ART DEPARTMENT
2019-2020

AR 401-402 / STUDIO CAPSTONE STUDENTS
Bennett Allen / Printmaking
Matt Calarco / Photography
Cen Yuzhou / Painting
Isabel Colón / Photography
Jake Conterato / Printmaking
Eli Decker / Painting
Alex Dorion / Printmaking
Aisling Flaherty / Photography
Natasha Gallagher / Printmaking
Emily Garza / Sculpture
Charlie Comprecht / Painting
Carter Hall / Printmaking
Matt Jones / Photography
Scott Kaplan / Photography
Austin Lee / Sculpture
Lexie Liu / Painting
Marla Montoya / Photography
Ellie Wright / Printmaking
Chang Zhang / Sculpture

AR 356 / WRITING ART CRITICISM STUDENTS
Howie Gao
Katie Herzig
Ella Hommeyer
Austin Lee
Jane A. Mackerron
Maria Minuesa
Marla C. Montoya
Ellie Wright

STUDIO FACULTY
Bradley Borthwick
Bevin Engman
Gary Green
Amanda Lileston
Gary Mitchell
Thalassa Raasch

ART HISTORY FACULTY
Marta Ameri
Daniel Harkett
Charles Orzech, Chair
Véronique Plesch
Tanya Sheehan
Juliet Sperling

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
Deborah Thurston

A NOTE FROM THE PROFESSORS
Two weeks before spring break, the art studios on campus were alive with activity. Students in the studio capstone were building sculptural models, printing from etched copper plates, experimenting with photographic technology and processes, and thinking about what a series of paintings might look like. As our seniors contemplated their culminating projects and reflected on what kinds of artists they wanted to be, participants in the Writing Art Criticism course were conducting interviews in cafes, classrooms, and common rooms and exploring how to represent an artist’s practice in words. Then, on a Thursday morning, we all received an email from President David Greene: campus was closing, most students were to be sent home, and classes would be taught remotely for the remainder of the semester. What would it mean to make art away from familiar tools and spaces, and friends? Or to write in a climate of anxiety? This catalog documents our students’ responses to these questions, in addition to archiving work made before the shutdown and dreams of projects not fully realized. Above all, it bears witness to the resilience of Colby undergraduates as they continued to think, make, and compose during the coronavirus pandemic.

We are grateful to our students and fellow Art Department faculty for all they have done to make a catalog possible in this challenging time. We also thank Eli Decker for his assistance with design, including the cover, which alludes to the ubiquity of the teleconferencing software Zoom in our lockdown lives; Jennifer Liese, director of the Center for Arts & Language, Rhode Island School of Design, who supported students’ writing in workshops and remotely; Pat Sims, who copyedited the catalog with care and precision; and Olivia Fountain, Anne Lunder Leland Curatorial Fellow at the Colby Museum of Art, who organized an online exhibition of student work in the absence of our annual show at the Museum.

Daniel Harkett and Garry Mitchell
Associate Professors
Art Department
An Email Exchange in a Time of Social Distancing
by Cen Yuzhou (Jodie) and Marla Montoya

On May 16, 2020, at 3:34 AM Yuzhou Cen wrote:

Hi Marla,

How are you?

Jodie

On May 16, 2020, at 6:58 AM Marla Montoya wrote:

Hi Jodie,

I'm doing alright! I just got woken up by some crazy thunder. How are you?

Best,

Marla

On May 16, 2020, at 8:19 PM Marla Montoya wrote:

Also, Jodie, your new work is incredible. Where are you so I can be mindful of the time difference? And if you want to continue the conversation, I'd like to hear more about the feelings you're describing in your artist statement, if it's something you wouldn't mind talking about :)

On May 17, 2020, at 9:34 PM Yuzhou Cen wrote:

Hey Marla,

I'm currently back in China, so the time difference is 12 hours ahead of EST. Where are you?

A little more background about my new work: I started it a few weeks before we were all dismissed from school. The original idea was to make a visual journal to record 16 days of my senior spring—my different experiences and feelings on those days. And I wanted these works to be more spontaneous than carefully planned out. Some of the inspirations for my project were traditional Chinese calligraphy and paintings, in which there's a lot of emphasis on mark making, the brushstrokes. I was trying to recreate some of the rhythms of calligraphy. Then, of course, the pandemic, and we all moved to online, and this project turned out to be more or less a reflection of my personal experience with COVID-19 from very early on—such as the huge separation between me and everyone back home in China in January and February when COVID-19 was at its worst in China. The darkest dark in my work is in the painting I made on the day they told us class moved online. However, my work isn't strictly sequential; it was rearranged a bit for a more cohesive visual effect.

Cen Yuzhou, Flow, 2020, oil on canvas paper, 7.9” x 7.9” each
Have you created new work since leaving school? How are you coping with the pandemic? And I also really like your work Joon. It has the exact retro quality you were talking about. I like the light and the composition, especially the way the shadow on the wall reveals some new details about the person you’re representing.

Jodie

On May 19, 2020, at 1:27 AM Marla Montoya wrote:

That must’ve been really hard. Feeling a whole disaster and being half a world away and around folks who aren’t taking anything seriously. And then having to deal with getting back home. You made something really incredible from that.

Thank you for your kind words about Joon (: I am home in Texas. The climate change was really drastic. It was hot and humid as soon as I stepped off the airplane. I even missed the snow for a while. I’ve been staying with my sister. She’s 15 years older than I am and has three girls. My brother-in-law is on deployment until September. At first it was really hard to not be freaking out all the time. Now I just focus on feeling lucky to be in a space where I’m comfortable and safe. Even though I’m surrounded by screaming, crying, playing children from 7am to 9pm haha.

My new work has been focused on my nieces. They don’t really understand the magnitude of all of this. I’m grateful they get a chance to be naive and not have to stress about their well-being. I remember really vividly what it was like to be a kid and it’s nice to be a participant in and an observer and recorder of their experiences. Photographing is a big exchange of trust and it’s such a nice way to bond. I felt this with my friends at Colby and I’m happy to now get a chance to know my nieces better.

Thanks for sharing with me, Jodie (:

Marla

On May 21, 2020, at 11:22 PM Yuzhou Cen wrote:

Marla,

Thanks for sharing. I’m glad you’ve settled down with your family amid all the chaos, and I wish you and your family all the very best!

Jodie ☺
Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it.
—Jasper Johns, 1964

As it is for Jasper Johns, so it is for Austin Lee. Austin has been a collector of objects since he was young, and has amassed an extensive array of items to which he has granted new life. Austin does not have a fixed agenda guiding his collecting process. As he puts it, he is not always looking for things, but he always seems to find them—in the dirt between the road and the sidewalk, in an old train yard, and even in the wreckage of a plane crash. After bringing them home, Austin reuses these objects as decorative pieces or even unconventionally functional items: a pencil holder (railcar lock), a vase for flowers (industrial spring), and an incense burner (part of an old door lock). In his art practice, Austin follows a similar path, re-presenting his objects in ways that celebrate an outmoded mechanical world.

