



2020

## 2020 MFA Thesis Exhibitions

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, School of Art

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# 2020 MFA CATALOG

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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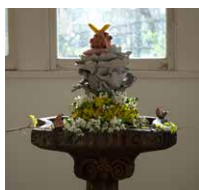
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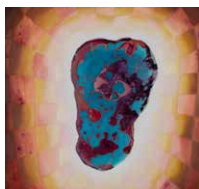
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# F O R E W A R D

Three years ago, the nine artists in this stellar 2020 MFA class began a challenging process that never fully came to the fruition they had expected. Although they faced unprecedented challenges in their final semester, our graduates were steadfast in their commitment to complete and document their thesis exhibitions. Each student created an exhibition that engaged us in a conversation with a distinct and individual voice. In a larger context, they collectively embody the potential for transformative discovery through contemporary art practice.

The creation and experience of art are both mysterious processes that we can never fully rationalize or explain. The essence of art is the potential for an inexplicable, but meaningful dialogue through its potent metaphorical language. In the School of Art, we believe in the capacity of art to express beauty, evoke wonder, confront injustice, and test our values. The artworks created by the 2020 MFA class document 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, Knoxville. As they move out into the world, they will continue to engage us in dialogue through their work and actively shape the future of creative expression in our culture. We thank them for joining us and look forward to witnessing the fruits of their imaginations.

**David Wilson**

Professor Emeritus  
2016–2020 Director  
School of Art  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville



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# JILLIAN HIRSCH

## BEYOND DESOLATION: EMBRACING A RUDERAL AESTHETIC

In a geological age characterized by human-caused planetary change and environmental crises, we can no longer afford to think of nature as something unadulterated and separate from humans. *Beyond Desolation: Embracing a Ruderal Aesthetic* (2020) is a mixed media installation that is critical of the prevalent romantic construct of nature. The work rejects the all-but-mythical view of humanless wilderness brimming with native flora and fauna in favor of a more empathetic view that recognizes the complex and layered beauty in ordinary ecosystems. Through the use of familiar objects and images like bricks, weeds, vines, racoons, classical sculpture, the work composes a physical lexicon for the ruderal aesthetic. By experiencing the work, I hope the viewer is able to recognize the natural beauty in damaged places.



*The Age of Entanglement* English Ivy, Poison Ivy, Virginia Creeper, Kudzu, Honeysuckle Vine, Blackberry, Greenbrier, Plasti Dip, 192" x 288" x 10"



*Beyond Desolation* ceramics, flora, asphalt, dirt, 48" x 120" x 120"





*Beyond Desolation (detail)*



*Backyard Beasts* (video stills), infrared camera, clay bricks, 03:26

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# KRISTINA KEY

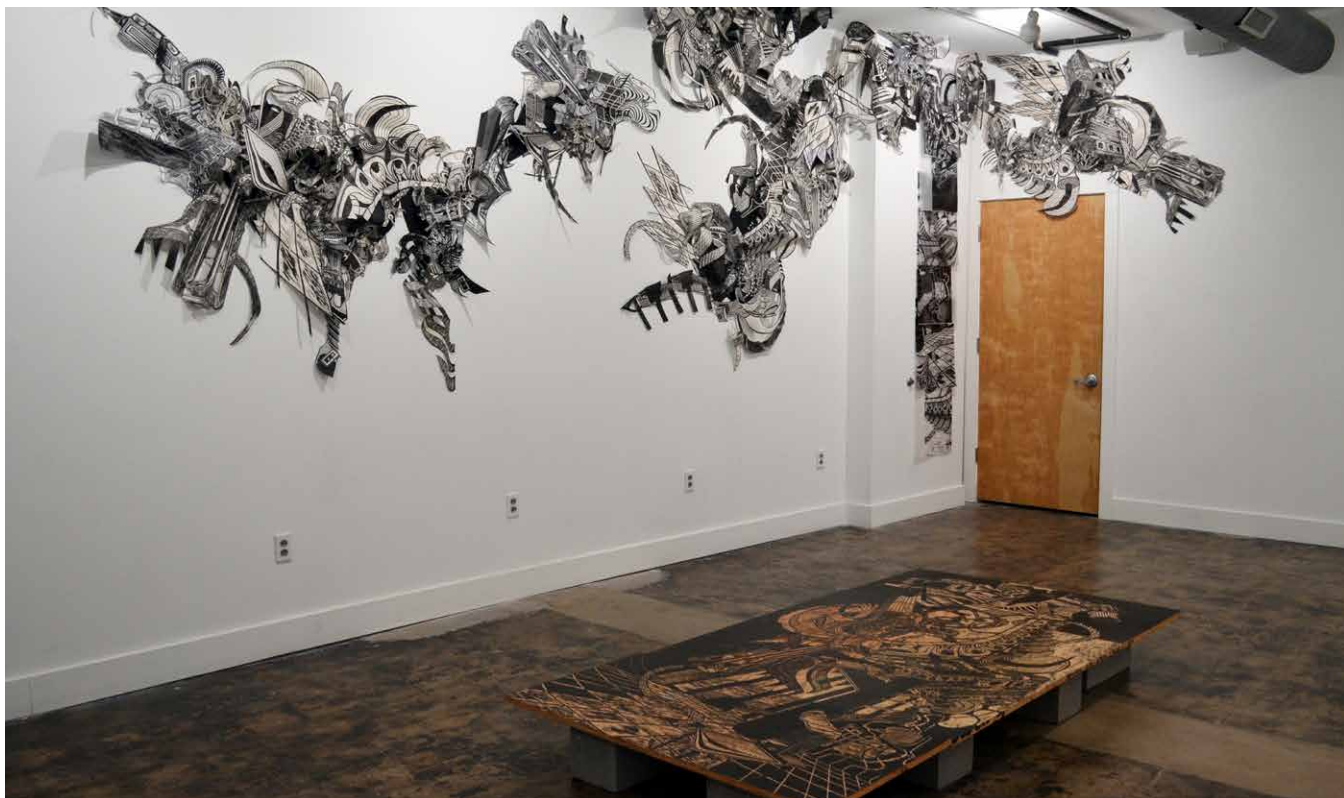
My work is an exploration of space— both physical space and psychological space. These spaces have a range of density, clarity, confusion, complexity, instability, awe, anxiety, and chaos. They can evoke feelings of both comfort and insecurity.

Repetition and layering are essential aspects of my work. Repeating abstract forms and layering imagery allows me to make literal and implied connections, creating moments of believability to an otherwise chaotic setting. Having different elements that suggest continuation allows for my work to grow exponentially across and through a space, both two and three-dimensionally.

Supportive architecture, such as railings, pillars, fences, support beams, are often the elements I gravitate towards while constructing a composition. These architectural elements are seen as strong and sturdy; meant to provide structure and organization to a space, but dangerous under deterioration. By combining a variety of architectural structures from very different perspectives and locations or by creating labyrinths of patterns and paths to disturb an otherwise coherent space, this stability becomes unhinged or questionable. By disorienting the viewer, I am taking them out of the predictable world and into my psychological head space.

These spaces and architectural forms are representations of anxiety. Using architecture to visually represent anxiety allows for the physical spaces being represented to exist as psychological spaces as well. In some ways, I am making biological architecture in a psychological space: imagined structures that contain tangible, complex, human emotions.

