



University of Tennessee, Knoxville
**TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative
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Ewing Gallery of Art & Architecture

Art

2021

2021 MFA Thesis Exhibitions

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, School of Art

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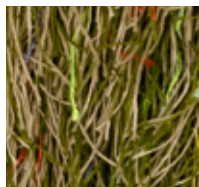
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The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

2021 MFA CATALOG



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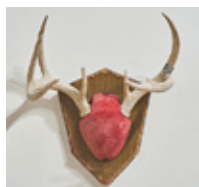
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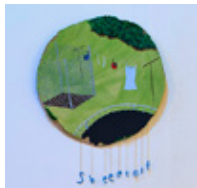
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F O R E W O R D

The University of Tennessee School of Art MFA exhibitions mark the culmination of a three-year degree program centered around the development of a rigorous, interdisciplinary studio art practice under the close mentorship of a committee of accomplished practicing studio art faculty. Each student in the stellar MFA class of 2021 engaged us in a conversation with a distinct and individual voice. As a whole, these students collectively demonstrated the potential for contemporary art practice to serve as a vehicle for transformative individual and cultural discovery.

While the creation and experience of art are both mysterious processes that can never be fully understood rationally, they invite us into an inexplicable but meaningful dialogue through a sensuous language and metaphor. At the University of Tennessee 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 2021 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 School of Art MFA alumni. 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 broader collective culture. We thank them for joining us and look forward to witnessing the fruits of their fertile imaginations.

Christopher McNulty

Director and Ellen McClung Berry Professor
School of Art
University of Tennessee

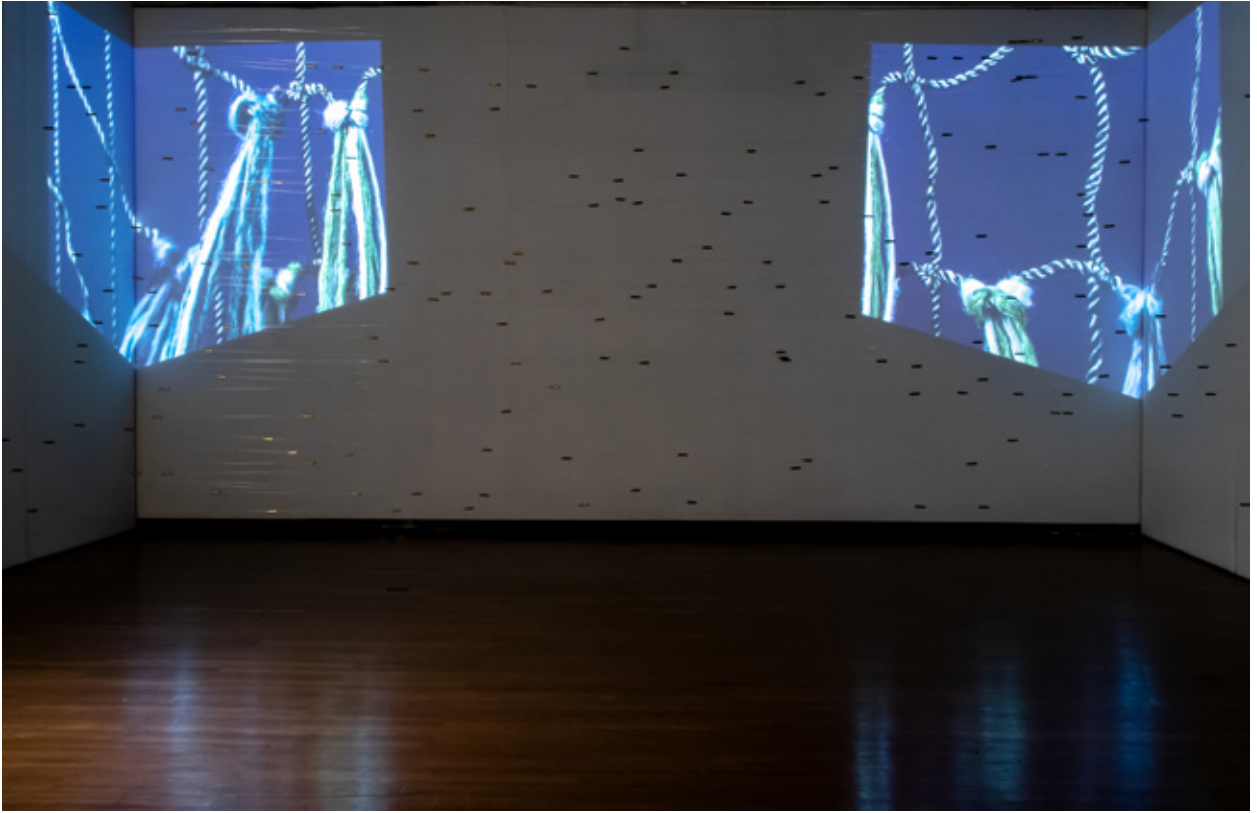
K. CLARK

BUNKER BUNKER CRAFTING HOUR

My work is about fringe, fringe ideologies and literal tactile fringe. My interdisciplinary practice is at its heart a collection of cultural odds and ends. It spans from wartime film production, cold war nuclear paranoia, contemporary conspiracies, and beyond. Research is the backbone of most of my projects, and my physical work illustrates this research. While these works can technically stand alone, I consider them more akin to a reference image in a textbook. They require external context and whether a viewer is allowed that external context is integral to the work. I am interested in concepts and artifacts that time cast off, overlooked, and left under examined. Things that come to us with a simplified answer but are, in fact, part of a rich cultural and historical tapestry that one must step back from to comprehend. Materials, techniques, and concepts presented in my work can be seemingly disparate at first glance but work in tandem to create a larger whole.

