

JEROME

KATAYOUN
AMJADI

KEHAYR
BROWN-RANSAW

NOOSHIN
HAKIM JAVADI

DEJ TXIAJ NTSIM,
KUAB MAIV YAJ,
KOUA MAI YANG

**JEROME
FELLOWSHIP
EXHIBITION**

2020/21

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Essays by Nicole Nfonoyim-Hara

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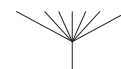
30

DEJ TXIAJ NTSIM,
KUAB MAIV YAJ,
KOUA MAI YANG

KATAYOUN AMJADI



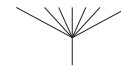
Eggplant
This Is Not an Eggplant series
2020–ongoing
Slip cast porcelain, 18k gold luster,
cast resin
13 x 3 x 3 in.
Photo: Rik Sferra



Top: *Chicken*, Bottom: *Egg*
The Nightingale and The Rose series
 2016–2019
 Slip cast porcelain, 18k gold luster, cast
 concrete
 7 x 7 x 5 in.
 Photo: Rik Sferra



Toilet Brush
Garden: Recalling Paradise series
 2018–2021
 Hand-built and slip cast porcelain, 18k
 gold luster
 16½ x 4 x 4 in.
 Photo: Rik Sferra



Top:
Where Red Tulips Grow, 2019
The Nightingale and The Rose series
Kitchen gloves, cast resin, CNC
machined styrofoam, latex
Hair + Nails Gallery, Minneapolis
43 x 43 x 57 in.

Bottom:
Re Member Dis, 2017
The Nightingale and The Rose series
Still shot from two-channel HD
video projection
2:51 min.



The Garden, 2019
Garden: Recalling Paradise
Multimedia audio/video installation
Katherine E. Nash Gallery, University of
Minnesota Twin Cities
24 x 24 x 14 ft.

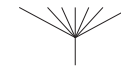
KATAYOUN AMJADI

In mythologies that span time, oceans, races, and tongues, we humans are made of clay. The proverbial potter forms, molds, and breathes life into an object, a *thing* made in human likeness. The clay object becomes us. I am reminded of this connective global cosmology woven through millennia as I settle into the divan beside Katayoun Amjadi's chrome kiln. The kiln is between us like an equal party in our midmorning conversation. A ceramic mug sits idle in my cupped palms as the dark tea spirits up gossamer wisps of heat. The shelves and tabletops in Amjadi's studio in the Q.arma Building are covered in her work, the walls lined with larger installation pieces and sculptures. I feel at home and strangely comforted by the objects surrounding us, a mix of smaller pieces for sale, work taken down from past exhibitions, and works in progress, like the neat rows of *Eggplants* that greeted me at the door.

We sip our tea and muse about excess and its discontents: excesses of objects and excesses of meaning. Excess is a notion intricately tied up in racialized, gendered, and othered ideologies in the Western imagination. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, objects like ceramics were considered an "Oriental pollution" in Western Europe and the United States and seen as markers of excess, the uncontrollable seepages of empire. As a ceramic artist, Amjadi is intrigued with the hybrid flux state of ceramics always vacillating between the sacred and profane. She often makes her work in multiples and at different scales ranging from handheld to statuesque. She admits that her prolific object-making is posing a logistical storage problem. And as with any excess there are also limits. The past year has forced her to confront what the limits of art, itself, might be in engaging audiences, in saying something or doing something of meaning and significance. Her own existential crisis poignantly matches the collective moment in ways that feel urgent and salient as the pandemic lingers on and the echoes of unrest still rumble underfoot. Where does art—the making of it and the consumption of it—fit in such a context? What does it say, and who, Amjadi wonders, is listening?

Porcelain chickens, suggestive pomegranates, gilded toilet brushes: in a visual double entendre, her tongue-in-cheek ceramics spin ordinary objects and symbols on their heads. She embeds them with meaning as she explores the fault lines of tradition, modernity, nationhood, religion, gender, and identity. The objects are dynamic and rebellious in their coded vernacular and alluring provocation to look and make meaning. Amjadi's self-proclaimed "high and low brow" works are in perpetual dialogue. In their own ways, they are engaged in acts of talking back and interrupting gazes and narratives that would reduce the work to mere tchotchkes on one hand, and art locked in presumed identity politics on the other. Either reading ignores the lush sites of inquiry, meaning, and contestation that her work embodies. Amjadi plays with these tensions in ways that are thrilling, visceral, and emotive.

The tie between humans and objects/things is a primal one. In an article titled "Human-Thing Entanglement: Towards an Integrated Archaeological Perspective," archaeologist Ian Hodder describes the ways in which humans and things co-constitute each other.¹ Human-made objects come to identify us, mark us, and shape our world. Objects, after all, have an agentic trajectory all their own. In *S/WORD*, Amjadi explores our entanglement with the word (as pen) and the sword (as gun) and their co-dependency on each other to sustain regimes of power, conflict, and resolution. In *The Social Life of Things*, Arjun Appadurai notes how words and things are commonly thought of as opposed. There is a misconception that things have no meaning on their own until words and language as well as "human transactions, attributions and motivations" grant them voice and value.²



Lately, Amjadi has been pondering the acts of translation and mediation that always seem to be required when looking at her work. The artist uses video as a visual interlocuter meant to provide yet another lens with which to consider and be in conversation with the wider project. Often, her identity as an Iranian woman creates a barrier or a filter, which she neither intends nor anticipates. Audiences feel they cannot understand or access the work without an explanation of culture, language, and history, and they look to her for the key to decode it. And while her own identity is deeply inscribed in the work she makes, the objects themselves want to be looked at. They demand to be looked at in their own right.

In *Eggplants*, large life-size ceramic eggplants bear a style of gold Farsi script commonly used in sacred or decorative objects. Suffice to say the gold script on the eggplants is no poem (though, it could be) or mystic wisdom. It is a transliteration of a more profane English word. Amjadi is interested in this play of cultural relations, of who in effect "gets it." Yet, understanding the work does not hinge on reading Farsi or being "in" on the joke. Like a codec, Amjadi is encoding and decoding meaning at various levels of entry and access. The invitation in her work is to a radical opening up to the entanglements between ourselves and the object as well as our entanglements with each other across lines of difference and encampments of identity. If she had not explained her intent behind the porcelain eggplant to me, how would I have first encountered it? What meaning would I have made of it independently? I find them lovely, pleasing to look at. I want to touch them like I would in a grocery store. I want to know how she made them and achieved their uniformly smooth, curved shape. My looking triggers my own indices of meaning and memory.

In reflecting on how the pandemic shutdown left her works idle on shelves in her studio with no one to see them or engage with them, the artist refers to them as "dead things" around her. And so, I am back to thinking about clay and life, life force, creation/creativity, form, and matter. Anthropologist Tim Ingold characterizes an object as a form that is bound and inert, its meaning isolated. In contrast, a thing is "a place where several goings on become entwined. To observe a thing is not to be locked out but to be invited into the gathering. . . . Thus conceived, the thing has the character not of an externally bounded entity, set over and against the world, but of a knot whose constituent threads, far from being contained within it, trail beyond, only to become caught with other threads in other knots. Or in a word, things leak, forever discharging through the surfaces that form temporarily around them."³ It is precisely this leakiness of form and meaning that Amjadi's work reveals, revels in, and thrives in. Her work functions as thick sites of encounter and gathering, vast portals into the labyrinthine tangles of cultural power relations and the wayward and wild flows of meaning-making both within and beyond our control.