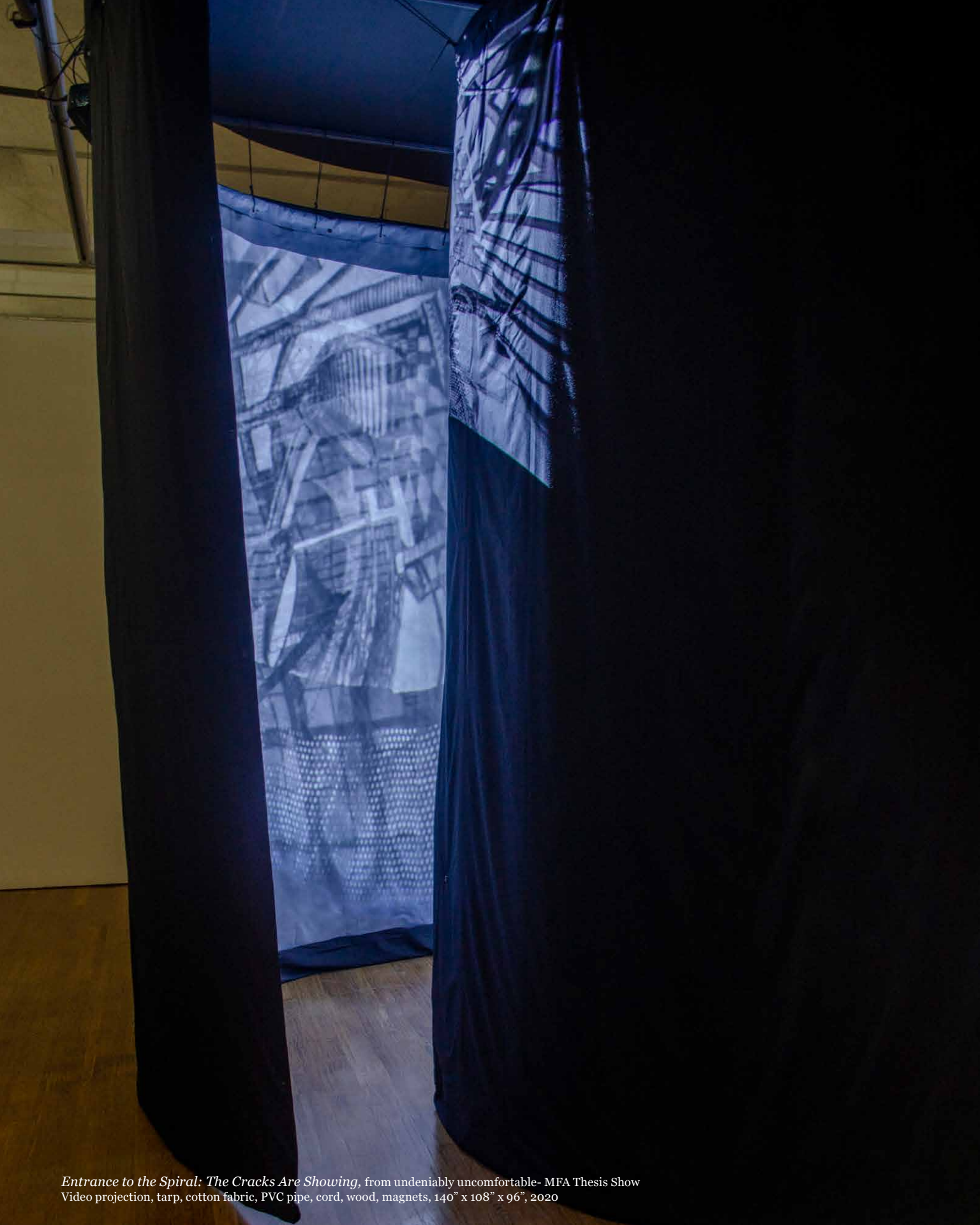
I have been researching different models and explanations of what anxiety is, what causes it, and what types of defense mechanisms are used against it— both positive and negative. Anxiety is undeniably uncomfortable, but not necessarily a positive or negative emotion. Growth, too, is uncomfortable but always productive even if it does not feel like it in the moment. I have come to see my anxiety as a pull towards growth, an opportunity, if I am willing to listen and follow the path in which my anxiety leads me. Finding a new perspective, whether that is mentally or physically, will help an individual grow, adapt, and survive.



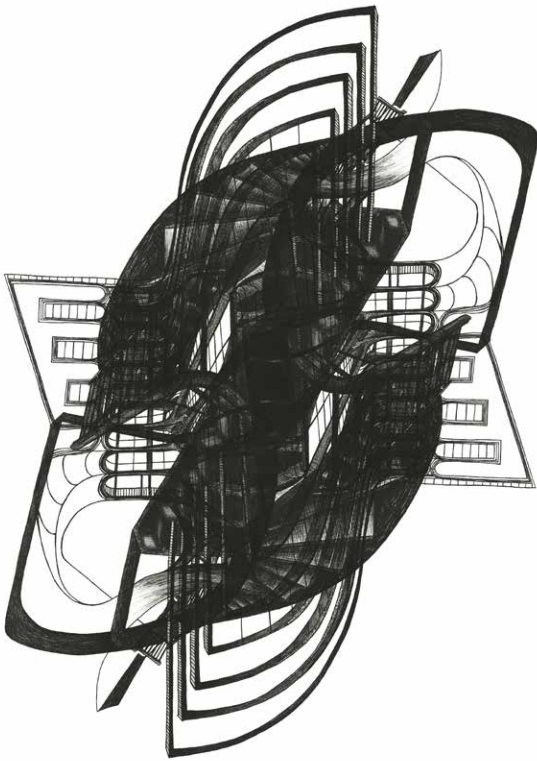
*Expanded Worlds Installation*, installation of hand-cut prints, woodcut matrix, size varies, 96" x 48" (wood), 2018



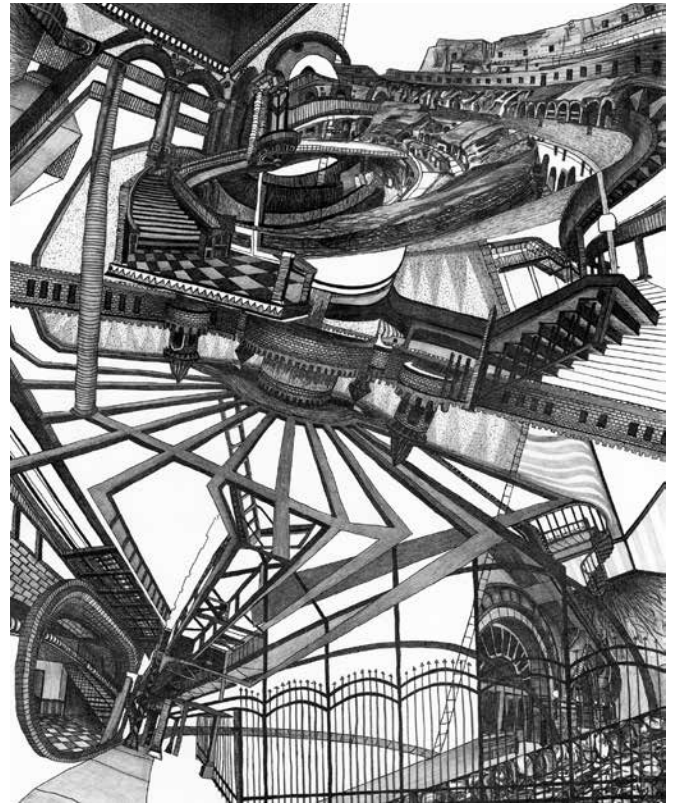
*Expanded Worlds: Installation Detail*, installation of hand-cut prints, size varies, 2018



*Entrance to the Spiral: The Cracks Are Showing*, from undeniably uncomfortable- MFA Thesis Show  
Video projection, tarp, cotton fabric, PVC pipe, cord, wood, magnets, 140" x 108" x 96", 2020



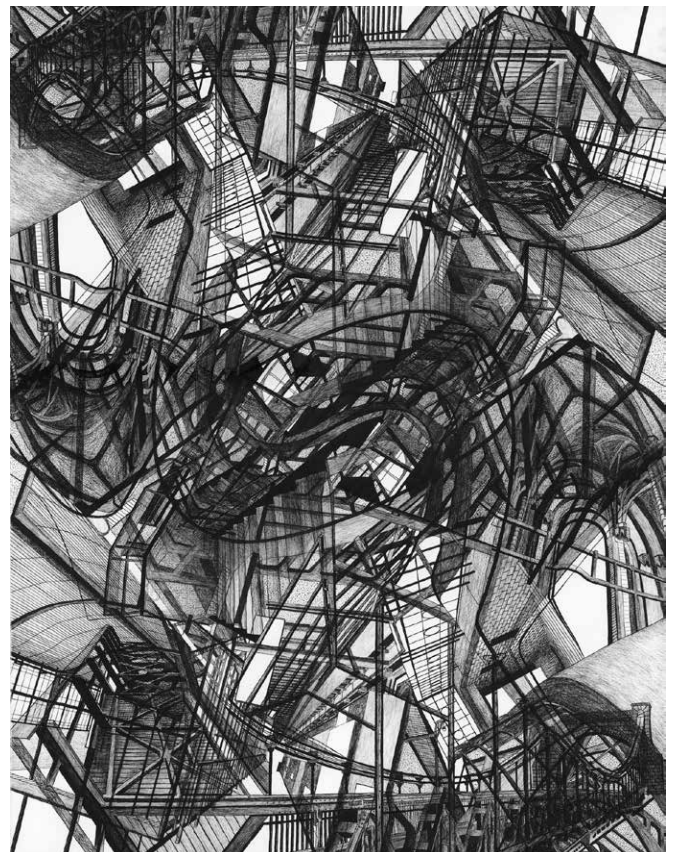
*Fusion Expande*, Photolithograph, 30" x 22", 2020



