

Abiam Alvarez  
Mape Andrews  
Marcia Boyajian  
Roya Ebtehaj  
Kyoko Fischer  
Terry Hart  
Leily Khatibi  
Patricia Ludovici  
Sean Peeler  
Emily Scettrini  
Amanda Trippler  
Emily Van Engel

20  
19 **MFA**

**Thesis**

**Exhibit**

**ition**

MAY 24 to 29

**ARTIST RECEPTION**

MAY 25, 5 to 7 PM

Hosted by Root Division  
1131 Mission Street  
San Francisco

**SJSU** | DEPARTMENT OF  
ART AND ART HISTORY

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

20  
19

# MFA Thesis Exhibition

CURATED BY  
KEVIN B. CHEN

Following on the heels of individual thesis presentations in numerous gallery spaces on the San José State University campus (shout out to Christian L. Frock for her 2013 MFA catalog essay, noting that SJSU cultivates more public exhibition opportunities for its students than any other Bay Area art school), this exhibition at respected San Francisco non-profit arts organization Root Division offers a unique opportunity to holistically view and engage with the work of all twelve artists at the culmination of their graduate studies.

Each Spring presents opportunities to experience work coming out of the robust MFA programs in the Bay Area. Although the majority of these programs present the work of MFA candidates in culminating group exhibitions, San José State University first have students prepare individual thesis exhibitions in support of their graduate degree conferral applications. Given a singular 400 to 600 square foot exhibition space to present their work, it is an exciting and perhaps daunting proposition for the artists in the SJSU program, but also boldly offers an occasion for an intensely focused solo exhibition. Allowing artists to fully consider and subsequently ascertain how material manifestation of their conceptual visions come to be shared with a public — without the distraction of other works by peers in visual proximity — is paramount in providing a platform that positions their work on its own merit. Yet this structure does not allow for the public to see a collective whole of a graduating cohort of artists who have so much common experience through the SJSU MFA program.

During studio visits in preparation for organizing this larger group exhibition at Root Division, I had the opportunity to see some thesis presentations on full display, and to discern how some artists contextualized their practice, how they resolved creating a spatial narrative with particular placement of works, and how they rose to the challenge of presenting a solo exhibition. Other artists who would have their thesis presentations later on were fervently finishing up and preparing work. SJSU offers an exceptional opportunity to have dedicated spaces to professionally present culminating thesis projects in a public realm. Although the perceived distance to San José often serves as a barrier for those based in San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley from making the trip, this exhibition at Root Division serves to bring the work up to a different community as well as presenting a singular survey of the manifold ideas emerging from this year's graduating SJSU MFA class.

**Kevin B. Chen, Curator SJSU 2019 MFA Thesis Exhibition**



# Abiam Alvarez //

By Ana Borlas-Ivern, MFA Candidate Art History

Abiam Alvarez's art focuses on the racial discrimination, immigration, labor laws, and environmental in-sustainability of American agriculture. Through his work in clay, he examines American consumer culture and its relationship with our dismissive attitudes toward farm workers. The dichotomy between privilege and oppression in his work provokes, but his approach is not rooted in protest but rather a type of artistic journalism.

Central to his ideology is acknowledging the lived disparities among classes. He displays what the privileged choose to ignore in prominent life-sized fired and glazed clay fruits, vegetables, and farm machinery. His latest work presents a sculptural vignette of a plow mangling a cantaloupe and jamming its fruit and rind beneath the topsoil. The viewer bears witness to the injustice in the farm-labor system. The discarded fruit, a commentary on human carelessness and waste, parallels the place of migrant farm workers in society. Not only are the products of their labor disregarded, but they are invisible outcasts. Alvarez traces the discontinuity from abundance to exploitation in handmade fruits and vegetables that have passed the state of freshness into something rotten and unwanted.

Alvarez spent five summers working on California almond and pomegranate farms, tilling soil by hand and picking produce. His younger brother still works seasonal farm jobs picking fruit and vegetables in the field. Alvarez translates elements of his experience working the field into his creative process. His studio is unswept, surfaces dust-coated. But in its quiet, he undergoes metamorphosis from artist to laborer. His hands knead the clay, the work gritty and unglamorous. His process evokes the unhealthy working conditions, monotony, and intense toil of farm work. Art becomes life, and life becomes art.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I pay homage to the worker who has harvested the crop for our taking. There are many varieties of labor playing different roles in society. Compared to the "brown collar" job that belongs to the agricultural worker, some blue-collar jobs are respected and venerated more than the field work. How much honor is given to agricultural labor done by Hispanic immigrants, many of whom are undocumented? The privileged American dismisses these people, because they are uninterested in the "dirty" side of agriculture, which is field work. The thought of going through this labor is unthinkable to them as they see it as something that should only be done by immigrants.

It is this commitment to labor that drives my art practice, as I put myself through a laborious process due to my choice of medium. Clay allows me to work with my hands and mimic some processes of working physically, just like field workers. I recreate the fruit or vegetable out of clay, that same fruit which I unintentionally left to rot. I also make the tools and equipment and mimic the colors, textures and size of the objects. I feel the connection to the field labor as I work with clay and recreate the crop and tools. Only minimally as the 'real' work is far more intensive. I want to feel the same burden that laborers go through, to feel less advantaged. Recently thinking about privilege, even my own, has further led me to reflect about my practice and the artwork I make.

I think about the politics involved in the Hispanic community who work in the fields, which include fears of deportation, excessive work hours, unfair wages, exposure to chemicals, overexposure to the heat, and an overwhelming physicality that wears down the body from all the years of work. Men, women, and children have different experiences. These issues have become more apparent and have also caused many of the laborers to leave or seek other jobs where they can feel more assurance. Their migrant status will still bring uneasiness no matter where they are, as our current politics have brought animosity from large segments of the privileged and entitled society. If the workers are driven away what will become of the produce and the work? As entire fields rot, and prices increase, perhaps our society will finally be forced to come to terms with the value of the work and the migrant worker.



Rotted Cantaloupes | Ceramic, cardboard, 13" x 25" x 40", 2016

I pay homage to the  
worker who has harvested  
the crop for our taking.



Cycle of the Crop | Ceramic, cardboard, 48" x 48" x 40", 2017



Summer Kisses | Ceramic, 12" x 12" x 24", 2019



Overgrown Cabbage | Ceramic, 13" x 14" x 12", 2019



Breakdown of Labor and Climate | Ceramic, cardboard, sculpture stand, plastic mesh, 36" x 15" x 60", 2017



From Field to Table to Rot | Ceramic, cabbage, steel, 33" x 7" x 14", 2017



Sunday | Ceramic, cardboard, 12" x 12" x 40", 2019

It is this commitment to labor that drives my art practice, as I put myself through a laborious process due to my choice of medium.

# Maape Andrews //

By Samantha Johnson, MFA Candidate Art History

Experimental artist Maape Andrews explores the natural and sometimes surprising process of human transformation by conceiving works that create a completely immersive journey. She seeks to orchestrate a visual and auditory odyssey, focusing on the energy of change by incorporating elements such as ice, sound, and digital media. Her pieces spark interaction, participation and discussion about the myriad ways humans see and experience reality.

Andrews infuses her installations with multi-media parts, as well as unorthodox methods such as interactivity, erosion and heat. Trained in photography, the artist uses photos as a canvas for her process. She carefully selects the materials she plans to use in her installation, first experimenting with different media to create the desired effects. Many elements of her artistic creations include personal components. In *I Try Not to Miss You*, Andrews creates a completely immersive experience incorporating a heavy black curtain in front of a doorway to define a meditative space to encourage observation and contemplation. She incorporates her voice and casts of her face along with time-lapse photography to illustrate loss and the passing of time.

Andrews strives to create art accessible to anyone to help uncover a deeper understanding that sometimes eludes even her. "I want my work to operate like a song or a smell," she says. She seeks to transcend a moment of art appreciation and to evolve the experience into something more sensory or even memetic. She does not look to control the viewer's interaction with, or understanding and appreciation of, her art. Andrews wants meaning to arise from the experience itself.

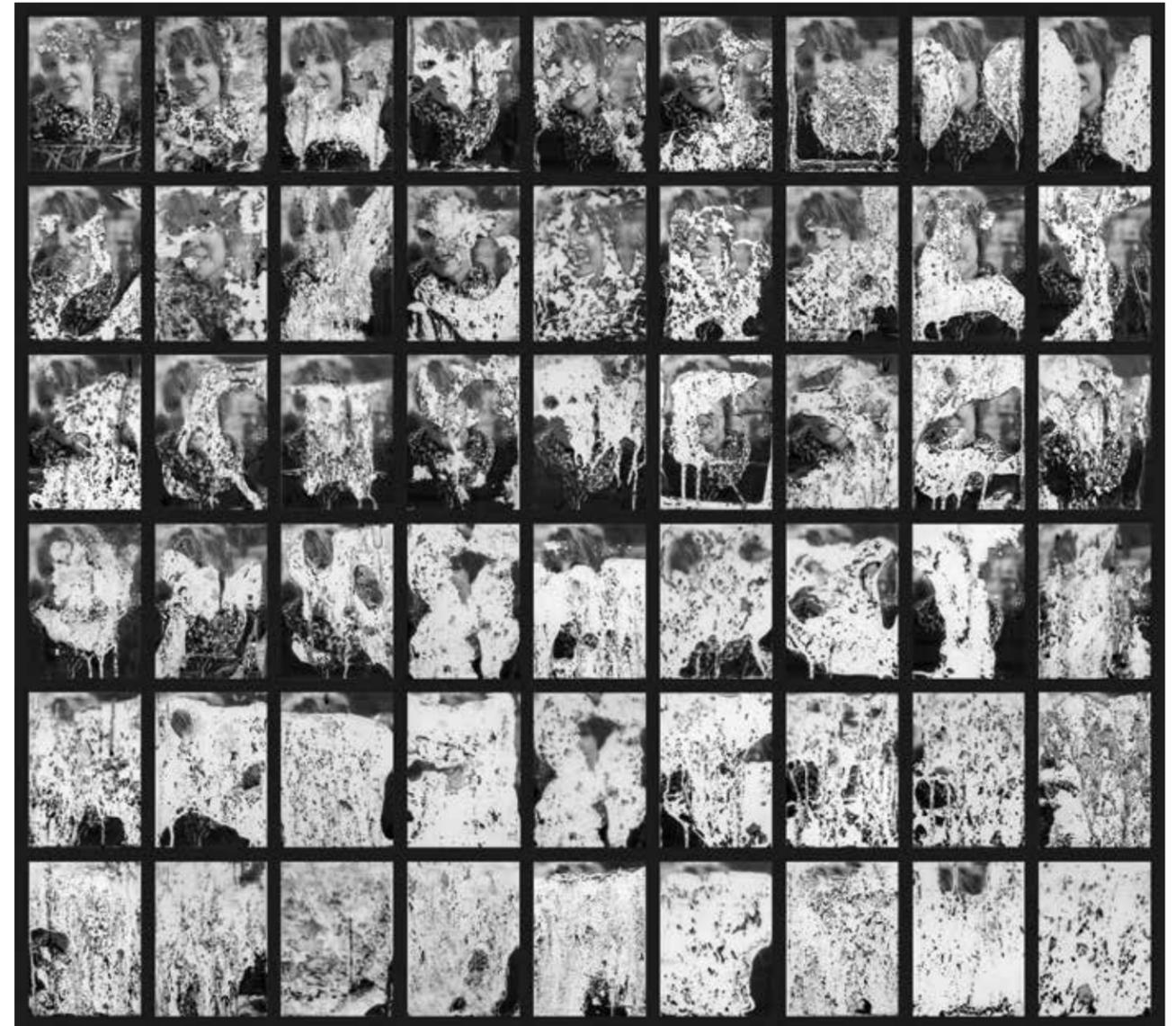
## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Transformation as a manifestation of time is a recurring theme in my work. I am fascinated by transformation because I believe that transformation is ever present and fundamental; everything is constantly moving and becoming something else.