Notes

1. Ian Hodder, "Human-Thing Entanglement: Towards an Integrated Archaeological Perspective," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 1 (March 2011): 154–77.
2. Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.
3. Tim Ingold, "Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials," 2010, accessed on September 10, 2021, <https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/schools/soss/morgancentre/research/wps/15-2010-07-realities-bringing-things-to-life.pdf>, 4.

KEHAYR BROWN-RANSAW



*From Dust We Are Made, and Dust We
Become, 2020*
Digitally printed cotton, linen
83 x 65 in.
Photo: Rik Sferra



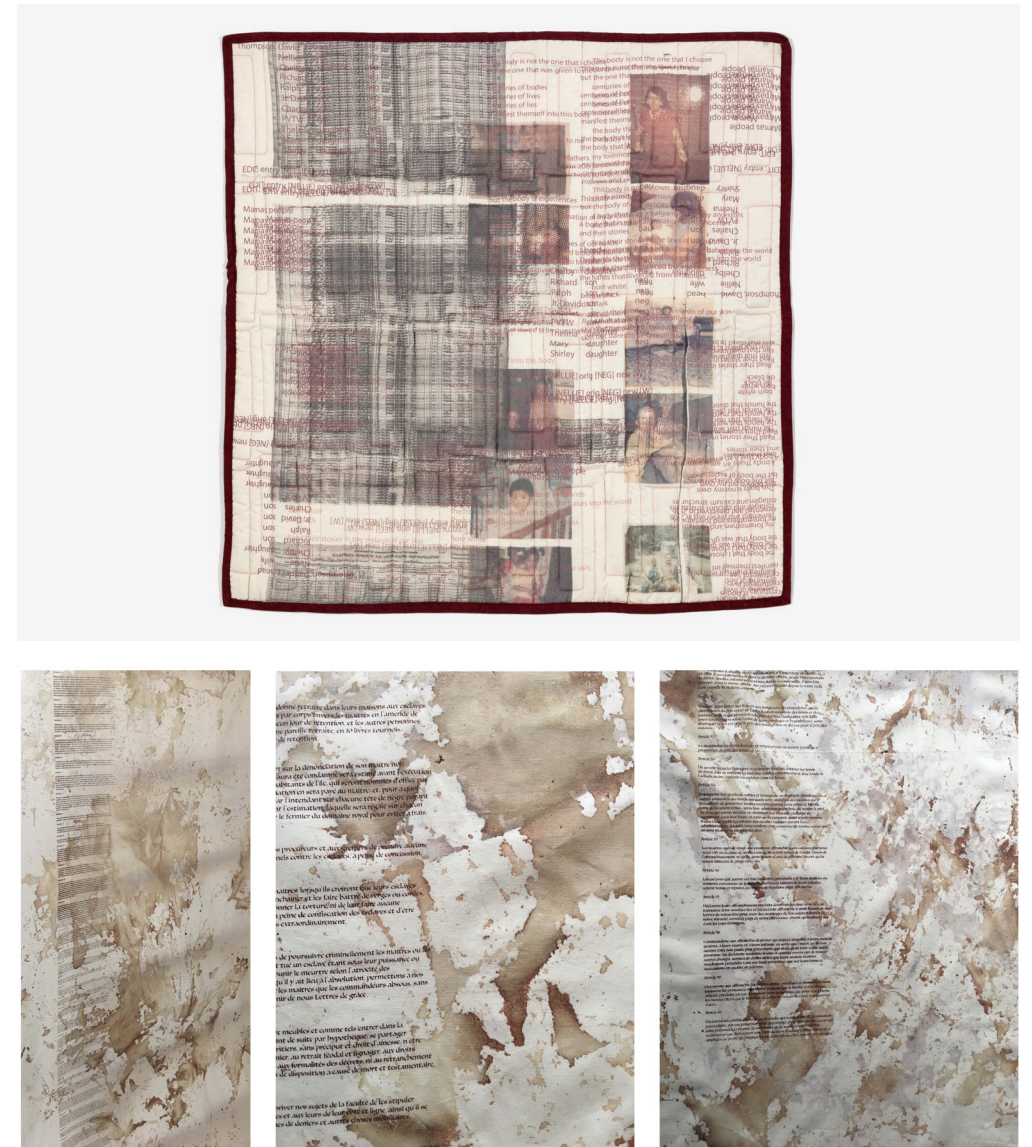
*ears to the ancestors, their spirits
speak softly, 2017*
Handwoven cotton
35 x 36 in.
Photo: Rik Sferra



*missing and manipulated: lies, fallacies,
and fairytales, 2018*
Handwoven cotton
9 x 50 in.
Photo: Rik Sferra



*To Love Something More Than
You Love Yourself, 2020*
Handwoven cotton
10 x 52 in.
Photo: Rik Sferra



Top:
*Mama's Quilt (quilt for my mother, her
 mother, and her mother's mother)*, 2018
 Digitally printed cotton
 44 x 44 in.
 Photo: Rik Sferra

Bottom:
To Wear the Length of Bloodied Shroud
My Ancestors Did Weave, 2020
Screenprint and livestock blood
on muslin
15 x 3 ft.

KEHAYR BROWN-RANSAW

In a village of red earth and verdant bush, he might have been a master weaver. If the long thread of memory and belonging had not been severed by the seismic violence of enslavement, Kehayr Brown-Ransaw wonders if he would have been chosen to sit at the knee of wizened kinfolk, studying the meaning-laden patterns and meticulous order of textiles meant to cover, to protect, to adorn, to trade, to honor, and even to shroud. Yet, as we sit in his studio, a stately wooden loom at his back, I wonder if he isn't, indeed, already chosen. Chosen by ancestors, maybe, but more significantly by himself—choosing a path to self-sovereignty and radical authenticity, to a practice, a birthright, and a joy all his own.

Brown-Ransaw's textile work is prescient, self-possessed, and knowing. The pieces withhold their secrets, just as much as they expose them. They know that history is not a matter of fact but rather a contested site, ripe for rupture, excavation, and questioning. In *From Dust We Are Made, and Dust We Become* each star is dedicated to an ancestor. The blue, brown, and gold pattern, with its idyllic toile de Jouy print, belies the intense embodied unease and emotional weight he felt in working with a quilting pattern that is considered so quintessentially "American" and commonly attributed to white women in the tradition. The artist goes in search of himself and his kin despite a white-washed master narrative that has always been intent on silencing and writing out the realities of Black life, identity, and cultural production.