*Extended Space 1*, Lithograph, 28" x 21", 2019



*Extended Space 2*, Photolithograph, 30" x 22" inches, 2019



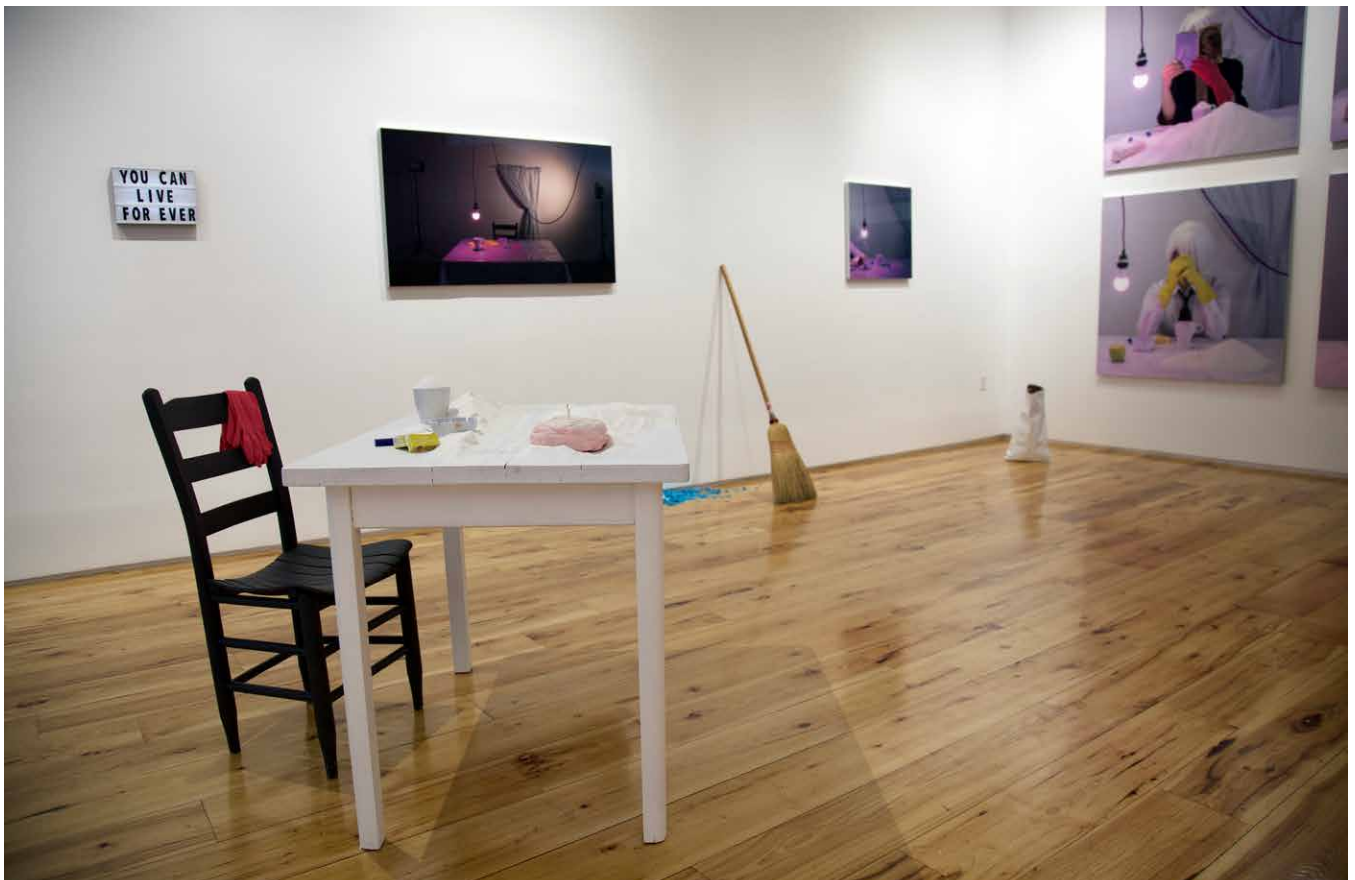
*Windmill Pinwheel Effect*, Photolithograph, 30" x 22", 2019

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# APRIL MARTEN

## IN BETWEEN

Hanging upside down  
when the sky is falling  
doesn't make it any less so,  
for if a thing loves it is infinite,  
existing,  
somewhere,  
in between  
a laugh and a cry,  
inside and outside,  
this side and that side.



