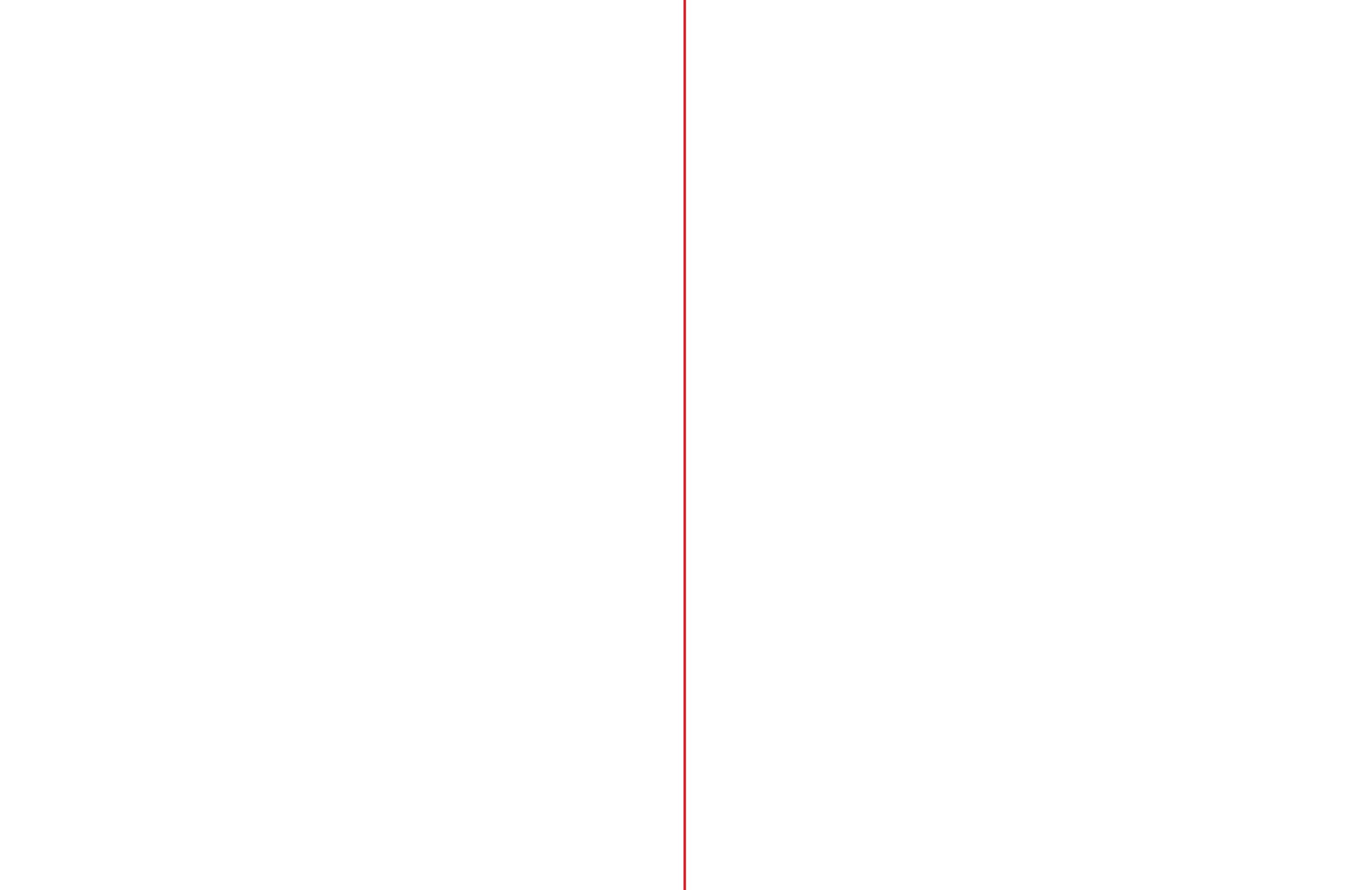


# The Task of The Translator

The San José State University  
Master of Fine Arts  
Exhibition 2018



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## **A series of notes on the 2018 San Jose State University MFA exhibition:**

### **A note on the exhibition title**

*The Task of The Translator* refers to an essay in which the early 20th century German Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin analyzes the role of the maker in the world, the content produced, and the potential dialogues that become manifest, created from a will to convey an idea or image. He goes further to contend that translation is an art in and of itself, an act “distinct and clearly differentiated from the task of the poet.” We’re inclined to agree with him and would contend that the validity of his argument is most firmly felt in the visual arts, a realm where literality holds almost no sway and negotiation is constant. However, a question immediately arises: Who is the translator? Is it the artist, bringing their perceptions, impulses, and emotions to bear and altering them through material and conceptual means? Is it the curator, finding linkages and making connections between works and practices, weaving a larger narrative from individuated fragments? Or is it the viewer, receiving the work and turning it into a message by adapting it to their own history?

### **A note on the venue**

For the better part of a decade, San Francisco’s Incline Gallery has been a non-denominational and egalitarian art space. As likely to host a performance fashion show as they are a salon of Sunday painters, few spaces have managed to cast such a wide net and still hold on to a sense of place and purpose. Undoubtedly a part of that identity is the uncommon architecture. Generously described as a “miniature Guggenheim” by one local artist, the gallery is an elevational experience constructed of a series of ramps rising up through three landings, eventually culminating in a high-wide open space, an antidote to the constriction of the entry. Wandering upwards, viewers are given no option but to consider each work sequentially, building a spatial chronology as they go. Artists, for their part, have contended with the unique qualities of the gallery since its inception. By finding inventive ways to make their work installational and using the oblique sightlines to their advantage, artists have historically created opportunities for surprise that would be difficult to execute in other settings. For an exhibition like *The Task of The Translator*, with the highly personal work of eleven emerging artists, Incline Gallery poses the perfect set of parameters, creating an exhibition that is additive but allows each work to be seen and digested in turn.

### **A note on the artists**

While analyzing their work and practices, it becomes apparent that these are individuals committed to creating with purpose. As a group, they all experience empathetic urges, leading them to generate for the sake of others as much as for themselves. This all happens in highly personal ways and with a variety of issues at stake. While themes of changing gender dynamics, cultural critique, environmentalism, and the fundamentals of perception are foregrounded and connect the artists, they are rooted in their individual tasks; whether communicating, conveying, or calling into question.

### **A note on the curators**

The job of the curator is typically to establish an ideology through art. This can often be a complex operation under the most ideal of circumstances, but when the group of artists has been predefined, it can become easy to force false narratives and artificial constraints. In this instance however, no such problem presented itself. In spite of working in close and constant proximity the artists have managed to maintain their own voices and directions, translating their particular visions. They have done this so clearly in fact as to make their individuality the prevailing theme. Our hope as curators is that this will provide ample room for the audience to fully experience the exhibition and find their own interpretation while doing so.