His process is labor intensive, layered, precise. He plans out patterns on grid-lined paper and sets about cutting fabric before the sewing and suturing begin. The abstract patterns weave their own visual language charting his family history and diasporic experiences. Brown-Ransaw knows that no comfort can be found in the mythmaking and false narratives of power paraded as historical truth. He turns inward to the personal and familial for grounding and affirmation of existence and resilience. And while his work is ancestral and archival, it worries the line, ever troubling the long-accepted narrative and its concomitant time line. In *Mama's Quilt (quilt for my mother, her mother, and her mother's mother)*, printed words appear across the quilt layered over family photos evoking a personal and collective body, genealogies of memory and the rush of countless lives echoing in bone and tissue. The quilt references a mysterious family history of his Irish great-grandmother, who was categorized on the U.S. census as "Black." His great-grandparents' marriage would have been illegal under the U.S. antimiscegenation laws criminalizing racial mixing—an ironic legal preoccupation for a nation that has been a ground zero for racial trespass since its inception. Brown-Ransaw grapples with these noises in the blood as well as the ways in which self-definition and identification are ever mediated by an unreliable "official" record.

He centers his own personal record—the body record as well as the family record housed in photo boxes pulled out at family gatherings and photos displayed wall to wall, mapping out an intricate visual genealogy. In *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, bell hooks notes how personal photographs adorning the walls of Black homes have historically served as sources of Black joy as well as a form of resistance aimed at countering the white gaze and image-making that either rendered Blackness invisible or reduced it to oppressive stereotypes and misrepresentation. Photography allowed Black people to be makers as well as viewers of their own image in ways that honored Black private life and interiority and ways of looking. Brown-Ransaw recalls frequently filing through boxes of family photos as a child. Now, years later,



the images and the details are committed to memory. He mines this memory, and with every stitch and pattern hurls questions into the abyss of diasporic oblivion.

In his studio, Brown-Ransaw unfolds *To Wear the Length of Bloodied Shroud My Ancestors Did Weave* on the table in front of me, and before I even know its title, I can't seem to shake the feeling of it being both swaddle and shroud. The dark-red French text printed on the cloth is from the fifteenth-century Code Noir edict that laid out the rules for how enslaved and free people of color in the French empire were to be treated from cradle to grave. As a textile artist, Brown-Ransaw is interested in the historical valences and implications of textiles, their production, and use. The muslin cloth he uses in *To Wear the Length of Bloodied Shroud My Ancestors Did Weave* is reminiscent of "Negro cloth," a type of coarse scrap cloth that also had legal underpinnings. Laws like South Carolina's Negro Act of 1735 defined what kind of fabrics could be used by and worn by enslaved people. At the height of the slave trade, a bolt of cotton cloth could buy a human life. The shroud is bloodied with cow and chicken blood, underscoring the horrors of American chattel slavery that sustained the building of the nation.

Ultimately, Brown-Ransaw time travels and scale jumps. A feat that is rooted in deeply personal histories that invite and call forth a more collective conversation but do not require it. The signifier/modifier "Black" with regard to art, aesthetics, and cultural production is often burdened with the presumption that the Black collective, "the community" and "the culture" writ large, is always implicated. And perhaps it is, but in a way that is far messier, more aporic, elusive, and multivalent. What his work teases out is the limits and redundancies as well as the boundless abundance of that modifier. In a poem, writer Bayo Akomolafe asserts,

My blackness is not an identity, stable and secure like a stain on white cloth. My blackness is a roaming principle, a geological force uncovering the otherwise, a departure from convenient algorithms, a fierce conjuring in a language so secret that the words themselves do not realize they are part of the spell. . . . My blackness is what happens when loss touches itself, . . . for what is my blackness if not the secret of flight?¹

And indeed, Brown-Ransaw's work is unbound, free to roam, free to question (or not question) and name itself fiercely and fully.

Note

1. Bayo Akomolafe, "In the morning you won't find me here," November 5, 2019, accessed on September 10, 2021, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/in-the-morning-you-wont-find-me-here>.

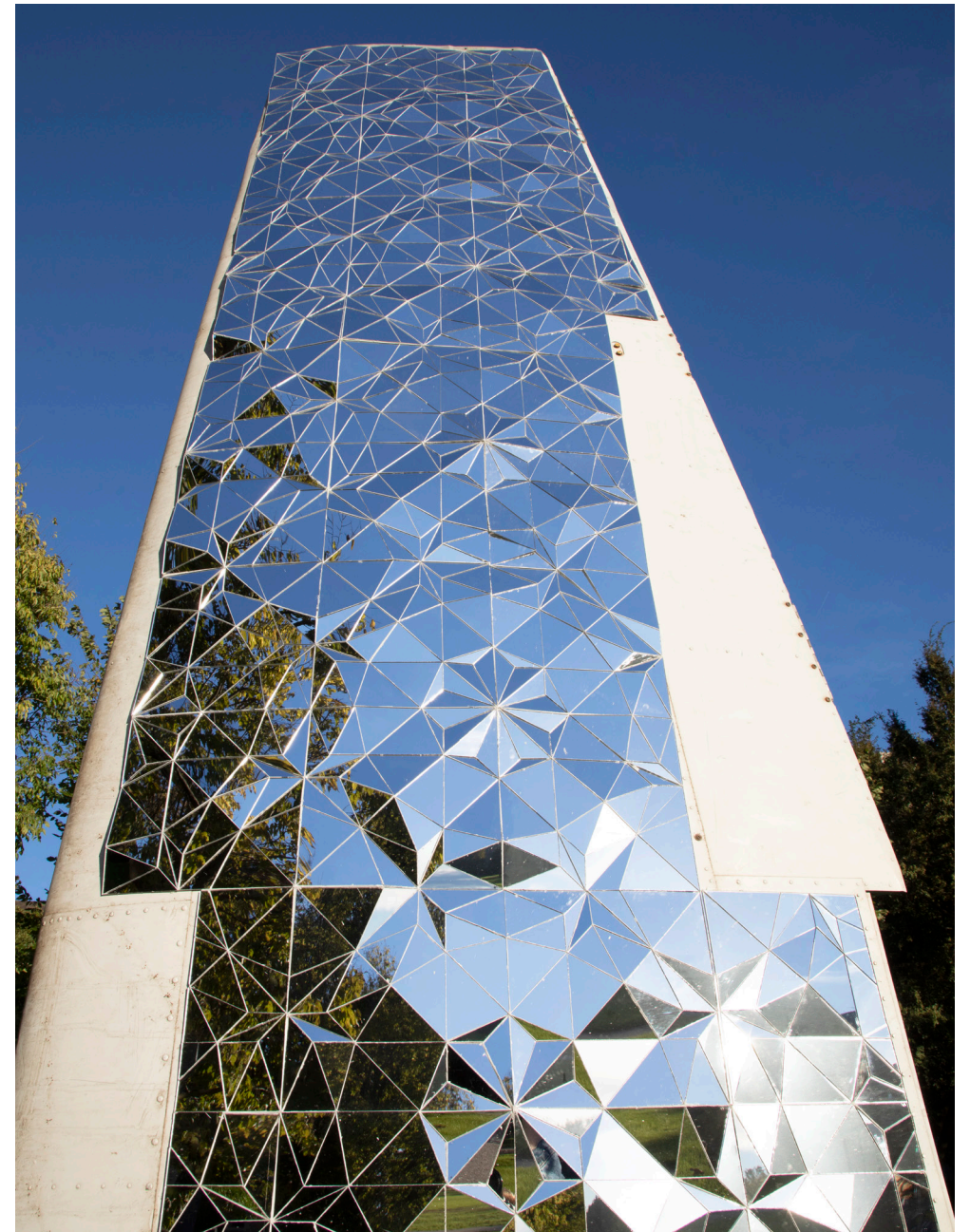
NOOSHIN HAKIM JAVADI



Placeholder, a significant zero in the decimal representation of us, 2021
Airplane wing, acrylic mirror
15 x 6 ft.
Photo: Evan Hume



