



2019

2019 MFA Thesis Exhibitions

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, School of Art

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_ewing



Part of the [Ceramic Arts Commons](#), [Contemporary Art Commons](#), [Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), [Interdisciplinary Arts and Media Commons](#), [Painting Commons](#), [Printmaking Commons](#), and the [Sculpture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, School of Art, "2019 MFA Thesis Exhibitions" (2019). *Ewing Gallery of Art & Architecture*.

https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_ewing/5

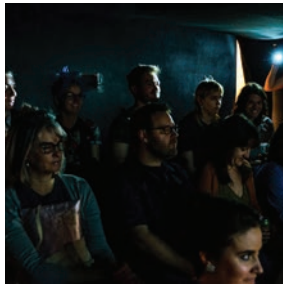
This Publication is brought to you for free and open access by the Art at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ewing Gallery of Art & Architecture by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.

KATIE GENTNER / ERIC HINES / HOLLY MAILEY KELLY / CARA ALLEN MCKINLEY
RACHEL SEVIER / MENG MENG SHANG / LILA SHULL / BAXTER STULTS

2019 MFA EXHIBITIONS

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

MFA EXHIBITIONS 2019



6

ADMIT IT / and / TRUTH BABY

Katie Gentner
painting + drawing



10

FINISH HIM!

Eric Hines
painting + drawing



14

TWO LINES

Holly Mailey Kelly
sculpture



18

GALACTIC SUBSTANCE

Cara Allen McKinley
ceramics

PHOTO CREDITS:

Cara McKinley: Shelly O'Barr / Mengmeng Shang: Shelly O'Barr / Lila Shull: Bruce Cole / Katie Gentner: Taryn Farro
(Admit It) & Katie Gentner (Truth Baby) / Holly Kelly: Holly Kelly & Ewing Gallery of Art + Architecture / Eric Hines: Eric Hines
Rachel Sevier: Shelly O'Barr / Baxter Stults: Shelly O'Barr & Baxter Stults



26

CONTINGENT
FRAMES
Rachel Sevier
ceramics



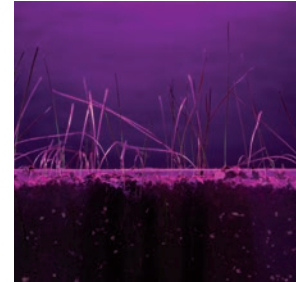
30

WALK WITH ME?
Mengmeng Shang
time-based art



34

CALL TO SUPPER
Lila Shull
printmaking



38

TO WHICH WE
BELONG
Baxter Stults
printmaking

school of art
FACULTY

Joshua Bienko | PAINTING + DRAWING

Emily Ward Bivens | TIME-BASED ART

Sally Brogden | CERAMICS

Jason Sheridan Brown | SCULPTURE

Mary Campbell | ART HISTORY

Rubens ghenov | PAINTING + DRAWING

Paul Harrill | 4D / CINEMA STUDIES

Timothy W. Hiles | ART HISTORY

John C. Kelley | TIME-BASED ART

Mary Laube | PAINTING + DRAWING

Paul Lee | PHOTOGRAPHY

Beauvais Lyons | PRINTMAKING

Frank R. Martin | CERAMICS

Althea Murphy-Price | PRINTMAKING

John Douglas Powers | SCULPTURE / TIME-BASED ART

Jered Sprecher | PAINTING + DRAWING

David Wilson | DRAWING / TIME-BASED ART

Kelli Wood | ART HISTORY

Suzanne Wright | ART HISTORY

Koichi Yamamoto | PRINTMAKING

Sam Yates | MUSEOLOGY

CATALOG DESIGN | meg erlewine

F O R W A R D

Three years ago, the eight artists in this stellar 2019 MFA class began a challenging process, the culmination of which is presented in this series of exceptional exhibitions. As a whole, these exhibitions engage us in a conversation among distinct voices and individual approaches. In a larger context, they embody the potential of transformative discovery in contemporary art.

Both the creation and the experience of art is a mysterious process, one that we should never fully expect, nor seek, to rationalize or explain. The essence of art is the possibility of an inexplicable, but meaningful, dialogue through this potent metaphorical language. In the School of Art, we believe in the capacity of art and design to express beauty, evoke wonder, confront injustice, and test our values. The artwork on display exemplifies the ever-evolving and unpredictable journeys of individual artists in the pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and fulfillment.