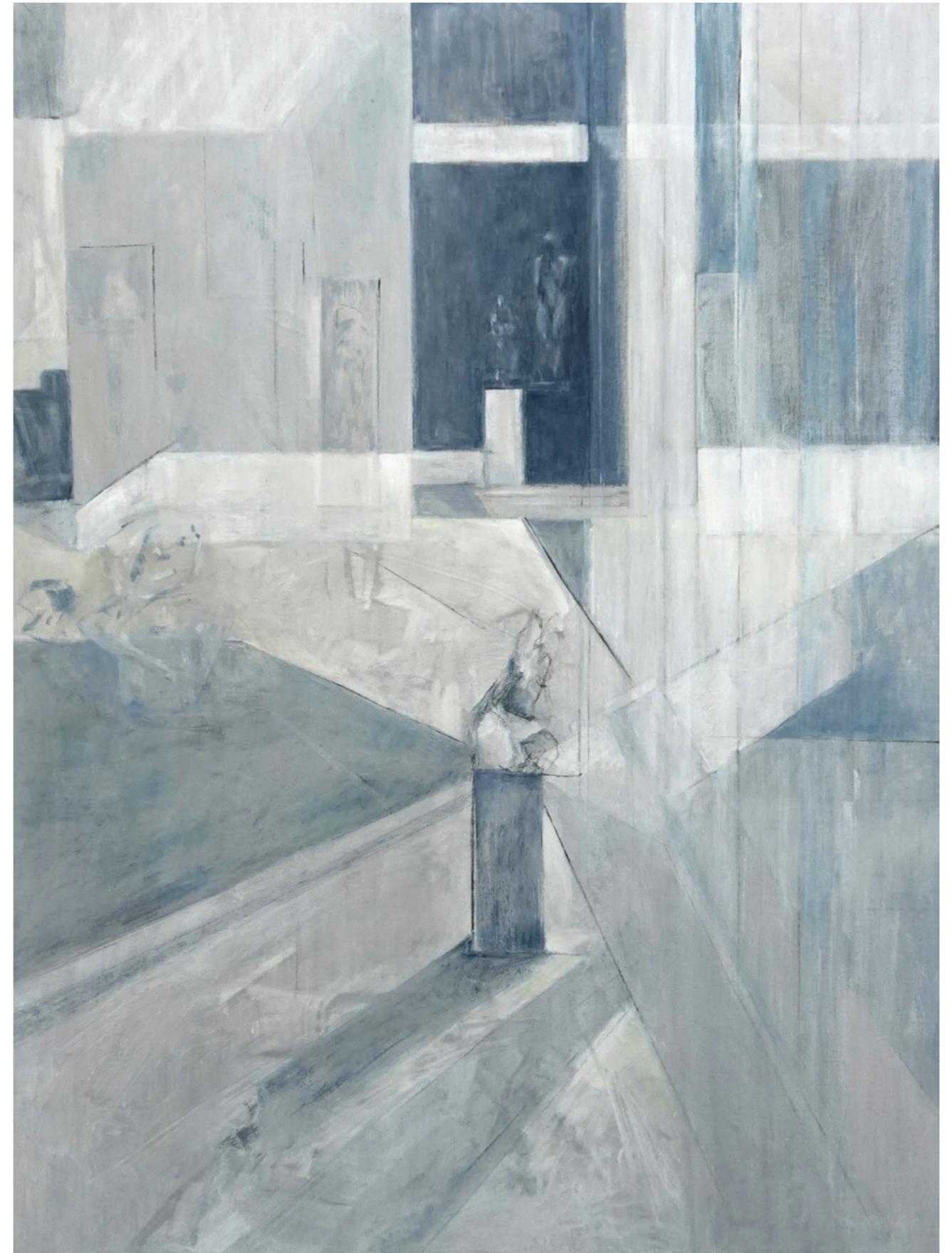
# KAREN AMIEL

By Ana Borlas-Ivern

When one awakens from sleep, there is often a brief moment of confusion and uncertainty of time or place. That sense of sorting through the darkness and light to connect one's setting with something recognizable is central to Karen Amiel's work. Amiel is an artist working in several mediums—oil, charcoal, watercolor, and photography. After a career in the curatorial field, she returned to her fine art practice, leading to her first SJSU exhibit in the Fall Semester of 2017. Entitled *Memory of Space*, Amiel displayed five oil and charcoal paintings on canvas. Visually fragmented and layered, these paintings depict spaces which delve into a non-site-specific world where unfamiliarity and familiarity intersect.

Her use of abstraction is a device for retrospective examination: Amiel experienced a vision impairment in her childhood, which generated a blurred perception of her environment. She translates this experience in her work—the viewer is not given assurance of concrete depictions, but rather an ephemeral setting. The dramatic shifts in focus and use of geometry convey space unattached to a specific time or place, allowing the imagination to roam, evoking emotion, and creating an atmosphere for viewers to interpret. Influenced by black and white films of the early twentieth-century, Amiel employs a monochromatic palette to deeply investigate the properties of light and shadow. Here, interior architecture becomes a carrier for nostalgia, recalling the intangibility of the past.

The formation of barren interiors culminates in Amiel's thesis: a reconstruction of Diego Velasquez's interior of *Las Meninas*, undisturbed by figures, in a contemplative rendition. By removing people, she is analyzing the meaning of the space: famous for its ambiguity, what does the room say? Amiel is currently working on answering this question, while also exploring our psychological relationship to our surroundings.



*Memory of Space 1*, Oil and charcoal on canvas, 48" x 36", 2017.



*Memory of Space 2*, Oil and charcoal on canvas, 48" x 60", 2017.



*Memory of Space 3*, Oil and charcoal on canvas, 60" x 48", 2017.



*Memory of Space 4*, Oil and charcoal on canvas, 24" x 18", 2017.



*Memory of Space 5*, Oil and charcoal on canvas, 24" x 18", 2017.

# RACHEL ASHMAN

By Lauren Montana

Existing in both the realms of childhood and adulthood, a dolls' house waits patiently to impart domestic instruction. When it sits silently across a room, it evokes the idea of home in each of us. The dolls' house that Rachel Ashman's grandfather made for her somewhere in between her childhood and adulthood has proven to be a source of both inspiration and subconscious angst for Ashman, and aspects of housework, femininity, age, and mortality are expressed in the mixed media installations she is currently producing. Cracked porcelain house facades and bronze moths impaled by entomology pins displayed among domestic grotesques—lifeless, loose hair and clothing lint—speak of Ashman's introspection. Her work prompts viewers to consider home, and the beautiful imperfections found there.

A turning point occurred in Ashman's life when she became indifferent to her chosen medium of ceramics. Ashman found a freedom in embracing feminism, but also became much more aware of her own life within a domestic context. She wondered: what is home, and how does a woman consciously accept age and physical change within both the home and herself? It was around this time that Ashman began to explore other media as well. In a trancelike state she cast moth after moth while superstitiously collecting each brown hair that fell from her head, ultimately creating installations like *End of Softness*, 2017, that address these questions.

Ashman's works has become more conceptual than ever as she taps into the collective unconscious. Driven by anxieties and fears passed down from mother to daughter over generations, Ashman presents her viewers with familiar objects in various states of strain and decay. At first the house facades from *End of Softness* appear smooth and satisfyingly uniform, but looking closer reveals they are warped, cracked, and fragile. The monochromatic ceramic houses of *Haunted*, 2016, seem to deteriorate before our eyes. While Ashman reconciles her thoughts of home and femininity, she creates for us domestic remembrances.



*End of Softness*, Detail, Archival inkjet print on fabric, porcelain, bronze, entomology pins, hair, 2017.



*End of Softness*, Archival inkjet print on fabric, porcelain, bronze, entomology pins, hair, 12'x10'x8", 2017.



*End of Softness*, Detail, Archival inkjet print on fabric, porcelain, bronze, entomology pins, hair, 2017.



*End of Softness*, Detail, Archival inkjet print on fabric, porcelain, bronze, entomology pins, hair, 2017.

# MIKE BATTEY

By Annissa Conditt

The Sacramento-San Joaquin River watershed is a significant factor in Michael Battey's *Downstream*. Not only do the abstract prints take into consideration the topography of the environment, Battey's creative process also utilizes the water found. Considering his deep connection to the mountains of California, Battey produces a variety of prints that mimic the manipulation, control, and human impact central to these significant water systems. Although Battey uses many techniques in his work, the process of how the prints are made and the unique abstractness of each image emphasize the meaning and theme of each print.

The watersheds between the Pacific Crest and Central Valley are heavily manipulated and influenced by human life, preventing the natural cycles of nature. With Battey's passion for the forests, alpine lakes, and mountains of California, many of his works are created out in these spaces: while on site he uses the natural materials of the earth and environment to assist in making his own work and controlling certain aspects. Since nature is a major component of Battey's art, the prints are created using light, water, time, and temperature. One of the processes used in Battey's work involve exposing paper in the tributaries that contribute to the Sacramento-San Joaquin River watershed systems for an extended period of time. Throughout the night, the ice that is formed in the water becomes imprinted creating a highly abstract lumen print. Battey also uses a process called *mordançage*, a destructive process which creates a degraded, decaying look and gives the appearance of thin, malleable, and fragile veils.

The variety of methods that Battey uses symbolizes how every action in life and on our environment produces an unrepeatable result. This set of unique procedures recreates the pollution and damage that these watersheds face. Battey's artwork brings awareness to the manipulative, abusive, and ultimately perceived control of these significant water systems.



*American River*, Silver Gelatin-Mordançage Print, 8"x10", 2017.



*Shasta Lake*, Silver Gelatin-Mordancage Print, 8"x10", 2017.



*Stanislaus River*, Silver Gelatin-Mordancage Print, 8"x10", 2017.

# CARMINA ELIASON

By Stephanie E. Thornton

Carmina Eliason transforms domestic items into interactive art in order to promote thought and conversation about issues that are otherwise difficult to discuss in everyday life. Eliason is fascinated by individual histories and how the story of each person will inevitably affect the stories of those around them, and she combines this interest with her own history to create art which engages her audience and promotes careful reflection on identity and heritage.