*Frances Wasn't a Saint* (installation), 2019

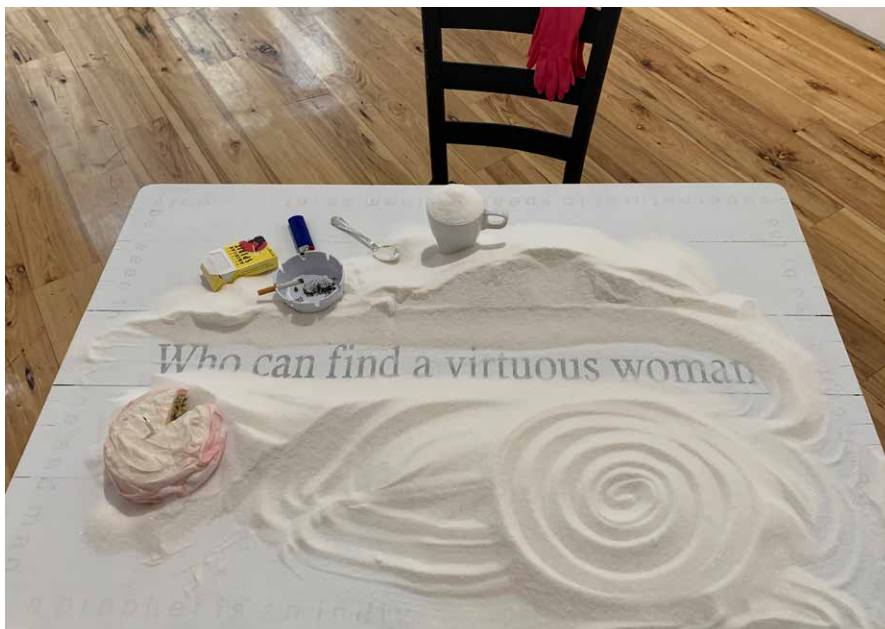


*Untitled No 2 and Untitled No 7, from Frances Series, 2019*





*Blue and Broom* (performance artifact), 2019



*Lullaby for a Harlot* (performance artifacts), 2019



*Blue Window, 2019*



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# ASHLEE MAYS

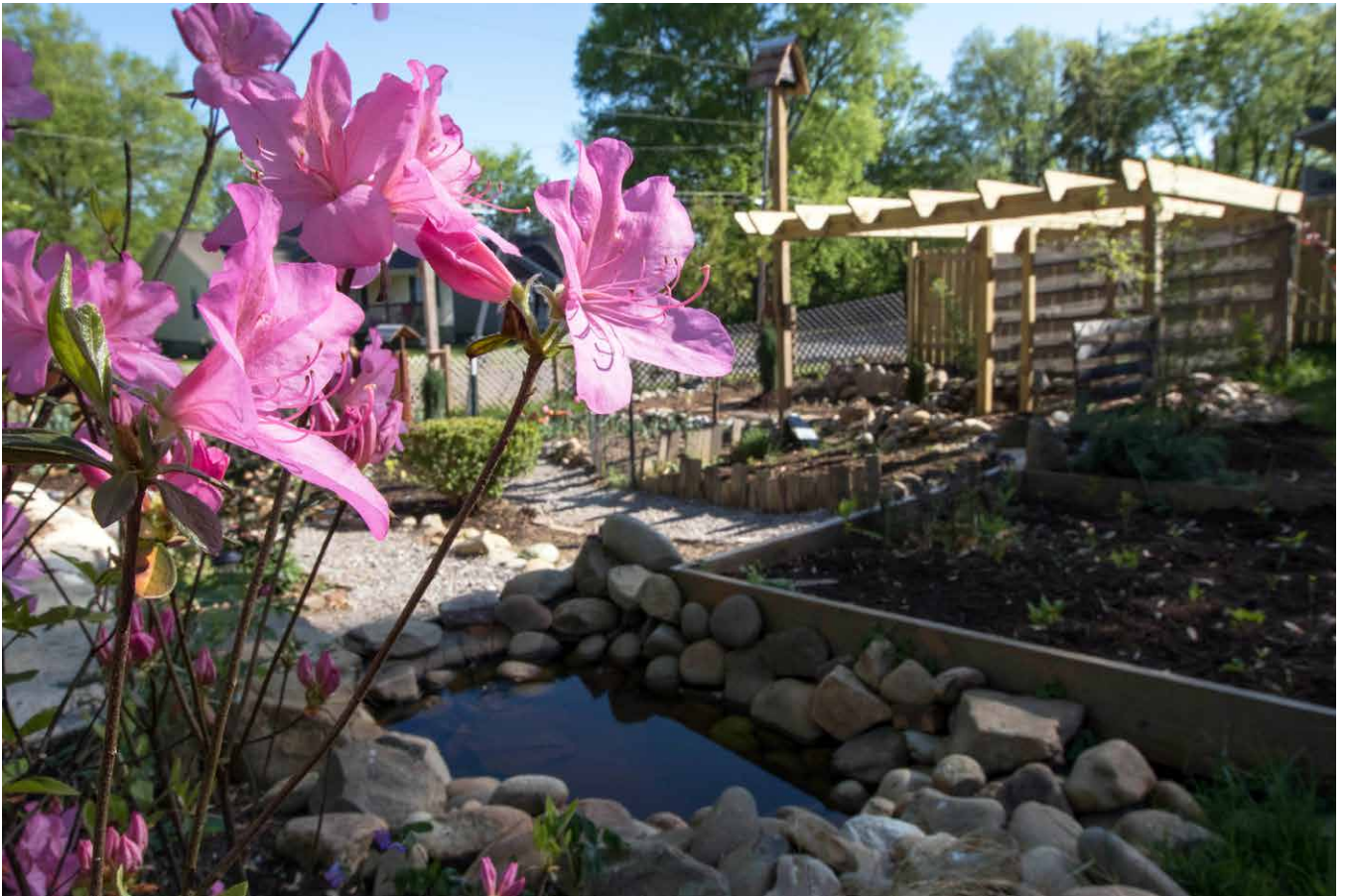
## THE MUSEUM OF INFINITE OUTCOMES

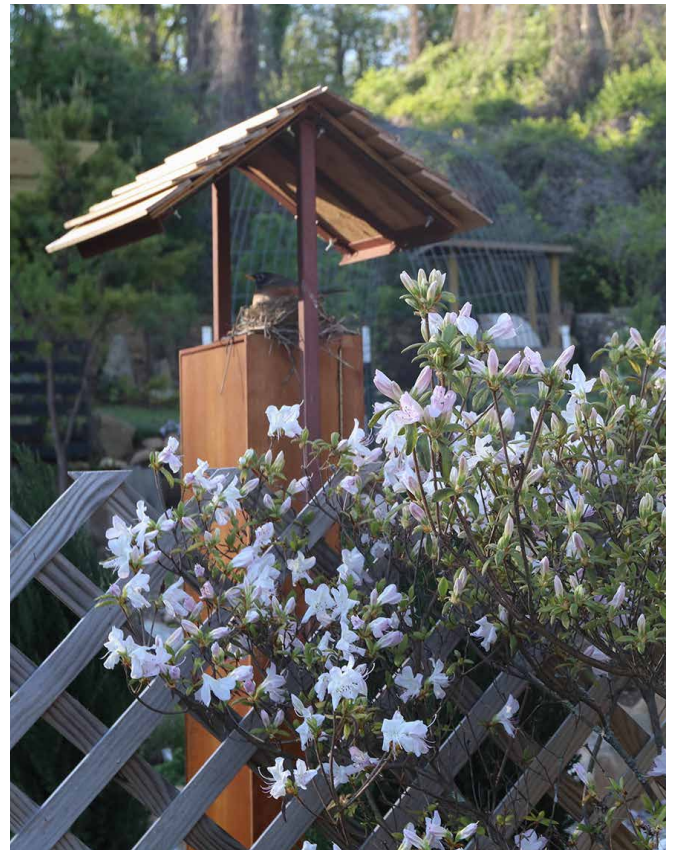
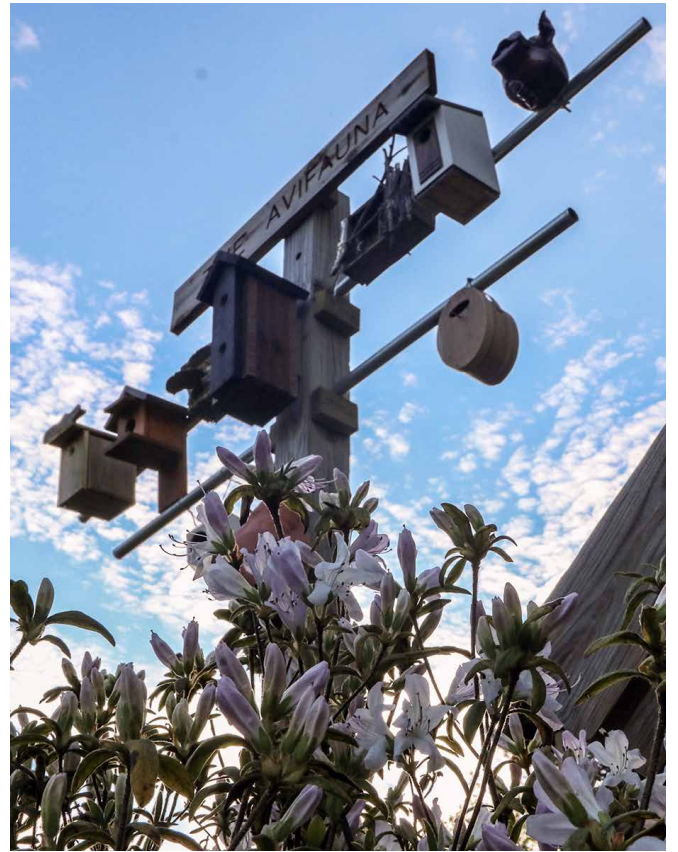
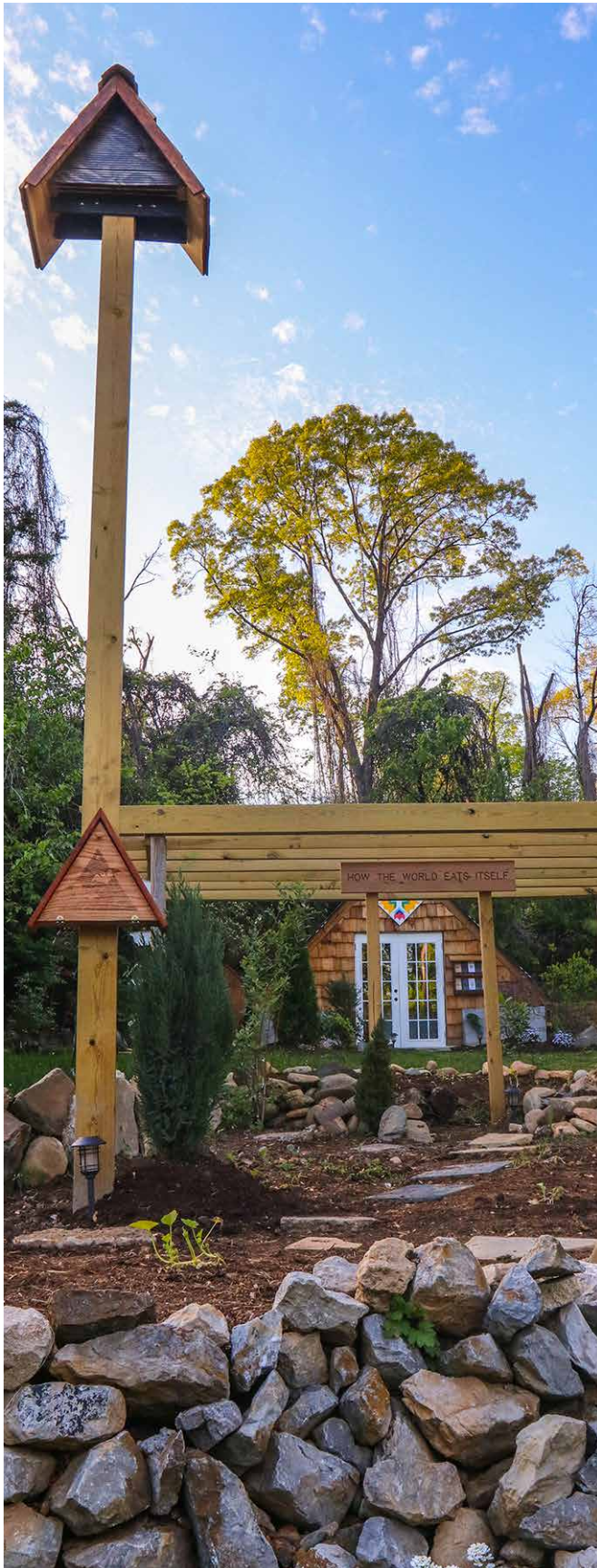
Perched alongside Knoxville's chestnut ridge sits the Museum of Infinite Outcomes, a museum of conservation. To conserve something is to preserve it with care.

