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MFA PHOTOGRAPHY

**PARSONS
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
PHOTOGRAPHY**

THESIS EXHIBITION 2020

THE NEW SCHOOL

PARSONS



CONTENTS

It is with great pride that we present the class of 2020. With an academic year spent in lockdown, the graduating class in the MFA Photography Department had multiple unforeseen challenges to overcome; spaces shrank, Zoom flattened everyone, distance and time stretched out in uncertain ways. Yet as projects were reconfigured, new ways of thinking about and working on their art emerged. This catalog is a testament to a group of artists, who despite these disruptions, persisted in creating and revitalizing their work.

It has been the greatest pleasure to work with these emerging artists and to witness their innovation and resilience. We truly wish them well in all their future endeavors. As they continue to strive for the highest possible standard of excellence, we look forward to witnessing their future successes.

It is our distinct pleasure to introduce the MFA in Photography Class of 2020.

Jim Ramer

Associate Professor of Photography
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REGISTERING THE HAPTIC

Charmaine Marie Branch

A torrent of rain hit my window, creating an intense rattling sound as I prepared for my first Zoom studio visit of the day. I prayed the storm wouldn't knock out the power grid and moved the lamp away from my computer screen to avoid appearing as a silhouette instead of a person. I had conducted virtual studio visits before, but this series of conversations with Parsons MFA Photography graduates felt especially contingent upon access to a digital interface. In this moment of necessary isolation to counteract the COVID-19 pandemic, our quotidian forms of communication have been disrupted. We have undertaken a series of substitutions for in-person interactions, resulting in sensory deprivations that inevitably shift our understanding of the world around us. These decisions have also heightened our awareness of the inherently fractured and flawed nature of traditional processes of relaying and receiving—of coding and decoding—information both in-person and online.

In speaking with these artists about their projects and the themes threading throughout their practices, it became apparent that long before the present moment they had been interrogating the filters through which we perceive ourselves, categorizations of the “other,” the surrounding environment, and more. These filters are multidimensional and multisensorial, as is their work; however, Zoom's rather flat online platform required us to verbalize certain elements of the

viewer's experience—most notably the haptic. We often affiliate the haptic with three-dimensional objects, but physical and perceptual manifestations of touch are present in digital and two-dimensional work as well. In her book *Listening to Images: an Exercise in Counterintuition*, professor and Black feminist theorist Tina Campt proposes a “haptic mode of engaging the sonic frequencies of photographs” that encourages us to watch and listen to an image as opposed to passively looking at it.¹ Campt describes this mode as emphasizing the overlapping visual, physical, psychic, and sonic forms of contact through which photographs “implicate and leave impressions on us.”² These impressions can linger long after our encounter with a photograph, underscoring the tactility of the viewing experience.

Campt's writing on the formation and function of archives in the African Diaspora highlights the everyday frequencies embodied in vernacular photography. Her words resonate with Michael Grant's investigations into the archive for representations of hope, love, and lineage in photographs of his grandmother taken by his grandfather in the 1950s. These images animate quiet moments of shared joy that are specific to Grant's family history, but also reverberate across Black diasporic communities. Photographs housed in personal archives are often physical objects we can hold in our hands, forming a haptic link between our bodies and the images. Even when photo-objects are scanned and digitized, they maintain the memory or suggestion of that initial contact. Their tactility is not erased but instead is processed through a filter that directly impacts our reception of it.

Contemporary modes of art making including, but not limited to, photography build upon infinite visual archives to enunciate the connection between our bodies and images, whether digital or physical objects. In the series *The Evolution of Her Self Worth*, Amanda Johnson creates sculptural photographs that emphasize the inherently textural qualities of skin and hair we often register through touch. Johnson's self-portraits tactfully work against histories of depicting amorphous Black bodies as one-dimensional surfaces in Western photography. Instead, she uses the abstraction and magnification of textures to capture the complexity of the individual. Johnson describes the series as reclaiming the Black

woman's body while simultaneously opposing racist and sexist objectification by others. Similarly, Jiachen Zhang brings our attention to the superficial treatment of female bodies in our consumer-based society by using photography, installation, and performance to playfully interrogate how we define luxury. Through a pop art inspired aesthetic, Zhang comments on the system within which we devour designer brands only to have our images be consumed by others on two-dimensional social media platforms that often strip away aspects of our full selves.

The body also acts as a site of converging senses, identities, and histories in Jesse Egner's work. Reflective surfaces such as mirrors and storefront windows embody his critique of the distorted filters through which queer people are often pressured into viewing themselves, even within queer communities. Egner photographs his own reflection to demonstrate the process through which harmful expectations of gendered behavior by society can be projected onto queer bodies. These expectations cause a mirror effect in which an individual views themselves through the gazes of others; resulting in distortions that can leave long-lasting detrimental physical and mental impressions.

Parallel to Egner's commentary on the limitations of pre-coded identities, Steven Baboun asks, “How do you navigate yourself, nationality, culture, and history when you are in this in-between, fluid state of self-representation?” As a queer Haitian-Syrian artist, Baboun draws from his family history to highlight the hybrid nature of his existence across the culturally distinct cities of Port-au-Prince, Bmalké, and New York City. This hybridity is reflected in his choice to construct the installation *Bmalké, Have You Seen Port-au-Prince?* out of multiple mediums, including film, sound, and colorful three-dimensional sculptures built around video projectors. The sonic, visual, and physical presence of the installation provides numerous entry points for viewers to connect with important themes, most notably the ongoing search for home in personal narrations of immigration.

Migration is often physically arduous for those who have to traverse a variety of geographies before arriving at their intended destinations. Artists who grapple with this reality frequently do so by registering the haptic nature of the

¹ Tina Campt. *Listening to Images: an Exercise in Counterintuition* (Duke University Press, 2017): 6, 8.

² Ibid., 72.

journey through its impact on the body as in Baboun's work; or by way of the obstacles migrants encounter in the form man-made boundaries as in the work of Tere Garcia. The use of photosensitive paper that responds to natural light in Garcia's series *Anti-Monument* underscores the illusion of an impenetrable border separating the United States and Mexico. Garcia documents her creation of a "contact picture" in which she weaves the paper in between the rusted metal slats of a fence dividing the two countries. Over time the sun darkens the exposed surface and leaves an imprint of the fence. This process of weaving and the resulting contact picture symbolize the transitory state of being that many people experience navigating between cultures, countries, languages, and identities. Garcia emphasizes that the contact picture is not fixed, but rather, "light and time will erase the image." This ephemerality is a reminder of the malleability and potential adaptability of nation-state borders often overlooked in contemporary politics.

All of the artists in this exhibition engage with the haptic in uniquely compelling ways, both materially and conceptually. Campt reminds us that to touch and to visualize touch broadens methods of communication, thereby encouraging a deeper understanding of the function of art. Thoughtful analysis of functionality is especially needed in this contemporary moment that has revealed the dysfunction in our traditional strategies for relaying and receiving information. During our studio visit Ashveta Budhrani impressed upon this issue when speaking about her projects, which include braille-infused tactile objects intended to make the art world more accessible for people who are blind. Budhrani explained that for individuals who rely on senses other than the ocular, communication in the visual arts has always been limited and exclusionary. The mission of inclusivity in visual thinking behind her practice speaks to the need for every conversation about the haptic to address accessibility in order to fully account for peoples' lived experiences. In doing so, notions of the tactile are expanded to include all aspects of making and interacting with art no matter where we find ourselves—even on Zoom.

BECOMING COUNTRY

Shehab Awad

The term nostalgia was coined by Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in 1688. Back Then, nostalgia was categorized as a potentially curable infectious disease diagnosed by obsessive longing, and a lost sense of time. It was thought that those who suffered from the incapacitating illness were rendered dysfunctional, lost their appetites, experienced nausea, and even had a propensity towards suicide. Even leeches and opium were used as a potential cure for the disease. Without something to return to, the nostalgic subject is incapable of finding peace. Wandering aimlessly, stuck in the past, unable to fully comprehend the present.

Experiencing nostalgia implies a lost sense of belonging. A belonging for some thing, some place, or someone that perhaps doesn't exist anymore, or even if it does, not in the same way. Much of our feeling of belonging is also connected to a notion of home. But, what is a feeling of being at home when one's home is unsafe, unwelcoming, or broken? Birds construct intricate nests only to desert them after their fledglings take flight. Can we conceive of the concept of home outside of permanence, ownership, and territorialization?

In his seminal book, *The Poetics of Space* (1969), French philosopher Gaston Bachelard reminisces about the space of the house, or the notion of home nostalgically, associating its warmth to that of a womb. He argues that the house we are born into encompasses us in warmth, and memories of that house remind

us of that warmth. He adds that it is our sense of where we belong in the world. We don't belong in the world and we wouldn't know that we belonged in the world, if it weren't for the a priori idea of the home. According to Bachelard, to be at home is to have a sense of oneself in the world. But what happens when one doesn't feel like they belong to the home, or community that they were born into? Maybe a sense of belonging need not be tied to any single place, any more so than one's identity does.

