

Mind the Gap



SENIOR STUDIO ART MAJORS 2023 EXHIBITION

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SENIOR STUDIO ART MAJORS 2023

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THE TROUT GALLERY
THE ART MUSEUM OF DICKINSON COLLEGE

acknowledgements | *Mind the Gap*

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Eleanor Conover
Assistant Professor of Art

introduction | *Mind the Gap*

When the Senior Seminar class visited New York City last October, one student nearly missed boarding a busy subway car. Another student instinctively (and heroically) reached out his hand, forcing the sliding doors to remain open, creating space and time for the other to leap from the platform into the train. We were leaving the Edward Hopper show at the Whitney Museum of American Art behind: a show that surprisingly seemed to touch nearly every student—and me—in Hopper’s moody sensitivity, light, loneliness, empty theaters, lingering glances. The show had opened the day before, and we navigated the sixth floor of the museum amidst a buoyant sea of New Yorkers who could have, in their density, just as easily been trying to find their seats at Yankee Stadium. It was a real crowd, and it took about as much effort to get up close to Hopper’s paintings as it did to make that train.

Relativity aside, time on Earth is understood to be passing according to a constant continuum, though we all know it often seems to be moving too slow or too fast for our liking. Such was the case in March 2020, when many of these artists were first-year students at Dickinson, unaware that they were about to be thrust into a Hopper painting themselves. Suddenly, many of us were stuck at home, finding new interest in the way the shadow of our window changed shape in the late afternoon, an unlikely protagonist by 2019 standards. “What is the world like out there? Are you singing in the tunnels?” writes this year’s Stellfox Writer in Residence Ada Limón of weathering the pandemic in her poem “Banished Wonders.”¹

Of course, the seminar exhibition title invokes Britishness and subway stations, because as we have discussed this year, readers (and viewers) unfailingly bring their own, learned associations to the work. Yet the phrase emerged from a discussion about ideas of betweenness, the interstitial. In considering this, I turn to *Near to the Wild Heart*, the Ukrainian-born Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector’s debut novel. The protagonist Joana awakens in the middle of the night:

“The dense, dark night was cut down the middle, split into two black blocks of sleep. Where was she? Between the two pieces, looking at them (the one she had already slept and the one she had yet to sleep), isolated in the timeless and the spaceless, an empty gap.”²

This liminal moment is immediately recognizable, simultaneously conjuring a state of mind, as well as an accessible abstract image. It is one we can all likely connect to our lived experience of recent time, in the dark of night’s strange physicality and ability to moor and unmoor. Like this passage, students in this show work across registers of representation and abstraction, *mining* the gap, as Lispector does with her narration.

In locating themselves within and around this so-called gap, these students signal that they know what it means to live in conditions of time and space that can only pretend to be objective. Formally, they are sensitive to the in-betweenness of negative space, silence, refusal to be named or categorized. Some hold an ambivalence toward definitive likeness, a faith in the telling of fiction, or a yearning to look forward and backward all at once. They are steeped in these more recent years of uncertainty and shadows, as well as some making-of-trains, and singing-in-tunnels. (These students also play the piano, the violin; they are athletes, radio hosts, and computer programmers, all of which emerges in the making). To the twelve hopeful, hardworking artists in this show, I offer congratulations. You have been a sincere pleasure to work with this year.

Eleanor Conover
Assistant Professor of Art
April 2023

¹ Ada Limón, “Banished Wonders” in *The Hurting Kind*, Second Edition, (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2022), 29.

² Clarice Lispector, *Near to the Wild Heart*, trans. Alison Entrekin, (New York: New Directions, 2012), 123.



On Sunday, oil on canvas, 80 x 50 x 2 inches, 2023

| *kate* altman

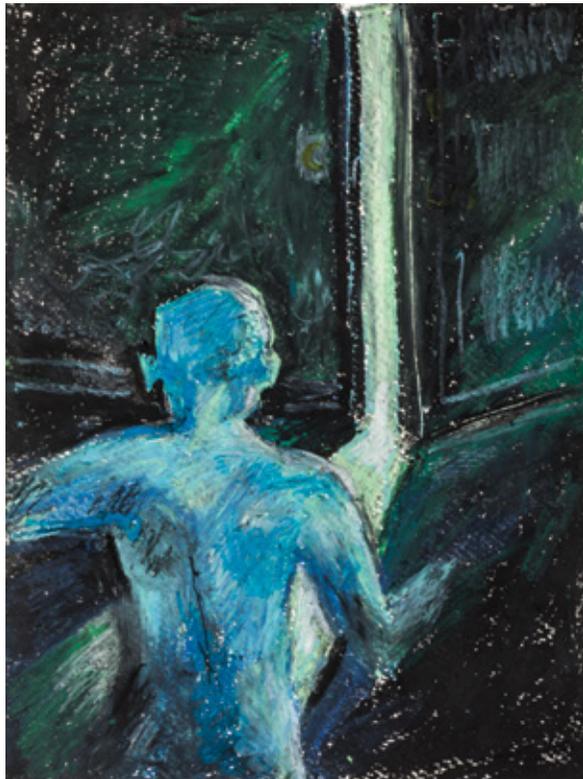
This past December, the foothills of Northern Colorado were hit with a storm of wet and heavy snow. The following power outage led me to perch in front of my fireplace and rediscover my favorite picture books from growing up. In this discovery, I found the origins of my identity. Much like people and place, stories inform who we are and who we become. The ways I like to wear my hair, the pictures I like to paint, and the stories I like to tell seemed to all originate from these books. In terms of identity, they teach us how to “play pretend” with something we are not. All grown up now, these moments of pretending are subtle. Maybe it’s the way you stare at the stars, or the way shadows become monsters on an empty street. In these moments, where you can’t help but turn into a child again, we all once again play pretend. As a result, many of us will find that however much we grow, however much we change, fiction and pretend remain a part of who we are.

My work pertains to the stories and experiences of childhood in fiction, specifically the act of playing pretend in terms of identity. So much of growing up consists of figuring out who you are: what role you want to play in the larger narrative of your life. The figurative paintings I create aim to capture the moments when one is harkened back to adolescence. These paintings contain more traditional elements of realism melded with the fictional. Certain elements are distorted or added to shape a fantastical world into reality. This abstract disfigurement of trees, shadows, or space challenges the viewer to interpret the narrative in their own regard. In this way, I leave you to question what is real and what is not, and perhaps to wonder if the difference matters at all.

While I experiment with a wide variety of mediums, I often work with oil paint due to its extraordinarily long and respected history. The medium stands in contrast to illustration and children’s narratives, which are often considered in a lower hierarchy of artistic value. These materials work to question the supposed distinguishing of “high art.” Why are certain things worth respecting more than others? With subject matter, I ask similar questions about how we value our experimenting with identities from youth. I work mostly on a larger scale: Aesthetically, I enjoy the way something large overpowers a space and brings the viewer into the painting. Additionally, I enjoy making the viewer look up. This simple action is childlike in nature and instills a sense of wonder.



Like the Wolf, oil on canvas, 18 x 16 x 1 inches, 2023



Footsteps, oil pastel on paper, 9 x 12 inches, 2023



On Ice, oil on canvas, 60 x 45 x 1 inches, 2023



Triptrash, fire grate, yarn, marine debris, doily, driftwood, porcelain baby foot, found fabric, trunk, 63 x 24 x 26 inches, 2022-23

| *nathaniel* chaves

A small cardboard sign hangs from the skeleton key, locked in the door of Nonna's linen closet: a warning not to let Bella the cat slip inside. Mountains of old sheets, blankets, and pillowcases would envelop her in a second—or else she'd seek to stay in there forever. A small, circular window shines through on the wall opposite the door: a rack of lightbulbs, odd vacuum pieces, and the occasional electric blanket rest in a wire cart below. To the left, you'd find towels: beach, shower, face, floor, stolen, borrowed, gifted, and ancient. Some are embroidered with hotels and resorts from far-off sands, or with teams from the city. Two towels are never to be borrowed: the defunct furniture company and the monopoly place towel—their use is strictly prohibited. On the right-hand side are the blankets, bed sheets, covers, sets, quilts, and so on.