Top and Bottom:
Placeholder, a significant zero in the decimal representation of us (details), 2021
Airplane wing, acrylic mirror
15 x 6 ft.
Photo: Evan Hume



Placeholder, a significant zero in the decimal representation of us, 2021
Airplane wing, acrylic mirror
15 x 6 ft.
Photo: Evan Hume



Exporting Liberty, 2019
Statue of Liberty stress ball dart, Iran
map, dart sharpener, safety glasses
Soo Visual Arts Center, Minneapolis
4 x 4 ft.
Photo: Christopher Selleck



Top:
Radio Rhizome (collaboration with
Pedram Baldari), 2019
Installation
Weisman Art Museum, University of
Minnesota Twin Cities
Photo: Zoe Cinel

Bottom:
*Life is the aggregation of all moments
of desire*, 2017
Two identical airplane wings in complete
and shredded form, plumb bob
Katherine E. Nash Gallery, University of
Minnesota Twin Cities
15 x 6 ft.
Photo: Daniel McCarthy Clifford

NOOSHIN HAKIM JAVADI



There, just below my chest, I sense an ache as I consider the underside of the severed airplane wing. The ache is familiar, intimate. Born of a knowing that wings do not always lend themselves to flight, and flight is seldom a guarantee of freedom. And what is freedom, anyway? The word is thick with meanings at once deeply personal, poetic, and political.

The glossy mirrorwork studding Nooshin Hakim Javadi's sculpture is cut into a painstaking geometry. It shatters and warps one's reflection upon its surface, dispersing light, line, and color. Thus, you confront yourself broken open, unable to discern where the edges and borders of your being begin and end. The sensation recalls the Greek root of the word *diaspora*: "to scatter across." In traditional Iranian architecture the decorative mirrorwork practice, *āina-kāri*, often covers royal, ceremonial, and domestic spaces. Walls, window frames, pillars, vaulted ceilings, archways, and corridors are covered in dazzling mirror glass. In sacred spaces, the scattered reflection might also evoke a sense of unity, continuity, a melding into a hallowed collective, a cosmic whole. The mirrorwork tradition is shaped by the seminal philosophy of seventeenth-century mystic Mullah Sadra, who viewed existence as being at once singular, multiple, and unified.¹ The broken mirrors transfigured into something far more vast and far more beautiful than the sum of its parts. And this is precisely what Javadi's work achieves. In her hands, objects are at once destroyed, transformed, and alchemized. And yet, the objects themselves never quite complete their fraught metamorphosis. Uneasy remnants of their original form are ever lingering.

At the height of *āina-kāri* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the mirrors and practices for refining the glass and metal used are thought to have cultivated an exchange between Venetian glassmakers, various European envoys, and Iranian artisans, architects, and nobility. Such historical footnotes remind us of the (albeit imbalanced) porosity of cultural and aesthetic borders in the *longue durée*. Still, despite the neoliberal promise of so-called free global movement and mobility, ours is also a conflict-ridden world of trade sanctions, immigration laws, and policed borders marked by immobility and abjection. Javadi's work signals this im/mobility—how one's reality, one's own agency, and freedom are by turns deferred and shaped by the exigencies of geopolitics and the violence of structures and systems of power outside oneself.

We meet over Zoom. Our images are refracted into light and code speeding through the ether to meet in this middle non-space where we both are and aren't. The meeting itself is marked by her own im/mobility and challenges in making her way back to the United States. In different ways, the ongoing pandemic situation has left much of the world, myself included, still relatively homebound—the detritus of our reluctant new im/mobility everywhere.

In *Bodies Left Behind* and *Life is the aggregation of all moments of desire*, the airplane wings seem to become organic matter: bodies of flesh, blood, and bone. The wings have been cast-off, amputated from a body unable to fly, return, or escape. The wings transform from object to "abject." Over the past decade, migration scholarship has noted how migrants are increasingly seen as abject—neither object nor subject. The migrant as abject is systematically excluded in the social realm and misrecognized as a legitimate part of the national "body" and community. This exclusion happens through various acts of legal and social bordering and boundary-making that, in

turn, shape the migrant's own material and psychological safety and reality. With the *Rhizome Radio* collaboration, Javadi centered and amplified the stories and voices of undocumented immigrants and refugees.

For philosopher Julia Kristeva, the abject "disturbs identity, system, order . . . does not respect borders, positions, rules" and comes to stand in for "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."² Javadi's work is similarly situated in this liminal and hybridized space as her objects grapple with their inertia and transition. Truly seeing the abject means reckoning with all we have chosen to exclude, separate ourselves from, and not see in efforts to maintain a precarious semblance of social purity and political order. In recent weeks, images of Afghan men and women crowding tarmacs, clinging desperately to any scalable surface of U.S. military evacuation planes only to fall midair—several to their deaths—have haunted media reels and news feeds. Javadi and I talk at length about this. We name our privilege and the paradox of our own personal detachments and intimacies with war and conflict. Ultimately, we agree, we *are all implicated*.

Feminist scholar and activist M. Jacqui Alexander asks, "What do lives of privilege look like in the midst of war and the inevitable violence that accompanies the building of empire? . . . Privilege and superiority blunt the loss that issues from enforced alienation and segregations of different kinds."³ In interactive installations like *Exporting Liberty*, Javadi toys with these intimacies of violence and war by transforming everyday popular games into political objects. As the artist invites audiences to engage in *Exporting Liberty*'s satirical dart game with a stress ball Lady Liberty dart ready for deadly aim or blowback, we become key players in the farce of liberation and freedom peddled as global exportable goods again and again.

What do our unwitting roles in such games and acts of bordering and boundary-making turn us into? How are we changed by the intimacies of political violence and both the real and imagined borders erected, alienating us from ourselves and each other? While her body of work is unequivocally rooted in her personal experiences as an Iranian living in the United States and her own navigation of displacement and mobility, Javadi's work exposes the borders and borderlands we all cross, carry, and reproduce. In her latest sculpture, the wings are still mid-metamorphosis, their alloy surface giving way to a brilliant cascade of tiny mirror tesserae. There is an aspiration that beauty might yet come from all this. The brokenness might yet surrender into something generative and akin to healing, if not wholeness. And perhaps, the abject is merely a misrecognition of our own true reflection laid bare . . . the other in ourselves, there all along. The wings remain dismembered, yet beautiful in their longing. As Javadi herself affirms, "There can be beauty from destruction."

Notes

1. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive, s.v. "Mulla Sadra," by Sijad Rizvi, last modified February 5, 2019, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/mulla-sadra/>.
2. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.
3. M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–2.