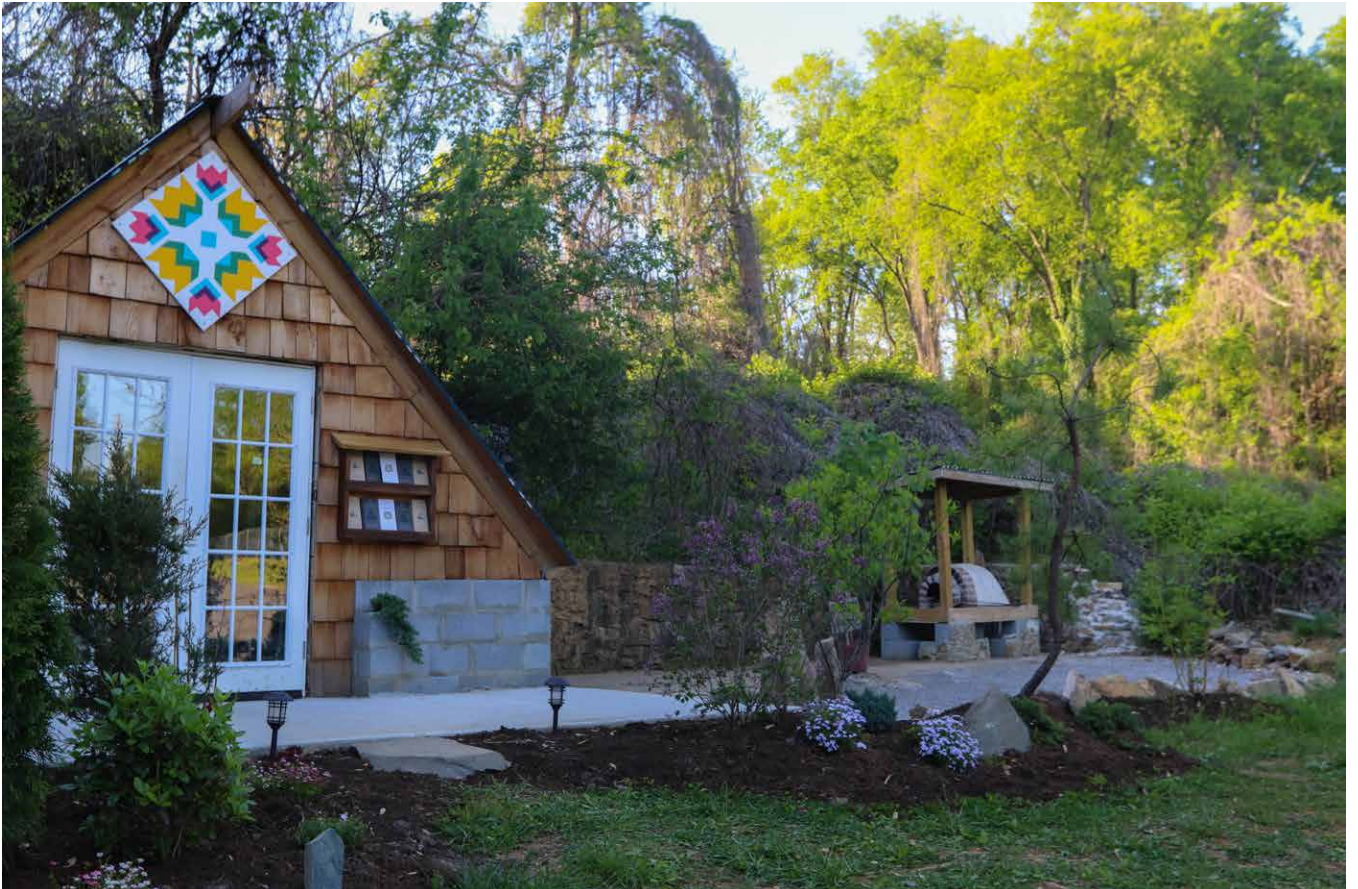
Our world is wild. It pulses with life. It sinks into death, and begins again – and again. This world belongs to all who are born out of it. “Nature” is a term that is born out of natal, Latin for the common origin of everyone. You and I are heterotrophs: something that must eat something else to sustain life. Outside, plants cling tight to the earth below them, patiently performing alchemy in the setting sun. Quietly, they transform its rays into a sustaining stream of life, like water into wine. Humans, like you and me, are not so graceful. It may be no secret to either of us that to participate in a human built world is unsustainable. To support our bodies, something must die, and more often than not that death comes in the form of cheap gasoline and non-biodegradable plastics. Can we rewrite these relationships? Can we engage in sustainable cycles of living and dying together?

The Museum seeks to foster material relationships, because these relationships are not optional. As an open-air museum, our collection meanders through sun-filled gardens, collaborating with the outside world to demonstrate that things in our reality can only exist in terms of relationships.

Located at 2345 Dodson Ave in the Parkridge neighborhood of Knoxville, Tennessee, the Museum features a lithographic Publishing House, the Library of Infinite Outcomes, and a collection of seasonal and rotating exhibitions.



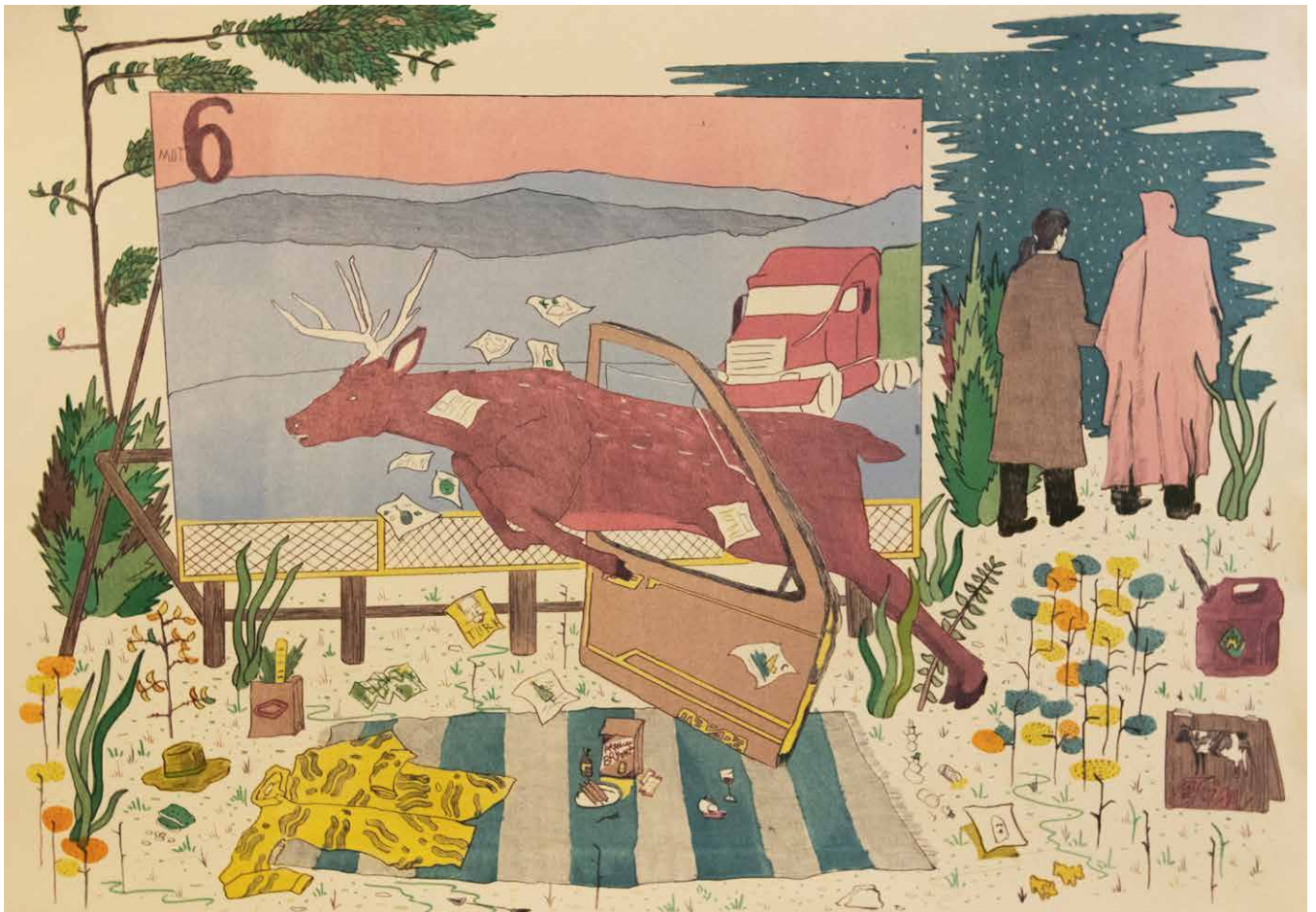




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# EMMETT MERRILL

My work uses printmaking methods to create narrative images which combine Americana imagery with that of myth and legend. The prints deal with the emptiness of the American landscape, the derivation of ghost stories and local legends, objects of Art History, and the culture surrounding the highway system. The work also explores how time can move within a single visual space, similar to the way hieroglyphs exist as a contained image, but can be read in the same fashion as words on a page. Objects clutter the ground of the imagery, as if a tornado whipped through town and scattered objects from an art museum and a gas station through an empty field. The work is intrigued by the contrast of nature to the human made object. I am fascinated by a billboard surrounded by grazing cattle, the bright colors of a newly constructed gas station in the plains with a black storm cloud drifting overhead, and the trash that collects in cars and motel rooms.