I am interested in the threads of history. Everything has a cause and effect. Events and concepts flow into each other or collide in unexpected ways. My practice operates as a web, both in structure but also in the formulation. A new topic captures my interest, but only with time and exploration do I discover how it fits into the larger body of work. My research is exhaustive, while my art-making is methodical. They are referential or appropriative of things which I believe should be given more attention. Typically, physical works follow strict, repeatable guidelines in their making. Everything I make is technically reproducible. This formulaic approach has long been a staple of my practice. Sets of works follow guidelines and presentation with minimal alterations. As someone inspired by mass communication and the literal systems of information storage, I find it important that my work is replaceable versus a unique object. Like the memetic or mass culture topics I focus on, the fact someone else could recreate my work, present it, and further the audience is vital to the conceptual concerns of my practice. My labor will always be in the research and the gathering.









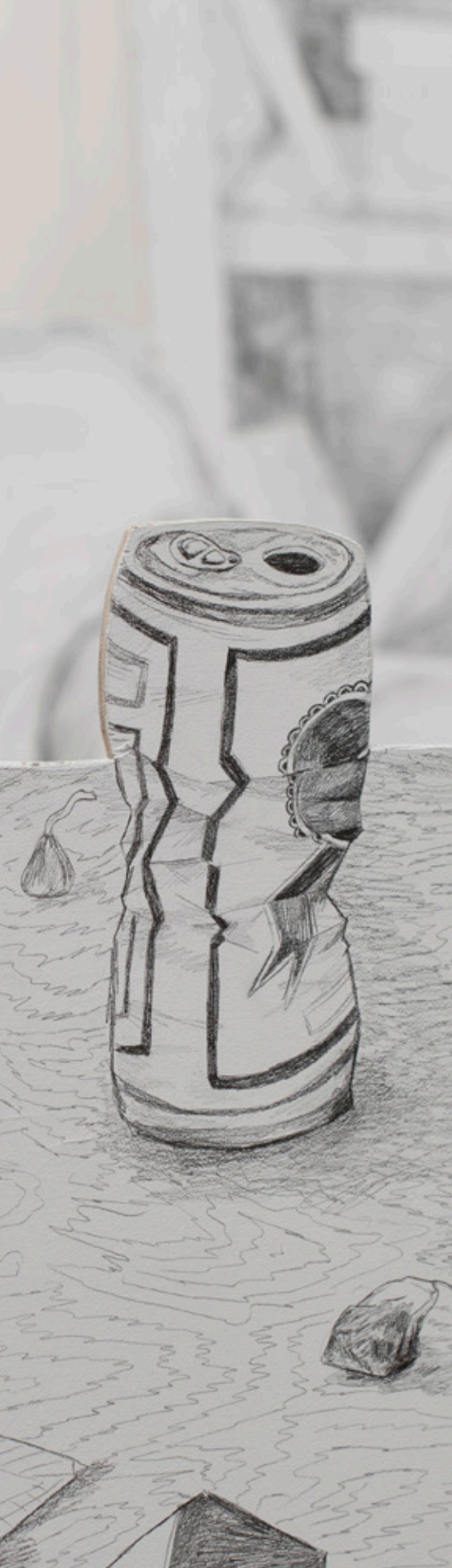
MARY CLIMES

MARY CLIMES PRESENTS: A VERY SPECIAL EPISODE

My work is an exploration of narrative through structure and content. I employ various mediums to their unique potential aspects, such as looping animation, installation, comics, and figurative drawing. I often use these mediums in tandem, stretching out narratives through multiple iterations to tell stories from specific and varying perspectives. Through the representation of religious iconography, cartooning and banality I present narratives that weave humor, intimacy and guilt to illustrate relationships.

Humor is paramount to my work as it has the ability and represents a desire to process the past and recast uncomfortable or even traumatic events in a funny light. In my Catholic upbringing, I was often surrounded by faux-gilded cups and exaggerated paintings of a cut Jesus on the cross. The stations of the cross, the May crowning of the Mary statue, and the “dress up as your favorite Saint day” are all Catholic school memories I invoke. These memories involve costuming, performance, and farce in proximity to religious experience.

Mary Climes Presents: A Very Special Episode is a collection of writing, comic, screenplay, animation, and interactive installation that explores the cyclical nature of generational narrative through the lens of the sitcom structure. Thematically *A Very Special Episode* focuses on intimacy, voyeurism, and sexual repression through the complacent actions of a Catholic guilt ridden protagonist. In the subversion of the project's namesake there is no allegory or moral to the *Very Special Episode*. The piece uses the narrative structure of the sitcom to explore the duality of womanhood as both the virgin mother and the original sinner.









NYASHA MADAMOMBE

NDEZVEDZINZA

In Shona, there is a common and profound saying, *Musha Mukadzi*, roughly translating to ‘the Woman is the Home’, because women keep the family, village, community together. Women are the protective, fierce, and loving overseers. The women deities in my thesis exhibition are remnants of an ancient, powerful but dormant world. Holding together the future by guiding their descendants in the present world.

Propelled by the question, “What would Africa be like today without colonialism?”, this is an awakening, a reminder, and unlearning of a narrative that is not entirely ours.

The theme of Afrofuturism throughout the show is a quest for our survival in an environment designed to relentlessly project a negative image of Black people, as a way of continuing the domination of what seems like an alien nation. The chatter is buzzing just below the surface and getting louder as the goddesses’ lifeforce and connection with their descendants grows stronger.

Ndezvedzinza is a legacy for the future generations.