I encounter such questions when thinking about some of the works in *Manifest*. Whether it is questioning one's place in specific communities, like in Jesse Egner's work, or struggling with a sense of belonging that is tied to a specific locality, or nationhood like in the work of Steven Baboun. The work of these artists and others in this exhibition further led me to think: is it possible to shift the notion of home away from physical ownership, or a permanent place, and instead find home within the self?

There are many examples of living that challenge Bachelard's postulation that the desire of a solid, stable home-unit is instinctual to humans, and inherent to the construction of one's identity. Nomadic communities still alive today, such as the Kochi people of Northern and Eastern Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania come to mind. Even though current societal structures and governments make it difficult, or almost impossible, to exist within cities without a permanent address or proof thereof, there are still efforts aiming to challenge that. The Location Independent Movement for example, a term coined by Leo Jovy who published an ebook with the same title in 2007, is a lifestyle and community that rejects society's notion of a permanent home by making accessible tools and resources to aid people in working remotely, from anywhere.

Continuing to think beyond ourselves, migrating animals, for instance, offer an interesting example of a life which disrupts the notion of a singular, permanent home. Even though these species do return to a "home," which is usually their breeding grounds at some point, they are constantly moving and never settle too long in the same place. For migrating species, homes are temporary, exist all around

the world, and are occupied for short lengths of time. What then can the concept of home mean from a non-anthropocentric perspective?

A non-anthropocentric perspective is a view that decenters humans as the main focal point, benefactor, or victim of reality. Viewing ourselves as the center of all things is a perspective that rose with the onset of capitalism during the Enlightenment in the 17th century, which brought with it notions of personal empowerment, and individual liberties. The divorce of humans from nature followed as a consequence. Non-anthropocentrism is an attempt to unlearn that. Perhaps from a non-anthropocentric perspective, home can be viewed as a place that is shared. It is a home that displaces, or distributes ownership. Pongsak Pattamasaeви explores these perspectives in his work. His video is a collection of footage of animals looking directly back at the lens attempting to capture them, as if returning that same gaze; destabilizing the agency of subject and object. Who is really watching whom?

I find intimacy on online broadcasting websites, like cam4. After logging in, I like to find someone to privately message. First, I tip them. Then, once I've gotten their attention, we begin to chat privately. I shower them with compliments, all sincere: how beautiful I think their cock is, and how much their smile at the camera turns me on. I like the fact that they are interacting with me, while also broadcasting and being watched by others. I like when their smiles, and looks, and strokes are directed, and dedicated to me. Often, I will start broadcasting too, so we can both see each other, and touch ourselves for each other. It comforts me knowing that two people, connecting from completely different places in the world are watching one another, enjoying one another, communicating with one another, financially benefiting one and another, and sharing space with one another, at the same exact time. However temporary those moments last, they nevertheless give me a sense of belonging I long to return to. Luckily for me, it always seems to be there, whenever I return.

STEVEN BABOUN

Steven Baboun is a queer Haitian-Syrian artist from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and based in New York City. He received a Bachelor's degree in Film and Media Arts as well as a minor in Education Studies from American University and graduated from Parsons School of Design with a Master of Fine Arts in Photography.

Baboun is a multimedia artist creating through photography, video, performance, and installation. His practice consists of creating in collaboration with and based off different marginalized or unrepresented communities in Haiti such as the queer community, the multicultural community (i.e. the Haitian-Syrian community), and the religious community (i.e. Haitian Vodou).

His work has traveled to Los Angeles, Haiti, Miami, South Korea, China, Netherlands, and New York City. He has shown at El Rincón Social during Fotofest in Houston, Texas, Photoville in New York City, Platform-L Contemporary in Seoul, South Korea, the Pingyao International Photography Festival in Shanxi, China, and Museum Belvédère in the Netherlands.

For more of Baboun's work, visit stevenbaboun.com or connect with him on Instagram @stevenbaboun.



BMALKÉ HAVE YOU SEEN PORT-AU-PRINCE?

Embraced by the Haitian sun. Fed by the Syrian cuisine of my grandparents.
Floating in-between homelands. In between-water. Between Haiti and Syria.
Not Haitian enough.
Not Syrian enough.
Because of Syria, he is Haitian. Because of Haiti, he is Syrian.

Bmalké, Have You Seen Port-au-Prince? is a video installation that is looking at my identity as a queer Haitian-Syrian. Through the lens of family history and memory; immigration; confronting my and my mother's in-between, fluid sense of being; textile and fabric as a tie to cultural visual identity and my grandmother's art-making practice; personal and family happenings in both Haiti and Syria; physical landscape of both countries; and language, I am looking at how my family's journey in the world created the identity I bear— an identity that is in-between, ever-evolving, fluid, and what I call “floating.” I am not Haitian enough. I am not Syrian enough. However, as I look at the documentation of identity through Bmalké, Have You Seen Port-au-Prince?, I see the formation of a new identity. I see the shedding of origin while still honoring it. I see my new land, my new home: the in-between— and even shedding the in-between to travel beyond it.





ASHVETA BUDHRANI

Ashveta Budhrani (b.1994) Mumbai, India, is an artist working at the intersections of Photography, Design, and Technology based between New York and San Francisco. She makes interactive art installations that are accessible to the non-visual audience talking about language, memory, connection, communication, and touch, with each project she creates a unique multi-sensory experience. Budhrani has a background in Software Engineering from Mumbai University, 2016. She was awarded the Nat Geo Moment Award, India, 2014. Budhrani did Post Baccalaureate in Studio Arts from San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, 2017, and studied international art exhibitions: The Venice Biennale, Documenta, and Skulptur Projekte Munster in Italy and Germany. She was awarded the Clyde & Co Arts Award for being Top 20 Artist in San Francisco, 2017. Budhrani graduated with her Masters in Fine Arts Photography and Impact Entrepreneurship from Parsons School of Design, The New School University, New York, where she was awarded the Dean's Merit Scholarship. She had solo and collective exhibitions, publications, workshops, and talks in China, India, Germany, and the USA. She previously worked as a celebrity music photographer and art director. She is an advocate for accessibility for the blind in the Art world. She is also an activist and educator for migrant and refugee children in India and the USA.

Website: ashveta.art

Instagram: [@ashveta](https://www.instagram.com/ashveta)

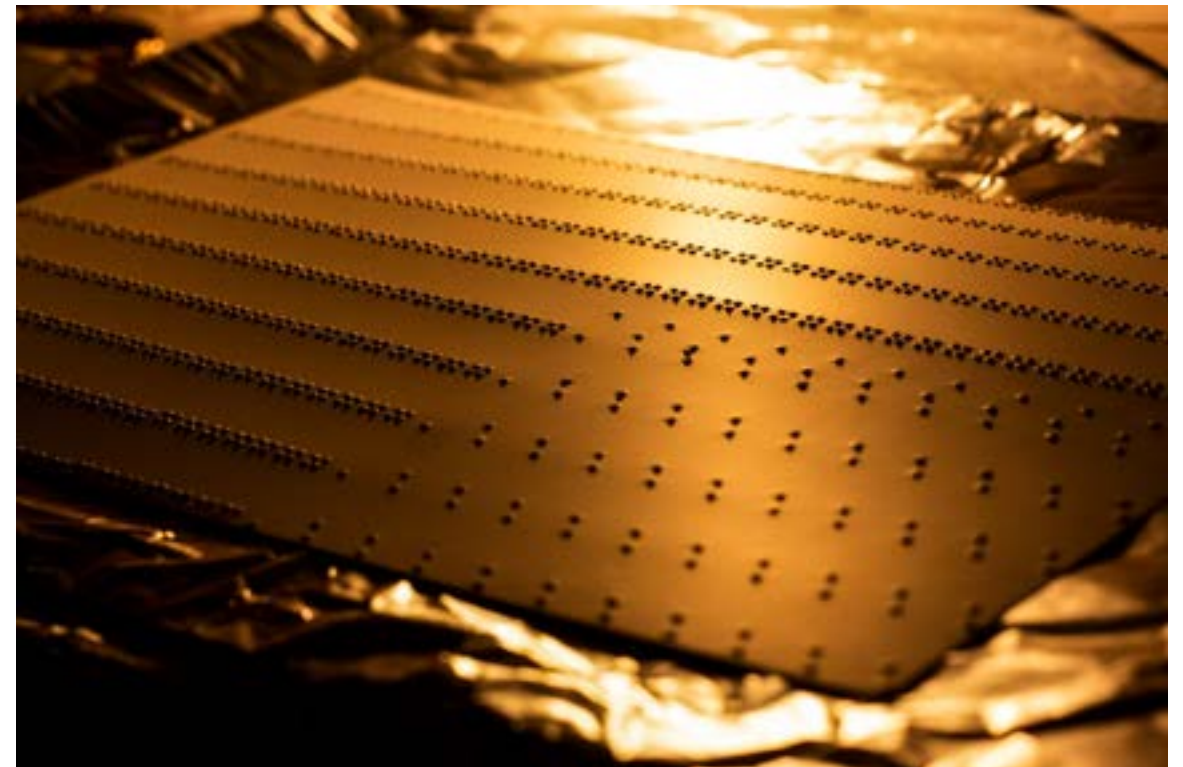
Linkedin: [in/ashveta](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ashveta)

