing this practice is not in a vacuum; it exists in a deep contextual reality. It's just one additional, like, means of furthering the conversations, historical lineages, formal strategies that have been ongoing, particularly across New York creative history.

DB: I'm curious whether you tend to have a general plan for how you want the work to end, and where improvisation figures into this.

NH: I really shirk anything that feels overdetermined. And the truth of the matter is, I work collaboratively; I'm always working with other people who have independent logic, truth, authority inside the work. So, I don't often write plays in advance. I come up with the inciting idea, say, and have these, like, conceptual strategies in my head. But then I bring it into the collective, and as much as I may have an agenda, I'm often really trying to allow everyone to shine and do their own things—these folks all have a strong, strong creative affect. Improvisation comes in the form of this social collaboration. How we get from point A to Z is a diverging, winding road. It's very collage-like, positioning these independent strategies together to form a collective strategy.

DB: Can you tell me a little bit about Social Security, how that was born and what you're envisioning for your company?

NH: Social Security is what I think of as a speculative theater company. I feel like when I moved to New York in 2017, there were so many collectives working together, and there still are, but I think it was a strategy that was really popular in the aughts and in the 2010s that none of my peers are really doing anymore. I think we're all in this sort of more individualistic, project-based reality. We bring constellations of

Nile Harris and Malcolm X-Betts, *Temporary Boyfriend*, 2025. Performance view, Chocolate Factory Theater, Long Island City, NY, January 11–16, 2025

people together for specific projects. But the idea of a theater company seemed like a fun way of trying to think about the history we inhabit, and also of honoring the people who I make alongside of, namely collaborator Dyer Rhoads. I wouldn't have it any other way. The phrase "social security" feels like a very apt way to describe these social interventions that we make, going back to all the things we've touched on in this conversation: social context, sociality, social forms, social constraints.

DB: Something we haven't really touched on is the digital sphere. Can you tell me about how the theater of the everyday informs the way that you world-build?

NH: Yeah, digital is everything. If we're thinking about contemporary social reality, the digital figures into every aspect of it. How I experience the fragmentation of everyday life is because of the digital. I'm a chronically online person, which informs the references I make in the work but also the, let's say, temporal logic inside of the work. Everything is very super fast-paced; I'm changing lines of logic every five seconds. In regard to world-building: There are others who have done a lot more thinking about this than I have, but, like, the digital is real; it's as real as anything. I'm just trying to make sense of that in regards to, like, my own contemporary everyday life. So much of that is inspired by my late collaborator Trevor Bazile. As much as he was a jazz musician and a filmmaker, he also was very much an internet-based artist working through memes. He had a meme account called All Triggers No Warning, and he was very much asking questions around, like, how liberal ideas performed themselves online, particularly around 2020, George Floyd, Black Lives Matter. We made a lot of work about that, namely,

minor b, 2024. Performance view, The Shed, New York, August 9–10, 2024

our manifesto, "you niggas in trouble," which became a basis for *this house is not a home* and other work. So, in that way, I'd say the internet informs the work both as formal strategy and subject content, thinking about how digital realities inform our everyday life.

DANIELLA BRITO is a writer and is Curatorial Specialist at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

BORN IN WARDAK, AFGHANISTAN; LIVES IN BERLIN

AZIZ HAZARA

Moon Sightings, 2024. Photographs and archival pigment prints on paper, 271 ¾ × 234 ¼ in. (690 × 595 cm). Installation view, Sharjah Biennial 16, to carry, United Arab Emirates, 2025

SOHRAB MOHEBBI: I think there are two essential aspects to your work. A lot of work that you do is lens-based, either video or photography. On the other hand, there is very comprehensive research about materiality—remnants, detritus, what's left behind when the various forces of occupation have left Afghanistan. Maybe we could start with *Shabnama* [night chronicle], your contribution to the Whitney Biennial, and how it brings together these two concurrent aspects of your practice.

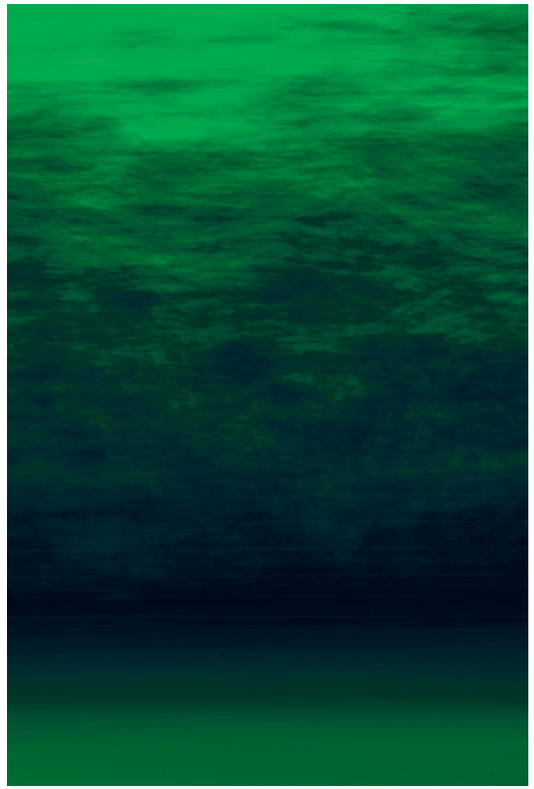
AZIZ HAZARA: I started thinking around the idea of plausible deniability as a strategy in most warfare and conflict zones—how states produce it, and how ambiguity plays into the representation of an event. Afghanistan, as I describe it, is a landscape of leftovers, layers atop layers—imperial adventures, regime changes, civilizing missions. The possibility of denial is introduced into these leftovers.

Moon Sightings (detail), 2024. Photographs and archival pigment prints on paper, 271 ¾ × 234 ¼ in. (690 × 595 cm)

In this case, we're working with electronic boards of night-vision goggles. After processing the data, you're introduced to a data set that doesn't belong to anybody. It becomes almost fictional. Plausible deniability brings in the fictionality of events, where everything could be manufactured. *Shabnama* starts there.

SM: There's an interesting tension in this work between night vision, which is about creating transparency to see through the unknown, and this question of plausible deniability, which is essentially about a peculiar form of obscurity or opacity—maybe it happened, maybe it didn't. You've been thinking about night as a site of activity for some time. *Camouflage* [2016] looked into this. You used night vision to capture—I want to say "everyday" scenes, but really, "every night" scenes—mundane moments, people hanging out.

AH: *Camouflage* was my first encounter with night-vision goggles—these objects were introduced during Desert Storm. That imagery became the image of empire: the Empire can see you. But once those technologies are massively distributed, a new dynamic emerges. Both the occupier and occupied can see each other. That changes the dynamics of occupation. In the case of *Kite Balloons* [2018/2022], foreign soldiers talk about how they would be really bored, so they would zoom in on the Afghans on their rooftops with the night vision from these kite balloons. There's a massive rooftop culture in the city—people sleeping, dancing, singing—and in response to this, people moved indoors. In our culture, we observe Shab-e Yalda [winter solstice], where everyone gathers on the longest



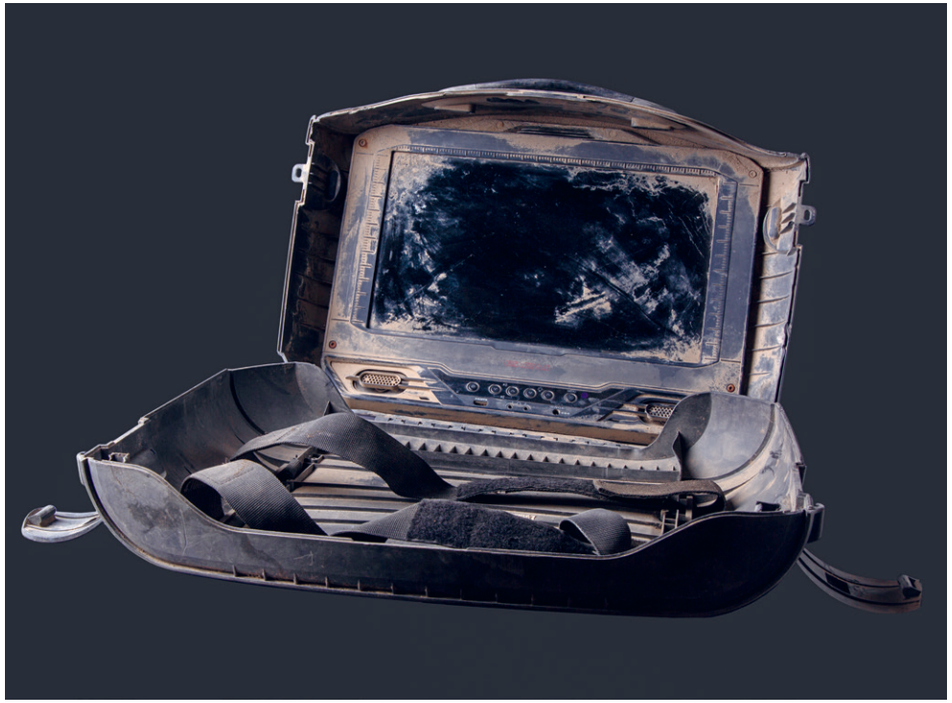
I Love Bagram (ILB), 2025. LCD monitors, stainless-steel trunks, shipping pallets, 14-channel audio, and 10-channel digital video, dimensions variable

night of the year to recite poetry collectively. But what happens when that night is under occupation? Where movement is completely tracked by whoever is occupying that landscape? When the Soviets withdrew from Kabul, people went to their rooftops and chanted "Allahu Akbar!" Thirty years later, as the Americans withdrew, the people started taking ownership of the nightscape through that same chant.

SM: That's so interesting—how this technology altered how architecture and public space were used. And of course, public space was already highly regulated during the occupation. You mentioned *Kite Balloons*—can you talk more about that work?

AH: The technology descends from Germany—World War I, World War II. After Nazi Germany's aerospace knowledge was transferred to the US, this surveillance technology became popular in the Iraq War. When the US scaled down there, they had surplus balloons, so they shipped them to Afghanistan. Basically, it felt like an omnipresent eye that was constantly watching you from every angle of the city, and all public activity—day and night—moved indoors. But at the same time, the balloons became the mark of the occupation infrastructure—every air base had one; you could tell where the Americans or British were by the balloon overhead. The balloons documented the landscape for fourteen years and gathered a lot of data. When the Americans left, the data centers were looted. Some of that data is available in the bazaars of Kabul and in the region.

When I went to Kabul in 2024, the balloons were gone, and that sense of freedom one has in the city without being watched had returned, even though other drones were around. But the inflatable occupational sculpture, the monument to occupation, was gone.



Untitled (Bagram Field Scans), 2024. Archival pigment print on paper, 12 ½ × 16 ½ in. (31.8 × 41.9 cm)

SM: A monument that's not symbolic, but active—total surveillance. It changes behavior. It's interesting because we now see this omnipresent eye deployed internally in the West, too. Total surveillance is everywhere. Night vision was a major part of Desert Storm imagery—broadcast on CNN in that unmistakable green. Let's talk about that color—how it became a pigment of occupation. You've used it repeatedly.

AH: Kabul is a desert city, but in night vision it's rendered green—like a memory of what it once was. That color fictionalizes the landscape. The fiction enters when you're "there," but not really. It's plausible deniability again. I wanted to see what could be done with that color—how to construct a nightscape using imperial imagery but subvert it into something new that doesn't belong anymore to the occupation.

SM: It becomes a kind of code; it signifies being watched, the presence of surveillance, but also countersurveillance. I want to go back to the night-vision goggles because these are related to the ongoing research project you've been doing since the American soldiers left Afghanistan in 2021. They left behind an insurmountable amount of—for lack of a better word—trash. Including these goggles. It would be interesting to hear you talk about the economy of this as part of your process—how did you gather these goggles and the data set that connects them?

AH: The supply chain of occupation is quite interesting; the rare earth that is used in night-vision technologies and most of these objects were produced in China, and most of the electronics in Taiwan, of course. All these Chinese companies were subcontractors of the American military-industrial complex. Afghanistan is a logistical nightmare, and for the Americans to supply their troops in Afghanistan, they used civilian ports in Karachi, Pakistan, and a few through Central Asia.

Early in the conflict, night-vision goggles were expensive. But over time, knockoffs flooded the market. You could buy one for $100 at Bush Bazaar, even though the US paid thousands. That changed the nightscape—suddenly, everyone had them. Many of these circuit boards became archaeological sites where one could excavate.

SM: The data is in the goggles?

AH: Yes. They have the possibility of reading or excavating them; in fact, most of the electronic circuit boards are readable. After excavating, one is often confronted with a dataset wherein one doesn't know whose night it is—was the soldier American? British? A militant? That ambiguity allows for the possibility of humor and the introduction of fiction.

SM: That's the core of your project—activating those data sets without resolving authorship, and allowing the viewer to construct narratives as well. In your work, by rendering what's visible, you're showing what can't be shown: the cumulative effect of decades of violence and occupation.

AH: I started thinking about how to subvert an imperial object and its imperial vantage point. Whose body/landscape are you making visible? What are the politics of representation? In most of the occupied landscapes, occupied bodies do not have a lot of agency. So, I turn to fiction and comedy.

SM: Let's talk about humor, because it's deeply rooted in our culture.

AH: In contested landscapes, humor is a method to cope with occupation. People sit at night and tell jokes—about the Empire, about each other. It's communal, and it is passed down orally. That's a tradition. Comedy is resistance. My latest favorite jokes are the ones circulating after the American escape from Kabul; comically, a lot of them resemble the jokes said about the Soviet soldiers.

SM: When I was invited to have this conversation, I thought a lot about the context and the two of us speaking in a catalogue for the Whitney Museum of American Art. I wondered: Is the institution trying to absolve itself from complicity in imperial systems? I don't know the answer. I'm curious about your thoughts—

AH: When I got the invitation, I asked myself: What is my relationship with the American Empire? The only relationship I could think of was buying overpriced liquor from the US Embassy in Kabul.

SM: In the past few years, you've been trying to return tons of leftover US military material from Bagram back to the US. That's a monumental undertaking. I also want to acknowledge how important this long-term project is.

AH: Over the past five years, in close collaboration with you, we've been doing this, and it's a performance in itself. Some objects are sensitive, some are trash. My practice has mostly been object-based. These leftovers—Soviet and now American—have become part of daily life. We attempt to disrupt that flow. To track the object's biography: Who made it, who shipped it, what inventory did it pass through? How did it move across the globe? *Shabnama* comes from this—it's an offshoot. For now, we're working with the imagery. Maybe later, the objects will come.

SM: That makes sense. *Shabnama* is an ongoing narrative. Your work is like a living *Shabnama*: dissecting, fictionalizing, resisting. It's truly an honor to be in conversation with you.

I Love Bagram (ILB) (detail), 2025. LCD monitors, stainless-steel trunks, shipping pallets, 14-channel audio, and 10-channel digital video, dimensions variable

SOHRAB MOHEBBI is Director of SculptureCenter, New York, and in 2022–23 was the Kathe and Jim Patrinos Curator of the 58th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh.

BORN 1961
IN SAN DIEGO;
LIVES IN LOS ANGELES

MARGARET HONDA

Film (Künstlerhaus Bremen), 2016. 324 polyester lighting gels, 13 × 12 ⅜ in. (33 × 31.4 cm) each, 14 weeks. Reel no. 1 of 6. Installation view, *Margaret Honda: An Answer to 'Sculptures,'* Künstlerhaus Bremen, 2016

STEPHANIE SEIDEL: Looking back at some of your writings, I was struck in particular by two phrases you mention: You talk about your work as "sculpting life within a space," as well as your pieces acting as "generative spaces." Both quotes touch upon the complex relationship of presence and absence, materialization and dematerialization within your work.

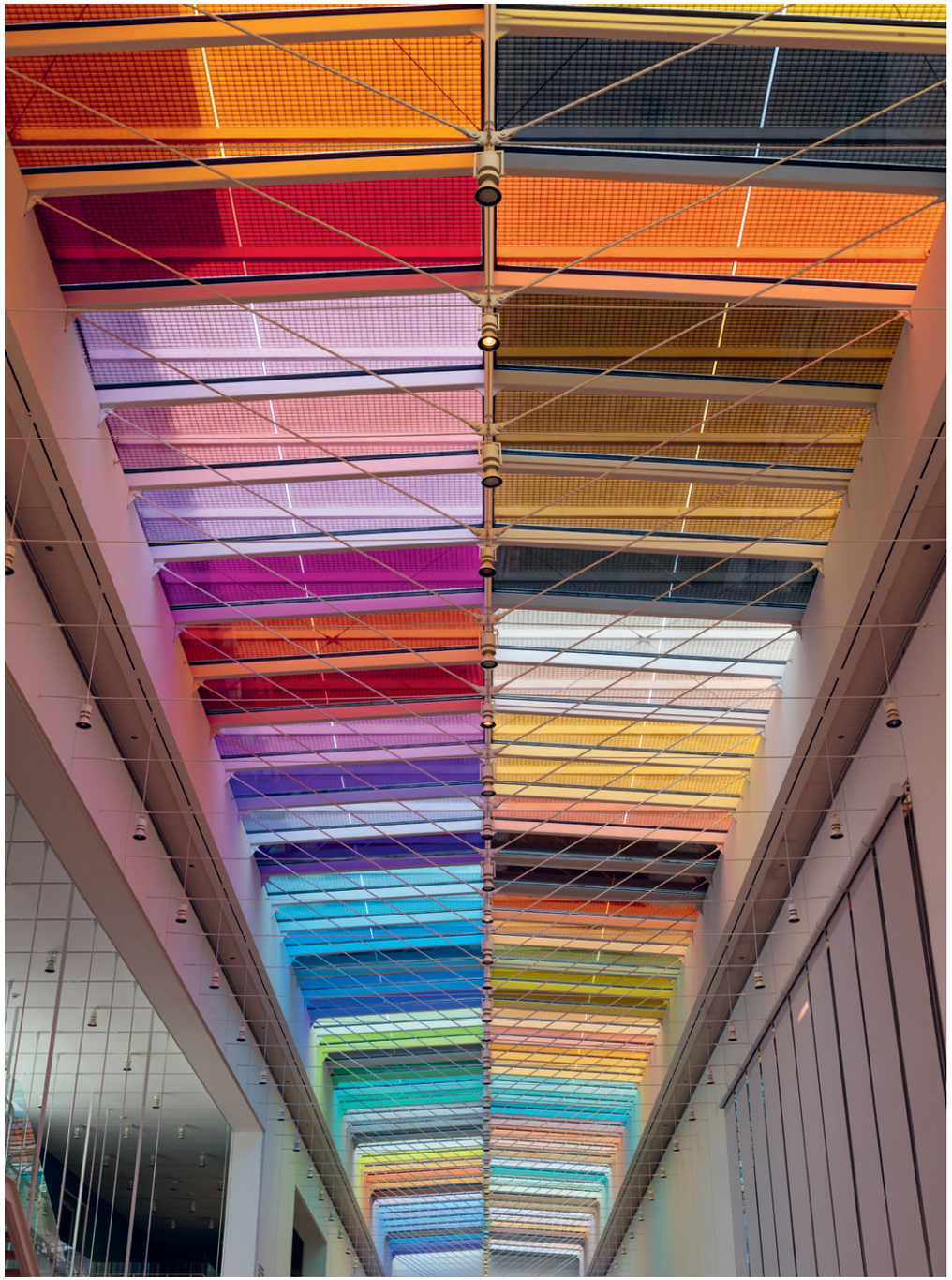
MARGARET HONDA: The 2015 exhibition at Triangle was when I began talking about things being generative. The main work in that show, *Sculpture* [2015], was a full-scale construction of the volumes of all fifteen studios I had worked in—all of them empty. So much happened in those studios that was outside the realm of depiction. They were highly generative spaces for me, and that's what I wanted to convey. The two other works were *Writings* [2015], a book with descriptions, but no images, of what I made in the studios and *Wildflowers* [2015], a film with a soundtrack and no images. Those works are starting places for things to materialize, even if only in your mind. I'm always thinking about how generous the materials and processes I work with are and how they present so many openings for me, and that provides a kind of basis for what I do. I think I know what your next question is—

SS: Yes! You mentioned the materials you are working with—could you share more about what you consider as materials for your work in the first place?

MH: Pretty much everything becomes a material for me: processes, tools, even my existing work. I had an older sculpture made of bronze wire, and it was taking up too much space. So I had the idea to melt it down, and that's the work called *Fish Trap, 1989, 2010* [2016]. I asked a foundry to melt it and pour it into whatever molds they had, which they did, sort of reluctantly. Actually, I did this twice—in 2010, and again in 2016. You don't lose anything when you're melting down bronze; it's the same amount of material. For me, it's still the same work. It's just in a different form now.

That work was pivotal for me because it felt like I could do anything after that. I began looking at all my sculptures that were stored in my garage—some of them for decades. I'd come to think about them in terms of how they were wrapped: if something was in bubble wrap or something was in cardboard, I kept seeing it in terms of the wrapping. The works themselves had become invisible in a way, and I realized that what I had was this garage full of materials. So I sealed all of the works—including their wrappings—in Marvelseal, which is a laminate film commonly used in art conservation. There were ninety-six elements that became a single work,

Model for 'Sculpture,' 2017. Drywall, metal studs, and acrylic, 90 × 108 × 147 in. (228.6 × 274.3 × 373.4 cm). Installation view, *The Everywhere Studio*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, 2017



Double Feature with Short Subject, 2023–ongoing. 124 polyester lighting gels, 4 × 14 ft. (1.2 × 4.3 m) each. Installation view, The Art Institute of Chicago, 2023

subsumed under the title *Marvelseal Work*. And the new date is 2020–21. They can't be unwrapped; this is now what they are.

SS: Compression and transmutation appear to be the methods you apply here, and I'm interested in how that connects to the idea of "generative spaces." Do you see this act of transmutation as an extension of the sculptural process—one that doesn't conclude with you but rather continues through the viewer's engagement? Is that something you consciously consider?

MH: I like the idea of compression—it suggests that something can expand, but you don't always know in what way. And that's actually what I consider when I make anything: how to use unforeseen constraints and accidents to shape the work. *Wildflowers* is a film that was supposed to have images, except the emulsion crumbled off in the camera. I still used the footage, but with a voiceover where there would have been images. But I see that as a form of generosity. Instead of me saying, this is all we're going to be looking at, it's, there are so many ways of looking at it.

SS: I think that's a really compelling idea. I'd like to pivot towards the question of images, and more specifically, how you approach working with film.

MH: I started working with film because I was interested in the materiality of it, not because I had narrative ideas. My first film—*SPECTRUM REVERSE SPECTRUM* [2014]—was made without a camera or a negative. It was made by running a full 2,500-foot roll of 70mm print stock through a continuous printer. The red, blue, and green valves on the machine were controlled to print the spectrum from violet to red, which ran about 1,200 feet. I wanted the full 2,500-foot roll to determine the work's length, so I did the reverse spectrum from red to violet on the other half of the roll. Those are the kinds of decisions I make as I'm working, and they're usually in response to the materials or to the processes.

SS: I'd like to turn to some of your time-based installations—specifically *Film*, which was first realized in 2016 at the Künstlerhaus Bremen, and more recently in a new iteration at the Art Institute of Chicago. As the title implies, these works closely relate to your engagement with film, yet they diverge from conventional definitions of the medium. Could you speak more about how you conceive of these works in relation to film and duration?

MH: When the Künstlerhaus Bremen approached me, I'd been looking at lighting gels as a material, but I wasn't sure what to do with them. The Bremen space has a wall with fifty-six identical windowpanes—rows of repeating modules, not unlike film frames. So I used the given circumstances—architecture, materials, and exhibition length—to make *Film (Künstlerhaus Bremen)*. It was a film but not in the usual sense. I ordered an entire set of Rosco E-Colour+ gels, and my plan was to install them on the windows in the manufacturer's numerical order. Since there were 324 gels and fifty-six windowpanes, the gels had to be changed at six intervals throughout the three-month exhibition—like reels of film. The version at the Art Institute of Chicago is called *Double Feature with Short Subject* [2023–ongoing]. It's on the skylights in the Griffin Court—there are sixty-three skylights on each side of a long hall. In that space, the sun functions like the lamp in a projector, and you're the projector motor. As you walk through the space, you're essentially activating the work.

SS: The viewer becoming the motor for *Double Feature with Short Subject* is a striking image. That idea of translating something into an almost visceral physical experience also connects to some of your more recent sculptures, *frog* [2019], for example.

MH: In the Bramantino painting that inspired *frog*, *Madonna delle Torri* [c. 1515–20], the frog is, by far—for me at least—the most interesting figure. When I first saw that painting, I'd turned a corner in the museum and suddenly was face-to-face with this upended, almost life-size frog. I

frog, 2019. Silicone, fiberglass, resin, ethylene-vinyl acetate, acrylic, polyurethane, stainless steel, enamel, and rugs from the collection of the Carnegie Museum of Art, 24 ⅝ × 57 ½ × 46 ¼ in. (62.5 × 146.1 × 117.5 cm). Installation view, *Margaret Honda*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 2019

just thought, I really want to see *that* frog in *my* space instead of in the picture plane. The dimensions [for *frog*] come from the painting itself. Since I was making a frog, she has her skeleton and all of her internal organs. It's very much about making a *frog*, not just making a surface. The construction has to have a rationale.

SS: While it's still in progress, I'm curious to hear more about the concept behind *Portrait*. The work centers on a biographical moment in your parents' lives, the seven years between their release from the Poston internment camp in 1944 and their marriage.

MH: I know about their lives during World War II when they were unjustly incarcerated in Poston, Arizona, which was one of ten concentration camps where the US government detained the Japanese

Marvelseal Work, 2020–21. Artist's sculptures, drawings, and photographs dated 1984–2013; aluminized polyethylene and nylon barrier film; and packing material (polyethylene, polypropylene, and cardboard), dimensions variable

American population they forcibly removed from the West Coast. But there is a gap in my knowledge from when my parents were released to when they got married, and now there is no one I can ask about it. But I did find a couple things in the archive from that era that made me think about how I might learn more about this period in their lives. One was a placemat from a restaurant near Cobb Hall at the University of Chicago, where my mother worked. And I found my father's union card from the United Office & Professional Workers of America, and pay stubs from the Doubleday Book Shop on Fifth Avenue at Fifty-third Street in Manhattan. That's the information I have—where they were employed. They had no home anywhere to go to once they left the camp; there were over 100,000 people from all the camps who were in the same situation. They were trying to rebuild their lives from a void. I was thinking about this and also the void that I'm working from in terms of information. How do you build something from that? So I began researching what I had: the office where my mother worked in Cobb Hall, and also the Doubleday Book Shop—two spaces that no longer exist. The plan is to rebuild those spaces, the original spaces that my parents worked in, but superimposed on the spaces that came after. There's this forensic work that I've had to do, digging through what's already there in order to see what I can't see anymore. It will be a pendant pair portrait of my parents, but for the most part, the objects will look like architectural models.

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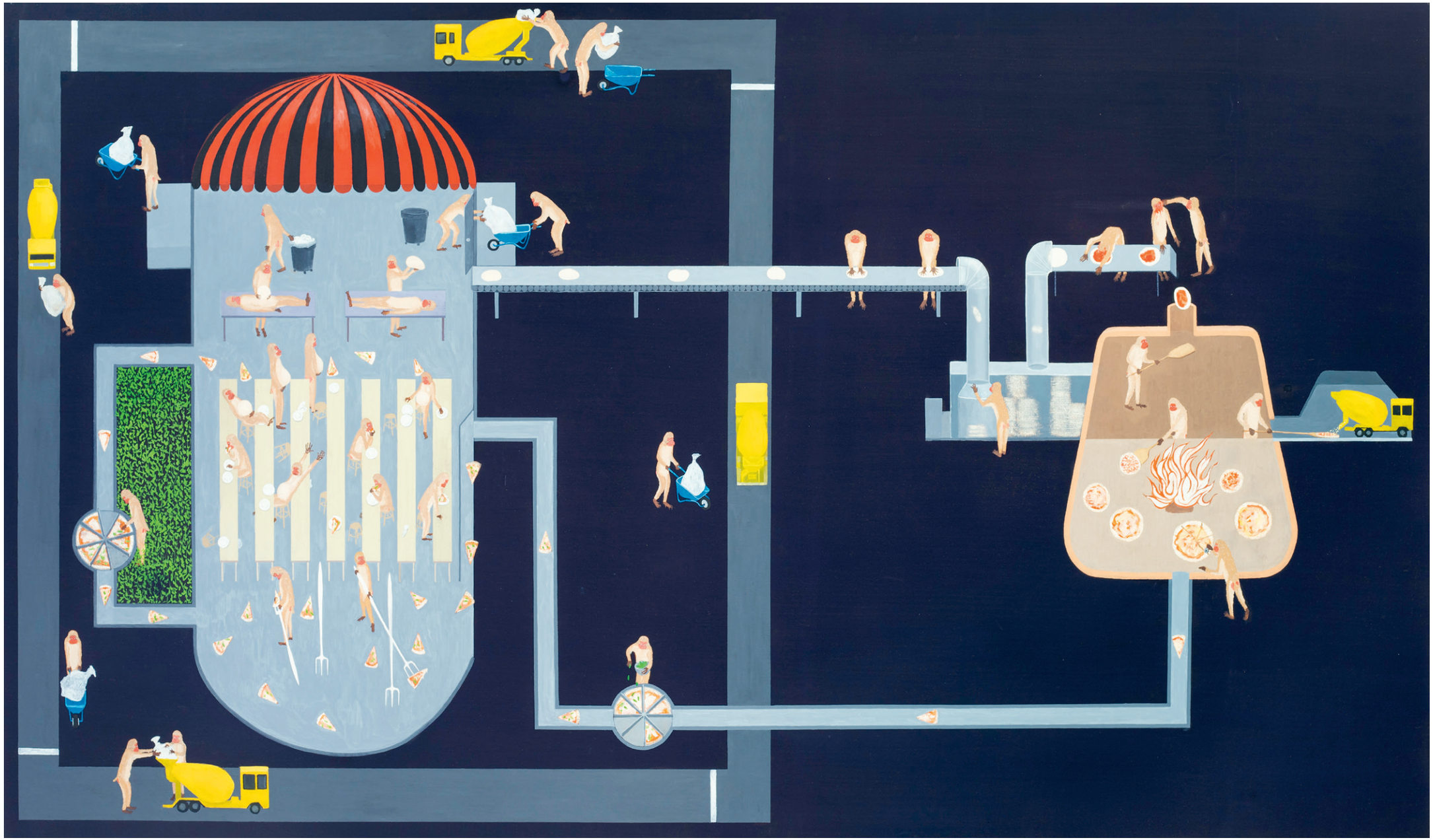
BORN 1979
IN KOCHI, JAPAN;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

AKIRA IKEZOE



Monkeys on the Diagram of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, 2021/2024. Oil on canvas, 46 × 79 ½ in. (116.8 × 201.9 cm)

SARAH DEMEUSE: Maybe we begin by jumping back to the past, and you tell us a bit about your artistic background.

AKIRA IKEZOE: I started painting when I was a high-school student in Kochi, which is a small provincial city in Japan. It was the ’90s, before the internet. I was painting still lifes, self-portraits, those classic subjects. I was really enjoying it, except that when we use oil paint, we can add and subtract, over and over—I actually didn’t know how to end a painting.

Still from *Clam and the Sun*, 2025. Digital video, black-and-white, and sound; 20:06 min., looped

Then, in 1998, I moved to Tokyo to go to Tama Art University, where I studied printmaking. It was totally different—I had to decide all the steps beforehand to make everything perfect. After graduating, I stopped printmaking because I didn’t have access to the machines, but slowly, that experience informed my painting to develop the current style.

SD: So you have a plan going into your paintings, and you execute them similarly to how you did in printmaking?

AI: Yeah, in printmaking, we have to decide where the ink goes and where it doesn’t. I’m doing the same thing in painting. I spread very thin layers of oil paint all over the canvas. After a first layer, I start drawing figures by removing the paint with a solvent. When I apply the next layer, I remove those same parts. I repeat this process multiple times before adding details and coloring.

SD: I got to know your work shortly after you moved to New York, in 2010. Something that I think has been consistent and prominent in your painting is that you come up with these circular systems that don’t produce any waste; things transform into something else. There’s a sense of growth, and nothing really dies; there’s always rebirth.

AI: I’ve been interested in mainly two things since I moved to New York, both of which are results of experiences while I lived here. In March 2011, a big earthquake and tsunami hit the north part of Japan and destroyed numerous towns along the coast as well as the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. I had a real distance from what was going on in Japan, but it made me think about our relationship to nature, about nature and our culture always invading each other. Is it possible for us to draw a clear borderline between nature and culture? They meet within our body.

The other thing is that I moved to New York without knowing much English, and, inevitably, I struggled a lot with the language barrier. I started focusing on visual expressions much more than before—it was a way to avoid explaining what I’m doing in English. In the beginning, I classified objects around myself. I made up categories based on shapes, like ball, triangle, or stick shapes. For example, the moon and bananas fall into the same category. I painted these objects in a specimen-like composition. While making this series, I realized I can make up stories by associating similar visual characteristics. That was the start of my painting in New York.

My circular systems probably came from my interest in both things: our relation to nature and the visual associations. There are a lot of circular systems all around us. We exhale carbon dioxide, and plants absorb it and generate oxygen. There are also circular systems related to visual association. An ancient belief in Japan associates the waxing and waning of the moon with our death and rebirth. When I find that the starting point and ending point meet, I feel—wow!

SD: There’s also a balance in it: You know that spring will always follow winter, and the plants will come again. It’s not chaotic; it doesn’t cause major anxiety.

Let’s talk about your visual compositions, which are like schematic planes that depict these different moments of people doing something, plants doing something, etcetera. One action moves to another, yet there’s not one author or force directing it all. How do you see the human component in that?

AI: Let me explain a bit more about the circularity first. My visual storytelling used to be one linear story, but at some point I realized it had something in common with diagrams, because diagrams also tell us something without language. So, I started incorporating existing diagrams into my paintings as the base of the composition, such as diagrams of the stock market, weather-monitoring systems, etcetera. And I thought, what if I incorporated not only the compositions but also the theme of those diagrams into my paintings? In 2021, I made a series of paintings about nuclear power plants by incorporating diagrams about plants that experienced serious accidents in the past.

To come back to your question about humans: in my paintings, they are not main characters. The main character is the system itself. The people are components of the system, which is automatic in my mind. That's why I'm not really interested in depicting the details of human figures. I want them to precisely work as part of a domino effect.

SD: Is that how you essentially understand nature?

AI: Yes, that's the way to coexist with nature.

SD: It's not exploitative, though. There is one painting that I'm thinking of where plant sprouts come out of the ground and become windmills, for example. Things move from one state to another, and the same happens with humans. They might be carrying some kind of blocks and making a pyramid or something, but it's all part of another plan that's not theirs.

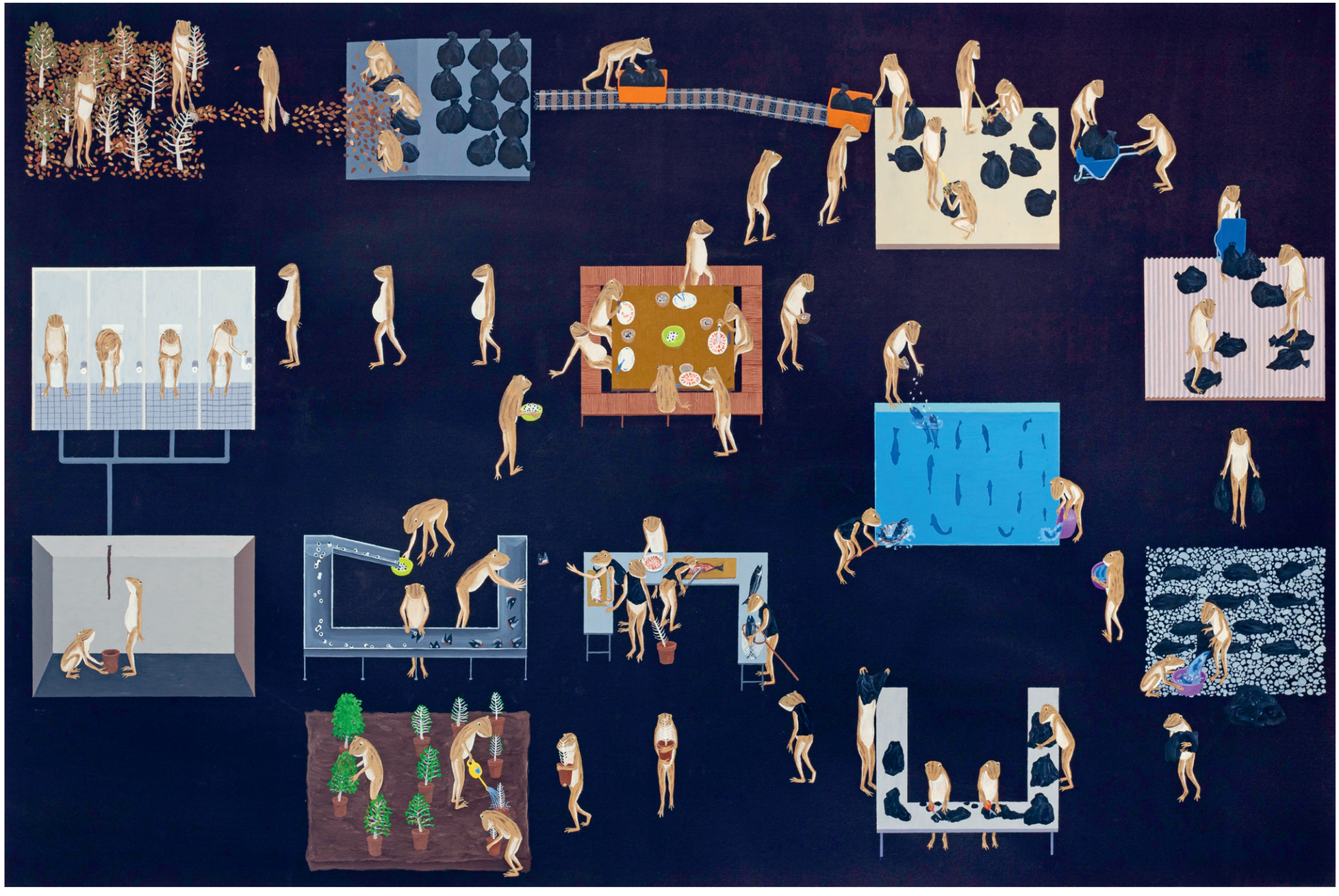
AI: That's what I'm having difficulty explaining, because right now, both the natural circular systems or the visual associations are working cohesively in my head. Like a plant seed becomes a windmill, or sometimes it becomes a street sign, because they are usually a stick with something on the end, and that looks like a sunflower. I also put it in an imaginary circular system—the street signs somehow bear fruits, and the seeds fall again to sustain the system.

SD: Everything lives together. You're also not looking at a specific time period, history is flattened—an ancient pyramid can exist next to a contemporary street sign, for example.

AI: I make a lot of categories based on shapes, and that process requires a lot of unlearning. I have to ignore a lot of existing values or orders in the real world. I make everything flat, then reconstruct my imaginary world where anything can happen.

SD: I think it's important to underline this *unlearning,* and maybe to a degree, you are in a better position to do that because of your experience coming to New York as a non–English speaker.

Even as you make your universe flat, though, there's a lot of detail and



Toads on the Diagram of Nuclear Fuel Cycle, 2021/2024. Oil on canvas, 43 ½ × 65 ¾ in. (110.5 × 167 cm)

Not So Still Life with Breasts, 2024. Oil on canvas, 40 × 36 in. (101.6 × 91.4 cm)

precision—otherwise, the system doesn't work.

AI: When I made the animation *Clam and the Sun* [2025], I thought the nuclear plant's cooling towers and the clam's water tube looked similar, so I made up a story between them. . . . First of all, the waste from nuclear power plants is very toxic, and we don't know what to do with it. I think the reason the waste is very problematic is that it doesn't belong to any circular system on this planet. The sun also does not belong to any circular system on the Earth. We receive the sunlight, but we are not giving back anything for the sun to sustain itself.

So I thought it's interesting to include these two outsiders in one of my imaginary circular systems. I don't know how much I'm interested in environmental issues, but I'm pretty much against the current nuclear power plants because we can't handle it. Also, as a Japanese person—we know how dangerous radioactivity is because we have had many tragedies related to radioactivity in our history.

Sometimes my artworks unconsciously express some kind of opinion about what's going on in the world. I don't know if I'm making artworks to convey my opinion to people. I don't think so. I'm pretty much making things to entertain myself.

SD: Entertainment and playfulness are important. Relatedly, I wondered if you wanted to share a little bit about you being a father now. I wonder if seeing things through the eyes of a younger being in your life has influenced your own perceptions.

AI: My son is six now, and he's learning little by little how things are working in this world. I think it was three years ago, he found a piece of broken water balloon on the ground, and he said, "Oh, Papi, look! It's a fish!" I never thought it looked like a fish. His way of perceiving the world is what I'm trying to do with much more effort—

SD: He doesn't have to unlearn!

AI: Yeah, he's just naturally doing it. Maybe I'm training myself to be a child.

SD: With extremely advanced painting skills! My last question for you centers on how we met, which was through Guatemala; you work very closely with [the gallery] Proyectos Ultravioleta. I thought it would be nice to bring in that facet, too, because you are based in the US, but there are many influences and geographic contexts informing your work.

AI: Leaving Japan for New York and learning to speak English was huge. Growing up, I was surrounded by people with negative feelings about the US and about speaking English because of the history between the countries. However, as my artworks started to go abroad, I started desiring to communicate in English, and I decided to do it. Now, I'm very happy about my decision. I came to New York and met my wife, Jessica [Kairé], who is from Guatemala, and I started working with Proyectos Ultravioleta and met many other artists from Guatemala. I met many artists in New York. To me, New York is a big school to learn many things as an artist, as an immigrant. A lot of immigrant artists are sharing their backgrounds here to influence each other. I'm enjoying being a part of it. I think there should be more and more immigrants coming to New York.

SARAH DEMEUSE is an editor and communications strategist based in New York.

MAO ISHIKAWA

BORN 1953
IN OKINAWA UNDER
US ADMINISTRATION;
LIVES IN OKINAWA, JAPAN

Untitled, from the series *Red Flower (Akabanaa): The Women of Okinawa*, 1975–77. Gelatin silver print, 16 × 20 in. (40.6 × 50.8 cm)

As Mao Ishikawa was not able to be interviewed for this volume, the following discussion was conducted by curators Yasufumi Nakamori and Fumiaki Kamegai, both of whom have organized exhibitions of Ishikawa's work.

YASUFUMI NAKAMORI: Mao Ishikawa's photographs bring light to people living on the fringes, with a primary focus on Okinawa, her homeplace. Her photographs look at America's ongoing military presence on the island, as well as the Okinawans' distrust of the Japanese government. Much of her work considers Okinawa's lack of sovereignty, both under US jurisdiction after World War II and, from 1972 to today, under Japanese control. Her principal subjects, however, are individuals who are subject to such conditions.

In the early '70s, Mao briefly attended the short-lived Workshop Shashin Gakkō [Workshop Photo School] in Tokyo. There she studied with Shōmei Tōmatsu, who had made the US military occupation of Japan, including Okinawa, a part of his artistic focus, including a major series about American GIs. Upon her return to Okinawa, Mao began photographing Black American soldiers, Japanese "bar girls" who catered to them, local theater people, and, later, political protests.

Over the years, she has developed a unique approach to photography by immersing herself in the everyday environments of her subjects—often working closely or living with them for extended periods. An early example of this approach is her series *Red Flower (Akabanaa): The Women of Okinawa* [1975–77], many images from which were published in her first book, *Hot Days in Camp Hansen* [1982].

FUMIAKI KAMEGAI: *Red Flower* is one of Mao's best-known works. It's important to understand its backstory: In the early '70s, there were frequent demonstrations in Okinawa over the US–Japanese agreement to return Okinawa to Japanese control. Mao took part in one of these protests, during which an Okinawan policeman was killed in a clash with an Okinawan demonstrator. Mao was at the scene but escaped being taken into custody.

Struck by the contradiction of Okinawans fighting each other, she was driven to make photographs about this paradox. Mao has long been fascinated by the idea that people are compelled to follow the decisions of a larger organization or institution, regardless of their own individual point of view. This rift between the individual and the group is, she feels, at the heart of society's contradictions. But, as she says, "We should remember that a forest is made up of single trees."

Along these lines, Mao notes, "I may not like the US military, but I can't hate each and every US soldier." She began photographing American soldiers as a way to investigate the US-military-base problem in Okinawa. From there, her project expanded to looking at the women working in bars near the base, who sometimes fell into intimate relationships with the soldiers. For

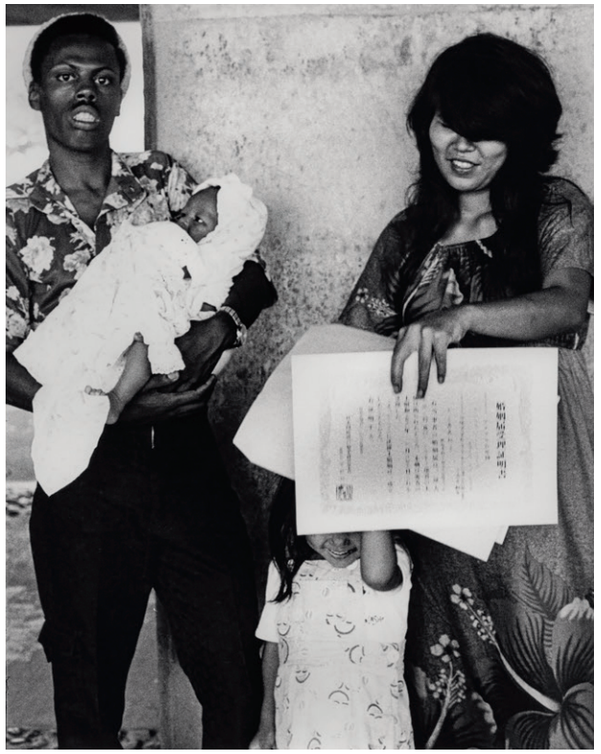
Untitled, from the series *Red Flower (Akabanaa): The Women of Okinawa*, 1975–77. Gelatin silver print, 16 × 20 in. (40.6 × 50.8 cm)

about two years, Mao worked in the bars alongside this community of women, lived among them, and continued to make photographs. Amid the violence and unease caused by the presence of the soldiers and the US bases, the surrounding area, too, was a space of contradictions, with its own economy and ecosystem, and the incongruity of the women living among the soldiers. And yet, as Mao's photographs demonstrate, her subjects' lives appear to be stable and solid enough—prompting us to wonder whether the contradictions that are her focus are really so problematic.