Driven by a desire to create art that eludes my own understanding, I avoid strong representational narratives, in favor of work that is more related to thought than to ideas. Successful pieces have an ability to communicate instantaneously, acting more like a smell or a poem rather than a story. Constantly, I question how I would like my work to function in the world, and if I want it to be a container for thoughts or their vehicle?

I use a multitude of materials and processes to explore transformation, trying to understand its purpose. I usually start by creating original photographs and then designing processes that will interact with them and dramatically transform them through very destructive acts. Designing these catastrophic encounters is a very important part of my work because it creates a momentum that gives me a strong sense of anticipation, and an impatient desire for the future. I like to watch the transformations happen and document them, so I can revisit them over and over. I equate the documentations to my own personal trophies. I film and photograph the entire processes to capture high quality recorded images. I collect any remains of the materials used during the processes and create new separate pieces which accompany the transformed photographs. Once I initiate the processes, I like to have little control over the outcome. This loss of control, risk and unpredictability, are absolutely essential for the integrity and honesty of my work. I need to be shocked and surprised by my creations.

Thinking about how I like to create my work makes me wonder when does activity become obsession. Through the rituals I design and enact, I feel my work bears witness to the instant when one thing becomes another, reflecting the nature of transformation, and how it relates to existence and derives meaning.



*Self Portrait* | Aluminum digital print, 30" x 34", 2019



Untitled 17 | Photo glass pyrography, 20" x 44", 2018

Through the rituals I design and enact, I feel my work bears witness to the instant when one thing becomes another, reflecting the nature of transformation, and how it relates to existence and derives meaning.



Untitled 9 | Photo glass pyrography, 20" x 43", 2018



Untitled 5 | Photo glass pyrography, 20" x 60", 2017

Transformation as a  
manifestation of time is a  
recurring theme in my work.



Untitled 19 | Photo glass pyrography, 20" x 44", 2018

# Marcia Boyajian //

By Stephanie E. Thornton, MFA Candidate Art History

In *Thank You for Shopping*, spatial artist Marcia Boyajian's 16-foot doily, crocheted from single-use plastic bags, confronts viewers with their real impact on our natural environment—in the nicest, most delicate way. Boyajian spent her youth outdoors and became an avid snorkeler. Nature has become the biggest influence on her art. Boyajian's colorful work remarks on the man-made degradation of our world, specifically our dying coral reefs and the massive number of plastic bags in our oceans.

In her drive to change our world, Boyajian uses whatever medium best communicates the message in her art. She explores media as traditional as clay, cloth, and yarn and as unusual as silicone and plastic shopping bags. She uses a variety of methods in her studio to achieve desired effects such as making porcelain look like bone, silicone like flesh, and resin like teeth and scales.

*Thank You for Shopping* uses plastic shopping bags crocheted into a colorful doily to address the effect consumerism, pollution, and garbage have on our environment. The 2,600 single-use bags represent a minute fraction of the five hundred billion plastic bags that are used each year around the world, an unsettling number of which find their way into our oceans.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Currently, my body of work is transitioning to a new material. As a child, I was taught how to crochet by my grandmother; I learned all the basic stitches, rules and patterns. Today, I create my own patterns and devise my own rules. I crochet with plastic from single-use bags as a means of using a discarded, harmful material to create thought-provoking sculptures that address environmental issues of consumption and pollution. I create a positive means of communicating about the conditions of our oceans and world.

I also create ceramic pieces with crochet trimmings that can be hung on the wall, from the ceiling, placed on a table, or the floor. The ceramic bodies are an ongoing coral-like theme. Although the pieces are non-representational, I create hybrid bodies that look like they could exist in an oceanic environment. There is a tension created between the impervious nature of the ceramic bodies and the delicate crochet trimmings. The narrative reflects on human's tenuous relationship with nature.

In the broadest sense, my inspiration comes from travel, stories, and the natural world, and particularly where the three intersect. I spend a lot of time looking at how things grow and how they live. Nature was (and is) both my teacher and a place of refuge. My early years imprinted on me the desire to preserve our environment, create worlds where my imagination can run free, and as a woman, take my place in art history with strong work and a strong voice.



*Thank You for Shopping (Detail)* | 2600 Single use bags, 16' diameter, 2018

**I crochet with plastic from single-use bags as a means of using a discarded, harmful material to create thought-provoking sculptures that address environmental issues of consumption and pollution.**



*Thank You for Shopping* | 2600 Single use bags, 16' diameter, 2018

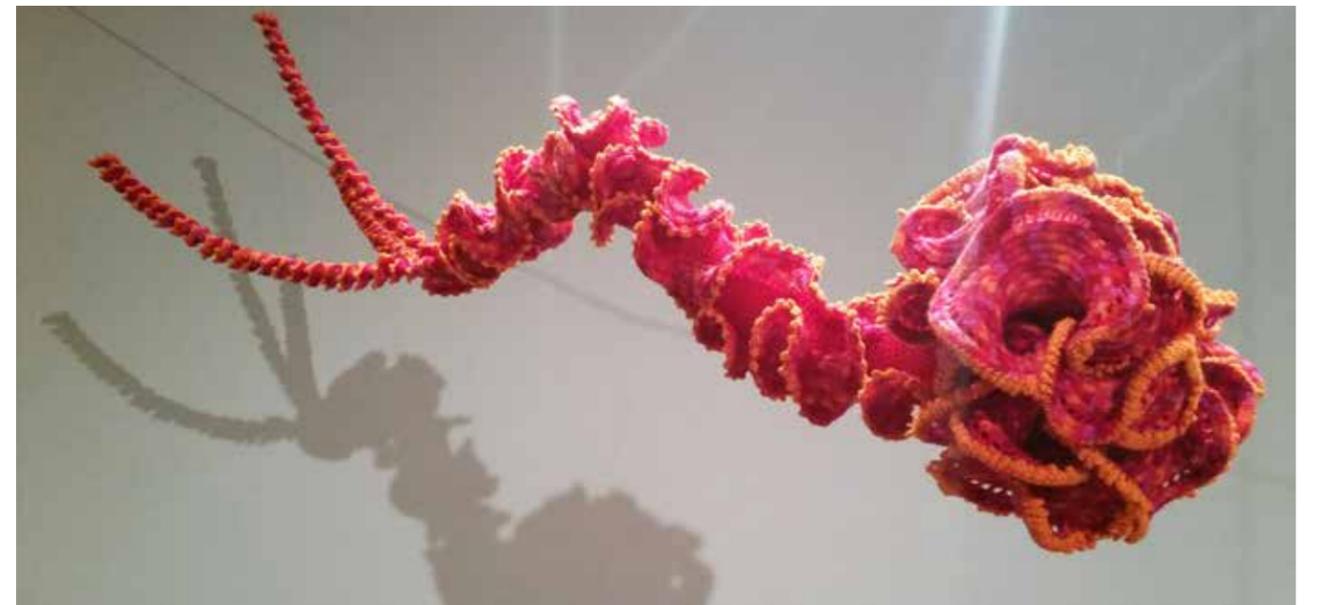


Purple People Eater, 2018, 20x20x72, Acrylic Yarn and Filament

Purple People Eater | Acrylic yarn and filament, 20" x 20" x 72", 2018



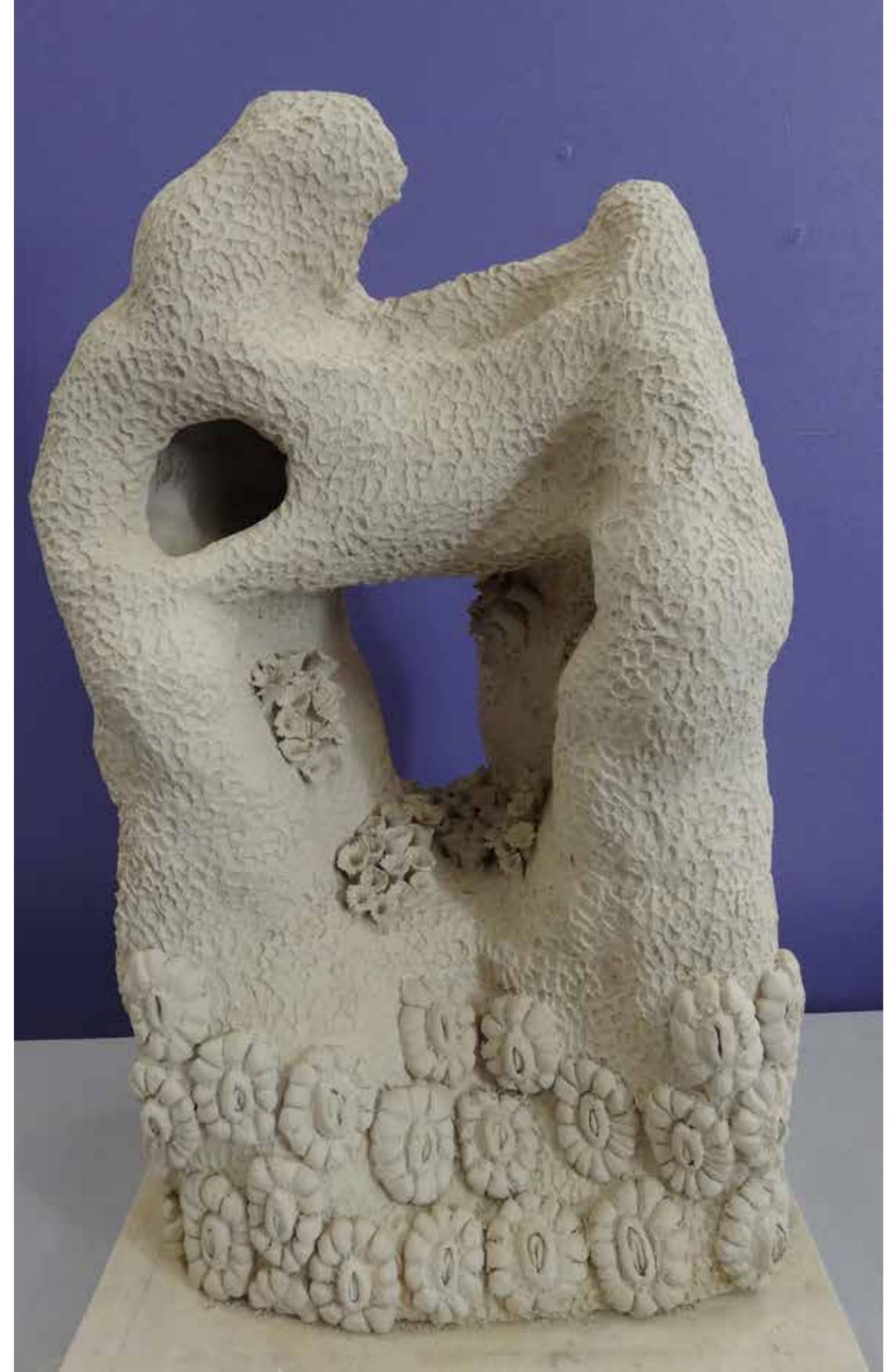
Red Silk | Stoneware, silk thread, resin, 10" x 26" x 6", 2017