Staying with Nonna over the summer, I'd sleep in the American-themed room. Stars and stripes lined the shower curtain, towels, rug, and bed sheets. A poster from Jasper Johns' exhibit at the Whitney featuring his iconic American Flag hung on the wall. As I would board the ferry to go visit, I knew that the same Winnie the Pooh sheets would be waiting for me, as well as the smell of mothballs and oak.

After years spent in the waters of Long Island Sound, these boards lost their structure and rigidity, and the low tides offered me a chance to gather and bring them home. Slowly amassing in my studio, these planks of wood would form shelves, like that of a rummage waiting to be adorned and piled high with discarded linens.

Tacky, dated, soft, and worn, these fabrics come from dozens of different locations along the East Coast. While they once held a purpose within someone's life, their patterns now speak to the time periods that one can recognize within their worn surfaces. This collection is my synthesis of the driftwood's time within the water, and the many hands that the fabrics passed through. As a response to the passing of time, I've manipulated the layers of fabric through abrasion, revealing what is hidden, concealed behind and beneath. Within these fabrics are the soft and fond memories of distant family members or friends. Slowly becoming worn and faded, the holes within them allow the viewer to look beyond the surface.



Scorched, stained glass panel, wooden frame, quilt, glue, screws, LED lighting, 18.5 x 27.5 x 3 inches, 2023



Scorched, stained glass panel, wooden frame, quilt, glue, screws, LED lighting, 18.5 x 27.5 x 3 inches, 2023



Kiss on the Nose, fabric, driftwood, clothing, yarn, staples, glue, wire, nails, 23 x 28 x 4.5 inches, 2023



Super Powers, street sign, fabric, car keys, screws, staples, head light bracket, 32 x 30 x 3 inches, 2023



Hold It Together, wooden furniture pieces, fabric, wire, rice, 72 x 36 x 48 inches, 2022

| josephine cook

This is a collection of finished works, but on a certain level they operate like studies. Each one is an attempt to acknowledge the shifting roles between my body and myself, and to contextualize my feelings surrounding that shift. In a process that made me feel more like a scientist than an artist, I landed on a series of questions:

What if I reverse engineered my own body?

How would I do it?

What would that tell me?

This body of work is my attempt at an answer.

The first question stems from frustration. If I can't understand my body as it exists, then I will break it down into component parts, learn how they come together, and reconstruct myself into a new whole.

Rather than take those goals in a literal direction (and create Frankenstein's monster), my second question was asked, and easily answered. For me, sewing is familiar, comfortable, and a place where I have history and memory and connection. Importantly, it's an area where I have practice. It's a strange experience to see a representation of your own body in pieces, but drafting sewing patterns translates my body into a language that I understand, and allows me to create self-portraits where even the material feels relevant to a depiction of the self.

Despite the personal significance of the medium, not all my work is made from fabric. By not restricting myself to soft sculpture alone, a material contrast is introduced. The image of pushing a needle and thread through paper, forcing fabric to appear sculpted like clay, or the ancient act of mending, depicted digitally, all suggest a tension that mirrors the discrepancy between the knowledge I have and the knowledge required to understand the form and function of my own body.

I think that the answer to my third question would be impossible for me to fully articulate within a single artist statement, but I can share what I've learned about myself as an artist. I started this year with the goal to move away from art as an academic endeavor. I wanted to be less analytical: to instead let art function as a means of emotional expression. What I've learned is that it's hard for me to separate logic from any part of my thought process. Trying to subvert the way I think and explore ideas beyond my initial instincts resulted in work that to me felt forced and uninspired.

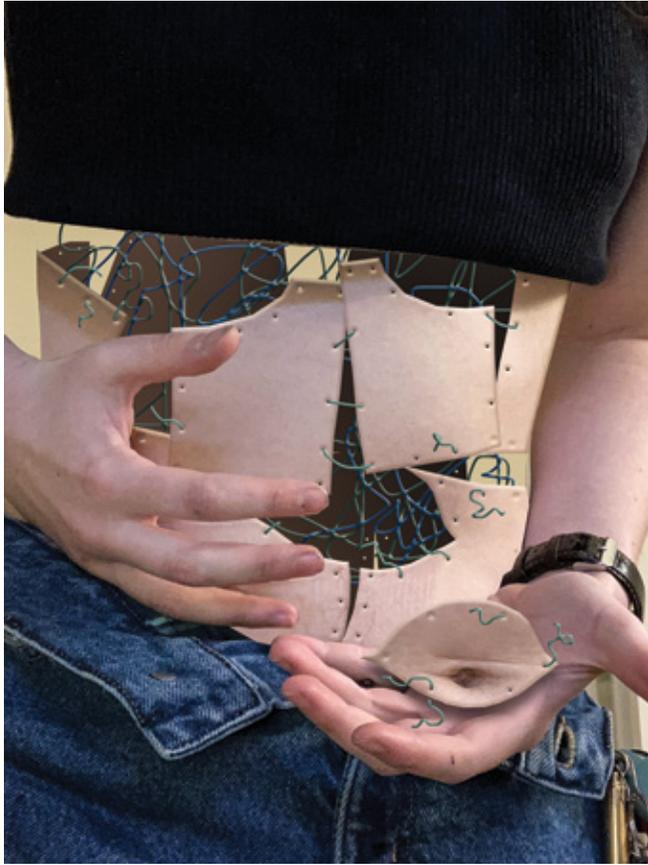
This final body of work was born from a circular journey. Coming to terms with the fact that there are some things that I cannot understand is an ongoing process, but I've found that artmaking allows me to grapple with the things that I cannot control in an environment where I call all the shots. My art is a learning process, but I am no longer creating work for the sole purpose of studying form, composition, or material: it has become the language through which I learn about and study my relationship to my body.



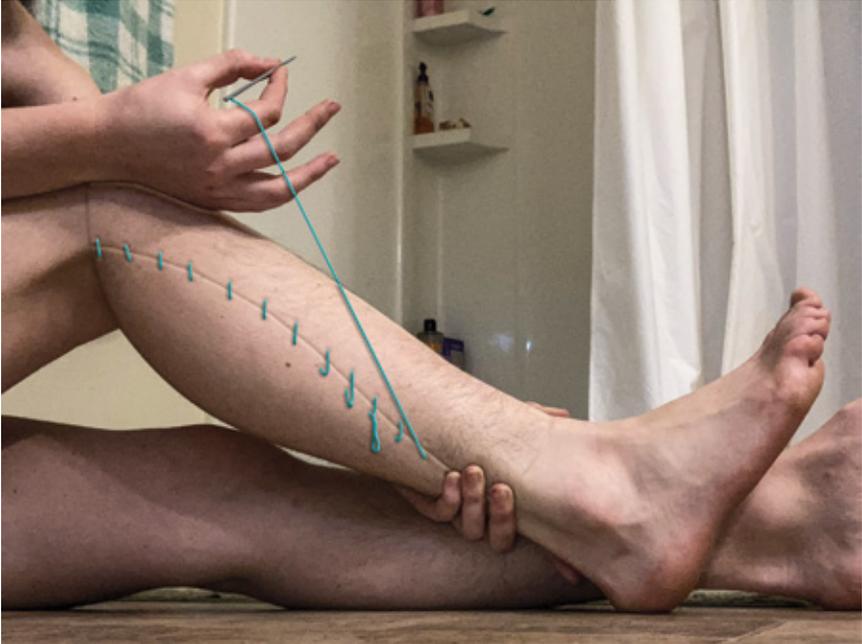
Self-Portrait, denim, thread, stuffing, 24 x 14 x 18 inches, 2023



To Pieces (1 of 3), digital image, 2023



To Pieces (2 of 3), digital image, 2023



To Pieces (3 of 3), digital image, 2023

WEEKLY.