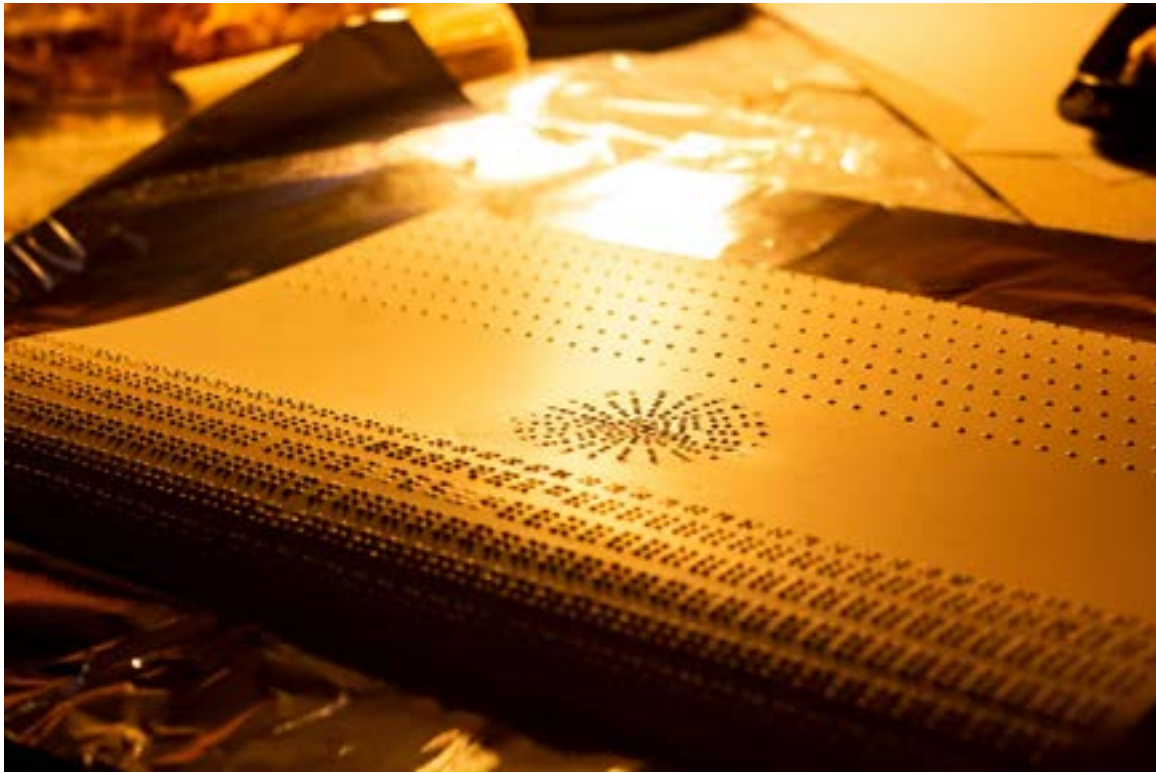


THE POWER OF SHADOWS AND LIGHT is revisiting the basics and using the elements from the philosophy of photography to create this piece. As explained by *Flusser, Vilém. Towards a Philosophy of Photography. United Kingdom: Reaktion Books, 2013.*, “The ability to encode phenomena into two-dimensional symbols and to read these symbols.”

I used the patriotic symbols from the United States and India, their flags. I made these braille flags using the metaphor of blindness and borrowing the language of the blind. Braille is the act of punching holes in paper to raise the alphabets, alphabets making words, words creating language, and language forming a story. In tune with *Jasper John's, Flag Series (1955)* I painted the flags with Indigo/*Nila*. In Hindu mythology, it was the darkest dye produced therefore in order to paint the paintings and figurines of Lord Krishna, the savior who shows the light and Lord Shiva, the protector, and the destroyer. However indigo turns dark blue after drying up. I am using Google's creditability tool which is powered by Artificial Intelligence and Motion Capture to create a sound as the person interacts with the piece by creating movements. Emphasizing how actions speak louder than words. My work promotes thinking-feeling by inviting the audience to interact and become part of this art experience. Everyone who comes in contact with the work made during the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020 has to follow guidelines set by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) for it to be safe to install and interact with by making the process part of the experience.

I am commenting on the banal nationalism happening in these two countries the USA and India. How the structure is set by the populist leaders of these countries is such it excludes the voices of the minorities. Often people are blindsided by what is happening around them, some choose to shut their eyes to ignore what is happening if that doesn't directly affect them. Hence by borrowing a new language, if things are served in a different way and the viewers are put in a position to hear the voices which are usually ignored as noise and make the viewer conscious about their actions and send a signal on how their actions really matter and that all affirmative action towards change counts. Each person counts.





JESSE EGNER

Jesse Egner is an artist working primarily with photography and video. Often taking the form of playful and absurd portraiture of himself and other individuals, his work explores themes of queerness, disidentification, queer corporeality, and the uncanny. Egner was born in 1993 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and is currently based in Brooklyn, New York. His work has recently been included in exhibitions at Photographic Center Northwest in Seattle, Washington; El Rincón Social and Box 13 ArtSpace in Houston, Texas; Columbia College in Chicago, Illinois; Academy Art Museum in Easton, Maryland; the Festival de Arte Lanzarote in Lanzarote, Spain; and the Pingyao International Photography Festival in Pingyao, China. His photographs have been featured in publications by Soft Lightning, Plataforma Minima, Photographer's Forum, and CNN Style. He received his BA from Millersville University of Pennsylvania in 2016 and his MFA in Photography at Parsons School of Design in 2020.



DISIDENTIFICATIONS

“No Femmes. No Fats.” When I started making profiles on gay dating/hookup apps as a teenager, this is a phrase I came across frequently, which set precedent that defined me as unwelcome. Luckily, this phrase isn’t quite as common anymore, but other variations that suggest the same thing have stuck around (“Fit only,” “Masc only,” etc). There are sub-communities that admire or even fetishize these otherwise undesired features, but imagine how difficult it can be to allow yourself to be admired for aspects of yourself you have been repeatedly conditioned to despise.

As a queer person with a non-normative body and an invisible disability, I have experienced constant rejection from members of my fellow gay community, forcing me into a precarious relationship with myself. *Disidentifications* is a series of absurd, unusual, and playful portraits of queer individuals meant to evoke the uncanny, humor, and curiosity. Inspired by the theory of disidentification as described by queer theorist José Muñoz, this series examines the liminality of disidentities that neither identify or counter-identify with a dominant ideology. The playful and performative acts and symbols in these photographs reflect the uneasy relationship I’ve developed with myself, while the fragmented narratives and uncertainty that exist in a space between reality and fantasy reflect the transitional space of queer identity.





TERE GARCIA

Tere Garcia is originally from Monterrey, NL, Mexico. She graduated from the University of Houston with a BFA in Photography and Digital Media and is currently pursuing her MFA in Photography at Parsons the New School for Design in New York City. Garcia works in a variety of media such as video, sculpture, installation, traditional and digital photography. Her work employs conceptual and performative tactics to intervene in the photographic processes.

She has exhibited at The Houston Center for Photography, Blaffer Art Museum, Box 13, Photoville, HCC Central Fine Art Gallery, Fotofest participating spaces, Presa House, Rudolph Blume Fine Art Gallery, Los Angeles, CA and New York, NY.

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ANTI-MONUMENT

I use the Border Wall and borderlands as my form of protest.

I am intertwining photosensitive paper in the fence, to create a photogram. The paper became a metaphor; I am the paper, I am now in Mexico and the USA, I am in-between. The paper is a shifting human accommodation, two cultures, two languages, two different identities it recorded power and domination.

With light-sensitive paper, I capture the imprint of the fence, the photosensitive paper itself collected small metal particles of the rusted metal and also scratches and marks that were recorded. The scratches left in the paper became a representation of the scars that these “monuments” cause to humanity and the ecosystem.

Light and time will erase the image, and it will erase the momentary image in the contact print. The marks of the gestures at the fence will stay permanently like the physiological scars and traumas that exist in every immigrant that crosses these marks, these boundaries, these fences. These images of the border are not meant to be reminded or to be fixed, but to change and disappear.