DEJ TXIAJ NTSIM, KUAB MAIV YAJ, KOUA MAI YANG



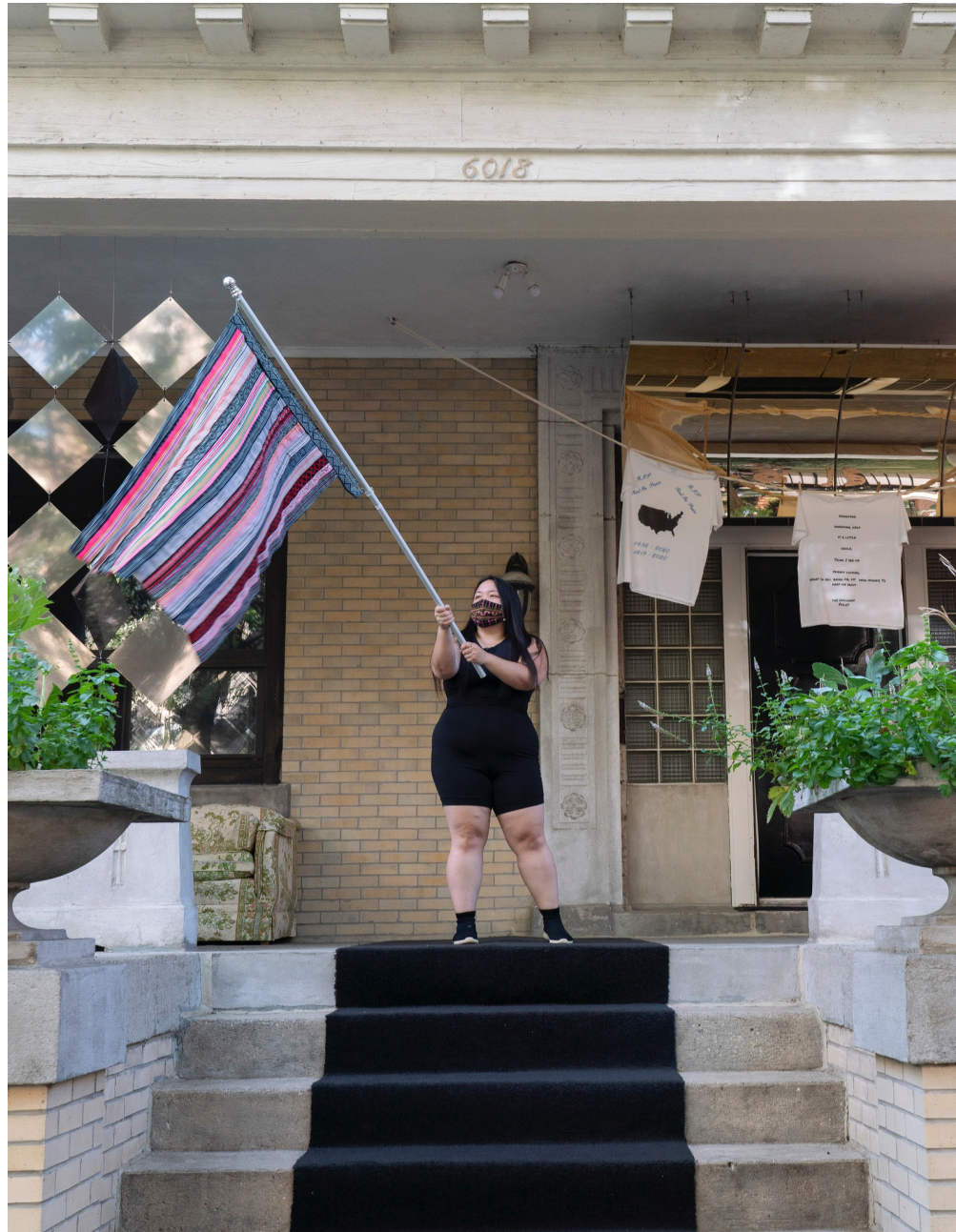
Dej Txiaj Ntsim, Kuab Maiv Yaj, Koua Mai Yang
Wear HMong Days 182-194 (contact sheet), 2020
Performance, digital photographs



Dej Txiaj Ntsim, Kuab Maiv Yaj, Koua Mai Yang
Day 330, July 22, 2019 from the *Hnav HMoob*, Wear
HMong project, 2019
Performance, digital photograph
Photo: Angélique Kombo



Dej Txiaj Ntsim, Kuab Maiv Yaj, Koua Mai Yang
Day 1035, June 25, 2021 from the *Hnav HMoob*, Wear
HMong project, 2021
Performance, digital photograph



Tshab Her
We Are: Chang, Cheng, Chue, Fang, Hang, Her, Khang, Kong/Soung, Kue, Lee, Lor, Moua, Pha, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong, Yang,
 2020
 Performance, 6018|North, Chicago
 Photo: Jesse R. Meredith



Top:
 Magnolia Yang Sao Yia
she can be seen walking alone, 2016
 Performed by Kealoha Ferreira and Laichee Yang
 (left to right)
 Choreography/dance performance,
 2016 Naked Stages Fellow
 Pillsbury House Theatre, Minneapolis
 Photo: Bruce Silcox



Bottom:
 Victoria Kue
 From the series *faceless in lancaster*,
 2021
 Performance, digital photograph
 Photo: Osmyn Josef Oree

DEJ TXIAJ NTSIM, KUAB MAIV YAJ, KOUA MAI YANG

For almost one thousand days, Dej Txiaj Ntsim, Kuab Maiv Yaj, Koua Mai Yang has been part ghost—silence, loss, collective trauma, and ancestral knowledge entombed and encrypted within her body. The ghost inhabits our material and social realm where regimes of power, patriarchy, race, war, statelessness, and forced migration are ever haunting the frame. Each morning she dresses as her foremothers would in her interpretation of her family's regional dress from the Xieng Khouang province in Laos. The fit and drape of the clothing change her breathing, posture, gestures, and the way her body moves through the world. And this world she moves through is one marked by systems and legacies of war, white supremacy, and patriarchy. It is also a globalized world of capitalist consumption and production and seemingly tidy notions of identity and tradition always conspicuously fraying at the edges, ever shape-shifting.

Yaj's *Hnav HMoob, Wear HMong* project is as expansive as it is intimately personal. The digital archive of photographs documenting her embodied practice each day reflects an oppositional gaze. The gaze centers her own HMong identity and ways of looking and knowing as resistance against dominant regimes of looking at, consuming, and producing knowledge about HMong people,¹ aesthetics, and material culture without consent or authority. The oppositional gaze was first coined by bell hooks to describe the right of Black people to look not just at white power, but at themselves and each other. Similarly, Yaj, in her direct address to the viewer returns a rebellious and resistant gaze that centers her power and agency as a HMong woman. It also carves a critical space for reclamation, self-knowledge, and self-determination.

Yaj's site-based installations are immersive. They represent place, home, as well as a third site where her questions about identity and culture can be explored freely and on their own terms. In her living room, Yaj walks me through her collection of objects, books, images, and textiles representing various aspects of HMong identity, history, culture, and aesthetics. Her collection is an accumulation of items given to her by her mother and other family members as well as found items. She shows me a framed story cloth she bought at a Minneapolis thrift store. The back reads: "From Mom and Dad, 1984." Yaj's mother says that they don't make story cloths like the one in the frame anymore, the practice now outsourced to other minority groups or mass produced for a tourist-driven market that seldom knows the difference. In Minnesota, Yaj has experienced a pervasive white entitlement when it comes to HMong identity and culture with strangers approaching her because they think they "know" something about her community. Perhaps they fought in Vietnam, perhaps they helped resettle a refugee family, or perhaps they had a story cloth hanging in their home from the church rummage sale. Yaj is concerned with who gets to know and who gets to claim and own HMong cultural production.