As a light-skinned woman of Mexican heritage, Eliason is acutely aware of the complexities of identity and culture. She spends a great deal of time exploring what these concepts mean, using them in combination with her own experiences and heritage to bring the work to life. Her art combines installation, interaction, and performance; pieces like *Corridos*, 2017, bring domestic objects and everyday materials into the gallery, creating a pleasant and familiar environment which also serves as a stage for Eliason to share her story and allow others to do the same.

In *white passing*, 2017, a selection of white handkerchiefs are presented for the viewer to approach. At first, it is difficult to see anything significant about the handkerchiefs, but as the viewer gets closer they are able to read the white words that have been carefully stitched into the cloth. Phrases like, “You’re Mexican? You don’t look it,” confront the viewer with the reality of what it means to be “white passing.” These handkerchiefs show their audience what it is like to feel that one is an outsider in one’s own culture while simultaneously drawing attention to how people pass down notions of race through the generations, just as a mother might teach her daughter how to sew.

As part of her interest in human relations, Eliason wants her viewers to see the larger narrative of the world we live in and our place in it while promoting an awareness of how we interact with the people around us. She hopes to inspire her viewers to consider what we pass on to others, be it skills like cooking and sewing or biases of color and race.



“You’re Mexican? You don’t look it.”, Embroidery on found handkerchief, 4”x4”, 2017.



"What is a Beauty? Am I a Beauty?"; Embroidery on found handkerchief, 4"x4", 2017.



"When I see your face I'm not sure you're safe"; Embroidery on found handkerchief, 4"x4", 2017.



"What happened to our memories?", Embroidery on found handkerchief, 4"x4", 2017.



"tension, I am quiet", Embroidery on found handkerchief, 4"x4", 2017.

# RHIANNA GALLAGHER

By Nicholas Nakashian

The photographs of Rhianna Gallagher capture more than a singular moment of time within their borders: they bring a material presence to the innate, internal, and intimate emotions and experiences that lack a physical manifestation. Photography crystallizes a moment in time, preserving it for future reflection and contemplation. In Gallagher's eyes, this gives her medium an inherent sense of nostalgia: while present in a setting we have the foresight to sentimentally preserve it.

Inspired by the medium's nostalgic nature, Gallagher employs archaic photography techniques and subject matter in her artistic practice. Working in cyanotype, she creates images of human subjects inhabiting invented worlds and landscapes which blend the heartfelt realism of the Pre-Raphaelites with the subconscious mysteries of the Symbolists. Natural and imperfect physical forms coalesce with the imaginative to form an idyllic state for the curious and mysterious, and Gallagher is driven to build a visually traversable bridge between the physical and the intangible. Romantic longing, dream states, and the emotionally hyperbolic all manifest as corporeal entities that confront the viewer directly.

The emotional value of these environments are accentuated further through her use of scale: producing large, grandiose prints that dwarf the viewer and generate an uncomfortable-yet-sublime atmosphere, as well as small paper theaters that invite the viewer into an intimate space and experience something private and perhaps secret. This juxtaposition of scale evokes a feeling akin to Alice in Wonderland: the viewer feels both gigantic and miniature at the same time, inducing a disorienting and dreamlike sense of childlike fantasy. Gallagher's work envelops you in a theater of powerful-yet-tender emotions, producing a grounded sense of the invisible.



"Young Man is Taller Than a Tree", Cyanotype, Watercolor, 24 Karat Gold Leaf. 23"x27", 2017.



"Great Grandmother Would Threaten to Eat the Oleander.", Cyanotype, Watercolor, 24 Karat Gold Leaf. 44"x132", 2017.

# BAHARAK KHALEGHI

By Stephanie E. Thornton

Baharak Khaleghi is a multimedia artist and feminist who uses her work as a means to promote dialogue about women's issues. Khaleghi feels that she can make her art about anything, but she wants her work to have impact and meaning; she feels that women are mistreated in our society—something that deeply bothers her—and this inspires her to make art which focuses on women's issues.

Khaleghi's work begins with reflection on her own experiences and the challenges faced by other women, which leads to researching other artists who are exploring similar issues. She is open-minded about working in different mediums, choosing a piece's materials based on what is most appropriate for each individual topic. Her work often includes performance, which she feels is more alive than any other medium. Integrating performance into her work allows Khaleghi to connect with her audience and make them uncomfortable, an experience which enhances her pieces' ideas and message.

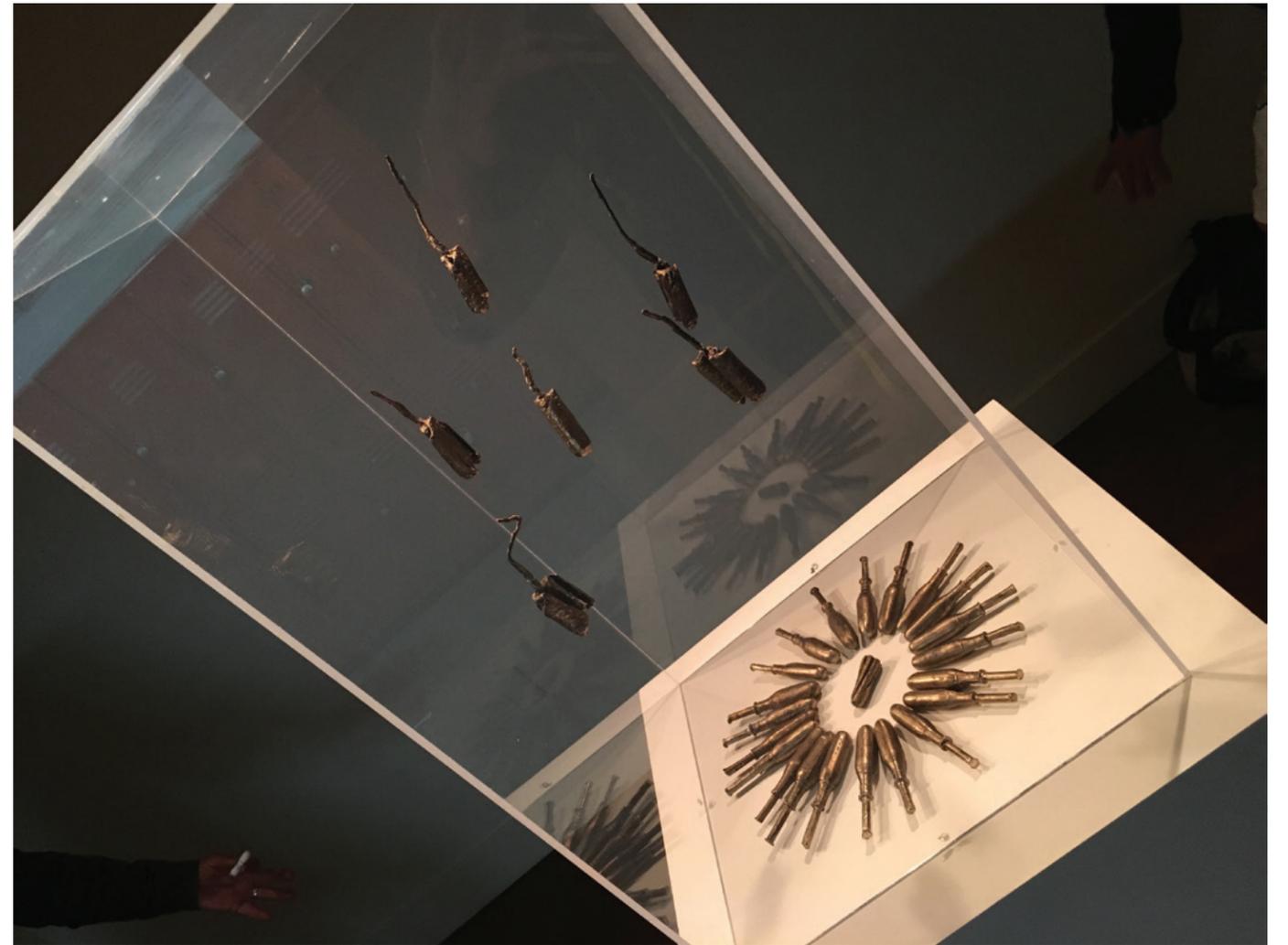
Khaleghi's most recent work has focused on the themes of abortion and reproductive rights. Many would be hesitant to breach these controversial subjects, but Khaleghi has no such reservations. She uses her work to promote constructive dialogue around these topics among her viewers.