In his sculptures Rayco and Pending, Austin has cast some of his collection in wax. This is a delicate process that requires considerable care to execute well. Welding the wax casts together to construct hybrid forms, Austin creates surprising juxtapositions as the form of one object overtakes the form of another almost to the point of nondifferentiation. What results is an amalgamation of fragments that suggests the return of these objects to their functional roles as small yet integral parts of massive machines.

Though some objects are recognizable, many are difficult to identify. This mystery is, for Austin, part of what makes them uniquely valuable. Incorporating the objects in his work—and consciously choosing to conserve their original forms through wax casting—is an act of admiration. Austin saves these dejected bits of metal from purgatory and honors them by giving them new roles to play. It’s an art of care for things. Take an object. Cherish it.

While Austin’s project of object recuperation is not explicitly environmentalist, Ellie Wright’s recomposing of natural forms is. Ellie creates multifaceted compositions laden with forms one might find in nature, and through this work she addresses the overwhelming human consumption of material objects that is rapidly destroying the earth.

Ellie’s work consists of hundreds of circles of various sizes and shades of blue layered on top of one another to form patterns that have innumerable resonances with natural forms. They look like multiplying cells, water droplets, planetary bodies, and vagrant clouds. Overlapping rings suggest the concentric ripples that emerge on the surface of water when it is interrupted. The bright dots of white that speckle the dark circles are like flecks of sand or snow, or star formations against a blue night sky. Another recurring motif in Ellie’s work is the image of a full moon, itself a circular symbol of the interconnectedness of land, sky, and earth’s many creatures. Ellie’s work is at once an homage to the environments that hold these natural forms and a reminder of our integral role in ensuring their preservation.

Though the works she creates are layered and complex, Ellie keeps her materials as simple as possible in an effort to reduce waste. This is reflective of the way Ellie chooses to live; she moves through the world with a critical eye on her personal habits of consumption. To
Chang Zhang, (Not) Armor (detail), 2020, felt and thread, 40” x 17” x 10”

Ellie Wright, Cycles (detail), 2020, monotype, 36” x 24”
conserve ink, for example, Ellie uses her fingers to monotype many of the circles found in her compositions—a literal human intervention into the environment of her artwork. Ellie also asks her audience to consider their habits of consumption and to live more sustainably. She ends our conversation with this thought: Just as millions of individual water molecules come together to create a river, so too can each of us make changes that, together, will result in a powerful environmental intervention to help protect this planet.

Though akin to Ellie in her focus on the layering of singular forms and critical thinking about her materials, Chang Zhang makes work that showcases a shift in perspective from the global to the deeply personal. She has created a wearable sculpture—a suit of armor—that operates as a self-conscious reflection on how she engages with the world outside of herself. She modeled the construction of her suit on ancient Chinese lamellar armor, but rather than using unyielding metals, she uses thick gray felt. One can resolve this seemingly incongruous use of a soft material to construct a traditionally (and often imperatively) hard object by considering another one of felt’s qualities: its insulatory ability. Chang takes inspiration from artist Joseph Beuys, who began incorporating felt into his sculptural works after a mythic near-death experience in which he was saved from exposure by a group of Crimean tribesmen, who wrapped him in layers of felt and fat to keep warm. For Chang too, the idea of felt as a warm, protective, and healing material helps her represent the safety she finds in internal retreat.

Chang describes her deflection from sociality as stemming from her perception of people’s lack of interest in understanding one another and her often overwhelming propensity to empathize with those around her, which can cause great pain when it is not reciprocated. Her armor represents a place of safety, where the small squares of felt, knit together, come to symbolize a gradual building up of emotional barriers. But while the armor separates Chang from the world outside her body, it also engages others by prompting them to sympathize with her experiences and radical honesty.

Chang’s work symbolizes the emotional insularity many are facing in a time of social distancing. As her piece directs our attention inward, Ellie’s work opens us up to notice the power of coming together, even in this difficult environment. Austin’s mechanical ethos reflects the way we look back as we move forward, offering a template for imaginatively navigating a transitional period. These works invite viewers to think critically about themselves and the world around them, and resonate with the contemporary moment in ways we can only begin to see now.
Carter Hall’s prints of topographical maps are filled with calming blues, grays, and greens, reminiscent of the natural landscapes they represent. Gray and blue for a glacier, blue and green for pieces of Maine wilderness. Each print, based on the actual maps Carter uses to plan visits to these locations, is enhanced with additional pieces, taken from the same source in a different color. They are carefully cut and placed along the clean white topographical lines of the base image, bringing actual three-dimensionality into the two-dimensional world of maps. One particular auxiliary element stands out: a translucent blue strip of paper running through the landscape, breaking the boundaries of the sharp plotted lines. A body of water? In conversation, Carter reveals that it is the path he took on his journey through that specific landscape, an insertion of his own fluid movement into the fixed forms of cartography.

Carter loves to take long cross-country skiing treks through the wilderness. His maps represent the places he has ventured to so far and others he would like to visit in the future; they document his footsteps and his fantasies of movement. Before taking a trip, Carter plans carefully. He begins by finding a route he hopes to ski, either through his own research or suggestions from friends. Next, he analyzes maps to determine what gear is necessary. After that, he sits and watches the weather for the right window of time to begin the adventure. The process of planning directly inspires much of Carter’s recent work. Along with his topographical pieces, other prints depict the gear he uses for his trips as well as images of the mountainous scenes he finds. Carter’s work calls to mind the sense of unbound freedom we can feel when exploring largely uninhabited areas of wilderness. It pulls us into the excitement of discovery and shares with us the satisfaction of preparing, executing, and completing an adventure. Many of us can appreciate this feeling, even if our own activities differ.

But what happens when exploration is forbidden?

Scattered across a high wooden table in her studio, Emily Garza’s collection of cut, folded, and painted objects march toward the most substantial specimen. Each piece along the way appears to be an exploration of material: cardboard, too rigid; dipped wax paper, doesn’t hold its shape; clear acrylic, not bold enough. Surveying the table feels like watching Emily’s sculptural process fold out through time. The main attraction, though, is a mesmerizing and complex object about the size of a microwave. One side of the piece is a clear acrylic panel through which you can see to the other side, where two thin sheets of red acrylic have been intricately cut and folded into small boxes that come together to form a dome-like shape that is reminiscent of a beehive. The bottom of the dome is attached to the clear panel, while its top and sides are joined to thick slabs of wood that arch over the structure. The sculpture seems to have no designated front or back and is visually interesting from any angle. Though limited in size by the material and technology Emily had access to, it feels monumental, as if it is meant to make the viewer feel small and vulnerable.

Emily grew up in Mission, Texas, a city in the southern tip of the state bordering Mexico.