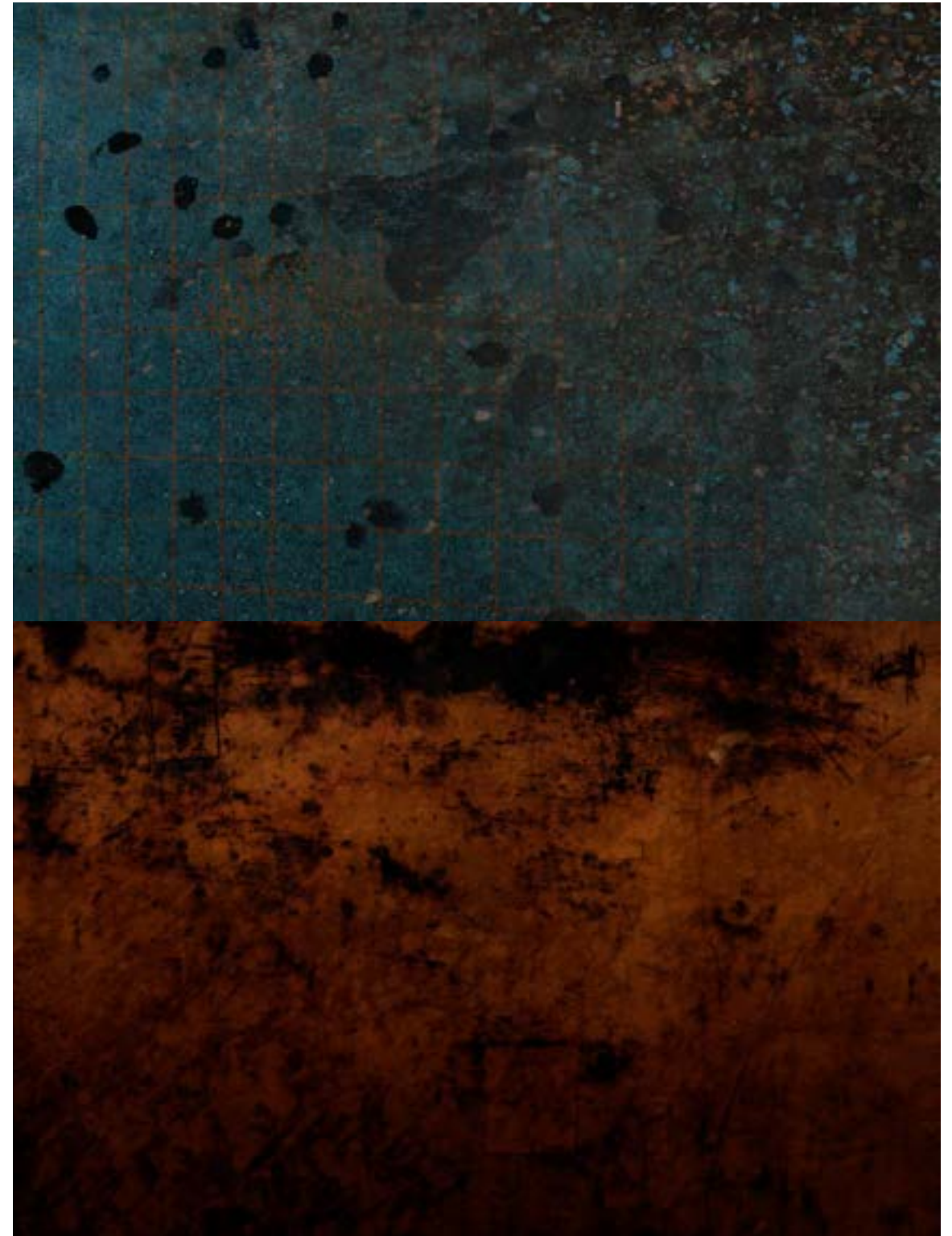
XIANG GENG

Also as known as Sean Fox / 耿翔

Xiang Geng was born in Wuhan and raised in Guangdong, China. He graduated from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville in 2018 with a BFA in Fine Art Studio and is pursuing his MFA in Photography at Parsons School of Design, the New School in New York City.

Geng works in a variety of mediums such as installation, printmaking, video, performance, and traditional or digital photography. He tends to discuss serious social issues that are often ignored. Both oriental and western cultural backgrounds give his works dual meanings. Humor and political satire always play important roles in his works.

He has exhibited at Pingyao International Photo Festival in China, Photoville 2018 in New York City, Manifest Gallery, Cincinnati, OH, Univ. of Central Missouri, Univ. of Arkansas, Lalaland Gallery and sUgAR Gallery in Fayetteville, AR. He has been awarded twice in Photographer's Forum Magazine Annual Best of Photography Contest.



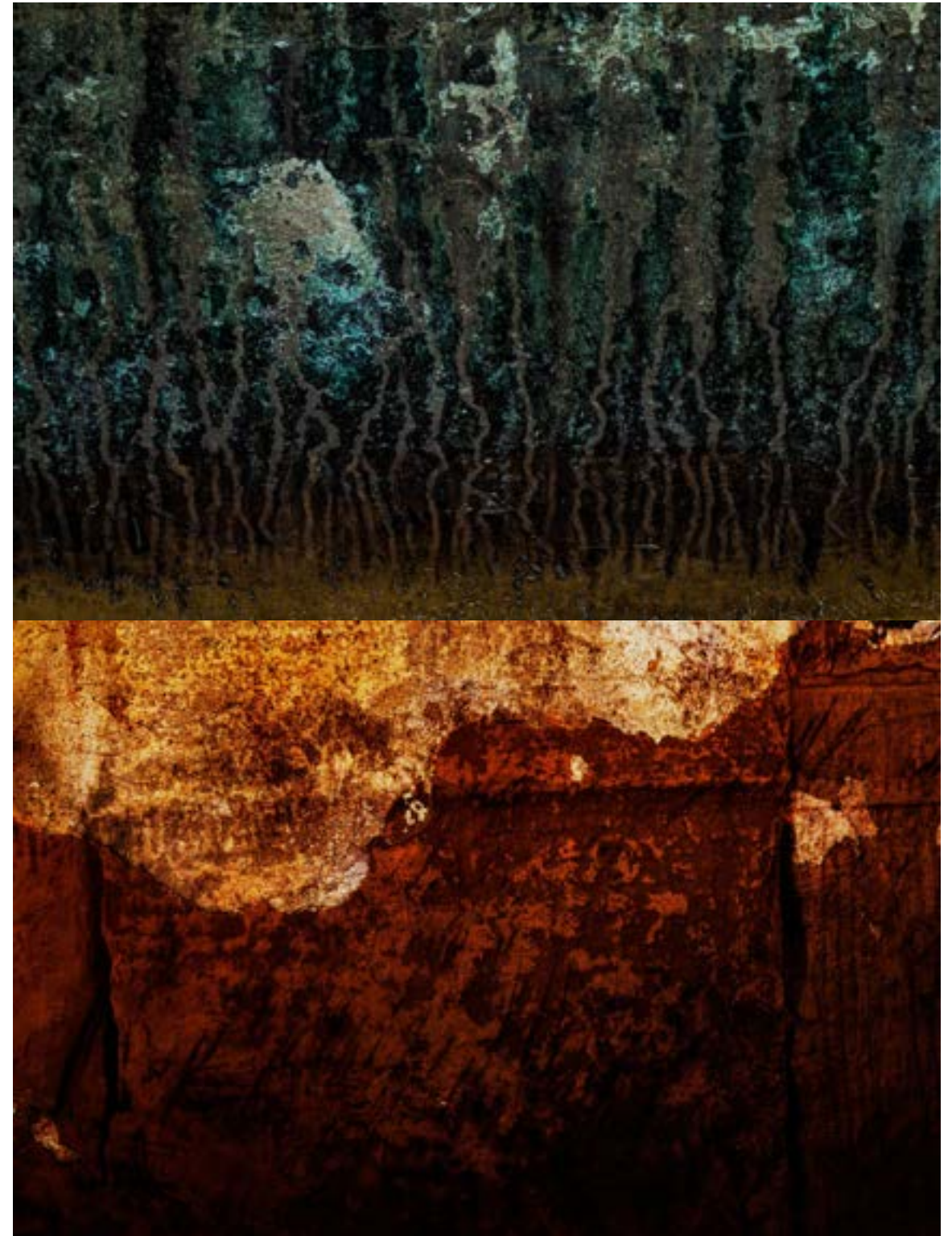
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Three-channel video installation / 8:05 mins

There was a poem I read during childhood that I recalled came, but I could never remember a single word of it, not even the poet's name. In this day and age, humans store memories in machines. Memory is digitized, symbolized, and can be easily read, modified, and transferred. In my work, I coded and symbolized my feelings about memory and tampered, modified, and destroyed it so that it could not be restored.

You may connect with my work. It's not your connection to its content, it's your connection to me. I edited an abstract experience that could not be written into a symbol that could be seen, touched, smelled, or heard. I used my work as a vehicle to try to reproduce you. They are all pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that I left for you, though they relate to me, they also relate to you.

Please don't leave off each piece, put them together. I hope you will remember the poem in your heart when you have carefully looked at this piece.





MICHAEL GRANT

Michael Grant was born in Miami, FL in 1991, and currently works out of Brooklyn, NY. Grant is an artist who investigates aesthetics of blackness, class, family, relationships, and cultural diversities. Grant works across multiple mediums developing bodies of work employing photography, collage, video, sculpture, and sound design. Constantly inspired by the materiality of black culture and its expression through domestic environments, Grant is drawn to non traditional processes with the aim of showcasing a new standard.



DO YOU WANT TO DANCE?

As I rummage through photos on my grandmother's floor, I could hear her call out "Michael Leave My Things Alone!"

Not realizing I've fallen into our vast array of family photos, she calls out again and is met yet again with silence.