UNITED STATES STEAM-SLOOP "SHANLEY"
AT PICKENS, FLORIDA.--[SEE PAGE 246.]

Yemoja in Transit, linocut on found newspaper, 14 x 16.5 inches, 2023

| facade fagoroye

I believe storytelling is an intrinsic part of the human experience because it is how we first begin to make sense of this strange, horrifying, and yet beautiful world we live in. Mythology has explained why the sun and the moon are in the sky; fairytales and folklore have warned us of virtues and vices. History discerns between fact and fiction. There are hundreds upon hundreds of these stories, and yet there is no universal and agreed upon history, folktale, or myth. A story is shaped through the lens of differing human experiences, languages, cultures, races, politics, genders, etc. My work in illustrative painting, drawing, and collage is an exploration into the complexity of being human and the narratives we have constructed to make sense of our reality.

I grew up in Washington, D.C., where narrative illustration, particularly in picture books and graphic novels, played a large role in my life and how I have explored my American, African American, and African ancestry. Inspired by the stories that I consumed throughout my childhood, I create dynamic, tense scenes that illustrate the themes of “the chaotic,” “the unsettling,” and “the unresolved.” In following the tradition of storytelling, I often re-adapt and re-contextualize these stories visually through African American/African diasporic characters and iconographies. One of my earliest series, *Alligator Skins*, retells an old Swazi folktale about a young woman covering herself in baboon skins to hide her beauty, a trait that has brought her nothing but misery. In the end, she is “rewarded” for her modesty by being married to a neighboring king. In these drawings and collages, I reimagine baboons as alligators, and the mountainous landscape of Swaziland with the American folkloric setting of the Southern swampland. In this and other work, I highlight and sometimes visually critique principal storytelling tropes found not only in Black diasporic storytelling, but also in the Western tradition. This includes elements such as the virtue of beauty, the symbolism of numbers (*Three brothers, Three Sons*), benevolent spirits (*Ti pye zorang*), and the symbolism of blackness and whiteness (*The Ballad of Black Beast*). My visual language and aesthetics for my figures are heavily influenced by Yoruba ceremonial art and design. The exaggerated forms often depicted in figurines, altarpieces, and masks honoring deities and good spirits, as well as terra cotta depicting ancient monarchies, are a conscious motif in much of my work.

In addition to looking back to the past to create the fantastical in my work, I also seek to look toward the future to emphasize the timelessness of the values and questions raised in old storytelling. Through exploring the genre of Afrofuturism, I am also interested in pushing preconceived ideas (often told through the Western narrative) that relegate Black figures to particular places and time.

My art-making process involves juxtaposition, layering of different images through loose malleable brushwork, and hard, graphic linework and historical images. With this, I often incorporate the medium of bookmaking (through the artist book, zine, etc.) as a framework. For me, the act of collaging references the complexity of storytelling as a whole: A single narrative is not simply surface level, as it often involves the melding of different materials and ideas.



Welcome to America, linocut on paper with ink, graphite, and acrylic, 14 x 16.5 inches, 2023



The Ballad of Black Beast, oil on canvas, 14 x 16.5 x 1.5 inches, 2023



Installation view, *Pieces of Me*, bandages, cotton fabric, chiffon, poly- fil, variable dimensions, 2023



Detail of installation view, *Pieces of Me*, bandages, cotton fabric, chiffon, poly- fil, variable dimensions, 2023

| *stephanie* henderson

As someone who has moved around a lot, engaged with many different sports and activities, and constantly experienced changing friend groups, I've worn a lot of different versions of myself. Every time I went into a new setting, met people, or even started an activity, I would always create a new version of myself to "fit in," even when I didn't have to. Even now, I am still searching for who I am, which has inspired my work.

In the last 10 years, the struggle I've had with mental and physical illness has constantly impacted the way I see and move throughout the world. Regardless of where I go, who I meet, or whatever version of myself I put on, my mental or physical illness is always with me. Even in the studio. If you can't relate to this, it is still likely that medical devices have been a part of your life at one point. Whether it's wrapping a sprained ankle, getting your flu shot, or going to the doctor for a checkup, everyone has experienced this at least once, if not more than once. For me, it's inescapable, all-encompassing, and part of my identity, even if I don't want it to be.

My work references a relationship between identity and illness. I primarily use ready-made medical materials in combination with sewing and casting to create work depicting the body or the torso. In most of these pieces, I have used bandages, syringes, or other materials, which together create a form that is the representative human form. Often when I think about my work, I tend to focus on the materials I use and their tactility. The texture, weight, and function all impact my work tremendously. My current body of work has bandages incorporated in every piece. To me, bandages represent a second skin that protects and supports the body. I have specifically chosen to represent the torso in my work because its function is to contain and protect your internal organs. As you look through each of these pieces, regardless of which one you look at or choose, illness is still part of its identity. Within each, a medical material has either been used to make up the piece or has been embedded into the form. These medical materials are therefore instrumental in the work and serve as a constant reminder of the impact medicine holds in daily life.



Detail of *Pieces of Me No. 3*, bandages, face masks, thread, poly-fil, 19 x 26 x 8 inches, 2023



Detail of *Pieces of Me No. 1*, bandages, cotton fabric, chiffon, poly-fil, 16 x 20 x 7 inches, 2023



Pieces of Me No. 1, bandages, cotton fabric, chiffon, poly-fil, 16 x 20 x 7 inches, 2023



March 20th, 2011 (Nuclear Plant Explosion in Fukushima), oil on canvas, 80 x 60 x 1.25 inches, 2023