Charted Territory
by Ella Hommeyer

Top to bottom: Carter Hall, Spearhead Traverse #1, 2020, multi-plate acrylic relief print. ink on hahnemuhle, 12” x 24” Carter Hall, Spearhead Traverse #2, 2020, multi-plate acrylic relief print. ink on hahnemuhle, 9” x 14” Carter Hall, Spearhead Traverse #3, 2020, multi-plate acrylic relief print. ink on hahnemuhle, 9” x 9”
Emily suggests, beauty can be found. While discussing her sculpture, she emphasizes the inherent mathematical harmony that structures like a wall or a chain-link fence possess. Such talk feels like a reclaiming: to find pleasing patterns in the architecture of containment is to undermine its attempts to stifle and control and to restore some agency to the contained. Emily asks the viewer to reflect on the ugly reality of living in a place where walls and cages have been erected by order of politicians hundreds of miles away but also to find freedom through observing—a freedom in resisting boundaries we also see in Carter’s altered maps.

She shares how her experience of living in this contested space inspired the components of her sculpture. The vivid red alludes to the bright colors of papel picado, a type of Mexican folk art that involves cutting designs into brightly colored tissue paper. The weightiness of the clear acrylic panel and the wooden arch stand for the border wall between the United States and Mexico, a wall that runs directly through the yards of Mission residents. The M.C. Escher–like folded boxes of the sculpture, meant to represent the cages in which migrant children were held after being separated from their families, are based on a pattern found in kirigami, the Japanese art of cutting and folding paper. (Emily’s use of kirigami in this context also brings to mind the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War). A migrant detention center is located near her home.

The border didn’t use to be such a prominent feature of life in this area, Emily explains. Her great-grandparents emigrated from Mexico to the United States but her great-great-grandparents were born in the United States and relocated to Mexico. In the early twentieth century, the border was a moderately easy-to-cross zone that wasn’t heavily policed. Now students at the local high school in Mission face lockdown drills multiple times a year while police search the area for migrants who have crossed the border illegally.

Through her sculpture, Emily invites viewers to experience what it feels like to live with the physical presence of the border wall and the migrant detention center in her community as well as the governmental institutions they represent. But even in such a tense environment, Emily suggests, beauty can be found. While discussing her sculpture, she emphasizes the inherent mathematical harmony that structures like a wall or a chain-link fence possess. Such talk feels like a reclaiming: to find pleasing patterns in the architecture of containment is to undermine its attempts to stifle and control and to restore some agency to the contained. Emily asks the viewer to reflect on the ugly reality of living in a place where walls and cages have been erected by order of politicians hundreds of miles away but also to find freedom through observing—a freedom in resisting boundaries we also see in Carter’s altered maps.
Matt Calarco knows what he seeks, but doesn’t know what form it comes in. Scott Kaplan seeks nothing, but always finds something. Jake Conterato neither seeks nor finds—that is our responsibility. The work of these three artists seems to have little in common. What does Matt’s grappling with his complex relationship with Catholicism have to do with Scott’s strolls through rural Maine? Where do Jake’s abstract arrangements of coffee stains fit in? When we consider each artist’s conceptual base, a unity emerges: the objects made by the introspective apostate, the curious wanderer, and the caffeinated abstractionist are all works of navigation and discovery. Each artist takes us with him as an experience is processed, whether it be a life of spirituality, a physical journey through space and time, or the impulse of the eye to attach meaning to a form.

Matt’s navigation is spiritual. His photo series, Cross Eyed, builds associations with religious iconography from innocuous elements of the natural world. Sandwiched between statuettes of Mary and church facades, leaves, birds, and trees assume new meanings. This “springboarding” creates the sense that there is no innocent looking; for Matt, it’s that one cannot shake the mindset instilled by a Catholic upbringing, even after leaving the religion. This idea, that what is ingrained never truly leaves, manifests itself poignantly and seamlessly. When you flip (or scroll) through Matt’s book, bushes become steeples, birds become angels, and crumpled leaves become silhouettes of holy icons. He encourages his subject matter to deny its true nature, his photos to “lie.” As viewers, we feel this deceit and thus get a glimpse of the doubt that follows Matt as he perceives and questions the world. When something favorable happens to him, is he “blessed or lucky”? Is an unfortunate event God’s wrath or an unhappy coincidence? Matt knows these questions will never be answered, and Cross Eyed is not about finding answers. Rather, it puts in visual form the way he experiences life after faith—how he now sees the world through both secular and religious lenses.

Scott’s navigation is physical. The photos in How the Hell Do I Steer the Ship document his passage through a place and the energies contained therein. Meandering through Maine, he makes the complexity of the world organized and intimate—his way of figuring out his own journey through what he calls the “strange design” that surrounds us all. For Scott, this organizing “extracts the natural rhythm” of a particular place in an attempt to bring clarity to the chaotic, absurd, and incomprehensible world he passes through. One photo shows a vintage Rolls-Royce parked in someone’s yard, glinting in the sun. Contrasting with the storage and utility trailers across the street, its presence is mysterious. A blurred telephone pole interrupts the scene, as if, in one quick motion, Scott turned and hit the shutter, grabbing the moment and its energy before it slipped away. There is a story here, a tale neither he nor his viewers can ever know. Happily wandering, observing, and capturing, Scott does not seek to understand stories like this, but to capture his brief encounter with them. Scott’s aimless wanderlust is infectious, inciting a desire to explore and consider the energies we come across, begging us to give our world more of the attention it deserves.

The Introspective Apostate, the Curious Wanderer, and the Caffeinated Abstractionist
by Austin Lee
Lastly, Jake’s navigation isn’t his at all, it’s ours—the slow movement of our eyes across a color-field of coffee stains, with each muddy blotch asking to be turned into a cloud, a country on a map, or something else entirely through the imagination. We scavenge what we can, our eyes unconsciously crafting recognizable forms that aren’t meant to be there but are there nonetheless. In conversation, I point out a shape remarkably similar to the eastern coast of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, asking if it was purposeful, an homage to the birthplace of coffee. “No,” he says, “but I kind of love that. People can pick out what they’re finding in it.” While what we find is largely up to us, one aspect of Jake’s art is nearly universal—the comforting smell of freshly ground coffee. Coffee, for many, offers a welcome burst of rejuvenation and solace; in front of Jake’s works, we are brought into this atmosphere, what he calls his “warm worldview.” He leaves us there, letting us navigate it on our own, stirring our imaginations and indulging our impulses.

I would like to have written this essay in my common room’s big leather armchair to the sound of my roommates stumbling through a rendition of Townes Van Zandt’s “Pancho and Lefty,” with the smell of coffee and communal plates of mozzarella sticks lingering in the air. Instead, it was written in my basement, where Spotify doesn’t do Townes justice and the mozzarella sticks are lonely and unshared. Now, when the mundane—trips to the grocery store, getting gas, simply being around friends and strangers—is nerve-racking, we must refresh our perspectives on our lives. Matt, Scott, and Jake offer us some help here. Matt’s photos prompt us to reexamine our basic beliefs and ponder the future with no set course in mind, insisting on pressing through times of conflict and allowing for a change of what’s taken as a given. Scott asks us to confront and investigate strangeness with curiosity rather than fear, while Jake offers much needed comfort and distraction, simple as a cup of coffee. The objects made by the introspective apostate, the curious wanderer, and the caffeinated abstractionist are truly works of navigation and discovery, relevant now more than ever.
Jake Conterato,
\textit{Delight in Decay, 2020,}
\textit{espresso on Sekishu,}
42" x 92"
In the weeks since Colby’s campus closed, my world has become quite small, consisting of my house, the six-mile running loop around my town, and the essential stores. I have found a routine of getting up, having coffee while reading the New York Times with my parents, doing homework, Zooming into class, running, and watching shows with my parents and cats at night. These days the mug I use recollects “Edward Hopper and the American Imagination” with a detailed sketch of Nighthawks, 1942. This mug is the perfect size, small enough so I don’t waste any coffee but big enough to give me my morning jolt of caffeine. Although I had barely noticed it before, this mug has become a dependable part of my everyday life. Gazing at it in the morning, I have reflected on how the COVID-19 lockdown has forced us into new relationships with familiar things. In the works of Eli Decker, Natasha Gallagher, and Matt Jones you can find a similar exploration of the objects and people we surround ourselves with every day.

