SENIOR

EXHIBITION

2021

DEPARTMENT OF ART

COLBY COLLEGE • WATERTVILLE, MAINE
SENIOR EXHIBITION 2021

MAY 12 – MAY 23
COLBY COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART
WATERVILLE, MAINE
ART DEPARTMENT
2020 – 2021

SENIOR STUDIO ARTISTS
Grace Connolly
Cole Guerin
Adrienne Rose Kaplowitz
Andrew Malia
Dominic Malia
Nicholas Malkemus
Kanon Shambora
Sophie Sherman
Evan Sievers
Hannah Southwick
Katherine Squires
Kaelin Wang
Sarah Warner
Delaney Wood
Benjamin Woollcott

STUDIO FACULTY
Bradley Borthwick
Christie DeNizio
Bevin Engman
Gary Green
Amanda Lilleston
Garry Mitchell

WRITING ART CRITICISM STUDENTS
Molly George
Stella Margarita Gonzalez
Maureen Jiang
Brittany Kane
Sally Kashala
Gabriela Nunez
Elliot Penn
Lily Santomenna
Gabriel Tigay
Katherine W. Zhang

ART HISTORY FACULTY
Marta Ameri
Daniel Harkett
Véronique Plesch
Tanya Sheehan

ART DEPARTMENT CHAIR
Charles Orzech

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
Deborah Thurston
A NOTE FROM FACULTY

A year on from Colby’s pandemic shutdown last March, the effects of COVID-19 are still very much with us. Some students and faculty returned to campus in the fall but to a different world, one shaped by mask wearing, frequent COVID testing, and the persistent possibility of campus restrictions. Others continued to learn and teach remotely, managing time-zone shifts and the disruptive interplay of home life and work. This situation has affected the conditions of production for artists in the studio capstone and participants in the Writing Art Criticism course. Access to studios was more difficult than in previous years, critiques were completely remote during the fall semester, and preparatory interviews for catalog essays were sometimes conducted on the video-conferencing platform Zoom. The pandemic has informed the art and writing too, in ways both obvious and less so. In some cases, form and subject matter draw directly from our new reality, while in others the very absence of the pandemic speaks of a desire to transcend our current circumstances.

We thank our students for their hard work and perseverance in these challenging times; our faculty colleagues in the Art Department for their support; Jennifer Liese, director of the Center for Arts & Language, Rhode Island School of Design, who once again worked closely (though this year remotely) with our student writers; and Pat Sims, who continues to copyedit the catalog with elegance and grace. We would also like to thank our colleagues at the Colby College Museum of Art, who always make this exhibition extraordinary, particularly the Museum’s new Carolyn Muzzy Director, Jacqueline Terrassa; Deputy Director, Julianne Gilland; Barbara Alfond Manager of Exhibitions and Publications, Megan Carey; and the preparatory staff of Jason Weller and Chris Patch.

As we bear witness to this unprecedented time in our lives, it has become ever more apparent that art can help. Making it, experiencing it, writing and talking about it, and, of course, sharing it with our colleagues, students, friends, and loved ones. Please enjoy these images and words and join us in congratulating the students who created them.

Gary Green and Daniel Harkett
Associate Professors
Department of Art
WORDS & IMAGES
TO WHOM DOES THE IMAGE BELONG?
SALLY KASHALA ON GRACE CONNOLLY

Upon viewing Grace Connolly's portraiture, it becomes apparent that the artist has noticed you first! Consider the diptych titled Look at Me/Don't Look at Me and read it from left to right. Examine the obscured checked flannel and the smoothness of the skin. The warm light that invites you in. Move to the adjacent panel. Notice the purple-gray light and ambience and the reflection of such colors in the draped background. Notice Grace’s stormy eyes. And stay there a moment.

Inspired by the ubiquitous, stylized, and critical nature of social media, where no image is sacred or safe, Grace composes pictures that personify this anxiety. Do you feel embarrassed or ashamed to have first viewed the feminine figure on the left before acknowledging the person who has caught you red-handed? The artwork begins to speak in a tense and almost accusatory tone.

“I identify as gay and I'm not interested in men; I'm in a long-term relationship!” Grace says. She adds in exasperation, “There's no reason that I should want men to find me attractive but I still want them to. I want them to want me but me still be able to reject them. And I don't know why.”

Grace’s portraiture does not supply her audience with unchallenged power. Instead, she anticipates the automatic objectification of her body and counters the viewer with a power of her own.

The “male gaze” is an oppressive force that Grace feels she is “trained to want.” Knowing this, she chooses to hide amongst shadows, clothes, and curtains. Grace recreates photos found in her camera roll and when constructing the corresponding paintings, she crops her images in order to limit her audience’s ability to view her. Although the warm yellow and orange light and the vibrant cerulean blues present in the left panel of Look at Me/Don’t Look at Me suggest purely pleasurable moments, the assumed omnipresent male gaze—more pointedly called out in the second self-portrait—unsettles this naive interpretation.

By simultaneously asserting vulnerability and control, Grace reclaims her own flesh via an acknowledgment of the voyeur. Typically the physical artwork takes on a submissive role. Unlike the artist or the meanings devised by the spectator, the canvas remains still and unchanging, without agency and monumental. Grace, however, invents a way in which the artwork appears to engage and interrogate those who look. When examining her paintings, you might abashedly turn away, growing significantly more aware of your looking. Grace’s portraits encourage you to continue the investigation into your own uncomfortable biases long after her eyes have first spotted you.
GRACE CONNOLLY / Look at Me, Don’t Look at me, right panel / oil on panel / 16” X 16” / 2021
THE WALK
MAUREEN JIANG AND SALLY KASHALA ON COLE GUERIN

Cole Guerin makes his pictures on walks. Bringing his 6x9 Fujifilm camera, he heads for Oakland or Winslow or downtown Waterville. Quiet and plainly dressed, Cole passes as an ordinary pedestrian, a somewhat attentive one, for he always has his eyes fixed upon his surroundings. In sync with his walking pace, his eyes trace the ebb and flow of the exterior forms of walls and buildings, sometimes fixating on an eroded spot. Seeing one apparently impenetrable cement wall, Cole thinks in concrete terms while also recalling distant memories. He considers: the date of the wall’s creation; the snowstorms it lasted through; how he found comfort observing his surroundings as a child; other walls, sometimes made of brick, he’s shot in the past; what a good complement a picture of this severely eroded wall would be to a photograph of a smoother, lighter example. He steps back, frames the shot, and releases the shutter, keeping in mind the price of each roll of film. Meticulous as he is, Cole walks on with a sense of ease. He takes notice of this feeling, much as he does of the teal-blue surface across the street, and approaches the next subject.