These artists now join a growing community of MFA graduates from the School of Art at the University of Tennessee. They will continue to be active agents in shaping the future of creative expression. We thank them for joining us and look forward to witnessing the fruits of their imagination.

David Wilson
Professor
Director
School of Art



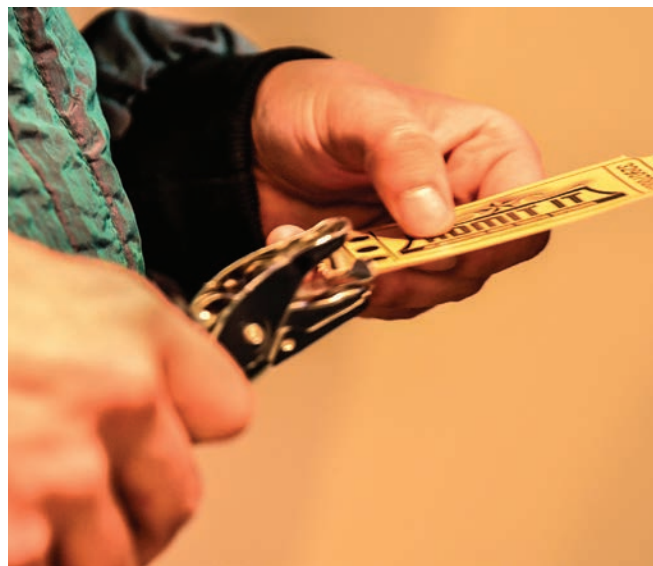
ADMIT IT KATIE GENTNER



Admit It is an underground cult film theater that has mysteriously wound up in the gallery. The theater is staffed by an eccentric cast of characters who are unaware of the gallery and go about their regular work-day guiding audiences of fifteen at a time through a choose-your-own-adventure film. The film currently on view is *Whisper Realty*. Karen Whisper, a real estate agent, holds an open house in a home that is still occupied by the previous family's history. The cast incessantly interrupts the film to dramatically mock it, illicit audience participation, or have side conversations. Each showing is a unique experience. Admit It theater staff are circumstantially united by their job and find it senseless to devote their time and

energy to this meaningless area of their life. Their dedication is mediocre at best.

Actively defying the prescription of productivity results in social displacement. An outsider group forms. *We don't know what to do with you, so we'll just pretend you don't exist.* It is important to note that basic denial is perhaps the most benign response to a non-conforming person, and confrontation can range from all levels of hostility. The struggle against displacement is an inescapable condition of queerness, which results in invisibility, misrecognition, and blatant erasure. A theater is ripped from its previous context, materialized for a fleeting moment, cockeyed in relation to the gallery container that holds it.



Performance and installation.
26 20-minute shows over the course
of seven days, March 25–April 2, 2019,
at the Ewing Gallery of Art + Architecture.

This project could not be possible without the collaborative efforts of some amazing individuals.
*Performers: Perry Davis, Rachel Doub, Katie Gentner, Ellen Nikbakht, Cole O'Keefe, Jill Roland,
Dede Sanders, Michael Santoro, Catherine Siravantha, Matt Styles, and Jaylin Witherspoon.*
*Special thanks: Nick Flair, Brandon Rei, and Katie's thesis committee —
Rubens Ghenov, Emily Bivens, John Kelly, and Lynn Sacco.*

TRUTH
BABY
KATIE GENTNER



Precious Memories

My dear Truth Baby,

To bring you into existence,
and by that I mean for you to
physically manifest for others to
see, made you real. Before that
I tried to ignore you. To reason
my way out of this desire for you.
But I never could escape.

With every notion of pregnancy, babies
and motherhood I was reminded of
how I held myself hostage.

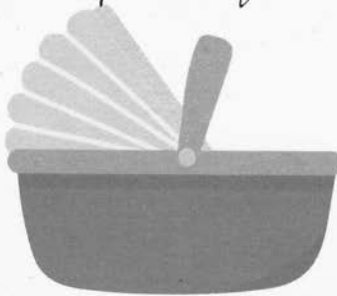
Subconsciously, I put myself in
situations that would force me to deal
with my desires. Once, it almost
worked. A year later, on the anniversary
of what could have been, I decided to
live in an alternate reality, one
where you found your way to me.