*Dead Deer*, lithograph, 22" x 30"



*Airport Bar*, lithograph, 22" x 28"





*River of Styx*, lithograph, 22" x 30"



*The Tornado*, lithograph, 22" x 30"



*Shadow Puppet*, lithograph, 22" x 30"

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# ANGELINA PARRINO

My practice concerns itself with an idea of home that is malleable— a place that can be reconstructed endlessly out of its constituent parts. I make installations that are modular in personality, possessing the capacity to be broken down and put away; to later become something new. Using a glossary of materials specific to the environment and personal memory, I aim to create destabilizing connections by folding interior and exterior environments into each other. The floor becomes a map or game board, in which all the pieces covering it are moveable. Its flexible nature alludes to childhood play or world-building. I am curious about how we exist in our brain or body, habitat, or collective— each being equally relevant.

This ongoing investigation grows out of my own origins: a unique upbringing in a one-bedroom cabin that my father built, buried deep in the woods of Florida. Twenty-three years of my life were marked by the devastation of hurricanes. Memories of childhood are waterlogged; I recall many nights in which my sister and I would hang our heads over the edge of our parents' bed as they mopped up the water that pushed through the floorboards. Post-storm, when the downpour ceased and the ground absorbed the liquid like a swollen sponge, we would go outside and look for things that had been lost. During these expeditions we behaved as kid ecologists, mapping every inch of the land. I fell in love with the smell of soil after rain, the way life persisted, and the magic unearthed through exploration.

Place is an arrangement that is always changing. As our needs and environments shift, our ability to adapt multiplies in importance. This call and response dynamic has become exceedingly relevant in our current world situation: the coronavirus pandemic and the slower-moving dangers of climate change parallel one another in important ways, and experts say the aggressive, if belated, response to the outbreak could hold lessons for those urging climate action.<sup>1</sup> In this time of uncertainty, we are forced to examine how we function as a society—how we care for each other, and the earth that is our home. We are given the opportunity to shift directions, and, as life bends in unprecedented ways, we must move with ingenuity in return.

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Gardiner et al., “Coronavirus Holds Key Lessons on How to Fight Climate Change,” *Yale E360*, accessed April 29, 2020, <https://e360.yale.edu/features/coronavirus-holds-key-lessons-on-how-to-fight-climate-change>)



*Corners & Murmurs*, Installation with performance and audio piece, dimensions variable, 2019



*The edge of the sea (Summer Room)*, Installation with video piece, lamp, play sand, sea glass tile, white marble, wrapped chair, unfired clay and apple snail shell, dimensions variable, 2020



*My body, breaking apart (Spring Room)*, Installation with soil, birdbath, unfired clay, wildflowers and felted objects, dimensions variable, 2020



*Guess how much I love you (Fall/Winter Room), Installation with tarp and felted objects, dimensions variable, 2020*



*My body, breaking apart (Spring Room), Installation with soil, birdbath, unfired clay, wildflowers and felted objects, dimensions variable, 2020*

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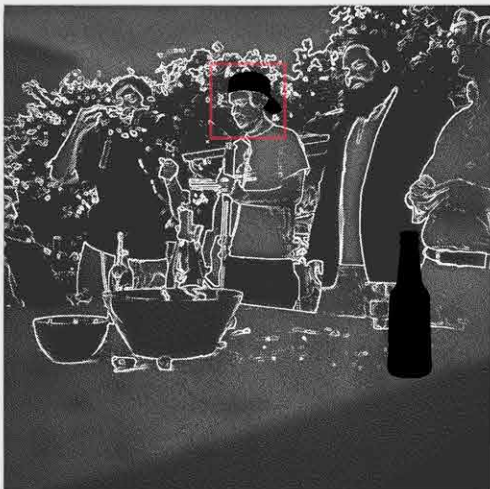
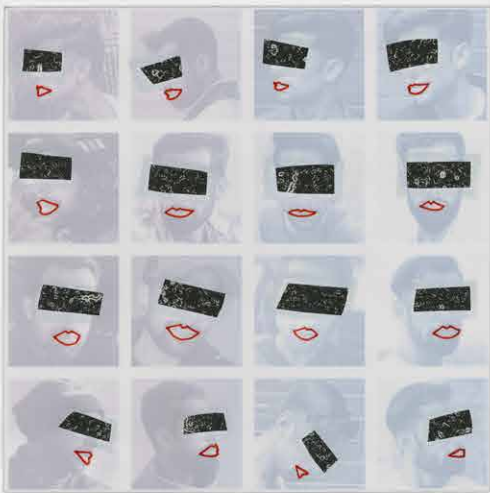
# DANA POTTER

## PUBLIC INFORMATION ONLY

Until recently, the notion that your selfie could be scraped off the internet by a private company and sold to law enforcement as a profitable mugshot would have seemed like a conspiracy theory (or at least an unlikely, worst case scenario). In early 2020, a technology company called ClearView AI scraped millions of public sites, including Facebook, YouTube, and Venmo, amassing nearly 3 billion photos for facial recognition and sold the datasets to more than 600 law enforcement agencies in the US.

These artworks allow the viewer to see an emotive interpretation of facial recognition (FR), how the computer cuts, warps, and distorts faces. Translating these invisible actions from behind digital screens into physical, printed objects makes the reality of online surveillance feel actual and personal. I don't believe anyone expects their photos to be used for FR when they post online, and I think we deserve basic digital rights to protect our data from this undesired use.

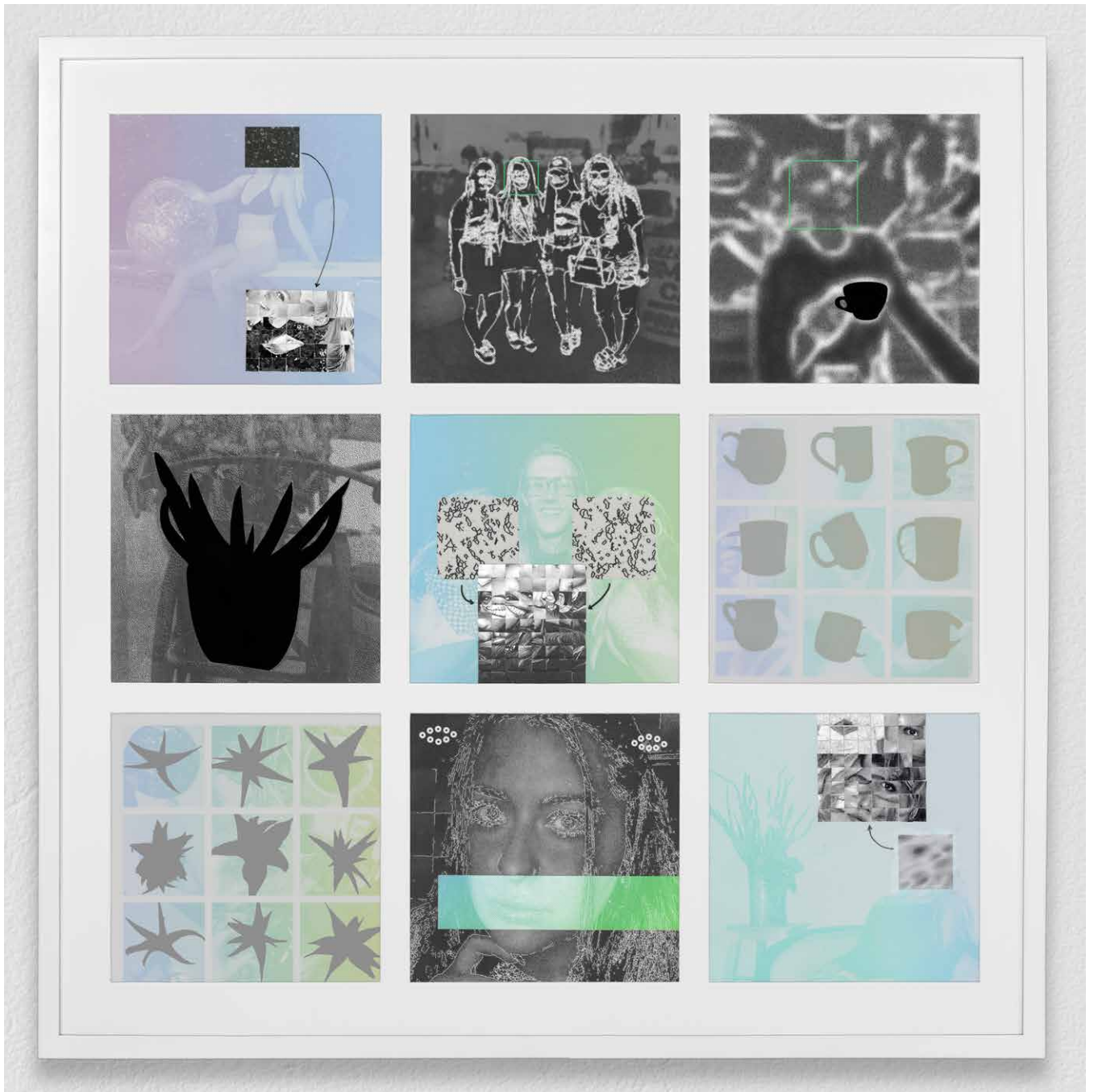
I make these screenprints to investigate the computer vision behind FR, to understand what the computer does to a face. Beginning with Instagram, I download selfies from various profiles. I reinterpret the logical instructions of FR from scientific journals and textbooks, as artistic prompts for hand-collage. The result of warping, cutting, and collaging distort the face. Screen-printing holds the detail of the photographs and expands on themes of image filtering. The translucency of the Yupo paper and heavily transbase-modified inks allow the double-sided prints to feel luminescent, like a digital screen, while the flocked surfaces magically trap light and solidify forms.