Facades includes upward of thirty images and is displayed in the Senior Exhibition as a photo book. Imagine flipping through the collection and gazing upon each composition. Envision the site of the image, Cole’s stance, the stillness within the film canister, the releasing of the image into the processing liquid, the curing time of the darkroom, the digital rendering and minute touch-ups, and finally the insertion of the resulting image into an intentional sequence. The images are ordered so that they “complement each other stylistically,” says Cole, and “make you want to bounce around and go back so that you interact with the book.” The idea behind Cole’s compilation is to give each photograph its deserved dignity and respect. Inspired by “quiet photography,” Cole has made images that seek to refamiliarize his audience with sites and locations that had been vacant or infrequently used long before quarantine began.

When writing this essay, we, the authors, asked: Why exactly does Cole feel respect for buildings? Why not photograph people as well? What philosophical meaning lies behind this photography? However, returning to the concept of “quiet photography,” which informs Cole’s work, these questions can perhaps best be answered by Gerry Badger in The Pleasures of Good Photography. “The quiet photographer,” Badger writes, “respects and trusts his subject—and for that matter, himself. By maintaining a discreet emotional distance from his subject, he allows it to tell its own story . . . and is content upon subordinating his own ‘story.’”

Cole makes his pictures on walks. He records the marks of time on facades, the outermost part of artificial structures. He observes without altering, and cares by noticing.
THE ARTIST AS FACILITATOR
MAUREEN JIANG ON ADRIENNE ROSE KAPLOWITZ

I met with Adrienne Kaplowitz on Google Meet. Admittedly, there were technical challenges, including inaudible moments, and my broken English testified to eight months of being back in China. But connecting with Adrienne was no problem.

Friendship and art have always been intertwined for her. Making friends in high-school art class was an important reason Adrienne fell in love with art. Her contribution to the Senior Exhibition, Reconnecting, was a chance for her to integrate different working methods and techniques learned throughout the years. At first glance, her paintings of Zoom screenshots of her high-school friends, scattered on the wall in a Zoom-esque grid, may pass as a commentary on isolation. However, upon examination, a striking richness begins to surface. You sense an affectionate tie forming wherever an animated talker is placed next to an attentive listener. You spot a depth of personality in every delicately rendered room and memorable reaction face. A simple but beautiful narrative of togetherness develops, beyond the invisible grid and independent of fictions about COVID-19.

A collaborative project, as Adrienne characterizes it, the process of making Reconnecting testifies to the unchanging charms of community: support and active cooperation, above everything else. Before Reconnecting, it was four years of keeping in touch remotely for Adrienne’s friend group; then an impressive “ten minutes and seven yeses” when she introduced her idea. The “sitting,” a group Zoom call, proved to be an online reunion, one that carried on in other ways. Continuing to support the project, the friends grew closer during the pandemic.

In Adrienne’s series, the realistic portraiture, the individualized color palettes of each panel, and the overall scene of a group interacting outshine the Zoom format, causing us to forget it for a moment. It’s still there, of course, a marker of distance and also a facilitator. But the real facilitator is Adrienne. By painting screenshots and piecing them together into one unified composition, she mends the distance with an artist’s hand, securing connections.

Overall, Reconnecting is warm, welcoming, never sentimental. Similarly, Adrienne is caring, composed, concise, even detached in some ways. She cares little about the physicality of her art and is ready to give away all seven portraits to her friends after the exhibition, concluding the collaborative process.

With a memorable genuineness, Reconnecting celebrates the gift of community, the capacity to adapt, and our ability to meet the hardships of isolation with humor. (Yes, the final layer of Reconnecting is a pun on the language of Zoom itself.)
Andrew Malia’s inspiration is the ocean. He knows waves inside and out from surfing East Coast swells, and pursuing environmental studies draws him to water as well. His art reflects this fascination. Andrew has explored natural forms during years of printing and painting, but recently he has focused on crafting concrete wave sculptures. They require a time-consuming process that involves many molds and much attention to detail, all to capture a moment. Waves constantly warp and change, but these pieces never will. They sit solidly on the studio workbench, monuments to flow.

Or maybe they’re not particularly monumental but more accidental. While Andrew meant to make simple symbols of motion and energy, they stand for the opposite as well. Stillness is the first thing that stands out. They are man-made static pauses representing a concept of constant motion. The sculpture surpasses its intended meaning as it combines concrete and abstract, wet and dry, sea and land, purpose and surprise.

Paradoxes abound in Andrew’s sculptures. The cement medium derived from sand doubles back to represent the earth, while the negative space suggested by the concrete form is air. Water’s opposites thus shape the image of the element itself, and the shape constantly shifts. Various angles evoke visions of gentle rolling waves, a heavy shore break, or a swirling submarine scene. The curve looks generic, like a doodle of a wave, but a complex process supports this simplicity. A conceptual wave transfers to a tangible wood-and-metal mold via the artist’s imagination. Pouring a cement mixture into this construction embodies the liquid motion of a wave, which solidifies into a suspended surge.

Beyond sidewalks and construction sites, concrete has a creative history. Brutalist architecture emphasizes the heavy presence and robust rigidity of concrete just as sculptor Sol LeWitt’s Seven Walls stands large and forbidding on Colby’s campus. Andrew’s weightless waves are different, however, sharing more affinity with the work of Maya Lin in various media in the Colby Museum. Pin River-Kissimmee is a conceptual water work by Lin that uses a sharp, unlikely medium to represent flux and flow. Lin’s marble sculpture Disappearing Bodies of Water: Arctic Ice makes use of fixed, dense materials to map the presence of water in the world, stilling it so it becomes visible and measurable. Andrew’s sculptures similarly pause the ocean for our contemplation.

The Colby sculpture studio is far from the coast where Andrew enjoys and observes the waves that are woven into his work. From a distance, he works diligently to construct a concept of water made of earth. The result is a concrete curl that forms a wave in its void as present as the physical sculpture. All Andrew wants people to see in his art is solid form, but his wave also evokes its opposite, fluidity.
Dominic Malia came to Colby College with every intention of studying architecture, but Colby guided him in a different direction—sculpture. His enrollment in Sculpture I solidified his decision to shift his focus. The freedom to make forms that defied the laws of physics and the invitation to work with his hands drew Dominic to the medium. His work, however, continues to reflect his architectural eye as he explores the themes of topography, landscape, and the relationship between form and function. During his college career, Dominic’s work has ranged from the strong and rigid form of a table to more flowing and dynamic pieces, all of which are crafted in wood.