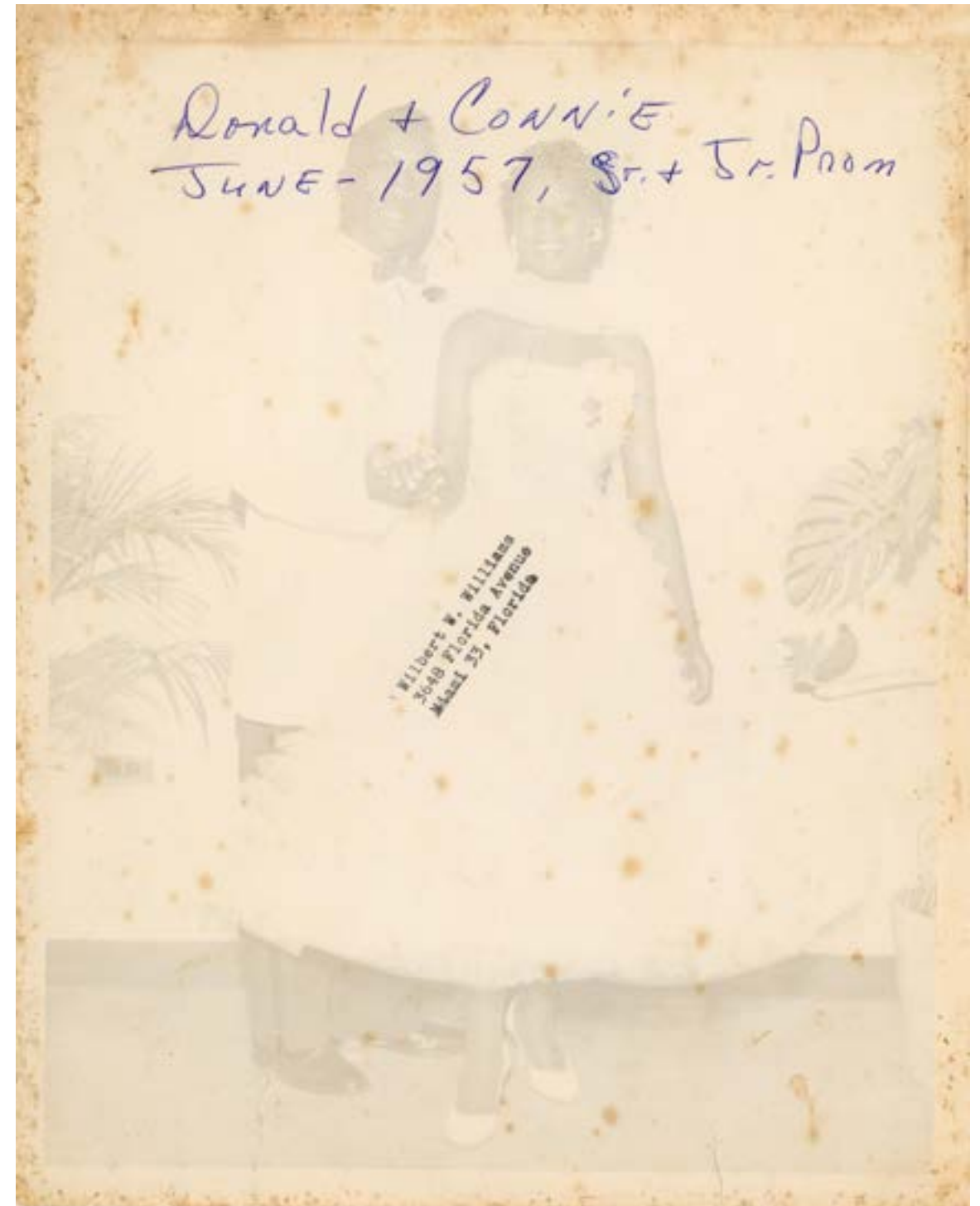
As *The Price is Right* faintly plays in the background, I could hear her storming towards my direction.

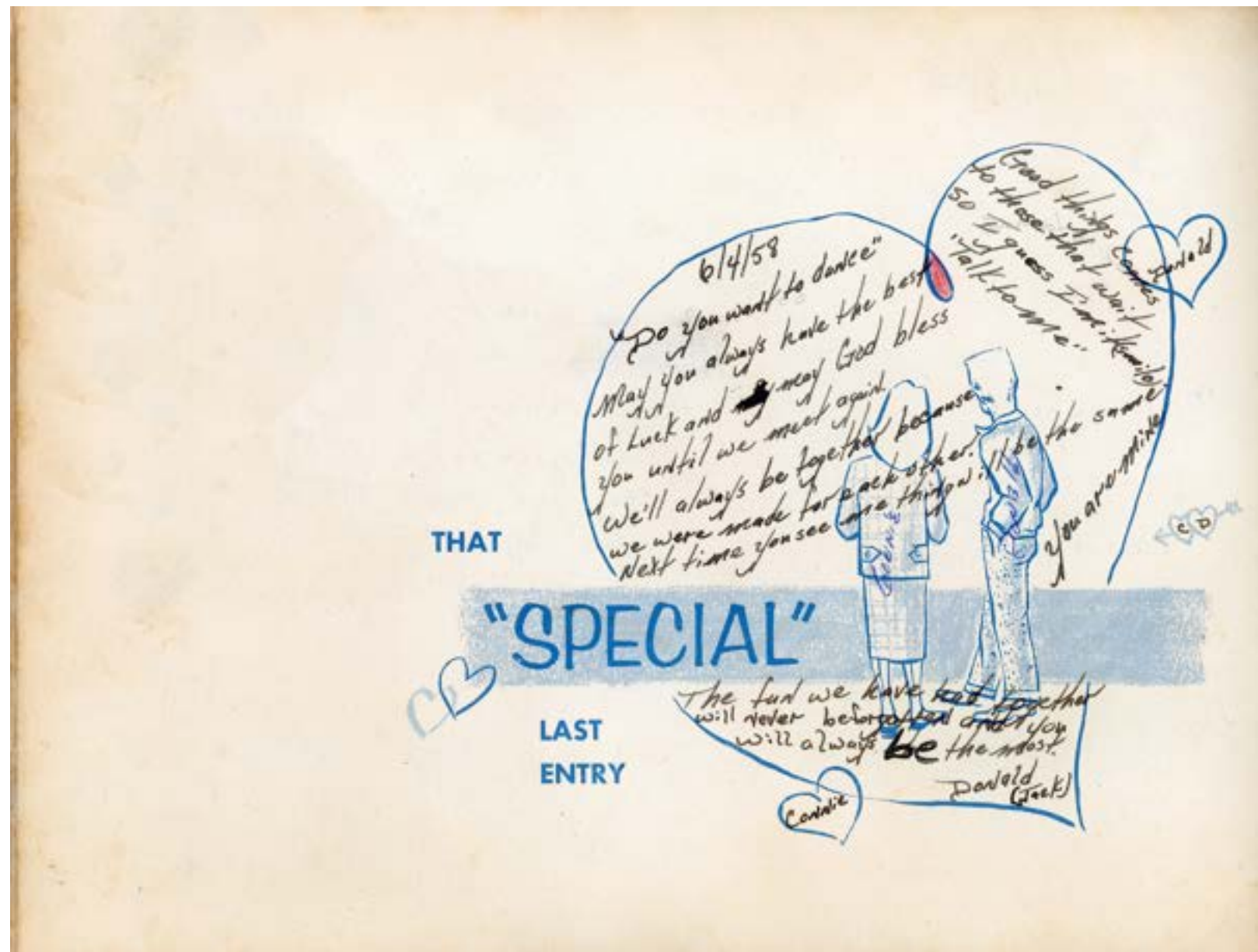
As she attempts to meet me, I embrace her. Not only am I equipped with physical representations of our past,

I'm also armed with our future and the longing for more!

"Do You Want To Dance?" is an exploration of time, memory, identity within one's own lineage, access, and preservation through the Black family archive. Despite the erasure and hardships generally associated with the black family archive, it still holds the place of the north star for the African American community. It illuminates the way for ancestral connections, and guides the way for generations to come.

While exploring the real yet imaginary relationship between my grandmother and grandfather, I've started to uncover a broader image of what love looks like, the power of risk and reward in the context of love, and the hope that love is truly obtainable.





JANIUCI GÜNTZEL

Janiuci Güntzel is a photographer and videographer based in Brooklyn, New York. The artist was born and raised in Brasil, where she graduated from Santa Marcelina College with a BFA in Fashion Design and is currently pursuing her MFA in Photography at Parsons School of Design. Her most recent work is an investigation of how the Brazilian youth is reacting to the current political situation in her country. Due to the introspective tone of Güntzel's work, the artist is documenting in this ongoing series of videos, the life of her closest friends from her hometown in south Brasil, Chapecó. The language of the piece is a translation of the world they are inserted in: pop, fast, almost like a music video where the aesthetical components are the primary form of resistance against the prejudice, violence and abuse suffered on a daily basis.



SQUAD

Where sorrow meets escapism.

The documental piece '*SQUAD*' is a response to the feeling of agony in watching my own nation vanishing, mixed with the hope of a better future. In between the attempt to understand and process the conglomerate of opposite emotions is where the work relies.

Politics x Brazilian youth.

What is the way young minorities have found to protect themselves from violence, racism, homophobia and sexism when just walking on the streets can cost their lives and sometimes the fear resides in their own homes?

Love. Communities are being created, friends are family. A wall of protection is being constructed and nobody is allowed to cross it.