Flaming Dragon | Acrylic yarn and filament, 24" x 24" x 96", 2018



Untitled | Stoneware, 24" x 24" x 14", 2016



Untitled | Stoneware, 28" x 24" x 14", 2016

# Roya Ebtehaj //

By Alexander Werdmuller von Elgg, MFA Candidate Art History

Roya Ebtehaj's art speaks for optimism that change can still happen in her native Iran. She combines diverse visual presentations of her country's 2009 election to communicate across languages and cultures. She aims to shift perceptions of Iran from generalizations to individuals. A major theme in Ebtehaj's work is the value of freedom. In her exhibit *Green Hope*, she combines the destructive forces of tragedy with creativity to present a grave historical event in a polished digital aesthetic.

*Green Hope* shows Ebtehaj's alignment with the resistance movement in three chapters. The first chapter, *Calm Before the Storm*, depicts the initial peaceful protest displaying her photographs of people marching. This collage of images glows from a narrow, vertical light-box acting as a podium. At the top of this display-case is a clear container holding the audio recorder she used as a journalist. The second chapter, *Eye of the Storm*, uses a projector to display videos of the height of the violence including distorted footage of the conflict that is mesmerizing and dreamlike. A sea of people sways as ambiguous shapes fade in and out of focus.

The third chapter, *Brighter Days Ahead*, features a sculpture of a wishing tree used in Persian ceremonies for good luck. Green ribbons overflow a container at the base of the tree, trailing onto the floor. Gold calligraphy illuminates the black form of the tree; protesters chanted "brighter days ahead" during the march.

Another work, *Revolution to Freedom*, uses virtual reality to immerse viewers and put them face-to-face with protesters. Viewers can move through three-dimensional space with long, flowing green ribbons, enlarged police clubs scattered throughout, and close-up photographic portraits of individual protesters.

Ebtehaj also displays a horizontal, rectangular green vitrine on a wall at eye level paired next to her stamped birth certificate: proof of a cast ballot. This solid light-green shape preserving evidence of direct participation alludes to the Green Movement slogan, *Where Is my vote?*

Ebtehaj's recent body of work critiques the adverse effects of Instagram on Iranian public perceptions of beauty and consumerism. These social media influencers inform followers what to buy and how to look. Ebtehaj's work expands critical discussion of Iranian marketing, poverty, narcissism, body image, and the relationship between social-media models and followers. To illustrate users' involvement with social media, Ebtehaj uses digital technologies including virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, 3D modeling, 2D design, web, video, photography, animation, and installation.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

In my recent body of work, called "plastic makes perfect," I chose to focus on examining the adverse effects of Instagram on contemporary Iranian culture. Iran is undergoing a rapid digital transformation. Instagram is the most popular social media platform in Iran, with over 24 million active users by 2018, and it is the only platform that has not been censored by the government. The work investigates the perception of beauty among Iranian people, especially women across this digital platform. Extensive Face and body transformations, through extreme plastic surgical procedures and western cosmetic industry, has become normalized in Iran. However, often the result of trying to reach this ideal Barbie look is highly bizarre and occasionally deformed.

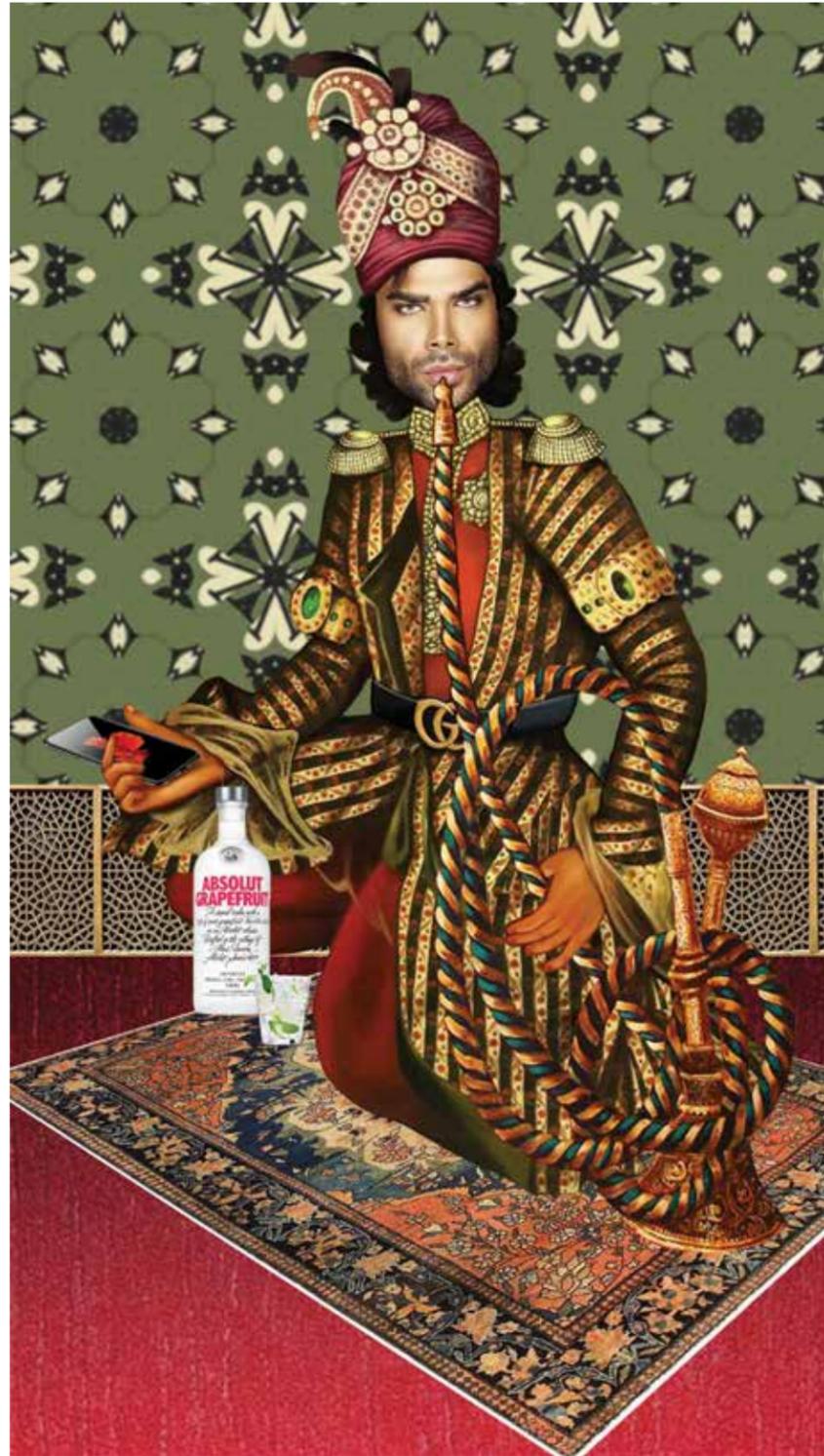
There is a western mold of beauty that many idealize this mold is made out of capitalism, money, and algorithm on a platform that is inherently objectifying. Financial incentives and advertisement industry play crucial roles to trap us within the Instagram culture. Hence, being influencer is an easy way to make money in an economically corrupt society. When a country is undergoing socio-cultural and economic crisis, it is so easy to sell westernized perfection to people that are tackling these issues. This is what I name as a cold invasion/modern colonialism to my culture.



Installation, 2018



*Green Hope* | Wishing tree sculptor, 2018



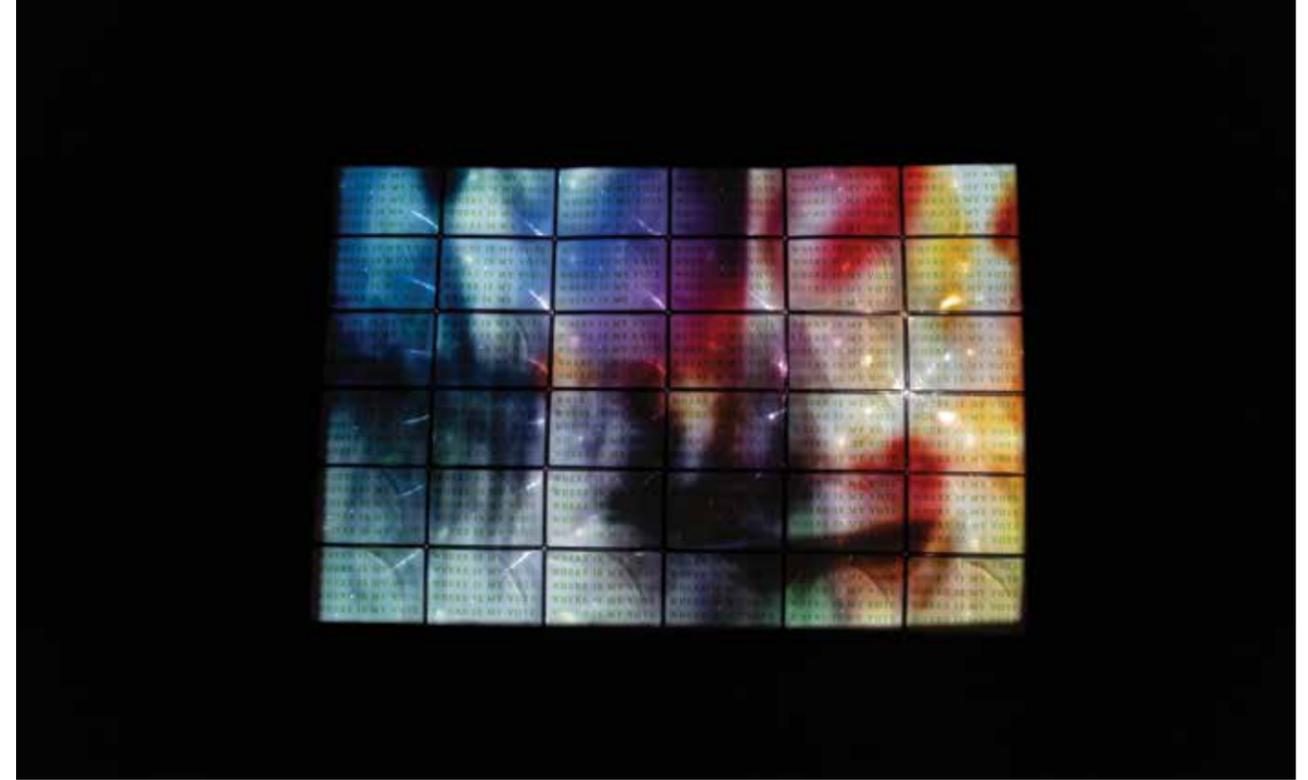
Plastic Makes Perfect | Animation, 26" x 15", 2019