Kumusha, laser print on paper in display case, 20 x 9 x 12 inches, 2021



Musangano, ceramic, 17 x 11.5 x 9 inches, 2021



Muchengeti, ceramic, 20.5 x 18.5 x 9 inches, 2021



Ndezvedzinza, Ewing Gallery



After the World Has Ended, ceramic, beads in display case, 36.5 x 32 x 15 inches, 2021.

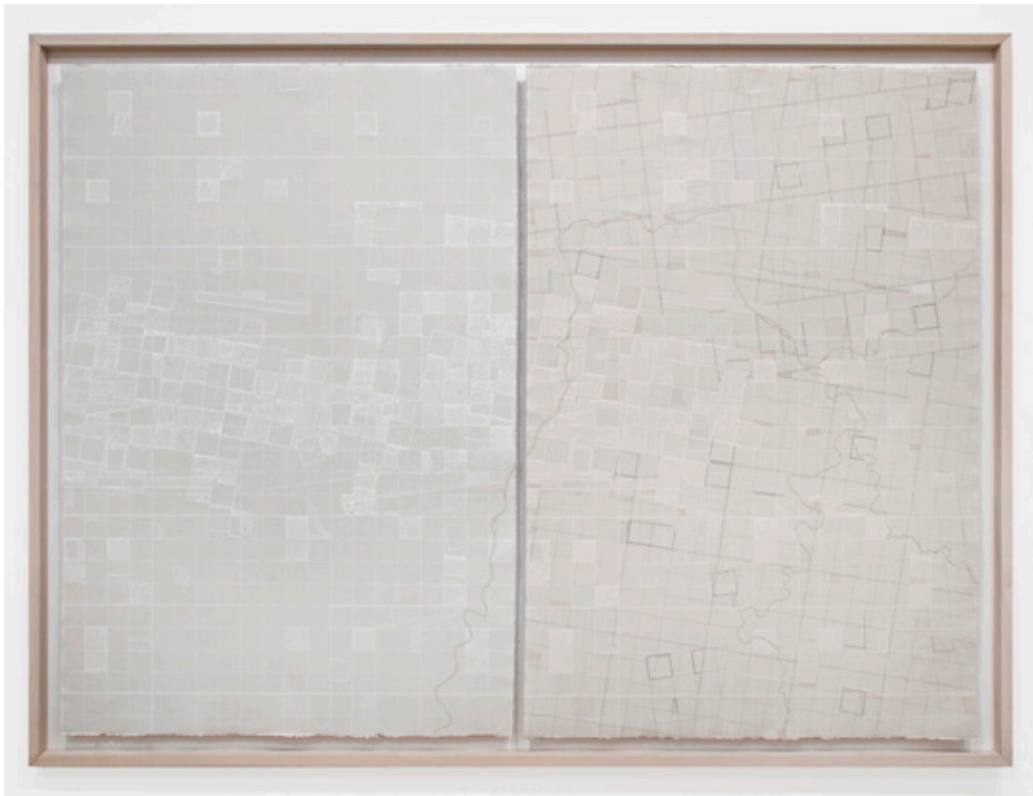
CONOR MCGRANN

IT'S NOT ADDING UP

My work is an attempt to understand the systems and systemic failures of our society. Horst Ritter described these issues as “wicked problems.” There can be no real repeatable solution, and the notion that there is one answer to complex societal issues actually further exacerbates the problems. “Common sense” is often lacking the context that would make it seem senseless, but anything can be convincing when presented with enough confidence. These issues are not easy, and in some cases impossible to solve, however, that does not mean these structural concerns should be ignored. My practice is my attempt to pay attention to these problems. The work ultimately fails in its efforts to find answers and reason. It therefore comes to be about the begrudging acknowledgment and acceptance that everything is more complex, interconnected, and unknowable upon closer examination.

I use publicly available Geographical Information System (GIS) data from the US Census Bureau, often times imposing a grid on top or behind. I use combinations of digital and analog processes to mimic the building and collapse of social systems. At each translation or combination of media the idea is changed, recontextualized, and moved further away from its source and original meaning. Much like how the social systems I am studying grow and evolve in scope and purpose through time, each little error in my process creates an opportunity for the materials to offer new and unintended outcomes. The work is quiet and clean so that it can mask its contradictions and errors unless closely observed.

My work is looking for answers but ends up being more comfortable with questions. It is a warning against certainty and trust in systems, a call to bring a skeptical eye to neat and tidy solutions, and an invitation to collectively question the culture. If, as Camus suggests, “beginning to think is beginning to be undermined,” then this thesis is designed to undermine itself in order to continue to build understanding. Context and process are more important than conclusions. *It's Not Adding Up* because it will never add up.



It's Not Adding Up, collagraph, lasercut collage, graphite, peeled paper, marker, 44.5 x 60 inches



Everything is Dumb When You Look Close Enough, lasercut, color pencil, 21 x 30 inches



A District, etched oxidized copper, 30 x 44.5 inches



Fixed It, collage, peeled paper, 20 x 16 inches



Thousand Year Old Stew, collagraph, 30 x 22 inches



It's Not Adding Up, gallery installation view

JAKE R. MILLER

BACK HOME

My artwork explores the hidden traumas that surround masculine identities in rural cultures. Through the use of traditionally rural/working class objects, I've constructed a visual language that speaks to the loneliness, frustration, and toxicity of my experience growing up in a remote conservative setting: domestic beer, blue jeans, work boots, guns, and jacked up trucks. Being raised in rural northwestern Illinois, I am a product of both blue collar and hunting/fishing cultures. Growing up, I was constantly surrounded by this special brand of camo-clad masculinity and "traditional" ideas of gender roles.