Eli paints cans of LaCroix, a brand of seltzer popular among college students that ubiquitously lives in value packs next to mini fridges in dorm rooms. He begins by crushing a can as if he intended to toss it off by the side of the road but instead of disposing of it, he photographs it and then carefully draws a grid to isolate each segment of the image. Once he has portioned off the representation, he does the same on his canvas. Eli then reproduces his photograph in paint by methodically completing each individual cell across the structured framework of the canvas. Like Chuck Close, Eli forces himself to see only a fraction of the image at a time, his painstaking process causing us in turn to slow down and closely examine the unlikely beauty of a can. Drawn into Eli’s intimate photo-realist paintings, we come to appreciate the colors and textures of the objects we are so accustomed to in our everyday lives. After the premature ending of the spring semester, the images of these cans have become—to me, at least—vessels of nostalgia, evoking late-night study sessions in Olin Library or ordering takeout with roommates. Eli has taken an iconic element of college life and elevated it into an art that can hold the memories of our time on campus.

Natasha does not have us reflect on the objects we surround ourselves with but rather the intimacy of human touch in our relationships. She creates relief cloth prints in which she takes on the difficult task of representing the power of human contact through simple lines. In her work, Exterior Unraveled (one layer in violet), mysterious hands and disconnected bodies reach out to caress each other, creating a feeling of warmth that we want to wrap ourselves within. Methodical like Eli, Natasha uses a process that involves carefully cutting her design into a board, rolling ink over the design, and then pressing cloth and delicate Sekishu paper alike onto the inked surface. To create one of her larger pieces such as Exterior Unraveled (two layers in red), Natasha goes through this process six times to construct a cohesive composition and then three more times for the three pieces of cloth attached and hanging in front of a printed piece of Sekishu paper. Although her process is time-consuming, the finished product does not appear overly calculated. In Exterior Unraveled (two layers in red), bodies flow into one another, with the line of one body melding into another. The intimacy of these bodies reveals the
Natasha Gallagher, Exterior Unraveled (one layer in violet), 2019, ink on Rives BFK paper, 44” x 32”

beauty of holding hands or physically reaching out to someone, simple acts we usually take for granted. Looking at Natasha’s prints, I find myself longing for hugs from my best friends, high fives from my teammates, or simply the chance to huddle on a bed with my roommates and talk about nothing for hours.

Matt asks us to reflect on nature, something else we often overlook in our overscheduled lives. He does so by isolating small segments of familiar views of trees. In *Light through Branches*, for example, the branches seem to float freely, inviting us to see the patterns and the reflection of light in nature. Matt’s process proceeds at the same slow pace he wants us to share when viewing his pictures. At one time, he worked with a digital camera, but it left him flooded with imagery. This year he began to use a Graflex large-format press camera, which limits him to shooting about four pictures an hour. Much like my coffee mug, Eli’s LaCroix cans, and the moments of tactility represented by Natasha, the patterns created by the fragmented middle sections of trees can be easily missed during the course of a normal, busy day. It is only during moments of focused reflection that we notice and appreciate them.

Now situated in various places across New England, Eli, Natasha, and Matt are confronted by the limitations of continuing their art making at home, from the inability to develop photographs in a lab to having limited work space or simply missing peer feedback on their work. However, the change in circumstances has allowed them to step back and seek novel approaches to their art. Although Matt is unable to take and develop new photographs using a large-format camera, he is able to edit more of his photographs and find new perspectives. Natasha is revisiting old prints, adding embroidery, text, and collaged elements to make them even more personal. Eli’s meditative process has helped him to slow down and appreciate the progress of his work amid the generalized anxiety. In this period of seclusion, we must find satisfaction in the everyday again, whether it be going on walks, hugging family members, or even just sipping a good cup of coffee. In times of chaos, art is something we can depend on. ☕️
Matt Jones,
*Light through Branches*, 2020,
archival pigment print,
25" x 32"
Imagine this: You are sitting alone in a museum and the sun is shining through the window. All you can see is a Monet painting in front of you. It’s a landscape, *The Parc Monceau* (1876). Leafy trees and abundant flowers fill the picture, and bright tones lighten the mood. The colorful brushstrokes and the clear skies invite you to linger. This is what beauty is or, at least, what many have come to see as beauty. After all, beauty is relative, and the canons of beauty are different for each and every one of us.

Aisling Flaherty and Alex Dorion show us we can find beauty in more unlikely places than an Impressionist painting of a park in summer. They ask us: what do we mean by beauty anyway? Aisling plays with traditional notions of beauty in her photographs, which are a fusion of color and mystery. Although she includes recognizable objects in her work, Aisling focuses on formal elements and describes her photographs as abstract. Take a look at one of her favorite pieces, *rainbow light*. The first thing you notice is a series of mostly muted hues. In the top right corner there is a dark purple that slowly turns into blue that transitions into a bright yellow that almost becomes white. Whitish yellow then turns back into blue, to purple, and finally to black. It takes a moment to realize you are seeing a powerful light coming through something you cannot see—a window perhaps—and hitting a wall in what you can assume is a dark room. You can’t pick out very much in the room, maybe just a place where two walls meet to form a corner. There is something unsettling about Aisling’s photographs because it is hard to recognize what’s in them. When you notice that the photograph is depicting two walls, however, this anxiety about the “unknown” dissipates and you are drawn into a trance by Aisling’s careful arrangements of color and form. Although in our daily lives we might take our surroundings for granted, Aisling represents the ordinary in a way that is strange yet pleasing. By intensifying the color saturation, using strong contrasts of light and shadow, and by choosing unusual perspectives, she turns a simple composition consisting of a window, a curtain, and the corner of a room into so much more. Aisling creates beauty from everyday situations and offers us a break from the constant thinking that goes on in our minds.