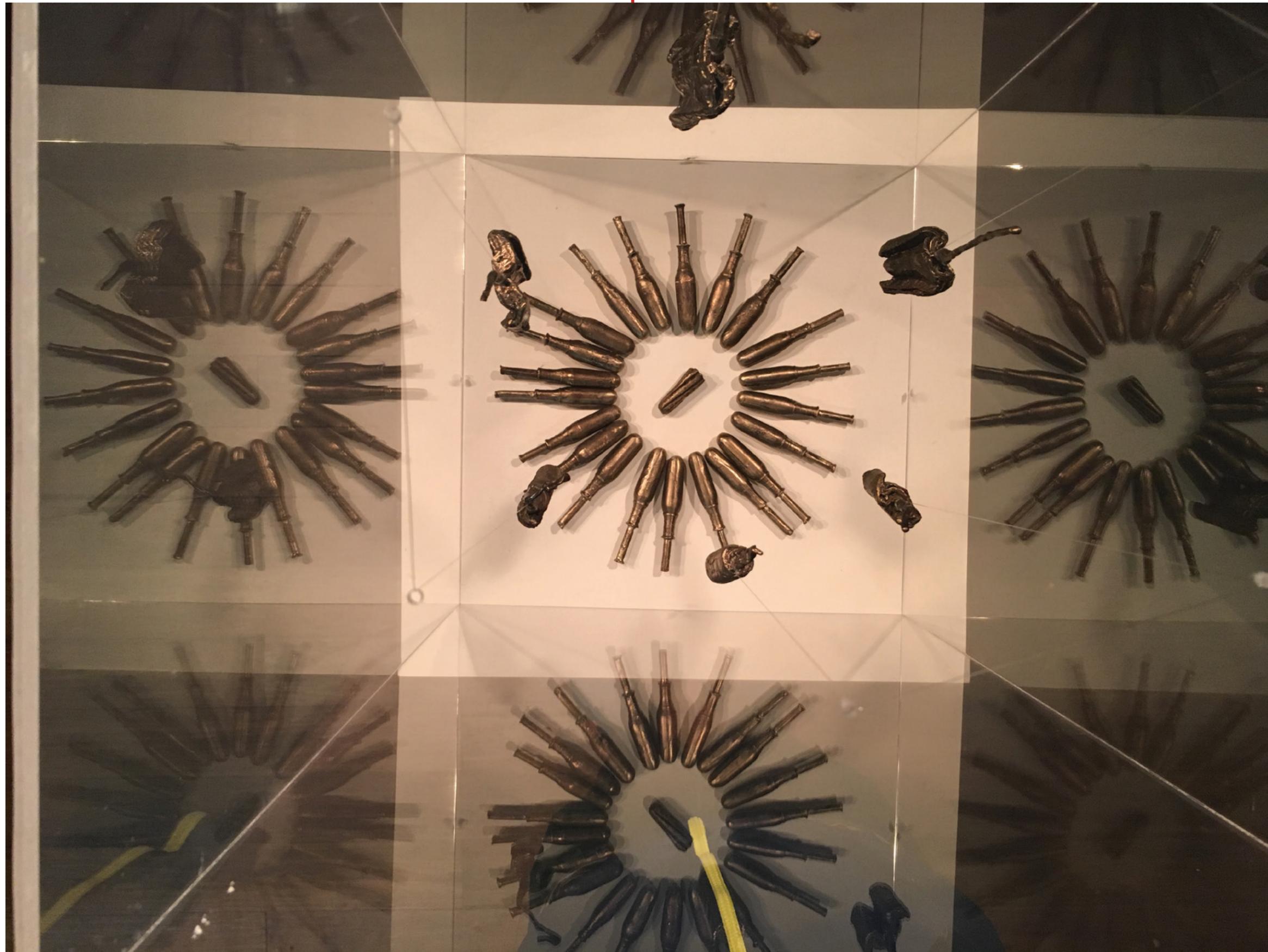
*Something My Mother Taught Me, Bronze, 2"- 5", 2017.*



*Something My Mother Taught Me*, Bronze, 2"- 5", 2017.



*Something My Mother Taught Me*, Bronze, 2"- 5", 2017.



*Something My Mother Taught Me*, Bronze, 2"- 5", 2017.

# Christian Mora

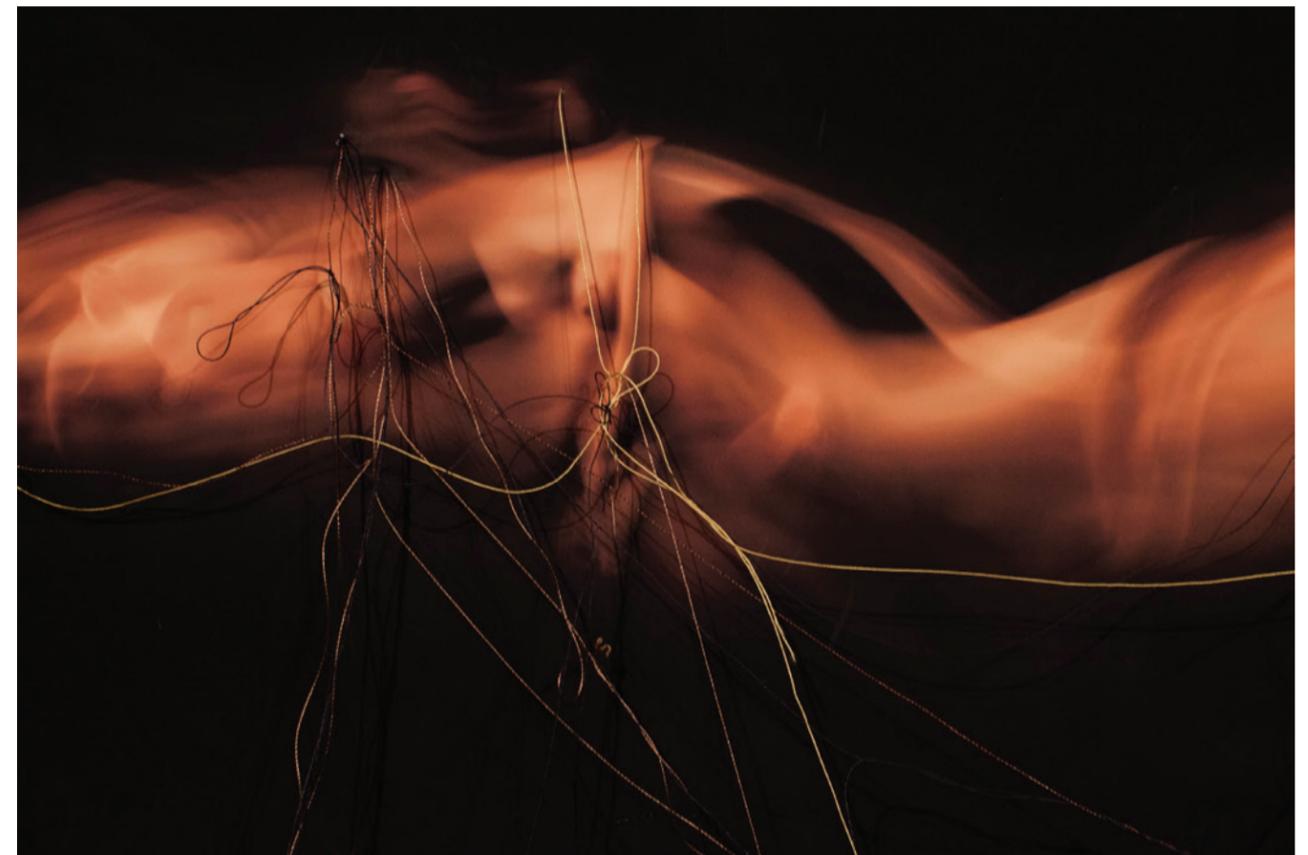
By Samantha Johnson

Christian Mora's work is autobiographical in nature, striving to engage in a critique of gender, race, and culture in relation to his own personal experiences dealing with judgment and critique. An interdisciplinary photographer with a background in commercial graphic design, Mora channels his diverse experience and heritage to construct a narrative which engages the viewer and asks them to seriously consider what they are seeing.

In creating his latest work, *Nudos de Oro*, 2017, Mora started a critique of himself based on how others had judged and labeled him. By looking at concepts of race, culture, and gender—specifically, what constitute accepted male or female attributes—Mora sought to find the most effective way to speak on both these concepts and himself. Set to a backdrop of dark space, anthropomorphic figures which Mora photographed and modeled from his own skin tone move fluidly through the picture plane, reaching out to one another from image to image.