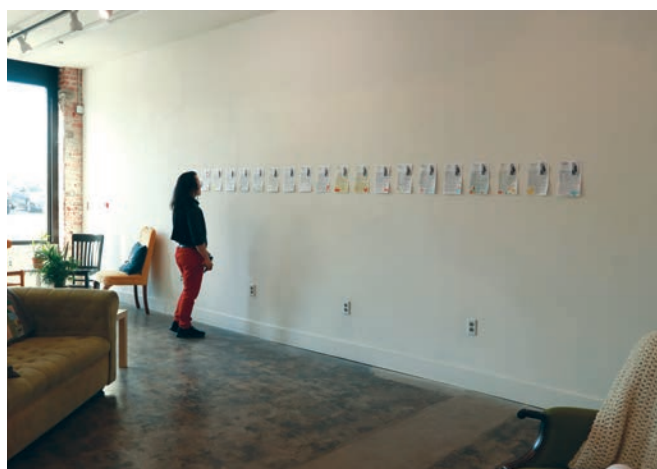
Some will never understand, only thinking
logically — something that is fake, can never
be real. Some understand without question —
to enact something has the power to transform.

This process is a rebirth. You are now
separate from me, something I can point to,
have a conversation about.

I am now separate
from you. I don't have
to carry you anymore.
You're out in the world,
and we will care for you
together.

Love, all your parents.





Performance, installation, and artist book.
10-month durational performance July 2018–May 2019,
and 15-hour performance and installation over the
course of three days, April 26–28, 2019, at Gallery 1010.



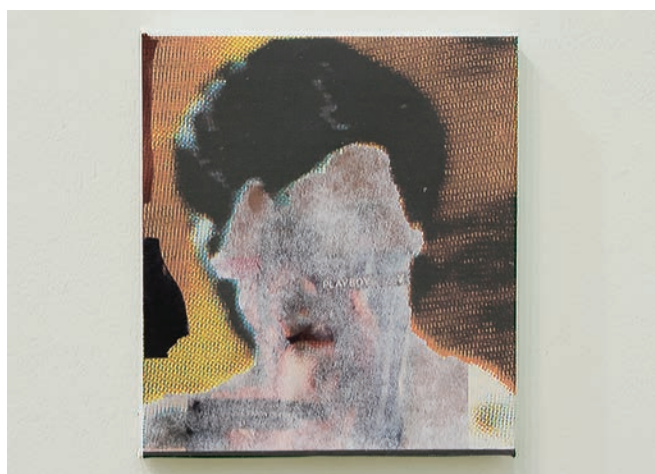
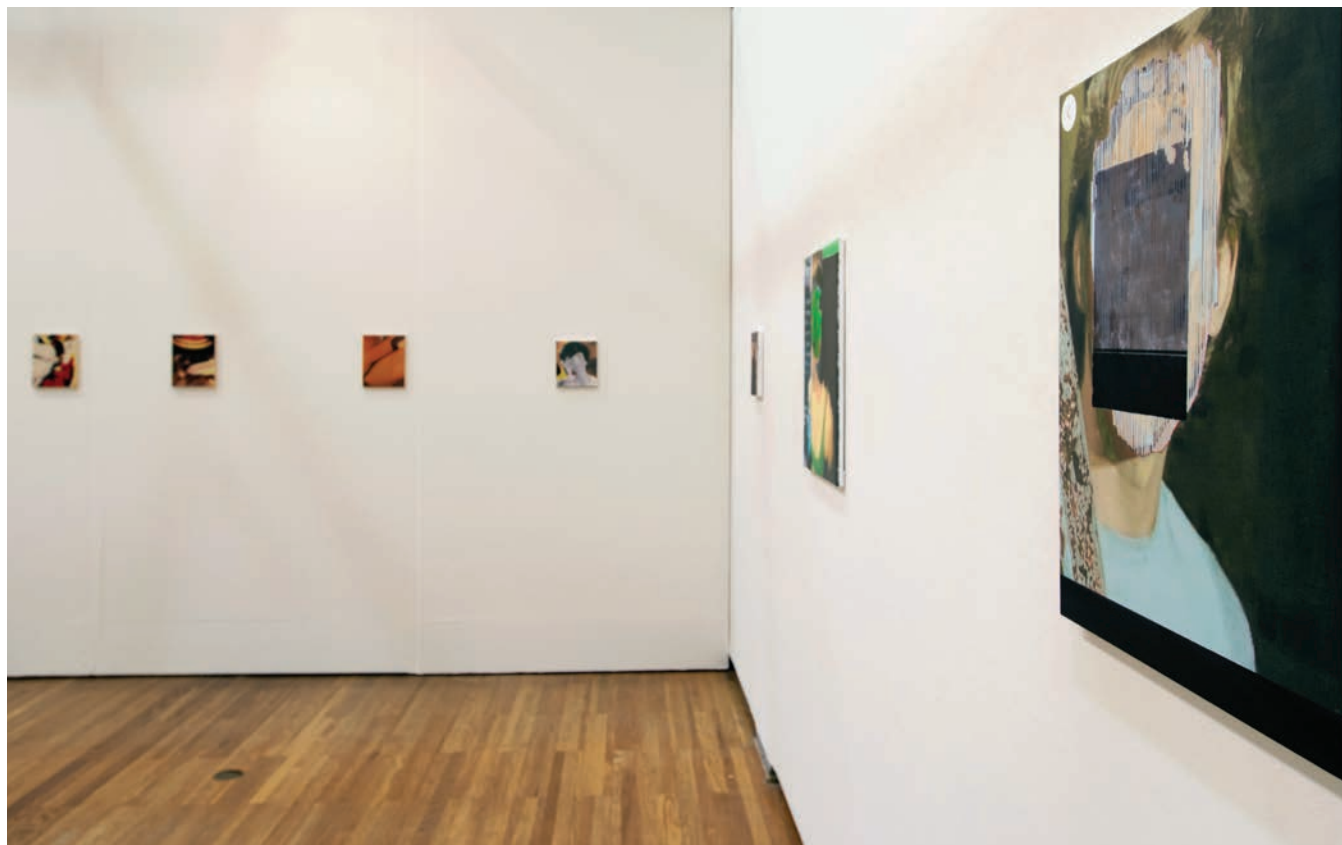
FINISH HIM!