Alex Dorion’s prints, although completely different in style and medium from Aisling’s photographs, are just as beguiling. Instead of distorting representations of interiors, Alex takes us outside and finds beauty in rural landscapes, especially in the decaying but surviving barns we might see while driving through the countryside. Alex turns these “typical” barns into captivating artworks by placing them in different perspectives. He first finds an image of a barn in a natural landscape and selects an angle that is appealing to him. Then, he chooses the elements he wants to include and gets to work. For example, in *Idaho*, Alex depicts a barn, an old fence, a tree, and a distant view of mountains. The focus of the print is the barn, which is positioned in the frontal plane, but the vertical line of the side tree also directs our attention to nature. Juxtaposing man-made and natural elements, Alex celebrates the everlasting life of nature while also honoring the craft of construction. Such interest in craft is also evident in the way he makes his images. With the etching medium he uses—which involves creating images from lines carved into a metal plate—he creates textures that at first
glance look like simple fine lines on paper, but as you move away, these lines come together to make up a landscape. Printmaking is about precision, and it is easy to leave marks that some see as mistakes. However, by drawing attention to his mark making, Alex wants viewers to know his hand was there, that these landscapes are, in fact, his work. In his prints a human presence is thus felt not just in the time-worn structures he represents but in the way the images are made. Printmaking, like barn building, allows a craftsman to leave his mark.

Aisling and Alex create contrasting kinds of art, but they share a goal: they pick humble subjects and seek to transform them. Aisling makes the viewer understand that beauty can be found anywhere, even in a dark corner of an empty room. Alex, meticulous in his works and processes, takes picturesque scenes (such as an old barn in a rural setting) and modifies the composition and perspective to make them more interesting. Both artists depict ordinary places in ways that are extraordinary and by doing so, they slow us down and draw us into contemplating something we might normally move quickly past. The result is a kind of enchantment, a realization that the ordinary is capable of generating wonder.
Bennett Allen and Charlie Gomprecht have found what many of us are looking for during this period of social isolation: an ability to turn inward and create in a manner that feels cathartic and soothing. Bennett’s meditative process pulls from the spiritual energy he’s gathered over the years from his outdoor escapades. Charlie explores what she finds comforting and familiar, drawing inspiration from her mother’s intense and intimate relationship to color, pattern, and design.

When I first encountered Bennett’s abstract prints, I tried to find recognizable elements in them. Browsing his work alone in the print-making studio, I thought about the shapes one sees behind closed eyelids after staring into bright light and the experience of lying down with your back on soft grass in the warm shade of an old tree swirling leaves toward you. Realizing I couldn’t find one sensation or image that accurately matched his etchings, I accepted the unknown and embraced the reverberating feeling these strange shapes seemed to produce in my chest. Ironically, it’s that sense of contained energy that joins Bennett’s prints to the outside world—to his experiences of moving through nature.

In conversation, Bennett speaks with admiration of how the world has natural energy that is constantly transforming. He has studied this as a geology minor and has felt it when skiing and sailing. As a skier, he redirects gravitational energy to maintain balance and style, and as a sailor, he harnesses the wind’s energy in order to navigate across water. Both on the mountain and out at sea, he enters a “flow state,” losing his ego in an activity. Bennett finds making art intensely absorbing as well. He lets himself make marks that seamlessly respond to his feelings and creates compositions that are, in a way, self-portraits. As a viewer, you can follow the trail of lines in a work like What’s the Use and pick up their busy energy. Your eyes hop along fantastic shapes and never-perfect circles and back again, and you imagine your feet moving to the beat of the print’s repeated forms.

If Bennett’s prints are like improvised jazz—rhythmic yet unpredictable—Charlie’s paintings are like the rock music she listened to as a child, steady and intricate. In her works, Charlie represents a variety of patterns that remind her of the eclectic household textiles her mother used to decorate the first room one encounters when walking into the family home, Charlie’s favorite room. She combines these with the inanimate tenants of a liquor cabinet as well as trinkets from the painting studio to create lively compositions—guitar strums of color and form. Looking at her paintings is like peering into a picnic basket during a cocktail hour in the sun or surveying the beautiful morning mess from a previous night’s party. When I suggest these comparisons to Charlie, she is entertained but says she’s not focused on representing any particular narrative.

In setting up her arrangements, Charlie also searches for internal cohesion, checking in with herself about what feels right: what happens when red and white polka dots are distorted in a clear cylindrical glass? Does it mesh with a black and white floral pattern passing through a green bottle? And she uses color to bring things together. In Still Life 1, for example, blue tones create an overall crisp and clear ambiance—the clarity of morning light—that makes the variety of printed fabrics and
glass and ceramic objects feel like they belong together. Similarly, the rosy hues and long shadows of Still Life 2 suggest evening time; dusky light seems to float in from a window. After viewing Charlie’s corners of vibrant, harmonious assemblages, I was put in the mood to find new life in my own surroundings—in the unnoticed patterns of a floral phone case, a marble countertop, and even a ripening and speckled banana suspended above a fruit bowl.

Both Bennett and Charlie find solace in intimacy. By listening to our feelings and giving new attention to familiar things and spaces, we too might learn to hold on to what we consider dear and true during the seemingly eternal isolation we find ourselves in. +

Charlie Gomprecht, Still Life 2, 2019, oil on board, 15” x 18”
Do you ever notice the way a loved one’s arm hangs on the edge of the kitchen table? Or how clutter collects in a corner? The frequently used items that gather by the door? These are the focal points of some of the pictures Isabel Colón assembles in her photobook, *Story Street*, which documents everyday life in her family home in Bozeman, Montana. Isabel knows that it’s the small details, the things taken for granted in life, that are often the first to be forgotten and she uses her camera to arrest the flow of forgetting. She explains that her “terrified fascination with time” has caused her to obsess over her ability to preserve her life through photographs. She thinks of her work as “a meditation on [her] life now, in this place” and through this meticulous appreciation of the present, she holds on to what will become her past.

Isabel’s intense observation of the present draws us into an intimate relationship with her family. We see the organic way its members have settled haphazardly into their home. Scattered objects—a dog toy on the edge of the carpet, jackets by the door—take us into their confidence, whispering, “We’ve been here.” We observe how her family moves through their living spaces, their feet resting on the hardwood floor, the dog on the stoop, her mother’s wrist strained against the weight of a houseplant. Isabel’s parents are present in shadows and traces, such as the creased pillows and blankets in an image of their bed. Her brother, however, is front and center. The book opens with an image of him casually slumped at a table, glancing over his shoulder with calm intensity in his dark eyes. Through his eyes, full of familial resemblance, we see how Isabel looks at him and get a hint of how she might look back at us.

Isabel’s presence in the eyes of her brother is one example of her displaced presence throughout her book. Her name is written among height measurements recorded on a doorknob, and her portrait is tucked into a dark corner of a dresser. Even when we don’t see her name or image, we are seeing her looking. When asked how she hopes viewers will respond to her work, she says, “I hope they understand that the photographs are not possible without me.” Her book of family and home is a subtle self-portrait, a processing of who she is and where she has come from. While the current quarantine feels like it has lasted forever, and many people are sick of their homes, Isabel reminds us that life won’t be this way forever and shows us how to appreciate all that we have in this moment.

Lexie Liu, a fellow artist in the 2020 Senior Exhibition, uses a different process of self-examination to create her series of paintings. Her work, like Isabel’s photographs, represents a conversation with herself. When we talk, Lexie explains her struggle with vulnerability. Outside the studio, she finds it hard to articulate her emotions to loved ones and, more importantly, herself. With time, however, Lexie has learned that hiding emotions doesn’t make them go away, and she has found that painting helps her tear back her hardened surface and explore what lies within. She says that happiness is not a part of her experience of painting; instead, she is drawn to the studio because it lets her be brave, curious, and honest.