The concept of gender is an important part of Mora's work. Within his composition, gender identifiers are fluid and not easily distinguished. Mora states there are both male and female bodies in his work, his ultimate goal being to showcase the interchangeability of these forms, directly challenging the idea of gender structures. Mora also inserts flesh-toned thread, a traditional signifier of work performed by women, into his photographs. According to him, the thread "seems to punctuate and penetrate the images, often in an unintentionally violent manner." To Mora this is an important, if not wholly accidental, addition to the conversation surrounding gender and gender roles in his work.

As an autobiographical piece, Mora's *Nudos de Oro* combines his heritage as a Mexican-American with his religious upbringing. He is aware that his work, which will be shown alongside a Spanish-language written component that will not be translated, may be perceived as controversial. His hope is that even if elements of his work make the viewer uncomfortable, they will continue to think about the images long after they have left the gallery.



(Top) *Nudos de Oro*, Detail, Archival Matte Print, tin, thread, velvet, 2'x2'x 5", 2017.

(Bottom) *Nudos de Oro*, Detail, Archival Matte Print, tin, thread, velvet, 2'x2'x5", 2017.





*Nudos de Oro*, Detail, Archival Matte Print, tin, thread, velvet, 2'x2'x5", 2017.

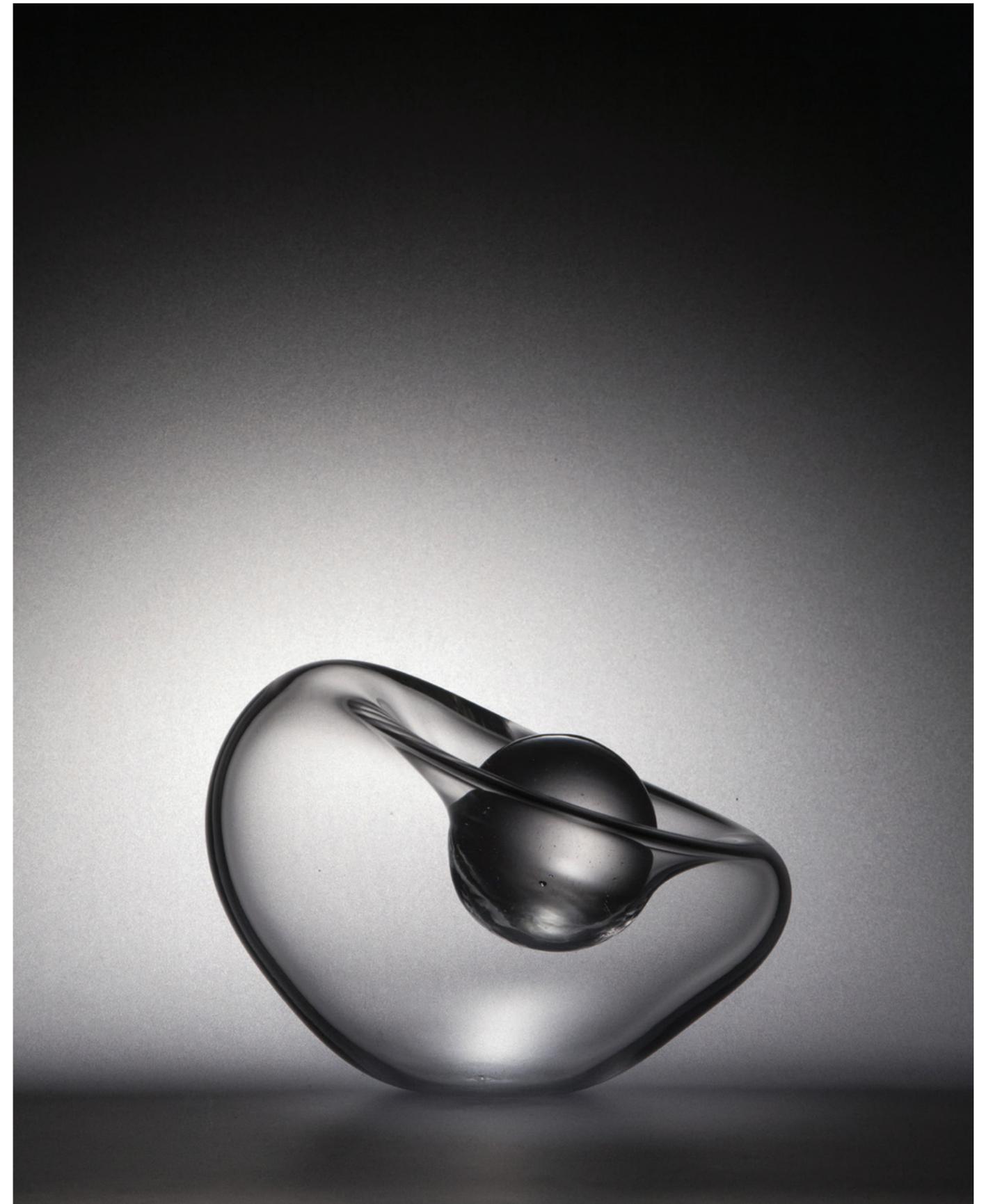
# MINAMI OYA

By Nicholas Nakashian

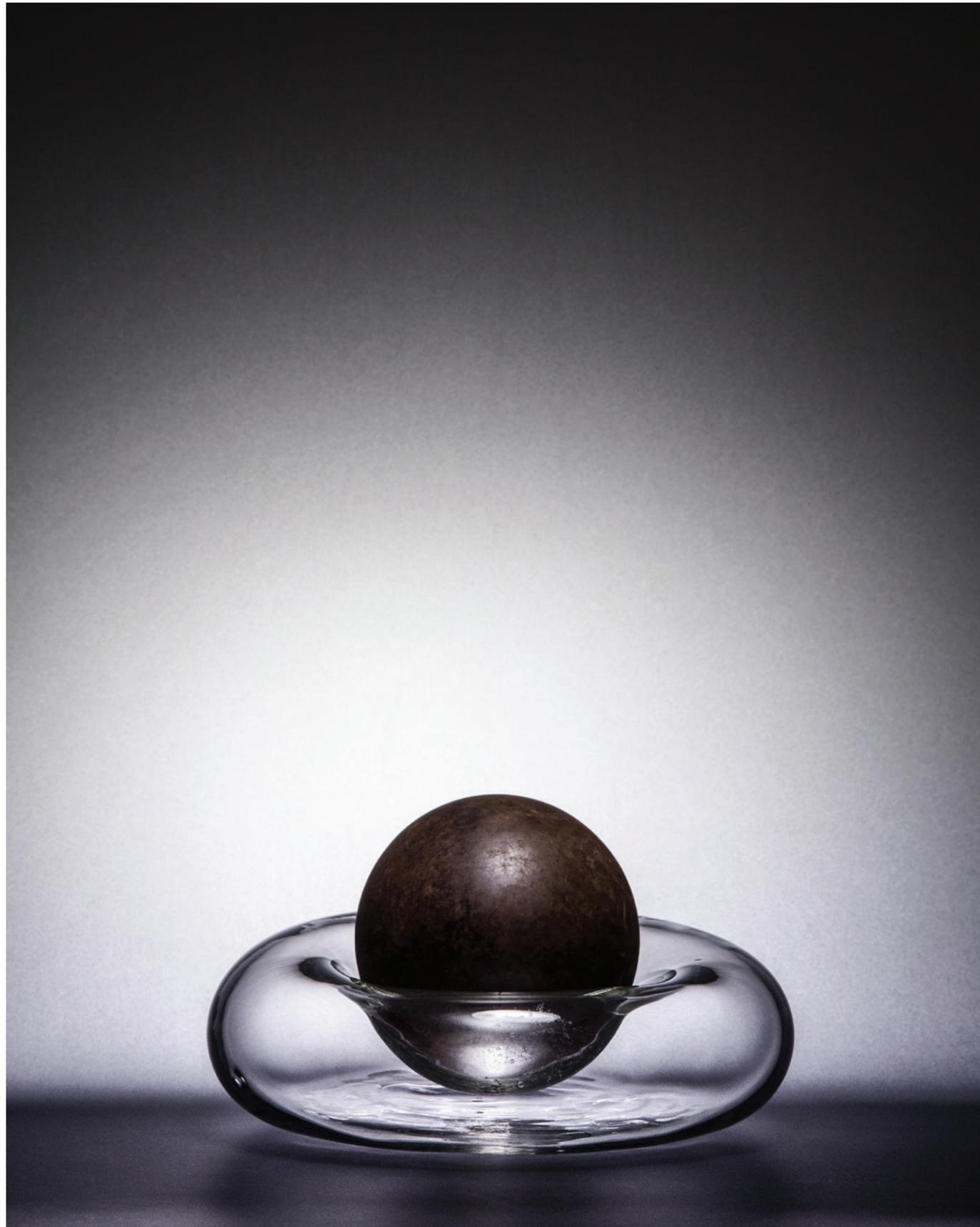
The universe is a complex machine; it is the sum of everyone and everything occupying it. There is a subtle balance between the two extremities that govern nature: black and white, light and dark, yin and yang. This duality inspires the work of glass blowing artist Minami Oya, who has simplified it to its most understandable and comprehensive in order to reveal nature's duality in her glass sculptures. Her work is in a constant state of evolution; beginning by delicately displaying the balance of the two oppositional—yet vital—energies and blossoming into an elegant exhibition of the culmination of the two as a unified entity.