As she calls forth her own ancestors, she also interrogates how ancestral wisdom, tradition, practices, and experiences fail to transmit or become interrupted by violent trauma and the deafening silence it often leaves in its wake. In discussing how traumatic historical and social events are silenced and come to be embodied intergenerationally, anthropologists Nicolas Argenti and Katharina Schramm state that "children may thus incorporate the ghosts of their parents as bodily practices. . . . these bodily memories can eventually become established in the community as social practices."² Bodily memory is enacted through movement and gesture



in everyday life. Yaj carries this bodily memory, this body of knowledge that both predates and prefigures her own lived reality right now.

Three years later, *Hnav HMoob, Wear HMong* has become mundane, sometimes tiresome. But each day, she sets out to honor her ancestry and to grapple with the questions swirling inside her. Her practice has invited microaggressions targeting her gendered, racialized body. After experiencing a series of microaggressions while in traditional dress, Yaj crafted small pillows to comfort herself and find some way to "soften" the violence of the experience. The white printed words over green-brown camouflage fabric read: Be still my heart / your ancestors / are the rivers of life / be still my heart.

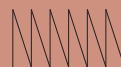
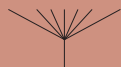
HMong women are often portrayed as victims of patriarchy and war, caught powerless in systemic crosshairs. Such reductive narratives reinforce patriarchy as they ignore the individual and cultural agency at work. There is a whole complex of knowledge-making about HMong people by non-HMong people. Yaj's own work seeks to subvert these regimes of knowledge production around HMong womanhood and identity as well as notions that HMong womanhood or expressions of feminism/womanism are suddenly new and emerging. Yaj's ghost is seeking a kind of justice that is deeply embedded in the collective.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been isolating for Yaj. Her racialized body also became even more of a target in the wake of anti-Asian hate spurred on by political and social rhetoric. Over the past year, she has been engaging with a community of other HMong artists and activists who are working at the intersection of gender, race, social justice, representation, and artistic expression. Her collaborators are Magnolia Yang Sao Yia, Lee Xiong, Victoria Kue, and Tshab Her. Magnolia Yang Sao Yia is a HMong choreographer who Yaj met in 2016. Yang Sao Yia's dance work holds space for BIPOC social justice struggles, and as a doctoral candidate at the University of California, Riverside, she researches HMong dance in the United States. Lee Xiong is a visual artist and higher-education professional. She is one of Yaj's childhood friends from their hometown of Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Yaj connected with Pennsylvania-based artist Victoria Kue via email after coming across her website. Since then they have been exchanging ideas, thoughts, and experiences around HMong art and identity. Kue's work teases out the frictions between womanhood, sexuality, and intimate relationships. Tshab Her recently moved to the Twin Cities from Chicago and connected with Yaj in 2016. Yaj invited Her to also wear HMong clothing and chronicle the experience on Instagram. Her's work explores identity, sexuality, and desire through photography and dress. Together the artists are cultivating community and are engaged in a rich exchange about what it means to be HMong women as well as artists exploring similar questions about their identities and culture.

In an essay titled *Reimagining Hmong Womanhood*, Xiong begins with a HMong origin story and addresses the collective as kin saying, "We are here because I have been alone and you have somewhat been alone too."³ While the practices and work Yaj and her collaborators engage in are grounded in histories and ongoing realities of trauma and oppression, their project is a powerfully restorative and healing one. Yaj's own work is one of reclamation, of standing in ancestral knowing and power.

Notes

1. The word *Hmong* refers to the Hmong people who are from Southeast Asia. However, the spelling *Hmong* stems from the white Hmong/Hmoob dialect. The artist chooses to use the spelling *HMong* instead of *Hmong* to be inclusive of the Mong/Moob green dialect.
2. Nicolas Argenti and Katharina Schramm, eds., *Remembering Violence: Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 13.
3. Lee Xiong, "Re-imagining Hmong Womanhood," accessed September 10, 2021, <http://www.leexiong.com/reimagining-hmong-womanhood>.



KATAYOUN AMJADI

Katayoun Amjadi is an Iranian-born, Minneapolis-based artist, educator, and independent curator. In her work, she often considers the sociopolitical systems that shape our perceptions of Self and Other, such as language, religion, gender, politics, and nationalist ideologies. Amjadi blurs these boundaries and creates an off-balance, hybrid style that is slightly acerbic and a little bit tongue-in-cheek. Her art probes the relationship between past and present, tradition and modernity, and individual versus collective identity, and simultaneously seeks to spur discussion about our place in the temporal arc and the interwoven roots of our histories.

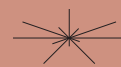
Amjadi holds an MFA in ceramics and sculpture from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities and currently teaches in the Art Department at Normandale Community College in Bloomington, Minnesota. Her work has been exhibited in several group and solo exhibitions nationally and internationally, including at Minnesota Museum of American Art, St. Paul; Rochester Art Center, Rochester, Minnesota; Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis; South Dakota Museum of Art, Brookings; Soap Factory, Minneapolis; University of St. Thomas, St. Paul; Public Functionary, Minneapolis; Beijing Film Academy; Karlsruhe Art Academy, Karlsruhe, Germany; and 7Samar Gallery, Tehran, among others. She received an Artist Initiative Grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board in 2015 and 2019. Amjadi co-runs a studio arts building and maintains a small pottery business in the Q.arma Building in the northeast Minneapolis art district.



KEHAYR BROWN-RANSAW

Kehayr Brown-Ransaw is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, and curator. Through quilting, weaving, and printmaking, he engages in conversations about individualism versus collectivism, familial histories, concepts of gendered work, tradition, and Blackness/Black identity. His curatorial and teaching practices are concerned with access, representation, and the presentation of marginalized communities.

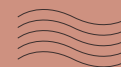
Brown-Ransaw received a BFA in furniture design from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). He has exhibited work at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities; FilmNorth, St. Paul; Vine Arts Center, Minneapolis; BI Worldwide, Minneapolis, and has public works at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design Sculpture Garden. He is the recipient of a 2020/21 Emerging Curators Institute Emerging Curator Fellowship, a 2021 Franconia Sculpture Park Mid-Career Artist Fellowship, and a 2021 Artist in Residence at the Minnesota African American Heritage Museum and Gallery. Additionally, Brown-Ransaw is an active and operating member of the artist collective People's Library, through which he has exhibited works collaboratively in arts programming at MCAD; Soap Factory, Minneapolis; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Minneapolis Institute of Art. He is the recipient of a 2021 Minnesota State Arts Board Creative Support for Individuals Grant, a 2020 Visual Arts Fund Community Relief Grant from Midway Contemporary Art on behalf of the People's Library, and a 2020 Next Step Fund Award from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council.



NOOSHIN HAKIM JAVADI

Nooshin Hakim Javadi works at the intersection of sculpture, installation, and performance. Her practice investigates the material culture of conflict through a range of ways—from objects that undergo the poetry of a destructive metamorphosis to interactive installations for shared vulnerability and empathy. She reimagines popular games as political objects that invite satirical engagement with difficult geopolitical issues. While playful, they also create visual metaphors for how conquest, in manifold forms, often masks itself as liberation.