ERIC HINES

My painting practice borrows from visual corporal history, and my personal history. What connects these two histories are pictures: the compulsion to consume pictures and the ways we mold them, and are defined by them. My paintings reference male homoerotic visual culture and contemporary dating app imagery. The popular hook up app, Grindr, opens to a cascading grid of profile pictures falling from the top edge of the user's screen. The images represent the other users near you based on their distance; as you change your location, the users also change. Visibility plays a dramatic role in the app. The user-generated images often subvert or reject the visibility of the user. Commonly the user will upload an image of themselves from the neck down, or use an unrelated image in place of a traditional profile picture. Frequent examples are a picture of a flat surface or a landscape. Chiefly, what *is* exhibited is a series of images dealing with the representation of the body through a theatrical gamut of visibility. It's a space where queer identities are defined by absences and visual obstructions to sight — where there's a compulsion to bear witness, to see and know.

My work relies on the notion of “seeing as a will to knowledge.” I locate visual moments in images where abstraction or the theatricality of the body give visual form to social realities, such as the “headless man” motif. I create meaning in my work by restructuring these images. Often, I crop the image focusing the frame on a detail. This solicits desire in the viewer; the painting posits the part, rather than the whole. Identity in the work is complicated using fields of color. Often, subject matter is painted over using varying paint finishes. I also work with translucency by layering paint in between image transfers, which is useful in controlling the amount of light the painting seems to “project” — affecting the visibility of the subject matter. My painting practice is a reckoning with visibility: the history of which bodies are represented and how; and our contemporary moment of visual viral reproduction, consumption, and excess. In an age of visual distraction, I make work that asks its viewer to stop and bear witness to how the body endures the burden of representation.



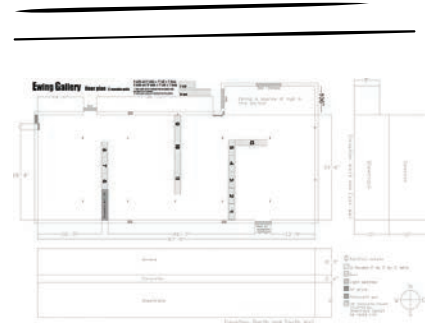






TWO LINES
HOLLY MAILEY KELLY

The exhibition *Two Lines* is a collection of works that run side by side, like a network of logical associations, and morphs into a meshwork of entangled lines. When analyzing the artworks, I group them into sculptural furniture, physical documentation of environments, and reactions to architectural elements. These outwardly disconnected subjects are all contemplations of space. Consider two parallel lines drawn on paper. Two linear marks disconnected from each other that occupy our visual field. We then bring our attention to the area in-between and around them. This show explores that topic. It builds and creates space with the familiar, material, and illusionistic, while responding to visual cues with an