The sphere is the recurring and prominent form in Oya's work. The simple shape represents some of the essential components of our existence: our atoms, our eyes, our planet, and our sun. At the same time, Oya addresses several ironic qualities in the sphere that exemplify the duality of nature: a sphere has no discernible beginning or endpoint, it is a continuous shape that can be infinitely circumnavigated, and you can mark a point on a sphere and return to it from countless directions. At the same time, a sphere can be small and fit into the palm of your hand, making it a very finite and tangible object. As a glass artist, the sphere is among the first objects that a novice practices; however, as someone pursuing her Master of Fine Art degree, Oya considers the sphere one of the most complicated forms to perfect. The irony and contradiction inherent in the sphere are not negative in Oya's eyes but humbling and humorous, and therefore lends itself to the poise and gentleness of her work.

In many ways, glass as a medium mirrors our behavior and personality. At certain times we are malleable and impressionable: we learn, grow, and change, much in the same way Oya blows glass to adopt whatever shape or form she desires. At other times we are stagnant, stuck, or stubborn and resist changing our shape not unlike the way a glass piece retains its form after it has cooled. This reiterates the importance of duality: we are not only one thing, with one mode of behavior, but a collection and combination of many components. For Oya, glass is the perfect medium and the sphere is the perfect form to communicate the complexity, the wonder, and the sense of balance that life has to offer.



*Impact Horizon 1*, Blown and hot-sculpted glass, 7"x 9"x9", 2017.



*Impact Horizon 2*, Blown glass and cast bronze, 5.5"x 10"x10", 2017.



*Impact Horizon 3*, Blown glass and cast bronze, 10"x10.5"x10", 2017.



*Paradigm Shift*, Blown glass and cast bronze, 9"x12"x10", 2016.



*Inursion*, Blown glass, cast bronze and cast silver, 9.5"x7"x7", 2016.

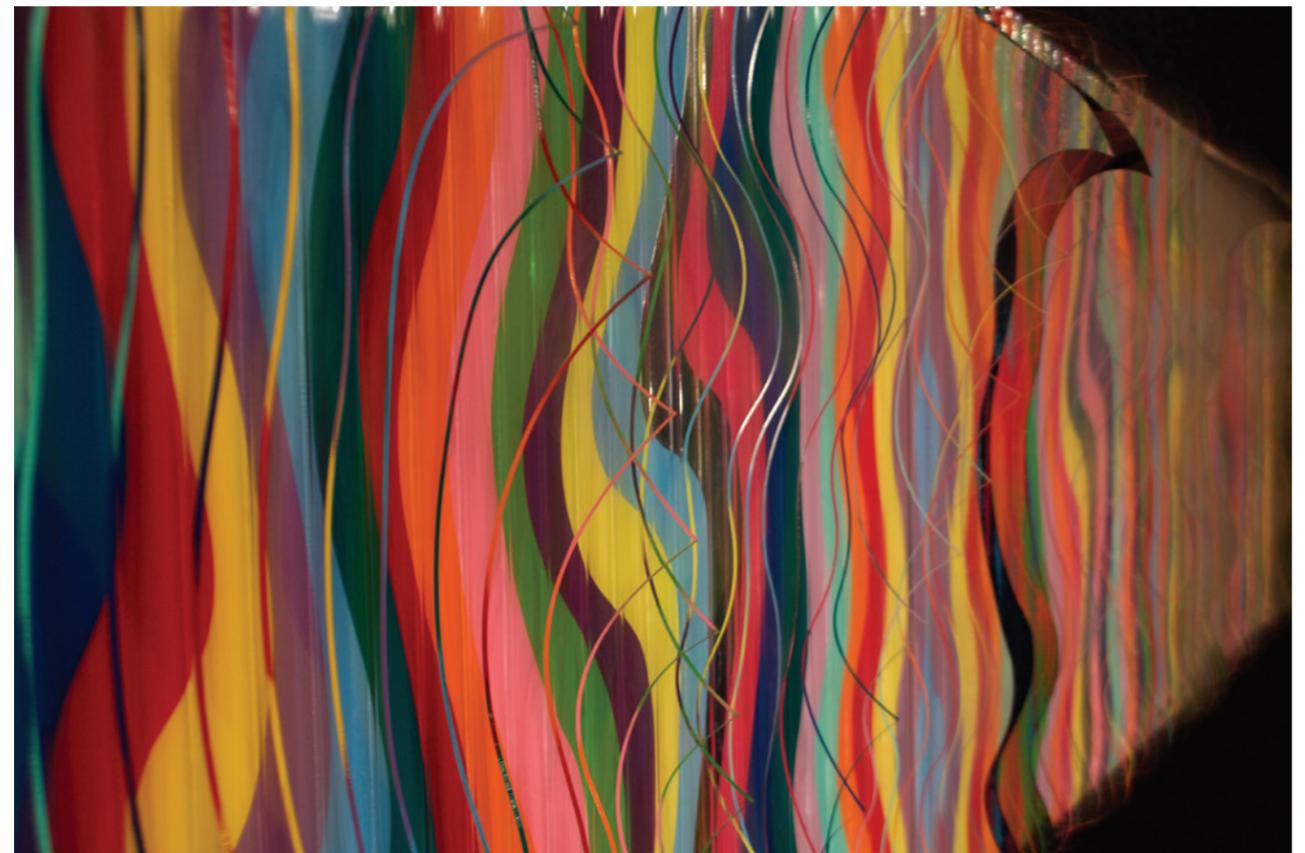
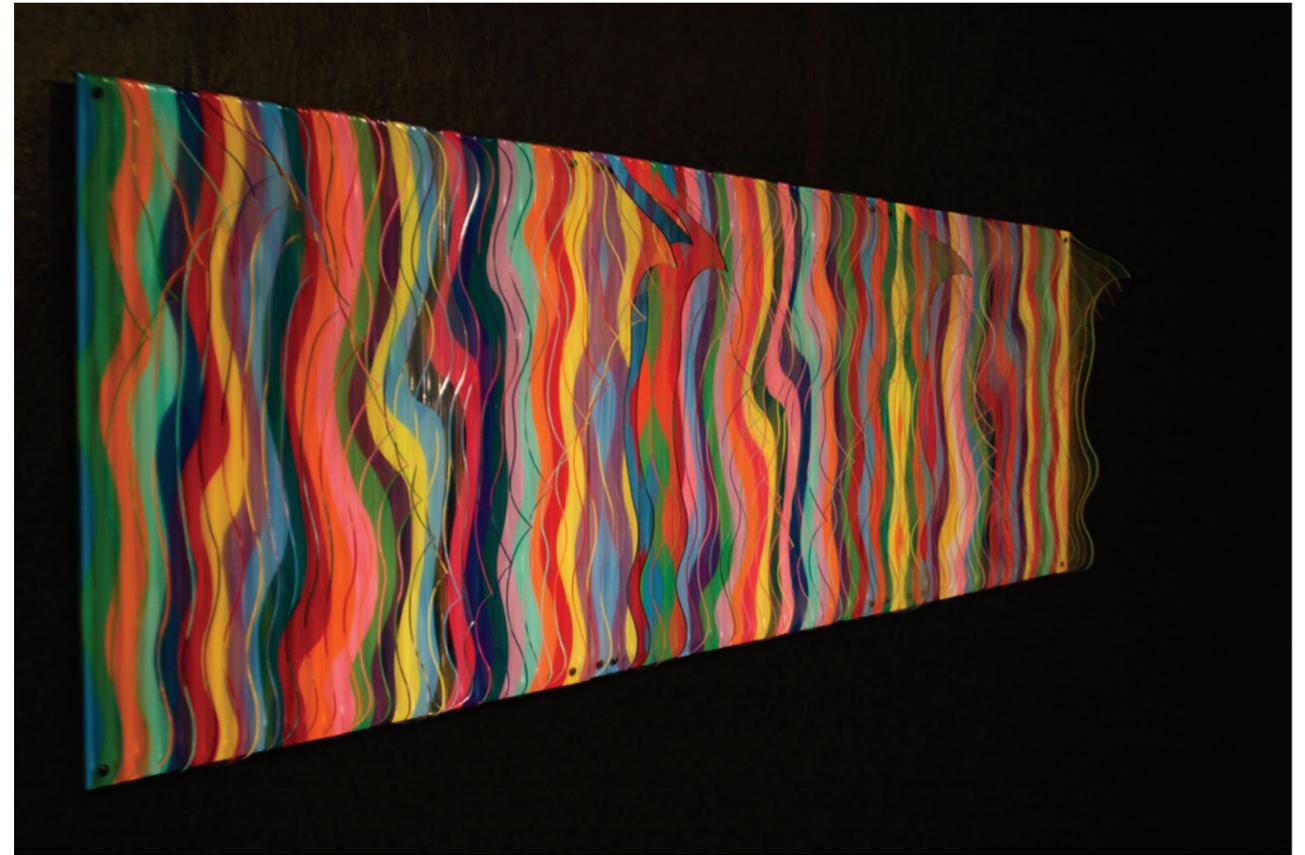
# NIKLAS RADFORD