Portrait #022725 Angela, acrylic screen-print, plastisol, talc flocking, Yupo, 24" x 18", 2020





*Profile #075138 Lauren*

acrylic screen-print, toner powder flocking, digital print, collage, paint marker, Yupo  
a set of nine 12" x 12" prints framed at 36" x 36", 2020



*Profile #114445 Jess*  
 acrylic screen-print, toner powder flocking, digital print, collage, paint marker, Yupo  
 a set of nine 12" x 12" prints framed at 36" x 36", 2020

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# WILLIAM RERICK

## FATHER MARK

Father Mark is a recently ordained Catholic Priest, who feels plagued with lustful thoughts for a parishioner. I paint his guilt-ridden psyche, where he abstracts these musings and tries to transcend earthly longings. Between the two motivations pertinent to the construction of Father Mark's character— a musing on a forbidden sensual union and a fog of shame— sits imaginative play. The paintings explore a particular merging of figuration and abstraction ripe with drama. Thus, in this theatre-like production the viewer and I enter a space where private, vulnerable moments are both revealed and obscured.

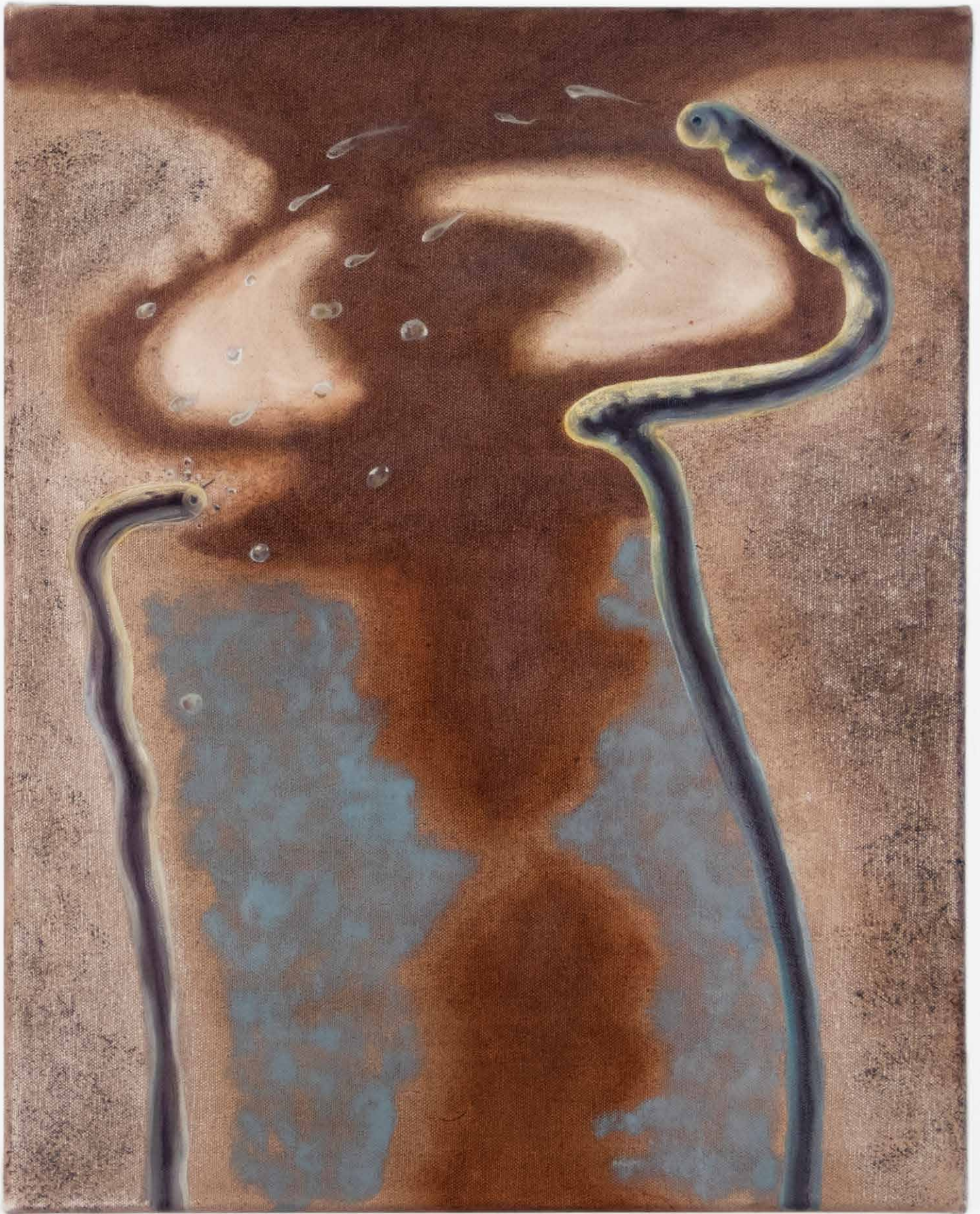
Oil paint is amorphous; being able to allure and repulse. It can mimic blood, dirt, or even candy. Akin to the Catholic belief in transubstantiation, the conversion of bread into body and blood, I use oil paint in my work as if it were both flesh and stained-glass. To further connect the divine with natural elements, I make my abstract bodily forms glow by starting with luminous saturated colors then layering earth tones. The paintings employ large spills of blood-like paint and small figures embedded within that resemble illuminated manuscripts.

I have built a surreal world inspired by the Catholic imagination that indulges in the pleasures of paint. The imagery recalls Catholic stained-glass windows, Boschian creatures, amorphous surreal forms, and parceled bodies turning back into paint. I create as if the paintings and I were in an intimate, physical conversation with one another. Desire drives the work, but in the end the story is told by the paint.