AMANDA JOHNSON

Amanda Johnson is a South Bronx-based artist and photographer. She is a member of the JustOne Collective, Editor of Copper Magazine, and co-founder of The Pandemic Archive. Johnson obtained a Bachelor's degree in Fine Art with a concentration in photography from Earlham College and an MFA in Photography from Parsons School of Design. Her work has been exhibited at Ghost Gallery, El Rincon Social in participation with Photofest Houston and Photoville in New York City. Internationally, she's shown at the Pingyao International Photography Festival in China and Platform L in Korea. Johnson's recent work focuses on beauty standards for Black women in America and uses the aesthetic language of Edward Weston's imagery as a way of dismantling the exclusivity in homogeneous society's definition of beauty.



THE EVOLUTION OF HER SELF WORTH

The foundation of *The Evolution of Her Self Worth*, came from my personal journey of wanting to be recognized and celebrated as a beautiful, powerful, and sensual being, a beautiful, powerful and sensual Black woman. Feeling beaten and let down by myself for seemingly having fallen into a stereotype of the Black woman as overly sexualized and degraded. An idea that says I shouldn't find power and strength in feeling sensual and sexy, and yet I do. A series of experiences that made me believe that as Black women, I cannot find power in these things. *The Evolution of Her Self Worth* is the culmination of many attempts at trying to piece together my own self-worth, ideas about femininity, sensuality, acceptability, and power. It is about taking the image that doesn't feel too sexual but just enough to evoke a feeling of strength and sensuality. Something that critiques the assertion that a Black woman cannot be too sexy or forward, too confident or empowered. The idea that enjoying and indulging in my size and curves was a predisposition to being enticed by sexualization, something needing to be snuffed out or pushed to the side all the while it's seeping out at the seams. The homogenous history of photography and art-making in response to the female body has either degraded and demeaned the Black women or denied her existence. This act of erasure from an era of image-making draws me to create work aesthetically reminiscent of that style as an act of writing Black women into that history. I draw from the aesthetic language of Edward Weston and challenge the misogynistic male gaze of artist's such as Weston, Man Ray and Brandt.





ANJELIC OWENS

Anjelic Owens (b.1994) is a visual artist and educator based in Brooklyn, New York. She received her BS in Mathematics at Illinois State University and MFA in Photography at Parsons School of Design.

My practice is an exploration of the interconnected layers in societal structures. My practice continues to investigate the intricacies of systemic injustice in relation to marginalized black and brown communities. Through my work the excavation process serves to develop new ways for folks to engage within these systems. With common themes of privilege, accessibility, white supremacy, agency, and intergenerational trauma, I began to redefine how I utilize photography. I gravitated towards the creation of space and its ability to affect our emotional sensibility. This process has developed into a combination of installation, sound and readymade objects into the space. As my practice has become more socially engaged, it has given me the framework to use the tools of institutional critique in relation to the academic space.

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DEAF KNOCKS

“Deaf Knocks” embodies the relationship between erasure and visibility of black and brown students within the classroom space. How the communal energy is established in the classroom environment is critical for the well being of each student. I began to re-open my experience in predominantly white schools, from conversations with the undergraduate students at my job. From those interviews I ventured into abolitionist teaching ideology, which opened the door to demanding the “impossible”; a classroom where each student doesn’t survive but flourishes. I began to engage with these concepts through found objects and sound, which has opened up my practice to explore how this combination activates an environment.





GYUHO PARK

GyuHo Park (b.1988) is a New York and Seoul based documentary photographer born in Seoul, South Korea. Inspired by a Robert Capa exhibition he saw as a child, he decided to pursue photography as a passion and career. He received a BFA degree in photography from the Academy of Art University in 2017 and an MFA degree in Photography from the Parsons School of Design in 2020. His work investigates the often contradictory relationships and messages in mass media, using his work to pursue more nuanced understanding of social issues, specifically in regards to representation. He is currently working on a project about the lives of migrant workers in New York and South Korea.



AFTER ARMANDO

As a documentary photographer, my work explores the relationship between the photographer and subject. I am interested in the way that power and the agency of the subject can be shown through both photographs and the actual act of photography itself. Photographs can try to be a “truthful” reflection of the world, but the truth is something that is negotiated between the photographer and the subject and the viewer. Even though the medium of photography seems to have no limits, my work shows how the relationship between the subject and photographer already limits the way the viewer sees and understands the photographs.

In March of 2019, I began documenting the life of Martin, an immigrant who was working at a slaughterhouse in Queens. As I spent more time documenting Martin and his friends from the slaughterhouse, an interesting and yet complicated friendship developed between us. After the sudden death of Armando, who was in this group, I was forced to reconsider once again the complicated relationship between a photographer and their subject. Through the sharing the act of photographing with Martin, I try to share power with the subjects and see how the pictures function between us as our relationship changed from photographer and subject to friends. While the project shows the life of a New York immigrant, it more importantly reflects on how they and I look at each other and where and what our relationship is through photography.

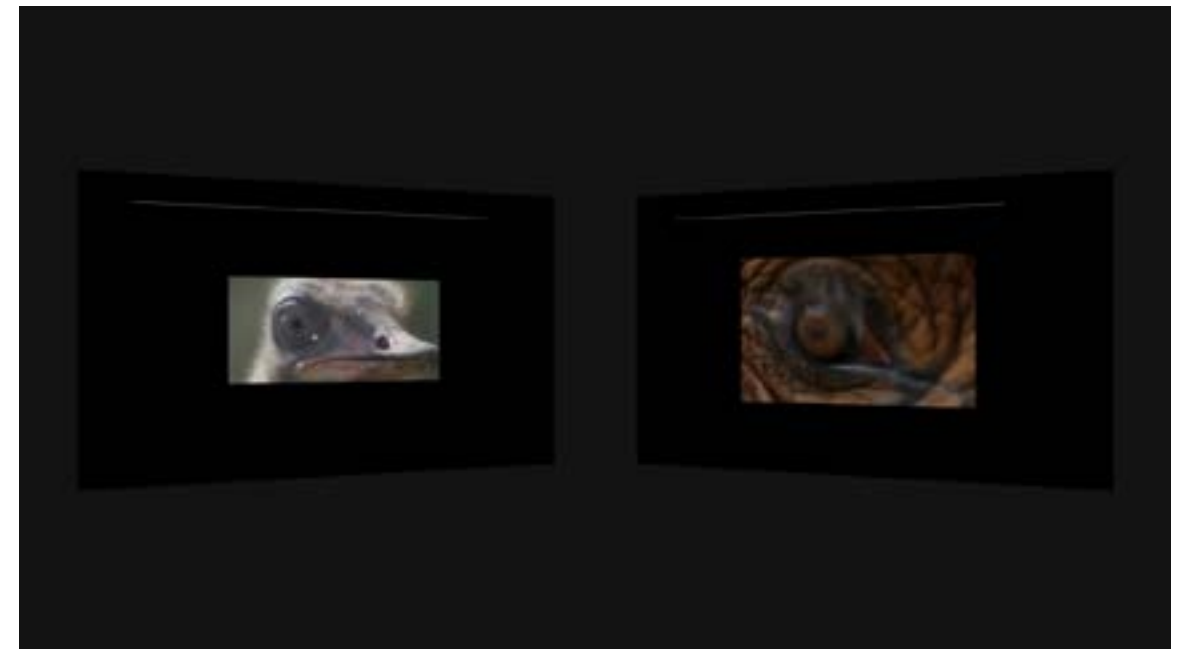
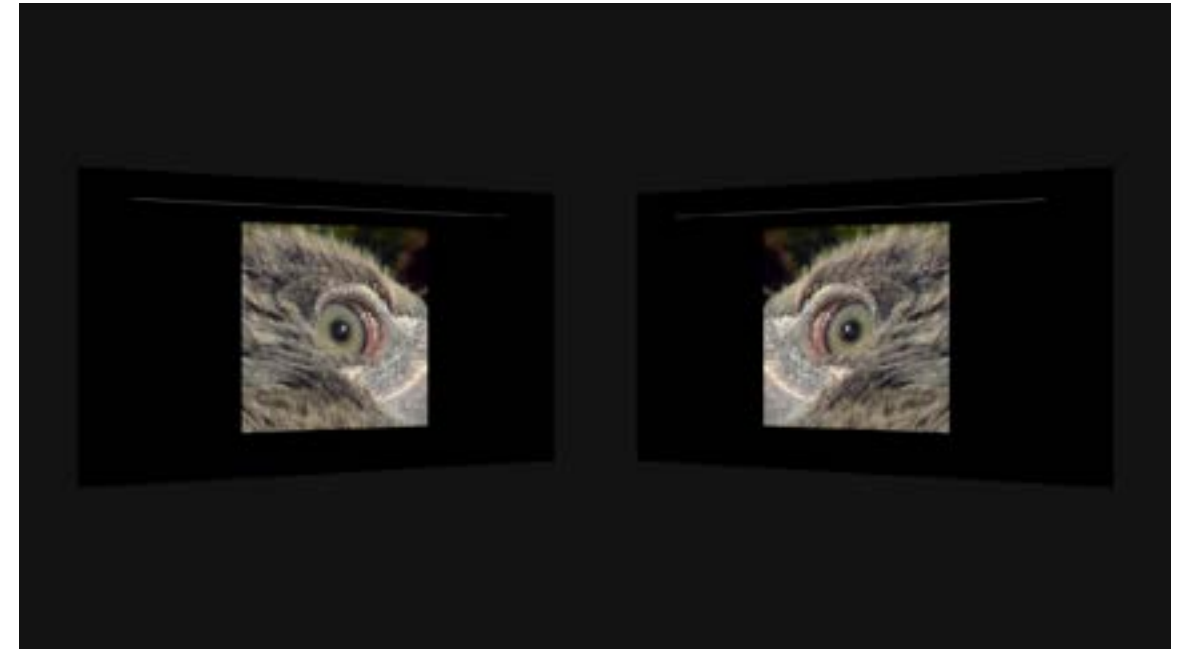




PONGSAK PATTAMASAEVI

Pongsak Pattamasaevi (b. 1988) creates images and videos that confront the consequences of humankind's continued distancing from the natural world. He works to dismantle the near-universal assumption that humans are inherently separate from and superior to the natural world - a dangerous attitude that leads our kind into a pattern of reckless exploitation.