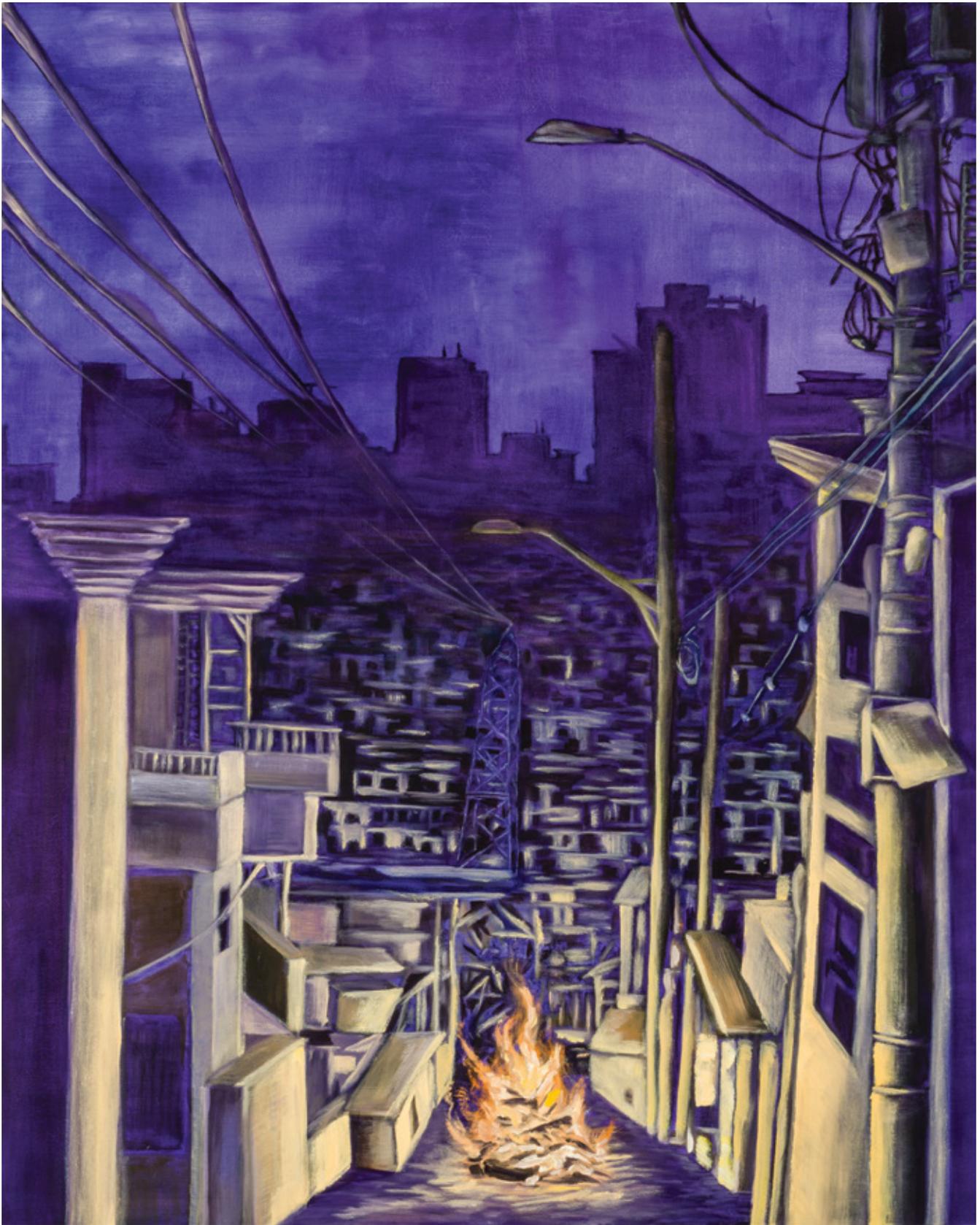
| caitlyn longest

Oil rigs sinking. Nuclear plants exploding. Coal mines collapsing. We are desensitized to these events and have come to expect them, yet they both horrify and mesmerize us. As an avid fan of apocalyptic shows, I wonder: Why are we so intrigued by the notion of our society crumbling around us? And how can something contain both volatility and beauty?

My work explores the contradiction of human fascination with, and passivity toward, disaster. It raises questions about spectatorship, destruction, reinvention, control, and negligence. Each of these disasters was preventable: they were the result of a failure to act. Each catastrophe involves the mismanagement of resources such as oil, coal, and nuclear power (often for monetary gain), and alludes to our collective failure to address another issue with the potential for catastrophic environmental consequences: climate change.

Oil paint allows for a great amount of depth and luminance, and a slowing down of process and images. The scale of my work orients the viewer within the space, and the unconventional colors allude to the sensationalization of disaster in the media. I draw inspiration for my approach to painting fire and explosions from the works of Ed Ruscha, John Constable, and J. M. W. Turner. When I paint these scenes, I am particularly interested in the warm color palette of fire and explosions, the juxtaposition between the rigidity of built structures and the fluidity of smoke and flame, and the illusion of control over an uncontrollable situation. The paintings are harrowing, imposing, and chaotic. Though my work captures the fleeting moments of each disaster, it also memorializes these events and raises questions about their effect on our world today.

I was born on March 20th, 2001. Each of these disasters occurred on that day in the recent past. For me, this creates a dialogue between the personal and the impersonal, the small scale and the large event. I grew up in post-industrial New England, which has given me a greater awareness and sensitivity toward the relationships between manmade structures and our environment. Dickinson College is also within the fallout radius of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in Londonderry Township, PA, when a series of human errors led to a partial meltdown of the nuclear reactor. Though I paint disasters across the world, some are closer than we may think. My documentation of substantial environmental crises engages with impressionistic landscape painting and genres of history painting, though the imagery is fixed in the present time. My preparation for each piece consists of research and sourcing various reference images so that I am able to construct a space that is both fictive and rooted in reality.



March 20th, 2019 (Nationwide Blackouts in Venezuela), oil on canvas, 60 x 48 x 1.25 inches, 2023



March 20th, 2007 (Methane Gas Explosion in a Coal Mine in Serbia), oil on canvas, 60 x 48 x 1.5 inches, 2023



Women through the Generations, digital print, 17 x 22 inches, 2023

| *anika* naimpally

My medium is photography, and my current work involves synthesizing ideas of place and displacement and its relationship to identity formation. It also has a specific narrative that symbolizes a passage of time in my personal life story. I am using images that I have taken, in addition to an archive of images that were not taken by me. I use collage and digital image manipulation in Photoshop to physically shift and deconstruct images, initiating a metaphor about displacement in a human narrative.

Over winter break, I spent time reflecting on the work that I made in the fall, which was about transience in and around Carlisle, PA. I was exploring different territories and photographing my surroundings, trying to create a connection between place, subject, and time. I was making work similar to the work I had created when I studied abroad in Rome in the spring of 2022. Upon my return from Rome to the States, I grew so much and did not want to let go of that notion of exploration. However, I felt slightly confined in a place where I had a hard time finding interest in the subject matter.

I was born in Hyderabad, India, and adopted at the age of 3 months into an amazing family. I settled in the U.S. with my family, living in Minnesota. We moved to Tokyo, Japan, shortly after my sister was born, and then later moved to Northern Virginia where I currently live. When I was younger, I knew that when I was older, I wanted to document my journeys. I traveled a lot as a child, but some of the places I went to are not in my memories but in the memories of others who have told me about them. I was raised by my parents and my maternal grandparents who share stories and memories of my childhood that I have never heard. This body of work returns to the spirit of that thought, using a personal archive of images that have helped me reflect on and interact with the events that I do not fully remember. It also helps me to synthesize memories, interacting with previous versions of myself.