Mao's work upends the power imbalance between *photographer* and *photographed*, between *looking* and *being looked at*. Sometimes Mao appears in the photographs alongside the other women, with whom she clearly has an intimate and respectful working relationship.

Mao's series *Life in Philly* [1986] developed from a similar context. Myron Carr was an African American soldier whom Mao met while working at one of the Okinawa bars in the '70s—an era when the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power were gaining momentum in the United States. Mao traveled to Philadelphia in 1986 to visit Myron, who was by then retired from the US Army. She discovered that his life was far from prosperous. In spite of social advances in civil rights, and despite his status as a veteran, Myron was subject to a lot of racial prejudice and wasn't able to find and hold onto a job. As he put it to Mao: "This skin color is to blame."

Mao saw correlations between the history of racism against Black people in America and the discrimination against Okinawans in Japan. As with her *Red Flower* series, Mao's *Life in Philly* includes photographs that could only be the result of an intimate rapport with the subject—and I believe that Mao's understanding of the alignment of these histories adds poignancy to the project as well. She captures rawness in her subjects' expressions, and they disclose themselves to her with absolute candor.



Untitled, from the series *Red Flower (Akabanaa): The Women of Okinawa*, 1975–77. Gelatin silver print, 20 × 16 in. (50.8 × 40.6 cm)

YN: Mao's strength as a photographer lies in her selection of participants, subjects, and topics. She is fully committed to tracing the histories and lives of Okinawans through photography—this is part of her raison d'être. This commitment resulted in the *Great Ryukyu Photobook* [1990], which she and other Okinawan photographers began by collecting photographs of the lives, customs, and culture of people in the former Ryukyu Kingdom, including Okinawa. The pictures were by numerous photographers, reflecting on their experiences living under the thumb of Japan's feudal and Meiji governments, and the subsequent Japanese–US geopolitical relations. Mao often gave talks about this body of edited work and has organized several exhibitions about it. Do you know how that project came about?

FK: For the *Great Ryukyu Photobook*, Mao put out a call for photographs from a range of Okinawans, with a view to creating a photobook about the people of the prefecture. She and the project's editors then made copies of the images so the originals could be returned to their makers. The photographs in the book aren't limited to the Okinawa Islands; also included are images collected from the nearby Amami Islands, and from Okinawan émigrés. The book includes photographs of ordinary household scenes taken by amateur photographers alongside pictures of the photographers/artists themselves. There are also images of nobles who once served the Ryukyu Kingdom. The *Great Ryukyu Photobook* is not the history of a single person, but embodies multitrack histories drawn from the experiences and choices of all the people in the region. The main editor of the book was the late Okinawan photographer Kenshichi Heshiki, and the call for photos went out via the photography magazine *Bifū*.

Untitled, from the series *Red Flower (Akabanaa): The Women of Okinawa*, 1975–77. Gelatin silver print, 20 × 16 in. (50.8 × 40.6 cm)

Mao's recent project *The Great Ryukyu Photo Scroll* [2014–ongoing] is a similar undertaking. It was initiated in response to public outrage over two issues in Okinawa: the assault on a girl by US soldiers in 1995, and anger over the persistent criminal conduct and pollution caused by the Futenma military base, which was located in a densely populated area of Okinawa. (The uproar eventually led to the base's closure and relocation.) Mao's original aim with this project was to look back on the history of Okinawa and consider why such affronts repeatedly and continually happen. In *The Great Ryukyu Photo Scroll*, historical figures are portrayed by performers—people living in Okinawa, including Americans and mixed-race families. However, as we move to the latter part of the series, elements from the daily lives of the actors become part of the images. One could say that, if history is the forest, the daily lives of the actors are the trees. The series is typical of Mao: as ever, she strives to capture her characters' genuine expressions rather than showing them in the act of performing.

YN: Mao's early work, in particular *Red Flower*, might be compared to Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* [1985]—the intimate documentation of the lives of Goldin and her friends and communities, including the transgender and gay communities, in Boston, New York, Berlin, and elsewhere. I've never talked to Mao about the impact of postwar American photography on her practice. She doesn't imitate other photographers, nor is she easily

From *The Great Ryukyu Photo Scroll*, 2014–ongoing. Archival pigment inkjet print, 42 ⅛ × 59 ¾ in. (107 × 151.7 cm). "Ignoring Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe steers toward the use of the Right of Collective Self-Defense by following only the cabinet decision without debates in the Diet."

influenced by others. But when I was a graduate student in Ithaca, New York, in the early 2000s, she and I happened to overlap for a week, staying at the home of a professor who was away on sabbatical. At the time, I sensed that she was eager to find out about American culture and what Americans knew about Okinawa and its relationship with the United States.

I also wonder if she was aware of African American photographers who made Japan part of their subject matter. For example, Al Fennar, who was part of the Kamoinge Workshop, picked up a camera while he was stationed at Yokota Air Base in Japan, after encountering the work of the photographer Eikoh Hosoe. Japan was part of Fennar's inspiration.

What do you think Mao's relationship is with American photography? Do you think she's conscious of her US counterparts—documentary photographers who are politically engaged? She is situated at an important juncture between Japan and the United States, visually and politically, a critical space where photography and activism meet.

FK: Actually, Mao strongly denies being an activist. . . . I think this is in line with her phrase about the difference between individual trees and forests. As the movement for Okinawan autonomy and the removal of military bases continues, there will be differences between the "party line" and personal opinions—this happens in any political movement. I suspect that Mao follows these movements because she wants to focus on the individual. Her endless interrogation about political issues—"What do *you* think?"—may seem like a provocation to each person, but I think she

Untitled, from the series *Life in Philly*, 1986. Gelatin silver print, 20 × 24 in. (50.8 × 61 cm)

naturally sees individual trees rather than forests as a whole. Mao is a photographer who is close to the individual while also being part of the movement.

I've known many photographers who don't like to be asked about other photographers, and Mao is one of them, with the exception of Diane Arbus. Arbus's photographs were introduced to Japan in 1973, at an exhibition at the Seibu department store in Tokyo. At some point, Mao encountered the book *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph* [1972], which left a strong impression on her. As a photographer, Arbus pursued individuals who lived their lives despite being oppressed by social norms. When I look at Arbus's photographic approach to such individuals, I feel she is close to Mao's style. Of course, marginalized people exist in the United States, in Okinawa, everywhere—and there are photographers everywhere who set their sights on them as individuals. There's a reason for that. Mao once said to me, "Arbus killed herself. . . . It may sound cruel or blunt, but I can say that, for whatever reason a creator may die, and however young they are at the time, their work will survive. That is the strength of photography." And yes, it's undeniable: through their photographs, the artist's gaze persists.

FUMIAKI KAMEGAI is Curator of the Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum (Okimu), Japan.

YASUFUMI NAKAMORI is former Senior Curator of International Art (Photography) at Tate, London.

Ruminator (rate my mind), 2024. Polyurethane, galvanized steel, stainless steel, silicone, bone, photopolymer, and electronics, 74 ¾ × 12 ⅝ × 9 in. (189.9 × 32.1 × 22.9 cm)

BORN 1989
IN PRINCETON, NJ;
LIVES IN MIAMI AND PARIS

COOPER JACOBY

JORDAN CARTER: Let's talk a bit about how you came to incorporate AI into your sculptural practice. In particular, I'm curious how you view AI as a medium, a collaborator, or as subject matter.

COOPER JACOBY: Around 2019, AI technology took a massive leap. I'd seen some results and was impressed, so I signed up to beta-test OpenAI's ChatGPT. What I still like about that era of AI is that it's half anthropomorphic and convincing and half glitchy; you see this algorithmic or machinic swerve of language that a human mind doesn't make.

Estate (January 14, 2019), 2024. Polarized polycarbonate, camera, LCD screen, speaker, electronics, acrylic, acrylic clear coat, and pan arm, 11 ⅜ × 11 ⅜ × 10 ⅝ in. (28.9 × 28.9 × 27 cm)

But when I began working with it, I realized that it's way less automated than it seems. You have to train it. Now, when you use ChatGPT or another chatbot, it's a product that's tuned and tweaked in ways you never see. I was really struck by how much data is made and cleaned and tweaked by human labor to even get it to be sort of convincing.

I was already a bit aware of this because my grandfather was an English professor and linguist, and he worked on what's known as the Brown Corpus, which is one of the first encyclopedic data sets, using punch-card publishing to figure out the statistical relationships between words. I knew that there was a tremendous amount of arbitrary data entry that goes into making an automated language. That's what I got interested in when I really started working with AI. Not necessarily its effects or all its speculative horizons, but its genealogy. So, a lot of the work I engage with is not just simply using AI as a given tool, but examining the material and social conditions in which it's made. The first works where I incorporated AI was the series using thermostats that take the temperature and humidity, and then ask an AI prompt, "How do I survive?" The answer shifts according to the temperature and humidity: If it's more damp and cold, it might become more doomer—I trained one of the AI model's moods on more dystopian speculative literature, authors like Samuel Delany. If it's warmer and drier, it'll shift to a slightly different register and draw from a different corpus of text.

JC: You said this word *training*, which introduces an idea of discipline. This reminds me of the kinds of objects that you tend to make or produce, these objects of infrastructure and interface, even surveillance and control, like benches, lamp posts, intercoms, and cameras. Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between the sculptural forms and the objects that you animate with these AI technologies?

CJ: I'm interested in how technological imaginaries are infused in ways that you don't often see—how, say, the streetlamp invents the notion of "night crime." As soon as there's a streetlamp, people associate darkness with crime because the lamp represents civic protection, like an arm of the state. With AI, you can draw these imaginaries out of things we assume are mute and mundane, like the thermostats. I've lived in Miami for a long time, and the thermostat is an almost godly object; it determines your survival during the summer and how you feel. It's a mundane object that plugs into this larger social apparatus connected to energy, comfort, work, socioeconomics. I'm drawn to these objects for their interface with these bigger systems.

JC: I'm wondering about the formal genealogies of your work. I think about the histories of Minimalism, finish fetish even—

CJ: I think when it comes to Minimalism, I'm more interested in the people who broke with the orthodoxy of it, like Paul Thek. The enduring relevance to me is just that Minimalism created a belief that the object really is the thing. And finish fetish—there's an animistic quality that's given to the object by the erasure of gesture, which can be powerful.

JC: Paul Thek makes me also think about artists emerging in the '90s who were thinking about Minimalism but viewing these objects with a sense of desire or even an interiority, oftentimes through an integration of personal effects or autobiography. But in your work there's a quite radical turn in terms of this twenty-first-century possibility of imbuing an object with sentience—giving it not just a narrative or a contextual life, but giving it a literal ability to generate its own personality in real time.

CJ: That's what really drew me to work with AI. I'm hesitant to say sentience, but it's a sort of complexity that might as well be agency when you're able to script an object's field of possibilities in ways that are completely unpredictable to you. I made these AI-enabled benches [*How do I survive?*, 2022] at the Hammer Museum, and I would get notifications that they

How do I survive? (a mouthful of firsthand), 2022. AI-scripted thermostat, thermochromic pigment, epoxy resin, acrylic, polyimide heaters, powder-coated aluminum and stainless steel, and electronics, 33 × 108 × 28 in. (83.8 × 274.3 × 71.1 cm)

insulted a visitor or said something surprising. And you're like, "Wow, it's really out there. I didn't do that, but I guess it's really engaging people."

JC: I find parallels there with Conceptual art—the idea of mining archives or indexes or linguistic inventories. It does seem like you're mining digital language sets in a comparable way.

CJ: Absolutely. A lot of photo-text Conceptual art is essentially prompt-engineering: write the idea into the prompt and produce all the versions of this concept. I've increasingly been interested in the provenance of the archive and data I'm using. With the intercom sculptures that I was making [*Estate*, 2024], I wanted to make this ghost in the machine, but in a kind of undead way—a dead person's social media profile inhabits the sculptures. What became the most fascinating to me, though, was how their voice changed from early social media to when social media becomes overtly performative and professionalized as everyone realizes they're online. In 2008, it's, "I'm in Chicago, eating a cookie," and then by 2024, it's, "please subscribe to my cookbook channel."

JC: I want to think about the ideas of portraiture and biography, as you and your friends show up in your work by way of proxies. You described the series of works in which you mobilize your friends' voices to recreate the way these dead creatives speak as portraits, as well as the work in which you've used your own baby teeth.

CJ: I thought, if I'm instrumentalizing the digital remains of anonymous people in these intercom works, I should instrumentalize myself in a way, which led to me using my baby teeth in the clock works [*Mutual Life*, 2024]. It also came out of an exhaustion with biography, of being asked, "Where are you in the work?" My frustration with that led me to think, "Okay, I'll give you something that's the most valued or cherished material part of myself." Baby teeth were also my first real encounter with the type of money exchange where something comes out of your body and you're paid for it somehow, and that's supposed to be even.

JC: A base, corporeal economy. These works with the clocks—the sort of pairing a cellular age with one's time

lived on Earth—reminded me of Felix Gonzales-Torres's *Perfect Lovers* [1987–90], the paired clocks that over time fall out of sync.

CJ: I started the clock works after I saw an offer to take this "biological clock test" to get a better rate on my health insurance. I got very interested in the history of life insurance, which was integral to the development of the stock market because industrial life insurance policies took the premiums paid by working-class people who might not ordinarily have invested and plowed those into capital markets. In both the *Estate* and *Mutual Life* works, I'm curious how life is increasingly assetized in different forms, whether it's a data training set or actuarial; whether it's your social media residue or better calibrating the window in which you're likely to die.

JC: I'm curious about your relationship to language as a poetic form. You extrapolated the text generated from the *How do I survive?* series into a book format.

CJ: There's a long, rich tradition of computer-generated poetry and rule-based poetry. I think AI and different programmatic tools are ways to get outside of the self—you know, some people use substances, others use programs. After the twelve [*How do I survive?*] works had been running for over a year, I looked at the server that aggregates all the text, and there were thirty thousand pages! I'll never write thirty thousand pages on my own in my life. And so I thought, "These sculptures are also just content farms; I might as well do something with it." My role with AI there was just to be the editor and to skim and select.

JC: I'm curious to talk a little bit more about your geographic influences. As you mentioned, you've lived for a long time in Miami, and now you split time between there and Paris. You've also lived in Los Angeles. How do you see your work shifting in relationship to these contexts?

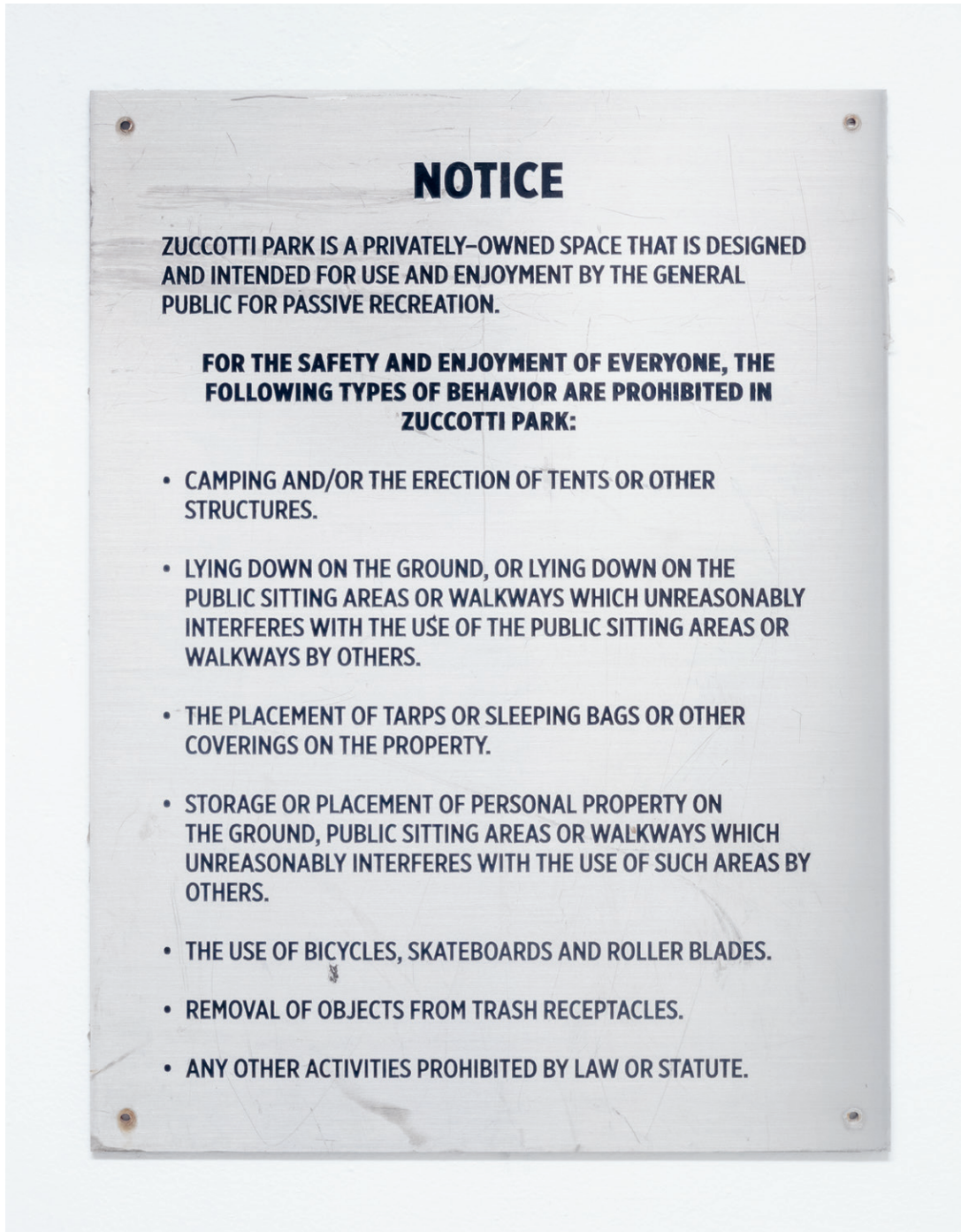
CJ: Moving to Los Angeles, the film industry and the aerospace industry are this overwhelming toolkit for sculpture. You go to a fabricator's place and ask, "Hey, can you make this weird cut into metal?" And they say, "We make robotic sharks. This is the least interesting project for us." I only realized later that the special-effects world actually had a big impact on me.

In Miami was where I started working with programming. Miami is not historically an industrial city, so having less access to those resources made me shift more into the studio and see what I could do myself, making these works that literally engage with the temperature and humidity.

Now, in Paris, I'm still sort of processing how the city's resources or infrastructures have impacted how I do things. A big influence has been all the museum collections here. For instance, the intercom sculptures were inspired by looking at early colonial ivory compasses that are in the Musée de Cluny. It's so twisted that France procures an elephant tusk, and one of the first things that they do is to make a compass to find more bone. It reminded me of this extractive platform logic: you make the tool to find more of the things that it's built out of.

JORDAN CARTER is Curator and Co-Head of the Curatorial Department at Dia Art Foundation, New York.

Estate (May 30th, 2017), 2024. Polarized polycarbonate, camera, LCD screen, speaker, electronics, acrylic, acrylic clear coat, magnetic-field viewing film, dead hard-drive magnets, leather, steel, aluminum, and polystyrene board, 78 ¾ × 59 ⅞ × 35 ⅜ in. (200 × 152.1 × 89.9 cm)



Rule, 2024–ongoing. Removed codes-of-conduct signs, dimensions variable

BORN 1993
IN NEW YORK;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

DAVID L. JOHNSON

Loiter (Jeffrey), 2022, from the series *Loiter*, 2020–ongoing. Removed standpipe spikes, 11 × 10 × 6 in. (27.9 × 25.4 × 15.2 cm)

ERIC BOOKER: Your practice is rooted in the specificity of place, particularly Manhattan, where you have lived in the same apartment in Chelsea for your entire life. This was originally your parents' apartment, which you have managed to remain in due to various city ordinances while the urban environment has continued to change around you.

DAVID L. JOHNSON: Rent stabilization and tenant-protection rights have been one of the biggest influences on my practice, both in terms of subject matter and form. Chelsea is one of the most expensive neighborhoods in New York, and even by the time I was growing up in the '90s and early 2000s, it had already undergone several waves of deindustrialization and gentrification.

Rule, 2024–ongoing. Removed codes-of-conduct signs, dimensions variable

Often, that type of change, especially when being on the receiving end of it, can feel like an abstraction. In my practice, I try to isolate singular images and objects from those larger systems and structures. A lot of the work takes on—maybe mimics—certain processes of urban change. The projects are ongoing, which I see as a corollary to ongoing processes like deindustrialization and the privatization of public space.

EB: I'm wondering about the interplay between urban space, the material that you remove from it, and the repositioning of this material within an institutional or commercial context. Could you talk about this?

DLJ: I always thought about the work as having a double valence, existing in two places at once. The objects are a product of this gesture of removal or subtraction. When they're shown in exhibition spaces, they're meant to be hyper-visible and open to critique as both formal and conceptual objects. How they perform on the street is opposite; their removal is meant to go unnoticed. I'm also interested in how they implicate the spaces they're shown in, maybe pointing to the fact that the museum or gallery is not divorced from the systems of urbanism that these types of objects regulate, especially in terms of property relations.

EB: *Diggers* [2022] provides a really interesting historical foundation to these ideas. This was a project that consisted of defensive planters, used as barriers to protect property, that you removed from the street and planted with carrots and parsnips. The title refers to a seventeenth-century English group of Christians.

DLJ: That moment in England where common land was starting to be sectioned off by the crown as part of the enclosure movement is an important historical precedent for me. So much of our property relations today are deeply structured by that history, making past forms of resistance and antagonism to that enclosure equally as relevant. The Diggers were one of the first historical movements that I became aware of that had a truly transgressive relationship to the regime of private property. Most of them were pacifists, so their gesture of growing edible crops on other people's property was militant in many ways. What's incredible to me is that it was so threatening to the crown that within a year or two of them operating, they were squashed by the state—arrested, imprisoned. One reason it was so threatening was because they were—materially and conceptually—undoing the claim of private ownership and transforming property back into land. I'm interested in their relationship to legality and Christian doctrine, in the sense that I think they were actually just indifferent to the law; for them, land was a commons created by their God to be shared, and any type of restriction around collective use was the deepest form of perversion.

EB: What's also interesting is this idea of reclaiming public space through nature—they were radical gardeners, right? As you push against these ideas of ownership and privatization, you're also thinking about nonhuman occupation or collaboration.

DLJ: I've done a few projects that look at animal life in relation to the built environment and the ways that different species have an antagonistic relationship to property lines. I've made work about the way birds relate to glass architecture: on one end, flying into a barrier that they can't visually identify; on the other, how they find interesting ways of inhabiting, or roosting inside, different forms of architecture. Simultaneously, I'm also interested in how those types of nonhuman relations influence human systems.

EB: With a more recent project, *Rule* [2024–ongoing], you're removing codes of conduct from plazas and other "public" spaces. These plaques police how we move through such spaces. The presentation of this work utilizes serialization and repetition, which feels key.

DLJ: I see the repetition functioning as a bit of an alternative archive of these codes of conduct in privately owned public spaces

Sculptures from the series *Loiter*, 2020–ongoing. Removed standpipe spikes, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Il morso delle termiti*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2023

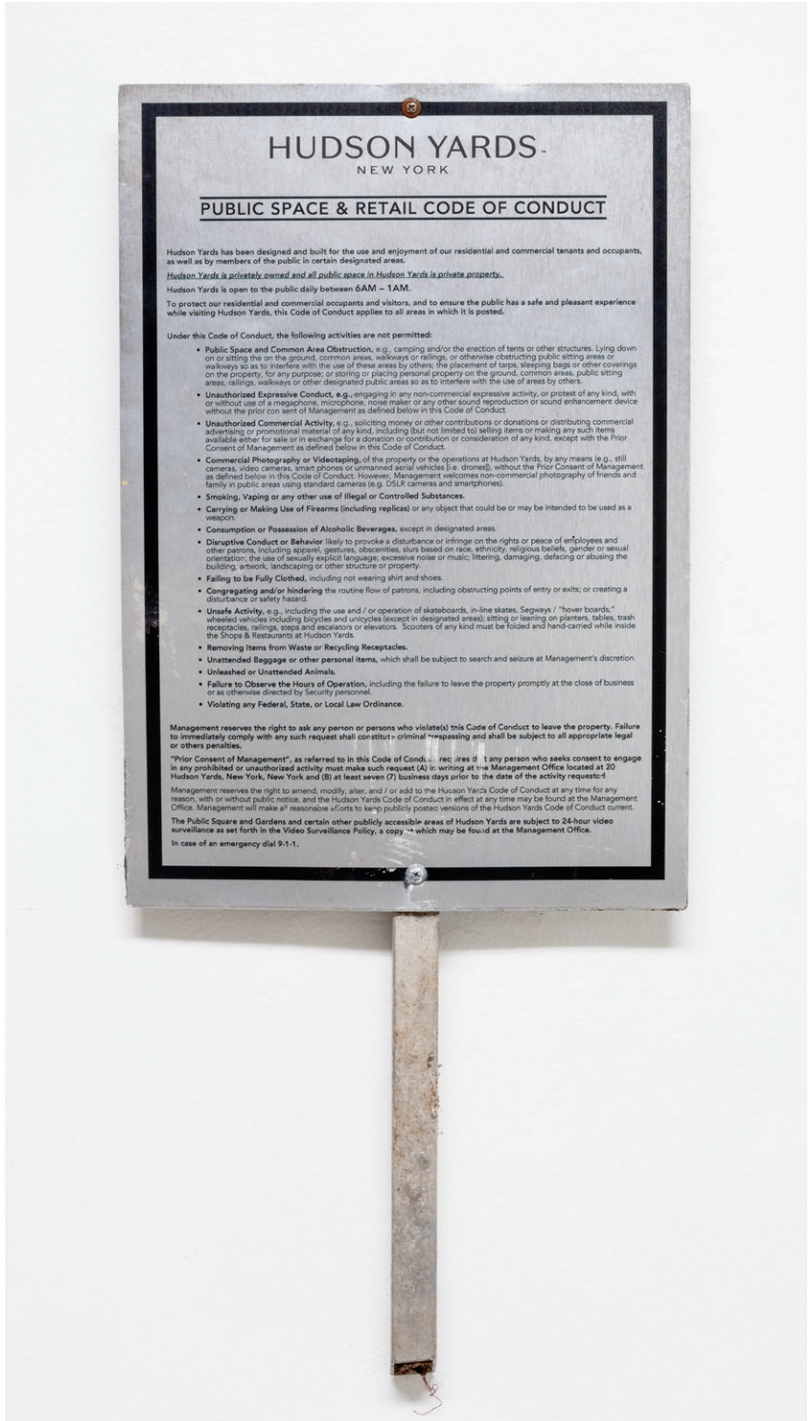
[POPS] that really exploded in New York after Occupy Wall Street and the occupation of Zuccotti Park. Prior to that, the only rules in that space and most other public or quasi-public plaza spaces were restrictions on skateboarding, rollerblading, and biking. So, technically, everything that the occupiers did was legal in terms of lying down, pitching tents, and using amplified sound. But after the park was cleared out, you had this mass implementation of really specific rules. The repetition in my own work I think charts out that expansion across the city in a very literal way. The growing number of plaques points to the omnipresence of these regulations in public space, or what's described as public space. But the repetition also reveals small differences. This is true for Zuccotti Park. They start to become a sort of archive of the "misuses" of urban space that were done by different people prior, whether activists, street vendors, or people looking for a place to sleep. That index of past forms of activity also doubles as an index of potential forms of actions that have been framed as being threatening to the current regime of privatization in the city.

EB: The theorist Fred Moten once said, "Has Black social life ever been anything other than the constant practice of questioning ownership?" This feels particularly apropos to your work.

DLJ: Yeah, I do think about my work in terms of the larger field of Black spatial intervention. *Loiter* [2020–ongoing] is probably the most literal embodiment of this, because the history of loitering and antivagrancy laws in this country developed out of the slave codes and Black codes that were used by white slavers to control the public and private lives of Black people. The work reflects an antagonism to these histories, which are still both materially and bureaucratically present in our lives. And this really intersects with, say, disability, Indigeneity, queerness, in terms of what subjects have been able to be in public life without the threat of violence by either the state or local powers.

EB: You're engaging with a rich tradition of artists working in public space. We first met around the work of the Smokehouse Associates, who in the 1960s were working with the community in Harlem to reclaim and open up public space. But there are others, of course, who come to mind, like Gordon Matta-Clark, David Hammons, Pope.L, Cameron Rowland—

DLJ: I would say all those artists at different points have impacted me. Particularly David Hammons, his early street interventions—when I first learned about those as a teenager, it really changed my whole understanding of art's potential. The work I come back to most is *Pissed Off* [1981], where he urinated on Richard Serra's *T.W.U.* [1980] sculpture in Lower Manhattan. The thing I've carried into my own work is


HUDSON YARDS
NEW YORK

PUBLIC SPACE & RETAIL CODE OF CONDUCT

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Hudson Yards is privately owned and all public space in Hudson Yards is private property.

Hudson Yards is open to the public daily between 6AM – 1AM.

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- **Unauthorized Expressive Conduct, e.g.,** engaging in any non-commercial expressive activity, or protest of any kind, with or without use of a megaphone, microphone, noise maker or any other sound reproduction or sound enhancement device without the prior con sent of Management as defined below in this Code of Conduct.
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- **Commercial Photography or Videotaping,** of the property or the operations at Hudson Yards, by any means (e.g., still cameras, video cameras, smart phones or unmanned aerial vehicles [i.e. drones]), without the Prior Consent of Management as defined below in this Code of Conduct. However, Management welcomes non-commercial photography of friends and family in public areas using standard cameras (e.g. DSLR cameras and smartphones).
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- **Consumption or Possession of Alcoholic Beverages,** except in designated areas.
- **Disruptive Conduct or Behavior** likely to provoke a disturbance or infringe on the rights or peace of employees and other patrons, including apparel, gestures, obscenities, slurs based on race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, gender or sexual orientation; the use of sexually explicit language, excessive noise or music; littering, damaging, defacing or abusing the building, artwork, landscaping or other structure or property.
- **Failing to be Fully Clothed,** including not wearing shirt and shoes.
- **Congregating and/or hindering** the routine flow of patrons, including obstructing points of entry or exits; or creating a disturbance or safety hazard.
- **Unsafe Activity,** e.g., including the use and / or operation of skateboards, in-line skates, Segways / "hover boards," wheeled vehicles including bicycles and unicycles (except in designated areas); sitting or leaning on planters, tables, trash receptacles, railings, steps and escalators or elevators. Scooters of any kind must be folded and hand-carried while inside the Shops & Restaurants at Hudson Yards.
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Management reserves the right to ask any person or persons who violate(s) this Code of Conduct to leave the property. Failure to immediately comply with any such request shall constitute criminal trespassing and shall be subject to all appropriate legal or others penalties.

"Prior Consent of Management", as referred to in this Code of Conduct, requires that any person who seeks consent to engage in any prohibited or unauthorized activity must make such request (A) in writing at the Management Office located at 20 Hudson Yards, New York, New York and (B) at least seven (7) business days prior to the date of the activity requested.

Management reserves the right to amend, modify, alter, and / or add to the Hudson Yards Code of Conduct at any time for any reason, with or without public notice, and the Hudson Yards Code of Conduct in effect at any time may be found at the Management Office. Management will make all reasonable efforts to keep publicly posted versions of the Hudson Yards Code of Conduct current.

The Public Square and Gardens and certain other publicly accessible areas of Hudson Yards are subject to 24-hour video surveillance as set forth in the Video Surveillance Policy, a copy of which may be found at the Management Office.

In case of an emergency dial 9-1-1.

Rule, 2024–ongoing. Removed codes-of-conduct signs, dimensions variable

Loiter (Corey), 2024, from the series *Loiter*, 2020–ongoing. Removed standpipe spikes, 17 ½ × 12 × 6 in. (44.5 × 30.5 × 15.2 cm)

really thinking about the pedestrian gesture; what's available from the street level and everyday life in relation to something that scales as large as a massive Richard Serra sculpture. [Hammons's] work is really just about the criminalization of public urination throughout New York.

I remember thinking of Matta-Clark's work, specifically post 9/11—how do you have a relationship to that type of alternative spatial production when there is so much surveillance. And difference—I mean, the architecture and texture of the city is so different from when he was working in the '70s. That was an important moment for me, understanding my own subject position in relation to the built environment. I think about Pope.L's crawls, like the Times Square crawl, where he's being stopped by a police officer, and the confusion surrounding what exactly he's doing. It's something I'm very much interested in, trying to find activities or gestures that maybe are harder to recognize immediately as political, which ties to Hammons's practice, too.

EB: Another material that you're working with is language—how it's used in service of power, and retooling this. . .

DLJ: I think how artists like Cameron Rowland are using legalese, the language of bureaucracy; even though it's very dry, I see it as deeply poetic. In my case, it's a kind of perverted concrete poetry that's produced from dislodging it from its original site to reveal the absurdity of it and the extent at which space is being hypercontrolled. Some of these plaques use intentionally generalized language, so that basically any way of being in those spaces could be categorized as a "code" violation.

A term that I got from Faye Raquel Gleisser in her book *Risk Work* [2023] has been super helpful to me recently, "punitive literacy." It's most literally materialized in the *Rule* works, but I also think it relates to a lot of other objects in between, like hostile architecture and property markers. Especially at this political moment, that framework has been helpful in thinking about the effect of removing things like rules of conduct, which operate to remove people from public space. But these rules only exist as plaques; they only exist and are legally enforceable through their material presence. There's no database of "rules of conduct" in POPS. So, not to romanticize or overplay it, but there is a potential in that subtraction as a counter, in the gesture of removing the ordinance of removal.

ERIC BOOKER is Associate Curator at Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, NY.

SANCIA MIALA SHIBA NASH
AND DREW K. BRODERICK
FOUNDED 2020,
HONOLULU, KONA, OʻAHU

KEKAHI WAHI

kekahi wahi (Sancia Miala Shiba Nash and Drew K. Broderick) and Bradley Capello, still from *20-minute workout [WIP]*, 2023. Digital video, color, and sound; 23 min.

JOAN LANDER: For the past fifty-five years, I've been involved in producing video documentaries about Hawai'i: its culture, language, music, dance, agricultural and sustainability practices, and navigational feats, as well as its history and politics of independence and sovereignty. With my partner of thirty-six years, Puhipau, who passed away in 2016, I cofounded the independent video production company Nā Maka o ka 'Āina, which translates to "The Eyes of the Land." As a Hawaiian Palestinian, Puhipau was motivated to share the stories of his people, as there was a dearth of such programming when we started working together in 1980. Puhipau had learned from the experience of being evicted from his own land that his history had been hidden. He saw the power of video to teach and enlighten. I was happy to help him in that effort.

In the early '90s we produced *Act of War—The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation* [1993], a documentary feature funded by the Independent Television Service. At the time, there were not many historians writing about the wrongs done to the Hawaiian people and their kingdom. Our work was considered polemical—I think because the true history had rarely been told, and hardly ever by Hawaiian historians and commentators. Now, there are so many filmmakers, like the two of you, turning their attention to this history and linking it with stories of today.

Ever since the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893, the country has been under United States occupation. That history has been covered up since then. But with the blossoming during the Hawaiian renaissance of the '70s, the digitization of Hawaiian newspapers, the resurgence of the native language, and the general increase of the Hawaiian population, there is a renewed awareness of the existence of a society and nation distinct in the world—and a lot of answers about how to live on islands. For we are all living on an island, a planet whirling through space.

DREW K. BRODERICK: I remember experiencing *Act of War—The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation* as a young child, in the

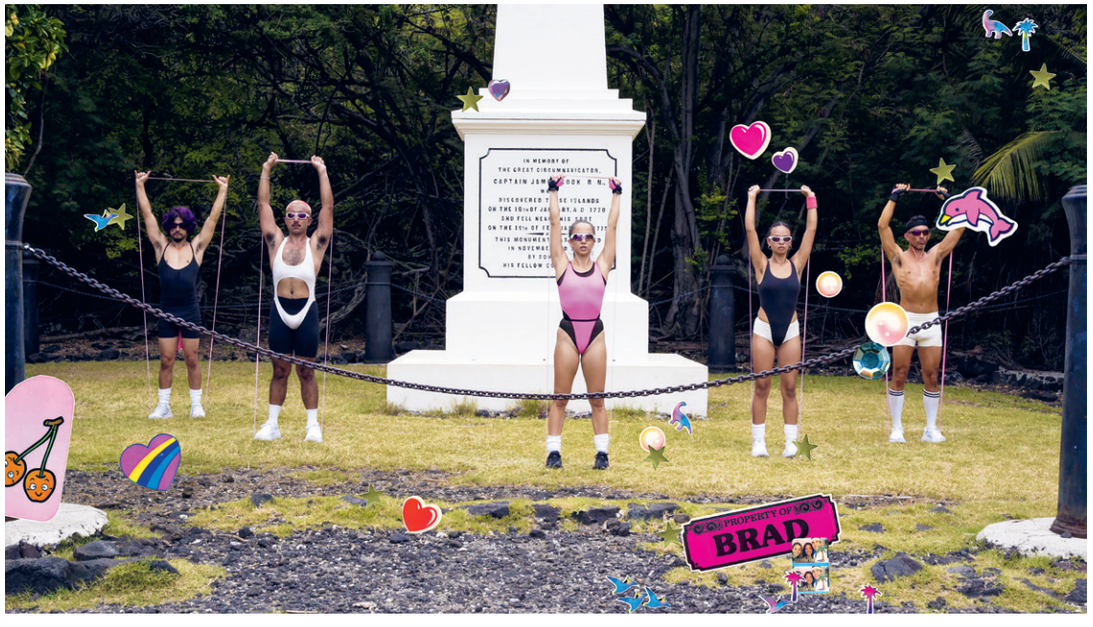
late ‘90s. It was the first time I had considered what it meant for the Hawaiian population to have collapsed from around one million in the late eighteenth century to something like fifty thousand in the late nineteenth century . . . the introduction of infectious diseases by European colonial expeditions, the forced removal of our cultural practices by Protestant missionaries, the dispossession of our people from the land by American business interests, and so on.

There’s a seriousness to *Act of War*, a heaviness that a lot of artists and filmmakers active across Hawai‘i today don’t have to shoulder. We’ve been released from the burden of having to tell that story in that way, because you and Puhipau told it over three decades ago.

JL: After that documentary was released, I met a Hawaiian on the island of Moloka‘i who said that *Act of War* was made from the point of view of haole [non-Hawaiians] and didn’t show enough kū‘ē—resistance. He was right. We had only haole materials to work with—congressional records and presidential speeches, that kind of stuff. I remember saying, “It’s up to you to present the Hawaiian point of view!”

The resources that filmmakers now have are so much more abundant than what we had. The history textbooks that we could consult were few and far between—and all written by the conquerors, the colonizers, you know? But now there’s so much more information available showing Hawaiian points of view.

DKB: Given that *Act of War* was produced to mark the centennial observance of the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom by US-military-backed pro-America businessmen, and that the story was not well known at the time, you and Puhipau also had to present the limited material in a solemn and respectful way. Whereas Sanci and I can retell and reinterpret those stories today with humor, exuberance, irreverence—even absurdity.



kekahi wahi (Sancia Miala Shiba Nash and Drew K. Broderick) and Bradley Capello, still from *20-minute workout [WIP]*, 2023. Digital video, color, and sound; 23 min.

I’m thinking of *20-minute workout [WIP]* [2023], a recent collaboration with family and friends including Bradley Capello, Maddie Biven, Brad Hamasaki, Josh Tengan, Lise Michelle Suguitan Childers, Reise Kochi, Sean Connelly, and Alec Yasunori Singer. The parodic exercise video revisits Kealakekua Bay on Hawai‘i island, the place where British Royal Navy officer and explorer Captain James Cook was killed—where “we” Hawaiians finished the job, so to speak—ending his devastation of the Pacific. In the program, we rework a historic monument, honor queer stories of resistance, address legacies of scientific colonialism, and activate pathways toward remediated futures that are already in the making. It’s joyous, campy, and at times unapologetically cringe!

SANCIA MIALA SHIBA NASH: Aunty Joan, you and Puhipau laid a foundation for documentary and experimental filmmakers of Hawai‘i. Thanks to Nā Maka o ka ‘Āina, we grew up knowing stories beyond the official narratives of the United States, stories of Hawaiian political resistance, cultural affirmation, and environmental stewardship. And because of this, we’re able to engage with the histories of this place differently, to take risks and approach them in ways that wouldn’t otherwise be possible. Drew, you mentioned how *Act of War* informed you as a child. For me, I remember being moved by the short film *Na Wai E Ho‘ōla I Nā Iwi—Who Will Save the Bones?* [1988], a story about the fight to protect Hawaiian ancestral remains at a burial ground in Honokahua, on the island of Maui, as it was being desecrated to build a hotel golf course. That documentary, and the Hawaiian leaders it gave voice and face to, helped spark legislation on a federal level—mobilizing the movement to protect burial places and repatriate ancestors not only in Hawai‘i but across the continental

Nā Maka o ka ‘Āina (Puhipau and Joan Lander), still from *Act of War—The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation,* 1993. Video, color, and sound; 58 min.

Still from *Ahulau (Epidemic, heaped up, as dead bodies)*, 2025. Digital video, color, and sound; 12 min.

United States. For younger generations, films like these shaped our consciousness. In the work we do together as kekahi wahi, we try to remain mindful of these earlier documentary efforts while also disrupting the filmmaking conventions that we have inherited. We are currently collaborating with the cast and crew from *20-minute workout* on an experimental short film commissioned by COUSIN Collective, *Ahulau* [2025], which translates to "Epidemic, heaped up, as dead bodies." It engages with burial dunes, golf courses, and the interwoven realms of the living and the dead. The project is a fever dream where nonlinear stories of place gush forth, provoking a reckoning with what lies beneath the well-manicured terrain. It's a hot mess!

JL: Some of our films are really rough, too, but whenever we got federal grants to make programs like *Act of War*, we were often met with the reality that we had to produce something more polished for a US national audience. Up to then, we had just been producing for Hawaiian and local Hawai'i audiences.

My position in Nā Maka o ka 'Āina, and my influence as a haole—a non-Hawaiian, nonlocal—was bringing a Western way of producing, a Western way of telling stories. And we've been criticized for that over the years. But as Puhipau would say, "You've got to work with what you have." When he saw other haole documentary teams being criticized by Hawaiians, he'd say, "Were *you* there with a camera documenting it? No. *They* were. They got it down. So don't criticize, just do your own work." But I told the same people, when you have all-Hawaiian and all-local production teams, you'll get a product that'll knock everyone's socks off. Because it comes from a whole different point of view, aesthetically.

DKB: kekahi wahi gets criticism for doing what we do, too, for deviating from the demands of "authenticity" and refusing to tell stories neatly. What Sanci and I try

Nā Maka o ka 'Āina (Puhipau and Joan Lander), still from *Na Wai E Ho'ōla I Nā Iwi—Who Will Save the Bones?*, 1988. Video, color, and sound; 26 min.

to do with the many folks that we are in relation with is to reposition ourselves—and, by extension, our work—in a place of complexity that hasn't been flattened, or made easily digestible, a place that holds contradictory perspectives and conflicting worldviews simultaneously. I can be right, and you can be right, and we can be right, and they can be right, too! Right?

Aunty Joan, the mission of Nā Maka o ka 'Āina from the get-go was to increase cultural self-determination and speed up the process toward political sovereignty for Hawaiians. All that really mattered to Puhipau. How do you think he would feel about where things are today?

JL: I think he would be very happy. I saw a bit of how he was reacting to the transformative moment we are living through, a couple of years before he died. We were watching a livestream of the Department of the Interior hearings on establishing a government-to-government relationship with the Hawaiian nation, and we heard people testifying and listened to the rhetoric and arguments they were using. It was so much more advanced than what people were saying back in 1993, when no one even knew the word "sovereignty"! Twenty years later, people were more assertive, and there was much more Hawaiian language being spoken, much more awareness of Hawaiian history. Once that happens, you can't go back.

You two are speaking to a new generation with a new voice. Puhipau would have loved that. He wanted our programs to go to the children first. That's why we made a series of films for the Department of Education on totally nonpolitical subjects, like surfing and lei making and Hawaiian artisanship. We wanted to show kids that Hawaiian culture is something to be proud of. When Puhipau was a kid in school, he sat in the back of the classroom—the Hawaiian kids were made to feel ashamed. He turned that around.

SMSN: Drew and I began kekahi wahi through a series of intense dreams we shared when we first met each other: an interconnected dialogue of dreams across the Pacific between Ehime, Shikoku Island, and Honolulu, O'ahu. I'm curious about how kekahi wahi might shape our waking lives, our creative collaborations, and our futures together—what it might be like in the next fifty years. And what kind of Hawai'i we'll experience between now and then.

JL: Puhipau dreamed of these islands out in the middle of the Pacific as jewels. His dream was that Hawai'i would become a center of peacemaking, and he would invite all the leaders of the world here. He would have them bring their children, and while the leaders were meeting and discussing world problems and resolutions, the kids would be playing with and learning from each other. And they'd go back home with a love for other people of different colored skins, different cultures, different nationalities. And that would be a seed for bringing the world together. I love that Puhipau had that vision.

JOAN LANDER is a documentary filmmaker based in Wai'oma'o-Pālauhulu, Ka'ū, Hawai'i.