Plastic Makes Perfect | Animation, 26" x 15", 2019



Green Hope | Lightbox with hard drive on it, 12" x 42", 2018



Green Hope | Projection mapping on fresnel lens, 42" x 24", 2018



Green Hope | Photo print, 12" x 42", 2018

I chose to focus on  
 examining the adverse  
 effects of Instagram on  
 contemporary Iranian culture.



Green Hope | Projection mapping on fresnel lens, 42" x 24", 2018

# Kyoko Fischer //

By Nicholas Nakashian, MFA Candidate Art History

Blue and red LED lights glow softly in Japanese American printmaker Kyoko Fischer's modern interpretation of the *tatami* mat. Fischer's installation, *Tatami*, combines the lights and small paper blocks made from lithographic prints to create the five-foot by five-foot installation. It delicately recreates the traditional grass-woven *tatami* mat. In her current series of work, Fischer revisits memories of her upbringing in Japan by recreating Japanese domestic objects that she remembers from childhood. Her work gives physical form to life's cycles.

Fischer did not always appreciate her native culture. Growing up in a traditional Confucian household, she was frustrated by the differences in the way she was treated compared to her three younger brothers. She resented pressure to conform to gender roles. Western pop culture fascinated her, and she was inspired by Western artists such as Cy Twombly, who influenced her use of color and abstract forms. Art was an escape, and she craved the freedom to pursue her creativity. Not until Fischer had lived in the United States for several years as an adult did she have nostalgic feelings for Japan. After each new experience in the United States, Fischer compared it to her previous life and naturally began to reflect on Japanese culture and identity.

Fischer's art personifies her identity as a Japanese American. Her artwork re-imagines traditional Japanese objects and practices such as the *tatami* mat and *sashiko*, a Japanese stitching method. Wielding her skills and knowledge as a contemporary artist and her influence from modern Western art, Fischer creates abstractions and impressions of her memories. We may reject and rebel against a philosophy or an approach one day, only to reflect on them fondly later. Fischer introduces her past to our present for a tender contemplation of culture, identity, and memory.

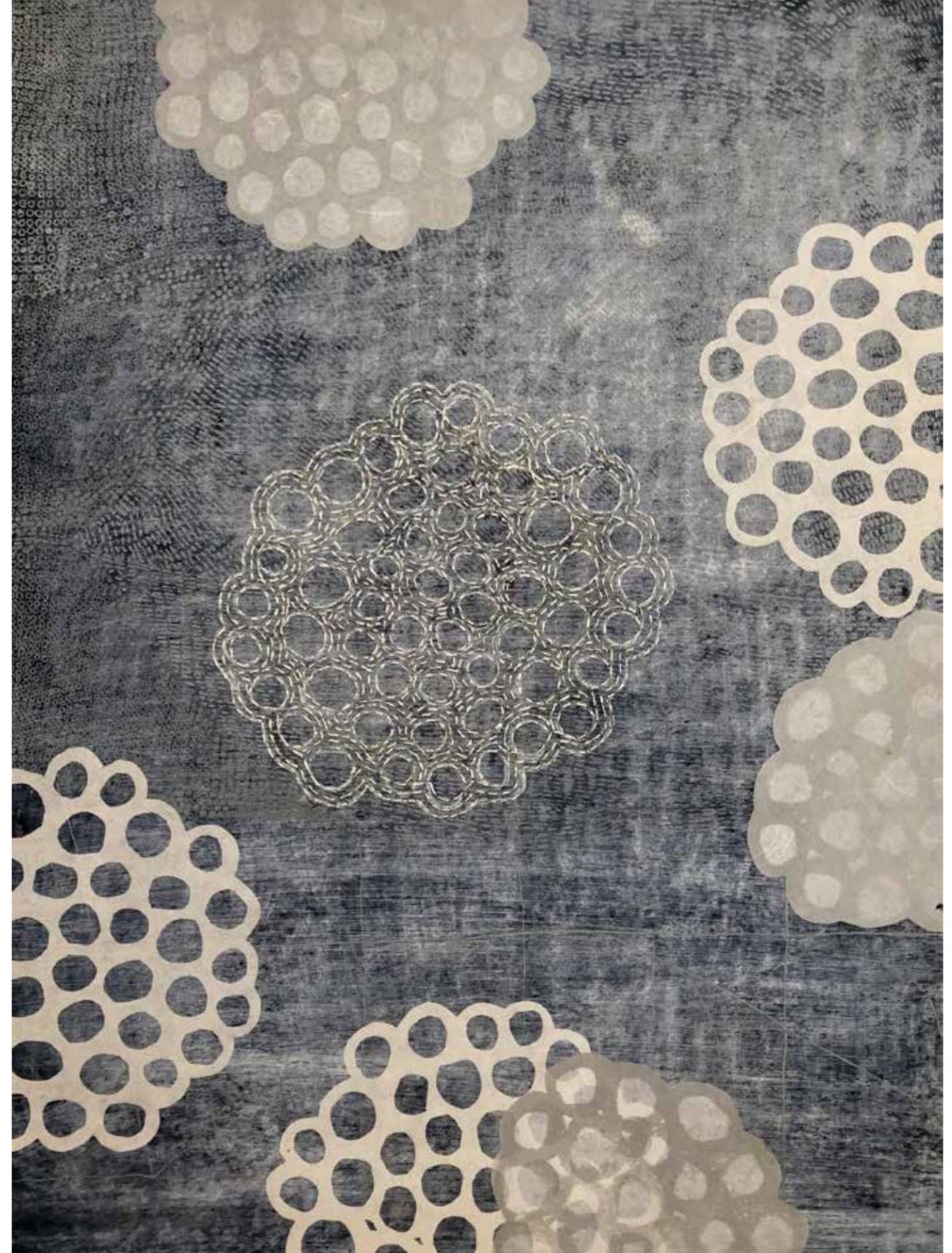
## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My work explores the artisan craftwork that people in the Edo era (1615-1868) of Japan used daily, called *Mingei*. As the art and craft of ordinary people, *Mingei* refers to everyday or "normal" objects – such as toys, brushes, clothing, or furniture – that people adored.