For me, hands symbolize determination, grit and strength; hands touch, hands build, hands provide a history. My father was a mechanic for 30 years and my grandfather an electrician for 40. Following the example of the working-class men in and outside of my family, I used my hands to perform hard manual labor from an early age. These men molded me into a hardworking individual with a work ethic that I am still very proud of today, but from a young age I felt alone and out of place in this culture and could never make sense of it. I regularly felt social pressure to participate in ritualistic displays of manhood – such as hunting, binge drinking, or fighting – out of fear of persecution. I was never very interested in these types of activities and was often told to "man up" or to "stop being so sensitive." Emotions are seen as a weakness and men are taught and expected to repress their feelings. This way of living was destructive and led to extreme feelings of emptiness that can be seen and felt in my artwork. Through my art practice making, I aim to make sense of my personal experiences, and my own identity in a conservative rural community while simultaneously challenging the outdated ideas of gender and culture within these communities.





You dont need to fix what aint broke, antler mount, camo duct tape, super glue, 2 part epoxy, 16 x 26 x 13 feet, 2021



Hang Tough Kid, camouflage fabric, spray adhesive, plywood, luan, hardware, dirt from Illinois, chain, 5 x 5 x 15 feet, 2021



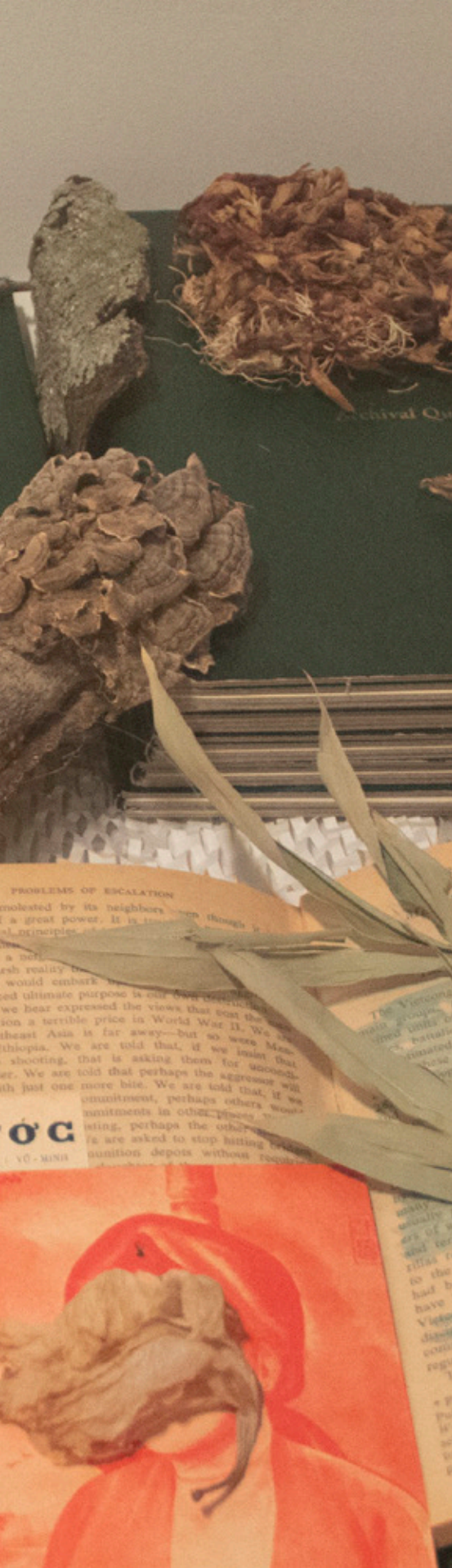
I'm pretty good at drinkin beer. father's lawnchair, plaster, patina paint, artist's urine, gravel, aluminum cans, 5 x 5 x 4 feet, 2021

QUYNH NGUYEN

NƯỚC A MEMOIR

I am an interdisciplinary artist working in performance, video, installation, and mixed media. I am deeply influenced by my family's photographs — taken before the Vietnam/American War of 1955-1975 — which led me to this current praxis.

In this project, *nước a memoir*, I create a liminal space in between my home country and my current country through my work. I use water (nước) as a metaphor to imply the notion of what a country means to me, as the term 'nước', in Vietnamese, means both country and water. The idea of both country and water coming together in my work feels appropriate, whether in maps, postcards, or photographs. I work directly with plant matter to connect all of my components in this project. Akin to many Vietnamese customs and art, the image of the Tonkinese woman often appears with plant matter such as tropical species in the background of painting, movie, photographs, songs. I collected similar Asian plants in the U.S. in order to create portrayals of the Tonkinese woman and examine the link between gender and nature. Beyond that, I employ decaying materials as a means of creating artifacts, physical tokens of memory and nostalgia.











LILLY SAYWITZ

BACK INTO MY LOVERS ARMS

This body of work, titled *Back Into My Lovers Arms*, is an expressed desire for closeness. My Lover is not romantic, rather a collector that wants to understand something intimately while acknowledging space for slippage. The embrace is a place of knowing and also being known. The images themselves are not resolved places of closure, but rather an acknowledgment of a search for definition. This search for language and cogency is clumsy and earnest, often time missing the mark. However, the line continues to meander its way across the surface, hoping to carve out meaning from sensory form. Like an essay eternally stuck in the editing process.

I foster a visual dialogue, moving back and forth with the images so that we can develop a shared vernacular, wobbly and mistranslated, but functional. The space between knowing and feeling opens up a heterotopic site, as feeling becomes something tangible and describable using shape-based forms of conveying information. This gives way to a sense of internal logic existing within the composition. The paintings use repeated shapes and colors to create a visual lexicon. There are archways to nowhere and a not quite-ness to the circles, triangles, and squares that occupy the canvas. From this, a clarity begins to arise as the words previously lacked, begin to take hold. We feel seen in the eyes of those we love and hold that recognition of self near.