In *Ripped 2*, we see an almost literal representation of Lexie reaching inside. A hand—Lexie’s
hand—peels back the supple skin at the center of a palm to reveal a mirror image underneath. Inner and outer selves gaze upon each other, reconnecting. Although Lexie’s eye dominates the picture, it’s the hands that do the work. Lexie explains that her hands help her gain access to an inner mindset; they allow her to both see herself and see into herself. In *It’s Lit*, hands are the focus. Their translucent surface offers us a view of the body’s inner structure while their clasp of a wrist and a cigarette betray a certain anxiety. What are the relationships between exterior and interior, outward gestures and inner feeling, Lexie asks.

Lexie’s hands enable her to feel the world around her and the negative emotions within her. Her work pushes us to feel as well. In *Reach*, we are looking at two hands again. This time one holds a razor blade while the other rests, palm open. Below the hand, on the wrist, we see wounds made by the blade. The imagery is uncomfortable, just as Lexie describes her relationship with herself. Lexie is showing us, metaphorically, what happens when she ignores her feelings, when she refuses to confront the uncomfortable. Through her artistic process, Lexie seeks what is real within herself but she is still nervous about how the work will be interpreted. Her bold and intimate choices may first make us turn away, uneasy, but if we lean into that feeling, we can hold on to what is difficult and use it to feel her art.

Both Isabel and Lexie illustrate with their art the importance of processing our emotions. In tough times, the physical effort of creating work can supply us with the opportunity to make sense of who we are. We don’t need to pretend to be fine—most things are not fine. Instead, we can make something, rather than letting our cares weigh on us. Art provides a different language, the visual, to communicate with ourselves. When we let ourselves in and make something from that feeling, we may begin to heal.
Bennett Allen

I experience energy.
  gravity, waves, and wind.
I create quickly.
  sketching, repeating, and reinterpreting.
I stop thinking.
  meditation, improvisation, and flow.

My work
emerges.
  organic, layered, and alive.

You look
  and begin to think,
  but instead, try to feel.

Scents and Subtle Sounds, 2020, trace monotype on butcher paper, 30" x 24"
I set out to take photographs on the subject of religion but had the loosest possible idea of what the images might say about it. As I drove from church to church and cemetery to cemetery, certain iconographies began to speak more clearly to me: hiding and aging cherubic figures, monumental steeples, and various forms of the cross. Soon after, I began noticing formal elements in the natural world that echoed both the iconography and the sense of ephemerality that I was feeling. Ultimately, this work combines images of Christian symbols with poetic interpretations of their themes in nature to blur the line between the religious and the secular.

Raised as a Roman Catholic, I no longer practice, but the psychological structures of religion still frame my life. Put another way, the afterimage of my upbringing is still a visible specter overlaid and intermingled with my present worldview. This leads to coexisting dissonant emotions such as blessed/lucky, sinful/guilty, etc. In an effort to capture this ambiguity, this work places images in constant conversation with each other, whether through repetition or deliberate springboarding of loaded meaning onto the otherwise banal. Each image also fits into a larger puzzle, so that a continuous narrative bounces back and forth between the obviously spiritual and the interpreted.

In the end, it is this interwoven discord that keeps the work’s definitive meaning evasive in the same way that finding a certain purpose in my life has felt just out of reach because of my uncertain spirituality. Rather than an answer, this project approaches a line of questioning: What is lost or gained by viewing the world with one eye through a lens of faith while simultaneously using the other eye to see without it?
Senior spring. These four months have been so dramatic in a way that it felt unreal. But they are not a dream. They are so real that they hurt. We’ve always been in this together. And then I picked up my brushes. It actually took me a really long time to finally find this project. Lines, brushstrokes, black and white. They dance on paper, they tell the experiences. Like rivers, they flow. Like trees, they grow. I wanted them to tell stories. The story of confusion, despair, anger, regret, reflection and much more. But among all of these, after all, there are laughter and hopes. Like rivers, they carry on and sustain lives. Like trees, they bloom and bear fruits.
My camera captures what shapes my life in moments, fragments. My images are the foundation of who I am and who I will continue to become. I would not be without these photographs, without their subjects. My work explores what is close to me—the people I surround myself with, my family home in which both my brother and I were born, the feelings that inform my life and my being. Look at the image of my brother. He’s staring at the camera, at me, and he is now suspended in the photograph. Suspended in time. This image captured a fleeting moment that we shared, and now it will never change. But it’s not all that simple. Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, writes about “that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead.” The moments our cameras catch are now dead, they will never happen again. I’m obsessed with, and terrified of, time. I don’t know what the future holds and that scares me. How much time do I have and what happens after that time has run out? Why not grasp what I can to remember the now?

When I was seven years old I woke up one morning, in the same home I’ve photographed here, to the sounds of my mother in labor. Three hours later, I was too scared to cut the umbilical cord of my fresh, screaming baby brother. In a way, I think that’s when I became an artist. But really it’s now that I consciously think back to that morning, those hours, and wish that I had a camera or the instinct to write it all down. But now it’s just a memory, and I worry that it’s not an honest memory—that it’s been warped and tainted by time. I want to save my future self from the mystery that is now, that will become the past. I want to capture the intricacies of my life and mind, and save them for later when I no longer know how to explain the things I did. My work is a meditation on my life now, in this place, and during this massive transition out of structured academia and into the real world.
It may be the light it is shed in
or heaven's purity beginning to rot,
divinely bright in its stagnation,
missing it’s usual, transient clock.

Corrosion reaches towards the crema
light which abides against the gaining green,
we wait for the fester's abatement,
such filling warmth, no longer so pristine.

I should have known, frozen in time
as amber is so cold
that I would begin to crave more
living corrosion.
My seltzer can paintings offer playful social commentary, inviting people to marvel at the magic of everyday objects while also examining consumerist trends. Instead of placing cans in their natural context on a kitchen table, I choose to elevate them by borrowing from aspects of both 1970s photorealism and Dutch Golden Age still lifes. With the photorealists, I share the technical challenge of rendering shining reflections on the canvas. From the Dutch Golden Age, I borrow the rich, dark backdrops and the careful arrangements. Instead of painting bowls of fruit or ornate platters, I give a nod to pop art and choose a more contemporary subject matter for my still lifes: the LaCroix can.

Today, the power of branding and advertising doesn’t come from billboards as it did in Warhol’s time; instead, online platforms like Instagram have emerged as a way to influence the masses. I chose to use LaCroix cans as a motif because they serve a dual purpose: the brand relies heavily on social media advertising while the brightly colored, crumpled aluminum forms provide the perfect subject for attempting to paint an illusion of depth and material. A photograph could also provide this illusion; however, I opt to paint these crushed single-use containers by hand and question whether pop art’s glorification of mass consumption is still appropriate today.