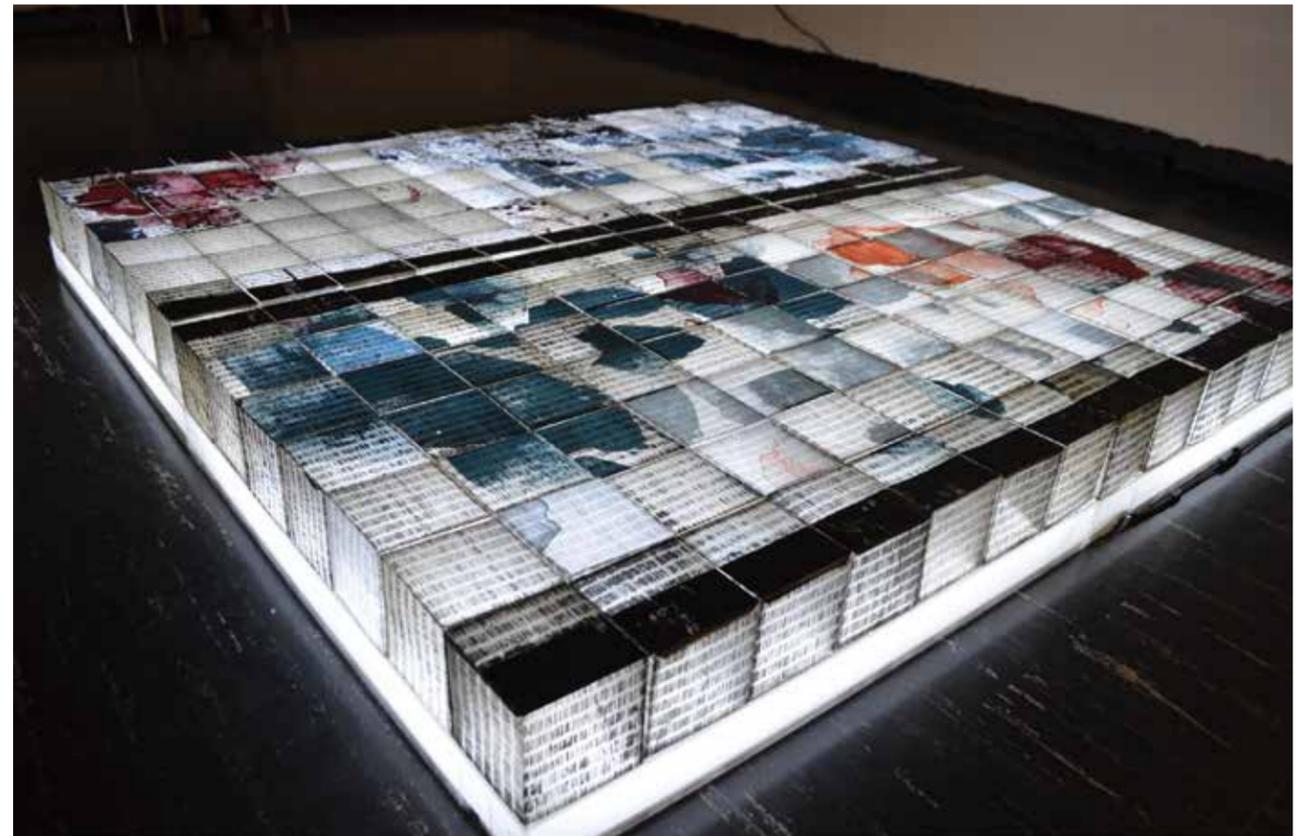
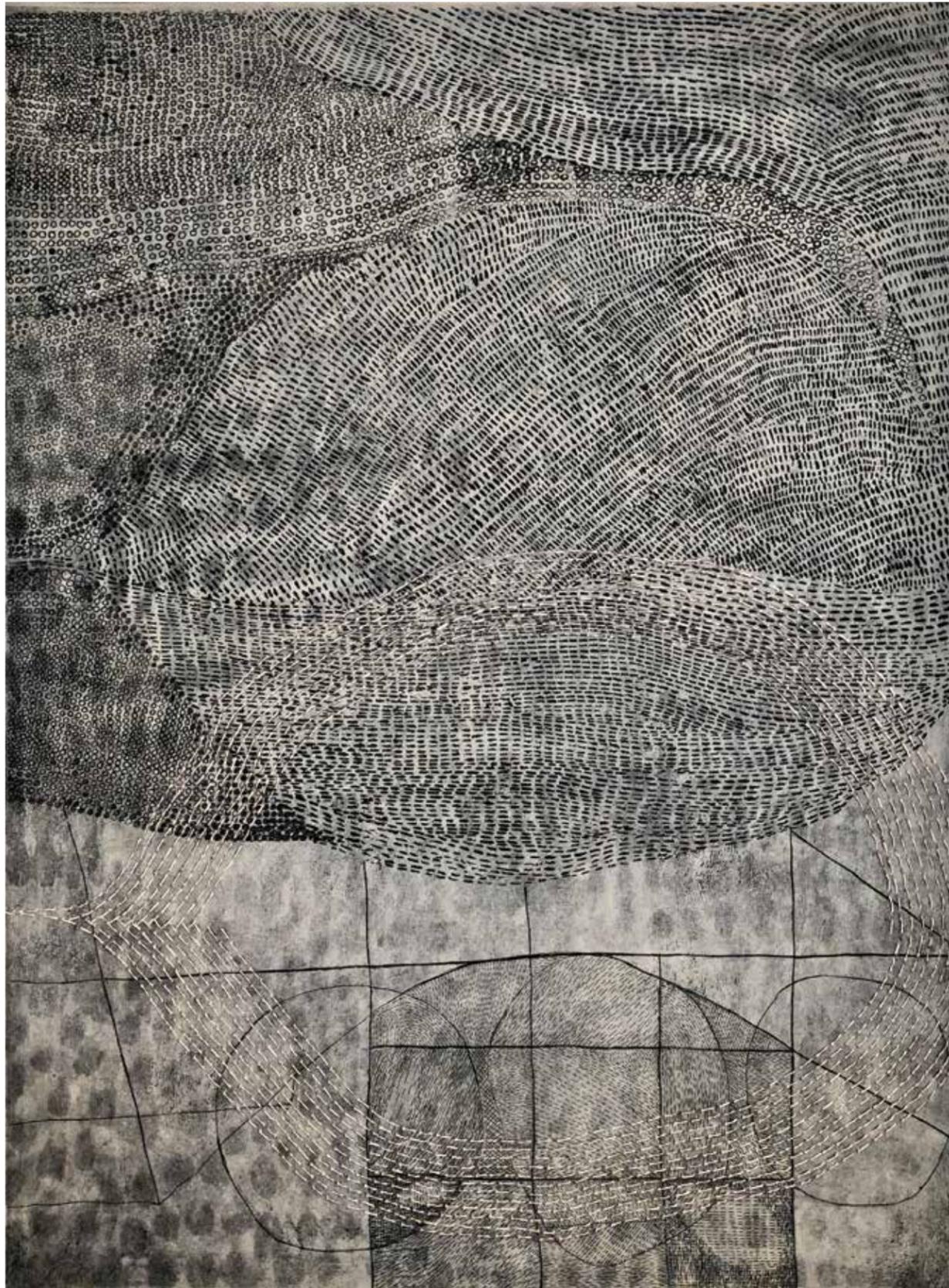
I deeply connect to this era. These ordinary objects had surrounded me when I grew up in Japan, but I had never noticed. Perhaps in the realization of how long I'd been in the US, I found myself drawn to *sashiko* (literally translated to "little stabs" or "little pieces"). *Sashiko* is a form of decorative reinforcement stitching on traditional Japanese clothing that started from a practical, functional need during the Edo era. *Sashiko* typically has a repetition of short lines from the stitches, a pattern I felt I had already subconsciously incorporated in my own artwork. This excited me. I knew I had to push myself to explore further and reimagine *Mingei*, and specifically *sashiko*, as modern fine art.

Most *Mingei* art was done by ordinary craftspeople who never signed name onto their work. The practice is practical and utilitarian, not commercial, and *Mingei* art is an everyday companion, something that grows on you affectionately through use.

At a high level, my project is centered on the *Mingei* concept, creating a modern expression of the traditional Japanese work that people cherished in the olden days. I envision an installation of etching prints with sewn *sashiko* to recreate the atmosphere of the Edo era.



*Sashiko 2* | Intaglio, 18" x 24", 2018



Blue Tatami | Lithography, 5' x 5', 2017

My work explores the  
 artisan craftwork that  
 people in the Edo era  
 of Japan used daily,  
 called Mingei. As the  
 art and craft of ordinary  
 people, Mingei refers  
 to everyday or  
 "normal" objects.



Tatami | Oil paint, 120" x 40", 2017



Sashiko 1 | Intaglio, 18" x 24" 2018



Sashiko 4 | Intaglio, 18" x 24" 2018

# Terry Hart //

By Lauren Montana, MFA Candidate Art History

Her pencil moves as quickly as the swallow's wings beat. The little creature cocks its head and peers with an eye for the perfect landing place. Its wings collapse to its sides, and the swallow's tiny feet grip the branch. In these moments, artist Terry Hart observes her subject. The sketching in her notebook begins her art process. As a trained field biologist, Hart's scientific background, attention to detail, and informed accuracy allow her to bring nature closer. In a world of pixelation and tiny screens, Hart encourages viewers to look up and enjoy what is real.

The artist speaks of the two worlds she combines for the sake of art: "I strive to serve science by depicting an accurate capsule of knowledge. I seek to serve art with an aesthetic representation that evokes environmental awareness about the natural world." Pages of observation data and drawings pile up and around her workspace as Hart practices in her chosen printmaking-medium: etching. She enjoys the process and has been experimenting lately with tonal mixtures and colorful ink. The artworks for her installation *Nature Prints* feature solitary tree swallows in flight and botanicals. As an ornithologist-turned-artist, Hart's work transcends dry specimen studies using color and perspective.

Hart's tree swallow prints offer backgrounds of blues, orange, and gray, while the soft lines of her bird figures expand slightly, creating a watercolor effect. As an admirer of Japanese woodblock prints, Hart's version of the iconic cherry tree branch is instead rendered as Darwin's sketch of an evolutionary tree. The swallow in the scene floats above the branch ready to alight. In another print, Hart again recalls her scientific roots and perches a swallow on a data chart. The fine intaglio and the tonal qualities of the ink combine to express a life-like pattern of feathers. *American Goldfinch* employs the Chine-collé technique, referencing her appreciation of Asian printmaking.

A separation, or ostracism, of specimen renderings is sometimes evident in the history of art. But Hart creates her own interdisciplinary interpretation of what nature illustration can be. Her scientific expertise, techne and manipulation of line and color elevate her work beyond genre.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

---

My work always begins with drawings of my perceptions of the surrounding environment. I find the beauty of nature inspiring, and human consciousness about nature fascinating.

I enjoy field sketching and believe that observing nature is the most rewarding method to learn about the natural history of California. Sketches of wildlife such as birds, insects, reptiles, and amphibians along with botanical studies fill my sketchbooks. These drawings are records, measured data of my response to forms and materials observed. Within the print studio, I transform field sketches into intaglio prints. I strive to balance artistic aestheticism and accurate observation in my work. Drawn elements are often merged with impressions of found objects and photographs.

I always feel great anxiety from the uncertainty of not knowing what I have done until the copper plate is printed. To be sure, the beauty of an etched line wrought from a copper plate is like no other.



*Bluegreen Take Off* | Etching, 13" x 16", 2018



Spring | Etching, 6" x 36", 2018



Moth | Etching, 2" x 4", 2018

I find the beauty of nature  
inspiring, and human consciousness  
about nature fascinating.



AMGO3 | Etching, 5" x 7", 2017



Take-off | Etching, 12" x 18", 2018



Downstroke | Etching, 12" x 18", 2018

The beauty of an etched line wrought  
from a copper plate is like no other.

# Leily Khatibi //

By Annissa Conditt, MFA Candidate Art History

Digital media artist Leily Khatibi brings technical skill and passionate nostalgia to her art. With an undergraduate education in architecture and engineering, her art straddles physical and virtual realities and is deeply influenced by her memories of and longing for her former home Tehran. In her exhibit *IRL (In Real Life)* she draws on Persian cultural imagery and uses digital media to show cultural icons and to dispel stereotypes. In *Exotic Bloom*, Khatibi depicts the Shah Abbasi flower pattern celebrated for centuries in Iran and used widely as a decorative motif in carpet and tile patterns.

In her animation *Counterculture*, Khatibi wants to change misconceptions about Iran in Western culture. She seeks to spotlight an individual person and to shift the political dialogue to incorporate conversation about the Iranian and Persian people. *Counterculture* addresses a subculture within a larger community that has been generalized and stereotyped. It features a three-dimensional image of a young woman wearing a sheer, patterned lavender scarf draped artfully over her head and around her neck. She's posing in front of a black-and-white checkerboard woven in intricate latticework. She wears round, intellectual glasses and a small nose ring. She looks as though she'd smell faintly of sweet perfume, not week-old body odor and hairy arm pits, counterculture American-style.

Khatibi documents her artwork by creating both digital representations and physical copies. For digital imagery sequences like *Counterculture*, she creates flip books whose pages are designed to be seen fast, like film frames, back to front. "The digital files, they get outmoded, obsolete. They are ephemeral," she says. "When you produce by means of computer and software, there's not really a means to preserve that file. Computer updates come, the IOS changes, and files get lost to time. But we have prints from centuries ago. This is an everlasting artifact."

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

---

As a millennial, I grew up alongside a technological evolution, transitioning from my analog youth to a hyperdigital maturity. This fluid, ever-changing landscape of technology focuses my art and design practice in which I aim to dance between, and marry the analog and digital worlds.