By Samantha Johnson

Niklas Radford strives to create a symbiotic relationship between his art and the viewer by combining light, color theory, and interactivity within his work. An experimental artist with an interest in theory, architectural forms, and the vitality of color, Radford employs these concepts with the goal of giving color a form, making it interactive, and ultimately enabling the viewer to become one with his designs.

In his latest artistic production, Radford has chosen to express this idea of color as a form by incorporating organic elements with vinyl strips of color. By placing plexiglass waves, or fins, on top of the picture plane, Radford looks to showcase color reflections and refractions with the intention of physically drawing viewers closer to the assemblage. An important element in creating this process of seeing is Radford's desire to eliminate any visual trace of the hand of the artist. By crafting smooth transitions between the individual strips and the plexiglass fins, Radford encourages viewers to experience his piece intimately and wonder how it was crafted. Ultimately, his goal is to showcase the interplay between space and perception, encouraging the viewer to become a part of the object.

Recognized as a colorist among his peers, Radford is always looking forward to his next inspiration. Every composition he creates is a reaction to a previous piece, including a recent step away from color to create what he calls his Brutalist images. These compositions, in contrast to his current work, are meant as commentary on, and pay homage to, Brutalist architecture and its towering presence over the viewer. Radford is also working on a piece that involves construction of a color wheel room that functions only through interaction between the piece and the viewer. Radford believes that to truly understand and experience the sensation and seductiveness of color, his work needs to be experienced directly by his audience.

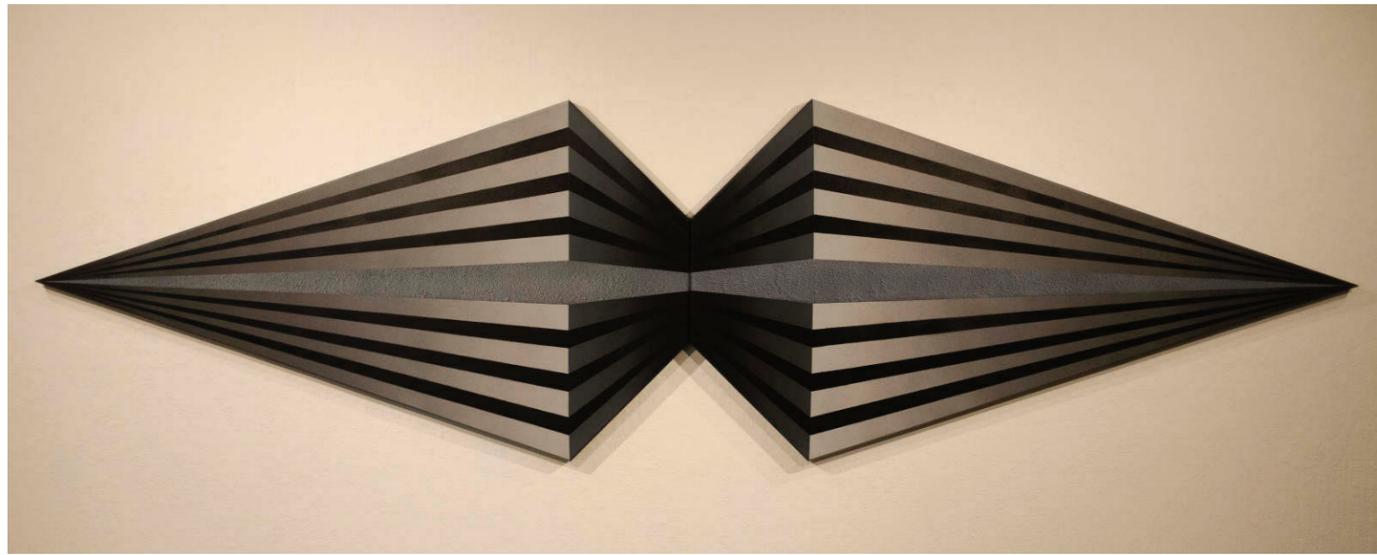


(Top) *Color Waves*, Vinyl, Resin, Plexi on Plexi, 93"x30", 2017.

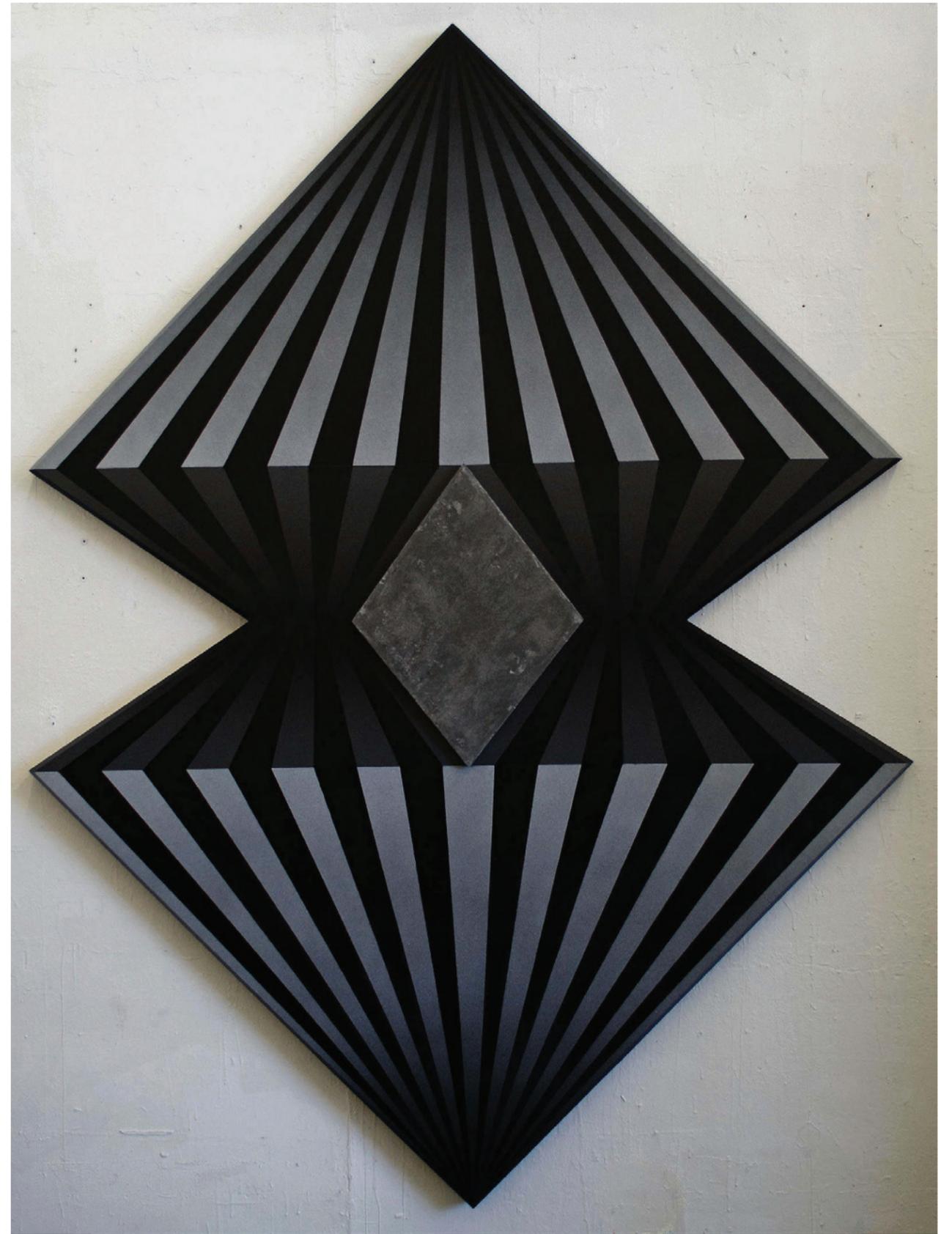
(Bottom) *Color Waves*, Detail, Vinyl, Resin, Plexi on Plexi, 2017.