Divine Dance of Soft Revolt (Anna, Travis, Charlie, Me), 2024. Resin, glitter, wax pigment, mirrored glass, and steel, 168 × 66 × 60 in. (426.7 × 167.6 × 152.4 cm)

BORN 1984
IN QUEENS, NY;
LIVES IN LOS ANGELES

YOUNG JOON KWAK

Divine Dance of Soft Revolt (Anna, Travis, Charlie, Me) (detail), 2024. Resin, glitter, wax pigment, mirrored glass, and steel, 168 × 66 × 60 in. (426.7 × 167.6 × 152.4 cm)

STAMATINA GREGORY: I think about your practice as beginning with touch as a primary element, where the body is materially recorded within this space of trust, intimacy, and kinship. I'm interested in how this idea allows your practice to expand outward—into sculpture, drawing, performance, sound . . .

YOUNG JOON KWAK: I want my work to honor the ways my community has touched me—physically, politically, spiritually—and that can't be held by a single form. Touch isn't just a sensory experience—it's embodied memory. That's something I carry into my sculptures from my performance and collaborative work, including performing with my band [*Xina Xurner*]. I want the work to carry traces of collective intimacy—not to be recognized, but to resist categorization and remain in flux.

Femmmes (Nic, Toria, Yara) (detail), 2025. Urethane resin, soil, glitter, rocks, aluminum, nickel silver, glass rhinestones, wax pigment, and steel, 87 × 42 ½ × 10 in. (221 × 108 × 25.4 cm)

SG: That's one of the things I love about your work, its insistence through trace and imprint. Trace operates in a number of ways, one of which is this insistence that the body is continually transforming. The trace does so much: it's a record of the body that was there, yet also contends with the body that has vanished and is now something else.

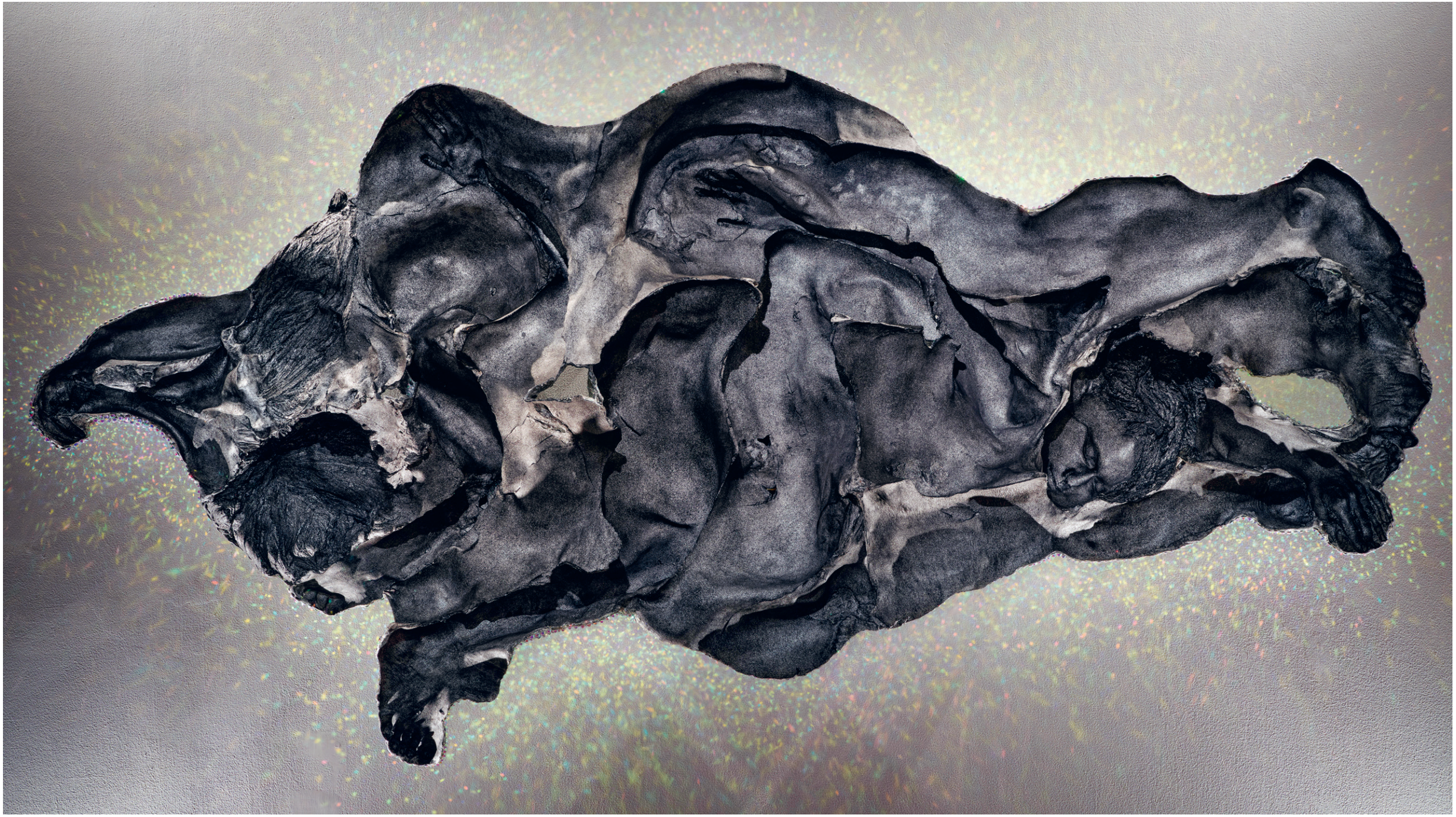
YJK: The trace isn't just about absence—it's the imprint of a transition, a state of becoming, a refusal to disappear. It protests the ongoing erasure, misrepresentation, and violence against trans and queer bodies.

SG: We've had a lot of amazing conversations about all this, and it reminds me of our discussions about José Esteban Muñoz, the way he talks about the trace or evidence as something that's both precious—it points to a queer horizon—but also potentially dangerous, especially for trans communities of color. There's a way your work functions that is indexical and intimate, yet there's an anonymity that can be protective or liberatory.

YJK: Legibility, in some ways, can be a trap that exposes bodies to policing, commodification, misrecognition, and exploitation. I'm interested in refusing that kind of legibility. Conversely, many of us are forced into categories that don't fit us. I'm interested in queerness as a site of other possibilities, and in opacity as a radical strategy for reconfiguring how we understand presence and power. Anonymity isn't erasure—it's insurgency, and it could also be lifesaving for those of us targeted through misrecognition. I want my work to create these encounters that might cultivate a sort of intimacy without full recognition.

SG: I love that, intimacy without full recognition—but it's a hard thing to pull off, in sculpture and other work in general.

YJK: Especially given sculpture's entanglement with monumentality, nationalism, white-supremacist patronage. I make sculptures that work with fragmentation, ephemerality, movement, light, shimmer. I want to subvert the traditions of sculpture and be with my community.



Femmmes (Nic, Toria, Yara), 2025. Urethane resin, soil, glitter, rocks, aluminum, nickel silver, glass rhinestones, wax pigment, and steel, 87 × 42 ½ × 10 in. (221 × 108 × 25.4 cm)

SG: Yes, there's a formal nod to "classical sculpture," which your work then immediately (and beautifully) flies away from, in part through the deployment of shimmer and interaction with light.

YJK: My sculptures take up a lot more space than their physical dimensions because of the way the light and color reflects, refracts, and expands into space. Shimmer refuses capture—simultaneously seducing, disrupting, and disorienting vision. I want viewers to move, to labor with their eyes and their bodies. The work insists that you come closer and linger in a space of unknowing.

SG: I've had not only the privilege but the fun of seeing people trying to take in what's available to them visually, but also what remains out of reach.

YJK: I love inviting this prolonged, sustained intimacy between the viewer and my sculptures that might be very different from how they engage with trans or non-normative bodies passing on the street.

SG: I'm going to ask the question about the context of US art. Stating the obvious, we're currently confronted with a rhetoric that really circumscribes what it means to be "truly American," which excludes nonwhite immigrants, trans individuals, cultural dissidents—perspectives central to your work. There's a history of US artists taking up matters like sex and intimacy and identity, the cycle of culture wars that reached a crescendo in the late '80s, early '90s. Your work directly reflects some of that art history—your prints really evoke David Hammond's body prints, for example. Yet your work also exceeds and complicates these earlier forms.

YJK: The culture wars involved a lot of artists fighting for the visibility and recognition of certain identities, and while I respect the legacy of artists who've been fighting the good fight prior to me, I also see how the push for recognition often reinforces the very systems that render us disposable. This ties back to what it means to have a legible body, especially when legibility is tied to categories like being an immigrant or trans or dissident—and to

Divine Dance of Soft Revolt (Anna, Travis, Charlie, Me), 2024. Resin, glitter, wax pigment, mirrored glass, and steel, 168 × 66 × 60 in. (426.7 × 167.6 × 152.4 cm)

then strip those bodies of their rights. I'm interested in the deviant excess or spillage from those frameworks. I'm more interested in turning recognition on its head, through disorientation, through touch, through shimmer.

SG: That's an absolutely critical point. We're in a different era. This is a different kind of refusal, taking into account the politics of visibility and representation, and the trap they've become—

YJK: I think there are a lot of people like me—in the US and beyond—who've been pushed into confining, reductive identity categories that were never meant to hold us. I want to make space for the parts of us that get cut out, misnamed, or refused by national identity. The excess, the ungovernable, the illegible—that's what I care for.

SG: I wanted to talk about a recent experience/work of art that stirred or disrupted something for you in your practice, and that work is *Femmes (Nic, Toria, Yara)* [2025]. It was finished in the nick of time; wildfires were raging in Los Angeles. Your stalwart studio team, some of whom participated in it from the very beginning, glued the last of ten thousand rhinestones to the back of it—not the front, which underscores the ways in which the sculptures take up space, shimmer, speak, withhold.

YJK: That sculpture resulted from a public mold-making performance gone wrong. Three friends, who were former students, their bodies were entangled and covered in silicone and plaster that never cured—it got caught in hair, piercings, in between body parts. In the end, we had to cut them free. That performance and the mold itself ruptured. The materials failed, and so did I, in some ways. But in that wreckage, I saw some other queer presence that was raw, intimate, collective, that needed care and needed to survive.

SG: The final sculpture might bear the traces of that wreckage, but it's also beautiful. Brutalist—

YJK: It holds that trace of failure and the brutal conditions under which it came to be. Yet, for me, it's also so much about love—not a clean or redemptive love, but one rooted in queer and trans kinship, care, and staying with what's broken. I wanted to burnish our wounds—not to erase them, but honor them with tenderness and complexity. The sculpture holds the mess and labor of queer touch, repair, resistance, and transformation.

SG: How does that reflect in your Biennial work, *Divine Dance of Soft Revolt* [2024]?

YJK: I want that piece to be a spiraling site that holds complex attachments and contradictions—queer and trans failure, pain, hope, collective resistance, healing, and survival. A space to rethink what resistance and agency could look like. Its relationality is shaped by the contributions of my community—in the musical score, in the embodied performance, and in the refracted gaze of viewers and the surrounding space. And amid all the hatred and erasure of this moment, the work insists that our presence exists and endures, even in—especially in—absence.

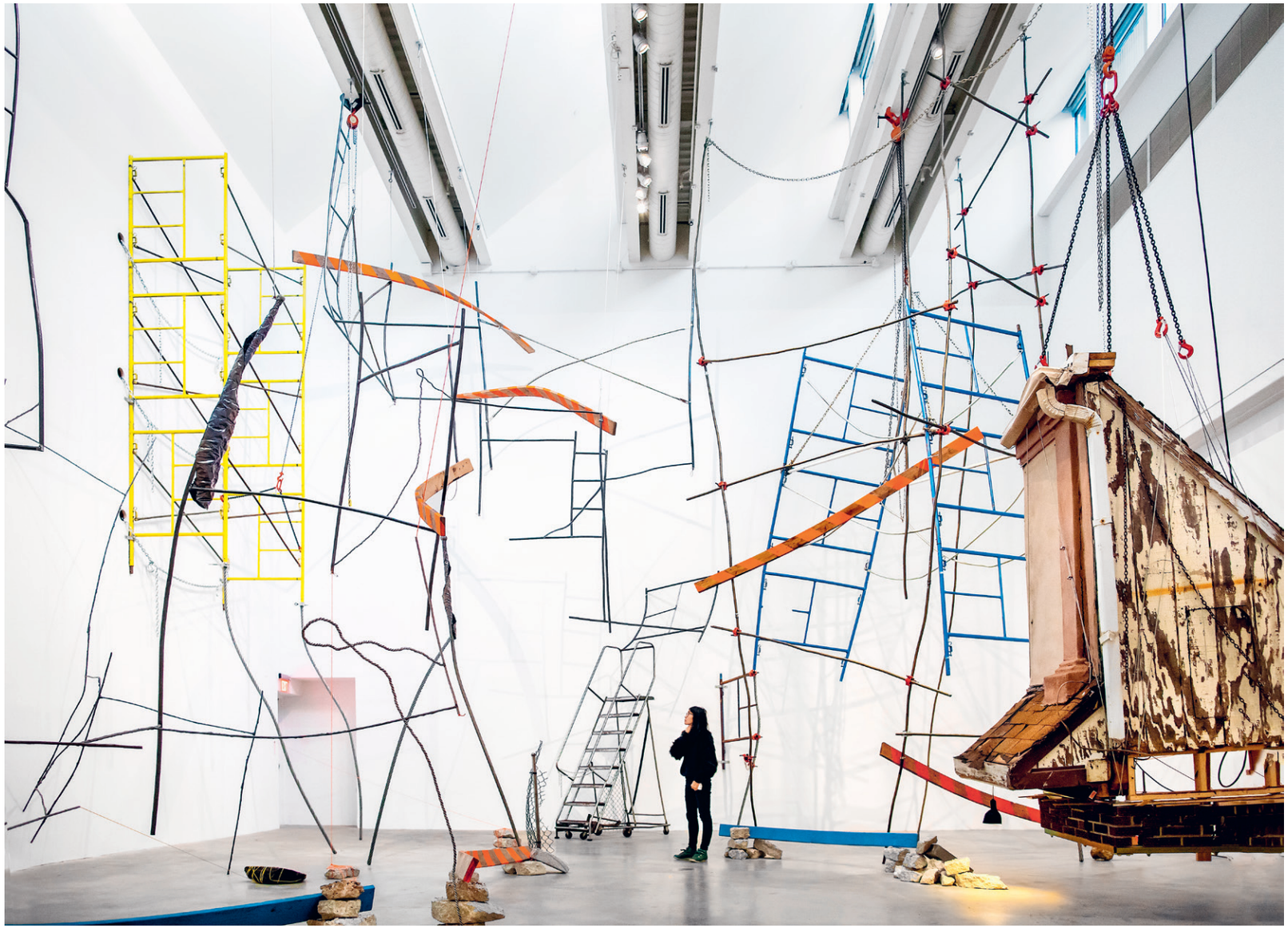
SG: One thing we've often talked about is, these uncategorizable bodies have always existed. We can look backwards through eons and find them, as well as imagining forward. That's especially evident in your evocation of the present-future, the Anthropocene, with materials like plastiglomerate.

YJK: As Heather Davis writes, we're all plasticized—composites of waste, earth, history, and touch. Bodies made of bronze, plastic, soil, connecting across time. I think that ties the work back to a different way of thinking about sculpture as an infrastructure for queer and trans presence and care—a site for ephemerality, movement, and transformation beyond representation. You know, we're all fragmentary—continuously transforming and shimmering.

STAMATINA GREGORY is Head Curator and Director of Exhibitions and Collections at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, New York.

BORN 1970
IN BRIDGEPORT, CT;
LIVES IN PHILADELPHIA

MICHELLE LOPEZ



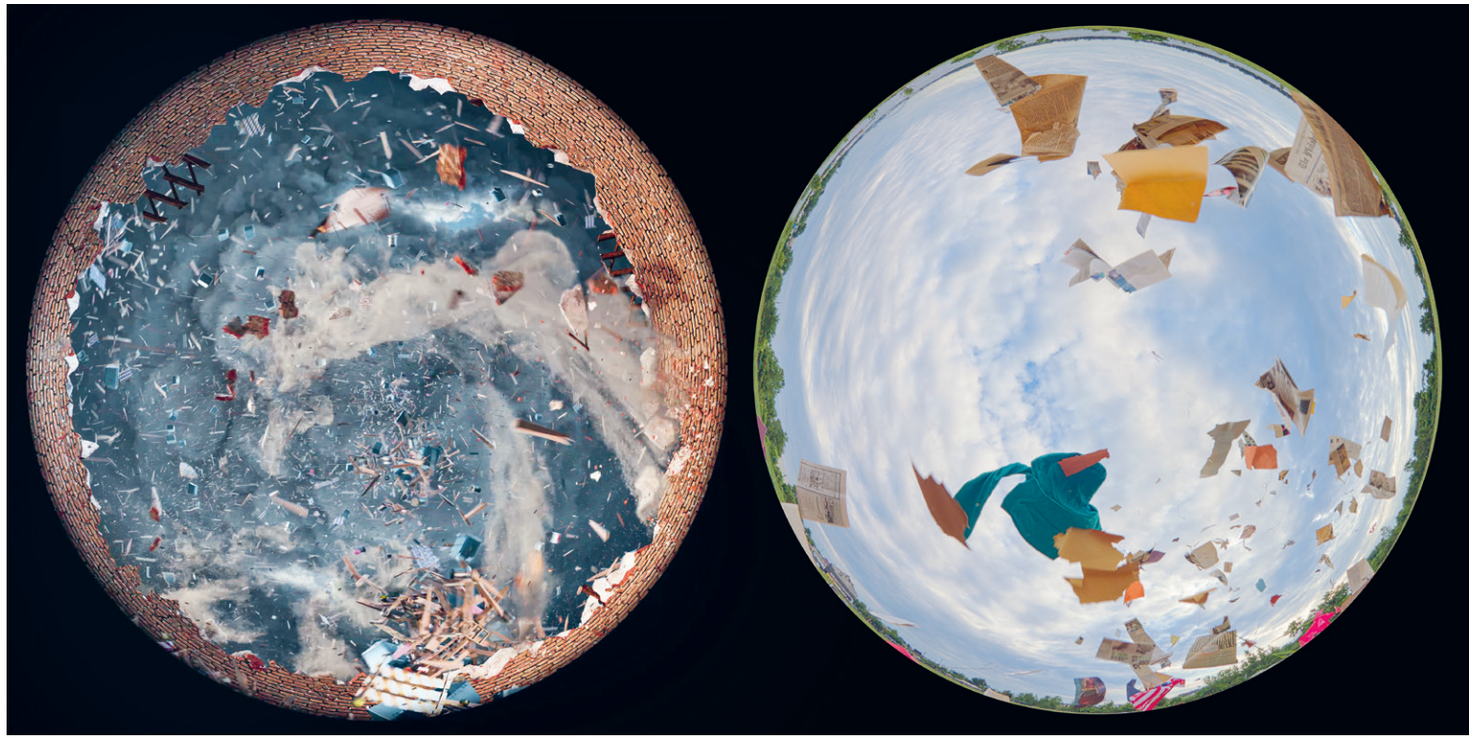
Installation view of *Michelle Lopez: Ballast & Barricades*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, 2019

CHRISTOPHER Y. LEW: Throughout your work over the years, there are a lot of formal considerations of sculpture—gravity, weight, material balance—but at the same time, the work is always embedded in the world we live in, addressing concerns that extend beyond art.

MICHELLE LOPEZ: I've always been invested in the history and tradition of sculpture, including its formal aspects, but I can't help but be affected by the world around us and world events, particularly 9/11. I was installing a sculpture show near the World Trade Center when 9/11 happened, and that had a huge impact on me; I felt I couldn't make the same work anymore.

Production still from *Pandemonium* (2017–25), RAIR Philly, Philadelphia, 2024

Above: Still from *Pandemonium*, 2017–25



Even though I'm still deeply committed to formalism, it doesn't seem entirely appropriate for this moment. The work that I've been making now for about a decade has had to do with this sense of global collapse that I'm feeling. I look for signifiers in relationship to that, and then start to see how I can play with that materiality to point to this sense of crisis, or amplify it.

CYL: The new work, *Pandemonium*, is interesting in that it is less of a physical manifestation; you're working with video and with computer-generated imagery. Can you talk about how that folds into what I still believe is a sculptural practice?

ML: I've always tried to grapple with a kind of crisis of sculpture. There's something about objectness that gets complicated in terms of mass, monumentality, and all the problems surrounding sculpture taking up space, so I'm interested in ways to dematerialize it. One of the sculptural tenets that's important for me is the experience in the round: with sculpture, you actually have to move around it in order to understand it. With this new project, I've been thinking how this relates to conceptualizing spatial relationships in terms of technology and AI. A lot of my work deals with epic acts of violence, and I feel AI is another form of violence in relationship to digital and social media, to information systems, but it's invisible. When I thought of this information maelstrom, what ultimately came to mind was constructing a collapsing tornado in the built environment, within a 360-degree surround space. But instead of using actual physical materials to create these tornadoes, the sculptural part of my installations has become animation—AI and a projection screen.

CYL: I was curious to get your thoughts on the symbolism and loaded imagery that are in the piece, especially since you've been developing this project for nearly a decade. How has your thinking shifted over that time?

Production still from *Pandemonium* (2017–25), RAIR Philly, Philadelphia, 2024

ML: At first, I was looking at different iconographies related to stereotypical Americana, like the flag, and thinking about this sense of a broken national identity, questioning the ways that flags are used in relationship to power and a sort of blind patriotism. My work has also explored failure—in relationship to technology, say, or to the American dream. But then I started expanding towards these epic acts of violence, such as environmental hurricanes, tornadoes as a result of the climate crisis, global warfare—all contributing to this existing sense that our known infrastructures are failing and are in collapse.

Because the original format was sited within a planetarium, I wanted to create my own constellations out of culture. I was interested in creating a concert within a stadium, where the cell phone lights of concertgoers appear as stars in the overarching sky. I also wanted to capture the tension that exists between the mania of a crowd and its sense of unity through collective gathering. That was largely influenced by the George Floyd uprisings: I was really impacted by how great it felt to be with crowds chanting, particularly after having been locked up so much during the pandemic. I wanted to create a moment of what's happening in the world: as both dividing us and bringing us together at once.

CYL: I was thinking about the installation, how all-encompassing and epic it is. What does it mean to be working on something that is taking on these themes at such large scale, and over such a relatively long span of time? More is more . . .

ML: It's such a different approach for me, because I'm very minimal, and I've definitely wondered if this has been the right approach. When I workshopped *Pandemonium* at Fabric Workshop [in 2024], it all came together; it just felt more dynamic and more truthful to what was happening now. At the same time, I've always been interested in this idea of beauty in relationship to the grotesque through violence. I feel that what's happening in the work is only possible because of all these layers.

CYL: Yeah, I think some of your past works can read as twisted or mangled, but also very seductive at the same time. Your *Correctional*

Correctional Lighting, 2024. Cast-iron highway lamp, sodium lightbulb, sound, motor, and cast-resin cinderblock, 216 × 180 × 24 in. (548.6 × 457.2 × 61 cm)

THREE ROPE PROP, 2023. Steel, 69 × 71 × 81 in. (175 × 181 × 206 cm)

Lighting piece has such an elegant balance to it, but also a sense of menace.

ML: Yes, I've been using a lot more elements to activate the space: the rotary motor, the sound of the sodium bulb of highway lamps. But, again, I'm really thinking about the materiality of everything. The lamp was cast in iron because I wanted it to feel like the weight of a plumb bob [level] hanging down, and then the cinder block has this kind of translucency, because I wanted it to feel like ice that could melt, or glass that could break, but also to cast a shadow onto the wall, giving it a menacing quality. So the searchlight is following a figure in a circular chase.

CYL: It's recognizable forms, but transformed into different materials. I think the combination of movement, light, and sound certainly brings it beyond the usual expectations of sculpture.

ML: Sound has been something that's been consistent for me as a spatial element—again, to achieve this kind of menacing quality. There's a consistency of "pounding" in my work, whether it's the Liberty Bell clanging or a flag flapping. I did a piece with a bird continuously hitting a glass window with its body, but it was just like, you know—

CYL: The sound of its own making.

ML: Yeah, that's a nice observation.

CYL: Does having your work shown in the context of a museum of American art carry any particular resonance for you, especially as a diasporic artist thinking about the volatile moment we're in, both in the US and in a more global sense?

ML: I think my work has always taken a positionality in relationship to being Filipino American—the Philippines is essentially this colonized territory of the United States. I've always been interested in that love-hate dynamic, i.e., how the Philippines is obsessed with American culture, as so many countries have been. My work has always approached iconography in relationship to a kind of cynicism surrounding the American Dream and the shock of its collapse, because I definitely grew up as an American with the sense that my family was a part of that dream, and so the work is informed by those concerns. I feel there's a different kind of urgency now for artists, in the way they are approaching this idea of American identity in their work.

CYL: Definitely, but not necessarily dissimilar to other moments in the past.

ML: True. I was thinking about abstraction—which you know I'm drawn to in my formal work—and how that came out of a time of warfare and crisis. I just read *Ninth Street Women* [2018], this biography about women abstract painters in New York from the 1940s through the 1960s—the "triumph" of American painting. It was a very different sense of identity, a different time and crisis, but we still use a lot of the same vocabulary and respond in the same way, because these cycles continue. That said, I do feel now, more than ever, America is experiencing a very different kind of collapse, and there's not as much a sense of hope, of building back up. That may turn out to be good; it may be the moment when things have to regenerate in a positive way.

CYL: Moments of crisis open up new possibilities, and I think art, in general, allows us to dream of those possibilities.

ML: I think this work for me came out of crisis: a crisis of American consumerism as an artist and maker. I don't want to shoot myself in the foot as a sculptor, but I've been wanting to find other ways to think about three-dimensionality that aren't so bound by the physicality of monumental *stuff*.

CYL: And what you're depicting within the tornado is so much stuff—literal materials, which we see in the aftermath of devastation. There are so many things scattered about and in the air.

ML: Yes, this project also came from another material I was thinking about: the internet and the amount of information and storage we have, more *stuff*. What could that look like in a work of art? How could I describe that outsize aspect of our world right now?

CYL: Not just describe, but also, what does it *feel* like?

ML: What does it feel like, and also what would it feel like not to have it? There's this moment at the end of the film where the debris all gets sucked away and disappears into blackness. I think a part of it is a sense of: Could there possibly be liberation from this world of *stuff* and from whatever systems we're all caught up in?

CHRISTOPHER Y. LEW is founder of C/O: Curatorial Office and a former curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

JOSÉ MACEDA
AKI ONDA

BORN 1917
IN MANILA; DIED 2004
IN QUEZON CITY, PHILIPPINES

BORN 1967
IN TENRI, NARA, JAPAN;
LIVES IN MITO, IBARAKI, JAPAN

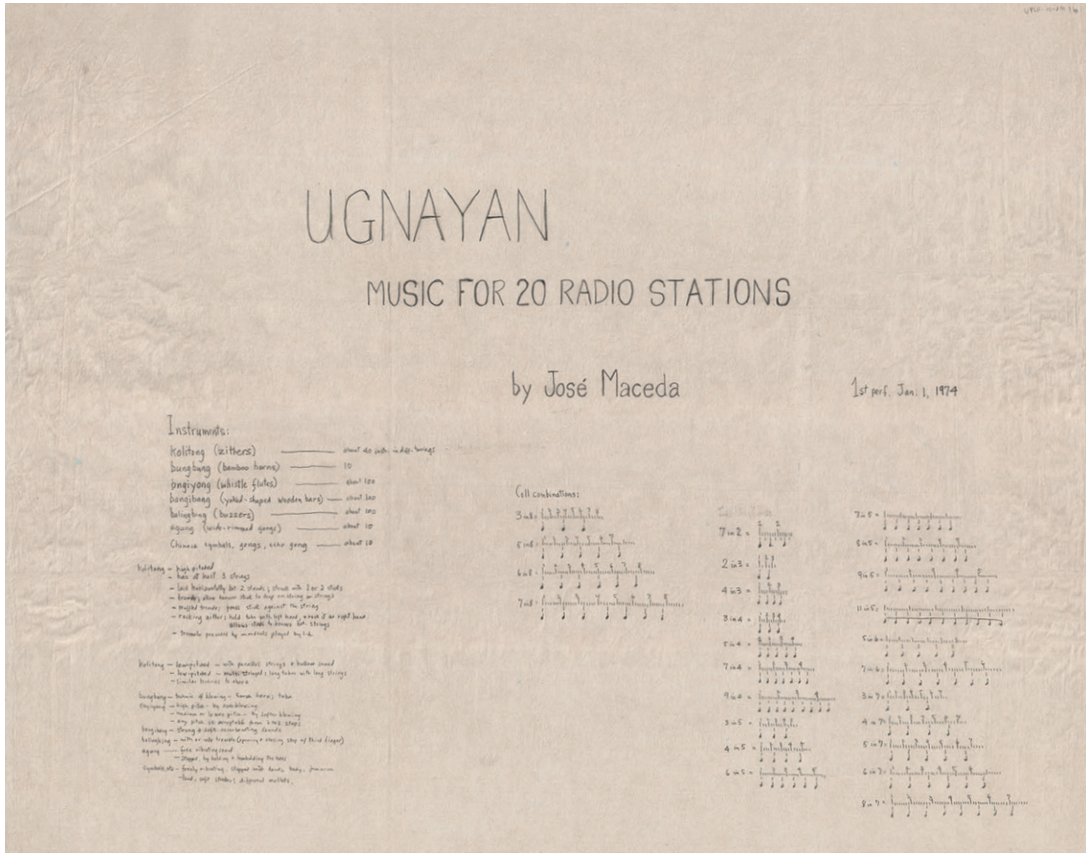
José Maceda, *Ugnayan*, 1974. Sound performance; 51 min. Installation view, *José Maceda: Echoes beyond the Archipelago*, Western Front, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2024

BILL DIETZ: It's not often that I talk with another artist who's as involved with someone else's work as I am with Maryanne Amacher's; in your case, José Maceda. I'm curious about the connections and maybe even conflicts between your work on Maceda and your own work.

AKI ONDA: I don't think there's much conflict, since Maceda and I share a lot of interests: using electronic devices for sound diffusion, strong attachment to tape recorders, blending cultural beliefs and spirituality, mixing ancient and modern, and so on. My biggest draw to Maceda's work was probably his cosmopolitan perspective. He studied Western classical music in Manila and Paris; then, while studying in the US, he discovered the Indigenous music of the Philippines, which later extended to the whole of Southeast and East Asia. He dove into ethnomusicology for a decade, carrying tape recorders into the field to document musical practices and folkways. Then he started his career as a composer at forty-six, merging his knowledge of Asian musicality with Western avant-garde techniques. As for me, I was born in Japan, but my father's side immigrated from South Korea. I grew up in Asia, but I've built my career mainly in the West, including spending two decades in New York. I definitely relate to something Maceda said towards the end of his life: "I'm a Filipino composer, but I don't confine myself to national borders. I consider my composition to be more universal. I don't want to pigeonhole myself as specifically Filipino. Whatever I need, I can borrow from anywhere." One thing I do want to make clear here, though, is that I'm presenting Maceda's work as a curator and researcher, apart from my work as an artist.

BD: I've been thinking about this notion of the cosmopolitan. Maceda's first composition is *Ugma-ugma*

José Maceda recording with a portable open-reel tape recorder in Palawan, Philippines, 1972



Cover of José Maceda's 51-page score for *Ugnayan*, 1974

from 1963, which comes on the heels of the decade he spent working in ethnomusicology—and 1963 is, of course, a major moment in various international decolonial struggles. I'm curious to what degree his thinking and his access to international spaces is also inflected by Spanish, American, and Japanese colonial histories in the Philippines, along with liberation discourses that were then current and widespread.

AO: For *Ugma-ugma*, he used different instruments from Japan, Indonesia, China, and the Philippines, combining the musical traditions of those Asian countries. It was a bold decolonial statement against Western cultural dominance. But at the same time, he incorporated Western avant-garde techniques like *Musique concrète*–ish abstraction and mass structures to organize sound, resulting in highly unconventional notations. So, Maceda was a unique type of decolonialist, blending both traditions in his work.

BD: There's a line in one of his articles that you quote: "Different combinations of drone and melody represent an expression of a group of people, perhaps a reflection of a social organization, a representation of values, and a view of time." This almost sounds inflected by someone like Adorno!

AO: Interesting. I'm not sure if Maceda was familiar with Adorno, but it wouldn't be surprising, considering his music often touched on social philosophy—specifically, how music functions in Asian societies. Maceda became deeply fascinated with Filipino Indigenous music—so-called village music—that had been performed as part of ceremonies and rituals for thousands of years. For him, music wasn't just music, it was everything happening around the event: the chatter of people, birds singing, the sounds of tropical rain and wind—these were all part of the musical landscape.

His concept of "drone and melody," which he created from his fieldwork as an ethnomusicologist, offers a really interesting way to understand the structure of traditional Asian music. Western musical concepts like pitch, rhythm, and harmony don't quite apply to his approach. In Southeast Asian traditions, there's often a "drone"—a sustained note—or an "ostinato," which is a repeating tone or set of tones. These create a kind of steady base. What's called melody in this context isn't the same as in Western music; it's also not about pitch in the usual sense. Instead, it refers to the layering of tones that add color and variation to the drone. For Maceda, this concept wasn't just about music, it was philosophical, too. Different combinations of drone and melody reflected different communities and maybe even their social structures.

BD: From what I understand, *Ugnayan* [1974] is by far Maceda's most ambitious work. In his words: "With a continuing broadcast of *Ugnayan*, the people would be prepared for other shifts in cultural perspectives. Music can play an important role in giving direction to this change." It's such a visionary position to imagine a work's social role as a long-term, national-scale pedagogical tool!

AO: Indeed! The idea was to broadcast twenty separate tracks through all thirty-seven radio stations in Metro Manila, with some tracks overlapping across stations. Maceda made a fifty-one-page score, meticulously composing all notes for Filipino bamboo instruments, gongs, and voices. He then conducted the musicians, and each track was recorded onto a reel-to-reel tape. Manila's population at the time was 4.7 million, and Maceda set up 142 "*Ugnayan* centers" around the city, where people were encouraged to bring transistor radios to tune into one of the frequencies. At one of the largest centers, 35,000 people showed up. This massive sound-diffusion project took place on New Year's Day 1974. Maceda wasn't concerned with presenting his composition in a complete form; his goal was to create a musical atmosphere that covered the entire city. Interestingly, as you mentioned, his original plan was even bigger: he wanted to broadcast it nationwide, and he wanted to repeat the broadcast over and over, for weeks or months, or at least once a week for a long period of time. Those ideas were way too ambitious and didn't happen.

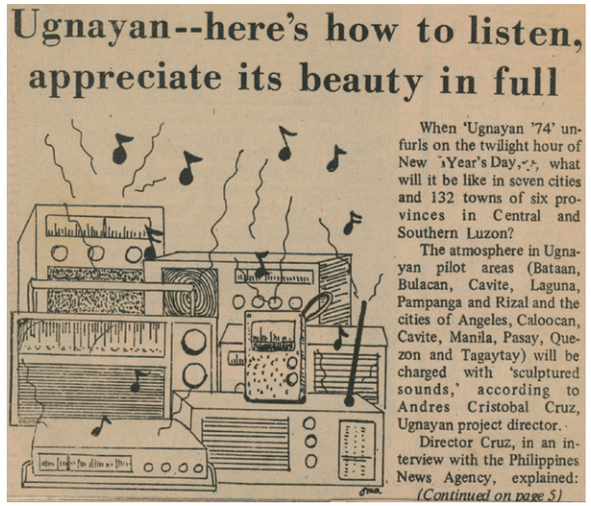
BD: Thinking of this period as a kind of a high-water moment of the postwar avant-garde, do you think a conversation about de-skilling is interesting in relation to Maceda? I ask this because at almost the exact same time Maceda is creating these large-scale pieces, you have, for instance, things like Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra in England.

AO: I'm not sure if Maceda was familiar with the Scratch Orchestra, but yeah, that was definitely an era when some composers were starting to explore nonmusical ideas and even collaborate with nonmusicians. In Maceda's case, *Cassette 100* [1971] is a great example. For the performance, a hundred participants carried cassette players around the spacious lobby and balconies of the [Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), Manila], playing prerecorded tracks. Like *Ugnayan*, the music was written for Indigenous instruments. Maceda designed the piece to create a constantly shifting cluster of sounds. He gave the performers a simple instruction: move up or down the atrium's interconnecting staircases. So, their movements shaped how the sound flowed through the space. Another example is *Udlot-Udlot* [1975],

Listeners gather at a "*Ugnayan* center" in Manila on January 1, 1974.

which was composed for hundreds or even thousands of performers in an open-air setting. It premiered at the University of the Philippines, with 800 high-school students. Many played bamboo instruments, others sang, and the whole thing worked with simple instructions instead of a meticulously written score. The beauty of it was that anyone could take part—no formal musical training needed.

But the majority of his compositions required highly trained and skilled musicians, sometimes a lot of them. *Pagsamba* [1968] was for 116 musicians playing bamboo instruments and gongs, and 125 voices singing in Tagalog. The



Ugnayan--here's how to listen, appreciate its beauty in full

When 'Ugnayan '74' unfurls on the twilight hour of New Year's Day, what will it be like in seven cities and 132 towns of six provinces in Central and Southern Luzon?

The atmosphere in Ugnayan pilot areas (Bataan, Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna, Pampanga and Rizal and the cities of Angeles, Caloocan, Cavite, Manila, Pasay, Quezon and Tagaytay) will be charged with 'sculptured sounds,' according to Andres Cristobal Cruz, Ugnayan project director.

Director Cruz, in an interview with the Philippines News Agency, explained:

(Continued on page 5)

"Ugnayan—here's how to listen, appreciate its beauty in full." Article published by *Times Journal*, Manila, Philippines, December 29, 1973

piece was also designed for a round church space because it was both a Catholic mass and a concert. These specific conditions make Maceda's works so hard to restage, which is one reason they're rarely performed.

BD: In your research, have you found private traces of critical thinking on Maceda's part about working with the Marcos regime, or of any explicit relationship he had with leftist politics?

AO: *Ugnayan*'s connection to the Marcos regime is among the many things that make it so interesting. The project was backed by the regime as an extraordinary sociopolitical music event, and it was heavily promoted by the national media. Imelda Marcos, who was the chairperson of the CCP, directly supervised the production. She was a major patron of the arts and played a key role in building a network of national art centers. Surprisingly, she had strong interests in experimental arts; she appointed composers like Lucrecia Kasilag and Conceptual artist Roberto Chabet as directors of the CCP. So, while the authoritarian regime was known for widespread human-rights abuses and political oppression, it simultaneously supported and promoted progressive artists and composers. The reality may be more complex—Maceda was never interested in aligning with any form of ethnic nationalism, something the regime tried to exploit in his work. He consistently explored Asian music traditions that transcended political borders. And although Maceda worked with the CCP in the '70s for multiple projects, it was because of Lucrecia Kasilag's support; it wasn't until *Ugnayan* that Imelda Marcos became directly involved, and Maceda had no control over that. So the question is: how do the artists and composers navigate the contradictions of an authoritarian regime being responsible for a substantial part of Filipino cultural production? Just criticizing those artists for working within those conditions may lack context.

BD: We're in such a wildly different historical moment that the idea of an authoritarian regime wanting to seem progressive or thinking that instrumentalizing radical art could be a good look seems wild—unimaginable! Thinking about the idea of doing this piece in 2026 in New York, I have to think about the "*Ugnayan* centers," the informal listening gatherings that were convened around the original broadcast. What feels so urgently relevant for us now is that even in the middle of a dictatorship, Maceda was able to create informal spaces across the Philippines, not just for listening, but for gathering, talking, eating, *plotting*. Maybe this is also something that can happen when visitors to the Whitney gather around radios and form fleeting collectives in the space? There's something beautiful about this as a model for navigating the authoritarian present.

AO: I completely agree! Let's see how it works.

BILL DIETZ is a composer, writer, and Co-Chair of Music/Sound in Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

AGOSTO MACHADO

Candy, Holly, Jackie (Altar), 2024. Jewelry, coins, pins, and textile; plastic, wood, metal, glass, papier-mâché, and found objects; postcards, books (*My Face for the World to See: The Diaries, Letters, and Drawings of Candy Darling, Andy Warhol Superstar*; *My Adventures with Holly*; *Candy Darling: Dreamer, Icon, Superstar*; *Andy Warhol's New York City*), soup can signed by Holly Woodlawn, matchbooks, makeup compacts, quarters from the Gaiety Theatre, New York City subway tokens, deck of *I Ching* cards, fabric from Candy Darling's gown; and original artworks by Steve Dalachinsky, Bruce Eyster, and Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, 63 × 34 × 14 ½ in. (160 × 86.4 × 36.8 cm)

CHARLIE PORTER: Let's start with the shrines. What's the meaning of the word "shrine" for you?

AGOSTO MACHADO: These shrines and altars represent wonderful people, a lot of street people, trying to find their way in the counterculture, acknowledging social inequities and Black Power—a New York downtown that expressed themselves in thought, word, and deed.

Previous page: *Shrine (Green)*, 2024. Jewelry, pins, coins, and textile; plastic, metal, papier-mâché, glass, and found objects; photographs, postcards, exhibition cards and announcements, memorial-service cards and programs, newspaper clippings, books, gong, zipper for Paul Bunyan, matchbooks, paper collage party hat, handmade feather butterflies, coins, sugar packet, carved shells, feathers, handwritten note from 1999, cardboard with graffiti tags collected by Martin Wong; and original artworks by Grady Alexis, Rodney Alan Greenblat, Bertha Halozan, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Miguel "Mikie" Perez, Gilda Pervin, Chris Tanner, Kenneth A. Wilson, and Stewart Wilson, 101 × 52 ½ × 22 ¼ in. (256.5 × 133.4 × 56.5 cm)

Untitled (Snapshots), 2022. Photographs, paper, pen, and pins on gator board, 80 × 36 in. (203.2 × 91.4 cm)

CP: As a young human, when did you recognize the need for altars, or remembrance?

AM: I feel blessed. I was a street person, homeless. Christopher Street was a catch-all for people in similar situations. There's a sense of remembrance and respect for those who shared and endured life together—through theater, dance, music, or protests—at places like Washington Square Park. At the end of Christopher Street, across the ugly highway, was the Sunset Pier, where we'd watch the sunset, smoke, pick up people.

CP: When did you first connect with that scene?

AM: I met Joe Cino in 1959; he started a gay theater [Caffe Cino]. Soon after, Ellen Stewart founded La MaMa. It was self-expression, live street theater.

CP: Was it spontaneous?

AM: This was before cell phones. People shared information on the street—places that were being raided, where to find soup kitchens. Many were homeless. In the winter, we'd go to the New York Public Library to stay warm, read magazines, keep up with the news.

CP: So, from an early age, you had this sense of art-making being multilayered?

AM: I didn't think of myself as an Artist with a big A. Downtown LGBTQ+ folks expressed ourselves in ways that didn't exist anywhere else. Our life was the expression of being antiwar and queer. The East Village was like going to Europe, because you heard different languages.

CP: When was it that you started keeping or collecting mementos from yourself or from other people?

AM: I started early—a toothbrush, flowers, or leaves I would press. We all shared floor space, found safety together. Marsha P. Johnson was especially generous, encouraging people to enjoy life, wear drag, or do whatever.

After dark, we gathered at the Silver Dollar Diner, a clearinghouse of information and drugs. It was lively! The waiters called all of us queens "Mary" because we called each other Mary.

CP: Can you talk about the night in 1969 at the Stonewall Inn?

AM: It wasn't about just one night—it had to do with payoffs between Mafia-run gay bars and the police. Raids were routine: lights on, alcohol seized, everybody out in the street . . . and they were back half an hour later. In the papers, the police were said to be doing their jobs—but it was all just for show.

Stonewall was an accumulation of many factors. My friend Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt (the only actual participant to speak at the dedication of the Stonewall National Monument) was caught inside during one of the raids. Many brave people, including many people of color, were part of Stonewall. It was also a place a lot of people avoided because it was lower class. But for people who hustled, sold drugs, or were a little more flamboyant, it was an outlet, a sanctuary.

CP: When did you first start making altars?

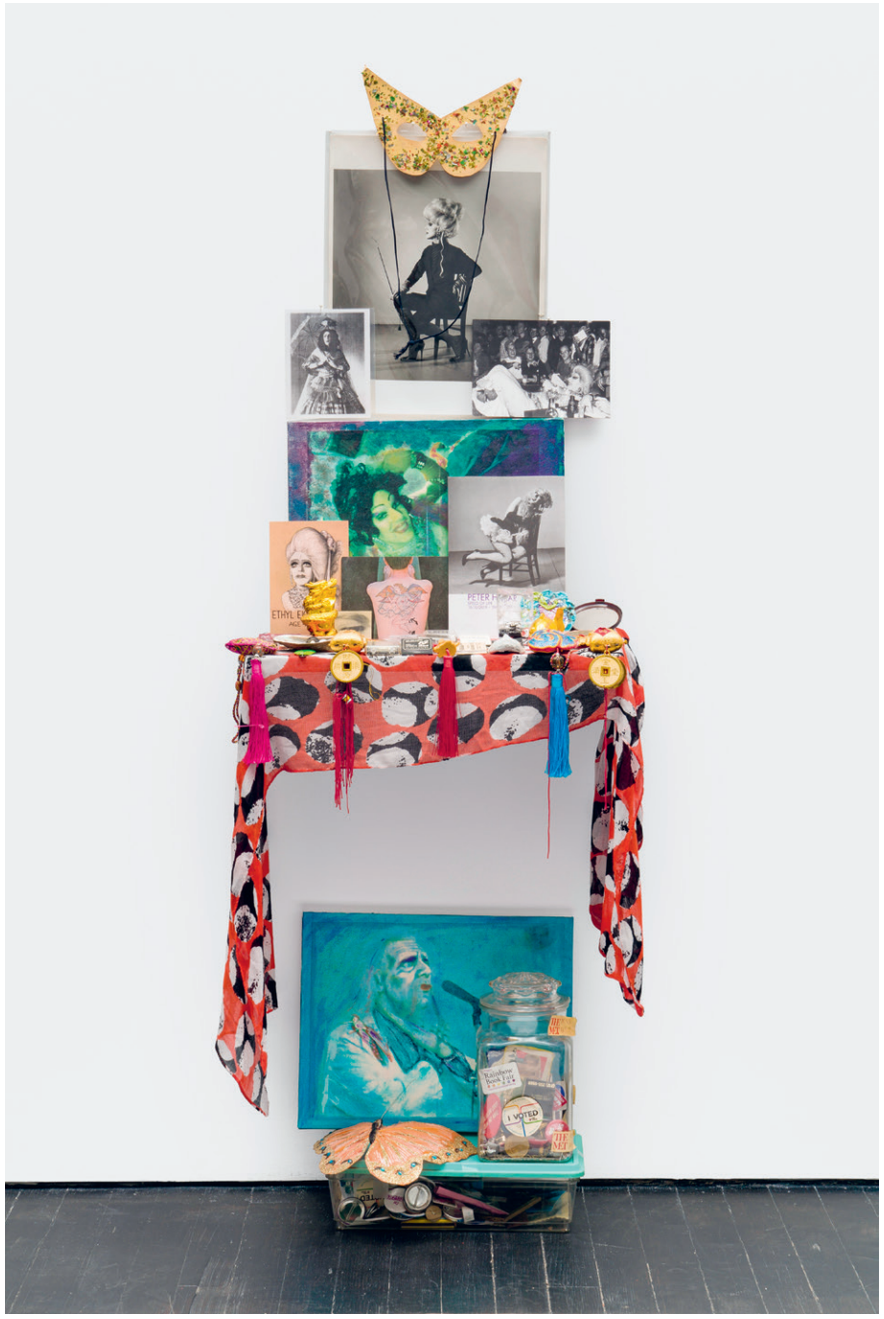
AM: As a street person, I always kept mementos, from the '60s on. Now and then there were deaths, and we'd have a gathering and talk about the person. They would be buried in the paupers' graveyard at Hart Island, in the East River. Pre-AIDS, we would meet people at the Chelsea Clinic, which gave out penicillin for your germs and disease. Some of the attendants would say, "Oh, girl, you're here again? You're going to have to drop your pants, I'm not giving you pills!" It was sort of social, but it was part of the game.