Through this exhibition, titled *IRL (In Real Life)*, I am exploring fluctuations between the virtual and physical realms, tying together elements of reverie and existence. Contemporary culture is fascinated by the phenomena of dematerialization, but recomposing keyframe animations and GIFs into a form of tangible artifact is where my personal interest lies.

Due to the ephemerality of producing by means of computers and software, I intend to unite material substance and digital representations into one collaborative medium through preserving my artworks as prints, retaining longevity. This process is the reverse of the history of moving pictures, yet my aesthetic emulates futuristic, ethereal, screen-based graphics.

### 1. Emission + Transmission

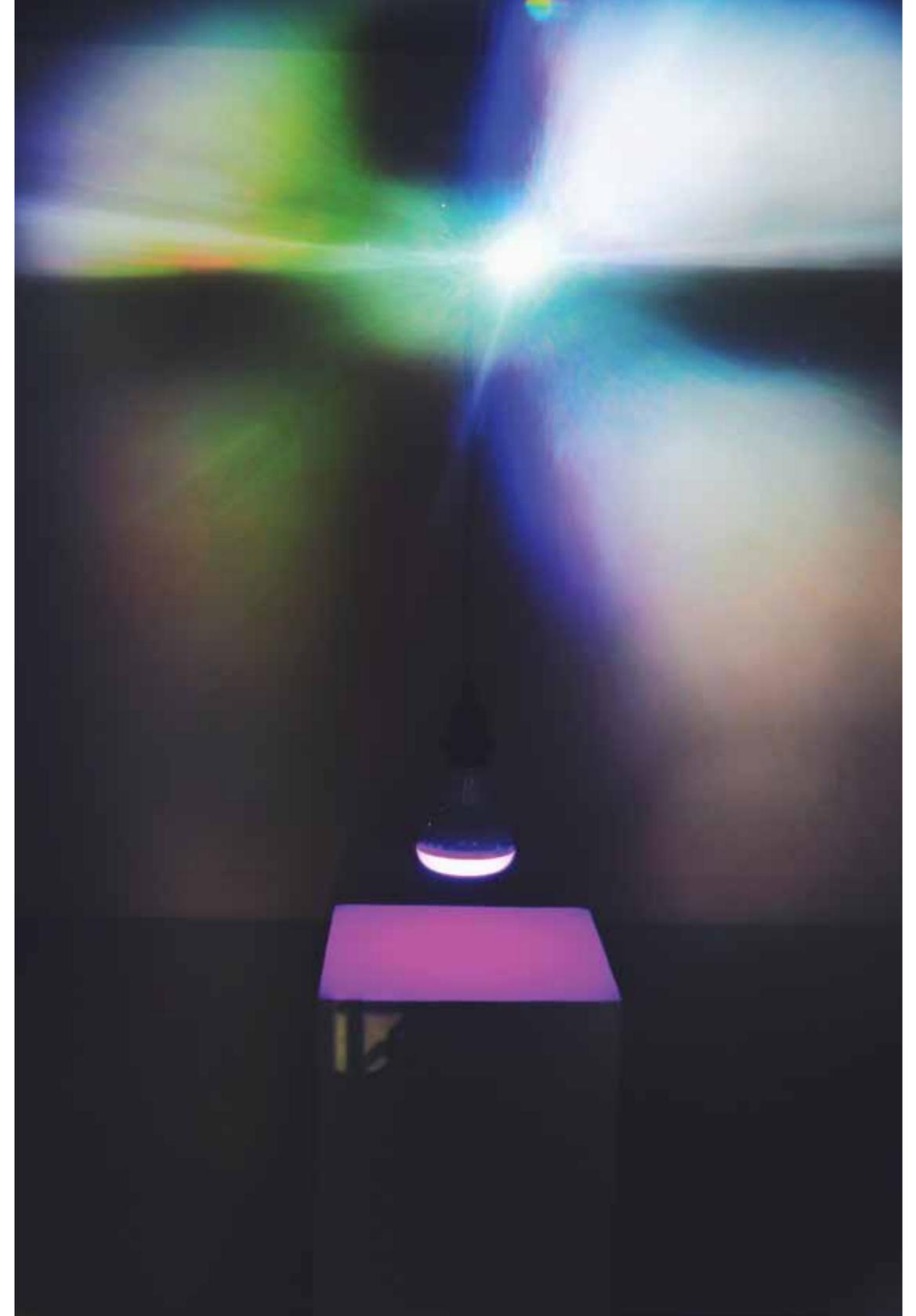
*Comes and Goes in Waves*: This piece is a sequence of images created using WebGL and output as a poetic video essay, visualizing the exchange of information transmitted electronically via physical media, such as cables or via electromagnetic radiation in the form of carrier waves within telecommunication systems.

### 2. Counterculture

This GIF animation is an homage to countercultures within communities that are generalized or stereotyped. My aim is to change the dialogue about Iran that has been trapped in discourse by politics and sanctions. I proffer an alternative to the predominant socio-economic narrative, and attempt to shift perspectives to identify my people from a more human-centric vantage point.

### 3. Exotic Bloom

The Shahabbasi flower which has been celebrated for centuries in Iran, is a quintessential Persian icon, often used in carpet and tile patterns. It's an imaginary representation of botanical organisms in paradise. I intended to create a contemporary remix of this spiritual, floral motif, by combining multiple effects based on computer/electronic characteristics and aesthetics.



Letter of Love | Smart light bulb, 4" x 4" x 5"



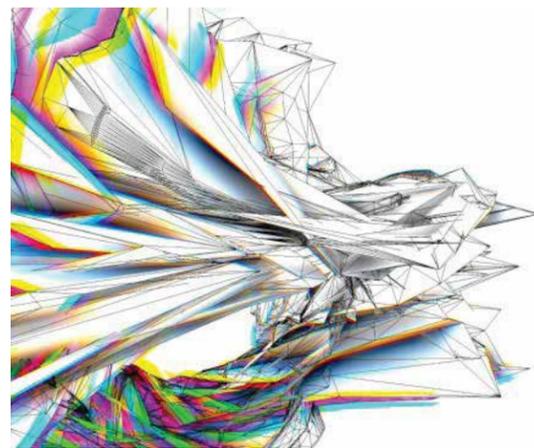
Counter Culture | Book, velo bound, clear and leatherette flap cover, 8.125" x 8.5" x 0.5"



Exotic Bloom | Book, velo bound, clear and leatherette flap cover, 5.75" x 5" x 0.625"

I am exploring fluctuations between the  
virtual and physical realms, tying together  
elements of reverie and existence.

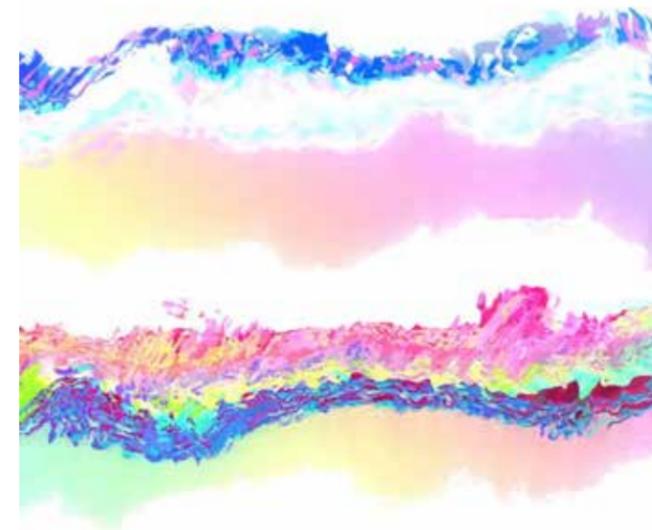
Contemporary culture is fascinated by the phenomena of dematerialization, but recomposing keyframe animations and GIFs into a form of tangible artifact is where my personal interest lies.



*Bird* | Book, velo bound, clear and leatherette flap cover, 6.66" x 3.37" x 0.5"



*Infinite Loop* | Compatible wall size, video projection



*Emission + Transmission* | Compatible wall size, gif animation

# Patricia Ludovici //

By Samantha Johnson, MFA Candidate Art History

Feminist sculptor Patricia Ludovici has a passion for theory, scientific inquiry, and the neuroscience of emotion. Striving for perfect balance between attraction and repulsion, she questions cultural constructs about acceptance and viewership of the female body. Her art exemplifies her process of taking the individual pieces she fabricates—her “chaotic elements” as she calls them—then curating them into a visual presentation meant both to intrigue and to disgust.

While disgust may seem counterproductive to capturing attention, Ludovici’s strategy is twofold. She believes the element of surprise layered within her art encourages people to “stick around for the message.” Secondly, by pushing against societal tropes that define what is acceptable when it comes to viewing the female form, Ludovici seeks to start conversation about concepts such as nude versus naked and art versus pornography. Her sculpture *Raised to Be Invisible* consists entirely of individual molds of the artist’s breasts, a statement of empowerment and ownership of the female form.

Ludovici’s current project continues her constantly evolving visual analysis of the male and female gaze. She continues to use her own body as a tool to evaluate the concept of consent. “If we talk about these things, these societal constraints, can we accept the chaos these conversations may create?” she asks. “Are we willing to work towards accepting and-or evolving them?”

## ARTIST’S STATEMENT

---

Bridging the gap between art and craft, I use glass to produce contemporary art informed by socio-political concepts. My work asks the viewer to question the borders of art and obscenity, to rethink self-objectification, and to support the reclaiming of the eroticized. It encourages the viewer to push against the containment, the gaze that controls vision, keeping the aroused body under control, or keeping the intimate spaces private.

My current work presents a room in which intimacy has occurred but that the whole is ambiguously unresolved. The sculptures can be taken individually, or together as a whole complete piece. Each piece references an item of decor unraveling to the brink of eligibility in an effort to expose the inherent fragility of intimacy and sexuality. Deconstructing both the decor and the physical objects that inhabit a space of intimacy pushes them to become more and more an accumulation of moments or thoughts, as opposed to a literal mattress, sheet, rag, or clump of hair.

In particular, my work “Aren’t We All a Little Out of Breath” explores the assumptions propagated by nudity and sexuality within contemporary culture. This line of concept and investigation into nude vs. naked and private vs. public also informs my work. It reinterprets discarded objects of intimacy and decor (e.g., used condoms, mattress, hardwood flooring) as erotic craft objects created in glass. Exploring the physical intersection of everyday objects with my lusty, leaky, fleshy aesthetic.

Patricia Ludovici

Patricia Ludovici

Patricia Ludovici

Patricia Ludovici

## Sean Peeler // By Nick Nakashian, MFA Candidate Art History

The way we express ourselves when our photo is taken is a unique form of performance, photographer Sean Peeler believes. "Say cheese!" is more than a banality when someone points a camera in our direction. It is a verbal cue to perpetuate a code of conduct carefully designed by an advertising culture. Peeler's projects investigate photography as it is practiced outside of art institutions. In *Smile, You're on Camera*, Peeler explores the effects of photography-industry advertising on everyday photographic traditions.