Color Waves, Vinyl, Resin, Plexi on Plexi, 93"x30", 2017.



*BRUTAL 1.0*, Spray Acrylic, Air Brush, Roll-a-Text on Shaped Panel, 204"x40", 2016.



*BRUTAL 2.0*, Spray Acrylic, Cement, Concrete, dye powder on Shaped Panel, 84"x60", 2016.

# VOLGA SOLAK

By Ricardo Chavez

Volga Solak's art explores ways of transcending human perception. In creating her work, Solak ponders phenomenological questions about the ways in which humans seek contentment and spirituality. These questions have ultimately led her to explore perception through consciousness. As Solak herself puts it, "One thing that differentiates us from the other living things—that transcends us to the willpower, desire, remorse, and the center of awakening of our souls—is consciousness." Influenced by this, abstraction is a recurring process in her art, as it asks viewers to exercise their intuition when perceiving these themes through slightly distorted visuals.

Working mainly with photography and printmaking, Solak identifies art as a universal communication device. For example, her 2016-17 series of screenprints titled *Yorganix* reveals the most important pathways of our perception, depicting the human eye, heart, and brain. These images, created using fluorescent ink, are abstracted in both color and rhythm, resulting in psychedelic visual experiences that can be viewed in both light and dark spaces. However, Solak believes that ultimately the universal language of art cannot be perceived with our minds or through learned knowledge. Only through intuition can viewers truly perceive this language, a concept inspired by James Turrell's light-based installations.

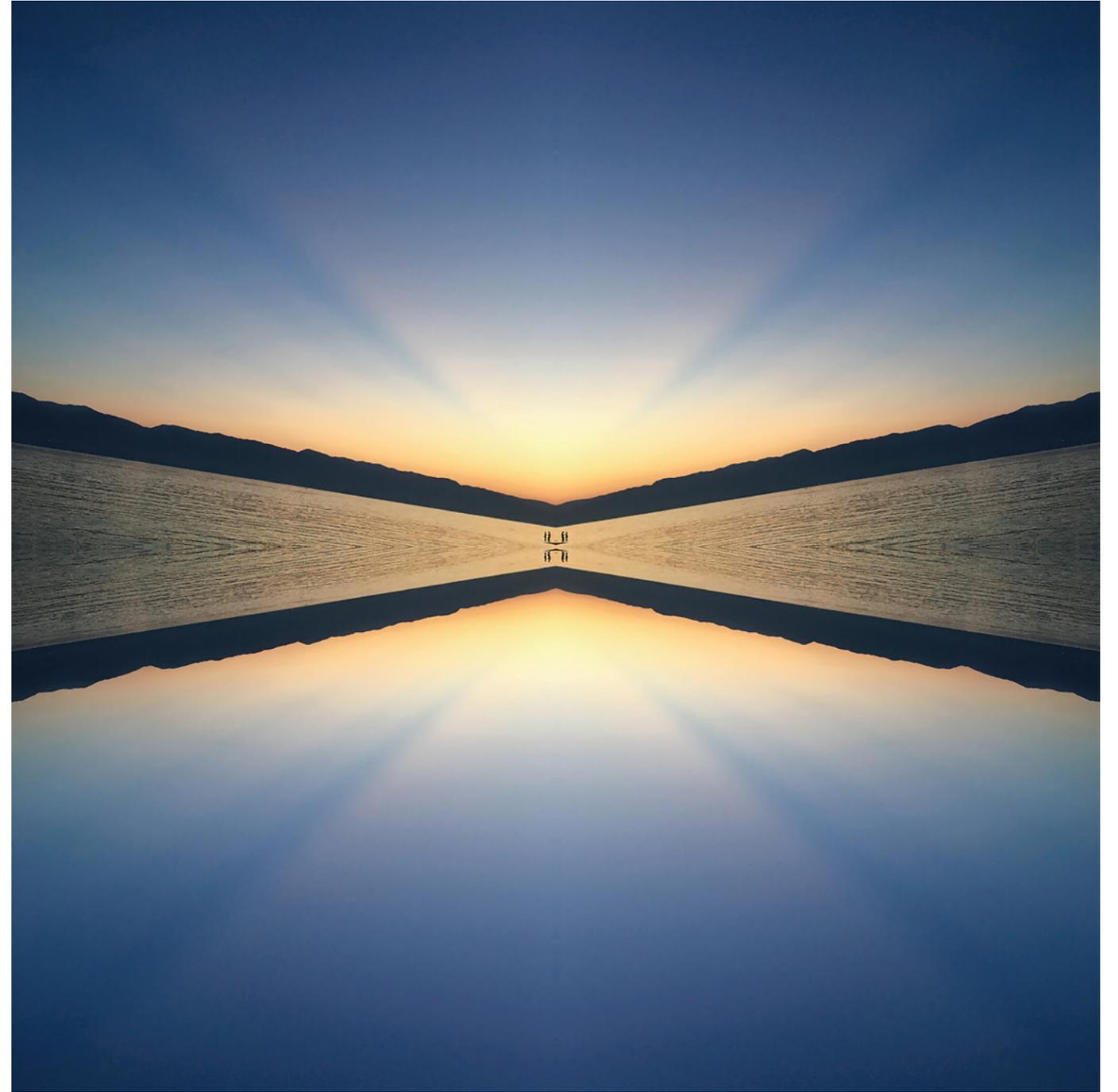
Solak hopes to evoke a similar response from viewers of her own work. As an artist, it is important for her to form an emotional bond with the rest of the world. As she describes it, such a bond "makes living lighter, breathing easier and brings hope, which as a result contributes to the universal consciousness, goodwill, strength, and wisdom in the world."



*Yorganix*, Screenprint, 12"x16", 2016.



*The Beauty of Coincidence 1*, Photograph printed onto white cotton sateen and polyester chiffon fabric, 12"x12", 2017.



*The Beauty of Coincidence 2*, Photograph printed onto white cotton sateen and polyester chiffon fabric, 12"x12", 2017.



*The Beauty of Coincidence Exhibition Gallery, Image Installation showing photographs printed onto white cotton sateen and polyester chiffon fabrics, 12"x 12" each, 2017.*

# LISA TENG

By Ricardo Chavez

For both subjects and viewers, Lisa Teng's multimedia installations are more than simply art; they are powerful healing experiences for dealing with traumatic life events. Participation in her work necessitates the formation of friendship and trust, which then allows her subjects to divulge the personal stories that shape the compositions of her portraits. Photographing them serves as one part of her process; Teng then experiments with her images and the space around them to create an intimate atmosphere that complements the gravity of the stories and evokes empathy in her viewers.

The culmination of this ever-evolving process occurred in Teng's 2017 MFA thesis show *Moiré*, which featured the portraits of ten individuals printed on silk and suspended in the gallery space. Silk, being a delicate but strong material, reflects both the vulnerability and courage needed by her subjects to share their stories with her and the viewer. By hanging the translucent images from the ceiling, Teng invites viewers to walk around them and, using their smartphones, listen to recordings of the subjects telling their stories of abuse, suicide, and loss of hope. Adding all these layers makes for a multisensory viewing experience that intensifies the emotional power of her photographs.

For Teng, the term *moiré* denotes not just the silk material and its appearance, but also the life events that shape the kind of people we have become (a reference to the *Moirai* or Fates of Greek mythology). Noting the lack of empathy in the world around her, the Teng creates works that speak to universal human moments of hardship. By facing hardship head on, Teng cultivates strength in not only the individuals sharing their stories, but also the people listening to those stories and reflecting on the events that shaped their own lives.



*Moiré*, Moiré Exhibition View, Pigment Print on silk, multi-media (including sound), 25"x 40" or 40"x25", 2017.



*Moiré*, Moiré Exhibition View, Pigment Print on silk, multi-media (including sound), 25"x 40" or 40"x25", 2017.



David C. from the Moiré project, Moiré Exhibition View, Pigment Print on silk, multi-media (including sound), 25"x 40", 2017.



Rose C. from the Moiré project, Moiré Exhibition View, Pigment Print on silk, multi-media (including sound), 25"x 40", 2017.

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