Pattamasaevi is native to Bangkok, Thailand. Prior to pursuing an MFA degree at the Parsons School of Design, he lived and worked as a creative director and photographer in Taipei, Taiwan. His art practice today is deeply inspired by the island nations' deep-rooted commitment to environmental protection.



BIOPHILIA

Two-channel video

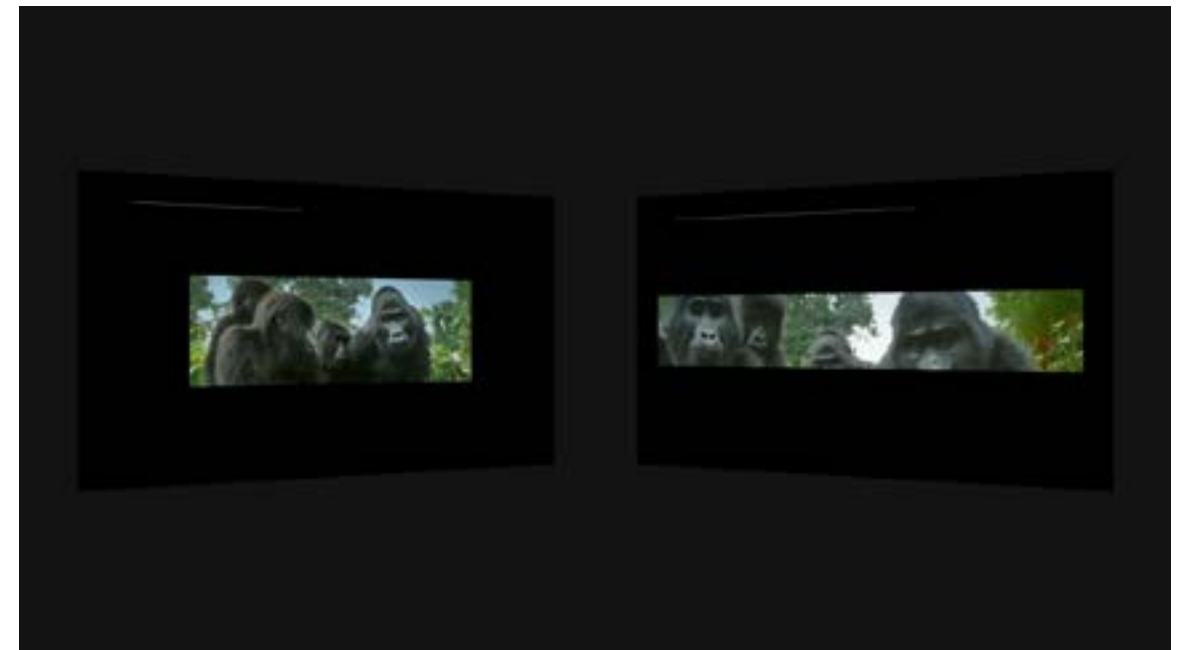
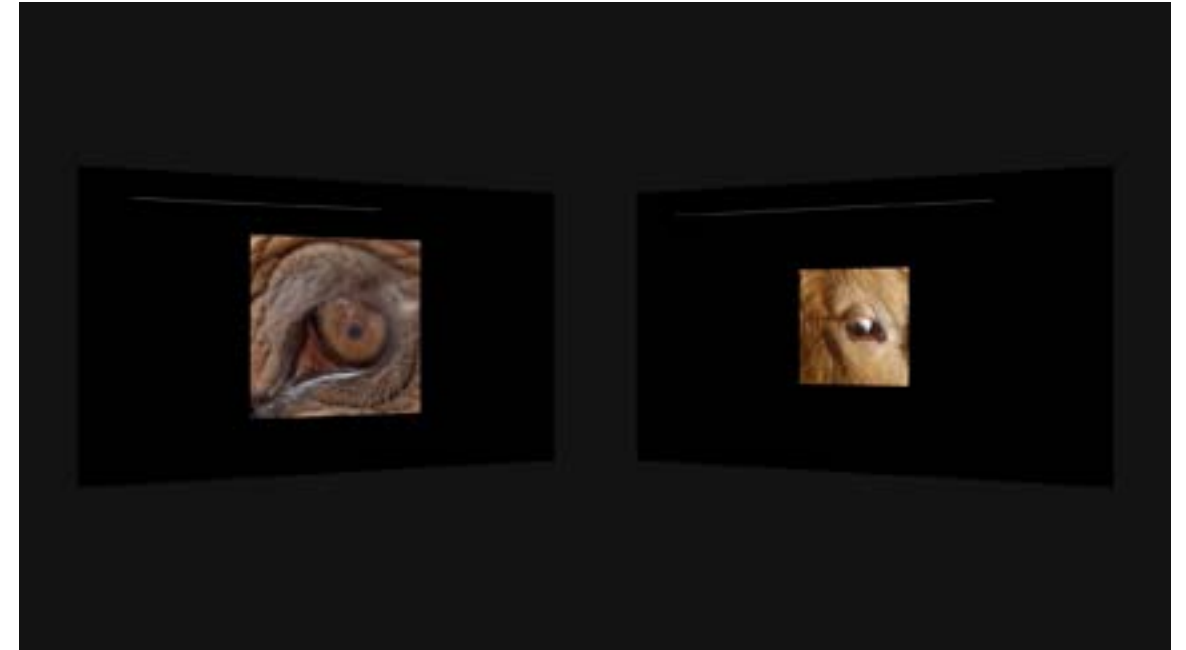
2:00 minutes and 1:55 minutes, looping

If an ethic is a body of rules that helps us navigate new and intricate circumstances far in the unforeseeable future, I believe one of the most important acts we can achieve within our lifetime is the creation of an enduring conservation ethic. Ultimately, I view our rampant mistreatment of living environments as partly a matter of perception. And I believe art, alongside activism, can play a critical role in reframing deep-rooted and sometimes misguided ways of thinking.

Through my images of human-nature relationships, I ask my kind to think more ecologically, and consider our connections to and responsibilities towards other equal beings we now deem as disposable.

To this end, *Biophilia* (2020) confronts the anthropocentric attitude that our kind exists apart from and is in dominion over the natural world.

The video work presents a dual-screen montage of appropriated moments from nature documentaries when another living being, some on the verge of extinction, glances directly into the camera. The screens are angled slightly such that a triangle of cross-species gazes is formed in the presence of a human viewer. The viewer sometimes plays the role of the observer, and sometimes the role of the observed. And in those quieter moments without human participation, the animals peer at each other across the screens, exchanging glances indefinitely. In *Biophilia*, as in nature, the animals reserve no special look for humankind.





LUYAO WANG

Luyao Wang (b. 1995), is an artist working in photography and literature. Her works include narrative stories, natural, abstract and food photography. She is interested in art history. Often creating images that bridge the gap between traditional realms of art and photography, her photo work can be compared to the medium of painting.