analytical and precise eye. In contrast, I additionally reflect on the critical moment when they might connect — the intersection. These drawn lines form the familiar gestural depiction of a chair or the precise plans of a detailed architectural layout. Anthropologist Tim Ingold describes the line as an ongoing movement rather than a connection between one point and another.¹ The physical lines form understandable relationships between the networks of two and three-dimensions, while the conceptual connections are simultaneously interwoven through a web. Ingold's thoughts on the concept of line echo how I connect the objects I create. The investigations displayed in this exhibition are not just about the observation of objects, but how they allow the viewer to recall other pieces of information. A memory from the viewer is added to the exchange, a logical association that becomes a part of the entangled maze of thought, object, and space.

¹ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art, and Architecture* (Routledge, 2013), 140.









GALACTIC SUBSTANCE

CARA ALLEN
MCKINLEY

My work is a dream space reflecting my beliefs about the world, illustrating the movement of energy that flows around me. It flows in my home, my studio, in nature, between objects...everywhere. The way I feel energy, thus talk about energy, has become the heart of my world, my value system, and therefore, my work.

Energy surrounds us all. It is in the objects we live with, and the materials that make up all things, flowing physically and metaphysically. Physically energy moves based on electricity flow, and the way electrons interact with the earth's surface and our bodies. A physical presence of these types of energy is concretely proven, yet it does not reveal itself. It is felt, but not seen. Intangible, yet the body reacts with physiological indicators. This energy flow is depicted as tinfoil cords.

The objects in my work contain energy reflecting their history, the residue of past rituals, the symbolism of their function, and physicality. I believe objects move the unseen energy that they house, forming invisible connections all around us. Old furniture and kitchen tools combine their imbued power, properties, and symbolism in their arrangement, suggesting their meaning to create an overarching narrative. My beliefs and feelings are displayed through these constructions, and like magic, the associated meanings create a shared reality about our world.

This installation describes a subsection of my world, a surreal segment of my home. It is comprised of a main contemplative ship and surrounding contemplative stations. The main contemplative ship is a grass mound with a moon figure suspended over it. Hovering over the mound, a milk moon glows with a video of domestic ritual, Nesting. The moon and milk are used as a symbol to declare the deep-seated relationship between women and the moon while, in combination with the grass mound, create a connection to the outside and a synthetic environment. The surrounding contemplative stations are a guide between states of mind, conveying my personal mythology.

This work reflects my ideas about life, and my connections to my spirit and body. The body receives the information, becoming the conduit for this network, where material properties, symbolism, dreamstate, and suspension of disbelief allow me to world build. I rely on the maximalist nature of my process to convey my interiors while exploring the exterior world and my body's interactions with it.