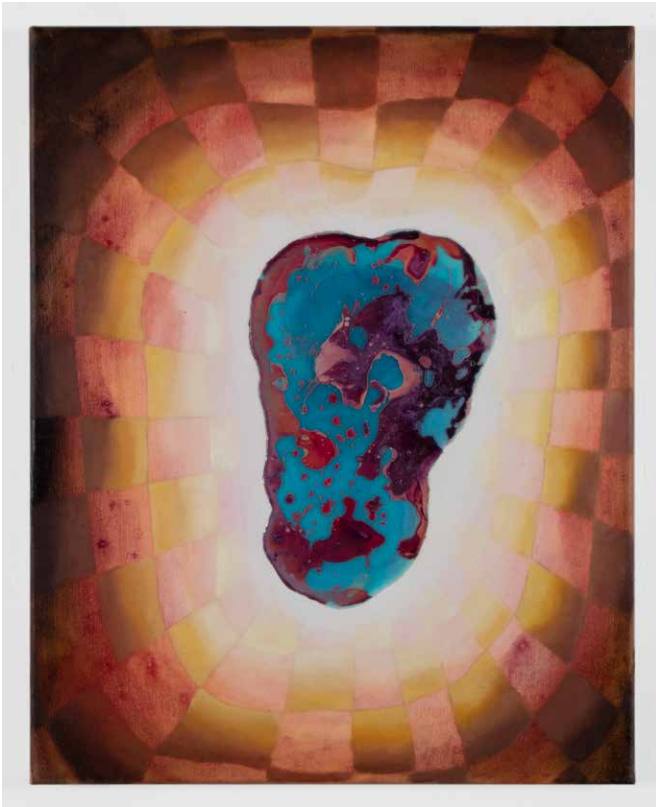




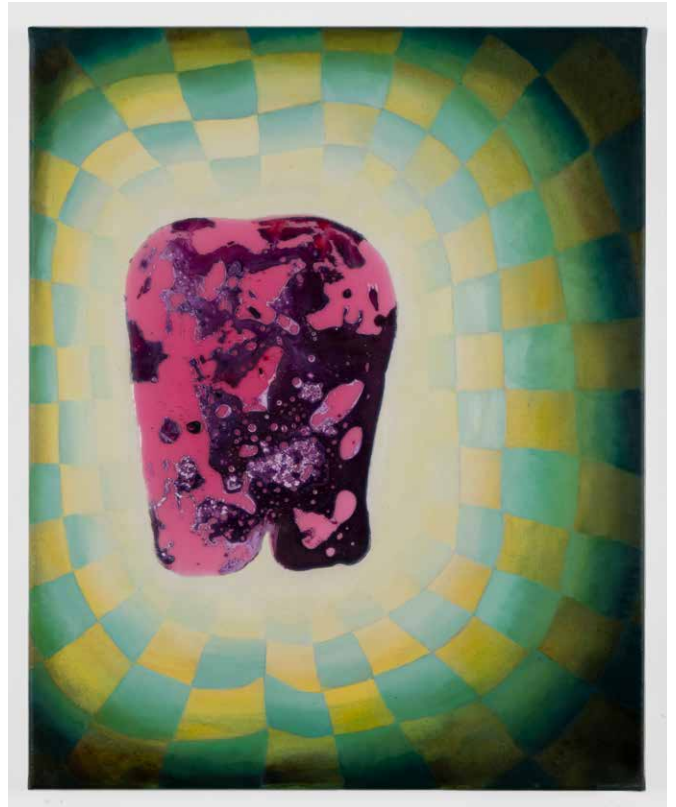
*Fall from Grace*, oil on canvas, 16" x 20", 2020



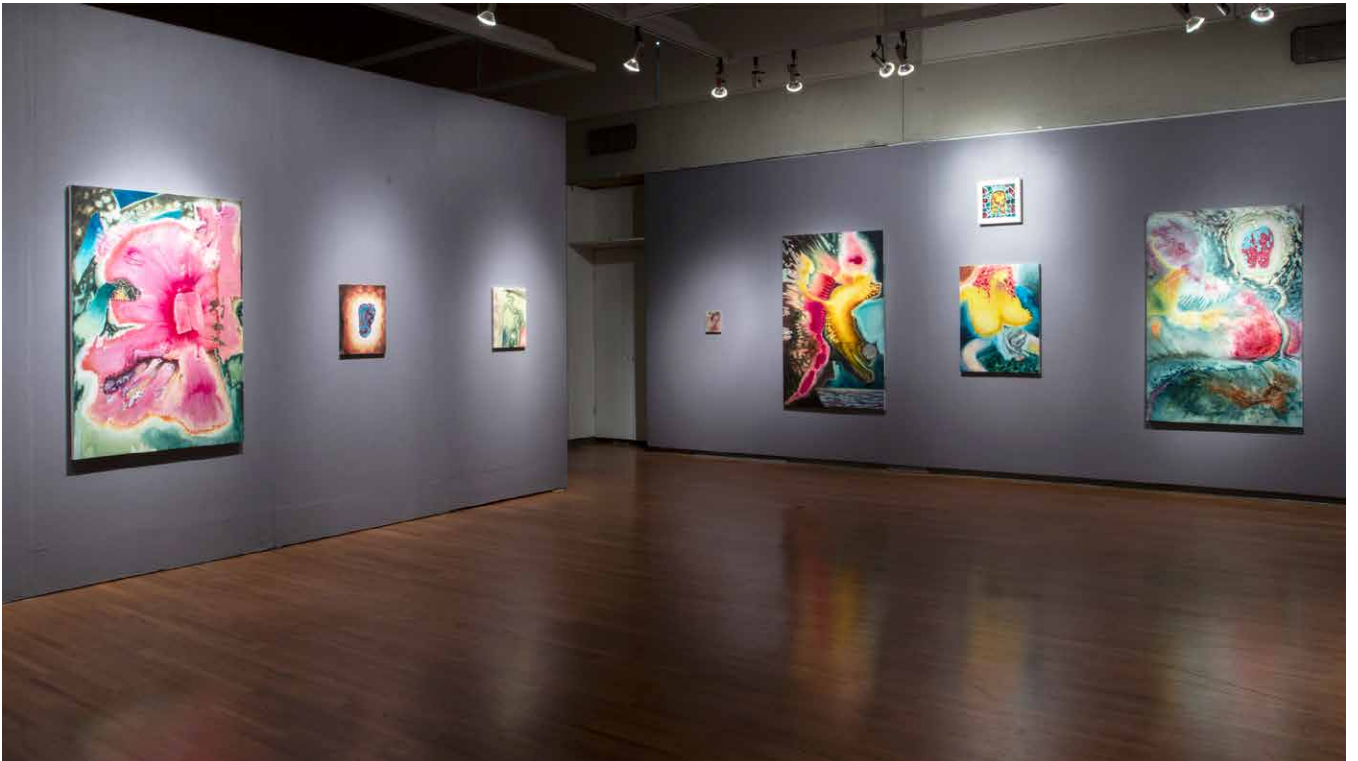
*Kinky Pipes*, oil on canvas, 16" x 20", 2019



*Holy Toast #4*, epoxy, acrylic, and oil on canvas, 16" x 20", 2020



*Holy Toast #5*, epoxy, acrylic, and oil on canvas, 16" x 20", 2020



*Father Mark*, installation view

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# MARLA SWEITZER

## GROUND MATTER

Using the three-dimensionality of clay forms as a painting surface, I explore form as a metaphor for presence. Walls, buttresses and arcs perform as stabilizing appendages that divert weight downward so that each object has a hold on the ground. Softened squares and arcs are architectural and organic — resembling both rock formations weathered by time and earth architecture formed by hand. Elements are repeating among forms — slightly modified in scale, orientation and direction.

Predominantly monochrome, the single overall color imbues a new layer of life to the forms, setting them aglow. A change in color also occurs from the presence and direction of light which creates shadow shapes adding complexity to the monochromatic forms.

Like a garden filled with various plants, the ceramic objects are amplified by their arrangement. Some of the objects may want to unite, bumping into one another or hovering in close proximity. The boundaries between forms creates a new environment, where the air and distance between objects opens up new spaces and possibilities for interpretation.



*Ground Matter, 23*, glazed ceramic, 6" x 6.6" x .75", 2019



*Ground Matter, 21*, wood-fired ceramic, 8" x 9" x 8.5", 2019



*Ground Matter, 43*, bronze, 9" x 11.5" x 4", 2020





*Ground Matter, 31*, oil and ceramic, 1.5" x 10" x 9.25", 2019



*Ground Matter, 19*, oil and ceramic, 7" x 9" x .75", 2019



*Ground Matter, 44*, bronze, 7.75" x 13.25" x 5", 2020

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville's MFA Program is ranked #22, with its printmaking area ranked #3 among public universities 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, Knoxville, 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 art with concentrations in ceramics, painting + drawing, printmaking, sculpture, and time-based art.

Our MFA program offers courses and opportunities that provide 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 springboard to their careers.

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 major urban art hub, acts as a bridge between the university and the broader art world.

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*The School of Art offers multiple high-visibility opportunities for its graduate students to build their professional skills through public exhibition of their work. These opportunities provide the critical groundwork and experiences for sustaining a successful practice as professional artists.*

## **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 UNIX Gallery, Foley Gallery, and White Box Gallery in New York; Zg Gallery and Co-Prosperity Sphere in Chicago; The Fridge in Washington, D.C.; and Coagula Curatorial in Los Angeles.

## **UT GALLERIES**

The School of Art operates one on-campus gallery and two off-campus galleries. The Ewing Gallery serves as a cultural resource for campus, the School of Art, and the Knoxville community. 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 international, national, and local artists' work. Gallery 1010, a completely student-run exhibition space, presents new exhibitions every week.

## **LIFE IN KNOXVILLE**

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

## SUCCESSFUL CREATIVE THINKING REQUIRES THE PERSPECTIVES OF DIVERSE PEOPLE.

The School of Art reaffirms the immeasurable contribution of diversity to the arts and seeks through 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 or veteran status. We recognize that exposure to all forms of diversity is essential to facilitating a creative artistic environment.

Contact the School of Art  
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Knoxville, TN 37996-2410



SCHOOL OF ART

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