By drawing from elements of distinct historical art movements, such as pop art, photorealism, and traditional still lifes, my work explores what makes a compelling still life in 2020.

Eli Decker

*Still Life with Eleven Cans, 2020, oil on board, 24” x 36”*
I first started making art in elementary school during arts and crafts time and slowly built some skills. My joy in artmaking mainly stemmed from receiving compliments from other students about how realistic my drawings were. Even at seven, I found the admiration was nice.

One rainy day a few years later, my soccer practice was canceled and my mom was scrambling to find a place to put me while she ran errands. My twin went to a local art class in town and she figured I could hang out there to kill time. I walked in to see some diligent students working away so I tiptoed to an empty desk tucked in the corner. I tapped away on the table, waiting anxiously for my mom to return. The teacher handed me an Oreo and a book of landscape photos to draw from. My pencil didn’t leave the paper for the next hour. I tried to craft every detail of the image in front of me until my mom came back. That’s where it all started and nothing has really changed.

My artwork is a series of monotypes and etchings, that concentrate on organic forms in nature and geometric forms in architecture. I’ve always had an interest in architecture and the way nature complements it visually, how they intertwine. My imagery is realistic and depicts the subject matter balancing the positive and negative space created by the architectural form. Ever since I was a small child, I took great pride in creating realistic renderings of complex landscapes and architectural forms. While my subjects are realistic, my visual hand is integrated into each piece through the use of black textures, hatching, and cross-hatching to illustrate the subject matter. I use my marks and interpretation of the image to make it mine.

Alex Dorion
I've always been worried that what I have to offer has been done before. maybe this is why I manipulate the scene past immediate recognition.

but also I’m not drawn to photographing the literal. it’s always been about the formal or the feeling and that remains true for this work

is my “intuition,” the driving force behind my process, driven by my ocd? sure
does my fixation on color come from constantly drawing rainbows in preschool? possibly
do I find light intriguing because it is fleeting, even when it’s not? definitely

is my work devoid of meaning out of spite, mental exhaustion, or to make a larger point? surely all three.

all of this is to say that as much as I know, there’s more i don’t, and that’s ok

and i welcome you to not know too
I’m every woman lounging, look at my clean lines attended by ghosts: eyes on eyes under anemic sky.

all bodies rise from water to my pedestal of polar ice, I am indistinguishable from cool steel of the surgeon’s table.

remove the warm weights from my body and let drains and tubes and chambers pour out of me.

finish this skin with slick polyurethane. there are people who take their lawn ornaments inside when it storms and there are people who don’t.

in the wet of glaze, my legs rest on the tongue in your eyes. I am heat-melted glass, ruddy and ready to eat.

I’ve taken to the calcified bubble and you’ve taken the keyhole. every bend of this spine is for you—look at me, my skin slips off my face.

A palimpsest refers to a manuscript in which the marks of earlier writings have been scrubbed, yet traces remain visible underneath new layers. Printed and collaged together with sheer fabric, semitransparent Sekishu, wax, text, and thread, this body of work is a palimpsest under constant revision. Coats of material and history invoke a viewer’s close gaze, as I incorporate and reassemble a collection of relief prints, color and detail building and double images appearing. The translucency of material and unrepeatability of process heighten the vulnerability meant to surface in these works. The layers of prints evoke levels of intimacy and personal history—images partially concealed, reformed, redressed, and undressed in ways that both risk exposure and beg to be stripped and understood. This is a body of work, and it bleeds.
“How do they live like that?” he asked. “I don’t know . . . I really can’t imagine,” I replied, completely dumbfounded by the resilience of immigrants, including my grandfather.

To move to a country where you know few, if any—a country that does not want you, a country that does all that is possible to keep you out—and thrive.

To constantly look over your shoulder as you do harmless and mundane tasks, to take less and do much more than others to survive, to grow a family and hide the hardships from them.

To hope that your children and your children’s children will not have to face what you have, nor that your decisions will affect them as much as they have affected you.

To leave all you know behind and come upon barrier after barrier meant to keep you out, and still be able to see the possibilities on the other side.
When I was fifteen, we moved to a different house—partially because we wanted to be closer to my school and partially because my mom gets bored seeing the same walls for too long. She had gone back to school to study interior design a year or two prior, but before that she was just an artist, obsessed with color. She looked at our new house like a blank canvas. I didn’t know I wanted to dedicate myself to making art at the time, but I always wanted to emulate her eye for things.

The first room by the front door—sunken down by two steps and flooded with light in the afternoons—excited my mom the most. She first painted the bookshelves an eye-catching orange, covered the walls in a damask motif and paintings of intricate gourds, and placed on the floor a rug dappled with colors that reminded me of warmth. A new bright blue ottoman sat directly in the center of the room. Finally, she added textured couches and vibrantly patterned throw pillows. It was beautifully and perfectly unmatching. It’s still my favorite room in my house.

When I am painting, a flat pattern feels familiar and manageable. Stripes are comforting and stable. A floral pattern is nostalgic. Checkers have an edge. When I add a light source, the color automatically shifts. Is it a warm light or a cool light? When I bend the pattern, it undergoes another change; things feel bigger or smaller, more or less important. When I put a glass object in front of a pattern, things shift again and gain a new character. The intermittent pattern or lack thereof supplies an interruption for the eye. The pattern looks familiar, but a different version of familiar. It’s like seeing someone you knew when you were little, but now they’re all grown up.
The corner office. On the second floor of a large brick building, two windows looked out onto the lawn. He could see the trees and the grass from his swiveling leather chair, over the framed family pictures on the shiny oak desk. I suppose that it was the envy of his co-workers, but all I remember was sitting in the rigid chairs against the wall and playing with the plastic desk toys, waiting to go home as he worked late into the evening.

After leaving the quaint houses and smooth pavement of suburbia behind, we bumped down the dirt road until we landed in a clearing in the middle of the woods. The Volkswagen almost got stuck in the driveway's muddy ruts. He greeted us with a laugh and a smile. I had to crane my neck to meet his gaze. It seemed like his weathered palms might scratch mine, or that the grip of his handshake could break my small soft hands. The woodpile was almost as big as the house at the edge of the clearing. There was only one room inside. The loft above had no ladder, just some leftover climbing holds drilled in a simple route into the overhanging roof. He grinned as he told us that he would never lose his strength climbing up to bed every night.

In the far corner there was an old wooden desk. Maps with chicken-scratch handwriting covered the wall next to triumphant summit photos shot on disposable cameras. My gaze fixated on the photos and maps. It was the working lab of a tireless adventurer. As I began to digest it all he laughed, and said, “This is my corner office.”

Carter Hall

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I grew up in a house surrounded by acres upon acres of thick forests. There was not a single house for miles in front of or behind my own and it was about a three-minute walk to the left or right until you would get to one of my neighbors’ houses. Needless to say, I did not grow up in the traditional neighborhood where I could run down the block, knock on my friend’s front door, and see if they wanted to play a game of tag with the rest of the neighbors. Instead, I had my brother, my sister, and the woodlands.