CONTINGENT
FRAMES
RACHEL SEVIER

skins that hold us together

contain our person

protect us

house our broken parts

are they shields

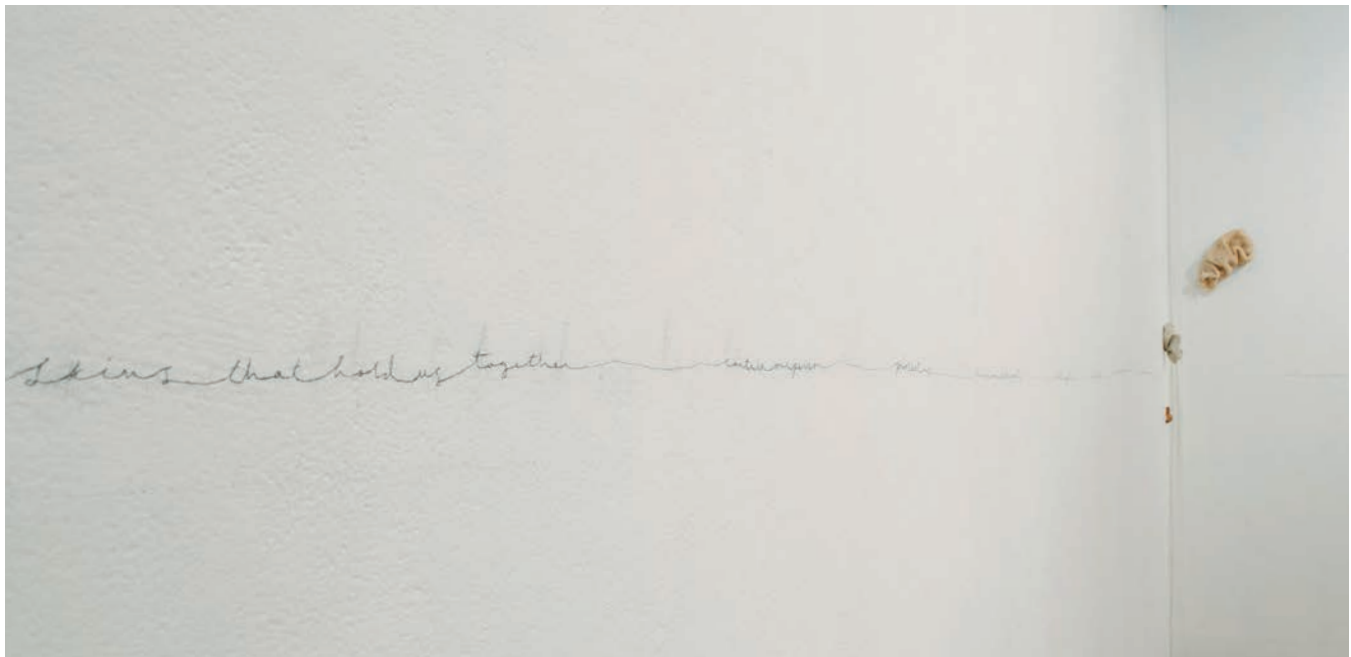
are they vaults

when your body feels like a living carcass

a dead shell you're already entombed in

what is a body then









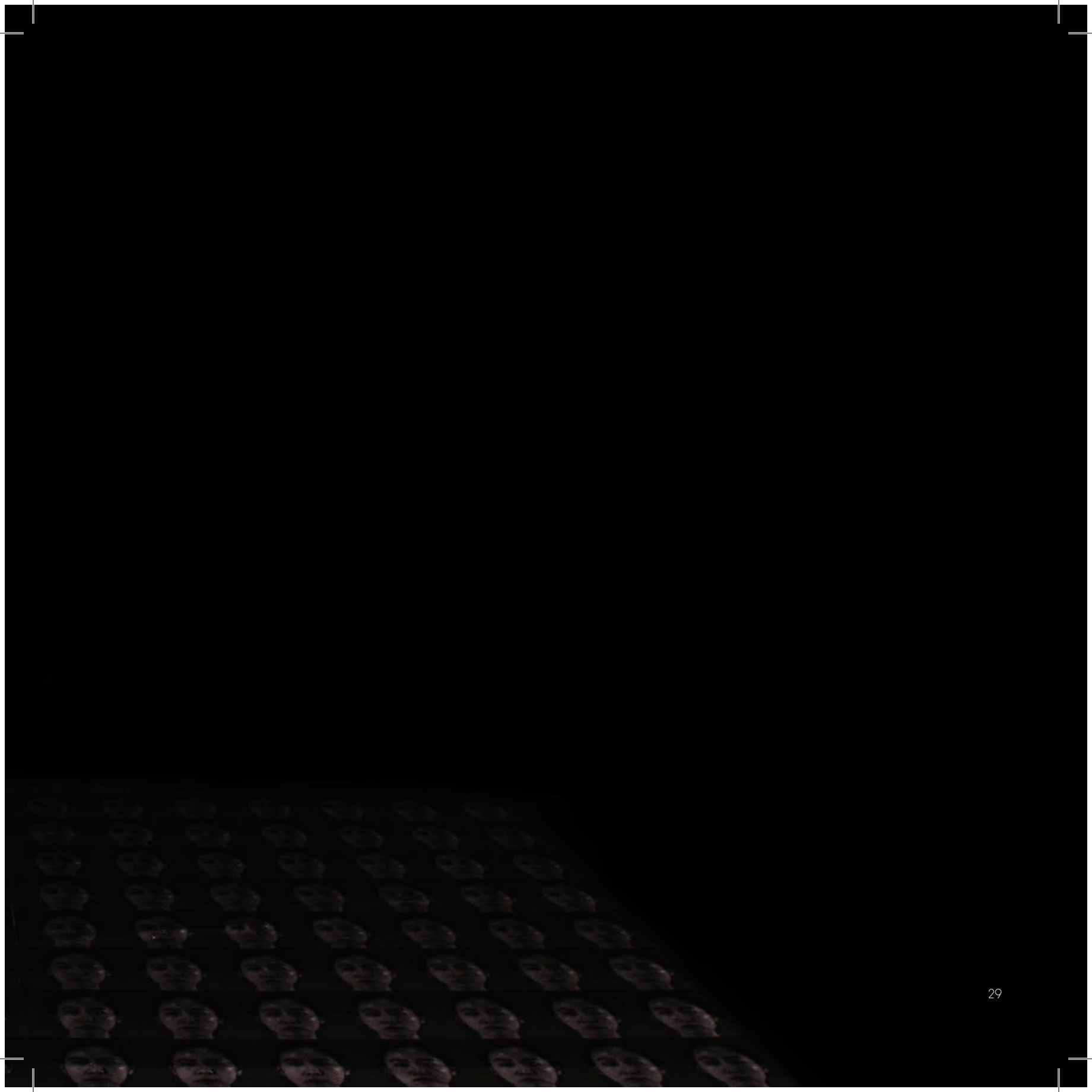
WALK WITH ME?
MENGMENG SHANG

I create installations, performances, and videos to explore potential relationships that are difficult to fully understand and clarify some topics or problems. Instead of revealing and judging these relations with a clear attitudinal stance, I observe and present the entangled yet common contradiction and fusion in the relationships between being and not being, right and wrong, objects and me, this and the other, meaning and meaningless, value and non-value, etc. By seeking and employing various possible approaches, I merge my experience and understanding of the relationships into the works.

My work is simple, straightforward, direct, and sometimes random. By providing the indispensable clues and trails within the relationships rather than recreating them, I re-examine the extraordinariness that should not be submerged in the ordinary. The re-examination can be arbitrary, routine, plain, and sometimes not-readily-noticeable. "Uncertainty" that is considered to be infinite changes that are almost impossible to grasp is emphasized in my work. It is a concrete and microscopic experience of life.









CALL TO
SUPPER
LILA SHULL

Call to Supper creates a mental and physical space to reflect on how perceptions, concerns, and emotions can shift over time and circumstances. I work with repetitive techniques, slow processes, and set structures that allow for the unknown to emerge. Here, the artist places trust in the value of chance encounters that are guided by intuition, and where touch is proactive. The exposed substrates are a humble reminder of efforts spent, and the self-referential imagery is a form of fellowship with the