Like his love for sculpture, Dominic found his inspiration for his senior capstone project here on campus, more specifically at the Colby Museum of Art. *Interrupted River: Penobscot*, 2019, by artist, architect, and 2020–21 Lunder Institute fellow Maya Lin introduced the challenge of emulating free-flowing water in sculpture to Dominic. This particular work by Lin is different from Dominic’s sculptures as it is composed of glass marbles mounted on the wall that map a river here in Maine. However, water is deeply connected to Dominic’s work because it is the element that allows him to create fluid forms out of stiff wooden planks in a technique known as steam bending. In this laborious process the wood must first be prepped and primed, steamed for four to eight hours, then clamped into the desired shape for at least one hour to cure. Gallons of water are used to produce each curved segment, which Dominic carefully assembles with others to create a form that suggests the swirling patterns of flowing rivers.

When constructing his sculptures, Dominic combines the steam-bent pieces with recycled wood he finds in the studio. He then carves away in some areas, adds fine details, and meticulously paints the wood in various shades of vibrant green acrylic. Like Lin’s work, Dominic’s sculpture is a map of sorts, but an imaginary one that charts not water itself but the effects of water on land. He doesn’t want to tame water but to reveal its power to transform.

Lin and Dominic alike ponder the impacts of their work on the environment. Both see their pieces as environmental calls to action: to protect, preserve, and respect the land on which we live. Although Dominic’s work has an environmental cost, because of the large amounts of water used in the steam-bending process, he believes his sculptures have the potential to inspire others with the passion for environmentalism he feels.
DOMINIC MALIA / Green River / wood, paint / 81” x 21” x 2” / 2021
AIMING HIGH
ELL IOT PENN ON NICHOLAS Malkemus

You must aim high, not in what you are going to do at some future date, but in what you are going to make yourself do today. Otherwise working is just a waste of time.

—Edgar Degas

For printmaker Nick Malkemus, working is never a waste of time. His aims are always high. “I am very independent and uncompromising in how I make art,” Nick tells me as we chat at a table in the crowded Joseph Family Spa. Nick belongs to an artistic tradition that champions competition and excellence. Though he takes his work very seriously, always striving to be the best, Nick does not fit the archetype of the ill-tempered artist. The opposite is true. As we talk, he waves and says hello to friends passing by. He is kind, well-mannered, and attentive.

Brimming with creativity, confidence, and candor, Nick enthusiastically discusses his art with me. From his backpack, he retrieves a few woodcut prints, his favored medium. As he walks me through each print, from oldest to newest, he makes note of his stylistic and technical improvements. For Nick, his latest work is always the best. His knowledge of art history is impressive. He speaks highly of Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, Félix Vallotton, and James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Though separated by a century of art history, Vallotton’s influence on Nick is readily apparent. Just take a look at the artist’s bold and simple monogram. Look familiar?

Like the Swiss-born Vallotton, the leading innovator of the woodcut during the fin de siècle, Nick strives to produce prints that are decorative, intimate, and striking. The two-part print Jackie (ready to order), Sam (still looking) has all three characteristics. The composition provides two perspectives on the same familiar event. On the left, Jackie sits patiently in a restaurant booth, ready to order as the title suggests. On the right, Sam peruses the menu. Both faces are obscured. This artistic choice draws attention away from the figures and onto the activity at hand. A heavy, black line frames the composition, creating a window through which the viewer witnesses the scene. The perspective provides the opportunity to see through the artist’s eyes, to dine with Jackie and Sam. Forms are rendered simply and effectively. Excess details are eliminated. Sequential sections of empty space, blackness, and linear patterns accentuate the flatness of the print, the foundation for the work’s decorative appeal. The piece is highly controlled and polished in style, yet informal in feel, much like the artist himself.

As we part ways, I am left wondering what will come next for such a talented and motivated artist. I hope that Nick remains independent and uncompromising. My hopes probably matter little to Nick. Regardless, be sure to take advantage of this chance to view the work of such a talented artist. I believe Degas, the inveterate curmudgeon, would approve.
NICHOLAS MALKEMUS / Jackie (ready to order), Sam (still looking) / woodcut on Rives BFK / 8\(\frac{1}{2}\)" x 12" / 2021
RECYCLED MEMORIES
BRITTANY KANE AND GABRIELA NUNEZ ON KANON SHAMBORA

Kanon Shambora has refined the studio techniques she has learned to create her own multimedia style that allows her to represent her memories of childhood. Discussing her work and process, she says, “My time at Colby leads me to appreciate home in ways that I don’t when I’m there.” The past year has given many of us, including Kanon, the opportunity to reflect on the moments that feel a lifetime away, or just yesterday.

In her current series of works, Kanon uses sketches of a childhood landmark, the AdvanSix Frankford factory in Philadelphia, as the blueprints for her printing plates. She has multiple memories of being mesmerized by the complexity of the chemical plant on car rides back home from the city. In her images, she represents this complexity as captivating mazes of intertwining pipes and machinery. Some of the lines and structures have definite beginnings and endings while others melt into one another.

Layering is a critical element in Kanon’s artistic process. She runs several plates through the press multiple times, in a variety of colors, to create the base of each piece. In order to achieve variation in the background, Kanon strategically plans which parts of her plates will be convex and which concave before developing them in the Mule Lab. This allows her to control the various line weights in each print such that there are some sections of vibrant color saturation as well as some open areas.

The topmost layer of Kanon’s prints starkly contrasts with the colorful factory backgrounds. Here Kanon selects old printed photos of her childhood friends and hand copys them in black and white ink. Her execution of the small figures makes them look like holograms.

How are they related to the AdvanSix factory? As a child, Kanon couldn’t know the significance the factory would hold in her life. Now she sees it as a physical manifestation of nostalgia, a reminder of place and relationships. The same can be said for the photographs taken casually by Kanon’s family in the early 2000s that speak today of important bonds formed in the past. In her art, Kanon brings together these memory triggers and explores the mechanisms of memory itself. Her apparently incongruous imagery corresponds to the ways memory works as a chain of idiosyncratic associations. Kanon has found that memories can be elusive, distorting, and ever-changing—and she has discovered a way of representing that strangeness in art.
KANON SHAMBORA / Summer Break / monotype, drawing / 13 1/2" x 20" / 2021
Sophie Sherman’s sculptures are free-flowing in their composition as well as in their production. In order for her to divulge what form lies beneath the surface of the marble she uses, she embraces a go-with-the-flow attitude toward the carving process. The malleability of her ideas compels her to sculpt based on what the marble reveals as she works. It’s hard to see form while cutting into a massive stone. Yet Sophie knows that the final product will reflect her personal experience with the marble.

Her sculptures are reminiscent of the undulating sand dunes, perilous couloirs, and steep slot canyons in which she spends much of her free time. She immerses herself in nature and draws inspiration from her time in the great outdoors. “All my art revolves around nature and my experience with it. My sense of place when I’m there. In my free time, I live in my car and climb,” she says in conversation.