Pale Fire, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 x 1 inches, 2021



Arrow Through Me, oil on canvas, 40 x 40 x 1.5 inches, 2021

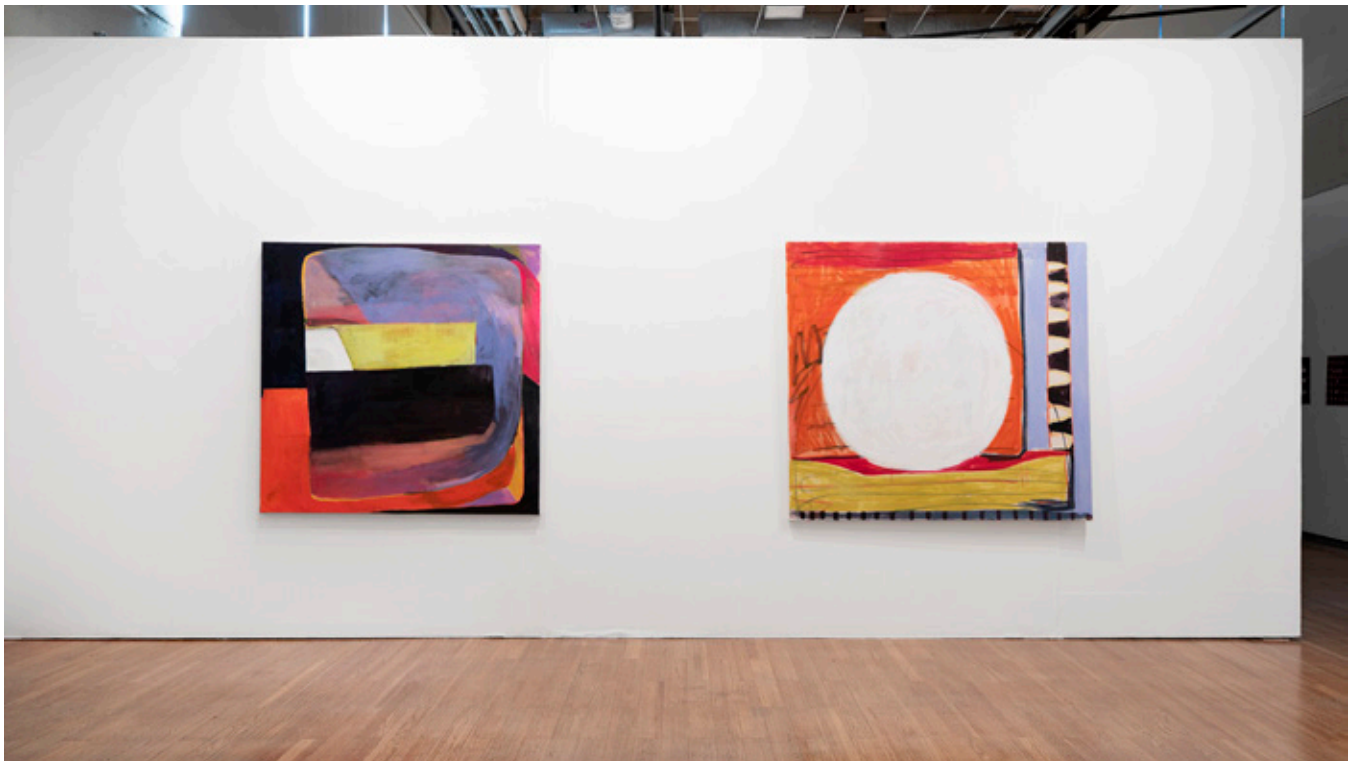


Red Sun Over, oil on canvas, 76 x 64 x 1.5 inches, 2021



You And I, oil on canvas, 56 x 56 x 1.5 inches, 2020

Same Song New Tape, oil on canvas, 9 x 12 x 1 inches, 2020



Turn About-Face (left), oil on canvas, 62 x 60 x 1.5 inches, 2021

Time Piece (right), oil on canvas, 62 x 70 x 1.5 inches, 2021

GINA STUCCHIO

PARASITE WITH A PROPER NAME



Throughout history there has been reference to this portal to the heavens. Throughout almost every culture and throughout all areas of the world. There are gods up there, a place that is better than the one here. The understanding of what kind of gods has differed throughout history as well. Some believe it to be God while some believe aliens are the real gods. Either way, the metaphor remains the same. Through a portal, there is the ability to gain access to somewhere better. To feel better. To be surrounded by better people. But how to reach that doorway varies depending on who you are talking to and when in history you speak to them.

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to reach the access point to get to the better. I have always been more partial to the idea of an alien abduction. For that reason, I constantly put myself in the position of almost asking for an abduction. Viewing the abduction as the portal. Many times, I laid out in the middle a large ditch on my street in the middle of the night just waiting for them to come. Giving myself up voluntarily. When the abductions didn't happen I tried various other methods to climb out of the place I was in with no avail.

At some point I looked at myself in the mirror and realized that moving to this other realm required having a conversation with myself. So I set up multiple mirrors so I could stare at myself and talk freely. It wasn't until that moment that I figured out that part of what was holding me back from my destination was myself. By confronting the reflection staring back at me I finally understood that I needed to meet myself halfway in both directions to open the doorway. Myself and my clone were each other's keys to the other place.