Before "say cheese," English photographers encouraged subjects to say "prunes." The act relaxed the face to cope with the long exposure times of early portrait photography, and more importantly, produced the image of the prim and regal values of Victorianism. In the early twentieth century, these austere expressions gave way to the modern photographic expression, namely the "cheesy" smiling and informal posture. In *Pruning Shears, Kirkland*, Peeler conceptualizes adjusting—or pruning—one's appearance for a photograph.

Peeler primarily credits the twentieth-century shift in photographic culture to the advertisements and educational manuals produced by its first corporate titan, the Eastman Kodak Company. Kodak portrayed photography as accessible fun and an essential part of any occasion. Depicting smiling models enjoying themselves while operating Kodak's easy-to-use products, the company constructed the modern photographic culture. Peeler's collection of found portraits from the eighteenth century to the late twentieth records this transformation and testifies to the influence of a single commercial enterprise on mainstream behavior.

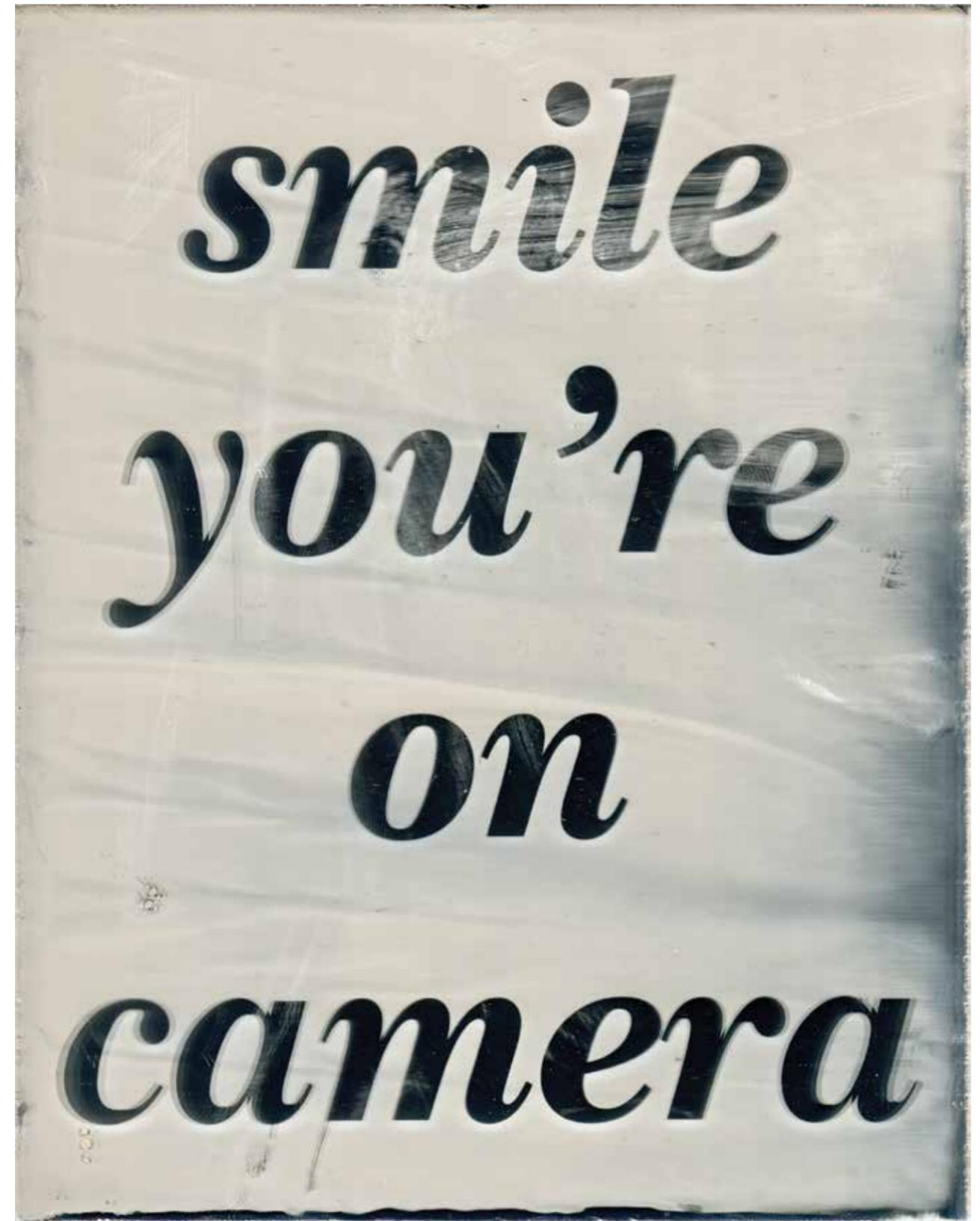
Peeler continues his exploration of photographic performance through his own work produced in a commercial lighting studio. Peeler creates humorous, even absurd portraits where his subjects diverge strangely from the norm through alternative performances. In *Non-compliant Gaze #1*, the subject completely conceals expression and gender by wearing a hood.

In each project, Peeler develops a conceptual body of work that thoughtfully upends photographic genre and norms yet remains lighthearted—humorous even—and conveys his deep fascination with both the photographic document and the culture of photography.

### ARTIST'S STATEMENT

---

I am deeply interested in the photographic document, as well as, the culture of photography. Photographs today are made in a fraction of a second, distributed globally, and consumed unceasingly. My work slows down this process, this act of looking—both provoking and reflexively studying our relationship with the image and considers the complicated impact photographs have on the production of knowledge, our understanding of history, and the construction of culture. My conceptual photographic practice finds non-conventional strategies for challenging traditional pictorial aims in favor of an exploratory approach to the medium. I embrace humor, play, and novelty. And I am interested in the applications of photography that have traditionally existed outside of art. In making work I utilize photographic technologies from antique to contemporary, re-contextualize both found photographs and stock photographs, paint, and use found objects. Research is an important component of my practice. My current research includes: The Society of the Spectacle, The Eastman Kodak Company, the history of portrait photography, The Pictures Generation, and Capitalist Realism.



*Smile, You're on Camera* | Wet collodion on mirror, 8" x 10", 2019



*Bryan Sings Polaroid Swinger Jingle* | Wet collodion on aluminum, 4" x 5", 2019



*Let the Children Kodak Circa 1870* | Wet collodion on tin, 2.125" x 2.75"



*Pruning Shears, Kirkland* | Digital inkjet, 20" x 30", 2019



*Non-compliant Gaze #1* | Digital inkjet, 22" x 33", 2019



*Lights, Camera, Action, Cheese* | Digital inkjet, 22" x 33", 2019

**My conceptual photographic practice finds non-conventional strategies for challenging traditional pictorial aims in favor of an exploratory approach to the medium.**

# Emily Scettrini //

By Alexander Wermuller von Elgg, MFA Candidate Art History

Emily Scettrini paints vulnerability using generic flower petals, houses, and self-portraits with exposed skin and a distant gaze. She plans a painting by photographing herself using mirrors to capture separate angles within evenly distributed light. Scettrini sketches and paints from these photos, making pictures on sizable canvases that closely resemble the natural, observable world. She uses black and white paint exclusively—a reference to black and white photography and her preoccupation with the past. Scettrini's installation *Rumination* is a brooding over yesterday.

*Reflection #3* is forty-eight inches by thirty-six inches and refers to superficial skin-deep beauty by showing her neck, shoulders, and back smoothed in gentle shifts of tone. It conveys a deeper identity through her accurately rendered eyes, which communicate a solemn critique of her story. Three of the four figures hold flower petals like armor, one of which obscures an eye, revealing and concealing. A foggy open horizon in the background darkening towards the bottom sets the stage for a bright, bare expansive plane. This enhances the feelings of exposure, softness, and sensitivity as it gradually fades out of focus. A delicate contour of mountain silhouettes occurs one fifth from the top of the picture plane, balancing the figures at the base.

Among Scettrini's motifs in *Rumination* are houses as symbols of security and structure. Scettrini has moved frequently throughout her life and sees houses as fleeting dwellings. *Archer St.* is forty-eight inches by sixty inches and shows a rectangular two-story house in three-quarters view from the corner of a street at standing eye-level. A massive flower, connected to its stem, falls by a curved curb on the road that is in front of a five-stair entrance to two doors. A single enlarged petal lies on the lawn, adjacent to a puddle. The lines of the sturdy home and the delicate organic lines of the flower complement one another.

Scettrini uses gaze in her portraits to express introspection—a reluctance to engage with viewers and a preference for examining her personal landscape. *Cross Examination #1* exemplifies Scettrini's engagement with her internal world. Her right eye consumes half of the forty-inch by thirty-inch canvas. She directs viewers to consider their own capacity for gaze by showing herself reflect, displaying her own face in the pupil of her eye. Scettrini's glazed eyes are detached from the environment within the painting, and disinterested in the viewers' world. Rather, her portraits showcase a gaze into deep space, a ruminating, reflective memory.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My paintings are black and white oil on canvas of surreal self-portraits juxtaposed with daisies. All of my works are introspective to deal with my own past. The flowers act as a form of armor to shield myself from the eyes of the viewer.

I am interested in issues surrounding self-reflection, mental health, vulnerability, isolation, the cliché nature of flowers, the gaze and femininity, and the relationship between painting and photography.



*Archer St.* | Oil on canvas, 60" x 48", 2019



Reflection #2 | Oil on canvas, 48" x 36", 2019



Reflection #3 | Oil on canvas, 48" x 36", 2018



Cross Examination #2 | Oil on canvas, 36" x 24", 2019



Cross Examination #1 | Oil on canvas, 40" x 30", 2019

I am interested in issues surrounding self-reflection, mental health, vulnerability, isolation, the cliché nature of flowers, the gaze and femininity, and the relationship between painting and photography.

# Amanda Tripler //

By Nicholas Nakashian, MFA Candidate Art History

Sculptor Amanda Tripler explores the malleability of interpersonal relationships amidst life's irrevocable change. Time passes despite contrary effort. Aging reminds us that we are not sovereign rulers of our own bodies. Tripler believes that sexual energy permeates our lives more than we understand. She juxtaposes sentiments of innocent home life with sexual tension and energy. Her delicate hand embroidery may conjure nostalgic images of a craft practiced by your grandmother, but you would quickly blush if your grandmother were embroidering a condom, as Tripler does for the piece *I Love You Inside Me*.