Sophie’s two sculptures in the Senior Exhibition perfectly encapsulate the natural forms she hikes, climbs, and explores. Untitled is a smooth, well-sanded interpretation of a mountain range or a sand dune, rising into a series of peaks and troughs. A ten-inch layer of epoxy above the marble seals the sculpture in a cube-like vessel. The marble is carved from the top down, and its peaks and valleys elicit thoughts about the natural process of erosion and how form and shape come to be in the natural world. The apparent topographical nature of this sculpture suggests aerial terrain images of national parks in the western United States.

Self is more vertically oriented. Featuring a cliff-like structure with rough ridges, it is reminiscent of the high-walled slot canyons Sophie has canyoneered and scrambled up during her summers. The rougher, grainier qualities of the marble are accentuated in this piece, drawing comparison to the crevices climbers must navigate in their upward treks.

Sophie’s work process is very much in tune with her outdoor skills. The trust she has in her hands as a climber is transposed to the confident approach she takes in sculpting. Marble is an unforgiving medium to work with and any mistake could lead to total ruin. Yet Sophie trusts her ability to fastidiously manipulate it in such a way that she doesn’t need a premeditated plan of what the final piece will look like. The marble will reveal itself to her as she works.
SOPHIE SHERMAN / Self / marble / 10" x 10" x 14" / 2021
Talking to Evan Sievers, it is clear that he is disciplined. And his sculptural method requires it. Create the mold, pour the plaster into the mold, wait, wait, wait, take the pieces out of the mold, examine each piece, keep or discard, then restart. In this way, Evan has made seven hundred small sculptures. One end of each sculpture is shaped like a bullet, the other like a pill, an association strengthened by the presence of the word “Xanax” (the name of the infamous antianxiety drug), the plaster-white color, and the matte texture. Every day Evan goes into the studio he makes around fifteen to twenty pieces, a significant amount of them breaking during the process. Every day, he experiences the joys of creation while simultaneously feeling the pits of loss. It’s a labor of purpose and love that requires resilience.

Yet Evan’s effort is invisible in his final piece, *The Pill Mill*, an acrylic box, placed on a pedestal, filled with orderly, marching rows of Xanax bullets. The transparency doesn’t seem to conceal anything; rather, it exposes the dual-sided bullet pill to the viewer’s scrutiny. You can approach from the side and get a view of the imprinted “Xanax” on each piece of painstakingly molded plaster. You can also view from the top to see the layers of bullets resting on top of each other, but you will never see the ones lost, irrecoverable.

Evan attempts to retain a certain neutrality. He appears to be simply presenting evidence in a sterile, impersonal acrylic container that recalls the laboratory or hospital—a box within the box of the gallery. You can, he’s suggesting, form your own opinion of these austere forms. Though, of course, by imagining medication as a bullet, he’s also sharing his perception of the issue.

What remains unseen outside the gallery box is the broken pieces and forms of the Xanax bullets. Many people have described drug addiction as the silent killer, taking the lives of many of their loved ones with no single true perpetrator to blame. The *Pill Mill* aims to reveal the flaws of our collective consciousness by giving us space to truly think about the perverse relationships between medicine and violence and between the idea of sterile “transparency” and the disposability of humans. As the media shapes collective consciousness by cycling news of drug abuse while letting pharmaceutical companies off the hook, Evan pushes back, demanding that we contend with the sheer reality of lives lost.
EVAN SIEVERS / The Pill Mill / plaster, plexiglass / 23" x 17" x 17" / 2021
First and foremost, Hannah Southwick is a storyteller. A reporter for the New York Post, she’s always felt at home as a writer. But in her first year of college, she took the risk of trying something completely new—art. Through a series of classes, Hannah slowly discovered and refined her skills as a maker of visual narratives.

In her printmaking experiences, Hannah became obsessed with the power and the limitations of the line, used by printmakers to create forms, set visual planes, and implement values. So important is it to her, she has tattoos of the line patterns she uses in her art. Though her intended career is aligned with her English major, Hannah’s tattoos will serve as a future reminder of this crucial period of artistic experimentation. The tattoos themselves are a method of remembrance; her artistic memories no longer live only in her mind but on her body as well.

Her photography work led Hannah into a study of cyanotype. Her capstone project, Hindsight, is an exploration of this photographic technique. With its color range limited to shades of blue, cyanotype is a natural fit for someone interested in pared-down tonal effects and contrasts between light and dark. In her views of Maine, Hannah finds lines in nature in the silhouettes of bare trees. Brilliant displays of changing light are complicated by the bewitching hues of the cyanotypes, creating immersive, otherworldly settings.

At the same time, these scenes, like the lines of her tattoos, contain memories important to Hannah’s artistic journey. Unlike her tattoos, this examination of memory is more concerned with the idea of suggestive nostalgia than the literal truth. In her work, Hannah hazily replicates familiar spaces as a means of reconciling herself to her departure from them.

Grounded in elements of reality—such as depictions of buildings and trees—the images nonetheless prove ambiguous with their reflective, recurrent window motif. The windows are Hannah’s invitation for viewers to take a peek into her perception of her memories. Yet the views are obscured by droplets of rain and distorted by reflections in the panes of glass. Memory, it seems, is nebulous, not forensic. And this disregard for accuracy makes these pictures enticing. They situate us in a world of feeling and half-remembered details, a world simultaneously stationary and in flux, a world loved and left behind.
HANNAH SOUTHWICK / Untitled from Hindsight / cyanotype / 14” x 11” / 2021
HOME AGAIN
LILY SANTOMENNA AND GABRIEL TIGAY ON KATHERINE SQUIRES

Katie Squires’s camera has captured the world. When she went abroad for the spring semester in Dublin last year, she borrowed a 35mm film camera from Colby. It traveled with her to Massachusetts when she was sent back to the United States due to COVID-19. While she was at home, Katie did not intend to create any substantial work, and instead used her camera as a tool to navigate the confusing, painful world around her. Though she couldn’t develop and print her photographs, she continued to make images, unsure of what would result. She didn’t put too much thought into them, didn’t worry about lighting or angles, and rarely shot multiple takes of the same scene. This freedom translates into the pictures she eventually printed when she returned to campus. They feel friendly and warm and provide the viewer with some of the comforting sentiments Katie experienced in her home.

Katie has turned her images into a photo book, titled Home Again, which gives them some order and a narrative. Focusing on the feeling of being home for the first extended period of time she’d had in recent memory, she digs into her relationships with her parents, grapples with religion, reminisces about her childhood, and explores nature. There are seemingly random shots—a bed unmade, a curtain billowing in the breeze, and a lone, twisty vine growing out of the corner of a bright pink fence—as well as intimate details—deodorant, crumpled sheets, and crushed pillows. Katie includes a few images of those closest to her, such as a somber portrait of her father. Generally, though, she sticks to objects like the religious icons, small marble busts, photos and childhood mementos that overflow a wooden table and tell a story of Katie’s family, its history and the virtues they hold in high esteem.