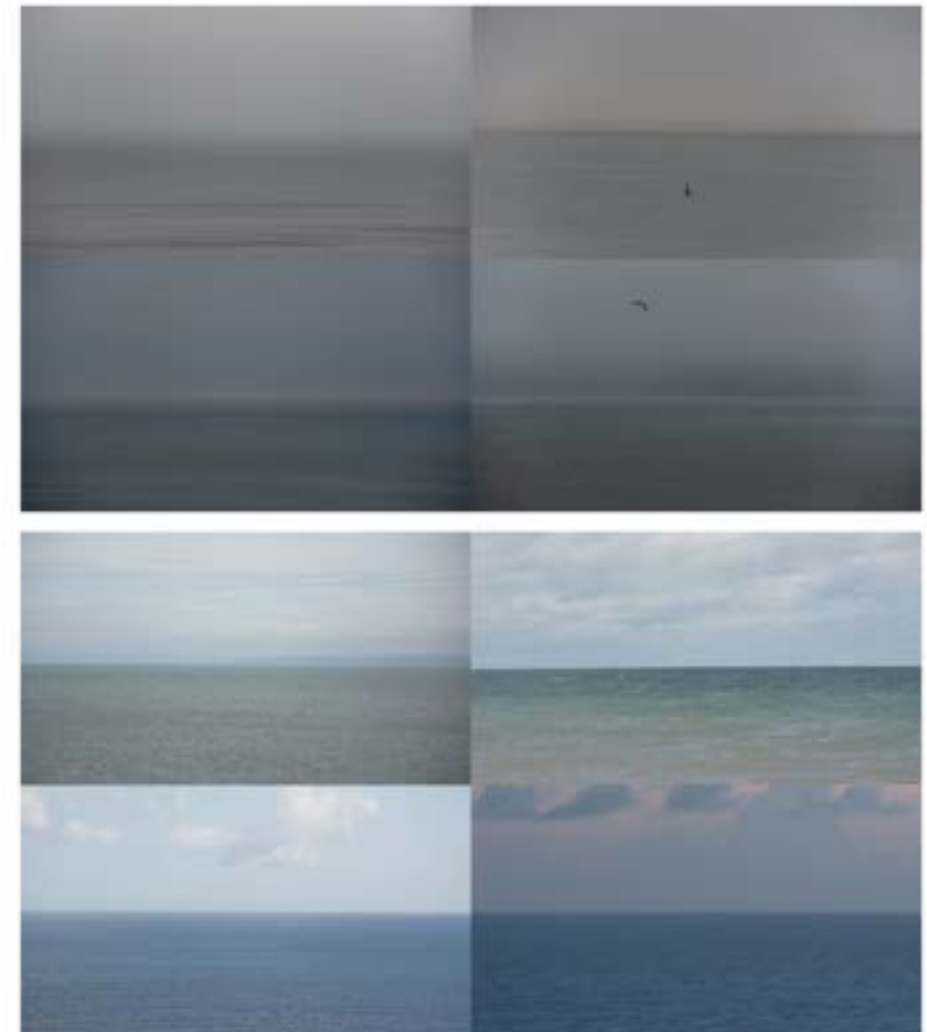
Wang is native to Liuzhou, China. Leaving her hometown, she came to Beijing and Denver, and received the BA degree in communication. During this time, she has done the weekly study of food and culture in Barcelona, Spain; and she learned a historical photographic process in a monthly program in Florence, Italy. Wang strongly experienced the similarity and comparison between south and north within China, between small towns rural life and metropolis city life; and the cultural shock from western world.

She is currently pursuing an MFA degree (in Photography) at the Parsons School of Design in NYC. And her studies have focused on humanistic geography.

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“LOOKING WHERE THERE IS NOTHING, YOU WILL FIND YOURSELF PROJECTED THERE.”

Nature is a place of comfort, imagination and meditation. I see the landscape as poetic, and see language as poetic because the human mind is poetic. I mean having some kind of rhythm, but with a lot of “play” and plurality of meaning, in the way that Barthes describes in “From Work to Text.”

“Orange island” is a constructed place. The weather and time of day in the set of works reflect my transition from sadness to calmness to lightness. Emotions also follow the works, from throbbing, to calmness, to lightness. Art provides an emotional solution. Although these places were captured are real, I still regard them as a place of comfort in my imagination, used to relieve sorrow and seek a place of tranquility.





JIACHEN ZHONG

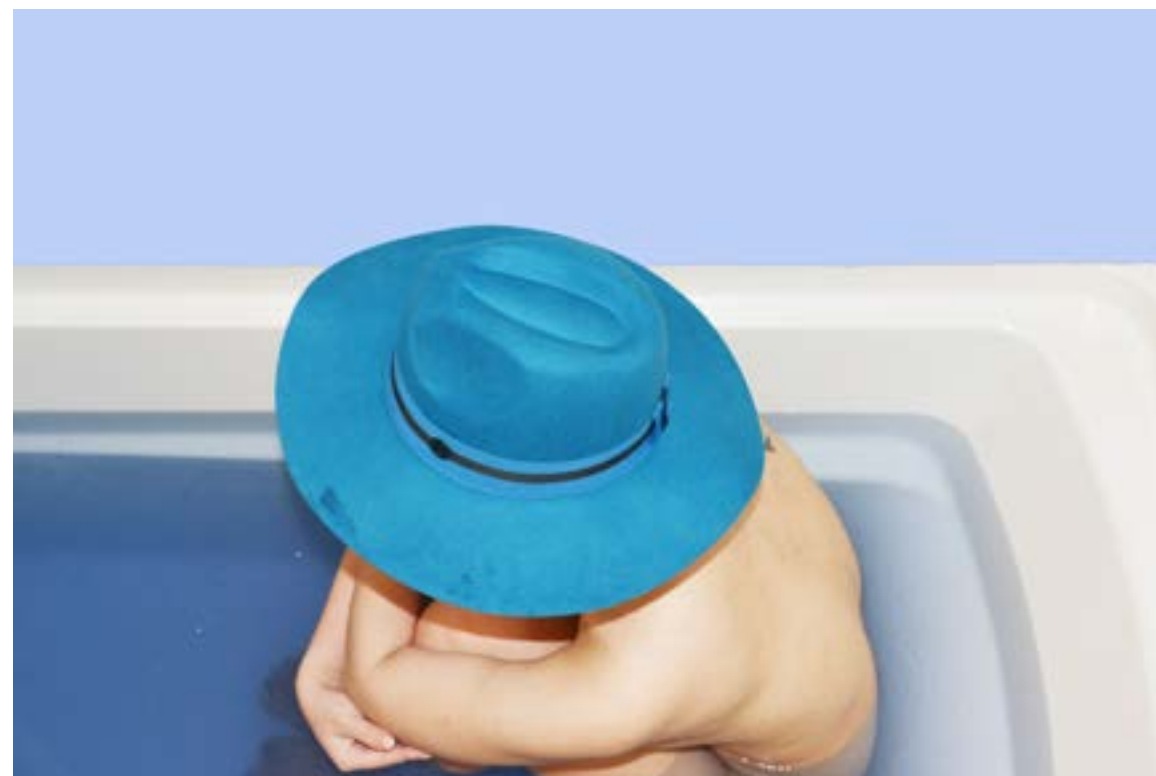
Jiachen Zhong (b.1996) is a China based artist studied in New York. Her multicultural background helps her to see things with an open mindset and encourages her curiosity to explore the diversity in art world. She received a BFA degree from University at Albany in Fine art. Her main medium is photography but also with a lot of great efforts on performance and installation. She is especially interested in topics related to consumerism and fashion. Her passion is to a large extent devoted to the presentation on the visual side, trying to find a unique path for her artistic career.



Covid-19 is the pandemic that invalidates the normal routine of a society. I use my collection of photos to help understand this epic moment from individual perspective. These photos with designed scenes are to show using objects by not following the formal usage instruction. The “weirdness” and “abnormality” presented in these photos are parallels to the society in confusion, indicating applied rules and schedules are not functioning.

In the history when events happen, individuals tend to be concluded as numbers that have not distinctive records and personalities. This collection is trying to generalize the lives during the specific time, helping people to realize that each individual has its own story in a history.





CENTIAN ZHOU

Centian Zhou comes from China, is a multimedia artist, focusing on discussing how society objectifies the female and requests female to be the perfect woman. After she graduated from the University of Oregon in 2015 with a BA degree in Economics and Japanese major, she came back to China worked in a television station for three years. Then she pursued her MFA in photography at Parsons School of Design. Her photos had been exhibited at Photoville 2018 in New York.



鸡 (Chicken)

I created the performance piece of touching and cutting the chicken to imply how the mass unequally objectifies women from an Asian perspective. In China, many people like to use some food that has unusual shapes to depict and objectify females. “Chicken” was the most famous one, which used to describe the woman is a “whore.” I exaggerate this phenomenon and mockingly made my performance piece, presenting how society requests the females to become a perfect woman.





THANK YOU

Jim Ramer
Stacy Miller
Anthony Aziz
Simone Douglas
Arthur Ou
M Burgess
Song Chong
Mike Crane
Sarah Hasted
William Lamson
Laura Parnes
Joe Wolin
Iris Stevens

Hashem Eaddy
Amanda Alfieri
Demetrius Oliver
Barb Compagnoni
Beth Gilbert
Nate Harger
Sol Hashemi
Tatiana Kronberg
Keren Moscovitch
Jeanine Oleson
MarieVic
Jack Nichols

Abstract geometric lines in white and pink on a black background. A vertical pink line runs down the left side. A horizontal white line runs across the top. A vertical white line runs down the left side, intersecting the pink line. A horizontal white line runs across the top, intersecting the pink line. A white line runs vertically down the left side, intersecting the pink line. A white line runs horizontally across the top, intersecting the pink line. A white line runs diagonally from the top left towards the center. A white line runs diagonally from the bottom left towards the center. A white line runs horizontally across the top, intersecting the pink line. A white line runs vertically down the left side, intersecting the pink line. A white line runs horizontally across the top, intersecting the pink line. A white line runs diagonally from the top left towards the center. A white line runs diagonally from the bottom left towards the center.

THESIS EXHIBITION 2020

THE NEW SCHOOL

PARSONS