When the onslaught of AIDS happened, I did twelve years of caregiving. Word got out that Agosto is helping *those* people, so when I would go to a gay bar or a gathering, people would move away from me; they'd barely acknowledge me. I said, "Well, I'm an untouchable, but I don't care. I'm going to help my friends." They lived in my building, on my block, in my neighborhood—hardly anyone wanted to visit them or boost their morale or help them get to doctors. But there was a network of wonderful people who did. Unsung heroes.

CP: Can you talk me through the altar for Ethyl Eichelberger that the Whitney recently acquired [*Ethyl (Altar)*, 2024]?

AM: Of course, being a hoarder, I have an accumulation of programs, flyers, and mementos. Thanks to Peter Hujar, who helped document us, there's a wonderful collection about that special time, which included the bloom of the Pyramid Club in the '80s, and artists showing work in empty stores around the East Village. At the bottom of the shrine is Uzi Parnes. He documented Ethyl and me in many places. He documented the sex piers and has over a thousand photos of Jack Smith, one of the great artists of our time. . . . Jack worked with Uzi and Ela Troyano and Carmelita Tropicana. There are so many mementos. There's a matchbook from Club 82, from back when it was on Fourth Street and Second Avenue. Of course it was Mafia-run. They had female impersonators who did shows a couple of times a night. Judy Garland, Frank Sinatra—all the important people came to enjoy or laugh. Bus tours would come with tourists, titillated by the Lower East Side and going into this forbidden place and enjoying the show. There are so many little things: boxes, matches, the Snafu nightclub. . . .

Ethyl was one of the great artists. She was encouraged by Charles Ludlam, of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, to come to New York and do her own shows. She was sort of insecure—she had worked for seven years at the Trinity theater in Rhode Island; that was a famous place—but she eventually did come. I was honored that she wanted to work with me, because she really could have done all the shows by herself! We had several wonderful years. Uzi made snapshots of us performing *Mrs. Wiggs in the Cabbage Patch*. We did it at Uzi's theater, Chandelier, and later at P.S. 122—that was in 1985. That was the last time we worked together, because Tabboo! [Stephen Tashjian], Hapi Phace [Mark Rizzo]—we all started working with other people. And after the performance there was a memorial for Jackie Curtis at La MaMa, where many of us got to speak.



Ethyl (Altar), 2024. Jewelry, matchbooks, pins, and textile; plastic, metal, and ceramic objects; postcards, photographs, exhibition booklet, handmade feather butterfly, mask with glitter, coins, makeup compact; pearl, shell, glass, and plastic containers with additional ephemera; and original artworks by Peter Hujar, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, and Uzi Parnes, 68 × 19 ½ × 12 ¼ in. (172.7 × 49.5 × 31.1 cm)

Downtown (Altar), 2024. Pins, matchbooks, mirror, and papier-mâché; plastic and metal objects; book (*Theatre of the Ridiculous*), photograph, jewelry, banana-flavored straw packets, New York City subway tokens; and original artworks by Arch Connelly, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, and Gilda Pervin, 19 × 20 × 20 in. (48.3 × 50.8 × 50.8 cm)

All that is part of the trajectory. It's been disconnected, but it will be chronologically put together.

CP: When you come to make the altar, how do you place the different elements? How does it happen?

AM: Well, by guardian angels! Because, as I've said, I'm a hoarder, and it's very hard to dig through the accumulation of unstable boxes piled to the ceiling. ("I know I have it *somewhere*, but I'm not quite sure where . . .") It was wonderful how the Ethyl piece came together. I take no credit! It was happenstance, and encouragement from [artists and dealers] Sam Gordon and Jacob Robichaux: "You can *do* it!"

CP: On the floor, there's the box with things inside it. So there's also the presence of things that we can't necessarily see as a viewer, right? Hidden things.

AM: Right: it's all part of the accumulation, things on the floor or down low. And there's fabric and little knickknacks and things that connect to Ethyl from different times and places. Everything means something. They all connect.

CP: That goes back to how you described Stonewall, as an accumulation of factors.

AM: Yes, and with my fading memory as a surviving dinosaur, thank God you got to me now, because *tick, tick, tick* . . . it's all going!

CP: Can you talk about the energy that the pieces and mementos hold?

AM: The memories and camaraderie and friendships—it's all alive. I have photographs of an installation with eleven people's cremation ashes. I prepaid with my life savings for my own cremation. The rule at Redden's Funeral Home—on Fourteenth Street, across the street from Our Lady of Guadalupe church—is, unless you pay in cash up front, each year the price goes up. So I went there with $2,000 in cash—my best friend, Glen Santiago, came with me, and we counted it, including taxes—and I got a quarter back. So I went across the street to the church and donated the quarter. The rule is, I have to die within the city limits of the five boroughs of New York City. My body will be taken over to Elizabeth, New Jersey, and cremated. And then, quietly, my ashes will be mixed with those of eleven other people, including Jack Smith and Marsha P. Johnson—you know, a little portion of many dear friends—and it will be put in the Hudson, not far from where Marsha's body was found in the river after she died.

CP: That's so beautiful.

AM: Yeah, I mean *very* quietly. The transitory nature and continuum of life is the reason I don't feel I need a funeral or a memorial that people will remember. I remember all the people in my heart. Commiserating together is good for some, but privately we mourn and miss people all the time—believe me, I have fifty people in my morning prayers, and I pray for other people who aren't well or who are in hospitals to continue on—because our journey is our art in our life.

CP: Earlier, you talked about the "big-A Artist." But your life of art shows a way of being an artist that is separate from the "big-A Artist."

AM: Well, that's part of the continuum of all alternative people—brave and daring—who just want to express themselves in any manner, way, shape, or form. The thing is: Explore! Failure is *not* trying. If you want to do something, do it, because you learn. Life is lessons.

CHARLIE PORTER is a writer from London whose most recent book is the novel *Nova Scotia House* (2025).

OSWALDO MACIÁ

BORN 1960
IN CARTAGENA DE INDIAS, COLOMBIA;
LIVES IN SANTA FE, NM, AND LONDON

Surrounded in Tears, 2004. Site-specific sound installation with megaphones. Installation view, Liverpool Biennial, Tate Liverpool, UK, 2004

FRANCES MORRIS: I was walking around the Tate and thinking about two of my lifelong loves—Alberto Giacometti and Louise Bourgeois—and it struck me that, in a way, they represent two opposite poles of artistic practice: Louise Bourgeois was a free ranger, exploring every kind of material and context over a long career. Artists like Giacometti—they're obsessive, digging deep, continuously arrested by the same concerns. Which one are you? How would you describe the essence of your practice and trajectory in relation to those opposite poles?

OSWALDO MACIÁ: Wow, you're talking about artists I've studied a lot. I've studied Giacometti all my life, and I know Louise Bourgeois's life by heart. I'm reading T. J. Clark's latest book, and it said something beautiful: art comes from the social fabric. For me, that defines what both Louise Bourgeois and Giacometti are. Even Giacometti—his research, his personal experience, these come from the inside to the outside, to us.

My research took me into the expansion of the visual element. I took volumes of sound and volumes of smell to try to get at the discourse of sculpture from another sense because, well, visually we're bombarded; we're ocularcentric. But vision is just one of many senses, many ways to get inside the brain.

FM: My deep engagement with your work comes from *Something Going On Above My Head* [1999–2021], that amazing piece in Tate's collection. It was made twenty-five years ago, but it seems so prescient now regarding what's happening to nature. When did you begin engaging with the ecological crisis? And has that been a central question behind your work since then?

OM: As artists, we hit a wall talking about humanity. When you try to talk about Gaza, for example, or Ukraine, it's "I know, I know—don't say more." It's difficult to engage; we're so arrogant about knowing everything. I started to go through the acoustic and olfactory as a way to engage with the language of the natural world. I found that if I can bring in the calls of animals, perhaps I can make people stop and think, instead of this "I know that, next . . . I know that, next. . ."

FM: You described noise as a sound yet to be placed in language. It's as if noise circumvents the need to talk about Gaza or Ukraine, but it is somehow equally powerful—prelinguistic, more immediate.

OM: Correct. For *Surrounded in Tears* [for the Liverpool Biennial, 2004], I borrowed from the British Library archives a hundred sounds of people crying from around the world and made a composition of twenty-seven channels. Crying is prelinguistic;

Composition in Three Notes / Reflections on Unconsciousness, 2023. Scent sculpture, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Odor, Immaterial Sculptures*, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, Germany, 2023

it's a kind of [animal] calling—a calling most people don't want to hear. It's a piece dealing with what people may call noise, but the noise has to be digested to be understood.

FM: I listened to one of the first works you made that brought smell and sound together: *The Opera of Cross-Pollination* [2020]. Can you discuss bringing smell and sound together—why they were more appropriate than sight and sound? What goes on in the brain or body with those two senses that might be absent with sight?

OM: Smell goes to the hippocampus; vision to the thalamus. So smell is linked to instinct; it's the most effective "language" in terms of primary response. Present something visually, and it might bring an image to mind—"It reminds me of something from art history." Smell works totally differently. It sends a bunch of information. Smell engages, while the acoustic surrounds the concept of the piece.

So, *Cross-Pollination*—we were living in the days of Brexit, and I was reading a book about Darwin, specifically this lovely experiment where he encaged an orchid, and it self-pollinated. It produced only three flowers. But the cross-pollinated plant produced seventeen flowers! And I thought, London is cross-pollinated now; we have so many different brains coming together. Why would we close ourselves off to produce only three flowers?

When Katerina [Gregos] approached me about the Riga Biennial, I said I wanted to create an opera score, and I needed to record insects in the rainforest, and she said, go ahead. To record the orchid pollinator, which are these beautiful green bees—euglossines—I had to have the essence of the orchid in order to attract them. I worked with a perfumer, and with an entomologist from the Humboldt Institute. We cannot be a caged flower or a solitary bee—we need others to exist.

FM: I love the way you talk about *we*. You're talking about nature—about the polyphony of it, its interconnectedness—but you're also always talking about *we*. And the way you've framed your works—*we* have opera, *we* have symphony—those speak to the *we* coming together. Am I reading into that, or is it a very conscious way that you've structured your projects?

OM: Yes, yes—it's fundamental. It's not just me or my studio; it's we. As you know, I love language. "Audience" comes from *audire*, to listen; "spectator" from *spectrum*, an image. We create work not for ourselves, but for the ones who are going to receive and process the piece—

FM: Some of those works feel celebratory—"opera," "symphony." But now you're working on a requiem. Are you moving from celebrating life to commemorating loss?

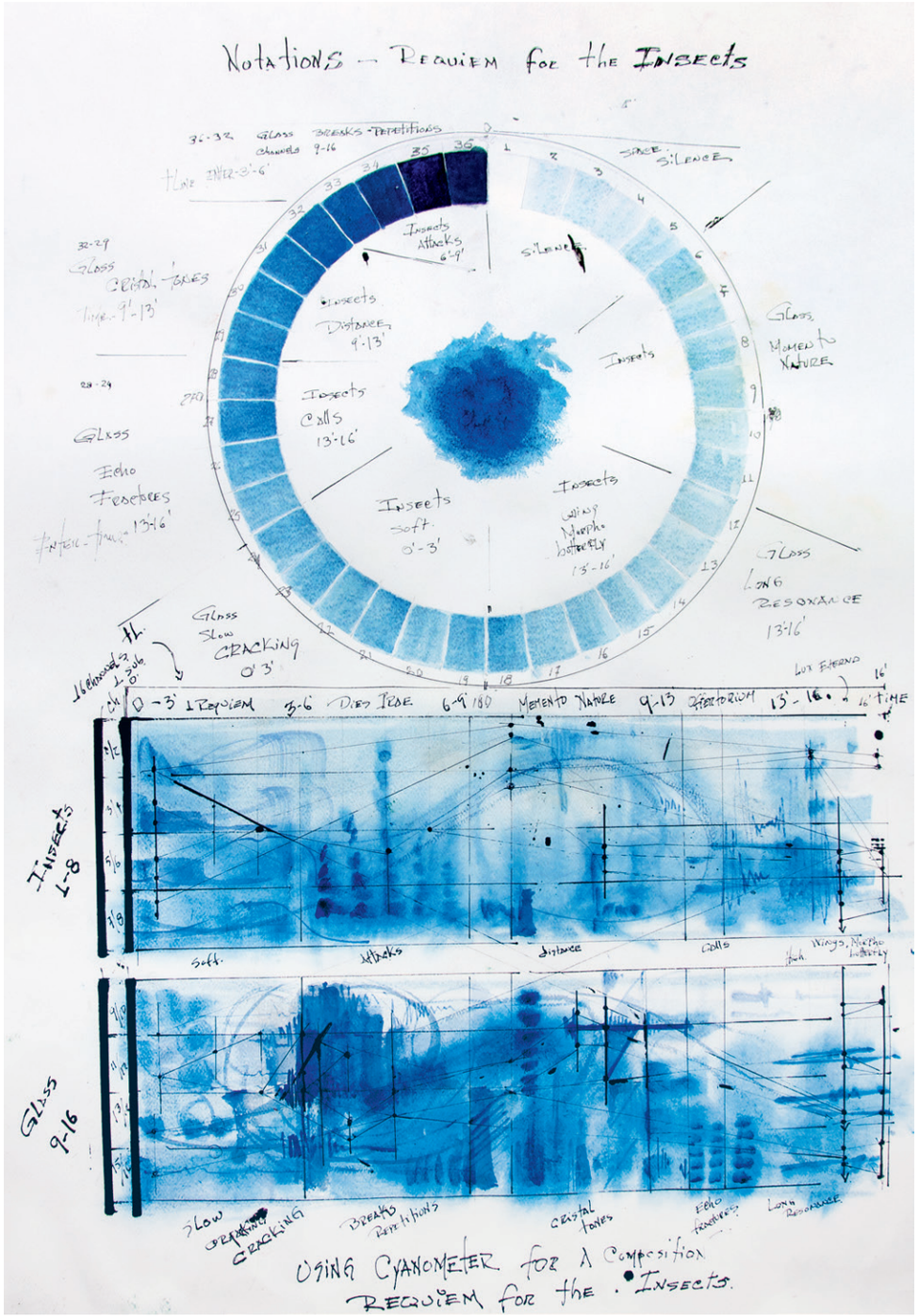
OM: *Requiem for the Insects* [in progress] speaks of a serious problem: the disappearance of insects. We read reports from many places where people are resorting to hand-pollination for food crops because so many bees and other pollinators are gone. My work is thinking about that incalculable loss in terms of a requiem for these creatures that are crucial for our existence.

FM: You've described your positioning of the audience as "in the vague frontier where knowledge ends and ignorance begins." That's a place both where the senses matter, and it also could be read as if we are without enough knowledge; we're still ignorant.

OM: [Alexander] Pope would say ignorance is as important as knowledge; we need ignorance to grow. We need layers! Again, insects as an example. When I record [agricultural] monocultures, you find just one sound, two sounds. All the rest of the insects have been wiped out.

FM: That must feel so tragic.

OM: It's a vacuum. In the rainforest, you have all these layers. When I was recording in Chiapas, Mexico, for *Cross-Pollination*, you could hear all the layers, and when you record it, you can *see* the layers in the sonogram: bats at 40 kHz, an insect at 60 kHz, another at 70 kHz, each with their own highway of communication. I said, my goodness—this is a symphony. That is the way it has to be composed, so that



Notations, from the installation *Requiem for the Insects* (work in progress), 2025

Cucaracha americana 1625 (diptych), 2025. Buon fresco, 11 13/16 × 15 13/16 in. (30 × 40.1 cm) each

is why I made a multichannel composition. In *Requiem*, what I found is that you see the tension between the existing and disappearing animals, the "invasion" of the new ones.

FM: Of course, they fill the space left behind. In a way, you both celebrate and subvert the notion of migration as positive, because now we have a world where the balance is lost.

OM: It's the most difficult polarization, like in politics. So, rather than talk about migration—because people will have a very polarized response, right/left, red/blue—I use the tension of insects to create a space for reflection.

FM: Do you see yourself as an activist?

OM: Good question. In some ways, all artists are activists, because in my head, the opposite is being passive. But I think anyone can admire a butterfly flying, enjoy the natural world. It's activist if you create questions surrounding these things, and I think it's the responsibility of everyone to ask questions, respond to the social fabric.

FM: We talked about migration. You've been a traveler and worked in different places, natural environments. Does your work resonate differently in different locations? For instance, you're showing at the Whitney in New York at a very interesting time. Do you feel your work fits into American art, now or historically, or are you a Lone Ranger?

OM: Not a Lone Ranger! I'm from the Americas. On top of that, I am Caribbean, too. I am not outside of the environment in America at the moment; I feel very affected. But I think it is a great moment to have a voice, to be part of a choir of thinkers. We're not lawmakers, but we can be part of this choir. This exhibition is important today, and I hope to contribute to this discourse, in this choir as one voice.

FM: I wonder what song the choir will sing! Okay, we've discussed sound, smell; we've distanced ourselves from the visual. But you're an artist; your work occupies space. And the painting element, the drawing and composition, are all hugely significant. You're still part of a visual art community. Are there recent experiences of visual art or artists who have helped shaped you?

OM: Oh, yeah, off the top of my head, Kentridge.

FM: The relationship to William Kentridge, particularly drawing—that's completely beautiful.

OM: Phyllida Barlow: a master class in understanding space in sculpture. My relationship with works on paper, sounds, smell—I call them notations. Drawings are notations. Sound and smell use "notes," similar to notation. I see them as one thing, notations moving between materials and senses to create my sculptures.

FM: You stand on the shoulders of giants. The interlocking frameworks are fantastic. I can see them all together in a room with your work. Is there anything you want to add?

OM: Something T. S. Eliot once said about the work of Dante: "Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood." Always I've found that kind of fantastic—so clear and, wow!, so true. You can communicate through smell and acoustic and visual support, and later it can be digested, understood, accepted, rejected, or whatever. But first you have to communicate like a punch!

FRANCES MORRIS is a curator and art historian and Chair of the Gallery Climate Coalition.

Monsters Are on the Loose (Los Monstruos estan sueltos), 2023. Stencil ink and oil on canvas, 138 × 102 in. (350.5 × 259.1 cm)

Right: Installation view of *Emilio Martínez Poppe: Civic Views*, Philadelphia City Hall Courtyard, 2025

BORN 1993
IN BALTIMORE;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

EMILIO MARTÍNEZ POPPE

Free Library of Philadelphia, West, 2024. Polypropylene photographic prints subsurface mounted to acrylic-and-aluminum composite with aluminum frames, 72 × 54 × ¼ in. (182.9 × 137.2 × 0.6 cm). Installation view, *Emilio Martínez Poppe: Civic Views*, Philadelphia City Hall Courtyard, 2025

SHARON HAYES: We most recently saw each other at the opening of your project *Civic Views* [2025] in the Philadelphia City Hall Courtyard. You started this work in the last year of your graduate studies at Penn, where we worked together and where you got a dual degree in fine art and city planning. Can you talk about the project, and how it embraces where you've been and where you're headed in your work?

EMILIO MARTÍNEZ POPPE: When I began my coursework in city planning, a year after starting the MFA, I noticed we were being professionally oriented towards working in the public sector without, at times, questioning some of the fundamentals that make that form of planning possible. But as an artist, that's where we begin, right?

We ask about fundamental truths that are taken for granted. LaToya Ruby Frazier, another Whitney Independent Study Program [ISP] alum, said that the role of the artist is to drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides. In a course I was taking with Akira Drake Rodriguez, where we did engage with the motivating contradictions of the planning field, we looked at the spatial arrangement of the Independence Mall area, where the African American Museum is surrounded by the police headquarters, a federal detention center, the FBI, DHS, and ICE—all government agencies that expand the carceral state. Taking this arrangement not simply as happenstance, I began to think about what the organization of buildings and the views they produce tell us about the way

The perception of city government is an honest one, 2025. UV direct inkjet print on aluminum composite, 26 ½ × 24 × ⅛ in. (67.3 × 61 × 0.3 cm). Installation view, *Emilio Martínez Poppe: Civic Views*, Philadelphia City Hall Courtyard, 2025

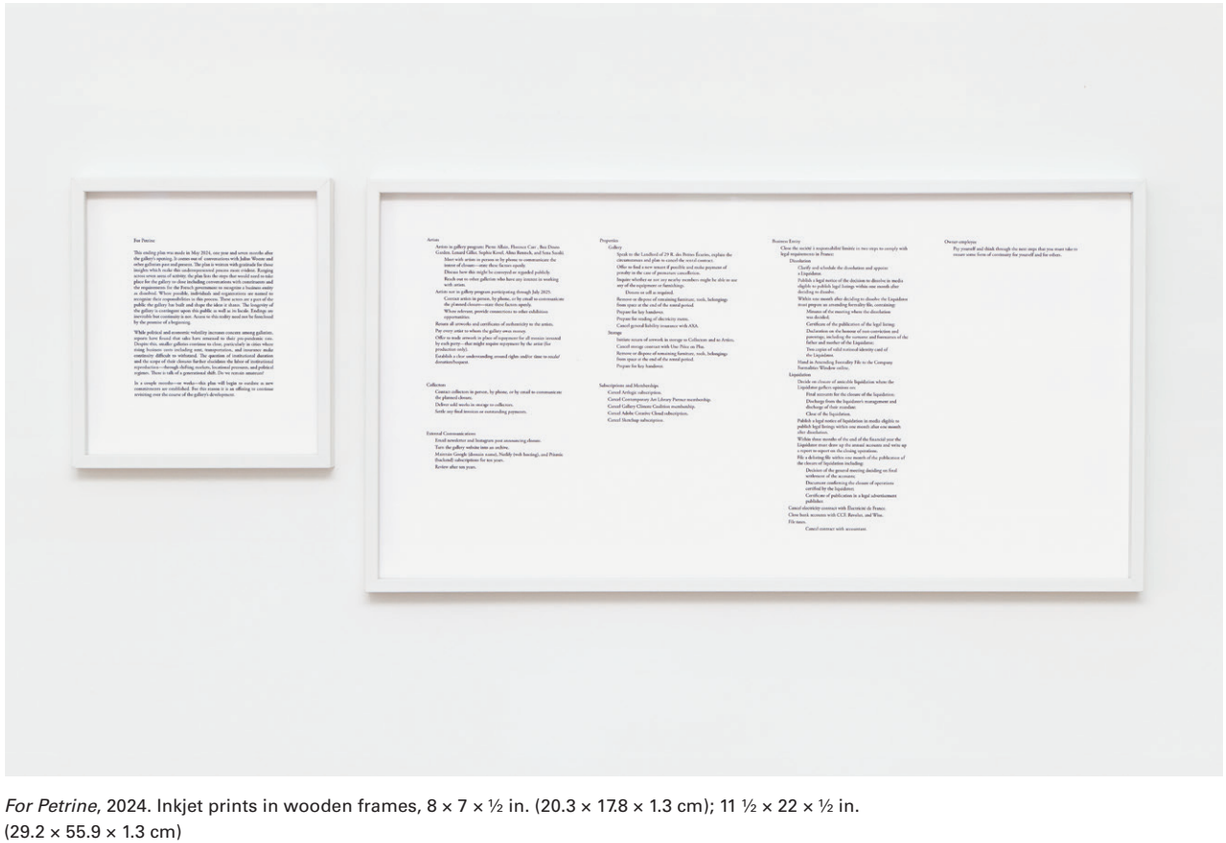
Philadelphia Housing Authority, South, 2024. Polypropylene photographic prints subsurface mounted to acrylic-and-aluminum composite with aluminum frames, 96 × 59 × ¼ in. (243.8 × 149.9 × 0.6 cm). Installation view, *Emilio Martínez Poppe: Civic Views*, Philadelphia City Hall Courtyard, 2025

power is expressed and memory is valued in Philadelphia. What does it mean to occupy those positions of power and surveil that museum every day? Around the same time, I was working with Francesca Russello Ammon, studying the history of urban photography, and I learned that the oldest surviving daguerreotype in the US was taken by a civil servant, an employee of the Philadelphia Mint named Joseph Saxton. His daguerreotype was the first photographic image of a city in the US. And while it is underrepresented in the canon of photography, it signifies a transformation in the way in which urban space was conceived and how people thought of themselves in relation to it. The photograph was taken just a couple decades before the Civil War, a time when the nation was undergoing massive transformations in the ways in which citizenship, property, humanity, and solidarity were understood and fought for. As we are living in one of those times today, I began to engage the window-view through these historical and spatial lenses to better understand the contemporary meaning of the public sector and its workers.

SH: Ultimately you installed *Civic Views* inside the seat of government power in Philadelphia and surrounded by city offices. What is your investment in civil service?

EMP: The commitment on the part of public workers to serving people despite shifting administrations quickly became the central inspiration for the project. In civil service I see what "a government of the people and for the people" really is, and that it must continually be insisted upon. That is our collective duty. Especially in moments like this, where our public sector is being gutted, attacked, and mobilized against the very people it is meant to serve. Because of this, the curator Jameson Paige and I found the courtyard at City Hall to be the project's ideal home. It is the geographic and legislative center of Philadelphia, where the voices and views of city's workers could be seen by thousands every day in one of the most transited parts of the city. There, a large scaffolding installation hosted the photographs taken with a large-format digital camera, all printed to scale and hung in reference to the architecture that they were shot from. Flowing through the photos were excerpts from long-form interviews that I conducted with more than thirty city employees across twenty-two agencies—including the sanitation department, Free Library, transit authority, fire department, and water department, among many others. Across these conversations, I heard many employees say that they were feeling heard as city workers for the first time, or for the first time in a long time. This saddened me but did not surprise me, as civil servants are often made invisible in the vast abstraction of city government, something I know as a city worker myself. The fact that the interviews were anonymous aided in the honesty of the testimonies, allowing room for grievances to be expressed without the oversight of an agency. And during the run of the exhibition, I kept hearing from visitors how important it was to read the perspectives included in the installation, to feel reflected in them, to find oneself in a view. It should be no surprise that the diverse experiences of residents across the city are shared by those working in its municipal government. For many of the city employees interviewed, civil unrest is discussed as a motivating force for the work that's being done for the city. The George Floyd protests and subsequent encampments appear multiple times throughout the interviews, as well as youth protests for safe schools. Many city workers say such activism inspires them and has made them feel represented as they're working "on the inside." What's evident here is that both external and internal work are important to create a dynamic tension towards progressive change

SH: Something that's interesting about what we do as artists is that we have a core set of interests that we keep returning to, but we return with difference, in part because our relationship to the questions we ask changes and our methodologies change. But also because the world outside our work



For Petrine, 2024. Inkjet prints in wooden frames, 8 × 7 × ½ in. (20.3 × 17.8 × 1.3 cm); 11 ½ × 22 × ½ in. (29.2 × 55.9 × 1.3 cm)

transforms. How is this very intense present moment changing your work and your practice?

EMP: I took all the photographs for *Civic Views* during the Biden years. The first ones capture traces of pandemic-era hybrid work, while the very last were taken weeks before the 2025 presidential inauguration. What began as an analysis of public sector work became an evolving conversation about the motivating contradictions and the stakes of that work—and, eventually, its precarity, as it became clear that the exhibition would open during mass layoffs at the federal level. In conversation with Jameson, we developed programming and a narrative for the project that contended with the repoliticized role of the public sector in this moment. The project allowed for a reconsideration of the values that motivate people to commit to work in the public sector and to defend the public sector as a democratic space. It became clear that my role as an artist is to champion workers' lived experiences; to humanize organizations that are being vilified by revealing complexity and nuance; and to host conversations across fields of cultural, political, and historical analysis to better understand the present moment.

SH: How does your work with public sector institutions relate to your interest in cultural institutions?

EMP: We are in an incredible moment in the cultural field, where the past decade has ignited the figure of the cultural worker as someone who exceeds professional categorization and who is vitally concerned with their means of production. Labor unions are cropping up at cultural institutions across the country, oligarch billionaires invested in extractive enterprises are being forced to resign from museum boards, and Western art collections are finally rematriating plundered artifacts. Amid this effervescent movement of cultural organizing, calls for the closure of museums have also come forward, even as many have shuttered in recent years due to lack of funding. This has taken on another level of urgency today, as we're seeing the defunding of arts organizations alongside politically motivated firings of progressive leadership and staff. What would it mean to engage the inevitability of an institution's closure on terms set by the workers of the institution itself, instead of those set by the market or authoritarianism? Last year, I had the opportunity to trial this speculative proposal in *For Petrine* [2024], which entailed working with a Parisian gallery that had only been open for a year to document everything that would need to take place for it to close. Taking an epistolary approach, the project reflected the conversations I had with the worker-owner of the gallery, bringing to light underrecognized labor and a question of legacy as the pressures of the market make such a business incredibly precarious. I would love to be able to do this with a museum one day, to collaborate with workers across departments and imagine the closure of the institution in an open way. What if institutions planned their endings as they planned their beginnings?

SH: What a provocative proposal, given the all-out assault on institutions by our current authoritarian federal government. The government's work is supported, of course, by organized, well-endowed coalitions of old and new monies and old and new political positions, so your work puts into sharp relief how we challenge and sustain the work of the institutions that we participate in as artists. You also raise questions quite close to home for us both with regard to the Whitney's recent decision to suspend the ISP. How do you contend with the conflict between institution building and dismantling?

EMP: Whether we're talking about governments or museums, these institutions are not monoliths—they're made up of different agencies trying to achieve different ends. At the Whitney, for example, there is censorship of vital cultural work, such as Fadl Fakhouri, Noel Maghathe, and Fargo Tbakhi's performance for an ISP capstone exhibition—an action that goes against the very mission of the museum and, therefore, against the aspirations of its workers and participating artists. While there is an official voice, it is not a unified one. Being able to recognize that field of contradictions is the first step in building solidarity in any organizational context. When considering a collective process of closure, or in moments of crisis like the current one at the Whitney, there must be a real platform given to those who are working to reproduce the institution first and foremost. I think leadership must hold space for that or it will be rightfully seized, as in the call for Warren Kanders to step down from the Whitney's board by its workers, exhibiting artists, and broader public. To be a cultural worker is to stand in resistance to the terms of American authoritarianism. While a museum is not a government agency, it holds democratic ambitions, which must be held to account in times of conflict because such institutions continue to be reference points for how we work together in the highly unregulated arts field. Institutions may appear as fortresses or obtuse systems, but they are fluid and shifting, they are made up by workers, and more of us should get to participate in the ways they are transformed, because in doing so we transform ourselves.

SHARON HAYES is an artist and teaches at Penn Fine Arts, Stuart Weitzman School of Design, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

BORN 1994
IN AUSTIN, TX;
LIVES IN CHICAGO

ISABELLE FRANCES MCGUIRE

Symbolic Birth Cabin Unit, 2024. Imitation logs, mudding, plywood, and paint, 204 × 192 × 144 in. (518.2 × 487.7 × 365.8 cm). Installation view, *Isabelle Frances McGuire: Year Zero*, The Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, 2024

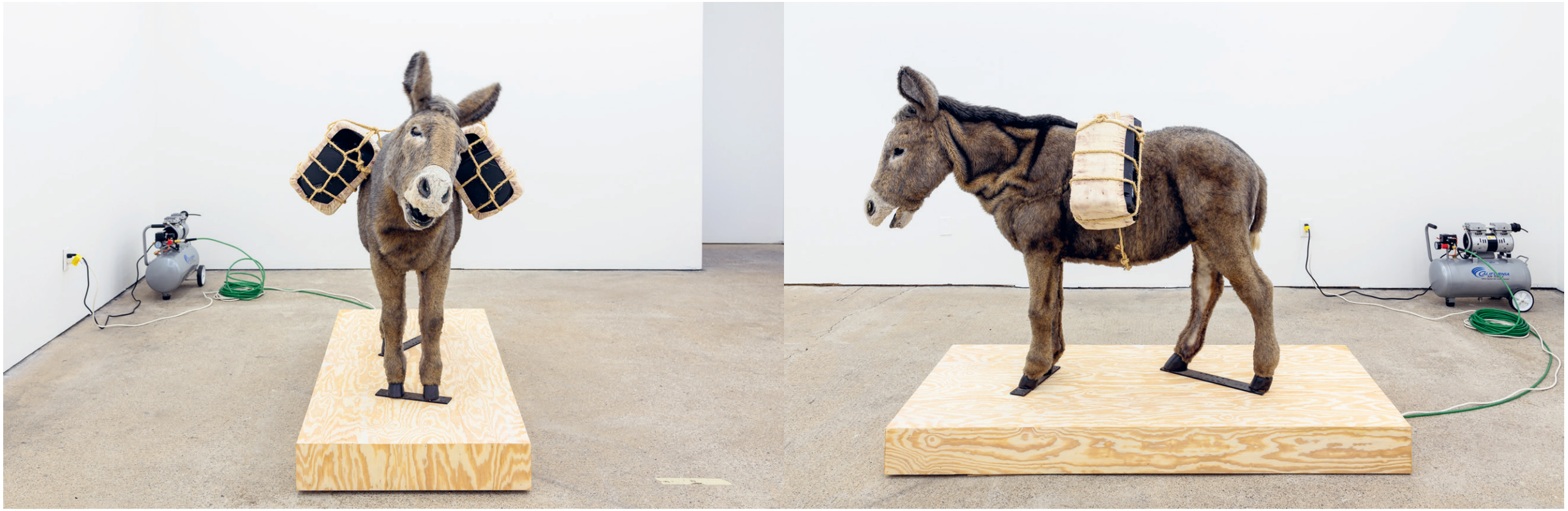
CHARLES RAY: Do you believe in ghosts? I don't, but I think ghost stories are often interesting thought experiments, maybe more about the living than the dead. Doubting Thomas is a great ghost story. After Christ rose from the dead, he visited the Apostles by walking through walls when he entered a room. The Apostles thought he was a ghost and easily understood the phenomena, even if amazed and surprised. Christ asking Thomas to stick his finger in the warm wound in his side from a Roman spear hit home the sexuality and physicality of the resurrection. The body is the soul?

Ghosts in sculpture go back to ancient times. Agamemnon was talking to a sculpture, not a sphinx! In the nineteenth century, there were a few examples of noteworthy haunted sculptures.

I'm sending you a few shots of Clover Adams's grave in Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, DC. Henry Adams commissioned Augustus Saint-Gaudens to make a memorial to his wife, who killed herself by drinking photography chemicals. Henry Adams was devastated and left the country for Asia, where he stayed and traveled for five years. On his return, he commissioned the grave as a place he could go to meditate. Nowhere on the memorial is there any text, name, date, or explanation. When Mark Twain visited the monument, he renamed it "Grief." It's a beautiful and haunting sculpture, worthy of a visit when in Washington.

The ghost aspect of the story is interesting and became notorious despite the quiet dignity of Saint-Gaudens's work. Shortly after Saint-Gaudens died, a wealthy Baltimore newspaper publisher named General Felix Agnus allegedly hired Danish American sculptor Edward Pausch to sneak into the cemetery late at night and take plaster molds of the sculpture. The sculptor and his team left the sculpture and grave site a mess, with bits of plaster left over from the unauthorized activity. A hacked-out bronze copy was made and used as the grave of Felix Agnus and his wife in Maryland. The copy felt horrid outside of the beautiful, enclosed site of the original. Over the years, the copy gained a reputation of being haunted. People said the sculpture's eyes glowed red at midnight on the first Friday of every month. Many people came at night, and the cemetery could not keep grass healthy around the grave. The entire

SelfPortrait2 {"Ghost"}, 2023. PLA plastic, fabric, child's tactical vest and knee and elbow pads, cord, leather boots, and metal, 49 × 29 × 24 in. (124.5 × 73.7 × 61 cm). Installation view, *Isabelle Frances McGuire: LOOP*, King's Leap, New York, 2023



Robot Donkey 2, 2023. Animatronic donkey, air compressor, and wood, 51 ½ × 41 × 61 in. (130.8 × 104.1 × 154.9 cm). Installation view, *The First Machine*, What Pipeline, Detroit, 2023

area became so unsightly that the cemetery insisted upon its removal. It was donated to the Smithsonian, which realized that it was an unauthorized copy and moved it to storage. It can now be viewed behind some bushes in Lafayette Square, across the street from the White House. Anyway, a long story only to say that I think the only ghost in the story is Clover Adams, in the mind of Henry Adams, and now in ours—or at least in mine.

ISABELLE FRANCIS MCGUIRE: No, I do not believe in ghosts, but I do believe in hauntings. Maybe because haunting is an experience or affect. It's funny to me that people intuitively knew there was something wrong with the copy without knowing its origins. It is quite the violation to have the privately enclosed image of your beloved deceased wife stolen and made into someone else's image. The sculpture was destined to be haunted!

It's notable what liberties people are willing to take with copies. Now I am embarrassed to say that I've behaved like Felix Agnus and defiled a few graves to make a new one. Although, I almost always begin with a copy of a copy. The Smithsonian released 3D scans of Lincoln's plaster life mask and hands. I digitally combined those scans with a scan of a naked male actor and then 3D-printed the result. Then I cast the seven-foot 3D print and rendered it in white foam for an exhibition at Artists Space.

You and I were exhibiting nude dead men at the same time in NYC. I was accused of somehow having insight into what you were preparing for your Matthew Marks exhibition. I was flattered that people thought I had the foresight to organize something like that, but ultimately that sentiment is uninteresting to me. It felt it was more emblematic of our shared interest in monuments and your influence on my work. I think you might have been haunting me, Charley!

It's interesting that Mark Twain, a man who wrote through his grief, would give language to something that had none before, and that Clover Adams became grief itself. When Twain commented on this monument, was he referring to the entire space? The way Clover's figure has become patinated while her face has stayed dark is divine. I will absolutely find a way to sit with Grief in the future.

CR: Not to shy away from talking about your work—or mine, for that matter—but perhaps we could talk about work in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. It might be a good middle ground between the young and the old. I'm sending a piece that I think is an interesting sculpture, *The Puritan* [1883–86] by Augustus Saint-Gaudens. The statue at the Art Institute is a model for a large bronze in Springfield, Massachusetts.

IFM: I am very happy to discuss *The Puritan*. I found this piece, and its recent installation at the Art Institute, to be particularly interesting. I've held this installation close to my chest, as I do when something really matters. I'm curious, did you see the installation in person? It included three small-scale bronze models in-

tended as studies for monumental works, with *The Puritan* at the center, flanked by *Abraham Lincoln* [1912] and *The Bronco Buster* [1895].

What struck me about these three figures, perhaps similar to what drew you to *The Puritan*, was the way each figure pushes themselves off their base. I love how quickly it's understood that these sculptures contain their own location and time because of how the bases are sculpted. And because of that, we can understand that the figures are breaching our territory. Lincoln and the Puritan step forward, while the horse in *The Bronco Buster* gallops off its dirt platform. While these gestures can be seen as merely dynamic, I find them significant. There's much that can be made of these early American archetypes, unconfined by their foundations, pushing perpetually forward. It's notable that each figure represents a pillar of masculinity that embodies certain early American ideals while their movement suggests that their work is ongoing. I thought this "stepping out" was a modeling of their time and rooted these archetypes of the past into the here and now.

I was especially conscious of *The Puritan* and the lions flanking the entrance to the Art Institute while making *Robot Donkey 2* [2023].

That piece repurposes a discarded animatronic from the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. I replaced the donkey's computer brain with a new one and coded it to have new behavior while maintaining its original external parts. Essentially, I designed the base/stage so that the donkey's head—the only moving part—extended outside its "zone" or place. I was interested in how the strategy used in *The Puritan* would feel if the breaching element was in motion. Basically, *Robot Donkey 2* is the offspring of *The Puritan*.

CR: A few years ago, Ann Goldstein installed Richard Hunt's *Hero Construction* on the landing of the main stairs at the Art Institute of Chicago. The sculpture was taken down and brought back to storage last year. I really enjoyed having the sculpture on view, and I thought Ann installed it beautifully in a place of both honor and consideration.

Hunt was very present when I was young, in high school and grade school. He made *Hero Construction* in 1958, shortly after he graduated from the School of the Art Institute. His biomorphic imagery made him less interesting to artists and serious curators by the mid-'60s. I'm not sure a writer like Michael Fried would be able to bring Hunt's work to mind, as Pop and Minimalism made him almost impossible to consider in a serious way. But he was always working and exhibiting. Reading about him, I learned that he was one of the most prolific artists of our era. I believe he holds a kind of record for public commissions. I still enjoy looking at his work. The UCLA sculpture garden owns his sculpture *Why?* [1974]. In the early '80s, the rhetorical purpose of the sculpture at UCLA was that he was a Black artist, but that aspect of the work's authorship seemed clear without being obvious. A few years ago, Jay Jopling began representing his work at White Cube. In the past, I got pleasure thinking of Hunt's work rather than his market. But why not? Jopling's representation causes me to think more about the market as a whole rather than Hunt's market in particular. Perhaps I'm out of touch with the art culture today, but I was both happy and surprised to come upon *Hero Construction* installed on the Art Institute steps. Do you like it? Did you see it?

One day I viewed it with friends from Europe, and they didn't think much of the sculpture outside of Hunt's Chicago history, which I had explained to them. The sculpture can have a strong image quality. Bug art. A portrait of an alien. But it is also an afterimage. Is *Hero Construction* an afterimage of a great work like an Alberto Giacometti or even a classical figurative sculpture? Afterimages in art are interesting to me. There is not an energy debt that violates the first law of thermodynamics. Artworks that are derivative have this debt. For me, Hunt is really useful even if his work lands too soon. Anyway, I was disappointed to learn they took it down and thought it would have been an interesting sculpture for both of us to look at if I had been able to come to Chicago. A counterfactual!

Symbolic Birth Cabin Unit, 2024. Imitation logs, mudding, plywood, and paint, 204 × 192 × 144 in. (518.2 × 487.7 × 365.8 cm). Installation view, *Isabelle Frances McGuire: Year Zero*, The Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, 2024

IFM: I really like Hunt's *Hero*, but it took me a second to get into it. For a while, I walked past it without noticing it.

My partner drew my attention to *Hero Construction* and asked me what I thought of that piece installed with the Buren. He opened my eyes to it. In my opinion, those pieces look fantastic together. I believe he thought I was already paying attention to *Hero Construction*, so I'm thankful for my surrogate eyes. Yeah, it has an afterimage of Giacometti, but it also reminds me a little bit of Umberto Boccioni's *Development of a Bottle in Space* [1913]. Maybe in a roundabout way. *Development of a Bottle* and *Hero Construction* contain the essence of a thing while modeling an understanding of the body under industry. I do not know Hunt's history, but when I saw *Hero Construction*, I was thinking about the cyborg.

Where *Development of a Bottle in Space* is emblematic of a shift in relationship to time because of the technological advancement of the factory, *Hero Construction* seems to be its logical kin. *Development of a Bottle* asks: how do I know this object? Or maybe, what are the limits of this object now that I have new tools to understand it? *Hero Construction* asks a succeeding question: how do we understand ourselves culturally now that the human has been integrated with the machine? I don't think this is the only way to dig into *Hero Construction*, but that is the itch I wanted to scratch right now. It would have been a pleasure to look at this sculpture together. I'm wondering where this conversation would have gone.

CHARLES RAY is an artist based in Los Angeles.

From the series *Hand Signs*, 1997. Dye diffusion transfer prints (Polaroids), sheet: 4 ½ × 3 ½ in. (11.4 × 8.9 cm); image: 3 ⅛ × 3 ₁⁄₁₆ in. (7.9 × 7.8 cm) each

BORN 1963
IN OXBOW, SK, CANADA;
DIED 2011 IN ST. PAUL,
AB, CANADA
CREE, COLD LAKE
FIRST NATIONS

KIMOWAN METCHEWAIS

REBECCA HEAD TRAUTMANN:
I thought I would start by sharing a little bit of background about Kimowan and how his work came to the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian [NMAI]. Kimowan was Cree and a member of the Cold Lake First Nations. He lived much of his early life on the Reserve and in nearby Edmonton. He earned a BFA from the University of Alberta in 1996 and an MFA from the University of New Mexico in 1999. In 2000–2002, he did a fellowship at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, where he went on to teach studio art, ultimately as an associate professor. Kimowan didn't consider himself a photographer or painter but a sculptor working in two dimensions. He layered photographs, drawings, text, and other materials, often folding, taping, rephotographing, and printing the works. He passed away in 2011, at the age of forty-seven, after living for years with a rare brain tumor. He left behind an extensive and highly original body of work that includes mixed-media works on paper and canvas, photographs, and wall-sized collages that he called paper walls. He bequeathed to NMAI a collection that includes 160 of his artworks, as well as his personal archive of sketchbooks, journals, hard drives, and nearly a thousand Polaroid photographs. So, I thought I'd start by asking each of you to describe Kimowan's practice and what drew you to his work.