Katie doesn’t see her book as a pandemic piece but it’s clear the shutdown created the opportunity for the project to emerge. Forced into isolation with her family, she explored experiences many of us can identify with. The monochromatic quality of many of her photographs calls to mind, for example, the repetitive blending together of the days many of us endured while confined with our own families. Yet her pictures also retain a freshness that speaks of the wistful feeling one has when walking through a familiar door after being gone for a while, pandemic or not.
When I encounter Kaelin Wang’s piece, *Constant Judgement Day*, it is a work in progress. It is huge—eight feet wide and three and a half feet tall—and pinned on a board with thumbtacks, layers of paper pinned on top of one another, with ample room to grow around it. It started as one panel, with a boy pictured, his shirt deeply contrasted and shaded. You can see him on the left, holding an upturned beer bottle, the remains dripping into an outstretched hand that extends from the right. Slowly, Kaelin expanded this charcoal work by adding more panels, figures, and aspects of her life. She cut out pieces from previous works and pinned them on top of the panels. The dog we see at the bottom left corner is hers, a remnant of another piece. The conjoined heads of three girls stand out in the center of the drawing. She includes intricate details such as the necklace she always wears and the clashing plaid tie and button-down shirt on a boy who was her date to a formal. As Kaelin kept drawing, she depicted herself sprawled out, sipping a straw attached to a Dunkin’ cup, taking a photo of the scene from above, and with her head buried between her knees. She’s also present as a two-faced angel and sitting crisscross applesauce. Along with the self-portraits, she added a perfect pyramid of beer pong cups, twisting staircases, and ladders.

Above all, Kaelin's work gives the viewer the sensation of life being lived. We can see the signs of everyday life, boring but perhaps also vital: sipping coffee, taking a photo, lying in bed. We also see signs of vulnerability and are met with the struggle that being human involves. Kaelin depicts herself as a figure pinned on to the side of the work, anxiously nibbling on her fingernails as she looks at the viewer while shyly lifting up her shirt, revealing her stomach. The large, alien-like figure in the center with the three heads represents her three closest friends, a significant part of her life. Taken together, the piece looks like an autobiography, full of details, stories, and memories. It is nonlinear, however. The jumps in scale, the overlapping of paper, the twisting of perspective, and the distortion of faces and bodies suggest the associative structure of a daydream rather than a carefully worked-out narrative.

Kaelin will continue to work on the piece, adding architectural details, snippets of memory, and tributes to those close to her until it is put on display and perhaps afterward. She’s not sure if it will ever be completely finished: what autobiography could be?
KAELIN WANG / Constant Judgement Day / charcoal on paper / 42" x 96" / 2021
Traditionally, triptychs are intimidating in their physicality and meaning. Representing dramatic Christian subject matter, they are often publicly displayed in churches, sometimes in a place of honor, where they can be approached by any parishioner. Triptychs have also historically been commissioned by individuals to act as devotional tools, allowing for more intimate kinds of looking. Featuring oil on a large central wood panel and two flanking smaller panels, Sarah Warner’s contributions to the Senior Exhibition together recall this traditional format while reinventing it to address personal, secular concerns.

The central element of Sarah’s modern triptych is *Family Portrait*, a colorful picture inspired by her idyllic suburban childhood in Illinois. To the left is an image titled *Woman/Lavender*, while on the right is *Woman/Rose*. Sarah’s original plan was to include recognizable figures in the side panels, a masturbating figure in *Woman/Lavender* and a fetal figure in *Woman/Rose*. The masturbating figure in particular would have disrupted the religious tradition of the triptych by running counter to Christian prudishness. It foregrounded the pleasures of the flesh while Sarah’s later version, which features an abstract arrangement of colors, directs us to aesthetic, visual pleasure.

As she was developing her project, Sarah came to see the inclusion of figures in the side panels as too forced, too much. She wanted the work to be organic and subtle, nonconfrontational yet still provocative, so she decided to reference the figure vaguely. Little bread crumbs—a shape formed by lines, an association with a color—would lead you to the grand prize: a three-paneled looking glass of identity composed of carefully arranged color and light.

Suggestive of a range of emotional experiences, Sarah’s colors murmur to us as we contemplate the visual feast in front of us. The lavender, more blue than red, of *Woman/Lavender*, has cooled down the references of the drama of sexual instigation into something we can process more calmly, coolly. The rose, more red than blue, of *Woman/Rose*, has dramatized references to the fetal figure, making *Woman/Rose* match *Woman/Lavender* in intensity of feeling. This leaves the center and origin of all this: *Family Portrait*. And now we ask ourselves, watching ourselves, how can we reconcile our individual feelings with our place in a family? How do we situate ourselves in relation to familial, religious, or artistic traditions?

Sarah’s work is striking in its intimacy and lush in its meaning. As voyeurs, we peer through a veil of color, searching for something to grasp. Transfixed by the interplay of color and light, we continue peering until we see bits and pieces of ourselves, scattered among three individual panels in the triptych. We complete Sarah’s piece and just maybe ourselves too.
SARAH WARNER / Woman/Rose / oil on panel / 24" x 24" / 2021
Upon first impression, Delaney Wood’s humble student studio resembles a carnival house of mirrors. Everywhere you look, there is another Delaney. One stands out among the crowd. She is smiling warmly, sitting on a wooden stool, excited to talk with us about her art.

“When you paint yourself, that's you in that moment,” Delaney explains. Her task is to capture a specific self in a fleeting moment in time. Take *Introspection*, for example. In front of a soft green background, the artist gazes pensively into the distance, her eyes acting as an important feature in centralizing the portrait. Much of the rest of her face is a muddy, ruddy mess of shadows. When painting them, Delaney makes no attempt to hide the evidence of her labor; brushstroke marks are clear. A triangular sliver of golden light cuts across the side of her face, a sliver composed of carefully applied individual daubs of neutrals, whites, and yellows. Rich reds and purples outline the sliver. Her hair flows delicately in separate pieces of yellow, gold, and brown. All of these details, so suggestive of how a face looks right now, convince us that the Delaney we see will be gone the second the light shifts.

Compared to *Introspection*, *Rumination* is more emotionally expressive. Resting her head heavily, Delaney stares intensely at the viewer with tired eyes outlined in subtle shades of blue and purple. Though she lies in a relaxed pose, her expression is far from tranquil. Again, light plays an important role in the composition. This time, instead of illuminating her face, it bleaches her skin, flattening a bright character into striking, introspective stillness. Another Delaney, in the moment, and gone again.

“I'm painting versions of myself and getting comfortable with myself too,” Delaney says, describing her creative process as meditative and therapeutic. She began at a young age and was always particularly interested in portraiture. In high school, she painted friends and family. However, she credits the Colby Art Department with refining her technique, visible in her meticulous brushstrokes. Delaney normally shares her artwork only with her inner circle, creating first and foremost with personal motives. “This isn’t for other people, it’s for myself,” she says of her work.