First Adventure to Norway for a Wedding, digital print, 17 x 22 inches, 2023



Love from your Spirit, digital print, US Letter size, 2023



Father, Grandfather, and Granddaughter, digital print, 17 x 22 inches, 2023



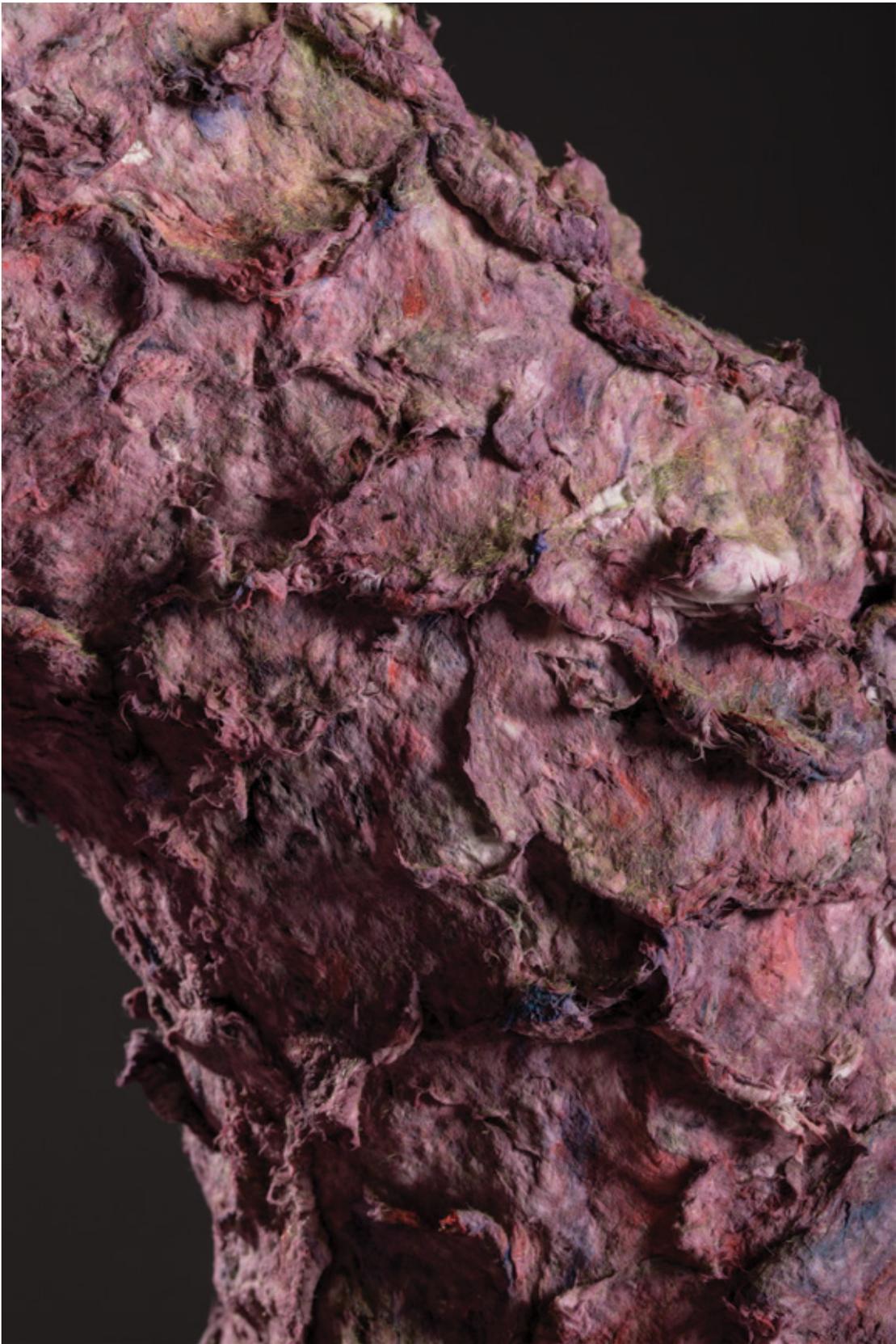
Sinkhole, paper pulp, paint, plaster, anti-static packing foam, insulation foam, masking tape, 44 x 18 x 13 inches, 2023

| *Belle* O'Shaughnessy

Because the nature of sculpture is to occupy physical space, there is an etiquette we uphold regarding art objects, specifically in the world of gallery dwellers, to maintain a respectful distance. The interstitial space between us and the object can influence our response to it differently: we step back to understand scale, walk around to observe form. We draw closer, maybe to inspect material or marvel at detail. An object's tactility and surface can evoke a temptation to touch, feel—connect. We hesitate to touch an art object—a sense of rule following, or good manners, holds your fingers at a respectful distance from the piece. I wonder: do we offer the same respect and distance, do we acknowledge the invisible barrier that exists in the personal space of people? Personal space is often invaded, breached, or violated—subject to weak-willed, temptation-possessed fingers. As a young woman, my experiences of learning to create and maintain personal space, and my memories of trespass, influence the formal and conceptual elements of the sculptures.

I am invested in how proximity to others creates unique physical, emotional, and energetic reactions, and I try to recreate these dynamics with sculpture. This interest in proximity has led me to content including sexuality, identity, and intimacy. The work attempts to make sense of human relationships through a visual language that evokes the history of what in 1966 critic Lucy Lippard termed “eccentric abstraction.” In my making and research, I consider artists Louise Bourgeois, Lynda Benglis, Eve Hesse, and Henry Moore.

Paper pulp allows for free-form sculpting and offers a more direct working process that is contingent on touch and contact. Paper pulp is versatile: I can transform the color easily and add other materials to it to enhance or shift the texture, manipulating it to be reminiscent of stone, wood, chewed food, ground beef, skin, etc. The process of tearing used paper, blending it into a pulp, and applying it to an armature is cathartic and meditative, allowing me to consider purposeful tactile transformation within the solitary space of the studio. In a sense, paper is a found object, like many of the materials I use to build armatures. Sourcing materials from the waste of others allows me to be spontaneous and responsive in the studio, and to practice being resourceful and mindful of sustainability in the art practice.



Detail, *Fishnet*, paper pulp, plaster, anti-static packing foam, masking tape, 28 x 29 x 45 inches, 2023



Untitled, paper pulp, 3 x 4 x 2 inches, 2022



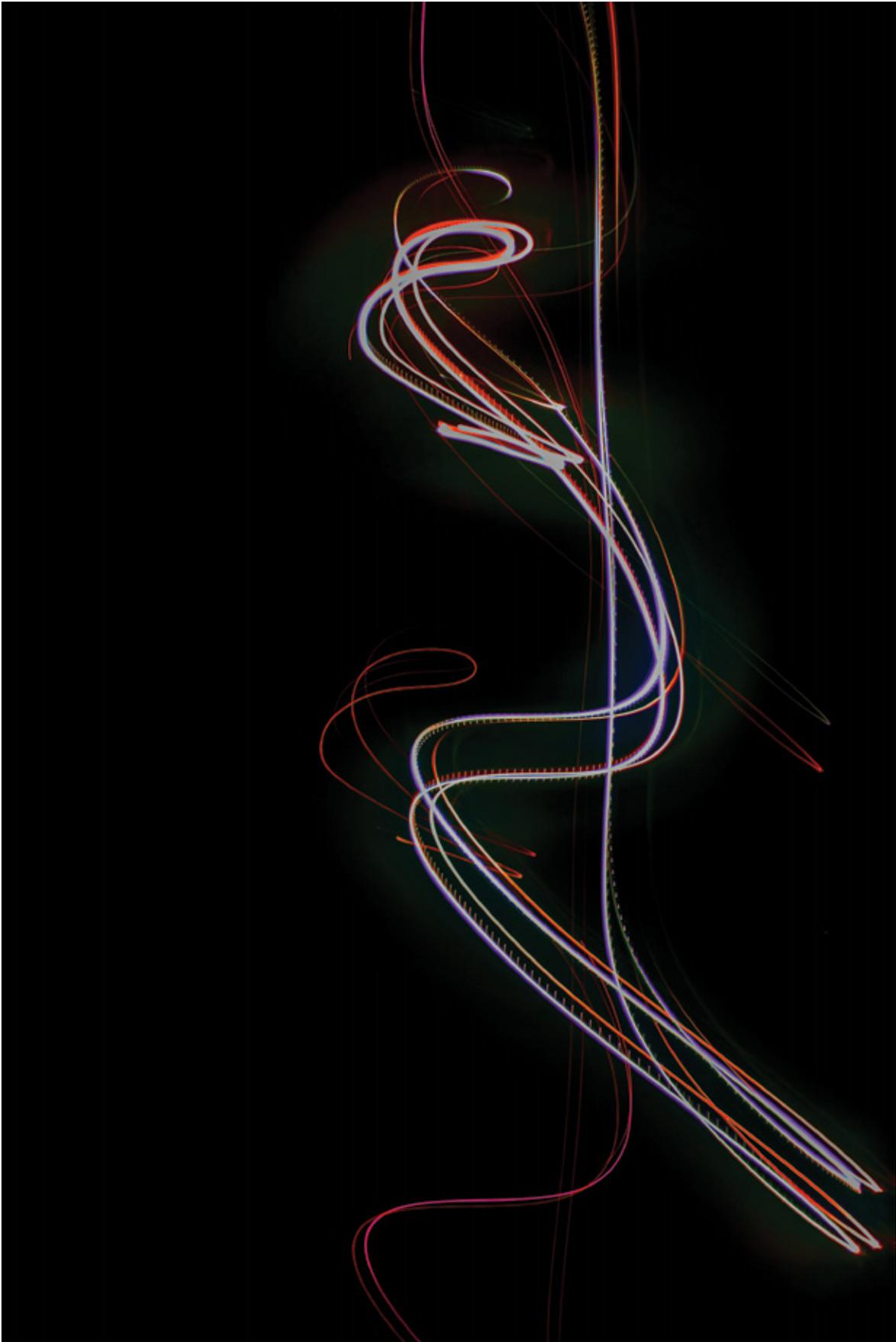
Self Portrait, paper pulp, 4 x 5 x 2 inches, 2023



Untitled, paper pulp, 4 x 2 x 2 inches, 2023



Untitled, paper pulp, 5 x 3 x 3 inches, 2023



Untitled, digital print, 22 x 17 inches, 2023

| *matthew* presite

Through my photography, I attempt to simplify the busy and eclectic world around me. The exposure to technology and social media, including the constant need for new styles, techniques, and aesthetics, has impacted my understanding of the visual world. While that has benefitted me and inspired me to create and experiment, it has also presented complications due to the never-ending flow of content. Just like too many things, too many images cause burnout and a lack of desire to continue with the creative process.