DUANE LINKLATER: Go ahead, Christopher!

CHRISTOPHER GREEN: Thanks, Duane—I mean, I really wanted you to start, because I'm so eager to hear more of the depths of your engagement. But I'm really stuck by the foresight and fluency in the conditions and concerns of contemporary art and contemporary Indigenous art that Metchewais showed throughout his career, and the capacity that his work had for challenging the status quo of how heavily mediated the image of an Indigenous subject has been. His attempts to lighten or to remove the expectations and the conditions of outsider viewers were seemingly inexhaustible! From his large-scale paper walls to his self-portraits, he pursued this idea of what he called a post-Curtis portrait, emptying his images of the baggage of ethnography and colonial stereotypes, and instead creating images that reclaim and restore

Untitled (JUL), 2003. Paper, ink, and adhesive tape on paper, 28 × 28 ½ in. (71 × 72.3 cm)

Untitled, from the series *Self-portraits*, 1998. Dye diffusion transfer print (Polaroid) and adhesive tape, 5 × 3 ½ in. (12.7 × 8.9 cm)

Night, n.d. Paper, ink, and adhesive tape on paper, 71 ⅞ × 50 ½ in. (182.5 × 128.3 cm)

what he called an elevated human status to the image.

RHT: Duane, do you want to talk a little bit about what Kimowan's work means to you, and particularly about what drew you to his project *Without Ground* [2002] at the ICA Philadelphia?

DL: Around 2013, [curator] Liz Park got in touch. We were acquainted, and she was working at the ICA. They were organizing a series of exhibitions for their fiftieth anniversary, and she invited me to participate. I said, "You're inviting me to come along, that's cool. But who, in this fifty-year window that the ICA exists—who were the Indigenous artists who were there before me?" That question is still a valuable one to ask of most institutions anywhere. She did some research and came back and said, "Oh, Kimowan McLain exhibited some work." (He was known as McLain at the time.) I never met him, but we had a few friends in common in Edmonton, where we both had lived, and that had prompted me to look up his work online and to look at it in more depth. I said, "Okay, cool. I know of this guy. Can I have all the information about what he did at the ICA?" And they sent me everything on *Without Ground*.

RHT: Just for a little background, Kimowan talked about North America as a crime scene for Indigenous people. For *Without Ground*, he transferred photographs of himself at different scales directly onto the gallery walls. He described the photographs as "tattoos etched onto the bones of the beast."

DL: Yeah, I found the idea of embedding something like that into a museum really beautiful and poetic and sensitive. I sat with that for a while, and I thought, well, the ICA wasn't offering a lot of resources, but I thought it'd be interesting to find some of these works based on their documentation. But this space had been used for many different exhibitions; there were layers and layers of paint. And there was a catch. They gave me a sanding machine that also sucks up the debris. In my search for Kimowan and his work, I risked damaging his work by looking for it. It became

Without Ground, 2006. Paper, ink, adhesive tape, and acrylic on paper, 40 ¾ × 39 ⅜ in. (103.5 × 100 cm)

a weird feeling of excavation for me, but the vulnerability of him and what he had left behind was—and is—important.

CG: I'm so struck by the poetry of the parallel between Duane's 2014 search and the original piece. Metchewais's figures were arrayed across the walls of this ramp space at the ICA—posing, looking, speaking to one another, even though they were all self-portraits. He had such a virtuosic capacity for the photo transfer. He could create the sense of atmospheric recession just by shifting the pigmentation. Of course, the key of the piece was a reference to the long history of Plains narrative art, from pictographic art and women's geometric abstraction through to ledger art of the Reservation Era and then the Studio School style and artists like the Kiowa Six. That flattened format of figure painting had no ground—so, *Without Ground*. Metchewais is referencing the formal nature of Studio School–style painting, connecting that to the conditions of coloniality, to a search for land, a place to be, a place for standing. Duane's search echoed that forensic, layer-by-layer approach. The stakes you brought up, where you are at once searching for and unearthing the archive, really speak to the stakes of the

Raincloud, 2010. Paper, giclée print, acrylic, and ink on canvas, 25 × 24 × 1 ½ in. (81.5 × 71.5 × 4 cm)

body and of the histories of Indigenous artists.

DL: I think back to, what was I searching for? I was searching for him. As a young artist, I was looking for other artists who looked like me and who were interested in contemporary art like I was. There's something important about an Indigenous person seeking out another Indigenous person—to communicate, to learn, to connect. We just sort of missed each other at the University of Alberta, but in his work I found a uniqueness that was—that is still—resonant and powerful and beautiful and problematic and investigative. There's a contradictory articulation of vulnerability. On the one hand, he's not afraid to show his body, his hands, his face, his hair. But it's not vulnerability as weakness; it became his position of strength.

RHT: That makes me also think about the vulnerability of his leaving his archive, with his studies and sketchbooks and personal writings. It was thoughtful and generous of him to keep this body of work and archive together. That context is so important for approaching his work.

CG: I'm struck by what an invitation his work is today. His magnum opus, the large-scale paper wall-hanging *Cold Lake* [2004]—he writes about it as a kind of prayer, but like so much of his work, it's also an invitation to a shared experience and to have the intimacy of relationship—like, Duane, you're speaking about—with someone you've never met. A lot of that comes down to the tactility and physicality of these works. He wrote that he loved Polaroids so much because nothing compares to the silky touch of a Polaroid in the palm of one's hand. And the beautiful series *Hand Signs* [1997] he did, the hand alongside the direct gaze of the self-portraits, always in vulnerable positions. They invite this close connection, and they're an invitation to come on this intimate journey across borders, one which today seems more relevant than ever, as borders and the politics of the body are being so brutally enforced, here in the US and so many places elsewhere.

RHT: He wanted his work to be innovative and contemporary, but also meaningful to his Cold Lake community, and for them to see that it carried on a long tradition.

DL: Yeah, there are Cree syllabics embedded in *Cold Lake*. What I take from that is, while there are so many ways he's communicating to so many people in that piece, formally and otherwise, at the center, he's speaking specifically to the Cree people. It's a unique and special kind of communication. There's something incredibly kind about that.

CG: What's so visually powerful about that beautiful idea is that Metchewais so cleverly used visual, formal cues—these cut-up, rephotographed Polaroids, for example—to play with the legibility of the image in a way where, at times, certain knowledge is withheld or reserved for certain communities of viewers.

DL: Then, in some of the works, he approaches photography almost as a kind of documentation. Life on Cold Lake, for example. There's a kindness there, and an openness in showing the people and their community, their way of life. When you start connecting that to other Indigenous artists of different generations, working in different forms . . . I think of Allen Sapp, this incredible painter—documenting Cree life, painting what he saw. These different artists in proximity to each other, geographically and culturally. It begins to compose this Indigenous art history. *That's* what I wanted to know about as a student, because I wasn't seeing myself in the work of artists I was being taught. But with Kimowan, I did; with Allen Sapp, I did. And a number of artists in that group. There's an alternate value system and perspective being articulated by Kimowan through his work and his archive, and he made it available to all of us, for anyone to see. Why would he do that? To me, that's—I'm not sure how to articulate it. So generous and kind. It's pretty amazing.

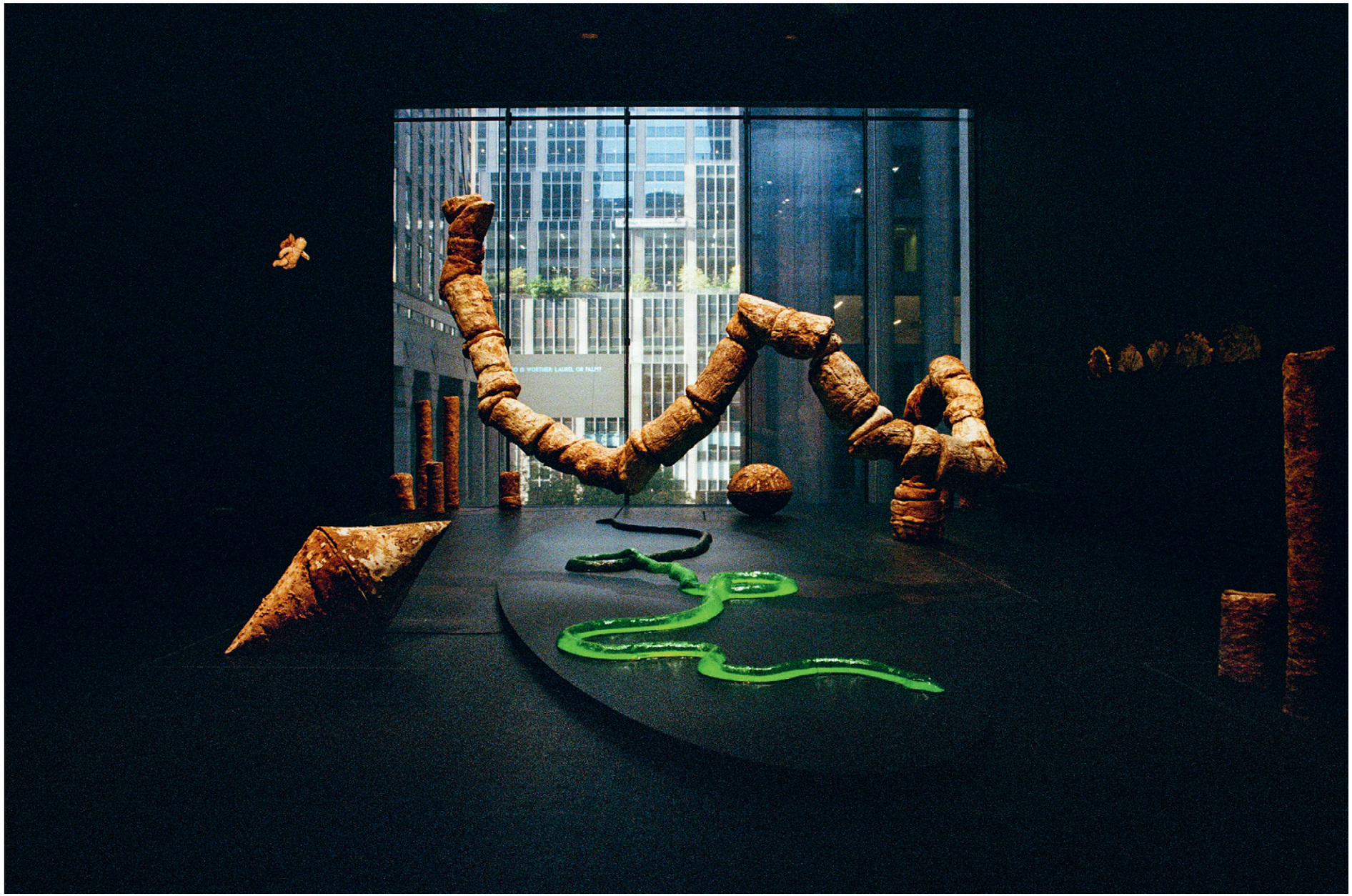
CHRISTOPHER GREEN is a New York area–based writer and art historian who is currently visiting assistant professor of art history and environmental studies at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

DUANE LINKLATER is an Omaskêko Cree artist.

REBECCA HEAD TRAUTMANN is Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC.

NOUR MOBARAK

**BORN 1985
IN CAIRO;
LIVES IN BAINBRIDGE
ISLAND, WA,
AND ATHENS, GREECE**



Dafne Phono, 2021–23. Digital video, color and fifteen-channel sound, 21:44 min.; *Pleurotus citrinopileatus* (golden oyster) mycelium and *Trametes versicolor* (turkey tail) mycelium; hardwood sawdust; plaster; polyethylene terephthalate; silicone; steel; and vacuum; dimensions variable. Installation view, *Nour Mobarak: Dafne Phono*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2024

NUAR ALSADIR: What strikes me in your work is how poetic it is. You've said that you were a poet before everything. Could you talk about that?

NOUR MOBARAK: When I was a kid, I had stirrings in the middle of the night: I'd get up and write things down. It came out as sort of science-fiction-y worlds. As I got older, my sense of absurdity was awakened, and the deconstruction of language became more meaningful.

Washington D.C.: Family and Friends Cheer as Father's Plane Takes Off, 2021. Raw linen, oil, *Trametes versicolor* (turkey tail) mycelium, applewood sawdust, millet, and plexiglass, 16 × 22 × 2 in. (40.6 × 55.9 × 5.1 cm)

I went to the University of Sussex, with the "new British poetry" scene and poet Keston Sutherland as a professor. I felt what was happening with language there was what I meant. That's when I started writing poems. Poetry can break down language; language is visual, sonic, systematized, and semantic.

NA: "Stirrings" is a great word—it reminds me of [psychoanalyst] Donald Winnicott's "spontaneous gestures," which he saw as expressions of the true self: the wellspring of creative forces lodged in each of us from birth, which some parents affirm and others correct.

NM: When I was young, it wasn't always my place to really express myself in a "true self" way. There were expectations for how I was supposed to act. I'm from a bourgeois Lebanese family; we immigrated to the United States when I was four. My family left home because of the Lebanese Civil War, and they moved around a lot. I was born in Egypt, then we moved to Italy, and later to the US—and we continued to move around. My dad went back to Lebanon—he couldn't handle the culture here. My mother tried to assimilate, but I think in some ways it was difficult for her. There was illness in the family, not to mention PTSD from the war. I'm the baby in the family, and I watched everybody spin out. . . . I was supposed to be the sane one, the happy one. I was a very polite kid.

NA: Do you think that's why you had those stirrings in the night?

NM: Yeah. I wrote a lot at night. And then one day, my computer was sold at a yard sale, and I lost all that writing!

NA: That makes me think of your work, which is so much about process. The fact that you don't know what happened to that product—or the *product* wasn't the goal—seems fitting.

NM: There is something liberating about that. Ephemerality eventually became very important to my work. It also had to do with resisting the idea of making a product for political and economic reasons. I didn't really show anything other than live sound and performance before I was in my mid-thirties. Then there was a turning point: I made a record in 2019 called *Synapse Fusion Refusal*. It was the first thing I sort of committed to the world; before that, I felt uncomfortable making anything *fixed*. Since then I've accepted that, as an artist, you have a practice—no work is a singular work. For that reason, I'm now comfortable producing. If it's not exactly right, there's always something that can be broken down again.

NA: That's a good entry point for the mycelium.

NM: Mycelium—the root structure of the mushroom—creates by breaking down the substrate that it's eating. I'm enlivened by it as a material, because it creates by decomposing. So I'm able to make positive objects with it through a negative process. I also like that an outside system takes part in the creation of my work.

The first works I made with the material were the *Fugue* sound sculptures in 2019. I embedded speakers into columns of mycelium. One column broadcasts conversations I had with my father, who had a neurological disease that let him remember things for only about thirty seconds. Our conversations were repeated like the Baroque contrapuntal compositional style of the fugue. The other channel of sound is my improvised singing. In the final piece, the two channels are played simultaneously: my inner psychic space plays alongside the psychic space between a daughter and her father. There are many analogous processes happening: the decomposition of my father's brain, the rhizomatic structure of the mycelium . . . so it's about this idea of decomposition-recomposition.

NA: You've described your father as very creative and artistic, and you've said that part of you wished that you had him there as a guide. But in the end, you realized that he *had* guided you, because your album *Father Fugue* [2019] was your first really significant work, and he was an enormous force in that.

NM: Making that work made me realize many things. I started it when I was

Recto Verso 2.4 (Mycelium Magenta), 2024–25. Epoxy resin, liquid pigment, and *Trametes versicolor* (turkey tail) mycelium, 36 × 30 × 1 ½ in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 3.8 cm)

Recto Verso 2.2 (Green Cobalt), 2024–25. Epoxy resin and liquid pigment, 36 × 30 × 1 in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 2.5 cm)

nineteen. I was just trying to find ways to pass the time when we were together. I'd bring a video camera or a recorder, and we would play together; we'd exchange unofficial sound poems. He was a brilliant person—and that didn't change, of course, when his brain changed; it just functioned differently, in an absolute presence. Making the work also taught me a lot about rationality versus irrationality.

NA: That brings us back to poetry, which is marginally about meaning—the meaning and logic of words—but more about the way it reaches the reader or listener's body. It transfers from body to body; that's what makes it poetry. Your work engages the body so much. And including mycelium in your work is like letting the id in—you can't control it. It's very psychoanalytic: lamenting the lack of a father figure to guide you, and then giving over guidance to a nonrational source that will determine your work in a way that you can't anticipate.

NM: I did feel like my work was set to express repressed thoughts or feelings, to accept the full range of my humanity—including what rots—to avoid becoming fully neurotic. And for a time, I was making all my sculptures with mycelium, but working with it started to become a burden. I couldn't be impulsive with it; it needs a lot of care. That was a good lesson.

I was drawn to try epoxy resin, which is what my latest sculptures are made of. When I started working with epoxy resin to make a sculpture of a snake, I became totally hypnotized by it—it's so beautiful! I get to follow a very primal instinct when I work with resin . . . but it's also a toxic, petroleum-based material, so it's awful, it's evil! With the mycelium, there's the romance of having this ecologically responsible material that can decompose and so on. But there is something seductive about working with the evil of the world.

NA: The *Recto Verso* works [2024–25] are beautiful, but they also have the energy of something political. What was happening in your life when you were making those sculptures?

NM: I had just come out of a huge and complicated project with mycelium sculptures, *Dafne Phono* [2021–23]. I was reading about Palestine and the United States and feeling like any art I could make was almost futile. I was so disgusted and disturbed that all I could think to do was to just sit in some brown, wet clay and moon the audience. I then imprinted these molds of my ass into this synthetic—but seductive and beautiful—epoxy resin . . . something about that felt meaningful to what's going on with the world. As somebody who's been moved around because of political forces and finally found my own free will, there was something about acknowledging the body as *home*—and all you have—that felt right. It's also a joke: it's stupid and not rational

in a way. There's something escapist about it—while making the work I was able to fall back into form, color, light, and space.

Meanwhile, and then while I was pregnant, I made sound pieces by putting a microphone up my vagina, to be able to hear the world from inside my body. It was interesting listening to things from this other perspective—the way the body's mechanics work inside as we go about our day and how it filters the sounds around us.

NA: You made a recording at your doctor's office: a part of *Broad's Cast #7* [2025].

NM: I made a recording while I was at the OB/GYN, listening to my baby's heart. And then I placed that speaker on my belly, so there's a recording of the inside of my body being broadcast *back* into the inside of my body, being recorded from inside my body. It was an uncanny feeling listening to that.

NA: This is a random question—do you like to throw parties?

NM: I love to throw parties.

NA: I feel that in your work. Throwing a party involves setting up a situation, then inviting random elements and factors in, as with the mycelium and epoxy resin. You can never control what happens.

There's also the collective unconscious at play, and the individual unconscious. What we think of as random is a way of getting to a deeper level. I think your work plays with what appears to be random but is actually an opening for deeper forces to seep through.

NM: As with the way I was raised, there was a desire to break down everything that was *comme il faut*—"as it must be." My first instinct in making art was to be very vulnerable, not care, and try anything. Once I lost all sense of propriety, that was a gift.

NA: There's also the *comme il faut* of political silence.

NM: Oh, yes: we don't talk about certain political realities. I mean, there are no words for the things that we've witnessed: they are unspeakable, or unconscionable.

Recto Verso 1.1 (Coral Green), 2024–25. Epoxy resin and liquid pigment, 36 × 30 × 1 ½ in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 3.8 cm)

NA: I think there's a gulf between struggling with what's unspeakable and silence. If something is unspeakable, you can improvise with it, you can find a way to express. But silence shuts it down.

NM: Right: there's the utterance. Antonin Artaud's screams in the recording *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* [1947] are incredible; they say more than any text can say. You listen to him screaming and it feels like the most accurate expression of the horrors of reality.

NA: Because it targets the body.

NM: That's right. I have a baby at home, and when she screams . . . it's potent! It feels like she's screaming from the source of all the pain in the universe—from which we all pull when we feel pain. The one pain.

NUAR ALSADIR is a poet, nonfiction writer, and psychoanalyst, and author most recently of *Animal Joy: A Book of Laughter and Resuscitation* (2022).

Recto Verso 1.3 (Burgundy Orange), 2024–25. Epoxy resin and liquid pigment, 36 × 30 × 1 in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 2.5 cm)

ERIN JANE NELSON

BORN 1989
IN NEENAH, WI;
LIVES IN SANTA FE, NM

Installation view of *Erin Jane Nelson: Sublunary*, Chapter NY, New York, 2023

MARGOT NORTON: We were recently discussing how you've been getting at the core of what has inspired your work, even going back to being very young. I'm curious to hear more about how you returned to an interest in making pinhole cameras, which you had early on.

ERIN JANE NELSON: Pinhole photography and collage were my main entry points into making art when I was a teenager, and now, twenty years later, I've been making ceramic sculptures that also function as pinhole cameras.

Bladderwort, 2023. Silk and cotton pigment prints, embroidered patches, cotton batting, and nylon, 34 × 42 in. (86.4 × 106.7 cm)

Opposite: *Sunflower Cam*, 2025. Pigment prints and found materials on glazed stoneware, 25 × 24 × 18 in. (63.5 × 61 × 45.7 cm)

I came back to it at a moment when I was feeling upset with the violence in the world, and a bit burnt out on the art world—not knowing how to find my place and feeling confused about what art could or should do. It seemed right to try to go back to the beginning.

For the last six years, I've used ceramics as a support structure for photographs, but the two processes were always intentionally a bit disjointed: the process of making the ceramics was formal and intuitive and bodily; the photographic process more conceptual or research-oriented. Then one night it finally clicked how the two techniques could start to merge in a new way: what if the sculptures made the photographs, and then could also be adorned with images of their own making? After using mostly digital cameras for the last decade, I was attracted to the camera obscura as such a simple form of imaging technology. Photography has grown to be this medium of exactitude and control and illusion, and now with AI, it's even more of a controlled uncanny reality. In this moment of feeling as though I had no control or understanding of the world around me, a world that is very messy and unpredictable—it felt appropriate to go back to a form of photography that is perhaps the least precise and controlled.

MN: Thinking about these processes and how they relate, I also find myself thinking about how within your work there are continuous cyclical relationships. The clay comes from the earth and is refashioned into another form, which captures it in an image. There's always this collaboration between you and the material, a collaboration that's embedded with chance. I think of your glazes and how they create patterns that resemble universes or something microscopic. I'm curious to hear your thoughts on both the ceramic and photographic material processes, and how they speak to one another so intimately.

EJN: For me, the ceramic forms and the photographs were both different ways of recording that were slow and inherently abstracted from their original source. Now the process is even slower. I went back to analog photography for the first time in about twelve years in this work, and that shift really underscored the similarity of the two mediums. Both are very alchemical, where there is a state-change that, as the maker, I am not witness to. With ceramics, you make something wet and have to wait for it to dry, then there's the firing and glazing, with this invisible transformation happening each time the work goes through the kiln. It can take weeks. The photography is similar. There's not a lab within 250 miles of Santa Fe that can process the kind of film I'm using. But I think something special happens in all that anticipation; the loss of immediacy changes the way I make decisions in the work.

MN: It almost doesn't feel as if it's even rooted in a specific time. And I think it addresses something very elemental

A Carnivorous Year, 2023. Pigment prints, sequins, and bio-based resin on glazed stoneware, 62 × 64 × 5 in. (157.5 × 162.6 × 12.7 cm)

about art-making. I'm interested in this type of film you're using where you can't find a developer within 250 miles—

EJN: It's from a collection of expired color film that a friend had saved from when he was in college in the early 2000s, when photography was moving from analog to digital. There are very few places that process film anymore, and when you get into larger formats like four-by-five, which is mostly what I'm using, it gets into weird territory.

MN: Does this also reflect the shapes of the images you're making? I saw some of the pinhole cameras, and they definitely were not meant to capture a square, straightforward image.

EJN: Yeah, I want to continue to play with moving outside the rectangle. Rather than the film limiting or determining the form of the cameras, though, I think it's the camera that complicates how the film performs inside it. That kind of push–pull between the apparatus and the image is something I'm especially interested in with this work.

MN: Shifting gears, the space of the swamp is something that has recurred in your practice. I'm curious to hear about what's fascinated you with that ecology, especially after moving from Georgia to Santa Fe.

EJN: Edge environments have always interested me, where water meets land and how that creates unique and adaptive ecologies—there's so much potential for richness and new life or biological changes, the way a frog goes from being gooey eggs to a water-bound tadpole to a creature who can live exclusively on land, for example, or the way swamps have such a high concentration of carnivorous plants. But edge environments have also been sites of intense moments of human history, especially in the United States, right? Of violence, civilizations, colonization. A lot of the work that I was making in the swamp centered on that tension, between what the ecology could teach us about ourselves in terms of adaptability and flux but then also thinking about the cultural history of swamps. The Okefenokee Swamp, where I was making work for the last few years, had always been a site of resistance, first for Indigenous populations, and then enslaved people. There was also this woman nicknamed the Queen of the Okefenokee, Lydia Stone Crews, who in the 1800s decided she didn't want to follow the traditional woman's path and instead created a bootlegging and timber empire of her own. So it's been a place where humans who haven't fit within the parameters of the dominant society have gone to create their own safe havens. And then there is also the cultural layer where swamps have historically been home to witches and women deemed malevolent by cultural norms.

Moving to a place that's so dry has been jarring in a lot of ways. But the lack of something often is just as powerful as the presence of it. As I've started to work in and photograph the New Mexico landscape, I've found myself searching for evidence of water, whether that's photographing flowers, or now-dried snowmelt pathways, or these wetland systems that only occur in this part of the world called *ciénagas*.

MN: There's something about these places—they're not land; they're not water. They don't want to be fixed. And I think about how that relates to your work, how you're thinking about these murky, messy processes, exalting the idea of something being unfixed. I love that—

EJN: Thank you. Yeah, I love the idea of materials being fugitive and unfixed, prone to changing over time or straddling several mediums. I love art history, but when you're working with, say, pure painting or sculpture, you're contending with such an intense canon. I prefer making my own rules about how art can perform, inspired by many different mediums and makers and aesthetic histories.

MN: We've talked before about your relationship with your grandfather, and now that's why you're in Santa Fe.

EJN: Yeah, I ended up moving here unexpectedly in 2024 to help care for my grandparents. My grandfather was raised for part of his childhood by his own

Angel, 2025. Pigment print, found materials, and resin on glazed stoneware, 11 ½ × 14 ½ × 1 ½ in. (29.2 × 36.8 × 3.8 cm)

grandfather, Alois Lang, who worked as an ecclesiastical wood carver. Lang did woodcarving in a lot of churches throughout the Midwest, including Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago, which I've started to make work about. Being reminded of this artistic lineage has been influencing the work, but also I've been thinking about how in research, we reach back to the past and forward to the future, often at the same time. Lang was taking care of my grandfather as a very young boy, right? And now I'm taking care of him on the other side of his life. What might transfer artistically between that linkage? A hundred years ago, he was turning wood and trees into devotional objects, and here I am turning clay into what I think of as somewhat devotional objects. I'd never made that connection, even though I've known about his legacy my whole life. In some of this new work, I've been photographing his sculptures—which are all over my grandparents' house—with my sculptures as a way to try to commune with him.

MN: This idea of care and also of gestation was a part of the work you presented in the New Museum Triennial in 2021. I'm interested to hear how that's evolved in your recent work.

EJN: Even as I've made a very conscious decision not to have children, I've always been curious about having been born with the potential to gestate new life—how that energy might be reclaimed or repurposed both literally and conceptually in an art practice.

Ciénega, 2025. Pigment print, found materials, and resin on glazed stoneware, 11 ½ × 14 ½ × 1 ½ in. (29.2 × 36.8 × 3.8 cm)

MN: I love this idea of gestation being applied to creativity, because the idea of the creative act is often very dominated in patriarchal tendencies towards—

EJN: The outward thrust!

MN: Exactly!

EJN: Just being quiet and going inward is a creative act. We tend to discount that—I know I did for many years. What's funny about this recent work is that, if I look back on the practice for the last ten years, the buildup to what I'm making now is so clear. A few years ago, I was making these vessels where the interior was collaged, almost like this inward gaze. Then the cameras have this kind of gestational nature: There is this dark space that we can't see, this invisible place where light happens and creates an impression, and it's a private thing between the sculpture and the film inside. I love that there's something unknowable that's happening inside of the work. There's something that's withheld from me as the maker, and I'm just kind of facilitating. It's this convening between light, emulsion, and clay, and I'm a mediator for the earth to photograph itself.

MARGOT NORTON is Chief Curator at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA.

BORN 1993
IN LONDON;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

PRECIOUS OKOYOMON

I wanted to kill but had nothing to kill, 2025. Artist-made children's toys with taxidermied bird wings, rope, and motors, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Precious Okoyomon: ONE EITHER LOVES ONESELF OR KNOWS ONESELF*, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria, 2025

BRACHA L. ETTINGER: Precious! So great to see you again. I would like to ask a few questions regarding certain motives in your work that speak to me and that I love, but I would like you to think about them starting with the artistic vision and then move to the biographical, not the other way around. Your work has a presence that, I believe, also has to do with different artistic notions, which then allows you to think about biography and the past. So, starting from the works and moving to life: what is the meaning of coemergence for you? I start with the work. I *feel* the relationship between the viewer and your stuffed inanimate creatures—the big ones that care for us; the small one with wings, which are quite monstrous. Who is caring for whom in these works? Who is giving hospitality?

PRECIOUS OKOYOMON: I think I'm always thinking through a noncoercive rearrangement of desire. How can I move in such subtle, small ways to make and unmake, to do and undo?

I'm interested in what forms in that space, where it's this new political economy of exchange, and then it's a new type of entanglement. And the space that's brought up inside of there maybe is somewhere where there's hope. The entanglement that I engage in is a sort of gift that turns the inner to the outer. That's where the grace is for me, because that's the hospitality. It's giving you space to rest. The monstrosity is terrifying but also an angel in its own way.

BLE: The people and the horrible meet on the edge of this shared border-space.

PO: That's part of the fragilization for me. It's one thing to say, "Accept love," but if you don't know how to open up like that, it can be very difficult.

BLE: Can we say in creating these moments, you are in a mode of "self-fragilization," but also inviting viewers to be vulnerable with you?

You have got to sometimes become the medicine you want to take (detail), 2025. Artist-made children's toys with taxidermied bird wings, rope, and motor, dimensions variable

PO: Yes, because vulnerability is quite scary for people; you have to be soft enough to see the self and have a lot of grace for the self, and not turn the other into a place of fear. So, I'm really trying to create the space where it could happen naturally, this slow unmaking of you, and it doesn't feel terrifying. I'm trying to get to the root to allow some new space, which is just the space that's already always there, but maybe we haven't had any way to hold it before.

BLE: And that place can both wound and heal. Which means that we are on the border between life-drive and death-drive, the desire to destroy and to further life. It's very clear in your work on the butterfly [*the world requires something of me and I'm looking for a place to lie down*, 2025]—what is safe and gives life to the butterfly can be poisonous to another type of life. That border between learning how to heal from trauma and go into that spiral of love—that place is very tender and intensive and strong. Now I would like to take you from the work and have you tell us a bit about your own life. When did you become aware that you were a poet and an artist?

PO: Everything was kind of a poem for me at a very young age. It was the place where I found light in a lot of darkness, and it helped me make figurative gardens in a way. When I was young, I would write poems and put them in the ground, and hoped that they would become these prayers that I was actually planting. So I don't think it was a transition of, "Oh, I'm becoming an artist now." It was a mode of self-understanding, of me continuously asking a lot of questions. And then it spiraled out of hand. For me, everything still is a poem. It hasn't changed. I feel in some ways I'm still planting poems inside of the ground like I did when I was seven. It's just the only way I know how to understand the world.

BLE: I know that your roots, your identity—these are complex. And that

in the belly of the sun endless, 2025. Faux fur and leather, plush, cotton, foam, polystyrene, polyurethane, resin, silicone, acrylic, and carpet, 56 11/16 × 166 5/16 × 157 ½ in. (144 × 422.5 × 400 cm). Installation view, *Precious Okoyomon: ONE EITHER LOVES ONESELF OR KNOWS ONESELF*, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria, 2025

complexity plays a role in your work. I'd like you to speak about that, but also in the context of dreaming, because you have said dreaming is important.

PO: Well, I feel where I live is in and out of worlds. I'm grateful my body is not the only place I live, that is why dreams are so central for me, because dreaming keeps me rooted in love. I actually believe dreams are an unconscious space that we go to. So, I always find it such a gift when I've made that space to be easily accessed, whether that is in my everyday life, a ritual of art-making, or making space for meditation. My ritual of doing analysis makes it easier for me to be in my body and also be in the spiritual world. It is real, actual work that then makes the soil fertile for everything else. It brings new energy to my life continuously. It's probably also why I'm so big on collaboration, because I'm so desperately trying to see other people and make space for them. And in return I want to be seen and be unmade, and then real fragilization can happen. Then we start to blur, because, figuratively, for me, utopic fantasy is actually just all of the world dreaming together, being in tune with everything around us, including the planet that we live on. Humanity is not separate from nature.

BLE: Absolutely. Which means that we will recognize it as a kind of living being that needs us to care for it because it cares for us a lot. What is important in your work is that we understand that we are part of nature and part of the universe that is endlessly giving to us.

PO: And how do we witness that? How do we witness that which is already and always occurring? It's a different way of understanding the world we live in, and I think it fixes a lot of our problems of -isms.

BLE: We witness through *with*-nessing. We take the risk of discovering the joint space, and we become smaller than an individual self.

PO: Which is a freedom!

BLE: Exactly! It's a freedom for all those who participate.

PO: For everyone involved. That's entangled.

BLE: It's a proposition to create spaces where whoever enters gains freedom out of this co-respondence-ability. The breath is coming and going, we share it, and we share beyond the conscious and beyond the unconscious, beyond the individual conscious mind, even beyond the collective conscious mind, because we share on the level of the sub-real, where a lot of things are exchanged. This is quite clear in the butterflies.

I want to address the question of femininity in the human and in the animal and in the atmosphere and in life and in your work. Maybe it starts from the goddess—

PO: Completely. To reframe it I always say, "Because that's how nature works." This continuous force of grace and spontaneous compassion, you see it in the everyday movement of how the world organizes itself. That's the divine feminine to me. It's powerful, it's violent, it's beautiful. How do we not be afraid of that? How do we acknowledge it within ourselves in a way that isn't separate from the self? That's why I'm always, like, "Humanity is not separate from nature." You carry it. It lives very much inside you.

BLE: Tell me about the cultural ties and heritage: where do you put yourself in this universe among poets and artists? Where do you feel at home?

PO: I think it's the soil that I'm made of. I say, "I can't be anything but the things that made me." I'm a Nigerian American who grew up in many different places, so I have a unique perspective of the world. All of my influences are based in the soil that loved me, which was poetry. A lot of these poets showed me a way to dream outside of the world I was living in. Maybe I've been doing that from a very young age, because of being a child of immigrants, the constant migration and movement, and then laying down new roots, seeds spreading quickly. I think about my relationship to invasive species and native plants from that perspective. I'm continuously made and unmade. So it is American in some ways, but also it isn't, because you can't control where a seed blows, and it's continuously being made and remade. The gardens that I loved growing up were like Derek Jarman's, his garden in the desert, and the stories I went to were Toni Morrison's, Octavia Butler's. World builders, dreamers—

BLE: Immigration, the anxiety of migration, the forced migration of ancestors—this is something that links us across continents. You could be born in England; you could live in America—still, the unresolved weight and transmitted trauma from past generations is looking for a voice. And you give it a voice. It's beautiful how you put it: things have to grow quickly, but they carry a weight of generations. I'm thinking again about your piece with the butterfly, where, in fact, it is the butterflies that are performing the performance of the butterflies. How short their life is, but in that short span there is this kind of eternal moment,

of the quickness of planting yourself and then thinking, "Okay, what now? How do I manage all of that and make it graceful?"

PO: It reminds me of Heidegger's *On the Way to Language*, which I was really into when I was younger because it was thinking about movement as continuous, not knowing where you're going but being on the way to something that is slowly unforming. I always say I don't know. Things are emerging from this path of not knowing, and that's freedom to me. Because I find so much on the way to the language that I'm forming. And that's the poem, you know.

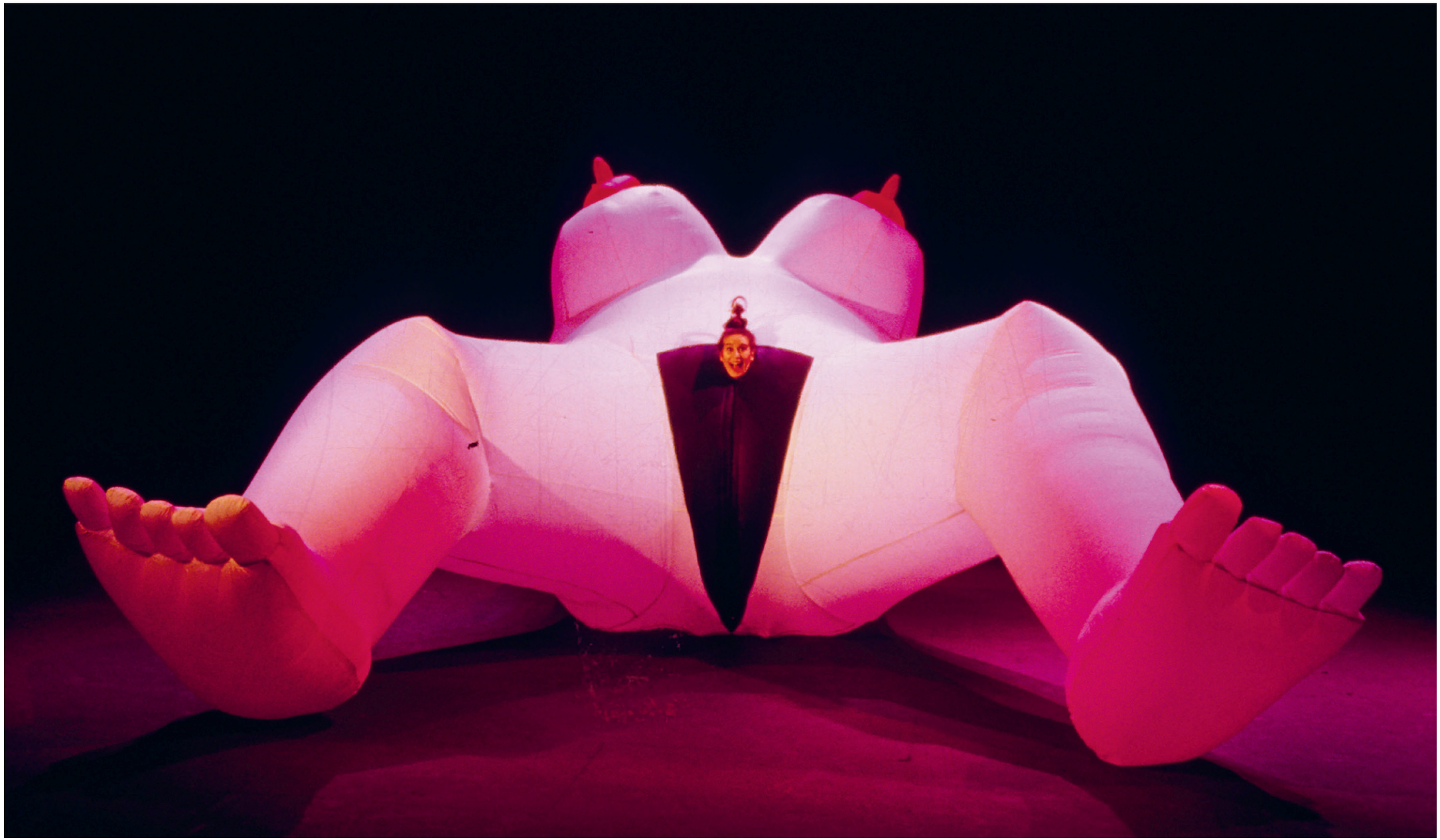
BRACHA L. ETTINGER is a painter, visual artist, and psychoanalyst and is the originator of matrixial theory.

Opposite: *the world requires something of me and I'm looking for a place to lie down* (detail), 2025. Mesh structure, seven species of butterflies, black-sugar water, and sixty-two species of plants, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Precious Okoyomon: ONE EITHER LOVES ONESELF OR KNOWS ONESELF*, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria, 2025

Right: *You have got to sometimes become the medicine you want to take* (detail), 2025. Artist-made children's toys with taxidermied bird wings, rope, and motor, dimensions variable

BORN 1947
IN DETROIT;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

PAT OLESZKO



Womb with a View, 1993, from the project *Nora's Art*, 1993. Nylon and blower, 105 ⅝ × 192 × 216 in. (268.2 × 487.7 × 548.6 cm). Performance view, The Kitchen, New York, 1993

WARD SHELLEY: Can you describe the kind of work that you do? Because you're not only a maker, you're also a performer, and both parts really intermesh.

PAT OLESZKO: First, I'm going to deliver a line that I've used many times: I make a spectacle of myself, and I don't mind if you laugh. That phrase encompasses the fact that I use my body as an armature for ideas; it literally becomes the vehicle for the notions in motion. In creating a kind of living, breathing art form, I make all the accoutrements to represent, enhance, or expound upon the idea. And they're all hanging on the armature of my six-foot frame.

Libertease A Broad, 1992. Fabric, foamcore, dolls, and fiberfill, 48 × 24 × 84 in. (121.9 × 61 × 213.4 cm)

WS: So you might say you make a costume, but it's very sculptural and extravagant.

PO: I think of myself as basically a sculptor, but my sculpture also sweats. I got into it because I couldn't quite learn how to weld properly when I was in college. In order to escape the humiliation from my mostly male cohorts, I started working at home, and I had a sewing machine. In that kind of self-Pygmalion moment, it was *Eureka!*; I walked off the pedestal and out into life using the world as a *stooge*, to use another phrase I like. So the sculpture is live, and it has a life in the world at large. I do performances that are on the streets, on the stage, in films; I do interventions; I do street walking, ever in heavy disguise. I work on the beaches, on mountaintops, in burlesque houses, trailer parks, in the forest, in the garbage. . .

WS: And you've been doing it—working in your own niche, really—for almost sixty years. How did you get started?

PO: I was at art school at the University of Michigan. Ann Arbor was a center of counterculture during the 1960s, and it has this vaunted "underground" film festival: six nights, six hours a night. Every night, I would make a different character and go on stage to comment on the series and perform a five-minute bit. Then I moved to New York in 1970, and before I left, one of my mentors said, "Pat, we've got to figure out a way for you to make a living. You don't want to just be a hired freak at a party."

WS: The first thing I ever saw that you did was a woman with blue hair prancing around the fountain outside the Metropolitan Opera in the middle of a season opening or something.

PO: She was part of the series *New Yuck Women* [1971] that I developed when I first got to New York. I did all of these very bizarre and extremely exaggerated renditions of New York types, because when I came to New York, it was like coming to the Land of Oz: there was a DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] character; there was Sally Sexretary, who had enormous breasts with a see-through dress that got me arrested when I wore it to the [New York] Easter Parade; the Playboy Bunny, which got me kicked out of the Bunny Club; the Women's Lip; the Model Model wearing shoes made out of coffee tins that made me seven feet tall . . .

WS: Each a kind of parody, and each a woman, which is interesting, given the surge of second-wave feminism at the time.

PO: Yeah, but they didn't take me seriously. I took *New Yuck Women* to *MS. Magazine*, and [Art Director] Bea Feitler looked at it and said, "Why do you make these things? Why don't you just make drawings?" And I thought, "Oh, boy, am I in the wrong place." They got their comeuppance later, though, when I sold them the idea of the Statue of Liberty for the cover of their bicentennial issue: me on my giant, two-foot pedestal shoes that I'd made out of Styrofoam, dropping the Declaration of Independence. It's been shown in many different iterations since, including walking in the Easter Parade.

WS: Parades have been one of the ways that you've inserted yourself into the culture: you would just decide to show up as one of your characters, very often created for that parade. That started at a time, I would say, in New York, when there were fewer places to perform; you more or less had to kind of create your own situations.

PO: I had a gig at the Museum of Modern Art, at an evening for young people. I strung together a bunch of my shorter five-minute pieces that I'd done in Ann Arbor so that I could have a half-hour show, which gave me a theatrical idea that I could occupy an evening. I took the show, *Clothe Your Eyes Revue*, to The Kitchen for my first stage show.

WS: This was before people were using the term "performance art."

PO: Oh, yeah. There was no name for it.

WS: But Roselee [Goldberg] was there, and of course, she ended up writing the book *Performance Art* [1979], more or less giving it its legs. Before I met you, I already knew what you looked

Pasta Madonna, 1999, from the project *Roamin' Holiday*, 1999. Pasta, cardboard, fabric, and fiberfill, 84 × 36 × 36 in. (213.4 × 91.4 × 91.4 cm). Performance view, Rome, 1999

like because you were in that book. Which performance was included in the book?

PO: *Coat of Arms* [1974]. What would you imagine a coat of arms to be? It was a black coat with twenty-six different arms, each clutching and pointing in different directions with these stuffed, bright-white gloves. It was an extremely important piece for me. It was done in response to a party invitation to celebrate the *Surrealist Manifesto*, and Milton Glaser and all these people in the art and design world were there. After that event, it became, literally, a signature piece in many different performances. I also did a female version—the *Handmaiden* [1975]—where instead of all the arms reaching outwards, they're pointing in and pawing at my form. It was probably the epitome of my stripping concept as I peeled off all those grasping arms to a soundtrack of relentless punning on hands, arms, "armor," "amour," etcetera.

WS: How did *Blowhard* [1995] come about?

PO: I've been making inflatables for years; it fulfills the need I had to make large sculpture, which started when I was in college. There had been times when I put costumes on trees or on buildings, but then I realized, I can make something and fill it with air, and then it would be huge presence. I started making some characters based on very peculiar news stories, and it fulfilled everything I could ever want in a performance: easy to pack, not heavy, and it could visually appear and disappear in magical moments. I made a lot of the inflatables for performances, and then I rented them out for parties as a way to make money. At one point, I was commissioned by the Downtown Art Alliance to make an inflatable for the plaza of the World Trade Center. It was the biggest space I had ever worked in, so I made this massive character—*Blowhard*—and two others, *Anchorbat* and *Juglure*.