Make good use of this chance to see these different Delaneys. Another opportunity is not guaranteed.
DELANEY WOOD / Introspection (top), Rumination / oil on panel / 21" x 16", 12" x 14" / 2021
A cool gray seems to find its way into every color in Vide, muting any sense of vibrancy. A high concentration of organic shapes separated by distressing lines fills the canvas. The splashes of color frame an ashen central area that evokes a sense of heaviness and hopelessness.

Abstraction steers us away from recognizable, tangible objects. It can often be difficult for the viewer to decipher meaning when there is nothing seemingly concrete present. Yet, recognizing the complexity produced by the absence of objects is the first step in understanding Ben Woollcott’s work. Vide (which means “empty” in French) is outwardly obscure and bodiless in a way that suggests the transcendental but it still displays an attempt to connect. Through close attention to elements such as form, color, and composition, Ben tries to communicate his thoughts, memories, and sensibilities—the immaterial embodiment of himself—to the viewer.

Ben begins his process with the canvas on the floor, earbuds in and eyes closed. Once he has imagined himself within a distinct period of his life, he starts his underdrawings—a phase of automatic drawing through which he attempts to honestly capture how he is feeling. Some preliminary drawings produce jagged, angular lines while others result in softer, billowing configurations. Once these are done, Ben begins to make deliberate decisions as he paints in order to refine what he intends to convey.

We all intuitively associate certain colors with particular passions or experiences. A warm yellow can remind us of the first mild day after a harsh winter; a deep red can evoke a sense of anger. “A yellow might be a happy memory briefly running through my mind while a cool blue could be a feeling of loss,” says Ben. “The grays that dominate the piece are largely representative of the hopeless stillness that dominated my thoughts during that time. Sort of a numbness and pessimism that bled into the other memories and emotions, causing their saturation to fade to neutral.”

After speaking with Ben, the significance of his work is clearer. Ben’s art is as much his conversation with himself as it is with his audience. Even so, he does not want to dictate how someone interprets his art. He is content if only one color in his work resonates with a viewer; even if they don’t entirely understand the piece, they can take that away with them. When first looking at abstract art, we are left to decipher its meaning. Despite the fact that we don’t always have the artist explaining their work to us, our impressions remain valid. We simply need to sit with abstract works for a moment, just long enough to make those connections.
BENJAMIN WOOLLCCOTT / Vide / acrylic and charcoal on canvas / 27" x 37" / 2021
I have always been acutely aware of my image, my body, and how other people perceive me. Every time I come back to my room, the first thing I do is look in the mirror and see what everyone else has been seeing. The reality that people perceive me and that I have no control over their perceptions is a deep source of anxiety for me. When I am in public, I feel intensely aware that people might be looking at me. At the same time, I find myself watching others in the same way I fear they are watching me.

This fear is encouraged in part by the prevalence of social media. Instagram and similar platforms are all about your image, reinforcing the importance and impact of imagery in how people perceive others, particularly young women. Further, the exhibitionist culture surrounding Instagram causes anxieties related to the male gaze and desirability to surface. While I crave to be desirable, I also do not want to be viewed. I do not want people to even know I exist. Despite these wishes, I exist in the material world and people can see me.

In my paintings, which are based on images of myself, I feel a sense of agency when it comes to these anxieties. I get to create and cultivate the image that is presented. I am in control of what others see. These images are both extensions of myself and opportunities for others to view me. While viewers gaze at my art, I make the art gaze right back. In doing so, I aim to highlight the invasiveness of their gaze. Creating this sense of invasion is my way of confronting the omnipresent male gaze and reclaiming control over my image.

Viewers Beware: The gaze goes both ways.
As a child whose parents had to work a lot, I spent a lot of time at a small trailer—home to a day-care center—pretty much every day until I was five years old and every summer until I was eleven. Unable to go and explore the rest of my town, I found myself wandering through the nearby woods, examining every root and every tree like they were structural marvels. My interest in my surroundings from a young age led me to gravitate toward photography as a way of expressing myself and showing others how I viewed the world around me.

As I got older, my interests grew beyond the day care’s expanse of woods, and I started noticing communities and their manmade structures. In high school, some of my classes were outside the academic building in trailers, which allowed me to leave the confines of the school during free periods as long as I didn’t get caught. On my secret walks, I would stare at the walls on the buildings nearby. What fascinated me most about these walls was that each one revealed its history right on the surface. Each brick and each crack had its own story. The colors of these buildings were changed by weather and each surface was roughened by age. My high school had been unchanged by human construction for forty years before I even set foot in it, but its facade had only become more distinguished from all the years it had been standing. It has since been reduced to rubble to make way for a new building.

Now that I am in college, and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, I find myself sadly limited in terms of being a part of the community. In an attempt to set my mind at ease again (and get some fresh air), I have gone searching for facades. Maybe I can share with others during these troubling times what fascinates me most about these places. At the very least, I can give them their deserved dignity through my attention to each photograph. Perhaps the photographs even reflect my own gratitude to these structures for their everyday surfaces and for shaping how I look at the world.

COLE GUERIN

Untitled
from Facades,
archival pigment print,
17” x 11”, 2021
Our lives disconnect and reconnect, we move on, and later we may again touch one another, again bounce away. This is the felt shape of a human life, neither simply linear nor wholly disjunctive nor endlessly bifurcating, but rather this bouncy-castle sequence of bumpings-into and tumblings-apart.

—Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

Reconnecting is a culmination of four years of practice with figures. I’ve always liked painting portraits; I’ve liked sitting down and talking with the subjects, finding out more about their lives, and how they would like to be represented. There is an intimacy in the process that is difficult to replicate with a friend or a stranger once the paintbrush is down. The pandemic has brought obvious difficulties to this practice yet has presented new options for how to immortalize a novel time in history with positivity and optimism. As this year has separated us, it has also allowed many people who are not physically close to reconnect.

This series portrays my close friends from my high-school art class. They are posed in my version of a modern group portrait, highlighted through a Zoom display. To me, applications like Zoom create the modern paradox: alone we are together; although we are farther, we can feel closer. “Connecting” is the word we see often as we open Zoom to reconnect. As our internet physically reconnects our images to each other, we emotionally reconnect with old friends and places far away. My subjects also reconnect me to why I originally loved art—because it was something that connected me with my friends.

I’ve never felt a physical connection to my finished work; the process and a picture after the fact is enough to feel complete. When this series is complete, I will separate all of the “screens” and send them to their models, where they will continue to bump together and tumble apart as we grow.
Last spring, I spent some time skateboarding on a concrete slab in an abandoned mill in my town. It was a way for me to see my friends and get outside. The mill is a large complex of rusty metal buildings and decaying wooden barns. Trees and shrubs grow out of the concrete, which is cracking and crumbling to sand. Abandoned sites like this are common where I’m from, where industries have closed, leaving these ruins behind. Skateboarding was a small way to make use of the space.