This scenario may sound like it would be filled with loneliness and bickering, but that is not at all how I remember it. What I remember are lightsaber battles in the forests of Endor, hikes through tropical rainforests, and hiding in a dense thicket of pine trees from a ravenous pack of wolves. Although these memories are greatly enhanced by imaginative tales curated by my siblings and me, they make up a childhood not of isolation or fighting, but one filled with excitement, adventure, and loving relationships with both of my siblings that continue today.

I owe these memories to the vast untainted landscape that surrounded my childhood home and acted as the stage upon which my siblings and I could experience even our wildest dreams. Today I still find many landscapes in the forest and see an empty canvas on which stories of the past have faded away and new ones lie ahead.
How the Hell Do I Steer the Ship is a series that asks: Where do we all fit into this mess?

The work brings together both physical and mental movement. A certain wanderlust ignites an ongoing conversation between me and the landscape, displaying both an appreciation for the strange design of the places we call home and a comment on life’s numbing repetitiveness. The images develop a unique vernacular and dialogue as they highlight and dissect the act of discovering a particular place.


This project brings together both uncomfortable and comfortable feelings. It unifies an assortment of closed thoughts in order to form a greater open thought. It tangles and untangles all the junk. It’s an attempt to organize the chaos of our everyday. It’s symbolic of my inability to leave the grocery store without checking every aisle. It takes you around a perimeter: once, twice, or maybe three times, without truly knowing what you’re after.

This project represents a time in my life that I’ll want to remember, but not necessarily one that I will want to return to. So as I push onward, the work doesn’t become nostalgic, but rather expresses a thirst for a deeper understanding of what’s to come.
My work is driven by my odd penchant for scavenging rusty bolts, railroad spikes, pipes, locks, and other nameless, discarded relics. Unused, abandoned, forgotten, and obsolete, the found objects I gravitate to exist in a limbo between their old lives as functional parts in larger systems and their inevitable decomposition. This is where I intervene, drawn to the mysterious aura implanted by years of use and deterioration, palpable on their rusty, weather-beaten surfaces. Loaded with histories forgotten over time, these artifacts surround us and are ripe for recovery. My works sprout from my desire to rescue these objects from their limbo and to give them new existence as something more than just debris—artifacts for appreciation and muses to inspire artwork.

By making wax replicas, I preserve the unique qualities on my finds, as well as open them up to reproduction and reimagination. Through cutting, welding, fitting, and refitting the wax copies together into new compositions, I explore how each object can relate to a different one, as well as muddle and obscure their original form and purpose. Some of my sculptures have been machinelike, suggesting a purpose and function, albeit unknown (or nonexistent). Others are chaotic amalgamations, with one object bleeding into another, all purpose lost. Wax offers endless creativity in this regard and allows me to engage with and manipulate my objects in ways I wouldn’t otherwise be able to.
My paintings are the story of my life. I put everything in the paintings when words fail to express how I feel. I tend to hide my negative feelings, and I’ve been told that I tell my most painful stories as if they were someone else’s. It’s not only that I fail to express my feelings to others; I try to convince myself not to feel as well.

Nonetheless, feelings won’t be cast away by my denial. They hide within my body, waiting to be let go. I guess that is why I spend so much time looking into the mirror, looking at my hands, my ribs, and my green and purple veins underneath my pale skin. I am certain that these represent something under the surface of me. It gets harder to drag my body around day by day because the mess is accumulating inside. When I retreat to my studio, I try to rip this surface open and be honest with myself. I am curious to see what is underneath this vessel of mine, to give some attention to “the inside.” Deep down, I know that these feelings that have been long ignored are more genuine. So I devote hundreds of hours to looking and to painting the vulnerabilities, the pain, and the struggles.

Painting is not about venting the psychological mess but about acknowledging and documenting it. I want to understand why I feel how I feel. Part of me also hopes others will understand what I am trying to say and see what’s beyond the seemingly perfect surface. “Is that a razor blade in your hand?” you might ask. Yes, and those are wounds on my wrist. But no, I have never thought about suicide. Don’t make assumptions or ask questions. Just look closely, and you will find everything in the paintings.
Marla Montoya

My parents ran a studio from their home in Mexico in the nineties. Making photographs in my apartment reminds me of my dad’s chunky, tender hands capturing the newlyweds, graduates, and quinceañeras always cycling through the house. As a toddler I imitated these strangers, begging for a turn. Later, as a self-aware, angsty young adult, I was timid and insecure in front of my dad’s camera. Jokingly and lovingly he’d say, “How can you not think you’re beautiful if you look like me?”

With this project, I return to those memories over and over. I see my friends’ inner children emerge to a surface I can capture. I see bold and unflinching toddlers, shy and unruly teenagers, and ultimately adults who want to play and be seen.
I use my body and found objects to make monotypes of dots and circles in blue hues. Blue is a unifying color, representing both water, which runs through life, and the sky we look up to. Circles allow me the greatest spectrum of scale, appearing in nature as both celestial and cellular.

I day dream of murmurations, the spilling, sprawling, dancing clouds of birds that move like smoke, randomly together. The patterns of murmurations help me to understand both that I am a single bird in systems of larger cycles and that the individual is powerful because it is a part of a whole. These dancing clouds are displays of the power achieved when moving and working together, perhaps attainable by focusing on what we share, from the cellular to celestial. My work is an abstract map of the patterns that unite us. The smaller circles are repeated and their density serves as a diagram of the power attainable when people understand how much stronger we are when we work together.

Watching the spread and response to COVID-19 has illustrated three things I knew to be true. One, people are as connected globally as we are locally. Two, people are stronger when we work together. Three, our individual routine habits, when multiplied by billions of people, have massive effects. COVID-19 has orchestrated a perspective shift, in reality, of which my art only dreamed. We are now forced to shift towards a more complete understanding of how our actions as individuals and as a globe work together interchangeably. I am grateful for this new perspective. COVID-19 has given us the opportunity to learn how to respond to the Climate Crisis, and what happens when response is delayed. Let’s start responding, in every way we know possible, to save what we share.
(Not) Armor, 2020, felt and thread, 40” x 17” x 10”

Chang Zhang

My work is the history of me finding my stand in this turbulent world. I knit together the felt pieces in the same way I put up a personal barrier between me and my surroundings: reservation sewed with calmness, the two qualities most valued by my homeland culture and family education; insensitivity weaved into detachment, what stopped me from empathizing too much until it hurts; the willing to isolate dangled at the bottom, the newest addition that protected me in the COVID-19 pandemic but caused an equal amount of loneliness.

While building the sculpture is reconstructing my mental blockade into a physical armor, wearing the sculpture on myself is reflecting on the nature of this barrier. Is it a shield that protects, or a burden that blinds? Is it giving me a safe space to self inspect or doing no good but distancing myself from people who care about me? Can I shed the barrier off one day to face the outside turmoil in its full force, or do I have to bear with it like a birthmark or a scar? Asking these questions is not fruitlessly dwelling on the past, but exploring what makes of me and accepting who I am. In a time when support from other people becomes scarce, our greatest strength always comes from a deep understanding of ourselves.
2020 SENIOR EXHIBITION

Waterville, Maine
Colby College
Department of Art