Blowhard, 1995. Nylon and blower, 408 × 156 × 222 in. (1036.3 × 396.2 × 563.9 cm). Installation view, SculptureCenter, Long Island City, NY, 2025

Hello Folly: The Floes & Cons of Arctic Drilling, 2015. Polyethylene fiber, gloves, swim goggles, interfacing, plastic bags, plastic tubes, foamcore, plastic containers, cardboard, megaphone, dowels, foam insulation, fabric, and marching band. Performance view, Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 2015

WS: You're still working, still doing shows, but one of the things that I feel you're also doing regularly are political demonstrations and parades of your own making. I've been lucky enough to wear some of your costumes—I was a *George Butch*, a *Dumpty Trumpty*, and I've been *The Weeping World*. That was in the parade that used the polar bears from *Hello Folly* [2015], about global warming. These parades normally have fifteen to thirty people, all wearing costumes that you make for them. You've always had a voice, and you've always taken some interest in the political problems of America. That's something that's as relevant today as ever, right?

PO: The work has always been political; it's always been a critique or had a specific viewpoint, usually in direct opposition to the norm. And so the work is in politics, it's in the environment, it's in social structure. I do the parades because it came to a point where, you're only getting a certain kind of audience when people are paying money to see a show; it's not really spreading the news. So the parades have become a bigger part of the practice. I'm taking them out there; I'm reaching kids and not the usual art-going public—which is major, because kids are the future.

WS: Clearly you value absurdity and satire. Why do you think humor is important, especially today?

PO: Every artist has a realm within which they operate. It goes from tragedy to comedy. Most people are solidly centered in the middle. But my brain is rooted in humor. No matter the subject, I somehow have to find a way to deal with it that amuses me. My muse is a-muse. I come from a long line of fools who did brilliant work, and it took the world forever to recognize them as artists. My personal heroes—Buster Keaton, Louis Carroll, Jacques Tati—were *artists* who made astonishing work that critiqued the culture in many idiosyncratic ways.

I think you reach people in a different way when you make them laugh, ranging from anecdotal to brutal satire. An image or an idea stays with them longer because they've laughed at it, but then hopefully on second thought, they'll think, "*What* was I laughing about? That's a very serious subject."

WS: One last thing I want to touch on is the seamless way you weave wordplay into every expression of yourself, from the titles of your work to the way that you engage with audiences. It's remarkable to see the multivalence of the spoken word be translated into sculpture and performance.

PO: Words have been very good to me. We make art because words can't say everything. To me, words are like ready-made clothes; they apply to a general idea, but then you alter them to fit. With wordplay, it's like two, three for the price of one! I see linguistics as little costume dramas with many truths vying for your attention.

WARD SHELLEY is a mostly New York artist who met Pat Oleszko in 1987.

Flipper, 1987, from the project *Where Fools Russian*, 1987. Fake fur, rubber tire, umbrella, flippers, diving mask, and cane, 48 × 48 × 96 in. (121.9 × 121.9 × 243.8 cm). Performance view, Performance Space New York (formerly Performance Space 122), 1987

BORN 1994
IN RALEIGH, NC;
LIVES IN BROOKLYN, NY

MALCOLM PEACOCK

Five of them were hers and she carved shelters with windows into the backs of their skulls, 2024. Foam, cement mix, wood, synthetic hair, and six-channel audio; 54:38 min., looped, 96 × 96 × 96 in. (81.5 × 81.5 × 81.5 cm). Installation view, *Malcolm Peacock: a signal, a sprout*, Baltimore Museum of Art, 2025

SIMONE LEIGH: I've been struck by how singular your practice is. There's a certain seriousness that I associate with it. I wanted to start by talking about that.

MALCOLM PEACOCK: I think an easy way to access thinking about that question is this story from my childhood. I'm the third-born of five children. When my older siblings went to school, I would get really melodramatic and moody. To get me out of my FOMO ruts, my mom would give me art supplies, and she'd become worried if I was ever *not* actively making artwork. When she brought that up to me for the first time, I burst into tears.

So, from a young age, I became interested in what it felt like to make something that was for myself but was also offered to others, and that is a type of seriousness that I've always placed with the processes of making. I'm highly interested in endurance as a mode of working and making, and that has become a centerpiece in the work—often, networks are created, or maybe things that can't be replicated, even by my own self. So I think things often do feel singular. I also tend to wait a really long time. I don't do a ton of testing or sketching, but I do marinate, and then I spend a fraction of that time in the actual making. It may seem long, but it's really a fraction. I'm quite the dweller.

SL: I can't believe you're saying that, because did you not spend a year making this work [*Five of them were hers and she carved shelters with windows into the backs of their skulls*, 2024]?

MP: I did, but I've probably been thinking about it the majority of my life.

SL: Let me just say: how wonderful that your mother thought that being an artist was such an important way of being that she would encourage that for you.

MP: My mother's father was an incredible artist, in a way that was extremely dignified;

Next in line at the top of the valley, his spine bent forward as he surrendered to his choices, 2023. Felt, wood, synthetic hair, and single-channel audio; 52:06 min., looped, 19 × 84 × 84 in. (48.3 × 213.4 × 213.4 cm). Installation view, *Malcolm Peacock: next in line at the peak of the valley, his spine bent forward as he surrendered to his choices*, SE Cooper Contemporary, Portland, OR, 2023

he had a sort of sovereign existence that I think a lot of artists aspire to. Reminds me of Thaddeus Mosley in that way—he always made alongside of the life he had as a postal service worker, even when there were opportunities to maybe step away from that work that was keeping his family financially stable and have a more public career. But yeah, my grandfather, he made artwork up until a week or so before he died. It was a spiritual practice for him, and that's what was passed down to my mother—not as something she understood as important for me to have a "career" in, but just something that was significant to nourish in a child.

SL: Wow! That's amazing. I wanted to make sure that we talked in this conversation about your work in sculpture. I think many sculptors in my experience work in this way, but it seems particularly important to me to understand your sculpture is also performance. How do you feel about that?

MP: Yes, thank you for the question, because I think art in the present day has a lot of different thoughts about performance. It's important to not generalize and to give artists their specificity around the types of performance they're doing or how they think about that word, because it can be so loaded. [*Five of them were hers and she carved shelters with windows into the back of their skulls*] is an act of a few different types of endurance performance work. The one that is the most visible, the most laborious act, is already completed—we never see the maker's hands or the acts of physical therapy and rehabilitation that sometimes did and didn't occur on a daily basis. For me, a really important part of performance is the sustenance that makes it possible for a body not only to continue to carry out a performance but to believe that carrying out a performance is viable or worth it. Considering the collective for me is also a sort of performance—there are so many people who went into this one singular object.

SL: It's very interesting for you to use the word *endurance* in relation to your performance. Literally speaking, let's talk about how much time and labor was given to this particular work.

Five of them were hers and she carved shelters with windows into the backs of their skulls, 2024. Foam, cement mix, wood, synthetic hair, and six-channel audio; 54:38 min., looped, 96 × 96 × 96 in. (81.5 × 81.5 × 81.5 cm). Installation view, *Pass Carry Hold: Studio Museum Artists in Residence 2023–24*, MoMA PS1, Queens, NY, 2024

MP: Right. It's something that can be generally broken down into numbers. I made a plan based on that it would take roughly eight months to make around 3,200 quarter-inch-wide braids that are each 40 inches long. That plan generally worked; some weeks I was under, some weeks I was over. What can't be accounted for are the variations of color and light and installation and shading and fur and fiber and growth. And also having this thing go from being something that you want to be completed to something that feels like it's almost completing itself, if that makes sense, or that it's growing in real time and the viewer begins to witness it. There was a point very close to the opening of it first being exhibited where there were about 400 braids that I just absolutely hated. I thought the color was way too loud, like off the palette. But I think because of the endurance act, I had told myself, "It'll work out because I'll blend those in later; I'll worry about it in September, and it'll be fine." But September came, and it wasn't fine. I needed to take a step back from the math of it and revert to the origin of the project, which was something that frankly required a great amount of faith. I really had to lean into this question of extension. "Well, I've gotten this far. I've ventured to dare to try this thing. I may as well give myself this next little push, this last unaccounted-for act of endurance, and see if it's possible."

SL: What would you consider your relationship to women's work? Women's work as an ontology.

MP: For me, it's like the origin of knowledge, the origin of learning. That's where I learned what race was. And that's where I learned who my mother was and who my sisters were. My mother has been a hairstylist for the majority of her life, and so I was fascinated by her ability to multitask in an almost infinite plethora of ways while doing this thing with her hands, this heart motion, that she was somehow only ever looking at for maybe a few seconds as she also watched TV or talked. It was like living alongside a magician. I think that became crystallized when I went to the Baltimore Museum of Art for the first time as a boy, and I saw the same type of work that my mother did in the home put on a pedestal inside a glass case as part of a Hawaiian pendant necklace. It's one of the few times that I've been moved almost to speechlessness over an artwork. I looked at it, and I looked at my mom, and I said, "Mom, these are braids." And she said, "Yeah, they are." And I kept looking back at her and at the necklace. My eyes were welling up. And I was like, "Could you do this?" Because I had never seen something that minuscule in size but which had such significance, and it felt like the work these women in my home were doing had some type of meaning that far

Next in line at the top of the valley, his spine bent forward as he surrendered to his choices (detail), 2023. Felt, wood, synthetic hair, and single-channel audio; 52:06 min., looped, 19 × 84 × 84 in. (48.3 × 213.4 × 213.4 cm)

exceeded the understanding I had access to as a child; it was part of other cultures, other languages.

I was thinking before our discussion today that I'm often asked to describe the significance of the braid. I've thought about it for so many years, and of course I think, yes, it's an indication of family and of who I am and where I'm from. But it's also this practice of repetition that when combined in this way that's cumulative speaks to something about taking one form and turning it into something else. It acts almost like a song. That's what's really kept me so tied to it, because otherwise I'm confused as to how I'm not tired of it. The fascination surrounds what it can become, how it can be extended, how the self can be extended, to make it a transformative experience.

SL: Can we talk about what you're working on now?

MP: It's another endurance project; this one refers to the 1928 "Bunion Derby," which was the first transcontinental ultra-marathon in the US. One hundred ninety-eight men attempted to run from Los Angeles to New York. Only a fraction of those men reached Madison Square Garden. I became fascinated by this race in 2022, after I learned about this Black man from Seattle named Eddie Gardner, who was the fastest man in the race but who ended up being held up by the Klan through the middle region of the country.

SL: Oh my God!

MP: Yeah, he walks about 800 to a thousand miles of the race to prevent himself from being shot and killed. I still am really dumbfounded by both his desire and persistence to decide to stay in the race. He says in interviews that the most important thing was for him to make an attempt to finish, and that he was interested in what that would say about the spirit of other Black Americans. With this film, I will be working with other Black runners to traverse that thousand-mile section over the span of about three to four months.

SL: Is there something that's of interest to you that you're not asked about that you want people to know?

MP: This maybe relates less to something I'm not often asked about, maybe because it feels like it sits somewhere outside of language, but it's what you and I and many other Black folks would relate to, and that's where endurance becomes understood as part of being in communion. I think about the salons in Flatbush and Harlem at 12:40 a.m. that are full of people, packed, or I think about running together and getting to mile ten and looking at my watch, and I think, "When did we do that?" Falling into that slippage of time is incredible. It's about going beyond these Western systems of measurement and tracking. Those are the experiences that I think ultimately change us.

SIMONE LEIGH is an artist based in Brooklyn, NY.

BORN 1984
IN HONOLULU, HI;
LIVES IN OJO CALIENTE, NM

SARAH M. RODRIGUEZ

Cup of Everything, Germ of Nothing, 2024. Cast, carved, and welded aluminum, 28 × 32 × 26 in. (71.1 × 81.3 × 66 cm)

Polarization, 2024. Cast, carved, and welded aluminum, 28 × 24 × 20 in. (71.1 × 61 × 50.8 cm)

MICHAEL NED HOLTE: You've referred to your cast assemblage sculptures as approximations—rather than translations—of the materials you gather from the "natural world." What is your approach to making these sculptures, and what's at stake for you in that semantic difference between approximating versus translating?

SARAH M. RODRIGUEZ: Approximation is something that I think about a lot in terms of behavior when I'm working with animals. In addition to making art, I also work as a trainer and an animal behavior consultant. Usually what we're doing in dog training is trying to break behavior down into small pieces so that we can approximate towards a finished behavior.

Within my studio practice, I started thinking about approximations because casts don't necessarily have perfect renderings: when an object is cast, there's something that happens in the process where the texture changes or something falls or burns out, and the object it becomes as a cast is a slightly different version of the original. There's something powerful in the potential of an approximation because it is the act of coming near or close, rather than attempting to be precise, which is how I view the goal of a translation. On some level, a translation might be impossible. You can make guesses about things, but I don't think you can ever have a direct translation.

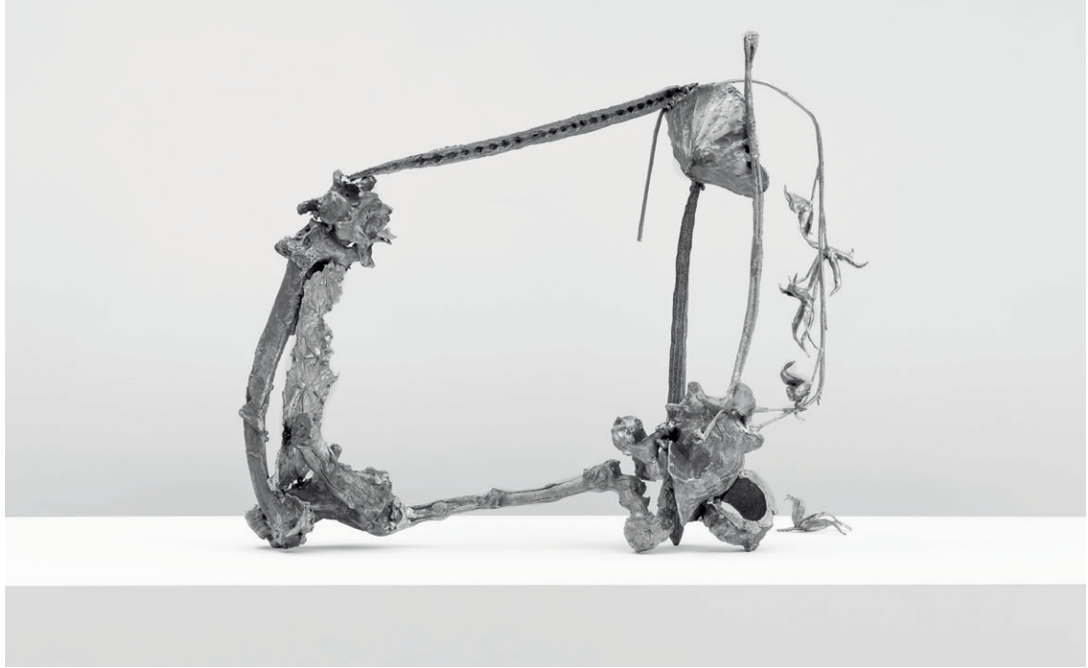
MNH: Maybe it'd be helpful here to talk about the materials you're drawn to that go into making your sculptures.

SMR: About ten years ago, I began to use aluminum because it was something that could adhere to other objects to form an assemblage. Aluminum is a strange material. It's elemental and fundamental, but it has no known biological function. It's a little bit brittle, not super confident, but also a part of the earth's crust. It also reflects light in ways that other metals do not.

All of the objects I collect are from places that I have some kind of relationship with. Currently, I live in northern New Mexico, and I collect a lot of objects here. Half of my family lives in Hawai'i, so I gather some objects there as well. I'm drawn to objects that can index or evoke multiple timespans. Like seed pods, for example: when you look at a seed, it holds the potential of what it could be.

MNH: Your source materials are coming from these distinct places that have very specific meanings for you, but my presumption is that you're bringing them together and not keeping them distinct as sort of portraits of a specific place.

SMR: I'm drawing from my personal life because that's what I know, but I'm not trying to make a realistic landscape depiction of a place or a plant. I do hope that the work



Nocturnal Anatomy, 2023. Cast, carved, and welded aluminum, 30 × 30 × 13 in. (76.2 × 76.2 × 33 cm)

Rooted Honey Creeper, 2024. Cast, carved, and welded aluminum, 56 ½ × 41 × 23 in. (143.5 × 104.1 × 58.4 cm)

feels conceivable within another world or time frame.

MNH: You've also talked about your sculptures in relationship to fossils.

SMR: I view fossils sort of as an excerpt of a body, or a trace. So the concept of a fossil, I guess, opens up a door to start thinking about expanses of time but also small excerpts of the now. The fossil is about looking at one imprint and then trying to get the bigger picture of what can or has occurred. To me, there's a direct correlation between casting and fossils. A cast object is what remains of the object of origin, which has been annihilated through the process of replication.

MNH: Can you say more about that process?

SMR: I have done some lost-wax casting. Ultimately I prefer sand-casting because it feels more like it's an approximation rather than a direct translation; you don't get so much detail with a sand cast because you pick up the sandy texture surrounding the object you are casting. Usually what happens during the process is: an imprint is made with an organic material that I've found, I cast it several times, and it starts to break down. There are unpredictable outcomes that happen with sand-casting that become opportunities for consideration; that's the appeal to me. My process is not necessarily full of overwrought formal decisions.

MNH: I'm curious how much composition is going on during the various stages of the process.

SMR: For the most part, I'm not doing much composing until various objects have been cast and I have an assortment to work with. I'm invested in the material learning that happens when you work with metal—dealing with weight and engineering and how it's going to interact with gravity. I might have an idea that an object can be a base, or a particular piece can lead the finished form to become more vertical or horizontal in orientation. Making sculpture this way feels like foretelling, because I might have some kind of conceit with the material, but I don't have the full composition until I start welding pieces together.

MNH: What's the typical length of time to make one of these works?

SMR: Usually six months, because I don't have a preconceived plan or design that I follow. I'll think I have an idea of what the work is going to be, and then I put it together and realize that's not it. It doesn't feel believable, or something about it feels undone. In those instances, I might cut the sculpture into three pieces, and then it becomes a completely different set of possibilities to compose together.

MNH: As you mentioned, you also work in the field of animal behavior. I'm wondering more about how these practices inform one another.

SMR: When I finished my MFA, I decided to do something very different, and that was to get into the world of animal behavior. I've worked with many species. When I first started, I realized that how we think about animals—through images and narratives—were really based on myths or cultural misunderstandings. A lot of nonhuman communication is impossible to understand if it's only viewed through our own verbal behavior or semiotics, so I try to think about the ways nonhuman beings might experience the world. Animals are typically using what we might consider indexes. That could be the scent of another animal; it could be a sound. When I started making this work, I knew that I wanted to touch on this idea that there are other more expansive ways to relate to the world. Art-making in and of itself is a nonverbal practice, an exercise in knowing that the current order of things is not necessarily preordained.

MNH: You've been living in northern New Mexico since the pandemic, and you live in close proximity to Carson National Forest. What's changed in your own relationship to that landscape in the past five years or so?

SMR: I can't really look at a landscape without thinking about wildlife—which, surprisingly, I don't see a lot of in New Mexico. Most of the animals that live out here, I think, are terrified of humans and are very good at avoiding our presence. I do see a lot of deer and elk, and I'm always

From left: *Cup of Everything, Germ of Nothing*, 2024. Cast, carved, and welded aluminum, 28 × 32 × 26 in. (71.1 × 81.3 × 66 cm); *Ground Aura*, 2024. Cast, carved, and welded aluminum, 28 × 24 × 20 in. (71.1 × 61 × 50.8 cm). Installation view, *Sarah Rodriguez: Post-Fair*, Babst Gallery, Los Angeles, 2025

watching the way that they move. Recently, I noticed a deer that had a sloping gait—one of its shoulders would always dip. I could tell that it had had a broken bone that had healed awkwardly. I wanted to understand what was happening physically with the deer. The first question I asked myself was, how did the deer get injured? And then I wondered, what is my accountability in the relationship? What is the ethical line for letting nature take its course, or when do humans assert our agency to intervene? Should I contact the wildlife center? Or would being caught and contained actually be more stressful for the animal than living with a poorly healed break? The deer gives me an opportunity to pay attention, which relates back to art-making. The questions in the studio might be, when to intervene and make subtractive decisions, and when to let an object be. Art allows you to have something that's both an already and a not-yet. It gives me the opportunity to hold and consider positions and possibilities, without the labels or constructs that might exist outside of the studio.

MNH: You've said that the American project is one of landscape, specifically the perception of landscape as a blank slate. Is your work an attempt to undo that perception, or to open a new understanding of landscape?

SMR: I think both. I'm not sure that you can live in America and not have some idea of the landscape as a blank slate. I think it's important to be aware of that viewpoint so that you can make decisions to think outside of it. Especially in New Mexico, I have some sort of culpability in that. I hope that the way that I try to think outside of classifications, to rethink these ideas of the natural, might start to approach some of these conversations. Most areas in the United States where this seems really heightened are places where there are asymmetrical power relations, and that always takes some kind of negotiation. In my work, I usually think about transforming these negotiations into a formal strategy of making sculpture, by using both addition and subtraction. My hope is to suggest the kind of making and unmaking that we are always enacting in the American landscape.

MICHAEL NED HOLTE is Associate Dean of the School of Art at CalArts, Valencia, CA, and the author of *Good Listener: Meditations on Music and Pauline Oliveros* (2024).

BORN 1991
IN SAN FERNANDO VALLEY, CA;
LIVES IN LOS ANGELES

GABRIELA RUIZ

Installation view of *Gabriela Ruiz: Full of Tears*, Vincent Price Art Museum, Los Angeles, 2019

JOSEPH DANIEL VALENCIA: Let's begin by talking about your exhibition *Full of Tears* [2019] at the Vincent Price Art Museum, which we worked on together and really solidified some of the issues you're working through today.

GABRIELA RUIZ: It was my first solo show, besides the one that I did on my own, and it felt like a moment to take advantage of the opportunity that was given to me and to make work that would build toward future work. In terms of themes, I was thinking about my experience with memory and my connection to technology, and how that was affecting me at the time.

Empapada, 2019. Performance view, CASTTL, Antwerp, Belgium, September 27, 2019

The initial inspiration was this image of my parents' wedding. My mom had given me all these photographs she had buried in the back of a closet, and there were so many memories that I didn't even remember! I remembered being so little at their wedding and really being into the curtains; they were beautiful—red, draping. And there was a giant white plant, and a big American flag. So symbolic.

I was also thinking about how I was archiving memory with my phone through social media. My friend Nacho [Ignacio Nava Jr.] had just passed away. It was my first time experiencing the death of someone very close to me. We were trying to get access to his phone—everything from Mustache Mondays was on it. That made me realize, when you pass and don't set things up, your things get lost. Memories could get forgotten, except for the people who were present. So that kind of turned into this whole thing about memory and connection.

JDV: Do you want to describe what the show looked like?

GR: When you walked into the space, there was a three-door installation, each resembling a memory and emotion. There was an island with artificial grass and decoy surveillance cameras. A monitor showed CCTV footage connected to a wall piece with a cast of my body dismembered, and the camera was hidden in the mouth. To the left, there was this sculpture of a window, inspired by my parents' wedding photo, down to a recreation of those curtains. Inside the frame, there was a video playing, a mix of found footage relating to different memories that were important to me.

JDV: I liked how you pulled together video, sculpture, installation—it was immersive. Can you talk about the immersive experience in your work?

GR: Telling a story is really important. I love bringing in the viewer to experience a story in the space. I think about how I react. Even when I was a kid going to street carnivals—you're in your neighborhood, but once you pay a ticket, you're transported into this other space, and you start imagining things. That's what I want to convey with my installations. I also think about how I want to create worlds for my pieces to live in. That traces back to my early pop-up show *Haus* [2017]—a five-room installation, each monochromatic in a different color. When I was little, I had this recurring fantasy where I envisioned my future home with all of these specific rooms.

JDV: What role does color play in your work?

GR: Color is one of the most important elements. It comes back to my childhood. The television was my babysitter, and '90s cartoons and music videos were saturated in color. My favorite aesthetic is Wacky PoMo or even McDonald's PlayPlaces—so vibrant. I became obsessed. It might have been a coping mechanism. There was a lot of instability in my upbringing, so maybe I fixated on these things.

I grew up first-generation Mexican American—going to swap meets, dollar stores. Everything was oversaturated. People now connect color with toxicity. They want muted colors. I think that's, like, inhibiting to human growth, because color is so important. When I see color, I get happy. Sterile spaces change my mood. I think about that even when I'm showing in institutions or galleries—abstracting these white spaces.

JDV: I like those connections, how they get at the power of color. Are there other connections with art or design, or is color mostly referenced through lived experience?

GR: Definitely lived experience. Going back to Mexico—my favorite thing is how colorful it is. Homes are painted green, pink, purple. Here, you need permits to paint your home. Everything gets constrained.

JDV: Something I've noticed in your work across media is this DIY ethos. Where does that come from?

GR: My parents—they've always worked in construction, manual labor. If they wanted anything, they'd build it. My stepdad's tech-savvy; he learns from YouTube. And my mom, she's always been the most resourceful person I've ever met. That mentality was passed down to me. When

I wanted to go to art school, she said we couldn't afford it, so I took a couple of community college classes. Before that, I was already making things in high school; I made outfits every morning, painted on the walls—which pissed my mom off. But there was this constant need to make things.

In the beginning of my career, I didn't have resources, so I was working with whatever I had. I took a screen-printing class, and by the second class, I was making shirts and selling them. That's how [my clothing brand] Leather Papi started. Then I began creating sets with found furniture pieces, and that's how I became interested in doing installations.

JDV: That touches on something I don't think a lot of people know, which is that you also do a lot of production work, like building sets. How has that experience shaped your practice?

GR: When you're working in art departments, you come across resources that you've never heard of, and it's a free place to get materials. The industry has so much money, but it's so wasteful. When I saw how wasteful it is, I was like, I have to use this opportunity. One day we were doing a music video, and they asked to buy 200 giant rolls of backdrop from Home Depot, and then they were going to throw them all away. So I asked the girl I was working with, "Can I have this?" She's like, "Yeah, why do you want it?" I was like, "I'm going to pass them out to the homeless people because it's about to rain." When you don't have a lot of funds to buy things, you work with what you have.

JDV: You could teach a master class on how to upcycle and transform materials for completely different experiences. I want to transition to talk a bit about the different environments where you've performed. For example, you began your practice working in places such as Mustache Mondays.

GR: Yeah, it was queer nightlife where I really began performing. I didn't think I was a performer, but this promoter, Cleo, who was doing Club Clit at the time, said "Do this," and I was like, "Oh, I'm not really a performer," and they were like, "No, you would do great." I showed up as the devil in a Quinceañera dress. So I started in underground spaces—really fun, anything goes—and that's led to everything else. Showing in all these spaces has been really beautiful, because I get to do work in nightclubs but also museums, or places like [Centro Cultural] Clavijero in Michoacán, where there's only ever been one or two performances. It really shows that art is for everyone.

JDV: What has your journey been like, and how has your artwork changed over the years?

GR: I'm always so grateful and sometimes in awe that I can show in art institutions, and that they allow me to go kind of crazy. At the Palm Springs Art Museum, for example, they didn't even know what I was making. I was like, "I think I'm making a maze . . ." But they trusted me, which really showed their faith in me as an artist.

JDV: In recent years, you've started making more two-dimensional works that might read as paintings. How do you situate those works with your previous installation and sculpture practice?

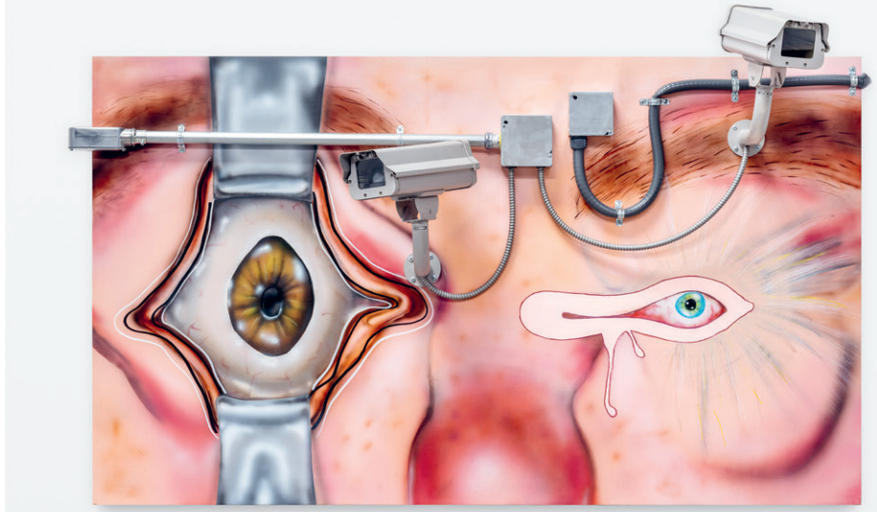
GR: I feel more like a sculptor. They're more like sculptures—I'm adding objects, monitors, surveillance equipment.

JDV: Where does the recurring theme of surveillance come from in your work? Because you're talking about things that are now deeply embedded in the American experience.

GR: At a very young age, I had to become super aware of it. Anywhere I would go with my parents, we were constantly being watched. There's also an awareness of surveillance that comes from being in a bigger body, being watched whatever you do, what you're eating. When you go somewhere to eat, you don't grab too much. I also saw surveillance become a lot more prevalent in the course of growing up in the twenty-first century, alongside digital technology and all the political changes we've lived through.

JDV: Right, your work gestures to the fact of public spaces not as welcoming

Now and Forever, 2023. Free-standing plexiglass panel, steel, TV monitors, aluminum-coated paint, chargers, nuts, bolts, and electric circuits, 96 × 48 × 24 in. (243.8 × 121.9 × 61 cm)



Real Eyes, Realize, Real Lies, 2023. Acrylic, colored pencil, pastels, surveillance housing, decoy cameras, metal hardware, aluminum, and rubber pipes on wood panel, 42 × 72 × 20 in. (106.7 × 182.9 × 50.8 cm)

You are here, 2022. Polyurethane foam, mirrors, acrylic, wood, mesh fabric, yarn, spandex fabric, metal hardware, foam molding, and digital video projection, 108 × 144 × 36 in. (274.3 × 365.8 × 91.4 cm)

or even neutral, but as places where one experiences the violence of surveillance capitalism. What you're saying: racialized communities, working-class communities, larger-bodied people, all experience these types of surveillance at a higher level. And surveillance has become so much more normalized in our everyday—at the grocery store, with AI, or how your face is scanned at the airport. You're often making us, as viewers, aware of this technology.

GR: I think when I present it, it doesn't present as aggressive; it's more playful. I've also put myself in the position of the observer, where I have access to the surveillance cameras. I can watch the viewer.

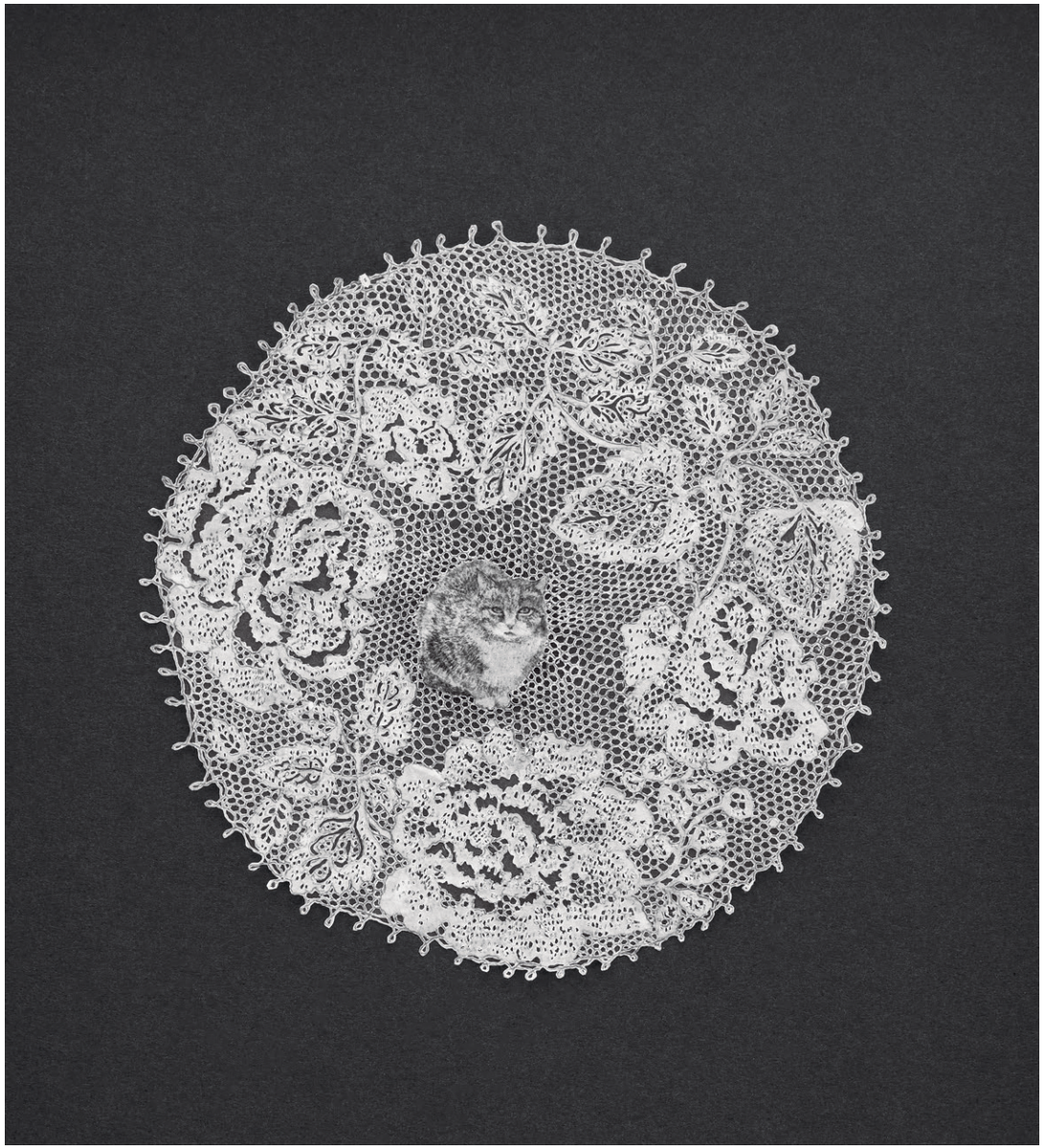
JDV: Wow, I didn't realize that.

GR: It's so invasive that I don't like to do it, even when there's two-way communication built in—I'm literally in New York, say, and the piece is in LA, and I can communicate with the viewer. I don't store any of the live footage. But I also think it's, like, taking back the power of surveillance, putting it back in the hands of people who aren't normally in that position.

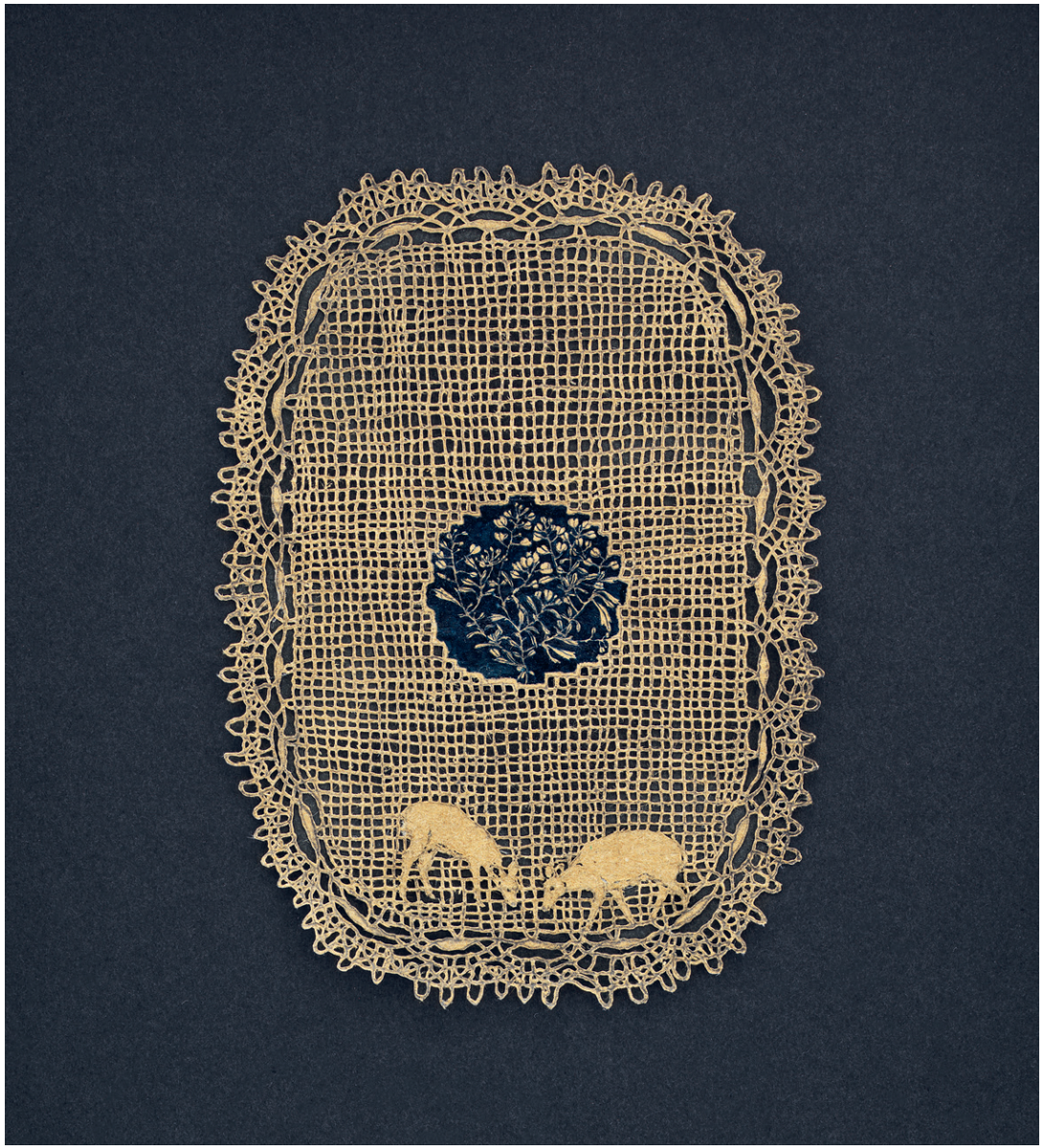
JOSEPH DANIEL VALENCIA is a scholar of Latinx art and Curator of Exhibitions at the Vincent Price Art Museum at East Los Angeles College.

BORN 1969
IN THE PHILIPPINES;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

JASMIN SIAN



wildlife I love: Mengmeng in catnip cloud lace, 2021. Graphite, gouache, and cutouts on cookie tray, 4 ⅜ × 4 ⅜ in. (11.1 × 11.1 cm)



Hudson River alpine grass with ghost deer, 2019–23. Graphite, gouache, lacquer ink, and cutouts on deli-bag paper, 4 ¾ × 3 ½ in. (12.1 × 8.9 cm)

MARK PASCALE: You bring to your work a really broad range of interests—scientific, philosophical, historical, religious, mathematical, and so forth. I'm curious if you want to start by talking about how you got started with the work that really defines you.

JASMIN SIAN: I was doing minimalist work when I was in grad school [for my master of fine arts], and I just started to lose interest. I needed a subject to kind of follow around. And I love plants and animals. Being in nature, being around my birds—it's the one thing that grounds me.

dovecote: Matsu and Hinoki at home foraging with broccolini, thyme, peonies, and small gardenia bush, 2025. Gouache, lacquer ink, graphite, and cutouts on doughnut-bag paper, 5 ⅝ × 5 ¼ in. (14.3 × 13.3 cm)

Opposite: *dovecote: a tree-pee in Bugoy's favorite spot with Mrs. Manok, mom's garden, Philippines*, 2025. Gouache, lacquer ink, graphite, and cutouts on deli-bag paper, 3 ⅝ × 5 ¾ in. (9 × 14.4 cm)

So I figured I'd try to do plants and animals, but then you have this real thing; it's easy to spot if you make mistakes. Making abstract work has its own challenges, but doing something that actually exists I find quite difficult. What you see in the works, though, is not just the plants and animals but my relationship to them and to the materials, which is probably indicative of my attitudes about them.

MP: There's a couple of things that come up with your work: one is craft; another, which is very powerful, is drawing from life. The art world often seems to ebb and flow in its focus on a more traditional way of looking at art—that is to say, art rooted in haptic hand–eye coordination and in drawing as a basis for everything—but for you, it's especially important because you're doing miniatures, and you're also cutting into them. How did you arrive at this process of working small and of drawing and cutting, and how does that tie into your use of found materials?

JS: I noticed a while back that all the paper bags that I was getting for my lunch had a stamp with the name of the person who made the bag and the date, and I thought that was wonderful and also probably no one even notices it. I find that we're evolving into a much more disposable culture where we have no relationship to anything. I use these bags because they speak to me and they're part of my history. They also help keep the work small because I'm able to bicycle with them. I can go do different parks, draw weeds, different plants, or if I'm out and I see something I find beautiful, I can stop and draw it. It's important to keep the material small and mobile so I can do what the old artists did, work *en plein air*.

I like being outside; you never know what you'll find. A woodchuck, maybe a deer in the middle of nowhere, next to

a freeway, not sure how they got there. That's why I made the ghost deer piece. Sometimes I find dead animals, and I make little worlds for them so they have it in the afterlife. The last show I had was *A forest for Fennel* (he was one of my parrotlets), so I made these drawings of trees so Fennel could have them in his afterlife. When he died, that really broke me. I spent years making these trees for him.

MP: How did you become attracted to miniatures? Because they're significant in many cultures. Was there one in particular that struck you or influenced you?

JS: Yeah, I look at a lot of devotional works—saints, illuminated manuscripts. To me, they look so big, even though they're small. I don't think works need to be big in order to be felt. I also look at a lot of old lace works. Most of these things are done by unknown artists because the act of making it is what's most important, not the name. It's quite the opposite of now; everyone wants to be a star. But I don't think, as an artist, that's most important. You have this thing that can make someone happy or can have redemptive or poetic value; to me, that's the most important thing. And you get to make it. How amazing is that?

MP: In some ways, the inspiration for you is spiritual. Do you have a particular religious belief? Or is it more of a daily practice tied to your life philosophy?

JS: I was raised as a Catholic, but I don't practice that, necessarily. It instilled in me a sense of what may be sacred, and I think that's important as a ground. I believe in a lot of mystical religions, like Sufism, Kabbalah, and even mystical Catholicism. What most interests me is the belief that the divine is in everything and that we are a small part to this connection. Science believes in that. As an artist, we can manifest in a very small degree, for example, what I feel when I'm around trees and animals and their connection to nature and to everything that's out there.

MP: What you're defining here is where all of your interests and activities and the subject of your work converge,

if i had a little zoo, 3, 2013. Ink, graphite, and cutouts on deli-bag paper, diptych: 5 × 3 ½ in. (12.7 × 8.9 cm) each

this greater connectivity. For example, you draw weeds a lot, or various kinds of vegetation that we tend to overlook, but in fact, these are living things, too; they provide many different kinds of nourishment for life forms most people hardly think about. But when you're riding your bike, you're right in the middle of it—you're

seeing it all—and it means something else. You've said that when you're riding your bike, you pay a lot of attention to trees, because "trees tell you what to do." Do you want to elaborate on that?

JS: Ha! When I'm struggling with an idea or a thought or a question, I usually go for a ride. Sometimes I do loops in Central Park, and usually at the end of that ride, I know what I have to do. Trees communicate to one another through pheromones, but I feel like they also communicate to us. This is based on poetic thought, but it's my theory. I think that's why you feel calmer when you're around trees.

MP: Let's backtrack just for a second to your origins. You were born in the Philippines, and your family moved to the United States and settled in Texas when you were in your early teens. Do you recall much about your life in the Philippines?

JS: When I was a kid, we didn't really have toys; we just played with whatever was around, like sticks and rocks and sand. I remember the first thing that I got was this box of forty-eight Crayolas, and I thought, "Wow, how amazing—color in a box!" Whenever I would sharpen them, I would keep the shavings in a bottle so I could keep looking at them. Nature was just around us. We didn't really think about it. It was just what we had, and we played with flowers. Now, with things that are cheaper, people are just buying a lot more, instead of reinventing or investing in the things they already had.

MP: Interesting—in that answer about your childhood, it gets at another question I had, because today, as an adult, you really restrict yourself. You have a very focused set of materials: an X-Acto knife, paper (which you don't necessarily buy). You don't work much with color, but when you do, it's very thoughtful and specific. And maybe you still keep your shavings—I don't know!

JS: I can't! I live in this tiny space in an SRO—200 square feet. And I have about a two-and-a-half square-foot table. I have to put things on the floor and hope that the birds don't chew or poop on what I'm working on. They have redecorated a lot of my work, and I have to go back and redo it in a different way.

MP: That's a funny way of saying what they did!

JS: They're definitely art critics.

MP: So they live freely in your in your room. They don't have a cage?

JS: No, they're free. I wouldn't be in a cage, so I don't put them in one either.