Inspired by skateboarding, I embrace the ability in my artwork to create repeated, though not identical, forms. I make them in different mediums and with different finishes, then arrange them after production, creating a flowing pattern. Concrete poured into the mold transforms from liquid to solid and allows for freedom while also producing a satisfyingly solid object.

I’m also inspired by surfing. I like the movement of waves and skate bowls. Skateboarders use empty swimming pools to ride in circles. Waves travel across oceans after distant storms, then crash on a beach. Changing temperatures create storms and melt, waves and rivers powered by gravity. I use raw materials that invoke our built environment and shapes that emulate cyclical patterns in nature, weathering and rebirth, movement and energy.
I like the natural flow of rivers and how they meander across a landscape with no guide save for natural processes. I wanted to represent these effects in wood. Wood is flexible in manufacturing (endless possibilities) but stable in structure, it is easily additive and can be carved, and I can create a build-as-I-go canvas for painting. The river shape is made with steam-bent pieces glued and screwed together, while the riverbanks are made with boards and small scraps shaped into pieces and glued on.

I was inspired by Maya Lin's pin river works, which she said she hoped would provoke audiences “to think of that river system as something that is much more controlled or finite . . . something that is a singular organism.” I also think of the Whanganui River in New Zealand, which in 2017 was granted legal personhood after 140 years of work by the local Maori tribe. Said tribe negotiator Gerrard Albert: "We have fought to find an approximation in law so that all others can understand that from our perspective, treating the river as a living entity is the correct way to approach it, as an indivisible whole, instead of the traditional model for the last hundred years of treating it from a perspective of ownership and management."

In a perfect world, a river is a free, living entity, free from ownership and interference, a free-flowing, singular organism that obeys its own laws of flow.
My work depicts quotidian subjects and situations that I have usually ignored or whose existence I have taken for granted. While the late nineteenth-century/early twentieth-century Modernists made art of their surroundings because everything was changing so rapidly, I am doing so but for another reason: because life has slowed down drastically—enough for me to look around and decide to make art of it before it passes. This work is in part a response to having been sent home last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon arriving home and entering quarantine, it dawned on me that I had not been very good about documenting my life up until that point. This series of woodcuts is an effort to be more diaristic and to honor the quiet moments in a life that seems to have recently become very transient. Such scenes include everyday interactions between pets and their owners and quiet moments in social situations (like menu browsing at a restaurant).

The woodcut medium suits this project: woodcuts take longer to create than etchings or lithographs, requiring me to really spend time with these fleeting moments. In this regard my work is like that of Degas, who rendered movement and blur in a slow, calculated manner (as opposed to Baudelaire’s conceptual painter of modern life, who would finish a picture in an afternoon). Regard the cleanliness of my images; I carve deeply and then ink carefully so as to avoid visual noise in my prints. In such a chaotic, unpredictable world, block printmaking is one of the few places where I can exercise full control over the process and outcome. The ink only goes where I allow it. The intentionality of my marks reflects an effort to live more presently, to not just remember everything as a scribbled blur. Our society is currently experiencing dramatic change, but this time the woodcut seems better suited to the task of documenting it. The immortalization of ephemeral or overlooked moments takes deliberate and careful marks.
The AdvanSix Frankford plant is located in Northeast Philly. It's visible from right off 95 when you’re driving into the city. I always found the facility oddly fascinating, especially when it was illuminated at night. I have vivid memories as a kid of staring at the lit-up jungle gym–like structures that made up the factory's edifice. I remember wanting to climb around the complex, failing to realize what it was.

As I grew older, I came to the realization that it's essentially a massive rubber-making facility. Banal, even unpleasant things like these can become redefined in our minds when we are children. To reflect this, I decided to visually reconstitute and reimagine these memories, imposing my sisters and family/friends atop prints of schematics inspired by the factory. I have made work that actualizes these reassembled childhood memories.
My stone sits so peacefully. What might you be thinking?

Were you comfortable in there—the ground, that is—the mountain from which you were taken?

Or did you like lying there—where you were born—in the womb of your mountain.

Did you find it pleasant, the solitude? Or do you revel in the brilliance of impermanence like I do?

I guess you and I aren't that different after all. You know, I was born from a mother too.

Do you feel when I run my fingers along your sides? Does it hurt when I pitch your edges and discard your innards? Does it hurt?

Your expulsion from the earth, was it your conception or your death?
My sculpture explores the interaction between the pharmaceutical industry and addiction, allowing viewers to think more critically about how those companies are contributing to addiction. Art imitates life, and I want my work to really resonate with viewers and make them feel more connected and knowledgeable about some of the causes of addiction.

My studio practice mimics the mass production of pills by the pharmaceutical industry. In my process, there is the repetitive course of pouring the plaster into the rubber molds, waiting a day, and then removing it from the molds. Throughout, there is little regard to the individual plaster pieces, the goal just being to amass a large quantity of the pill bullets. In much the same way there is little thought within large pharmaceutical companies as to the health effects of prescription drugs on unlucky individuals. The purpose of my piece is to spark discourse about this huge yet taboo issue, providing a perspective that hopefully sticks with viewers.
The night before I left for college, I wandered my hometown listening to “All of the Lights” by Kanye West. I looked into the windows of Main Street stores as the verses coursed through my body. Watching the sun fade and headlights dance in the glass, I held on to the last light of the day. Ever since, I’ve only listened to that song during transition times—moments when I have one foot in the past and the other toeing the future. Whether I’m driving down Waterville roads or wandering through the nighttime pulse of New York City, the song compels me to imagine where I’ve been. To see times and places that only live on in my dreams.

Looking back at moments we’ve lost touch with is like looking through a window. You can’t fully peer into the past without also seeing the reflection of your present self, silently staring. I took photos for these cyanotypes during twilight hours, when one day was slowly seeping into another. Like memories, cyanotypes are created by trapping a moment behind glass, letting some time pass, and coating reality in the color of fiction. It’s in the quiet moments—alone, face peering through glass—that the paper fades into a new identity.

Now when I listen to “All of the Lights,” I feel as though I am staring not only at the places I have known, but at the faces of my past selves, knowing I’m about to lose touch with them too. The self I am now is just about ready to fade into blue, on the cusp of melting into a dream.
The people who lived in our house before us owned pigeons, which they kept in a small shed in the backyard. My Grandpa Al painted the outside red and the inside pink when my sister and I were young (we chose the colors). We spent many summers making “raspberry juice” in the little red shed with our cousins, mashing up berries that we had picked in the garden. It was, and still is, an idyllic place. Now it is no longer used and there are plants growing through the cracks in the back wall and floor. I’m too tall to stand up straight in it, so I have to duck my head or squat when I am inside.