That Sad Space With The Milk, oil on canvas, charcoal on newsprint, 4 x 4 feet, 2021



Blinds, cardboard, newsprint, polyurethane, flowery fabric, yarn, 2021



Sitting area with video



Door to that Other Place, oil on canvas, gold chain, photo of artist's mom from 1994, grommet, LED lights, plastic cup, white fabric, 2021



Door to That Other Place (detail), 2021

LAUREN TERRY

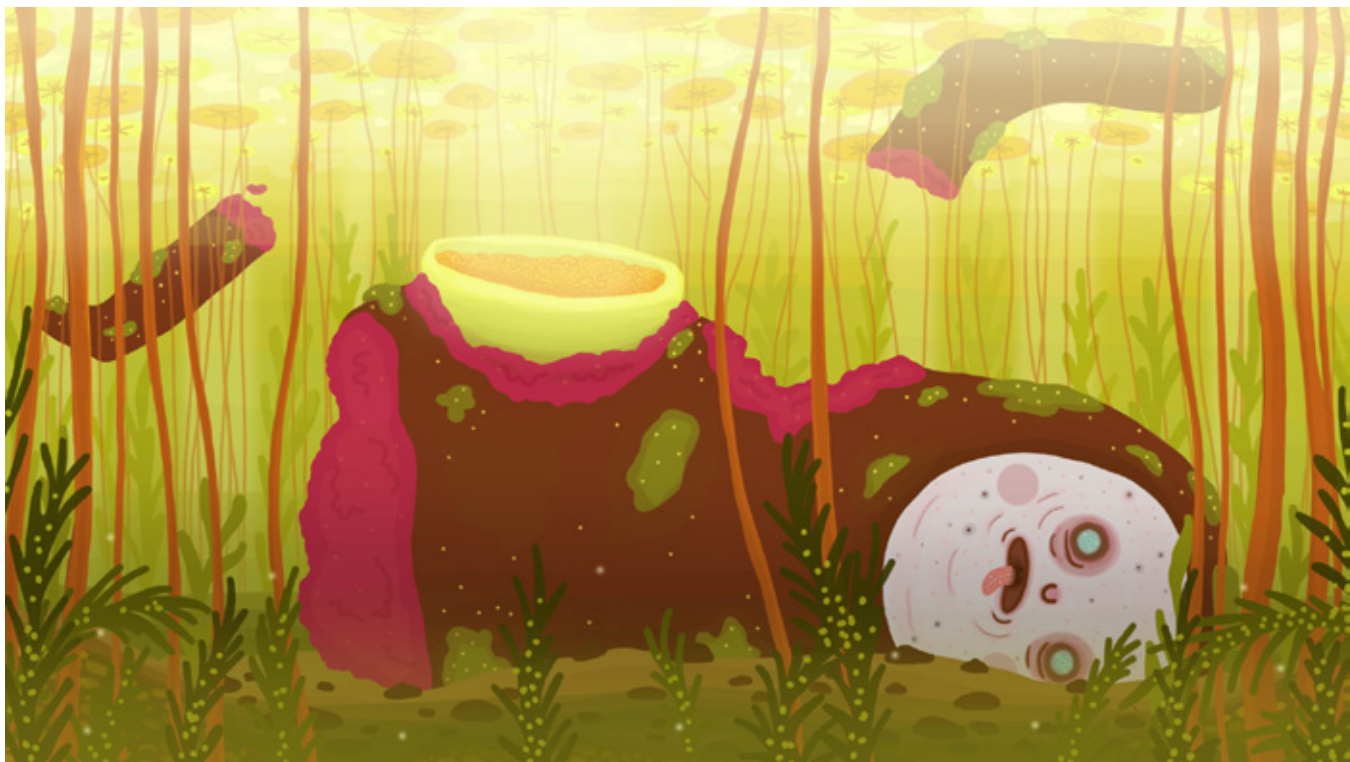
MACARONI TITANS

Macaroni Titans is an installation that investigates my relationship with my own invisible chronic pain and others' perceptions of it. The work is inhabited by giant apathetic beings called Titans whose bodies are slowly rotting away. The animations are presented as looping gifs, endless states in which the Titans are stuck. The sculptures act as physical manifestations of invisible pain.

It is visually evident that these Titans are not "ok." The viewer can see them bleeding, being torn apart, and slowly dying at the pace that a glacier moves. Time, for the Titans, is stretched to the point that it feels like it is not moving at all. The luxury of having one's pain evident is a small gesture when the overall condition and eventuality of their condition is infinite. In the animations, the Titans are seen slowly bleeding out into a canyon river, decapitated and twitching in a foggy swamp, and mangled in a marsh with their dismembered limbs floating above them. The plush Titan sculptures show a much more simplistic rendition of pain and stylized designs than their animated counterparts, but their scale and the physicality of their bodies cause for a greater exchange of empathy and sorrow towards them.

I implement the manipulative tools of consumerism such as bright colors and cartoonish aesthetics in order to pull the audience into the experience. As to not ignore the condition, I balance the visual delight with equal amounts of the carnage caused by illness and the resulting breakdown of the body. I am never pretending that the condition is absent. The opulent comfort is needed for the viewer to visually endure the Titans' predicament. The audience can still choose to ignore the unfortunate condition, just as they may choose to ignore others' pain.









ALISSA WALLS

THE SPACE RACE

I find a special kind of magic in stargazing and nightswimming, lying on my back in the grass or slipping belly-down through water. The vastness above and depths below projecting infinite scales. An unimpeded cloudless night sky has a quiet confidence and makes the unknown wondrous. It offers up endless spaces to rest my mind, allows my dreams to wander, to stretch my body and breath.