In *Stifled Spring II (Maintaining Autonomy)*, she considers our sense of self and the way we change throughout a relationship. She places a sculpted hive-like structure atop an antique coffee table. It stands four feet tall and is drenched in rusted reds and browns suggesting dried blood. Deeper inspection reveals shimmering golden threads randomly woven throughout and bees delicately placed about the hive. The threads symbolize our connections to others and ourselves; some become tangled while others reach to connect but fall short. Relationships and ideas we deem static and stable in fact metamorphose. Time and events not only transform our bodies but our inner selves. We may grow apart from someone we'd loved, or move closer together. We let go of ideas we held firm and gain new ones. Incorporating bees into the sculpture raises questions of personal autonomy within a relationship. Is the bee an individual, or is its existence defined by the collective hive? When we enter a relationship do we remain autonomous, or do we become limited by our union to another?

Uncertainty is uncomfortable. Humans fear the unknown and change. Pleasantries of the past alleviate fears of the future. Tripler confronts us with inexorable realities. Despite our perceived individuality, we share wants and desires, fears and anxieties, and ultimately ourselves with each other.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

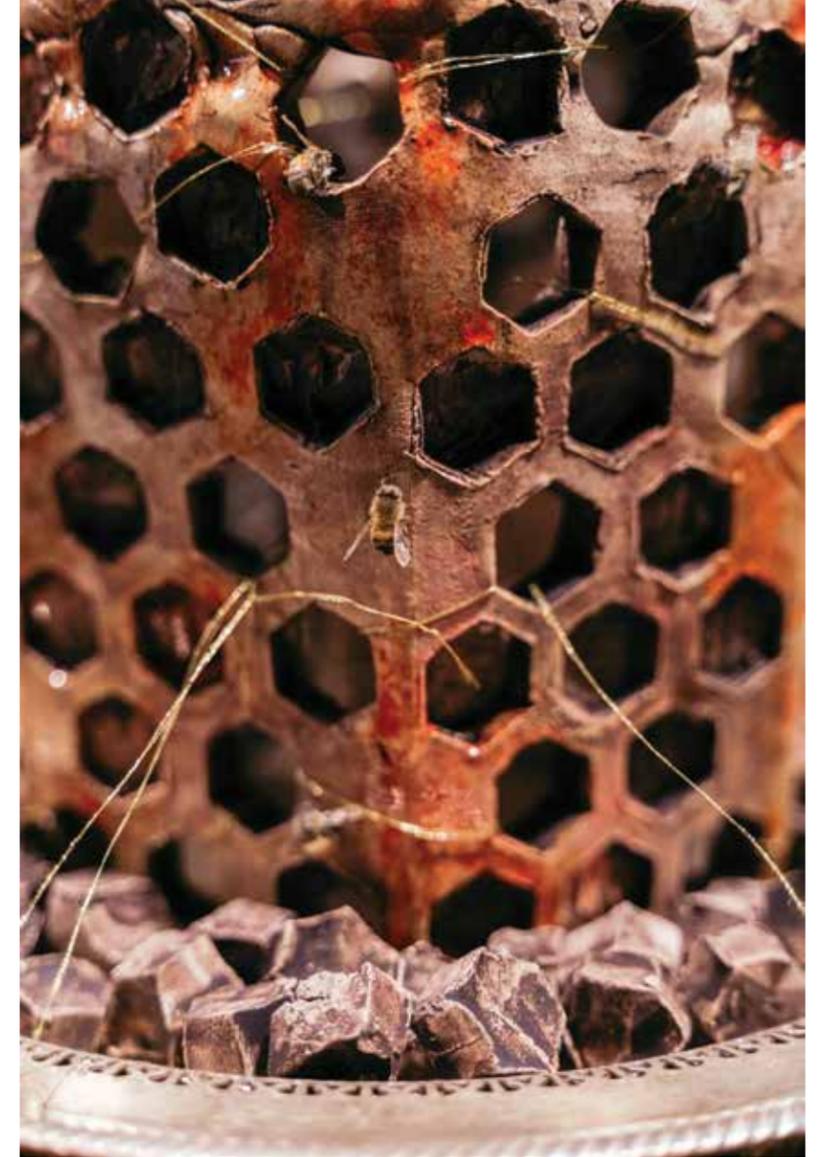
Interpersonal relationships provide fertile source material for contemplations, activities, and subsequent sculptures. The euphoric feelings that arise when you meet someone you have a connection with, the evolution of a bond, the things we put up with to stay together, secrets, and compromises all make me question the role of autonomy in romantic encounters. These potential discussions seem, at times, to be lurking just below the surface, ready to overflow at any moment.

The fleshy, physicality of clay and the warm comfort of sewing are useful companions along this artistic exploration. Domestic objects displayed in an uncanny fashion help display the tension of having to reconcile big worries and heavy feelings with the constantly-turning wheels of everyday life. This journey is not complete without humor as well. A dark levity is necessary for tackling life's tragic-tory, including jokes about sexual encounters and our inevitable end.



*This Feels Normal, Now* | Pollution on wood panel, 40" x 32", 2019

*I Love You Inside Me* | Mixed media, 0.5" x 1" x 0.5", 2019



*Stifled Spring II (Maintaining Autonomy) (Detail) | Mixed media, 4' x 3' x 3', 2018*

**Domestic objects displayed in an uncanny fashion help display the tension of having to reconcile big worries and heavy feelings with the constantly-turning wheels of everyday life.**



Ruminsomniations (Detail) | Mixed media, 1" x 2" x 3", 2018



Flushing Oracle | Mixed media, 2' x 2' x 3', 2018



Ruminsomniations (Detail) | Mixed media, 1" x 2" x 3", 2018



Flushing Oracle | Mixed media, 2' x 2' x 3', 2018

# Emily Van Engel //

By Annissa Conditt, MFA Candidate Art History

Emily Van Engel uses her art to speak from the heart and to focus her concern about climate change, pollution, and increasingly destructive natural disasters and the chaos that ensues. With a goal of reversing environmental degradation, she seeks to create a visual language to communicate. She believes that her art is the most direct way for her to lead.

Van Engel channels her despair by taking images from news stories and making illustrations of them. She seeks to slow the moment and thereby to give pause. Her canvas is big to make the scenes more emotional and impactful. A dripping technique with paint imbues the work with lethargy. The scene feels frozen and uncontrollable, intensely sad and disappointing. Van Engel is also experimenting with using materials that are causing the environmental damage, making something beautiful with something destructive.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

For many of us, climate change is abstract. While we know that we have set climate change into motion, it's not clear what we can do about stopping it or mitigating its effects without completely dismantling our way of life. As we start to see extreme weather with increasing frequency, from fires and mudslides in California, to drought and famine in the Middle East, to monsoons in South Asia and hurricanes striking the Gulf Coast and Puerto Rico, I channel what I see into my paintings. I create depictions of these events, hoping to generate pause in the face of news cycles determined to move swiftly on to the next sensational story.

As our climate changes, I grieve the loss of the life I know. There is sadness in me as I watch disaster demolish beloved places, communities, homes, histories, and cultures. I feel chaos and horror, realizing that this instability is rampant. My work reflects the sinking feeling of despair that these events are likely to continue.

The work asks viewers to consider something most of us typically ignore: how so many facets of our lives are intertwined with irreversible environmental destruction. In addition to images of storm damage and changing weather patterns, the imagery I select touches on themes of food production, transit, electricity, future generations and our relationship with indigenous culture in America. Each image explores what we can change, what the consequences are of our current system, and where we might look for solutions. I hope my work gives space for sitting with and processing the ecological crisis and the environmental consequences of modern capitalism.



*This Feels Normal, Now* | Pollution on wood panel, 40" x 32", 2019



LA 2018 | Oil on canvas, 40" x 54", 2018



Santa Rosa 2017 | Oil on canvas, 22" x 32", 2018



Overextension | Glass, 16" x 20", 2018

As our climate changes,  
I grieve the loss of the  
life I know.



A Relationship I'd Like to Repair | Pollution on wood panel, 32" x 40", 2019



Cognitive Dissonance National Park | Oil on canvas, 40" x 54", 2017

**The work asks viewers to consider something most of us typically ignore: how so many facets of our lives are intertwined with irreversible environmental destruction.**



Potential Goodbye | Glass, 16" x 19", 2019

## CURATOR'S BIOGRAPHY

---

Kevin B. Chen has been involved in the Bay Area arts community for over two decades as a curator, writer, and visual artist. He currently serves as faculty at San Francisco State University's School of Art and at Stanford University's Department of Art and Art History, a member of Recology's Artist in Residence Program Advisory Board, and a Curatorial Committee member of Root Division and Pro Arts Gallery. He recently served as co-chair for the City of Oakland's Public Art Advisory Committee and managed the de Young Museum's Artist Residency Program and Public Programs. He has curated projects for Headlands Center for the Arts, Minnesota Street Project, University of Nevada Reno, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Francisco Art Institute, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco Arts Commission Galleries, SOMArts Cultural Center, and Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco & Kearny Street Workshop. His curatorial work has been reviewed in publications nationally, including *Art in America*, *afterimage: the journal of media arts and cultural criticism*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *Art Papers*, *New Art Examiner*, *Bidoun Magazine*, *Bitch Magazine*, and the *Huffington Post*. He was the Program Director of Visual Arts at Intersection for the Arts for over 15 years, where he curated over 70 exhibitions and hundreds of public programs. He has been a funding and residency panelist (Creative Capital Foundation, Multi-Arts Production Fund, Alliance of Artists Communities, Creative Work Fund, City of San Jose, SF Arts Commission, Headlands Center for the Arts), an exhibition juror (CCA, SF Camerawork, CSU Chico, Root Division, Pro Arts Gallery), and author of catalog essays (*The Third Line – Art Gallery in Dubai*, *Paper Museum Press/Park Life*, *Yerba Buena Center for the Arts*, *Light Work*, *AKAACA Art Publishing*). His own visual work has been exhibited locally at San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, Southern Exposure, Palo Alto Art Center, Jack Fischer Gallery, and nationally at Angel's Gate Cultural Center (San Pedro, CA), Harn Museum of Art (Gainesville, FL), Bob Rauschenberg Gallery (Ft. Myers, FL), Bruno David Gallery (St. Louis, MO), and The Kitchen (New York, NY).

## EDITOR'S BIOGRAPHY

---

Sharon Simonson (MFA Candidate, Creative Writing, 2019) has reported and won awards for Hearst Communications Inc., the Gannett Co. Inc., and American City Business Journals. She is earning her masters of fine arts degree in nonfiction writing at San José State University and writing a book about life in Silicon Valley. She was the managing editor of the 150th anniversary edition of *Reed*, the SJSU literary magazine. She is a 2016–17 recipient of The Rico Resson Scholarship, awarded by SJSU English faculty.

**SJSU** | DEPARTMENT OF  
ART AND ART HISTORY

# **2019 MFA Thesis Exhibition**

Curated by Kevin B. Chen