Growing up, I didn’t like having friends over because I was embarrassed by all of the “stuff” in my house. Piled up in corners, stacked on coffee tables, and shoved under the couch, “stuff” was everywhere. It was an eclectic mix of socks, family pictures, my Dad’s paperwork, preschool artwork, rosary beads, old Christmas cards, handwritten reminders, vitamins, trophies, books, and other odd objects. This past spring, I moved home after having lived away for nearly three years. The “stuff” scattered throughout my house still bothers me, but I find a sense of comfort in sorting through the piles.

On our fourth birthday, my next-door neighbor gave my twin sister and me each a stuffed animal—Blue Teddy and Jellybean Bunny. Every night, before going to bed, I gave Blue Teddy a quick kiss on the top of his head. “Goodnight, little blue,” I told him. When I moved to college, I left Blue Teddy at home. I didn’t want to lose him, and he seemed comfortable atop my pink bedspread. This past December, when I was home for Christmas, I decided to make a picture of our stuffed animals. As I was setting up my camera, my sister came rushing in. “Stop,” she told me. I was confused, so I asked her why. “They’re so worn now—look how dirty Jellybean Bunny’s fur is. I don’t want them to look sad.” I made one picture and then put my camera away.
My recent charcoal drawings are about myself. I don’t want to force anyone to think anything about my drawings. I like to see what people notice about them or think they are about because they usually are projecting their own life on to mine. I think we are all very similar in the big picture. My artwork is personal; I value being an open person because it is easier to connect with other people, which I think is the most important part of being alive as a human. My time in college was a lot of struggle with depression, sobriety, and working to accept that life isn’t how I wish it was.

This piece includes my memories, dreams, people, and objects that feel important to me. Writing this artist statement has been daunting to me; I want it to be perfect because I feel like it needs to represent my last four years in a meaningful way. I know that nothing is ever perfect so I decided to be honest and try to explain who I am as a person, which I think is also a goal of my drawing. I worry that people don’t take me seriously as an intellectual because I am an artist. I also worry a lot about being a “real” artist, whatever that means. I am trying to learn to trust the Universe. Sometimes it isn’t better to be right; it is better to be happy.
Ask me my favorite color as a kid and I would tell you: green, like the sun shining through an oak leaf. Pink like my mother’s roses after a long rain. Blue like the light through the windows in the winter. Yellow like the walls of my childhood bedroom.

I remember getting mad at my twenty-four pack of Crayola markers (with four scented ones, although they all really smelled the same) because they weren’t true to what I was seeing. They couldn’t capture a beautiful day outside, the heavy scent of a wet garden, the sky reflecting through glass. Mix red and blue to make purple, sure, but how do you make sunlight? How do you make darkness?

I started going to a serious art school when I was ten: all work, no play. I showed up excited with my newly purchased tin of Prismacolor pencils, over a hundred of them—a Christmas gift. I told my teacher I wanted to draw a giraffe.

“Well, you won’t be needing those.”
“What do you mean?”
“You’re not ready for color; it’s too hard. You start with graphite, charcoal, the basics.”

I spent years drawing in black and white. Still lifes, cubes, spheres, portraits, all totally absent of color.
I remember walking into Colby’s painting studio for the first time. Color was everywhere. Painted boxes stacked up to the ceiling, patterned fabrics stuffed into cabinets, papers scattered about. Our very first assignment was a color wheel.

“Color is the foundation of painting. Everything you see in a painting—shape, form, light—is created by colors placed next to one another. It’s all an illusion.”

I spent a year using palette knives to carefully place dabs of color next to one another, learning how a color could change depending on where it’s placed. Desaturated pink placed next to permanent rose becomes gray; placed next to green, it turns to blush.

Ask me what my favorite color is now and I couldn’t tell you. Dioxazine purple next to cadmium red, maybe, or a tinted phthalo blue next to a fully saturated French ultramarine. Light-pink tissue paper layered over a magenta cello sheet, backlit by the sun. A deep-violet paper crumpled inside a sky-blue box. The colors I see behind my eyelids when I lie outside on a bright day. It’s all relative. What is light can be dark, in the right conditions, and what is dark can become light. Everything we see, all an illusion.
There is a certain beauty to the way light both clarifies and obscures our appearance. How a bright ray of sunlight refines our features, diluting the soft curves of our face down to their most basic and recognizable forms; how the ambient lighting of night draws our figure out from the shadows, blurring the distinctions between where our bodies stop and where the world around us begins.

The way light redefines the human form speaks to the malleability of self. The person we are today is not the same person we were in our childhood, nor is the person we are today the same person we will be in a decade. The self is a dynamic and fleeting entity, exemplified by the ease in which light molds our physical form, our body, our face.

I’ve always experienced a restlessness when it comes to defining myself. And, to me, self-portraits have always served as an outlet to toil with this feeling, a practice that helps me explore my multitude of selves. Each work I create subtly embodies parts of me, some ragged, sharp, and unwieldy, some soft, elegant, and well defined. With every portrait, I pin down some aspect of my innermost experience, some thought, feeling, or memory I struggle to put into words.

As an aspiring neuroscientist, I deal with studies of the mind. I spend hours counting neurons, handling brain tissue, reading scientific papers, all while trying my best to pick apart the mysteries of the human psyche. The beauty of paint is that this exploration doesn’t have to be clinical and precise; it can be loose, figural, and suggestive. With every brushstroke I leave a fingerprint of my thoughts, feelings, emotions, a personal touch of my own introspection I’ve seldom found in my scientific endeavors.
Abstract painting is abstract. It confronts you. There was a reviewer a while back who wrote that my pictures didn’t have any beginning or any end. He didn’t mean it as a compliment, but it was.

—Jackson Pollock

Why do abstract painting? Because representational images limit the painting to a single space, time, and emotion. That’s just not enough when trying to depict the complex architecture of experiences, emotions, and opinions that make up a person. Instead, I reduce painting to line, form, and color so that I can then use it as a visual language with which to investigate myself, those around me, and our relationships to each other.

When I go into a painting, I have very little idea about what I’m doing. I’ll focus only on a specific memory or emotion and let my mind go blank to everything else. It’s only when I step back, look, and think about what I’ve drawn that I can truly see what’s been developing. I try to expand my initial feeling by letting the character of the work come through. The painting has a life of its own; I just try to help discover it.

The act of painting is a constant exchange between the canvas and the painter. If I don’t lose contact, there is pure harmony, and the painting comes out well. It’s when I’m too far removed from that initial feeling that contact is lost and the identity of the painting is forgotten.

My goal with my paintings is to create something viewers can connect with, but how they connect is entirely up to them.
2021 Senior Exhibition Catalog

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