I drew a line and then another. Lines intersected to form grids. Grids shifted and curved. Curves became spirals. I tore through paper with my hands and a sewing needle. I built up pigments only to scrape them away. A reductive palette in black and cream pushes and pulls. Forms, surfaces, and depths accumulate, then give way. I bring whatever noises lie beneath—the messy personal and public histories, the hyperventilations—into equilibrium through a visual language of bare bones.

Born at the end of the Space Race and raised in the last years of the Cold War, I came to view outer space as a site of unlimited imagination and discovery, as well as a potentially threatening one of orbiting satellites and weapons poised for a nuclear Third World War. Somewhere in the depths of these murky waters, I took a big breath and started swimming through the night sky. The scales of the universe, global political economy, and my personal hopes, fears, and dreams kept shifting, expanding, and contracting upon one another.

The Space Race addresses the “race” to locate sustainable spaces where all people can breathe freely within the current structures of our complex world. We each deserve to pursue the unique visions we have for our lives without violence or limits. My work responds to this challenging contemporary moment with an offering of contemplation, peace, and quiet.

∞

And no-beginnings,
accumulations and voids,
wall-gazing the breath

—∞





Untitled, oil on canvas, 72 x 92 inches, 2021



Untitled, latex, acrylic, tempera, glue, spray foam, plaster, and porcelain on fiber cement board, 105 x 36 inches, 2020



Untitled, oil and soft pastel, chalk, assorted sauce on paper, 30 x 22 inches, 2020



Untitled, found polaroid photograph with dirty hand smudges, 5 x 5 inches, 2020-21



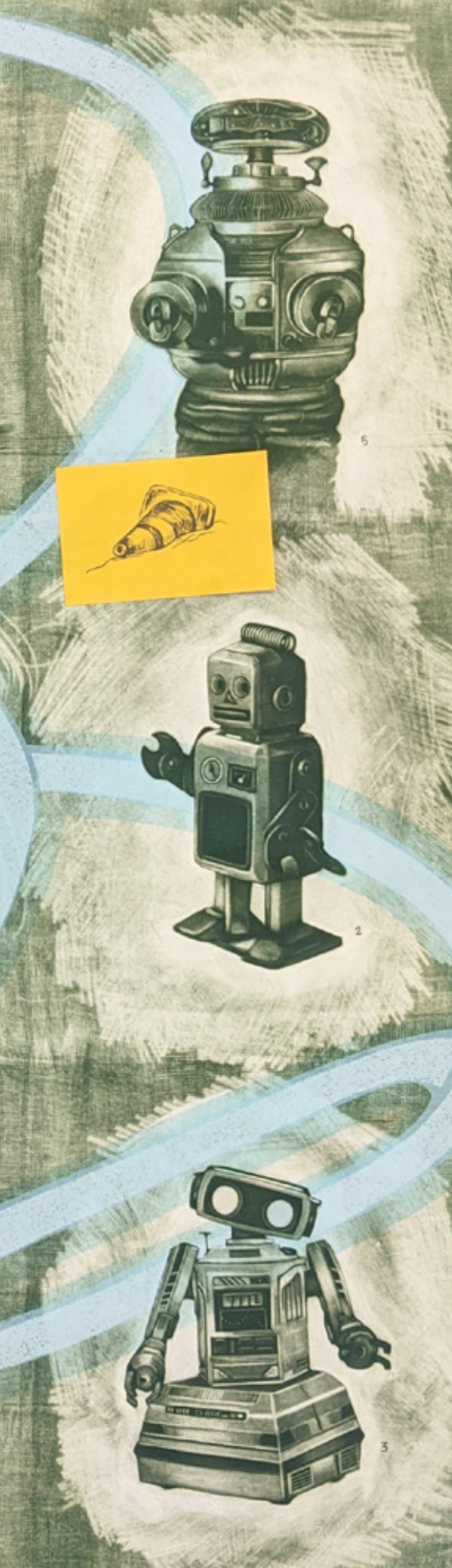
ERIN WOHLTZ

THE BLACK VORTEX

The Black Vortex is a book which takes its title in reference to Sergei Lukyanko's novel *Night Watch*. This exhibition is a series of visual essays about my battle with nonbinary queerness. My self-discovery of queerness has come through a lot of internal struggle and argument. I found myself at a crossroads, an x/y axis if you will. On the x axis I have gay/straight, on the y male/female. As things stand, I've sat myself down somewhere in the middle. This is the point from which I investigate and I argue with myself. The argument? Am I, or am I not a liar? As the topic is multifaceted, it requires a multi-pronged approach. Each piece in this exhibition seeks to approach this debate from a different angle in order to come to a conclusion which takes into account; history, memory, risk, deception, and feeling.

These prints were made utilizing the traditional materials, processes, and language of naturalist prints. Naturalist prints were created as images of scientific study and education. Animals and plants were drawn in order to define and gain understanding of their nature. However, instead of animal or botanical specimens, the analyzed subject in this work is a page from an imaginary book, titled *The Black Vortex*. Notebooks as spaces for private argument and discovery, a context where problems are worked out before being finalized. Within this exhibition, a series of these pages is laid out for the viewer to investigate and analyze.

The book ends in an index which can be referenced at any point whilst reading *The Black Vortex*. Which brings me to deception. Often in my work, I have sought to deceive the viewer, or at least hide from the viewer. Symbolism serves this goal. I could create a work which, much like a page, had two faces. An outward facing confusing landscape of symbols which could only be interpreted by my internal index. An index which I was very careful to reveal incrementally at times of my choosing. In this exhibition the index can be viewed at any time and utilized to decode the reading of *The Black Vortex*.