Javadi is the recipient of a 2017 Franconia Sculpture Park Jerome Fellowship and was a 2018/19 Target Studio for Creative Collaboration Fellow at the Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis. In 2017 she received the Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award from the International Sculpture Center, while completing her MFA in studio art from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Her interdisciplinary works and performances have been shown in the United States, Europe, and Iran, including at Museum für Neue Kunst, Freiburg, Germany; Parks Exhibition Center, Idyllwild, California; Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, New Jersey; Kunstverein Graftschaft Bentheim, Neuenhaus, Germany; Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Plains Art Museum, Fargo, North Dakota; South Dakota Art Museum, Brookings; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis. She is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Art, Art History, and Design at University of Notre Dame.



DEJ TXIAJ NTSIM, KUAB MAIV YAJ, KOUA MAI YANG

Dej Txiaj Ntsim, Kuab Maiv Yaj, Koua Mai Yang explores HMong history, culture, and identity in her work. In 2009, Yaj created the HMong American Experience Series. Through drawing and paintings, the series focused on the everyday to counter the saturation of HMong textiles, particularly clothing of HMong women and girls in the HMong imagination. These subjects have become allegories and symbols of the culture and in many ways common aesthetics in HMong art today.

Her current and ongoing project, *Hnav HMoob, Wear HMong*, represents a shift in her artistic practice where Yaj recenters HMong ways of knowing, the artistic practice of textiles, and HMong fashion in her everyday life. Through photographs, moving images, and installation, this project engages in ancestral HMong clothing making, dressing, and performance to raise questions about HMong materiality, aesthetics, culture, and the female representation through the circulation of global cultural production. A consistent gesture in the work is addressing gaze and questions of authorship in HMong culture for a historically nationless community. Yaj's practice moves slowly and lingers on the complications of HMong participation in capitalism—in the selling and consumption of HMong bodies and knowledge. Yaj seeks to understand the history of HMong ancestral dress from a female perspective, as a place of labor, both experientially and through an embodied methodology.

Yaj received a BFA from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2012 and an MFA from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities in 2020.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As the 2020/21 MCAD–Jerome fellowship year has extended into 2022, we have passed a milestone, and there is reason to celebrate. No, the worst pandemic in a century is not over. The climate crisis looms larger than ever, systemic racism persists, and the global number of refugees and internally displaced people has reached historic levels. Nevertheless we celebrate because our artists are still here, ensuring that the stories of individuals, communities, and cultures are not subsumed by negative headlines and banter across political divides. We celebrate because 2021 marked the forty-year anniversary of this fellowship. Generously and steadfastly funded by the Jerome Foundation, it has supported two hundred early-career Minnesota artists at critical moments in their creative lives. We celebrate because over the past year Katayoun Amjadi, Kehayr Brown-Ransaw, Nooshin Hakim Javadi, and Dej Txiáj Ntsim, Kuab Maiv Yaj, Koua Mai Yang, our 2020/21 MCAD–Jerome fellows, have completed thoughtful, ambitious projects that resonate with the complexity of our current moment.

This group of fellows, as beautifully described in Nicole Nfonoyim-Hara’s essays, are indeed “rebellious,” “dynamic,” and “resilient.” They have struggled with what it means to make art now, in the midst of so much uncertainty and social upheaval. But challenging the patterns of cultural consumption, and questioning whose history gets told by whom were already at the forefront of their creative practices. They have already been doing the work. We just need to pay attention; it matters more than ever.

While we frequently highlight the continuities of the fellowship program—the perks of this fellowship, as imagined by MCAD President Jerome J. Hausman in 1980, have not changed much during forty years—the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in some shifts. For the first time, the three arts professionals who selected the 2020/21 cohort did all of their jurying completely online. Jackie Clay, executive director of the Coleman Center for the Arts in rural west Alabama; Duskho Petrovich, artist and assistant professor of New Arts Journalism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; and Ginger Shulick Porcella, executive director and chief curator at Franconia Sculpture Park in Shafer, Minnesota, selected our four fellows out of a group of one hundred applicants. Instead of meeting with the finalists in person, the jury conducted the twenty-five-minute studio visits via Zoom. To our surprise, the process went far better than expected. We have adopted it moving forward since the online platform lessens the demand on the finalists to set up a physical studio space.

Over the past year some of the interaction with visiting critics has also moved to the realm of the virtual. Most of the studio visits and meetings with the local critic and writer Nicole Nfonoyim-Hara, based in Rochester, Minnesota, were able to take place in shared physical space. But when circumstances made that impossible, the relative ease by which virtual spaces are accessible made the process that much more comfortable. Nicole’s appreciation of those encounters filter into her cogent, visceral readings of the fellows’ work. Due to unexpected circumstances, the national curator the fellows had chosen was unable to travel to the Twin Cities so the final two visiting critics will be unique to each fellow. These critics can be local, national, or even international thanks to the flexibility of virtual visits.

Without the unabating support of the Jerome Foundation staff and board of trustees, none of these activities would be possible. On behalf of this year’s fellows, we wish to thank Jerome President Ben Cameron and Program Director Eleanor Savage. Similarly, it is decades of MCAD staff and college leadership assistance that has made this fellowship sustainable. Most recently, we are thankful for the support of President Sanjit Sethi, Vice-President of Academic Affairs Robert Ransick, and Associate Vice-President Melissa Rands. Over many years the directors of various departments have provided our fellows with access to special facilities. A heartfelt thanks to Diana Eicher (Printshop), Don Myhre (3-D Shop), Amy Naughton Becker (Library), Tyler Page (Service Bureau), Robert Truesdell (Campus Safety), and Lauren Zimitsch (Media Center).

In terms of longevity, no one has been a part of the success of the MCAD–Jerome Foundation Fellowship offerings longer than MCAD professor Rik Sferra. Rik has photographed all of the culminating fellowship exhibitions in MCAD Gallery since the first one occurred in October 1981. His talents are truly unparalleled; he is known far and wide as one of best art photographers (and friendliest!) in the state. And anyone who applies for a fellowship, grant, or exhibition opportunity knows the value of high-quality photographs of artwork.

Other MCAD departments are instrumental in making the fellowship opportunity, the selected fellows, and their exhibition and catalog more widely known. In this critical area we are indebted to the ongoing work of the DesignWorks and Communications and Marketing team, which includes Kayla Campbell, Steven Candy, Nicky Dolan, Gregory Gestner, Annie Gillette-Cleveland, Canaan Mattson, Mara Rosen, and Brandie Zaspel.

While much of what gets done happens in-house with MCAD staff, the excellent editing of our catalog is turned over to an outside professional, Mary Keirstead, who makes all of the writing read better.

The MCAD Gallery Dream Team, comprised of exhibition technicians and work-study and graduate students, offer their own art expertise in the installation of the fellows’ work. This hard-working crew includes Micheala Chorn, Ivan Heft, Jamie Kubat, Joy Li, Sara Suppan, and Aurora Wolfe. We are also lucky to have the excellent assistance of Jeff Jones, Academic Services Coordinator, Madeline Garcia, Academic Services Exhibition Technician, and Binbin Shen, 3-D Shop Academic Support Technician.