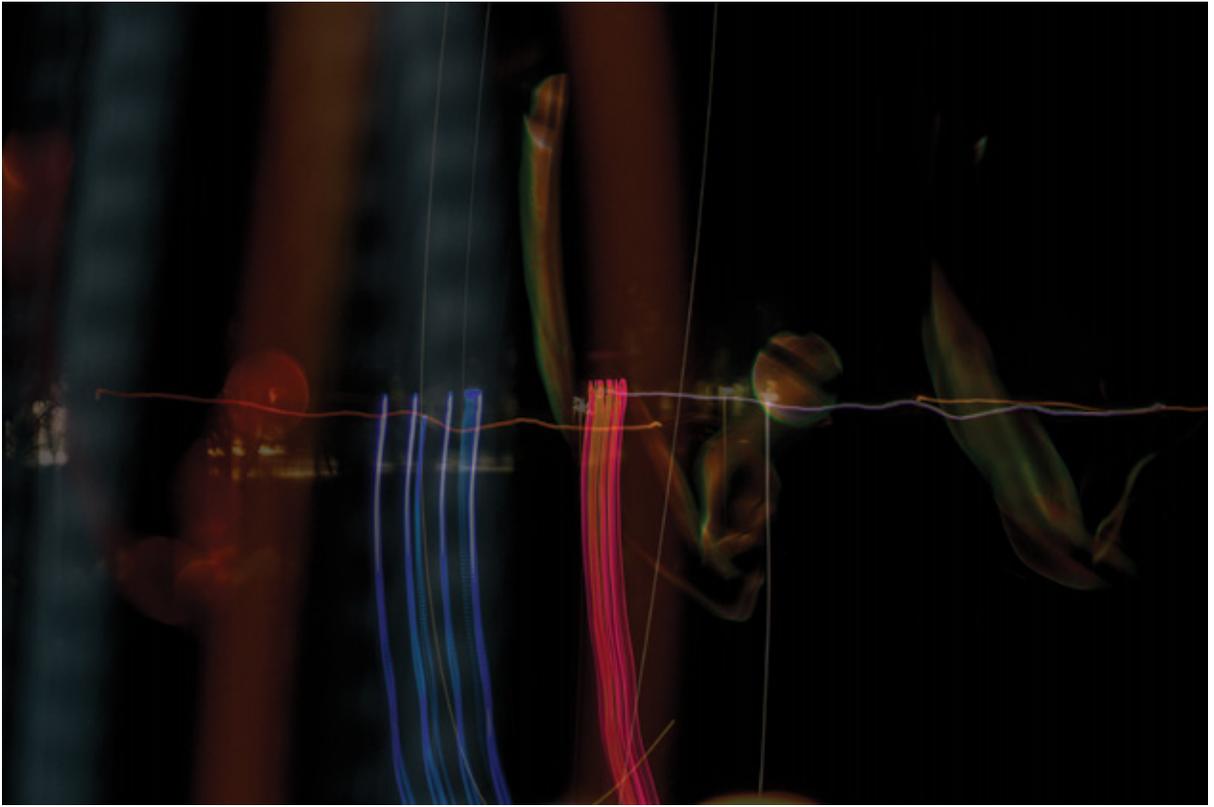
Photography for me is being able to go out any time of the day, any day of the week, and begin capturing images. I am not confined to a studio or one singular space. With my current process, I never really know what I want to go out and shoot: even the most unsuspecting spaces, such as the corner of a door frame, or a shadow cast on the ground, when transformed into two-dimensional photographic space take on a new and unfamiliar visual life.

This interest in candid shots has led me to photograph subjects in motion, whether it be a theatre practice or a tennis player serving for the match. The unexpected moments provide unusual angles, surprising color contrasts, and strange perspectives that I could have never contrived were I to meticulously plan ahead. Much like my interest in photography took me by surprise, I want my work to surprise, asking the viewer to slow down and to take their time trying to understand how something so common and ordinary can be manipulated in a way so that it is no longer something with which they associate so regularly.

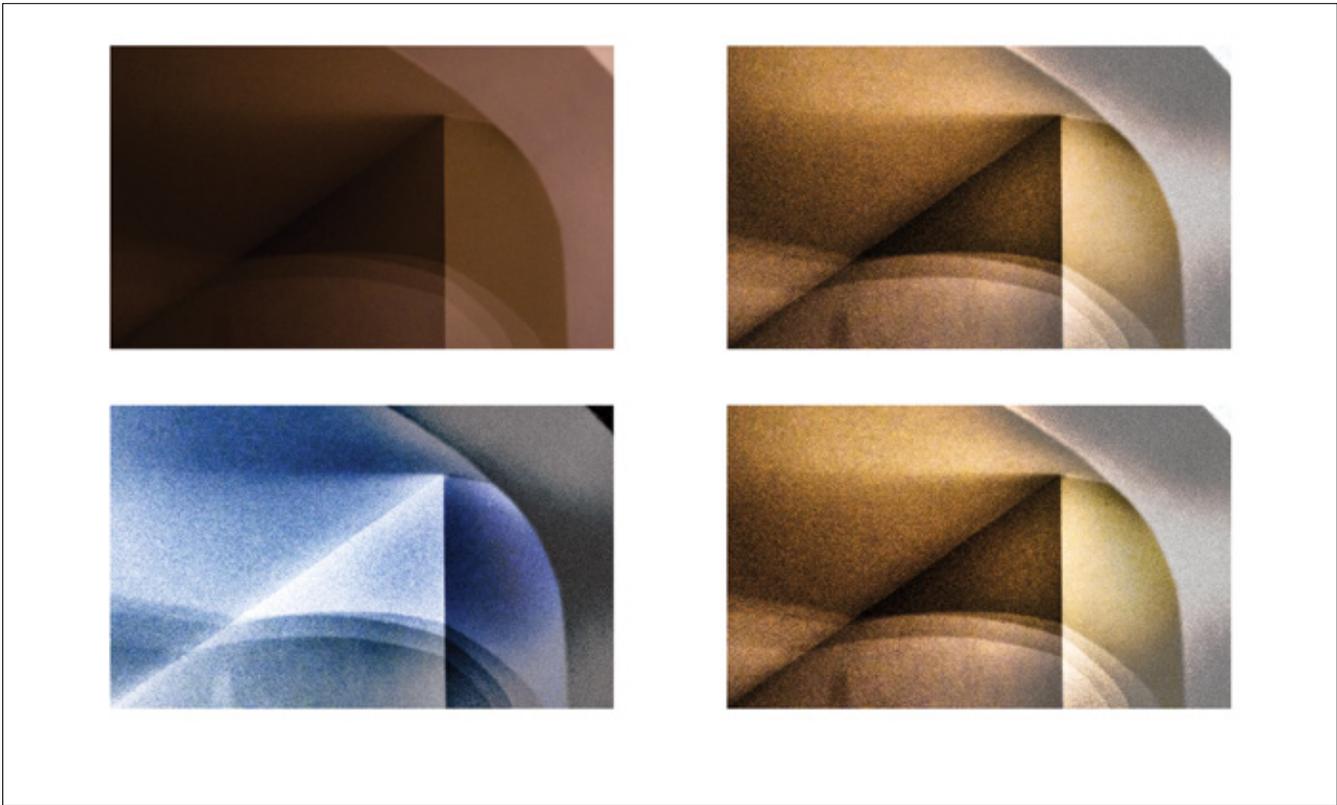
The relationship between the images in this body of work comes from shared simplicity and formal qualities. When making this collection, I appreciated how perspective played a large role in the read of the image. I focused on how I could change the illusion of space with careful, yet drastic manipulations of color, adding complexity to something so simple.