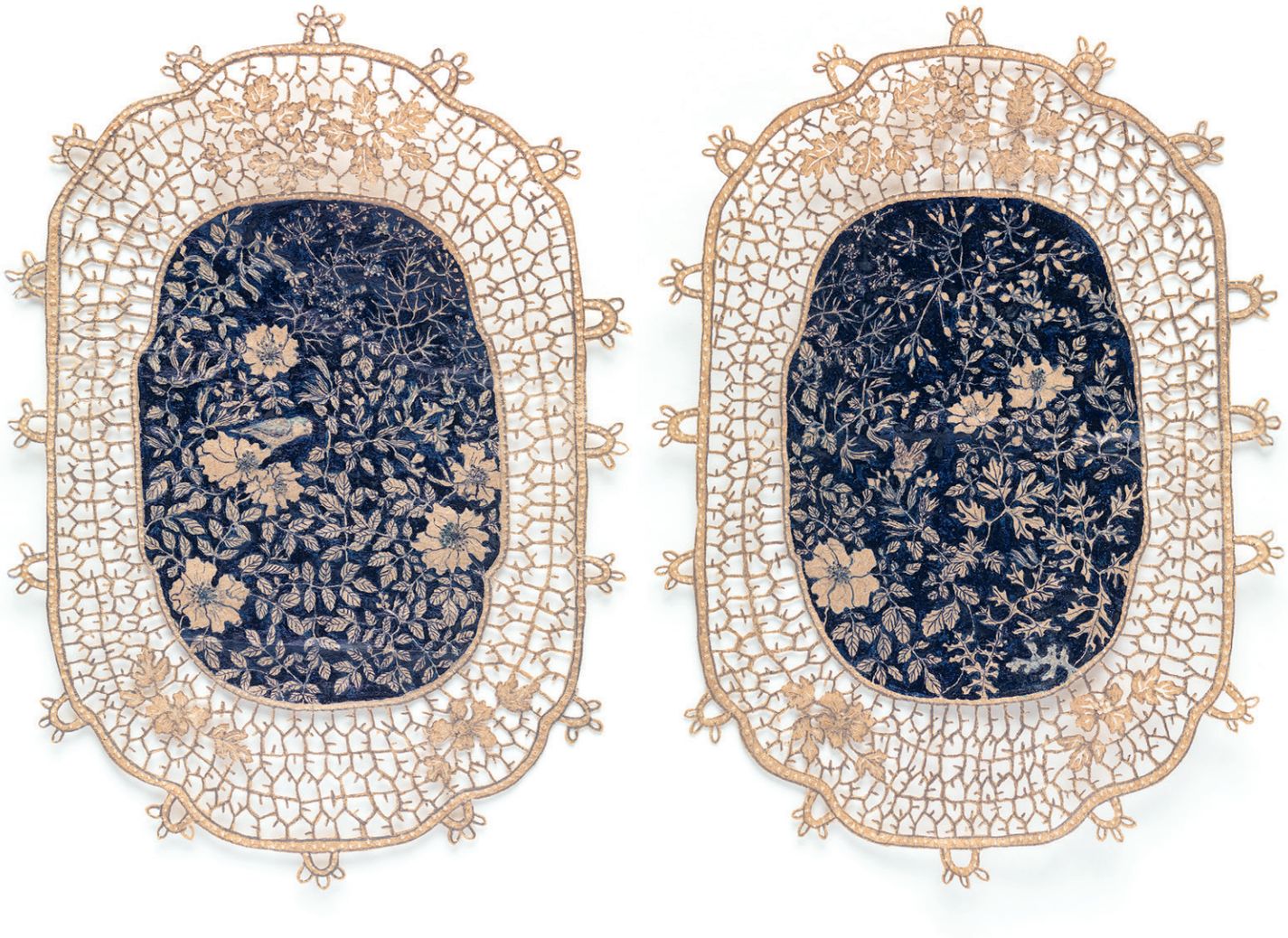
MP: Do you get to travel much beyond where your bike will take you, or is that not of interest?

JS: Oh, I do! Like Camus says, traveling is good exercise for the brain. I go to Texas a lot, though the carbon footprint on that trip definitely isn't great. But it's important to see my family. I like to work at my sister's house—drawing weeds in her yard and in the bayou. Texas has beautiful weeds and native plants. I used to go to Greece a lot more, because I love to swim, but not so much lately.

MP: I suppose one could say that, given the amount of time you spend on your bicycle, you travel a lot more than someone who flies to a lot of exotic places. You're seeing the exotic and the natural in what a lot of people overlook. One of the things that captivates me most about your work is that it delves into minutia in such an incredible way that it doesn't seem limited at all.

JS: I feel like in knowing a very small thing in a small area, you can get to know many, many big things. That's how the universe is organized, in many ways. Like, I was looking at a pigeon feather, and its layers—it's organized in the way tree branches are organized. So many things in nature repeat, even the way people are. If you just get to know the people around you well, and if you truly see the things that surround you, you can pretty much figure out how other things work, too. But the important thing is to really get to know what you have.

MARK PASCALE is the Janet and Craig Duchossois Curator in the Department of Prints and Drawings at The Art Institute of Chicago and Senior Lecturer in Print Media at the School of the Art Institute.



if I had a little zoo: HRH Fennel and busy bumblebee, 2015. Ink, graphite, and cutouts on deli-bag paper, diptych: 5 ¼ × 3 ¼ in. (13.3 × 8.3 cm) each

BORN IN MIAMI;
LIVES IN NEW YORK
AND ATHENS, GREECE

JORDAN STRAFER

Production still from
LOOPHOLE (2023), 2023

BRUCE HAINLEY: You have used the word "parafictional" to describe a key part of your working methods. You employ the parafictional—which remains distinct from either "fake news" or "truthiness"—in your recent trilogy, *LOOPHOLE*, to stage a thinking-through of the ethics of infotainment, legal systems, and procedural reenactments. How has your interpretation of the parafictional, if that is still the best term, evolved from its operations in your first trilogy to this new one?

JORDAN STRAFER: My work is inspired by "truth." In its completed form, my work isn't technically "parafiction," which would be fiction presented as fact. I tend to do the reverse, presenting fact as fiction (with fiction), making my work "inspired by true stories." Truth is a moving target.

The exploration I keep returning to in both trilogies is the impossibility of a true story, even, or especially, in court. Nothing means anything anymore. "Facts" have always been staged, and authority is mediated through performance. I work by transgressing the codes of credibility.

Formally, I combine quotations and reenactments with elements from other media. Once they enter the script, the layers are flattened, and those distinctions blur. By the time the script is enacted, who said what is already gone.

In the first trilogy, the "real" at play was autobiographical, mixed with language from fairy tales, psychoanalytic texts, YouTube comments, movies, TV, etcetera. My approach to writing was essentially collaging and then Mad-Libbing. Anything not directly autobiographical had to intuitively project an emotional truth of my narrative.

For the beginning of the newer trilogy, I limited sources to public-record speech by the people my characters are inspired by, and to erotic thriller scripts from that era. In 1991, Americans watched the William Kennedy Smith rape trial on TV, one of the first televised trials, and like other televised trials, it commodified trauma and, in a sense, redid the rape as spectacle. The erotic thriller sits on the other side of that same coin in cultural memory, with mass libidinal/morbid appeal. In the last film, the source material shifts again, mostly to '90s talk shows and the Nuremberg Trials.

BH: Despite the "factasy" (where facticity meets fantasy) we're now dealing with, again and again in *LOOPHOLE*—and in so much of your work (functioning variously in aspects of art direction to narrative construction)—the scalpel of the

Production still from *DISSONANCE* (work in progress), 2025

Production still from *PEAK HEAVEN LOVE FOREVER* (2022), 2022

real, however that is construed, cuts through any dreamtime: you extend and/or emphasize over-mic'd sound (often of eating) as well as shots of food (the resonant, disgusting, and darkly hilarious platter of pigs in a blanket) and decor, in a way that discombobulates the symbolic, frustrates any conclusive "meaning," and almost approaches haecceity—i.e., things are left to be just the things that things are, on film or in video. Could you talk about letting your filming come almost to a standstill to dwell on what the camera and mics take in (and on)—what this achieves?

JS: This impulse has a few motivations. It describes alienation/dissociation. It's an expression of repulsion for the characters and myself.

In *PEAK HEAVEN LOVE FOREVER* [2022], which embellishes/reenacts an air-ambulance flight I took with my comatose father and his husband, the disgusting food and associated sounds are central. That shoot was brutal. When I watch the video, my memory of the original event and the shoot overlap; in a weird way, the shoot becomes the thing that happened. That is to say, despite the world created by the story, something new happens in the retelling. In all its fakeness, something real is occurring. It isn't just *about* something; it *does* something, both as a whole and in its parts. I like to pause to recognize the new reality that exists in this kind of storytelling.

BH: You are currently based in Athens. How has your Greek vantage changed your thinking about the United States? I ask because the "actual events" that fuel *LOOPHOLE* are, let's say, über-American (with all the hangover Germanicity of that umlaut intact): the devolution of the Kennedy dynasty into the sordid grotesque of a Palm Beach Camelot, a debasement that began long ago, long before (but resonating acutely with) Chappaquiddick. The William Kennedy Smith trial has aspects of tragedy that return in comic (or at least tragicomic) form in the Bill Clinton–Monica Lewinsky debacle.

JS: I hate America more than ever. Where I am geographically doesn't change that. We have passed a turning point.

The Kennedy family tragicomedy thread began with my wanting to make an image of "America" for Europe, which led me to the 1991 rape trial. The heavy WWII arc in the last film may seem random, but the recent discourse of "who's the Nazi in this scenario" and comparisons between 2025 USA and 1933 Germany makes it feel relevant. Collapsing some of that history with the turn of the twenty-first century suggests a European framing for the moment we're in.

Still, I'm obsessed with "America," and the world is, too. Our culture is exported everywhere, and people outside the US are expected to learn our references while we stay myopic about theirs.

A lot of US behavior comes from a felt "no history" (which is false and violent). The oldest building in Miami (where I'm from) is about a century old; the Parthenon is 2,471. That gap fuels a mix of amnesia and self-invention. Though I appreciate the self-invention part.

BH: We've had more than a few conversations about Pamela Anderson (💗). I mention her because of your ongoing study of blondeness. Various incarnations of the blonde play crucial roles in your work—particularly how blondeness operates in America and, even more particularly, in Florida. Could you say something about blonde benefits, blonde burdens?

JS: Blondeness could be an extension of the American self-invention I mentioned earlier, with Marilyn Monroe as the template. Pamela Anderson is the new Marilyn Monroe.

When my light-blonde childhood hair slid into "dishwater" in my early teens, I went straight to Sun-In, then dye. The two times I wasn't blonde, I felt like I'd lost my shield. "Blonde-orexia" is *so* Floridian.

In my work, the blondes are my avatars. "Blonde" operates more as a deliberate construction, as opposed to an inherent trait. It's a costume. It carries a narrative before anything happens. "Blonde" is a concept and a code. It signals desire, aspiration, conspicuous whiteness, unseriousness, baby-angelic, sluttiness—depending on the shade. Calling someone blonde isn't just descriptive; it can be a compliment or an insult. It's a magnet for misogyny. Blonde is a category of person and of joke. That embedded symbolism suits my characters; I want to complicate their victim/villainhood.

BH: You've moved from various kinds of dolls to using actors. How has casting become an important part of your process? Do you work with a casting agent, or do you put out calls and rely on a network of friends and associates? Is there tension between the necessity of a specific look for a particular part and any actor's given skill?

JS: I see my evolution as a filmmaker in building blocks in both scale and skill, and casting has followed that arc. I started with myself, my immediate family, and dolls. Then I removed myself and worked with

Still from *SOS*, 2021. High-definition video, color, and sound; 11:08 min.

dolls and nonactors in masks. Some of that was economic, and some of it was hesitation. If I only used extensions of myself, then any critique would point back at me. Dolls and masks did exactly what I wanted, looked exactly how I wanted. Total control was the advantage—and the problem.

I've come to understand casting as a material. I look at what actors have done, how I know them, what kind of performer they are (screen, experimental theater, performance art, comedy, etcetera), and what their presence brings energetically in combination with everyone else.

I cast about half the roles myself and work with casting agents for the rest. I give the conceptual prompt; there's always a specific reason a person is cast, something inherent that already works.

BH: In the strictest sense, a director is responsible for the actor's performance (not that she doesn't do many other things). Do you have a philosophy of directing, of performance? Perhaps philosophy is a bit too taxing a term: do you see your thinking about performance in a particular tradition or lineage of acting and/or directing? Has your ongoing work with Jim Fletcher, among others, changed or influenced how you work?

JS: My way of directing actors is evolving. At the beginning, I choreographed actors almost like dolls because I was thinking in images. But I learned to make room for what performers bring. First there's the idea, then there's the script, the storyboard, the shot list, and then there's the reality of being on set, where the idea and the script die. A lot of what I do is decide to let things be the way they are. I usually send actors and other collaborators source materials, which are sometimes something to literally reenact, and sometimes more abstract references, so we're aligned before we get on set. Even after preparation, someone will make a choice or something will happen that I didn't anticipate, and I'm very open to that, partly by temperament and partly because we rarely have time or budget for extensive rehearsals or do-overs. The constraint becomes a method I embrace.

In our first collaboration, Jim played my father in a coma. People laugh that such a talented actor was cast as "unconscious," but he brought so much to the role; it was deeply moving. I cast him because he resembled my father and because I'd seen him in Ellen Cantor's *Pinochet Porn* [2008–16]. My prompt was: act like you're watching a movie no one else can see. On his own, he studied hand gestures in Renaissance painting and Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and he stayed "method" the entire shoot. I'm lucky he agreed to work with me.

Working with Jim and with exceptional performers like Emily Davis, Emily Allan, and Cammisa Buerhaus, among others, has made me want to be a better director. It's made me eager to write better scripts and to inch toward my version of "realism."

BRUCE HAINLEY lives in Houston.

Production still from *DECADENCE* (2024), 2024

SUNG TIEU

BORN 1987
IN HAI DUONG, VIETNAM;
LIVES IN BERLIN

Mural for America, 2023. 1,920 engraved stainless-steel plaques and screws, 63 × 352 ¾ in. (160 × 896 cm). Installation view, *Sung Tieu: Infra-Specter*, Amant, Brooklyn, NY, 2023

MARTIN BECK: You were asked by the Whitney to bring in another person—an artist, writer, or someone you are in dialogue with—for this conversation. What motivated you to ask me?

SUNG TIEU: I see this as an opportunity to make some parts of our shared dialogue public. One anchor for that dialogue is *echo**, our duo show curated by Mirela Baciak at the Kunstverein in Salzburg [2024], which is also how we met. That exhibition opened a shared set of questions around how sound operates both as evidence (as a trace of an event) and as affect; how histories are mediated through material and immaterial infrastructures; and how research-based practices can move between different registers of critique.

Mural for America (detail), 2023. 1,920 engraved stainless-steel plaques and screws, 63 × 352 ¾ in. (160 × 896 cm)

One of the central challenges for me with the work *Liability Infrastructure* [2023]—first presented at Amant—is the way the work is so often read primarily through its research. Strangely, the artistic dimension seems to take on a secondary role. I understand that impulse: the material is highly specific, and the investigative research framework is rich.

Despite the differences, I think our work overlaps in how we both engage with infrastructures of control—whether cultural or chemical—and in how we attend to their effects. Whether through sound/visual language and/or administrative form, we're both trying to give shape to systems that govern us, systems that manipulate perception, emotion, and meaning. The methods differ, but we share the impulse to make that machinery felt.

MB: Navigating the relationship of research, narratives, and artistic form is a continuous challenge for us both. Your Amant show marked the beginning of your investigations into fracking and the industry behind it; in my recent body of work, a suite of 1970s vinyl records titled *environments* functions as the starting point. In both our projects, what emerges as the actual artworks depends on a process of translation. The artworks are not the research or the narratives referenced but the result of a process of form-finding within our respective artistic vocabularies. In *Mural for America* [2023], you made the choice to use a form that projects authority rather than simply list the fracking chemicals you researched in a booklet. This process is where, on a level of method, our artistic voices come in and distinguish the work from that of a scientist, journalist, or historian.

ST: Yes, that's where our practices converge—in how we attend to forms of display. You, for instance, integrate vinyl records and their covers into some artworks, and the way they're shown—how they're framed, staged, held—creates a conceptual condition.

MB: The "nature sounds" I contributed to our *echo** installation were recorded from the *environments* records. What interests me, in addition to the story behind those records and what the sounds actually are, is the process of mediation: the crackles and pops, bringing to the foreground the apparatus and the nature of the sonic storage device—time represented through the rumbles of the archive, so to speak. The sounds are not natural; they are highly processed. The record covers' verbal and visual rhetorics mark the sounds as self-care tools and mask their role within optimization processes within a capitalist setting.

ST: The fiction of neutrality, embedded in every technical device. It comes back to the apparatus—how mediation structures perception.

MB: Exactly. I try to mobilize display to highlight how the way something is presented affects the possible readings of it. A similar operation is at work in your practice. You choose materials and forms that, in and of themselves, already speak about bureaucracies, control, and power. For example, in the exhibition *Infra-Specter* [2023], your work inhabits, among other formats of control, mainstream TV news; also, *Mural for America* is made from material that will last hundreds of years, thus projecting authority and permanence.

ST: Since display is never neutral, it inevitably ties into site. I'm curious how you approach that in your own work.

MB: I prefer the term *context specificity*, as it also speaks to the discourses, rituals, and power relations associated with a site. The *environments* records map one space on top of another—an acoustic one on top of a physical one, "nature" onto architecture—complicating the notion of specificity of a site. Your piece *Proximity Relation* [2023], about the underground gas infrastructure, points to a specific site. That site can simultaneously exist in

From left: Martin Beck, *tasks*, 2023. Pencil on paper, 70 ⅞ × 59 in. (180 × 149.9 cm); Martin Beck, *equilibrium: Summer Cornfield*, 2023. LP cover (*environments 7*, Syntonic Research Inc., SD66007, 1974), 8-ply museum board, and plexiglass, 20 × 30 in. (50.8 × 76.2 cm). Installation view, *Martin Beck: . . . for hours, days, or weeks at a time*, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, 2025

different places but is, nevertheless, always specific regarding location: in proximity to an art institution, or far away somewhere in a forest in Pennsylvania. It could also point to the entire infrastructural complex of energy production and its relation to the environment.

ST: Yes, exactly. And that connects to a prompt the Biennial curators offered early on about how American art relates to the broader context of the US. I think that's one of the deeper undercurrents linking us—the way we each engage with America at large and wider imperialist structures and ideologies, but from different positions.

MB: Most of the topical references in my work over the last thirty years have to do with the cultural and political histories of the United States. That interest brought me to the country in the first place—I was looking at American culture as an outsider. Now, of course, I also have personal connections, not just work interests. Despite not living here, your connection to the US is built into your life, into your family's history. In a way, we are both tethered to the US through a certain distance, but that distance is structured in different ways, choice being one factor.

ST: Coming from Vietnam, the Vietnam War is a historical condition I inherited. But it wasn't until I was studying art that I understood how deeply that war reverberated elsewhere, particularly within the history of Conceptual art. I remember reading Lucy Lippard's *Six Years* [*: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, 1973] and realizing the geopolitical rupture the war caused as a

Reverberations (Marshall County, WV), (Greene County, PA), (Ryerson Station State Park, PA), 2023. Sound installation, dimensions variable. Installation view, *Sung Tieu: Infra-Specter*, Amant, Brooklyn, NY, 2023

catalytic force in the transformation of artistic strategies. The student protests of the late 1960s were a response not only to the war's brutality but also to the institutions and systems complicit in that violence. What interested me was this dislocation: that something so formative to my own context had instigated a radical shift in another place. It made me wonder: How could I contribute to this history of Conceptual art from a different vantage point? What would it mean to engage that legacy, not from New York but from the position of someone whose country had been the so-called locus of its emergence?

MB: Did you start thinking conceptually as an artist from the get-go, or did you transition through a more traditional approach?

ST: When I was studying, I didn't know what to make work *about*, really. The art history I was taught was overwhelmingly Eurocentric, and I struggled to see where I fit within it. Before enrolling in art school, I had studied political science and public administration.

MB: Ha! That makes sense.

ST: I didn't know what to do for a long time. I actually didn't think I would become an artist. I imagined I might work in a related field—something applied, something functional—

MB: Become an administrator, a registrar—

ST: Exactly! [*Laughs.*] I was open to all of it. It also came from an insecurity of not really believing that I had the permission to make art. I didn't grow up going to museums. Art wasn't something that entered the house. It took a long time to arrive at a practice that felt like it could be mine. The history of Conceptual art became unexpectedly important. Not only as a movement, but as a structure, as an idea—of resistance even; and/or as a form of strange mirroring. As someone

There Is Green Gas in Ohio State (detail), 2023. Newspaper and rocking chairs, dimensions variable

who exists between two worlds, I became interested in how historical narratives shift depending on where you stand and how you're positioned.

MB: No single history, only multiple histories. Over the last few weeks, I've been reading and rereading books and essays on Minimal art for a seminar I'm preparing. One of the unresolved and fascinating connections I kept thinking about is imperialism as it manifested itself during the American War in Vietnam but also in today's culture and political climate. In relation to Minimal art, I started thinking about the phrase *corporate imperialism* and about corporate aesthetics as an imperialism of form. One could connect that thought to some of your works, because you employ some corporate forms and minimal aesthetics as habitats for your ideas.

ST: Our work overlaps in our shared interest in the manipulative potential of sound. I come from an interest in sonic warfare (also used by America's PSYOPS Army division in the Vietnam War) and thinking about how sound is deployed tactically—and violently—to manipulate, destabilize, and control. You approach it more through affective management, the subtle coercions of corporate sound environments. But structurally, they're closely related. Military psychological operations have historically borrowed from Hollywood using "horror" sound design, oftentimes with various echoes, ambient tension, even meteorological cues to generate fear or unease. And in your case, too, the sound of rain or thunderstorms or birdsong—these aren't neutral. They're mediated, constructed.

MB: One could call it wellness as a form of exploitation: the person who is rested and focused as a result of listening to the nature sounds on the *environments* records becomes a more efficient person—*efficiency* being the key word. Some of the sounds you have worked with are meant to assault; they are part of actual warfare. In both cases, it is psychological manipulation.

ST: Exactly. And I think with *Liability Infrastructure*, that idea extended into another register—not through sound directly, but through data. The chemicals, the fracking registry, the infrastructure . . . it's a different kind of manipulation—not sonic, but systemic and administrative. The sheer abundance of information becomes a strategy—a way of disorienting, of making it difficult to see clearly or to act.

MB: You said in a recent interview that your practice involves providing information that's already public. *Mural for America* mobilizes an overwhelming number of names of chemicals used in fracking to confront the viewer with, as you say, the systemic, administrative effect of this manipulation, as well as its physical effect.

ST: I worked with a data scientist, Gary Allison, and compiling those chemicals was incredibly labor-intensive. We were working with five million entries from FracFocus. It became this strange oscillation between the monumental and the banal—days spent combing through Excel spreadsheets, sorting, cross-referencing, and cleaning data. There was no grand narrative, just slow, repetitive administrative work.

MB: There exists a compelling methodical connection between *Mural for America* and my book *Last Night* [2013/2019], despite them addressing radically different contexts. What is key artistically in both cases is how we format the data we work with and how information is given form, both conceptually and visually.

ST: For me, the gesture was never about interpretation, but about making this material available in a form that both holds and disperses it. The work, in its current form, consists of 1,920 stainless-steel plaques, a surface that feels monumental and yet open-ended, allowing others to continue the research and extend it in new directions.

MB: I imagine there are hundreds of additional chemicals in fracking that one could unearth.

ST: Absolutely. I became interested not only in the chemicals themselves but also in the systems of classification that surround them. Often, they would alter a chemical compound slightly or rename it entirely. It's a strategy of complication through variation and sheer abundance, of flooding the registry—submitting large volumes of slightly altered compounds, which makes patterns difficult to trace and environmental impacts difficult to prove. At the same time, these companies aggressively lobby for strong trade-secret protections. As a result, even though FracFocus holds so many disclosures, a significant percentage, around 15 to 20 percent, remain undisclosed, protected as proprietary information. That's over 900,000 individual chemical entries that have been withheld. So, within this flood of data, there's a deep infrastructure of secrecy.

MB: Does the work address that fact?

ST: Yes. On the last part of the mural, in those last engravings, they just say "trade secret" or "proprietary." That's how they are listed in the FracFocus database—they are all accompanied by a vague chemical classification, with no further detail. It gestures towards how regulatory language performs transparency while often withholding substance or anything meaningful. What is made visible is, in fact, a carefully managed absence.

MB: It is stunning how the management of information about fracking connects metaphorically with the gas's material condition. In both, there is a "presence of absence." Consequently, information withheld and the invisibility of gas become the foundation of an omnipresent infrastructure of extraction.

MARTIN BECK is an artist living in New York and Vienna.

BORN 1987
IN SAN SALVADOR,
EL SALVADOR;
LIVES IN NEW YORK

JULIO TORRES

Julio Torres in *Color Theories,* 2025. Off-Broadway theater production (Boundary Road Productions)

MARTINE GUTIERREZ: One of the most intriguing questions that people ask me is, how did you and I meet?

JULIO TORRES: Why do you think people are so obsessed with this question?

Martine Gutierrez and Julio Torres in *PROBLEMISTA*, 2023. Film (A24), 1:44 min.

MG: They want to feel like they're a part of destiny?

JT: I think it's, like, in the way that people feel like podcast hosts are their friends. They want the same from us. But I think that we enjoy a layer of distance. Would you say that's correct?

MG: I would love less distance from you, honestly. I did tell someone once that I was your stalker.

JT: You were my what?

MG: Your stalker!

JT: Oh, "stalker!" I thought you said "soccer."

MG: No, no, we definitely have never played sports together.

JT: Yes. You were my stalker, yes.

MG: What did you want to be when you grew up?

JT: An architect. For a little bit, just because my mom is one. But then, I don't know, I never really daydreamed of a profession.

MG: Oh, really? You didn't want to go to work.

JT: I definitely do not want to go to work. No. I mean, school was hard.

MG: School was grueling.

JT: Having to wake up that early, to go do something that you're bad at. I still have nightmares of not knowing a single thing that the math teacher's talking about.

MG: I feel like you would have been good at geometry, though, because it's so visual.

JT: I was fine with geometry because there was something soothing about being able to see the shape and solving the visual puzzle in front of you.

MG: Do you remember just learning how to use a computer?

JT: I had computer class!

MG: Yeah, I did, too. I had Type to Learn, do you remember that?

JT: Oh, I don't think I had that. A bulk of my computer class was about learning how to fold the plastic that covered the different parts of the computer. Because we had plastic that covered the computer, the monitor, the keyboard.

MG: A draping class!

JT: [*Laughs.*]

MG: Actually, it was a fashion class.

JT: Next question.

MG: Do you ever wish upon a star?

JT: No, but the moon, definitely. You know when people text you and are, like, "Full moon in Leo tonight," and you're a Leo moon, very important night for you, and I'm like, "Okay, well, what do I do with that?"

MG: I just did a full-moon ceremony in LA before flying back for *Color Theories*. And I cried! I had written down three things that you let go of, and then one thing that you want to summon, to bring in.

JT: They were all, "First name, last name."

MG: No, it was, like, "illusion," "happily ever after," "save yourself."

JT: Those were the three that you burned?

MG: Yeah.

JT: "Illusion"? Walk me through "illusion."

MG: Illusion was the biggest one. I was with Seb, and I was like, "I am Illusion! I can't burn this. I am this!"

JT: "I am but a mirage!"

MG: And he was like, "No, amiga, you are real; you are right here."

JT: So now your translucent flesh is turning solid.

MG: Time is ticking. I need to make use of the mortal world, or something.

JT: Hmm, till the next full moon.

MG: What was the first color you ever saw?

JT: I don't know about the first color that I ever saw, but I remember the first color that I liked. Purple. Because I had a little outfit that my mom made for me. I feel like the '90s were so much about kids' shorts-and-t-shirt combos, right?

MG: Yeah, that's all we owned!

JT: Shirt with a graphic on it—

MG: —and shorts that look like boxers—

JT: —and my mom made me one, and she hand-drew a little purple train onto the shirt. I remember wearing it, and a girl asked me if I was a boy or a girl. And I just didn't answer.

MG: I heard the same question, "Are you a girl or a boy?" And I also didn't know how to respond, but often would just say, "What do you think?" So cunty. Turn that question right around. What did you make of the confusion?

JT: I feel like it further isolated me from the

Martine Gutierrez and Julio Torres in *FANTASMAS*, 2024. Television series (HBO)

kids around me. I was, like, "Oh no, someone has infiltrated my dome and is now asking questions." I like the idea of having a bubble around me, where I could just be alone.

MG: Wait, I do want to talk about purple. For those unfamiliar with the allegory of the Torres color scheme, could you—not define, but give us an interlude into how you would identify purple?

JT: I think of purple as a delicious clash between logic, which is blue, and passion, which is red. So, when something is subverting or mocking the logic that it's trapped in, that is purple. A soap opera is purple because it plays with convention, but there's so much passion in it that, when you mix them, it just creates this—sort of funny drag or something.

MG: I'm learning that I am purple rising.

JT: Like, fairy tale villains are purple. Because they have a lot of rage in them.

MG: When do you find inspiration? When does it come to you?

JT: Walking around and seeing things I haven't seen before. Just going off the beaten path a little bit.

MG: You've starred in TV shows and feature films that you've written. Do you identify as a main character?

JT: No! I don't. I really don't. I really, really, really, really don't. I identify as a narrator. I think I'm an observer and a narrator. Like, whenever I see my face on a poster, I'm like, "What? Why? That makes no sense."

Martine Gutierrez in *FANTASMAS*, 2024. Television series (HBO)

MG: And then you . . .

JT: Created a one-man show, yeah.

MG: Then you made a feature, and a series, and then . . .

JT: I'm eager to not use my physical vessel anymore.

MG: We've talked about this, I'm excited for you to—

JT: To be disembodied.

MG: To really step into being a director. Wizard of Oz vibe. How many muses have you had? Who was the first?

JT: How many muses have I had? I mean, the first were my Barbies. Obviously!

MG: Love! Your dolls!

JT: My first was definitely my Ariel Barbie. And there was another one, a classic Barbie with long blonde hair, and I hated her long hair, so my mom took me to the hair salon to give her a bob. We gave that Barbie a little perfect bob. And I was like, "Now she's elegant."

MG: "Now I can see that neck." Ha! Very Steven Meisel of you.

JT: I truly don't really identify with the archetype of creator and muse.

MG: So, you don't consider me a Julio Torres muse?

JT: No, we're talking about earlier ones, Martine. Don't you get all frustrated! I feel like I'm drawn to you, and people like you, who can manipulate your body and use the body as a tool in ways that I can't.

MG: But you grant permission, in a way that, sometimes, even on my own, I don't.

JT: How do you mean?

MG: Like, permission to be purple.

JT: Growing up as an artist is understanding that the people who you work with are not dolls that you're putting into place and changing their outfits and doing whatever, because you're not God to them, right? You are a part of what you are doing together.

MG: Even when you say, "You're going to be nude here and have sushi all over you."

JT: I believe the sushi was your idea! [*Laughs.*] Let the record show!

MG: I love you.

JT: I love you, too.

MG: Why do you think that is? [*Laughs*]

JT: I think that we see ourselves in each other. And I think that we love the parts of ourselves that are reflected in each other.

MG: And you make me *laugh*.

JT: And you make me *laugh*! Yeah, you make me feel *safe*.

Julio Torres in *My Favorite Shapes*, 2019. Televised stand-up comedy special (HBO), 57 min.

MG: Oh, honey! My mom wants to know why she hasn't met you yet. She wants to come see *Color Theories*. She was actually trying to be my plus-one last night, and she just couldn't get it together to get here.

JT: She couldn't find her keys?

MG: She couldn't find the car!

JT: "Oh, honey, I'd come, but I just don't know where the car is."

MG: I actually have a quote from her for you. Quote: "I truly believe that artists are the truth-tellers in spite of all the bull-bleep! People are just numb. They don't seem to know. They don't seem to care. Sometimes I listen to the news at night, and it just makes me so sad. I want to sit and cry. I just think, how do you go on? How do we all go forward?"

JT: She's tapping into something that I wanted to ask you about, which is: do you think you're an optimist? Because I think there's something quite optimistic about your work, and I think there's something kind of optimistic about my work, too.

MG: This is where the tears come, with this idea of getting rid of illusion. I've never thought about it that way, as being optimistic. I usually say "delusional."

JT: But calling yourself delusional comes with self-deprecating self-awareness.

MG: It goes into my next question, actually, which is, do you believe artists have a civic responsibility to push the needle forward?

JT: I don't want to say what anyone has to do, but I do think that honesty is a very important part of art—seeing the world as you honestly see it. I feel like that is one of the key differences between art and entertainment. I do think we owe honesty to an audience. Sharing the world as we see it and not sweeping things under the rug.

Julio Torres and Tilda Swinton in *PROBLEMISTA*, 2023. Film (A24), 1:44 min.

MG: If you could assemble a dream team of collaborators—muses—fictional, living, or brought back from the dead . . .

JT: So it's obviously you; it's obviously Tilda. Isabella. Spike. I'm bringing back Eartha Kitt.

It is set in the—have you seen that ghost town in Turkey, where all the mansions have been abandoned, and they all look like castles?

MG: No.

JT: Yeah, so that, scored by Grace Jones. That's the vision.

MG: In theaters this Christmas.

MARTINE GUTIERREZ is a Whitney Biennial 2026 artist.

Julio Torres interviews Martine Gutierrez on page 222.

SHE MUST BE A MATRIARCH, 2023–25. Fiberglass, paint, adhesive, resin, plaster, plastic, wood, foam, metal, IKEA remnants, leather, deer hair, menstrual cups, prophylactics, and found objects, 96 × 180 × 48 in. (243.8 × 457.2 × 121.9 cm)

BORN 1977
IN LAWRENCE, KS;
LIVES IN BOULDER, CO
NAVAJO NATION
AND CREEK

ANNA TSOUHLARAKIS

YOU KNOW SHE BUYS HER SAGE AT URBAN OUTFITTERS, 2024. Paper on wood panel, 48 × 72 × 2 in. (121.9 × 182.9 × 5.1 cm)

LEILANI LYNCH: We had the opportunity to work together on your exhibition *Indigenous Absurdities* at MCA Denver in 2023, which explored humor through a contemporary Native lens. How do humor, absurdity, and Indigenous identity figure in your recent practice?

ANNA TSOUHLARAKIS: The way humor is used within Indigenous communities is often a double-edged sword: bringing people together to laugh, but also teasing and poking at them. It's a humor that cuts and bites, but there's also love in it, and at times it's amazingly awkward. That's the form of connection that I'm interested in illustrating.

SHE STILL THINKS HER SHIT SMELLS LIKE SAGE, 2024. Plaster, IKEA remnant, shed antler, paint, rabbit fur, beads, German silver concho, cloth, rope, screws, nails, adhesives, and found objects, 11 × 26 × 16 in. (27.9 × 66 × 40.6 cm)

SHE MUST BE A MATRIARCH (detail), 2023–25. Fiberglass, paint, adhesive, resin, plaster, plastic, wood, foam, metal, IKEA remnants, leather, deer hair, menstrual cups, prophylactics, and found objects, 96 × 180 × 48 in. (243.8 × 457.2 × 121.9 cm)

LL: Do you think humor becomes more vital during fraught times like now?

AT: Absolutely. Humor reminds us that there is lightness in even the most difficult situations. Through all the hardships Native people have experienced in the Americas throughout the time of contact, humor has always played a vital role, as you see in our creation stories and in the cautionary tales that circulate within our communities.

LL: One of the other themes that came up in that show was thinking about women and the matriarchy.

AT: Growing up as the only daughter of a single father, I always thought of myself as one of the guys. I wanted to play football, work with my dad in his workshop, build things with a hammer and nails. There was nothing feminine that I was naturally drawn to. It wasn't until I was much older and had my own kids that I realized the feminine side is definitely in me, the idea of being a strong mother. There's a fierceness, a raw protective energy that emerges when I'm around my children. I was invited to show in an exhibition dealing with Indigenous feminism a few years ago, and that was the first time I really thought about my work from that perspective. It's something I'm interested in exploring more—seeing it not only through the idea of being a mother, but also through those filters of humor and sarcasm. When you're with other Native women, inevitably there's teasing and loud, raucous laughing. How do you translate that into sculpture and artwork that can help people understand it a little bit more?

LL: I love how you find ways to imbue certain materials through your choices, to embody that sense of fierceness and aggression. Your sculptures that have, say, a table-saw blade for example—

AT: Saw blades are something that I utilize quite a bit. They have this beauty and shine that draws you in to touch them, but they're also very dangerous. I also use tobacco can lids, which are traditionally used in Native communities as jingles, but instead of curling them I keep them flat so the sharp edges are exposed, giving them that same sense of a blade. I'm always thinking about new ways to repurpose materials and give them new meaning, whether traditional Native craft materials or items that I encounter in my life as an urban Native.

LL: Things such as the diva cups on *SHE MUST BE A MATRIARCH* [2023–25].

AT: I saw that as a form of empowerment, of feminine choice. For this matriarch to have those [diva cups] hanging on her horse shows that they're nothing to be ashamed of. For me, it is a very Navajo way of seeing the world, because in our culture when a girl has her first menstruation we have a puberty ceremony, and it's a huge celebration. It's not seen as a time of withdrawal or embarrassment. It's a time to really show your strength as a woman.

LL: You also make reference to your blood quantum in many of your works, something that was historically used to categorize and suppress Native peoples—which, again, feels like a taking back of power.

AT: I reference the fraction three-quarters in my work for a variety of reasons, including the fact that it's my blood quantum; I'm three-quarters Native. It's how the US government technically defines me as Native American and, for better or worse, how my tribe defines me as a citizen of the Navajo Nation. "Three-quarters" references other parts of my history and life, such as my children; I was pregnant four times, but only three children survived. The three-quarter-inch wrench is something I use a lot in my work. It is a tool, but I also love the idea of throwing a wrench into any situation. And I love silly puns.

LL: That's a great way to transition to some of your text-based work, because, in a sense, I think the immediacy of the text maybe acts like that metaphorical wrench, too. You create two-dimensional works that are almost meme-like: shorter pieces of text that elicit a visceral response from the viewer. They make them either laugh or cringe. Maybe you can talk about why text, and is it part of your intent to provoke a response?

AT: The first time I used text was in the early 2000s, and it was just a handwritten note on corkboard. It wasn't until over a decade later that I started utilizing text in a larger way within my practice. When I was an artist-in-residence at Colorado College, I had been thinking a lot about conversations between museum educators: how they would talk about the response they hoped to get from different audiences, and how to frame that experience. I started thinking about that in terms of race relations, of eliciting reactions to images and ideas surrounding Native Americans.

I loved the immediacy of it. It was so simple: bold Helvetica text; I didn't have to add any flourishes for it to be effective. It cleared the way for understanding how I could utilize text to speak to viewers in a very direct way.

LL: I wrote down your first text-based work. Is it okay to read it?

AT: Yeah.

LL: "I tried emailing you, but you don't have a computer. I tried coming to visit you, but you don't have a house. I tried calling you, but you don't have a phone. I tried talking to you, but you don't understand." When did you make that?

AT: That was from graduate school in 2000.

LL: Already it had the ingredients of some of the things you're exploring currently. Pared down and rooted in an experience or a truth, per se, but also just this biting sense of humor. You've described the reception of that piece as bafflement. Do you think that's because it was defying expectations of what you, as a Native artist, would be making?

AT: I think it was unexpected because it was so pared down. It took me twenty years to pare it down even more, to where the text becomes the primary focus of the piece. That includes building the confidence to present it in such a minimal way.

LL: That's interesting. I wonder if you've felt a different sense of confidence when you've presented your text-based work outdoors for the casual passerby—on a billboard, say—versus in a gallery setting.

AT: Scale matters. I love to present work outside; I love that when people see it, it's not necessarily seen as an artwork—it's just signage that's integrated into the city. And because it's black-and-white, there's nothing else to give you information about where this is coming from, why it's being presented to you. That's where I like to invade people's space and have them be part of my little world for a moment.

LL: Yeah, it's sort of addressing people with a type of Indigenous voice that might be less expected, depending

The Native Guide Project, 2019–present. Billboards, banners, digital monitors, and social media, dimensions variable. Installation view in Phoenix, 2023

SHE THINKS SHE'S TOO GOOD, 2023. Keg, books, foam, wood, tobacco lids, mesh, metal, resin, adhesive, toy teeth, leather, plaster, IKEA remnants, paint, plastic, and found objects, 102 × 60 × 60 in. (259.1 × 152.4 × 152.4 cm)

on the context. I think your work really gets at that in terms of the combination of materials and form. There's always a sense of rootedness in the present; even when you're referencing so-called traditional materials or older stories, there's a sense of the present and thinking about the future. In that context, I was wondering how you feel positioned within the discourse of American art, or contemporary art, or contemporary Indigenous art—if those qualifiers even feel relevant to you?

AT: Growing up with my dad as an artist, I was always aware of the battles he faced when presenting his work as a Native man, and the expectations placed upon him of what his work had to look like for it to sell. I became even more aware of this when my turn came to start creating work. I have always been very proud to call myself a Native American artist, because I want to help expand that definition. I have purposely tried to make work that doesn't easily fit into people's preconceived ideas of what that is. I think defining my work as Native art helps people to recognize that there is no static definition as to what that is.

LL: I know you've talked about explicitly addressing acts of decolonization. But you've also talked about acts of indigenizing instead.

AT: Definitely. I don't like to think about how something can be deconstructed or pulled apart, but how can it be evolved into another form.

LEILANI LYNCH is Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver.

BORN 1974
IN SANTIAGO, CHILE;
LIVES IN NEW YORK
AND BERLIN

JOHANNA UNZUETA

Installation view of
Herbaria, St. Cyprian's
Church, London, 2023

CARLA ACEVEDO-YATES: I understand that your environment is very important for your work, and your personal history informs it as well, so maybe that is a good place for us to start.

JOHANNA UNZUETA: What I learned very early in my life is completely related to the way I work, and not only the technical issues. It's also about the environment, the way I grew up, the places that I was part of. When I was a young, I spent a lot of years going with my grandmother to the countryside in the south of Chile, and she was very good at teaching me many things that I never knew I would use in the future—collecting corn or flowers, or being among chickens and ducks (even though I was afraid of them). I was always busy—doing embroidery, making colors, or making my own album with flowers. When I look at that little girl, I see myself now as an adult; it's like time didn't pass. I moved to Berlin almost five years ago, to a remote place where I'm surrounded by animals and plants so, once again, much more connected with nature. I enjoy it so much because of how simple the way that you live is, and how that gets reflected in the work.

CAY: You did live a lot of years in urban New York City, and there's a whole part of your work that is about the history of industry and industrial objects. You worked with felt, for example, to produce several objects like pipes and faucets and hinges, but at the same time you are very much thinking about the natural environment. I'm wondering how you think about these two very different spaces.

JU: This is when I perceive how much influence my parents had on me. My mother was always a person who showed me that I have to be an independent woman, and even though I have an older brother, she always saw us as equals. She and my grandmother were very good role models, and my father, too. We were an

Installation view of *Drawing in the Continuous Present*, The Drawing Center, New York, 2022

Right: Installation view of *Johanna Unzueta*, Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, East Lansing, MI, 2019

educated, middle-class family, and even though I grew up during a dictatorship, still I somehow developed an interest to know more about the world in general, especially communism, socialism, and all about the Industrial Revolution. I also started working with textiles when I was young, because my grandmother taught me to sew, to knit, to weave. Somehow, in my mind I combined these things—working with your hands, and also world history. I started working with felt because it was a material that is very crafty and soft, but also it's a very industrial material used by architects. In New York, I discovered a felt that is made out of 100 percent merino wool. I fell in love; it blew my mind! I already was working with more humble felt in Chile, but with this felt, I could build the things that I always wanted to build. I started making iconic interiors of industrial buildings, inspired by Bernd and Hilla Becher—their photographs, but also the way that they describe the photograph as a sculpture. I am a three-dimensional thinker, always thinking about ideas that can be walked around and have a relationship to the body. We are not one dimension. We are so much more than three dimensions, because our spirit also goes out of our body. So, I started to create buildings. It was something so soft but so strong at the same time. In a way, the material describes me, because I'm tiny, but I can build huge things, and I always feel like I'm strong.

CAY: You clearly think three-dimensionally, and I want to talk more about that, because I know you're showing drawings at the Whitney Biennial. Recently, your drawing practice has taken a completely different direction. Can you talk a bit about that relationship to drawing, and how there was a shift for these drawings to have more autonomy as objects?

JU: I did a lot of watercolor paintings and sketches for the felt pieces, but that was a personal thing for me; I never took them as a final work. And also, I've never been good with technology; no idea how to do that on a computer. I enjoy doing it with my hands in a more classic way. But then I suffered this illness with my hands, and I couldn't keep doing the felt pieces. I was asking too much of my hands.

I was in a very critical situation, emotionally and existentially, because I'm an artist. I kept asking myself, "If I cannot do this, what am I going to do? How can I keep developing my art if I cannot use my hands?" This is how I came into the drawings. It was such a simple thing I did, not beautiful at all, just two circles. And I did this thinking about me and society, and what we produce together is in the middle. I kept doing more of these circles, adding texture, all graphite. I spent a year doing this. I call it "exercise to survive."

CAY: Love.

JU: A friend of mine has a letterpress and always gives me a lot of leftover paper in different colors and textures. The drawings started to grow, from postcards at first, then I started to make these larger symmetrical drawings. It gave me so much peace. But at the beginning I remember thinking, "What is this? Where did this come from?" And people would ask me, "What happened with the felt? What is the connection?" I didn't have any answers. And then the beautiful thing was that people began telling me that they can see a relation to textile in these drawings.

CAY: Yes, I see them so influenced by textiles. You even started incorporating threads. I know you worked with Mapuche women in 1999 to learn all these different techniques, and they show up in such unexpected ways.

JU: I lived with a Mapuche woman, Eugenia, for a year and nine months, and she showed me how to weave. I wanted to learn to use a real Mapuche loom to make seven wearable sculptures, so I traveled to the south of Chile. But it was really hard to find someone to teach me the technique, because it's a culture that has been punished so much, like many Indigenous cultures. I always think that in the same way as humans don't respect nature, we don't respect Indigenous people. Those are very much related. Indigenous people have been surviving all these years because they listened to what nature has to say. And with textiles, we must think from the beginning of our existence as humans—not only the animal hide to cover ourselves, but also plants like flax and cotton.

This is kind of like magic, the way your brain works and how everything can have a explanation in the end. When I was showing drawings for the first time, these two ladies were discussing them as if they were embroidery or weaving. I tried to explain that they were drawings—then I realized this was the answer I couldn't see myself. The felt pieces; the drawings. Of course! They're like sisters and brothers. I see the drawings as something physical, almost like a body, or even sometimes as a plant because of the way that I treat the paper with natural pigments, and I see how they change over time.