A special thank you to Melanie Pankau, Associate Fellowship and Gallery Coordinator, for her ongoing management of people, places, and things. Without her excellent organizational skills and heart of an artist nothing would be done on time or so well.

I have immense gratitude for everyone who has contributed to the success of these fellows, those who came before them, and hopefully the many who will follow. Yes, we have much to celebrate.

Kerry A. Morgan
Program Director, MCAD–Jerome Foundation Fellowships for Early Career Artists

PAST RECIPIENTS

2019

Sarah Abdel-Jelil,
Zachary Betts,
Sophia Chai,
Kaamil A. Haider

2018

Mara Duvra,
Marjorie Fedyszyn,
Tucker
Hollingsworth,
Boone Nguyen

2017

Alyssa Baguss,
Josette Ghiseline,
Sarah Kusa,
Joshua McGarvey,
Lela Pierce

2016

Nikki J. McComb,
Kelsey Olson,
Edie Overturf,
Jovan C. Speller,
Amanda Wirig

2015

Star Wallowing Bull,
Emmett Ramstad,
Holly Streekstra,
Lindsay Rhyner,
Samual Weinberg

2014

Miranda Brandon,
Regan Golden-
McNerney,
Jess Hirsch,
Sieng Lee,
Jason Ramey

2013

Kjellgren Alkire,
Pao Houa Her,
GraceMarie Keaton,
Robin Schwartzman,
Nate Young

2012

Susannah Bielak,
Amanda Hankerson,
Michael Hoyt,
Melissa Loop,
Lauren Roche

2011

Richard Barlow,
Gregory Euclide,
Lauren Herzak-
Bauman,
Alison Hiltner,
Jehra Patrick

2010

Greg Carideo,
Teri Fullerton,
Julia Kouneski,
Brett Smith,
Jonathan Bruce
Williams

2009

Steven Accola,
Caroline Kent,
Tynan Kerr/Andrew
Mazorol,
Tony Sunder

2008

Evan Baden,
Barbara Claussen,
Kirsten Peterson,
Benjamin Reed,
Lindsay Smith

2007

Matthew Bakkom,
Monica Haller,
Colin Kopp,
Liz Miller,
Rosemary Williams

2006

Ernest A. Bryant III,
Brian Lesteberg,
Cherith Lundin,
Monica Sheets,
Marcus Young

2005

Janet Lobberecht,
Megan Rye,
Angela Strassheim,
Dan Tesene,
Megan Vossler

2004

Michael Gaughan,
Kirk McCall,
Abinadi Meza,
Lisa Nankivil

2003

Tamara Brantmeier,
Lucas DeGiulio,
Jesse Petersen,
Matthew Wacker,
Troy Williams

2002

Joseph del Pesco,
Helena Keeffe,
Charles Matson Lume,
Justin Newhall,
Grace Park

2001

Jay Heikes,
Markus Lunkenheimer,
Alec Soth,
Peter Haakon
Thompson,
John Vogt

2000

Santiago Cucullu,
Alexa Horochowski,
John Largaespada,
Gene Pittman,
Cristi Rinklin

1999

Amelia Biewald-Low,
Jason S. Brown,
James Holmberg,
Anne Sugnet,
Inna Valin

1998

Amelie Collins,
Brad Geiken,
Rollin Marquette,
Don Myhre,
Thor Eric Paul

1997

Jean Humke,
Carolyn Swiszczy,
Amy Toscani,
Cate Vermeland,
Sara Woster

1996

Therese Buchmiller,
Todd Deutsch,
Celeste Nelms,
Mara Pelecis,
Mike Rathbun

1995

Robert Fischer,
Anne George,
Stephanie Molstre-
Kotz,
Todd Norsten,
Carl Scholz

1994

Terence Accola,
Mary Jo Donahue,
Jonathan Mason,
Karen Platt,
Elliot Warren

1993

Mary Esch,
Damian Garner,
Shannon Kennedy,
Linda Louise Rother,
James Whitney
Tuthill

1992

Angela Dufresne,
Tim Jones,
Chris Larson,
Andrea McCormack,
Shawn Smith

1991

Hans Accola,
Sara Belleau,
Franciska Rosenthal
Louw,
Colette Gaiter,
Annette Walby

1990

Andy Baird,
Mark Barlow,
Keri Pickett,
Ann Wood,
Christopher
Wunderlich

1989

Lynn Hambrick,
Vince Leo, Stuart
Mead, David Pelto,
Alyn Silberstein

1988

Phil Barber,
JonMarc Edwards,
Jil Evans,
Dave Rathman,
George Reboloso

1987

Michelle Charles,
Leslie Hawk,
Paul Shambroom,
Viet Ngo,
Diana Watters

1986

Gary DeCosse,
Christopher Dashke,
Jennifer Hecker,
Michael Mercil,
Randy Reeves

1985

Betina,
Judy Kepes,
Peter Latner,
James May,
Lynn Wadsworth

1984

Doug Argue,
Remo Campopiano,
Timothy Darr,
Audrey Glassman,
Robert Murphy

1983

Jana Freiband,
Janet Loftquist,
David Madzo,
Jeff Millikan,
Steven Woodward

1982

Jane Bassuk,
Frank Big Bear Jr.,
Laura Blaw,
Matt Brown,
Kevin Mangan

1981

Ricardo Bloch,
Bruce Charlesworth,
Alison Ruttan,
T.L. Solien,
Scott Stack

**ABOUT THE
JEROME FOUNDATION**

The Jerome Foundation, founded in 1964 by artist and philanthropist Jerome Hill (1905–1972), honors his legacy through multi-year grants to support the creation, development, and presentation of new works by early career artists.

The Foundation makes grants to vocational early career artists, and those nonprofit arts organizations that serve them, in all disciplines in the state of Minnesota and the five boroughs of New York City.

VALUES

The Foundation's core values, which we strive to model in our practice as grantmakers and to support in our grantees, are:

DIVERSITY

We consciously embrace diversity in the broadest sense. We support a diverse range of artists and organizations, including but not limited to those of diverse cultures, races, sexual identities, genders, generations, aesthetics, points of view, physical abilities, and missions. We support a diverse range of artistic disciplines and forms, created in a variety of contexts and for different audiences.

INNOVATION/RISK

We applaud unconventional approaches to solving problems and support artists and organizations that challenge and engage the traditional aesthetic and/or social dimensions of their respective disciplines.

HUMILITY

We work for artists (rather than the reverse) and believe that artists and organizations are the best authorities to define their needs and challenges—an essential humility reflective of Jerome Hill, our founder. The artists and arts organizations we support embrace their roles as part of a larger community of artists and citizens, and consciously work with a sense of purpose, whether aesthetic, social or both.

jeromefdn.org

ABOUT MCAD

Since 1886, the Minneapolis College of Art and Design—a private, nonprofit four-year and postgraduate college—has been the preeminent art and design educator in the region. Today MCAD is a strong national leader in fine arts, design, entrepreneurship, and sustainability education. Through degree programs, continuing education courses, exhibitions, and a number of other community programs and events, MCAD cultivates the next generation of creative cultural leaders.

MCAD MISSION STATEMENT

The Minneapolis College of Art and Design provides a transformative education within a community of support for creative students of all backgrounds to work, collaborate, and lead with confidence in a dynamic, interconnected world.

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