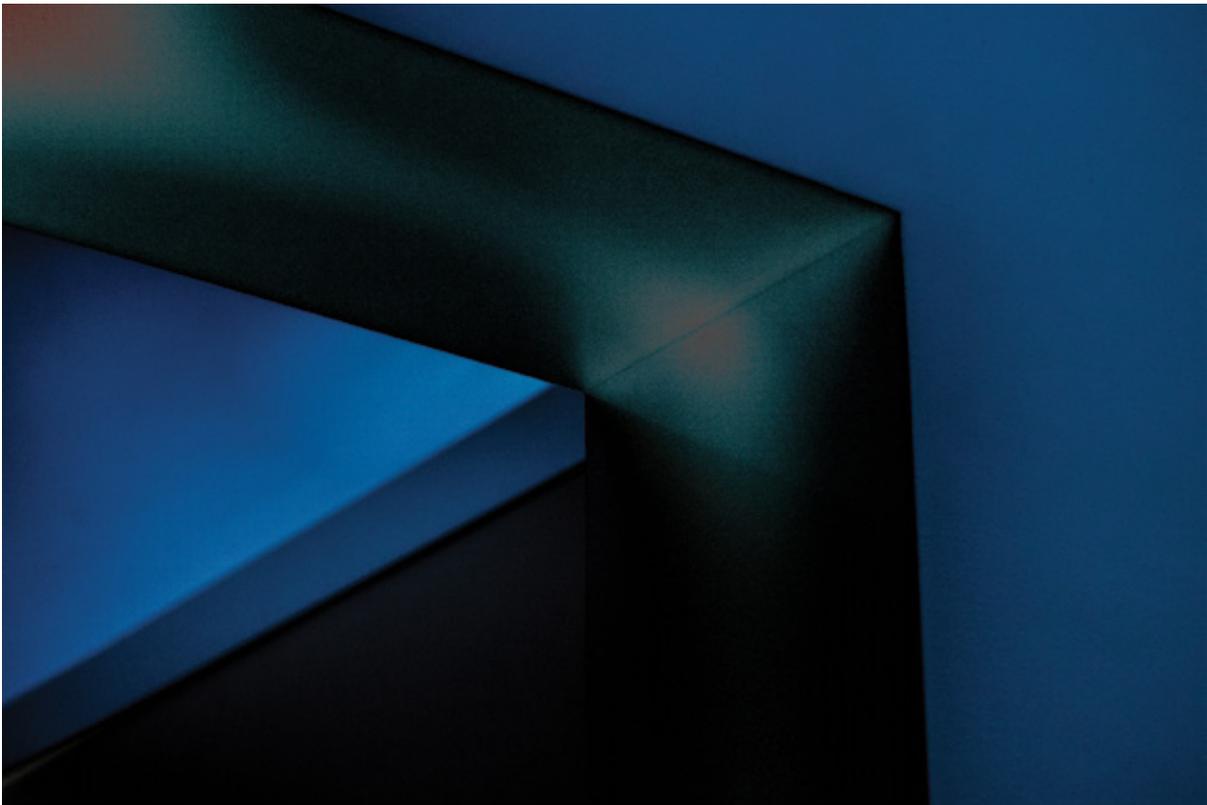
Cerebral, digital print, 17 x 22 inches, 2023



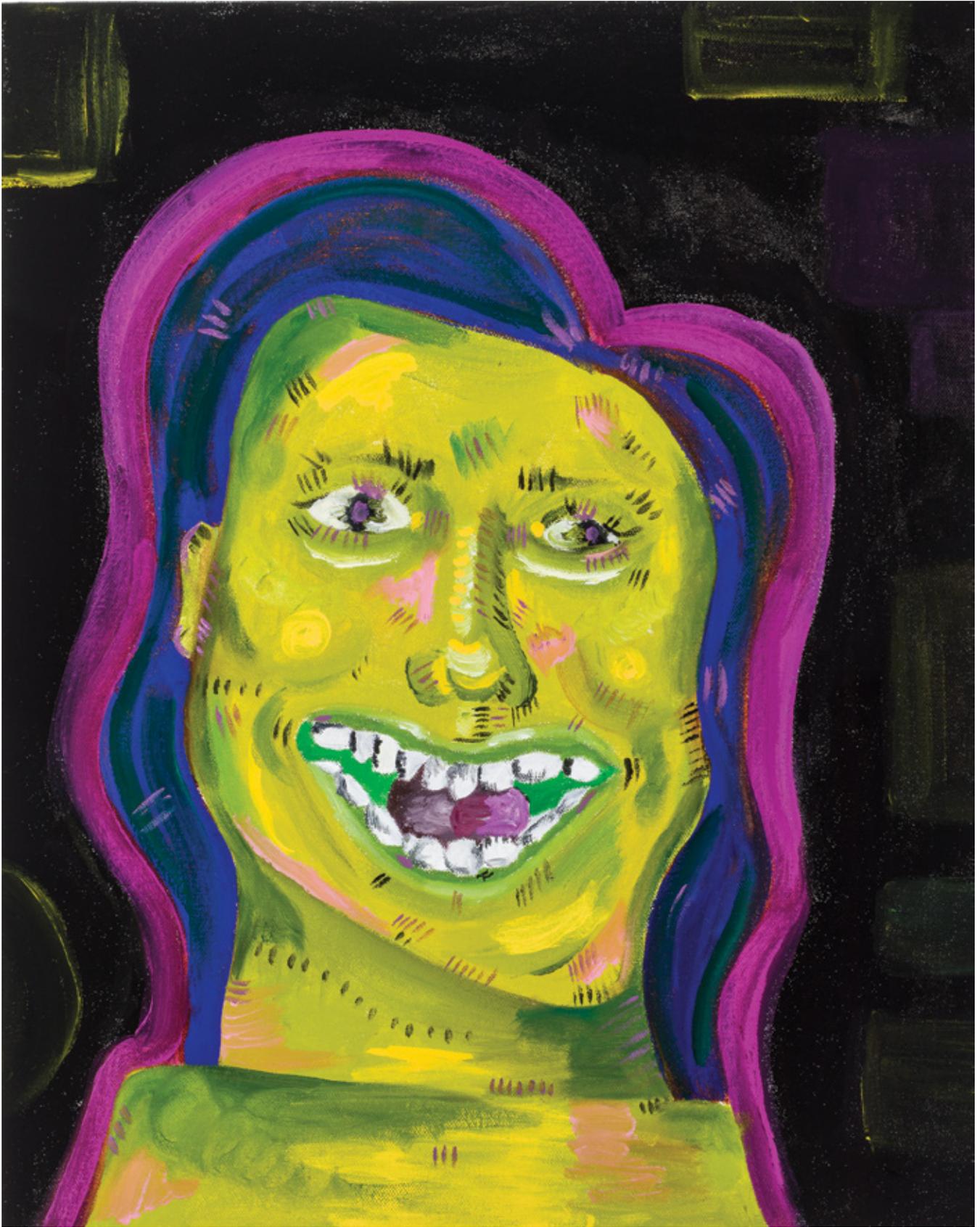
Solar, digital print, 17 x 22 inches, 2023



Four of a Kind, digital print, 7 x 11 inches, 2023



Untitled, digital print, 13 x 19 inches, 2023



CnT, oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2023

| *olivia* schapiro

Our perception is not the only perspective. College has taught me to look deeper into everything I do. As I navigate my work, a collaborative space has helped me to grow into a more introspective artist. The artistic process is not something that is straightforward or step-by-step. My process has taken a while to figure out and to discover what works best. At first, I felt like I needed to just get into the studio and paint—figure it out as I go—but I was often challenged when trying to intuitively build compositional space. I started creating loose, low-pressure drawings that began to inspire more formal paintings. Translating drawing to painting is more challenging than expected, but it has helped me find a direction.