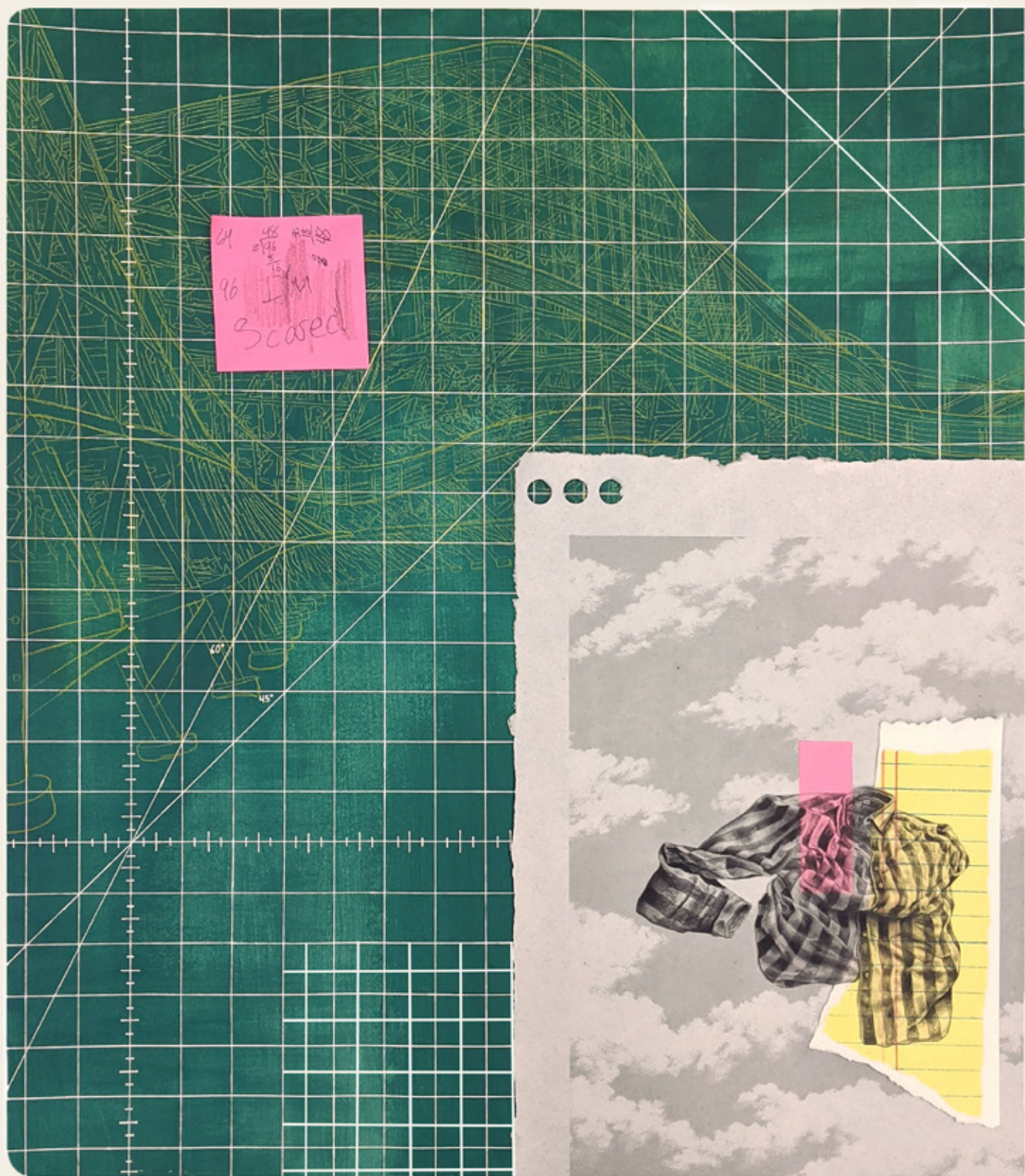
Erin Wohletz (left), mezzotint, 25 x 29 inches, 2020

Liar, Liar (right), screenprint, oil paint, graphite, colored pencil, and staples 25 x 29 inches, 2021



Rube Goldberg (left), lithography, handmade paper, watercolor, crayon, mezzotint and screenprint 25 x 29 inches, 2021

Evidence (right), mezzotint, lithography, handmade paper, relief, colored pencil, gouache, found materials and screenprint, 25 x 29 inches, 2021



Breeze, gouache, graphite and handmade paper, 25 x 29 inches, 2021



My Friend Leda (left) mezzotint, lithography, and screenprint, 25 x 29 inches, 2020
That Eagle (right), mezzotint, lithography, and screenprint, 25 x 29 inches, 2020



Index, black Pen on legal pad with sticky notes, 2021

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 School of Art's MFA program is ranked #22 and its printmaking area is ranked #3 among public universities by U.S. News and World Report. The NASAD-accredited, 60 credit-hour, three-year graduate program offers 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 enable our students to plan, promote, fund, organize, and build community as part of their creative practice. Graduate students take advantage of university-wide graduate courses that relate to and expand their creative horizons.

MFA students work closely with faculty, visiting artists, and each other in small studio classes and participate in regular critiques, studio visits, and school-wide graduate reviews. The three-year degree provides students with the time necessary to research, experiment, and hone their practice. The final year is devoted to creating a thesis project that will serve as a springboard to a wide array of careers in the arts and education, including successful art practices as well as positions in industry, museums, and galleries.

The School of Art oversees a host of visiting artists' programs. Accomplished artists from a variety of disciplines visit the UT 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 campus each semester to teach a graduate seminar. The AIR, who typically works in major urban art hub, acts as a bridge between the university and the global art community.

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
website: art.utk.edu/mfa
office: 865.974.3407
email: art@utk.edu

1715 Volunteer Blvd
Art + Architecture 213
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996-2410



SCHOOL OF ART

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