viewer. The repeated motifs of rocks, gloves, boats, and furniture offer context and perspective. By utilizing these forms, the seemingly clear distinction between interior and exterior significance is eroded. The personal becomes a communal, shared experience, like a conversation enjoyed over a good meal.

** This exhibition is a short succession of notes, staggered to produce a singular impression; here a brief melodic formula multiplies and longer visual passages develop.*









TO WHICH
WE BELONG
BAXTER STULTS



To Which We Belong examines humanity's relationships with the natural world through use of various media, including print, sound, animation, and living sculpture. Utilizing natural processes in my practice allows me to address human/nature relationships, as well as ideas of time, change, and ephemerality.

Plant life becomes a primary tool in my work due to its inherent properties of life and death, change and growth. The passage of time is measured through plants and in the change and transformation seen in their life cycles. The use of natural materials creates a body of work that is delicate — temporary and fleeting — requiring care to create and maintain. Time causes all things and beings to change, to deteriorate, and to dematerialize and so decay also becomes a part of the process of creation.

I am inviting introspection in the viewer — to think about their own place in the world, their relationship with nature and our man-made environment, and to consider the impermanence of all things.







THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE'S MFA PROGRAM
IS RANKED #15 AMONG
PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AND
PRINTMAKING IS RANKED
#2 OVERALL BY U.S. NEWS
AND WORLD REPORT. MFA
STUDENTS WORK CLOSELY
WITH FACULTY IN SMALL
STUDIO CLASSES AND
PARTICIPATE IN REGULAR
CRITIQUES, STUDIO VISITS,
AND SCHOOL-WIDE GRADUATE
REVIEWS. IN ADDITION, MFA
STUDENTS TAKE ADVANTAGE
OF UNIVERSITY-WIDE
GRADUATE COURSES THAT
RELATE TO AND EXPAND
THEIR CREATIVE HORIZONS.