My subjects are mainly figurative, creating a bridge between languages of cartooning and realism while also utilizing gesture. At times, they invoke the eerie and uncanny. My interpretation of the body contains notions of weirdness, while also retaining a sense of the familiar or familial. You had a lucid dream about someone you know and see them the next day. You're angry and upset with a friend, while sitting face-to-face with them. The work engages with the personification of swirling thoughts about anything and everything. All evoking a sense of awkwardness, these are moments anyone could imagine. I have chosen to draw on memorable life experiences or people which feel mundane, maybe even sad, yet are still highly real in my experience and imagination. The painter Peter Saul has had a large influence on my perspective, and the painter Dana Schutz has been an inspiration for how to comprehend color.

I have been very hesitant with what I want to say with my work. I feel pressure, as an artist, to convey some deep meaning with my work, but I have realized that I just want the viewer to see a bit of themselves in it. The human body has been such a primary subject for many historical works and have, in turn, set the beauty standard for different periods of time. In my work, my subjects are tired, unconventionally shaped, and a little bit deranged. I personally can see myself in those descriptors, and I think others can as well.



Inner Monologue, oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2023



Shout It Out Loud, oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2023



Vessels 3, ceramic stoneware, 10 x 8 x 9 inches, 2023

| iris shaker-check

I work in ceramics, primarily creating vessels. Ceramic vessels have a history of representing the body, which is understood in the way vessels are discussed technically: they have, for example, lips, feet, and bodies. I draw from the history of ceramic vessels to explore how bodies shape each other.

My vessels are created by wrapping slabs of clay around my hand, and molding them so they have a softness and also contain many of the bumps and divots of my hands. This allows for the slabs to have several of the features of a functioning vessel, such as an opening that leads to an interior. However, these vessels also move away from the functional form in that most cannot stand up on their own and thus require constant care. After I've created the individual vessels, I press and wrap them up against each other. This process shapes each vessel according to the imprints of the other vessels. When the vessels are together, they shape each other, and also collectively create an environment or space. This space is distinct from the physical space the vessels inhabit as independent forms; instead, I create an environment through the interaction of the vessels.

This environment is shaped by the pulling, layering, holding, contorting, squeezing, and hugging of the vessels in relation to one another. These actions create either a feeling of comfort or discomfort in the space. Oftentimes, however, the feelings evoked are both comfort and discomfort. Theorist Sarah Ahmed discusses how structures move and shape bodies, orienting them in specific directions. Bodies that cannot or will not orient themselves in those directions experience discomfort. Ahmed specifically expresses these ideas in terms of heterosexual spaces: "Heteronormativity functions as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape. These spaces are lived as comfortably as they allow bodies to fit in; the surfaces of social space are already impressed upon by the shape of such bodies."¹ The vessels I create reflect the comfort that I feel in spaces where I can orient myself in the desired way. Likewise, they express the discomfort I feel in spaces where I don't fit within the normative structure.

When I first encountered Ahmed's work, I could relate it to my experience as a gay person living in a heteronormative world. I knew the comfort of being in a queer space and the discomfort of being in a heteronormative space. I couldn't help but apply this same theory to my experience being neurodivergent, specifically as a dyslexic person living within neurotypical structures. I know what it is like to be in spaces within which I feel discomfort. I need accommodations to be able to survive in a working and educational system that was specifically built for neurotypical people; I have yet to experience such a system in which I am comfortable without needing accommodations.

Because of this, my artistic practice deals with the tension of finding and creating structures and spaces that orient me in such a way that I feel comfortable moving within them. At the same time, I do not know what these would look or feel like. The different gestures that are being enacted between the vessels are my attempts to confront, through tactility, the inherent conflict of trying to enact a comfortable space while, at the same time, not knowing how to do so. I also address this unknown through the use of color. The interiors of the vessels are a deep black that seem to extend forever into an unknown space. This black represents the grief and sadness that I have felt as I become more aware of the way in which normative spaces are structured and oriented to make me feel discomfort.

¹ Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 425.



Vessels 2, ceramic stoneware, 6 x 7 x 5 inches, 2023



Vessels 3, ceramic stoneware, 12 x 5 x 6 inches, 2023



Vessels 1, ceramic stoneware, 36 x 20 x 7 inches, 2022



Primate City, oil on canvas, 30 x 54 inches, 2023

A reservoir of unconscious recollections and reminiscences of past moments forms recurrent themes in my paintings. Growing up in Saigon, Vietnam, I have witnessed most of the city's rapid changes throughout my upbringing. Moving to the U.S. to pursue college, I felt my old memories—the walls I drew on, the beams I stared at, and the ground I set my feet on when I was little—slipping through my mind when I left. I realized that my identity had been deeply reflected and inscribed in my urban upbringing in Vietnam, resulting in the battle of growing from, outgrowing, and re-seeking a sense of identity in an unfamiliar space.

More and more memories are left behind when we move forward with life. I find myself gradually forgetting how I enjoyed Turtle Lake, or how the top of Notre Dame Cathedral was my favorite nap-time view when I was in middle school. The more I grew, the faster the city changed; when I left for a new place, I left parts of my identity behind. Contemplating what has been forgotten through the transition of the same city and through moving away from a familiar place, I look for a connection between myself in the past, myself in my hometown, and myself in the current space. Using painting to depict the forgotten, I treat my body of work as a time-based process to retrospectively question influences and moments that have shaped myself today.

I refer to abstract city locations like Turtle Lake, “Bồn kèn” Roundabout, or simply plastic chairs on the street or staircases. I also bring personal references to beloved individuals through images like flowers, suggesting the influences I have had. Intertwined with the references to urban structures—denoting the city scenes I was used to—are biomorphic forms and fragmented, distorted representations of the body. Resulting from my process of fragmenting body parts, unresolved images are metaphorical implications of incomplete recollections. These forms interact with surrounding elements like stairs or beams, suggesting estrangement, solitude, and human connection. The tension I experience when I am away from these familiar spaces is reflected in these visual relationships, which allows me, in turn, to engage in conversations about what has and will become of me.

The colors in my works are observed from blurry moments of the city I grew up in, as well as Vietnamese lacquer paintings that I looked at throughout my childhood. Regenerating personal symbolism from color and intimate objects, I want to revisit past sentiments and the tension of finding belonging in unfamiliar spaces—whether it is a space I grew out of, or a new space that I have become immersed in. Light and shadow emphasize feelings and emotions as a state, rejecting the idea of a specific time and location. Without the representation of either day or night, the focus on the moment and dimensionality using light allows my works to be read as emotional occurrences that can happen regardless of time and space.



The Further, The Closer, oil on canvas, 32 x 48 inches, 2023



Remnants of Memories, oil on canvas, 25 x 46 inches, 2023



The Embrace, oil on canvas, 32 x 18 inches, 2023

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