Installation view of *Naturalist*, Casey Kaplan, New York, 2024

Nel pomeriggio non ci serà la luna, 2024. Wood, indigo dye, pastel pencil, oil pastel, and acrylic, 37 ½ × 31 ½ × 6 in. (95 × 80 × 15 cm)

Opposite: *January, September 2024 Berlin*, 2024. Indigo dye, pastel pencil, oil pastel, cut paper, and thread on watercolor paper, 51 ½ × 39 ⅜ in. (131 × 100 cm)

CAY: That's beautiful. Could you talk about your process a bit? Because I know it's slow and very intentional.

JU: The drawings were made out of graphite pencil. No color. It's funny because, as I said, I didn't know what exactly I was doing; I couldn't recognize myself in these things. It's like when I had my son. I remember looking at him the first months after he was born and wondering "How does he relate with me?" Same with the drawing. But they took me out of the world in a way: I became completely disconnected to the sadness and pain I was having, and it was like a dialogue between me and the paper. The first pigment I used was indigo, after having the opportunity to travel to Guatemala—I couldn't believe this amazing velvet blue was coming out of a plant! We don't have that in Chile. I started to dye the paper in different ways on both sides, and I kept using ovals and circles because I don't like corners. Then I added texture with the pastel pencil. They were so beautiful, so rich—the color. I was really kind of, like, submerged! I always feel when I get into these drawings like I'm jumping into the ocean or floating in space—it's so open that you can do whatever you want. This connection almost goes beyond anything here on the earth.

CAY: Before closing, I wanted to mention Lina Bo Bardi, because I know her glass easels have been very influential to how you show your work. The easels aren't just a display mechanism; they're part of the drawing.

JU: I knew about Lina for a long time, and I remember when I started to do the drawings, I was completely sure that I never imagined them hanging on a wall because they have perforations that allow the light to go through the paper. So to resolve the hanging problem, I noticed the wooden pieces that you see in restaurants, where menus are displayed.

It's very ordinary, very basic. But I love it because this was just an observation. As I said, the drawings have two faces, neither is more important than the other. One is just more talkative, and the other is quieter.

CARLA ACEVEDO-YATES is a curator and researcher based in Chicago.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

A

BASEL ABBAS AND RUANNE ABOU-RAHME
Until we became fire and fire us, 2023–ongoing. Multichannel high-definition video, color, and sound, 32 min.; steel panels; sublimation prints on chiffon; and archival inkjet prints. Collection of Moraes-Barbosa, São Paulo, and Polygreen Culture & Art Initiative, Athens; courtesy the artists

KELLY AKASHI
Imprints, 2026. Embossed and book-ash-flocked paper in artist's frames, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

Inheritance (Distressed), 2026. Waterjet-cut weathering steel, 55 × 55 in. (139.7 × 139.7 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

Monument (Altadena), 2026. Cast-glass bricks, mortar, and stainless steel, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

Remnants (Constellations), 2026. Animation; duration unknown. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

KAMROOZ ARAM
Archipelago, 2025. Oil, oil crayon, and pencil on linen in artist's frames, five panels: 84 × 131 in. (213.4 × 332.7 cm) overall. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist, Alexander Gray Associates, and Green Art Gallery

An as-yet-untitled collage, 2026. Mediums and dimensions unknown. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist, Alexander Gray Associates, and Green Art Gallery

An as-yet-untitled vitrine, 2026. Mediums and dimensions unknown. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist, Alexander Gray Associates, and Green Art Gallery

Beneath the Ruins, 2024. Oil, oil crayon, and pencil on linen, 66 × 76 in. (167.6 × 193 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist, Alexander Gray Associates, and Green Art Gallery

ASH ARDER
Broadcast #4, 2024. Wood, plastic crates, Black Bottom Detroit soil, brass, seeds, paper, speakers, mixer, drum machine, audio cables, and sound, 31 × 90 × 41 in. (78.7 × 228.6 × 104.1 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

Consumables, 2023. Display refrigerator, solar-powered battery storage system, shea butter, butter, chocolate, plastic, and light, 19 ½ × 17 ⅜ × 20 in. (49.5 × 44.1 × 50.8 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

B

TERESA BAKER
The Harvest Melting on Our Tongues, 2025. Yarn, acrylic, buckskin, and willow on synthetic turf, 145 × 132 ⅝ in. (368.3 × 336.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Broadway, New York

To the Morning Light, 2025. Yarn, buckskin, beads, and artificial sinew on synthetic turf, 108 × 73 ½ in. (274.3 × 186.7 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Broadway, New York

Voluminous Day, 2025. Yarn, parfleche, buffalo hide, and artificial sinew on synthetic turf, 108 × 73 ¾ in. (274.3 × 189.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Broadway Gallery

SULA BERMUDEZ-SILVERMAN
As-yet-untitled, 2026. Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Hoffman Donahue

blister i, 2025. Hand-blown glass, iron, and steel, 9 ½ × 9 ½ × 13 ¾ in. (24.1 × 24.1 × 34.9 cm). Collection of Anatoli Papirovski and Lindsay Reeve; courtesy Hoffman Donahue

blister iii, 2025. Hand-blown glass, iron sheep shears, and steel, 12 × 6 ½ × 15 ½ in. (30.4 × 16.5 × 39.4 cm). Collection of Hannah Hoffman and Marguerite Steed Hoffman; courtesy Hoffman Donahue

trap i, 2025. Hand-blown glass, iron animal trap, and steel, 13 ¼ × 6 × 6 ½ in. (33.7 × 15.2 × 16.5 cm). Private collection; courtesy Hoffman Donahue

trap ii, 2025. Hand-blown glass, iron animal trap, and steel, 8 ¾ × 5 ½ × 4 ½ in. (22.2 × 14 × 11.4 cm). Private collection; courtesy Hoffman Donahue

weaner i, 2025. Hand-blown glass, iron calf weaner, and steel, 6 ½ × 5 ¼ × 3 in. (16.5 × 13.3 × 7.6 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Hoffman Donahue

ZACH BLAS
CULTUS, 2023. Five-channel high-definition video, color, and 6.1 surround sound, 49:04 min., looped; LED sphere and panels; LED lights; aluminum; medium-density fiberboard; oriented strand board; acrylic; metal chains; 3D-printed Spanish ticklers; hand-blown glass with sandblasted sigil; representations of ejaculate, brain matter, tears, and blood, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist. Commissioned by arebyte, London, and Secession, Vienna. Support provided by Canada Council for the Arts and Thor Perplies and Jason Kemper

C

ENZO CAMACHO AND AMI LIEN
Flame Garden (bruised), 2024. Watercolor, ink, beeswax, abaca pulp, bagasse (sugarcane fiber), banana stalk, cilantro, coconut, cogon grass, fennel, kale, leek, onion skins, primrose petals, rice hull, sargassum algae, seashell, seaweed, spring onion, statice blossoms, and taro shoots, 31 ¾ × 48 ¼ × 4 ½ in. (80.6 × 122.5 × 11.4 cm). Collection of the artists; courtesy the artists and 47 Canal

Flame Garden (enzyme), 2024. Watercolor, ink, beeswax, abaca pulp, bagasse (sugarcane fiber), banana stalk, cilantro, coconut, cogon grass, fennel, kale, leek, onion skins, primrose petals, rice hull, sargassum algae, sea-shell, seaweed, spring onion, statice blossoms, and taro shoots, 31 ¾ × 48 ¼ × 4 ½ in. (80.6 × 122.5 × 11.4 cm). Collection of the artists; courtesy the artists and 47 Canal

For a Just War against America, 2026. Collaged paper, papier-mâché, watercolor, ink, plaster, and epoxy resin with wood cabinet, 25 ½ × 67 × 21 in. (64.8 × 170.2 × 53.3 cm), open; 25 ½ × 33 ½ × 21 in. (64.8 × 85.1 × 53.3 cm), closed. Collection of the artists; courtesy the artists and 47 Canal

Sacred Heart (baby kamote), 2025. Watercolor, ink, beeswax, abaca pulp, banana stalk, calophyllum (bitalog) leaf, cilantro, imitation gold leaf, linden leaf, *Macaranga tanarius* (binunga) leaf, primrose petals, spring onion, sea moss, sweet potato (kamote) leaf, taro shoots, and wildflowers, 15 ¾ × 14 ⅛ in. (40 × 35.8 cm). Collection of the artists; courtesy the artists and 47 Canal

Social Volcano (heavy clouds), 2024. Watercolor, gouache, beeswax, abaca pulp, ash, bagasse (sugarcane fibre), banana stalk, bugnai leaf, cauliflower leaves, cilantro, coconut husk, cogon grass, mica, nipa, parsley, pineapple tops, seashell, seaweed, sugar-cane leaves, and taro shoots, 36 ¾ × 60 ¾ × 4 ½ in. (93.3 × 154.3 × 11.4 cm). Courtesy the artists and 47 Canal

LEO CASTAÑEDA
Camoflux: Biomes, 2026. Ultra-high-definition video game, color, and sound; fiberglass furniture; fabrics; interactive monitors; and controllers; dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist. Designed in collaboration with Maria Thereza Negreiros; programmed by Jaime Soto Kure; produced by Lauren Monzon; sound design by Victor Gamboa and Christian Cahill (TRNGS); furniture fabrication by Eric Cloutier

Camoflux Biomes 360, 2026. Ultra-high-definition animation, color, and sound; fiberglass pedestal; interactive monitor; and trackball; dimensions variable. Designed in collaboration with Maria Thereza Negreiros; programmed by Jaime Soto Kure; sound design by Victor Gamboa; furniture fabrication by Eric Cloutier

Camoflux Recall Grotto, 2025–26. Web-based game. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; commissioned by the Whitney Museum of American Art for the artport website. Game design

and direction by Leo Castañeda; programmed by Jaime Soto Kure; sound design by Víctor Gamboa; vocals performed by Irene Rodríguez. First started with support from the 2020 Game Jam Lab at Museo La Tertulia, Cali, Colombia

CFGNY
Continuous Fractures Generating New Yields, 2025. Wood, polyethylene sheeting, mirrors, tempered glass, eight porcelain sculptures, and one soft sculpture, dimensions variable. Collection of the artists; courtesy Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver

NANI CHACON
Our Gods Walk Among Us (1), 2026. Iron and steel, 194 ⅝ × 87 ⅝ × 48 in. (493.2 × 222.6 × 121.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Creative Capital

Our Gods Walk Among Us (2), 2026. Steel, 189 ½ × 136 ¼ × 97 in. (481.3 × 346.1 × 246.4 cm). Collection of the Navajo Nation Museum; courtesy the artist and Creative Capital

Our Gods Walk Among Us (3), 2026. Steel, 181 ¾ × 124 5⁄15 × 48 in. (461.7 × 315.8 × 121.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Creative Capital

MAIA CHAO
An as-yet-untitled performance, May 2026. Courtesy the artist

An as-yet-untitled site-specific wall drawing, 2026. Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

JOSHUA CITARELLA
Doomscroll, 2024–ongoing. Series of live-recorded podcast episodes, duration unknown. Courtesy the artist

MO COSTELLO
Untitled (Cleveland Ave.), 2025. Gelatin silver print, 11 ½ × 9 ½ × 1 ¼ in. (29.2 × 24.1 × 3.2 cm) framed. Ed. 2 of 3 + 2 AP. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and april april, Pittsburgh

Untitled (Moreland Ave., I), 2025. Gelatin silver print, 11 ½ × 9 ½ × 1 ¼ in. (29.2 × 24.1 × 3.2 cm) framed. Ed. 2 of 3 + 2 AP. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and april april, Pittsburgh

Untitled (Moreland Ave., II), 2025. Gelatin silver print, 11 ½ × 9 ½ × 1 ¼ in. (29.2 × 24.1 × 3.2 cm) framed. Ed. 2 of 3 + 2 AP. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and april april, Pittsburgh

Untitled (Peter St.), 2025. Gelatin silver print, 11 ½ × 9 ½ × 1 ¼ in. (29.2 × 24.1 × 3.2 cm) framed. Ed. 2 of 3 + 2 AP. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and april april, Pittsburgh

Untitled (Readers), 2015–26. Materials and dimensions variable. Ed. 2 of 3 + 2 AP. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and april april, Pittsburgh

Untitled (Riot), 2025. Gelatin silver print, 11 ½ × 9 ½ × 1 ¼ in. (29.2 × 24.1 × 3.2 cm) framed. Ed. 2 of 3 + 2 AP. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and april april, Pittsburgh

TAÍNA H. CRUZ
As-yet-untitled, 2026. Tempera paint stick on wall, video projection, paintings, drawings, and figurine, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler

I Saw the Future and It Smiled Back, 2025. Billboard, 17 × 29 ft. (5.2 × 8.8 m). Courtesy the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler

D

CARMEN DE MONTEFLORES
Four Women, 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 83 × 112 in. (210.8 × 284.5 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

Man and Woman Sitting, 1968. Acrylic on canvas, 84 × 83 in. (213.4 × 210.8 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

Via Crucis IV, 1967. Acrylic on canvas, 79 × 60 in. (200.7 × 152.4 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

E

ALI EYAL
An as-yet-untitled series of drawings, 2026. Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly

Look Where I Took You, 2026. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly

F

ANDREA FRASER
Untitled (Object I), 2024. Microcrystalline wax, aluminum, and steel, 5 ⅞ × 35 ⅜ × 15 ¾ in. (15 × 90 × 40 cm) sculpture; 33 ½ × 47 ¼ × 23 ⅝ in. (85 × 120 × 60 cm) pedestal; 19 ¾ × 47 ¼ × 23 ⅝ in. (50 × 120 × 60 cm) plexiglass case. Private collection

Untitled (Object II–V), 2024. Microcrystalline wax, aluminum, and steel, 5 ⅞ × 35 ⅜ × 15 ¾ in. (15 × 90 × 40 cm) each sculpture; 33 ½ × 47 ¼ × 23 ⅝ in. (85 × 120 × 60 cm) each pedestal; 19 ¾ × 47 ¼ × 23 ⅝ in. (50 × 120 × 60 cm) each plexiglass case. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist; Marian Goodman Gallery; and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin

G

MARIAH GARNETT
Songbook, 2024. High-definition video, color, and sound; 55 min. Courtesy the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles and Mexico City

IGNACIO GATICA
Sanhattan, 2025. Digital video, color, and sound, 18:57 min.; and LED panels. Courtesy the artist. Support provided by Fundación Amo Amoedo and Thomas E. Moore III

JONATHAN GONZÁLEZ
An as-yet-untitled performance, May 2026. Courtesy the artist

magic hour–golden time A. [Overlook], 2026. Chromogenic print, 9 × 11 in. (22.9 × 27.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

magic hour–golden time B. [Catwalk], 2026. Chromogenic print, 9 × 11 in. (22.9 × 27.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

magic hour–golden time C. [Heights], 2026. Chromogenic print, 9 × 11 in. (22.9 × 27.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

EMILIE LOUISE GOSSIAUX
And You Alone, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

Becoming Part of the Forest, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

Becoming Part of the Forest 2, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

Co-Shaping One Another with the Moon, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

In Dreams We'll See Again, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

Kong Play, 2025. Acrylic on 100 individual ceramic sculptures, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

London, at the Foot of the Bed, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

The Marriage of Hand and Paw, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

The Menage a Trois, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

Reaching for Heaven, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

Return under the Moon (with worms and flowers), 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

Surrendering to You, 2025. Ballpoint pen and crayon on paper, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

KAINOA GRUSPE
early fires—when god arrived—"before had england, before even had Jesus," 2025. Fabric, wood stretcher, thread,

strawberry guava wood, kiawe wood found at Pu'uloa (Pearl Harbor), teak, cardboard box from firewood package, roofing tar, paint, and zip ties, 40 × 48 × 2 in. (101.6 × 121.9 × 5.1 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

he'e and leho forever / cones, 2025. Fabric, embroidery, teak, fossilized squid, niu and hau cordage, paint, and cement paver from Hilton Hawaiian Village, 70 × 37 in. (177.8 × 94 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

Kainoa Gruspe with Caleb Sugai and Amber Khan, *→✹←(starfish of doom)*, 2025. Fabric, wood stretcher, silicone-based adhesive, paint, photograph, fishhooks from swordfish bill, nails, hau cordage, cowrie shells, and ironwood from Ala Wai Golf Course, 56 × 48 in. (142.2 × 121.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

welcome to here—doorstops, 2025. Salvaged stone; kiawe wood, haole koa wood, and Douglas fir; and cement from property on O'ahu currently occupied by those who might have helped cause or are currently upholding extractive and imperialistic dominion, including military bases, golf courses, and hotel resorts; dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

MARTINE GUTIERREZ AND JULIO TORRES
An as-yet-untitled theater production and performance, 2026. Little Island, New York. Courtesy the artists

H

SAMIA HALABY
Bread, 1988. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and silent; 0:31 min. Ed. 5 + 2 AP. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery

Central Park 8, 1986. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and sound; 3:47 min. Ed. 5 + 2 AP. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery

Dark Weaver, 1989. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and silent; 0:17 min. Ed. 5 + 2 AP. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery

Ebb Tide, 1987. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and sound; 0:39 min. Ed. number unknown. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery

Flower, 1988. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and sound; 0:34 min. Ed. number unknown. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery

Fold 2, 1988. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and sound; 0:55 min. Ed. 5 + 2 AP. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery

For Olga Rozanova, 1988. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and sound, 1:58 min. Ed. number unknown. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery

Land, 1988. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and sound; 1:15 min. Ed. number unknown. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery

Lines 3, 1986. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and silent; 2:05 min. Ed. 5 + 2 AP. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery

Weavings, 1987. Kinetic painting programmed on a personal computer, transferred to digital, color, and silent; 0:32 min. Ed. 5 + 2 AP. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery

RAVEN HALFMOON
The Guardians, 2026. Stoneware and glaze, 108 × 47 ⅜ × 43 ¹³⁄₁₆ in. (274.3 × 120.3 × 111.2 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Salon 94, New York

Sun Twins, 2023. Stoneware and glaze, 78 × 48 × 28 in. (198.1 × 121.9 × 71.1 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Salon 94, New York

NILE HARRIS WITH DYER RHOADS
An as-yet-untitled performance, March–August 2026. Courtesy the artists

Dark Brown Birkin Bag, 2026. Crate, artists' skin, thread, and hardware, dimensions unknown. Courtesy the artists

End of Days, 2026. Three LED displays, dimensions unknown. Courtesy the artists

AZIZ HAZARA
Moon Sightings, 2024. Archival pigment prints on paper, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Experimenter Kolkata/Bomba

MARGARET HONDA
Film (Whitney Museum of American Art), 2026. 22 color-balancing and neutral-density polyester gels, dimensions variable, site-determined. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Galerie Molitor

I

AKIRA IKEZOE
Frog Stories around Nuclear Power Plant, 2025, from the series *Stories Around*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 58 × 96 in. (147.3 × 243.8 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City

Mole Stories around Methane Gas, 2025, from the series *Stories Around*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 50 × 62 in (127 × 157.5 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City

Robot Stories around Solar Panels, 2025, from the series *Stories Around*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 58 × 96 in. (147.3 × 243.8 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City

MAO ISHIKAWA
A selection of untitled photographs from the series *Life in Philly*, 1986. Gelatin silver prints, 16 × 20 in. (40.6 × 50.8 cm) each. Courtesy the artist and Poetic Scape, Tokyo

A selection of untitled photographs from the series *Red Flower (Akabanaa): The Women of Okinawa*, 1975–77. Gelatin silver prints, 16 × 20 in. (40.6 × 50.8 cm) each. Courtesy the artist and Poetic Scape, Tokyo

J

COOPER JACOBY
Estate (January 21, 2016), 2024. Thermoplastic, polarized polycarbonate, camera, LCD screen, speaker, electronics, acrylic, acrylic clear coat, and pan arm, 15 ¾ × 7 ⅞ × 9 ⅞ in. (40 × 20 × 25 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Fitzpatrick Gallery

Estate (July 10, 2022), 2026. Thermoplastic, polarized polycarbonate, camera, LCD screen, speaker, electronics, acrylic, acrylic clear coat, magnetic field viewing film, dead hard-drive magnets, motors, leather, painted steel, acrylic, aluminum, and polystyrene board, 78 ¾ × 80 ⁵⁄₁₆ × 35 ⁷⁄₁₆ in. (200 × 204 × 90 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Fitzpatrick Gallery

Mutual Life (40.4 years), 2026. Polished stainless steel, plastic teeth, electronics, wax, medium-density fiberboard, thermoplastic, acrylic, and acrylic clear coat, 13 ¾ × 13 ¾ × 5 ½ in. (35 × 35 × 14 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Fitzpatrick Gallery

Mutual Life (77.3 years), 2026. Polished stainless steel, plastic teeth, electronics, wax, medium-density fiberboard, thermoplastic, acrylic, and acrylic clear coat, 13 ¾ × 13 ¾ × 5 ½ in. (35 × 35 × 14 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Fitzpatrick Gallery

DAVID L. JOHNSON
Claim, 2026–ongoing. Erosion of the outdoor concrete property markers of the Whitney Museum of American Art, dimensions variable, site-specific. Courtesy the artist

Rule, 2024–ongoing. Removed codes-of-conduct signs, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

K

KEKAHI WAHI
kekahi wahi (Sancia Miala Shiba Nash and Drew K. Broderick) and Bradley Capello, *20-minute workout [WIP]*, 2023. Digital video, color, and sound; 23 min. Released by Aupuni Space. Starring Maddie Biven, Josh Tengan, Lise Michelle Suguitan Childers, Reise Kochi, Sean Connelly, and YOU. Kealakekua, Ka'awaloa, Kona, Hawai'i. Collection of the artists; courtesy the artists

YOUNG JOON KWAK
Divine Dance of Soft Revolt (Anna, Travis, Charlie, Me), 2024. Resin, glitter, wax pigment, mirrored glass, and steel, 168 × 66 × 60 in. (426.7 × 167.6 × 152.4 cm). With assistance from Charlie Roses, Brianna Aguilera, Ian Smith, and Jackie Perez. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles and Mexico City

Marvin Astorga and Young Joon Kwak, *Soft Revolt Jamz (Glittered)*, 2025. Two-channel sound work; approx. 20 min. Featuring Johanna Hedva, Anna

Luisa, Dorian Wood, and Xina Xurner. Courtesy the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles

L

MICHELLE LOPEZ
Pandemonium, 2017–25. High-definition digital video, color, and sound, approx. 20 min., projected on 20-ft.-diameter circular screen. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

M

JOSÉ MACEDA AND AKI ONDA
Ugnayan, 1974/2026. Multi-channel sound installation; 51 min. Courtesy Aki Onda and the UP Center for Ethnomusicology

AGOSTO MACHADO
Anna May Wong (Altar), 2025. Textiles, costume jewelry, and pearls; Chinese embroidered shawl and shoes; human hair; mah-jongg tiles; Chinese fingernail guards; Empois Chinois starch; plastic pagoda, makeup compacts; postcards; doll; matchbook; shoe box; photographs; business cards; antique sad iron; and other metal, paper, and plastic objects, 66 ½ × 20 × 16 ½ in. (168.9 × 50.8 × 41.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Gordon Robichaux

Downtown (Altar), 2024. Pins, matchbooks, mirror, and papier-mâché; plastic and metal objects; book (*Theater of the Ridiculous*), photograph, jewelry, banana-flavored straw packets, New York City subway tokens; and original artworks by Arch Connelly, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, and Gilda Pervin, 19 × 20 × 20 in. (48.3 × 50.8 × 50.8 cm). Collection of Jane Hait

Ethyl (Altar), 2024. Jewelry, matchbooks, pins, and textile; plastic, metal, and ceramic objects; postcards, photographs, exhibition booklet, handmade feather butterfly, mask with glitter, coins, makeup compact; pearl, shell, glass, and plastic containers with additional ephemera; and original artworks by Peter Hujar, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, and Uzi Parnes, 68 ×19 ½ × 12 ¼ in. (172.7 × 49.5 × 31.1 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee and the Photography Committee 2025.60a–xx

Shrine (Green), 2024. Jewelry, pins, coins, and textile; plastic, metal, papier-mâché, glass, and found objects; photographs, postcards, exhibition cards and announcements, memorial-service cards and programs, newspaper clippings, books, gong, zipper for Paul Bunyon, matchbooks, paper collage party hat, handmade feather butterflies, coins, sugar packet, carved shells, feathers, handwritten note from 1999, cardboard with graffiti tags collected by Martin Wong; and original artworks by Grady Alexis, Rodney Allan Greenblatt, Bertha Halozan, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Miguel "Mikie" Perez, Gilda Pervin, Chris Tanner, Kenneth A. Wilson, and Stewart Wilson, 101 × 52 ½ × 22 ¼ in. (256.5 × 133.4 × 56.5 cm). Collection of Florencia Cherñajovsky

Untitled (Mask), 1972–73. Plaster gauze, acrylic, and elastic cord, 9 ¾ × 8 ¼ × 1 ½ in. (24.8 × 21 × 3.8 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Gordon Robichaux

Untitled (Self-Portrait), c. 1965. Acrylic on paper, 18 × 12 in. (45.7 × 30.5 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Gordon Robichaux

OSWALDO MACIÁ
Requiem for the Insects, 2026. Scent sculpture, oil on canvas, and 16-channel sound, duration and dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

EMILIO MARTÍNEZ POPPE
Civic Views, 2025. A selection of photographs and text mounted on die-cast aluminum, plexiglass, and scaffolding, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

For the Whitney, 2026. Materials and dimensions unknown. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

ISABELLE FRANCES MCGUIRE
Satan in America and Other Invisible Evils: Experiments in Public Sculpture (Demon, Crouch), 2025. Epoxy resin, epoxy clay, plastic, and steel, dimensions unknown. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

Satan in America and Other Invisible Evils: Experiments in Public Sculpture (Demon, Splay), 2025. Epoxy resin, epoxy clay, plastic, and steel, dimensions unknown. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

Satan in America and Other Invisible Evils: Experiments in Public Sculpture (Witch) 1, 2025. Epoxy resin, epoxy clay, plastic, and steel, 19 × 68 × 16 in. (48.3 × 172.7 × 40.6 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

Satan in America and Other Invisible Evils: Experiments in Public Sculpture (Witch) 2, 2025. Epoxy resin, epoxy clay, plastic, and steel, 19 × 68 × 16 in. (48.3 × 172.7 × 40.6 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

Satan in America and Other Invisible Evils: Experiments in Public Sculpture (Witch) 3, 2025. Epoxy resin and epoxy clay, 19 × 68 × 16 in. (48.3 × 172.7 × 40.6 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist

Symbolic Birth Cabin Unit (Partition) 1, 2026. Imitation logs, mudding, and plywood, 48 × 96 × 12 in. (121.9 × 243.8 × 30.3 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and King's Leap

Symbolic Birth Cabin Unit (Partition) 2, 2026. Imitation logs, mudding, and plywood, 48 × 96 × 12 in. (121.9 × 243.8 × 30.3 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and King's Leap

Symbolic Birth Cabin Unit (Partition) 3, 2026. Imitation logs, mudding, and plywood, 48 × 96 × 12 in. (121.9 × 243.8 × 30.3 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and King's Leap

KIMOWAN METCHEWAIS
Antlers and suspenders Kimowan, n.d. Paper, ink, glue, and graphite on paper, 14 × 10 11/16 in. (35.5 × 27.2 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

Daisies, 2010. Paper, ink, acrylic paint, and adhesive tape on paper, 29 3/16 × 23 1/16 in. (74.1 × 58.5 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

Dogwood, 2006. Paper, ink, graphite, and adhesive tape on paper, 21 15/16 × 21 ¾ in. (55.8 × 55.3 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

Night, n.d. Paper, ink, and adhesive tape on paper, 71 ⅞ × 50 ½ in. (182.5 × 128.3 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

Raincloud, 2010. Cotton canvas, paper, photographs, acrylic, and ink, 25 × 24 × 1 ½ in. (81.5 × 71.5 × 4 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

Roadside Flowers, n.d. Paper, ink, graphite, and acrylic on paper, 22 × 22 ⅛ in. (56 × 56.2 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

A selection of photographs, n.d. Dye diffusion transfer prints (Polaroids), 3 ⅛ × 3 1/16 in. (7.9 × 7.8 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

Spotted Kimowan speaking bubble, n.d. Paper, photographic paper, ink, and graphite on paper, 10 ⅞ × 8 ½ in. (27.7 × 21.6 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

Untitled (AUG), 2003. Paper, ink, and adhesive tape on paper, 29 15/16 × 29 15/16 in. (76 × 76 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

Untitled, from the series *Self-portraits*, 1998. Dye diffusion transfer print (Polaroid) and adhesive tape, 5 × 3 ½ in. (12.7 × 8.9 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

Untitled (JUL), 2003. Paper, ink, and adhesive tape on paper, 28 × 28 ½ in. (71 × 72.3 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

Without Ground, 2006. Paper, ink, adhesive tape, and acrylic on paper, 40 ¾ × 39 ⅜ in. (103.5 × 100 cm). Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian; courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

NOUR MOBARAK
Broad's Cast, 2024–25. Sound work, duration unknown. Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Recto Verso 1.1 (Coral Green), 2024–25. Epoxy resin and liquid pigment, 36 × 30 × 1 ½ in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 3.8 cm). Private collection; courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Recto Verso 1.3 (Burgundy Orange), 2024–25. Epoxy resin and liquid pigment, 36 × 30 × 1 in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 2.5 cm). Private collection; courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Recto Verso 1.4 (Mycelium Azure), 2024–25. Epoxy resin, liquid pigment, and *Trametes versicolor* (turkey tail) mycelium, 36 × 30 × 1 ¾ in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 4.4 cm). Private collection; courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Recto Verso 2.3 (Brown Jade), 2024–25. Epoxy resin and liquid pigment, 36 × 30 × ⅝ in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 1.6 cm). Collection of Serralves Museum; courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Recto Verso 3.1 (Purple Violet), 2024–25. Epoxy resin and liquid pigment, 36 × 30 × ½ in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 1.3 cm). Private collection; courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Recto Verso 3.2 (Yellow Red), 2024–25. Epoxy resin and liquid pigment, 36 × 30 × ½ in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 1.3 cm). Private collection; courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Recto Verso 3.4 (Mycelium Red), 2024–25. Epoxy resin, liquid pigment, and *Trametes versicolor* (turkey tail) mycelium, 36 × 30 × 1 1/8 in. (91.4 × 76.2 × 2.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

A selection of as-yet-untitled sculptures, 2026. Epoxy resin, liquid pigment, and acrylic, dimensions unknown. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

N

ERIN JANE NELSON
Angel Cam, 2025. Pigment print and found materials on glazed stoneware, 20 × 28 × 16 in. (50.8 × 71.1 × 40.6 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist; Chapter NY, New York; and Document, Chicago and Lisbon

As-yet-untitled, 2025. Photographs in ceramic artist's frames, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist; Chapter NY, New York; and Document, Chicago and Lisbon

As-yet-untitled, 2025. Pigment print and found materials on glazed stoneware, 10 × 7 × 11 in. (25.4 × 17.8 × 27.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist; Chapter NY, New York; and Document, Chicago and Lisbon

Bubble Cam, 2025. Pigment print and found materials on glazed stoneware, 6 × 6 × 4 in. (15.2 × 15.2 × 10.2 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist; Chapter NY, New York; and Document, Chicago and Lisbon

Bunny Cam, 2024. Pigment prints, gelatin silver prints, stainless steel, acrylic, and mat board on glazed stoneware, 11 × 9 × 15 in. (27.9 × 22.9 × 38.1 cm). Collection of Abby Pucker

Mesa Cam, 2025. Pigment print and found materials on glazed stoneware, 7 × 14 × 8 in. (17.8 × 35.6 × 20.3 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist; Chapter NY, New York; and Document, Chicago and Lisbon

Sunflower Cam, 2025. Pigment prints and found materials on glazed stoneware, 25 × 24 × 18 in. (63.5 × 61 × 45.7 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist; Chapter NY, New York; and Document, Chicago and Lisbon

Thistle Cam, 2025. Pigment print and found materials on glazed stoneware, 23 × 10 × 10 in. (58.4 × 25.4 × 25.4 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist; Chapter NY, New York; and Document, Chicago and Lisbon

O

PRECIOUS OKOYOMON
An as-yet-untitled installation, 2026. Artist-made children's toys with taxidermied bird wings and rope, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist, Gladstone Gallery, and Mendes Wood DM

PAT OLESZKO
An as-yet-untitled performance, 2026. Courtesy the artist

Blowhard, 1995. Nylon and blower, 408 × 156 × 222 in. (1036.3 × 396.2 × 563.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

Footsi, 1979. Video, black-and-white, and sound; 4:50 min. Courtesy the artist and David Peter Francis, New York

P

MALCOLM PEACOCK
Five of them were hers and she carved shelters with windows into the backs of their skulls, 2024. Foam, cement mix, wood, synthetic hair, and six-channel audio; 54:38 min., looped, 96 × 96 × 96 in. (81.5 × 81.5 × 81.5 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist with support by Sibyl Gallery

R

SARAH M. RODRIGUEZ
Coil, Gather, Leap, 2025. Cast, carved, and welded aluminum, 43 × 27 × 26 in. (109.2 × 68.6 × 66 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Babst Gallery

Cover/Cross, 2025. Cast, carved, and welded aluminum, 42 × 35 × 45 in. (106.7 × 88.9 × 114.3 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Babst Gallery

Disperse, 2025. Cast, carved, and welded aluminum, 36 ¼ × 26 ½ × 27 ½ in. (92.1 × 67.3 × 69.9 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Babst Gallery

Scent-Vane, 2025. Cast, carved, and welded aluminum, 43 × 44 × 32 in. (109.2 × 111.8 × 81.3 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Babst Gallery

GABRIELA RUIZ
Exive II, July 2026. Performance. Courtesy the artist

Homo Machina, 2026. Fiberglass, foam, plaster, resin, aqua resin, plexiglass, mirror, plastic, LED street lamps, motor, monitors, speakers, and surveillance camera, 72 ⅞ × 71 ⅜ × 30 in. (185.1 × 181.3 × 76.2 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist. Support provided by Forum of Fountainhead Arts

S

JASMIN SIAN
Diptych (left): *dovecote: bantam chicken with hibiscus, iba and gardenia, mom's garden, Philippines*, 2024–25. Ink, graphite, and cutouts on deli-bag paper, 5 × 3 ⅞ in. (12.7 × 9.8 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Anthony Meier, Mill Valley

Diptych (right): *dovecote: Matsu and Hinoki at home foraging with broccolini, thyme, peonies, and a small gardenia bush*, 2025. Gouache, lacquer ink, graphite, and cutouts on doughnut-bag paper, 5 ⅝ × 5 ¼ in. (14.3 × 13.3 cm) Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Anthony Meier, Mill Valley

dovecote: Mrs. Manok and Bugoy with gardenia, mom's garden, Philippines, 2024–25. Ink, graphite, and cutouts on deli-bag paper, 5 × 3 ⅞ in. (12.7 × 9.8 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Anthony Meier, Mill Valley

dovecote: a tree-pee in Bugoy's favorite spot with Mrs. Manok in mom's garden, Philippines, 2025. Gouache, lacquer ink, graphite, and cutouts on deli-bag paper, 3 ⅝ × 5 ¾ in. (9 × 14.4 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Anthony Meier, Mill Valley

dovecote: Penny, Buddha, and cardinals with wild texas sunflowers and weeds, 2024–25. Gouache, lacquer ink, graphite, and cutouts on deli-bag paper, 6 × 4 ½ in. (15.2 × 11.4 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Anthony Meier, Mill Valley

if I had a little zoo: HRH Fennel and busy bumblebee, 2015. Ink, graphite, and cutouts on deli-bag paper, diptych: 5 ¼ × 3 ¼ in. (13.3 × 8.3 cm) each. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Anthony Meier, Mill Valley

Mengmeng, most favorite cat in the world, 2026. Graphite, gouache, and cutouts on biscuit wrapper, 2 ⅜ × 4 ⅜ in. (6 × 11.1 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Anthony Meier, Mill Valley

Spring dandelion and wild strawberries with Texas bayou ghost turtles, 2025. Ink, graphite and cutouts on deli bag paper, 10 × 10 in. (25.4 × 25.4 cm) framed. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Anthony Meier, Mill Valley

Venus, working horse, in a field of edible weeds in Central Park, 2025. Gouache, lacquer ink, graphite, and cutouts on pharmacy bag, 5 ½ × 3 in. (14 × 7.6 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Anthony Meier, Mill Valley

JORDAN STRAFER
TALK SHOW, 2025–26. High-definition video, color, and sound; 27 min. Courtesy the artist

T

SUNG TIEU
System's Void, 2026. Steel pipes, video projection, and five-channel sound, 60 min., looped; dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Emalin, London

ANNA TSOUHLARAKIS
SHE MUST BE A MATRIARCH, 2023. Fiberglass, paint, adhesive, resin, plaster, plastic, wood, foam, metal, IKEA remnants, leather, deer hair, menstrual cups, prophylactics, and found objects, 96 × 180 × 48 in. (243.8 × 457.2 × 121.9 cm). Collection of the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH; purchased through the Virginia and Preston T. Kelsey 1958 Fund, the Julia L. Whittier Fund, the Acquisition and Preservation of Native American Art Fund, the Alvin and Mary Bert Gutman 1940 Acquisition Fund, the Olivia H. Parker and John O. Parker '58 Acquisition Fund, and the William B. and Evelyn A. Jaffe Fund

U

JOHANNA UNZUETA
January, June 2025 Berlin, 2025. Indigo dyes, wild berries, pastel pencil, oil pastel, cut paper, watercolor and thread on watercolor paper, 55 ⅛ × 51 ½ in. (140 × 131 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan Gallery

January, September 2024 Berlin, 2024. Indigo dye, pastel pencil, oil pastel, cut paper, and thread on watercolor paper, 51 ½ × 39 ⅜ in. (131 × 100 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan Gallery

July 2023, November 2024 Berlin, 2024. Indigo dye, pastel pencil, oil pastel, cut paper, watercolor, and thread on watercolor paper, 37 ⅜ × 59 ¹³⁄₁₆ in. (95 × 152 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan Gallery

June 2024, February 2025 Berlin, 2025. Indigo dyes, turmeric, wild berries, pastel pencil, oil pastel, cut paper, and watercolor on watercolor paper, 51 ½ × 43 ¹¹⁄₁₆ in. (131 × 111 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan Gallery

As of December 8, 2025

ADDITIONAL WORKS ILLUSTRATED

Unless otherwise indicated below, the additional works illustrated in this volume are in the collection of the artist.

Kelly Akashi, *Monument (Shelter)*, 2025. Collection of Pete Scantland. *Witness*, 2024–25. Baltimore Museum of Art. **Teresa Baker,** *Field Notes*, 2022. Collection of the Gochman Family. *Movements of the Land*, 2024. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY. *Of This Time*, 2024. Collection of Kate Chertavian. *Throw It to the Ocean*, 2025. Collection of Peter and Wendy Asher. *Tracing the Memory*, 2024. Collection of Sasha and Charlie Sealy. *Twenty Minutes to Sunset*, 2023. Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, KS. Acquired with funds provided by the Barton P. and Mary D. Cohen Art Acquisition Endowment at the JCCC Foundation. *Waking*, 2024. Collection of Banner House, Dallas. **Sula Bermudez-Silverman,** *Repository I: Mother*, 2021. Brodie Family Collection. *vestige*, 2025. Collection of Marguerite Steed Hoffman. **Enzo Camacho and Ami Lien,** *Flame Garden (nitrates)*, 2024. Private collection. *Langit Lupa*, 2023. Private collection. *Social Volcano (restless waves)*, 2024. Private collection. **Joshua Citarella,** *Do Not Research Mapping Project (2021–2023)*, 2024. Collection of Do Not Research. **Taína H. Cruz,** *Root Check*, 2024. Private collection. **Carmen de Monteflores,** *Big Mami*, 1966. Collection of Andrea Fraser. **Ali Eyal,** *Don't let the beautiful colors fool you, who would draw Goofy inside the rooms of grownups? And*, 2021. Sharjah Art Foundation. *Look what I remember*, 2025. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. *Paper, pen, map in a pocket and*, 2023. Kadist Art Foundation. **Andrea Fraser,** *Untitled*, 2003. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee and partial gift of an anonymous donor 2014.290. *Welcome to the Wadsworth: A Museum Tour*, 1991. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Wilfred P. and Rose J. Cohen Purchase Fund 2015.52. **Ignacio Gatica,** *Fantasmas*, 2019–23. Collection of Abby A. Caulkins. *Preface for an Automated Stratosphere*, 2023. Collection of Cesar Reyes and Thomas E. Moore III. **Raven Halfmoon,** *Grounded in Style*, 2024. Private collection. *NWA – Natives with Attitude*, 2024. Private collection. **Margaret Honda,** *Double Feature with Short Subject*, 2023–ongoing. Art Institute of Chicago; purchased with funds provided by Meredith Bluhm-Wolf 2024.89. *frog*, 2019. Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; A. W. Mellon Acquisition Endowment Fund 2019.73. *Marvelseal Work*, 2020–21. Art Institute of Chicago; gift of the artist 2024.472.1–96. **Akira Ikezoe,** *Monkeys on the Diagram of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant,* 2021/2024. Sharjah Art Foundation. *Toads on the Diagram of Nuclear Fuel Cycle*, 2021/2024. Sharjah Art Foundation. **David L. Johnson,** *Loiter (Jeffrey)*, 2022. Collection of Alain Servais. **kekahi wahi,** *Ahulau (Epidemic, heaped up, as dead bodies)*, 2025. Commissioned by COUSIN Collective. Featuring Maddie Biven, Bradley Capello, Brad Hamasaki, and Dallas Etzel. The Dunes at Maui Lani, Wailuku, Maui. Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina (Puhipau and Joan Lander), *Act of War—The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation*, 1993. Featuring Haunani-Kay Trask, Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa, Kekuni Blaisdell, and Jonathan Kamakawiwoʻole Osorio. Honolulu, Kona, Oʻahu. Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina (Puhipau and Joan Lander), *Na Wai E Hoʻōla I Nā Iwi—Who Will Save the Bones?*, 1988. Featuring Palikapu Dedman, Ipō Nihipali, Davianna Pōmaikaʻi McGregor, Dana Naone Hall, Leslie Kuloloio, Ed Kanahele, Pualani Kanahele, Kīhei Soli Niheu, Darryl Aiona, Bobby Alcaine, David "Kawika" Kauwe, Kapena Kamahele, Kauilani Almeida, Leiānuenue Niheu, and Parley Kanakaʻole. Honokahua, Kāʻanapali, Maui. **Michelle Lopez,** *THREE ROPE PROP*, 2023. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee 2025.101a–c. **Nour Mobarak,** *Recto Verso 2.2 (Green Cobalt)*, 2024–25. Private collection. *Recto Verso 2.4 (Mycelium Magenta)*, 2024–25. Private collection. *Washington D.C.: Family and Friends Cheer as Father's Plane Takes Off*, 2021. Private collection. **Erin Jane Nelson,**

Bladderwort, 2023. Collection of Elisabeth Sherman and Peter Siroka. *Ciénega*, 2025. Collection of Douglas Kunstberatung, Frankfurt, Germany. **Precious Okoyomon,** *I wanted to kill but had nothing to kill*, 2025. Private collection. *You have got to sometimes become the medicine you want to take*, 2025. Private collection. **Sarah M. Rodriguez,** *Polarization*, 2024. Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA; purchase with funds provided by Simon K. Chiu 2024.81. **Gabriela Ruiz,** *Full of Tears*, 2019. Los Angeles County Museum of Art; purchased with funds provided by Collection of Alfred Fraijo Jr. and Arturo Becerra-Fraijo, Julian Bermudez and John Rabe, Laura S. Maslon, Fabian Newton Family, Morales + Morales, William Escalera and Francisco George, Karen Fritsche and Allen Mezquida, The Othenin-Girard Family, Olivia Padilla, and Jay Bell and Sarah Kammerer. **Jasmin Sian,** *Hudson River alpine grass with ghost deer*, 2019–23. Private collection. *if i had a little zoo, 3*, 2013. The Francis H. Williams Collection. *wildlife I love: Mengmeng in catnip cloud lace*, 2021. Private collection, CT. **Jordan Strafer,** *DECADENCE*, 2024. Co-commissioned by the Vega Foundation and Renaissance Society. *DISSONANCE*, work in progress. Commissioned by Fluentem. **Julio Torres,** *Color Theories*, 2025. Color Theories LLC. **Johanna Unzueta,** *Nel pomeriggio non ci sarà la luna*, 2024. Private collection.

Nadia Abudi
Jehad Abu-Hamda
Becky Acosta
Casper Aguila Morales
Aimen Ali
Yasmin Ali
Stephanie Alifano
Liam Allan
Gina Allen
Heather Allison
Scarlet-Frances Alonzo
Adrienne Alston
Anthony Altavilla
Andrea Ambro
Charles Amorosso
Casey Amspacher
Alyssa Andrews
Jason Anzovino
Juan Aranda
Santiago Arango
Morgan Arenson
Silvina Arismendi
I.D. Aruede
Rafael Ayala
Allegra Baker
MacLaine Bamberger
Wendy Barbee-Lowell
Paula Bauer
Michael Beiser
Max Bell
Harry Benjamin
Caitlin Bermingham
Christopher Bernu
Theda Berry
Nora Bethune
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Amy Black
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Mia Marion
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Lane Muniz
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Micah Musheno
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William Norton
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Nelson Ortiz
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Ana Torres-Hurtado
Bernard Trainor
Julius Treadway
Aislinn Tucker
David Tufino
Tyler Tufino
Tiaalea Tupuola
Beth Turk
Jorge Ulrich
Khaleiah Vasquez
Christopher Voegels
Cynthia Vogt
Eva Von Schweinitz
Farris Wahbeh
David Walker
Alexa Walkovitz
Niccolo Walsh
Rowan Walter
Audrey Wang
Sunny Wang
Audrey Warne
Caroline Webb
Rachael Wehrle
Maggie Wei
Erika Wentworth
Jonathan Wenur
Joshua Wertheimer
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As of September 8, 2025

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