THE MFA PROGRAM

The University of Tennessee is one of the nation's leading public research institutions committed to excellence in art and design. The MFA program is a NASAD-accredited, 60 credit-hour, three-year, terminal degree in Studio Art with concentrations in Ceramics, Painting + Drawing, Printmaking, Sculpture, and Time-Based Art.

The MFA program includes workshops and lectures that cover the fundamental skills artists need to develop and sustain a professional life. Embedded in the common curriculum are experiences that help our students to plan, promote, fund, organize, and build community as part of their creative practice. Students work closely with the faculty, visiting artists, and each other. The three-year degree gives students time to research, experiment, and hone their practice. The final year is devoted to working on a culminating project that will serve as a career springboard.

The School of Art oversees a host of visiting artists' programs. Artists from a variety of disciplines visit campus each semester for lectures, critiques, and week-long collaborations. Additionally, the nationally recognized Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program in the Painting + Drawing concentration brings a different visiting professional artist to the UT campus each semester to teach a graduate seminar. The AIR, who typically works and resides in a major urban art hub, acts as a bridge between the university and the broader art world.

Showing work in public exhibition spaces helps graduate students build their professional skills – a significant aspect of sustaining a successful professional practice as an artist. The School of Art has several outstanding opportunities.

ORANGE

Curated by the School of Art faculty, the Orange exhibition coincides with the annual College Art Association conference and features exceptional work by current graduate students. Previous exhibitions have taken place at at UNIX Gallery, Foley Gallery, and White Box Gallery in New York; Co-Prosperity Sphere in Chicago; The Fridge in Washington, D.C.; and Coagula Curatorial in Los Angeles.

THE EWING GALLERY

The Ewing Gallery serves as a cultural resource for the University of Tennessee, the School of Art, and the Knoxville community. The gallery curates and programs exhibitions to support the university's academic goals of broadening perspectives and enriching lives. These exhibitions focus on historical and contemporary movements in art and architecture. Each spring, the gallery hosts an annual student art competition and third-year MFA exhibitions, which showcase student achievement and research.

UT DOWNTOWN GALLERY

Located in the heart of downtown Knoxville, the UT Downtown Gallery presents a series of innovative solo and group exhibitions that offer students and the community an opportunity to see national, international and local artwork. First-year graduate students use this space to present their work to the public.

GALLERY 1010

The School of Art operates an off-campus gallery space that is completely student run. New exhibitions are presented every week. Graduate students serve as the gallery director and assistant director, and coordinate the selection of exhibition proposals. Experience overseeing the gallery has helped MFA students secure museum and gallery-related positions after graduation.

LIFE IN KNOXVILLE

Knoxville has a population of nearly 190,000 and is home to an urban wilderness of 1,000 forested acres with 112 miles of paved greenways and natural trails, plus lake and river access. Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a 45-minute drive away. Knoxville is also home to Big Ears, a world-renowned avant-garde festival, and countless other arts and culture events.

SUCCESSFUL CREATIVE THINKING REQUIRES THE PERSPECTIVES OF DIVERSE PEOPLE.

The School of Art reaffirms the immeasurable contribution of diversity to the arts and seeks in its programming and activities to incorporate diverse perspectives from the rich panoply that is the human race. Furthermore, we assume our responsibility to ensure a welcoming and conscientious environment for everyone without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical or mental disability, genetic information, veteran status, or parental status. True diversity is defined not merely as differences in individual backgrounds, personal identities, intellectual approaches, and demographics; it is also the removal of barriers and the creation of space that allows individuals to fully engage, freely think, and creatively explore.

Contact the School of Art

website: art.utk.edu/mfa

office: 865.974.3407

email: art@utk.edu



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

1715 Volunteer Blvd

Art + Architecture 213

University of Tennessee

Knoxville, TN 37996-2410

All qualified applicants will receive equal consideration for employment and admission without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical or mental disability, genetic information, veteran status, and parental status, or any other characteristic protected by federal or state law. In accordance with the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the University of Tennessee affirmatively states that it does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, or disability in its education programs and activities, and this policy extends to employment by the university. Inquiries and charges of violation of Title VI (race, color, and national origin), Title IX (sex), Section 504 (disability), the ADA (disability), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (age), sexual orientation, or veteran status should be directed to the Office of Equity and Diversity, 1840 Melrose Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37996-3560, telephone 865-974-2498. Requests for accommodation of a disability should be directed to the ADA Coordinator at the Office of Equity and Diversity.

The university name and its indicia within are trademarks of the University of Tennessee.