carla

issue 37

HAUSER & WIRTH

GUSTAV METZGER

AND THEN CAME THE ENVIRONMENT

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DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

Liquid Crystal Environment, 1966 / 2021, 7 Kodak SAV 2050 slide projectors, control units, rotating polarized filters, liquid crystals, dimensions variable

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B L U M

LOS ANGELES TOKYO NEW YORK

Fall 2024

Letter from the Editor

Writer Annie Dillard describes witnessing a total solar eclipse: how as the sun disappeared, the grass turned matte and metallic, her hands silver, and everything she thought she knew got turned upside-down. "Usually it is a bit of a trick to keep your knowledge from blinding you," she writes. "But during an eclipse it is easy. What you see is much more convincing than any wild-eyed theory you may know."[1] Here, Dillard looks to her body, to her sensory experience, rather than to logic or reason.

Several writers in this issue similarly explore the body's innate capacity to access knowledge through corporeal cues. In a conversation with Carmen Winant, Sofía Córdova uses the image of a diver navigating a shipwreck as a metaphor to describe living within the wreck of colonization in her native Puerto Rico. "I imagine darkness and a flashlight illuminating things in pieces… we're always getting a little bit of a picture, but [if] you're underwater living in that wreck, you know it really well, even without having to see it all," she explains. Our bodies allow us to intuit what's happening around us even when surrounded by darkness.

It's impossible to write about embodied wisdom without thinking about intergenerational knowledge. While we typically think about this type of corporeal comprehension as one-directional—passed to us genetically at birth—in this issue, Ashlyn Ashbaugh considers how several artists, including rafa esparza and Lotus L. Kang, engage ancestral traditions through an "active, participatory process," that invites a "reciprocal alchemy"—a space where these artists can interact with and help shape their inherited knowledge.

This issue also includes an essay co-written by several UCLA students about their experience participating in the pro-Palestine encampment on their campus last spring. They share how creating visual media became a unifying action within the camp —a way to communicate, bond, and process trauma. "It felt like a home," one student shared with them. Together, the students, faculty, and community members who participated formed one collective body—a body that insisted on resistance against the continuing impacts of global colonialism.

In an unprecedented political season—as our problem-solving capacities go into overdrive—tuning into our bodies may be a strategy for seeking out knowledge and connection; a way to ground ourselves in community and active refusal. After all, as Córdova insists, these "sensorial and relational pathways [may be] more available than we think."

Lindsay Preston Zappas
Founder & Editor-in-Chief

1. Annie Dillard, *The Abundance* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016), 8.

Issue 37

Colophon

Contemporary Art Review Los Angeles
is a quarterly magazine, online art journal, and podcast committed to being an active source of critical dialogue in and around Los Angeles' art community. *Carla* acts as a centralized space for art writing that is bold, honest, approachable, and focused on the here and now.

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Sofía Córdova, *A Cast of Thousands (Quartz) and Portón #1* (installation view) (both 2022). 3-D scan and resin, dimensions variable; CNC routed aluminum sheet and LED light, 23 × 37.5 inches. JOAN, Los Angeles, 2024. Image courtesy of the artist and JOAN. Photo: Evan Walsh.

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Matthew Barney, *SECONDARY: commencement* (installation view) (2024). Regen Projects, Los Angeles, 2024. Image courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects. Photo: Joshua White.

Sirens in New Pitches

Immersive Art and Violence

Isabella Miller

In writing for *The New Yorker* about the persistent bathos of immersive exhibitions proliferating across institutions in recent years, tech correspondent Anna Wiener cites art historian Janet Kraynak's observation that "rather than being *replaced* by the internet, [the museum] is increasingly being *reconfigured* after it."[1] Visitors become "users" in multisensory interactive spaces that are often "pleasurable" and "nonconfrontational" despite their aim to cultivate experiential intensity.[2] From erecting Instagrammable Gustav Klimt and Frida Kahlo experiences to enveloping light and sound environments like Random International's *Rain Room* (2012), art institutions, many have recently argued, are curating content that reinforces a status quo of passive consumption, rather than serving as instigators of deep thought and reflection.[3]

Immersive art exists on a continuum but generally provides visitors with a nonlinear, multisensory experience. It is also historically contingent: TVs were once considered an immersive form of media, as they for the first time synchronized video with sound in people's homes. In fact, the current lamentation that these types of immersive art exhibitions create passive, coddling experiences for the viewer recalls a famous insight by media theorist Mary Anne Doane about the mediated deflation of violence through live, onscreen news broadcasts. In her 2000 essay "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," Doane highlights the paradoxical impact of the immediacy and intensity of 24-hour live news coverage. This media can simultaneously create a sense of urgency—a feeling that crisis is everywhere, always—and a sense of detachment—a feeling of removal from violence—the way one might block out a droning siren if it plays for long enough.[4]

At its best, immersive art does not allay the siren but presents it in a new pitch. And while immersive art experiences may bring up questions of passive engagement, they also hold the potential to radically reframe a viewer's perspective on the subjects they present. As exhibitions critiqued as cash cows on the content farm have proliferated, so too have presentations of immersive works that grate against expectations, attuning viewers to the shaping potential of immersive media. As writer and critic Chris Fite-Wassilak has noted, an immersive installation positions the viewer as a character within its world—a character either warmly ensconced in its environment or stuck within it, unmoored from the familiar.[5]

Some of the most striking recent examples return to the central problem of placation Doane wrote about 24 years ago, asking viewers to think about violence and media, and how the media through which information is communicated ultimately shapes the viewer's experience of it. In the last year alone, several exhibitions across Los Angeles played with these ideas of violence and mediation via immersive installations, whether through the overt representation of violent events, as in Gretchen Bender's recently closed exhibition at Sprüth Magers, or via indirect interpretations, as in recent shows by Matthew Barney and Paul Pfeiffer. Subject matter is estranged in all of these artists' work. By sidelining visuality (Pfeiffer), disrupting narrative legibility (Bender), or protracting a violent event to the point of surreality (Barney), these shows addressed issues of immersion and mediation directly, engaging the viewer to think critically about what violence is and how it is represented, thereby resisting the numbing effect Doane described.

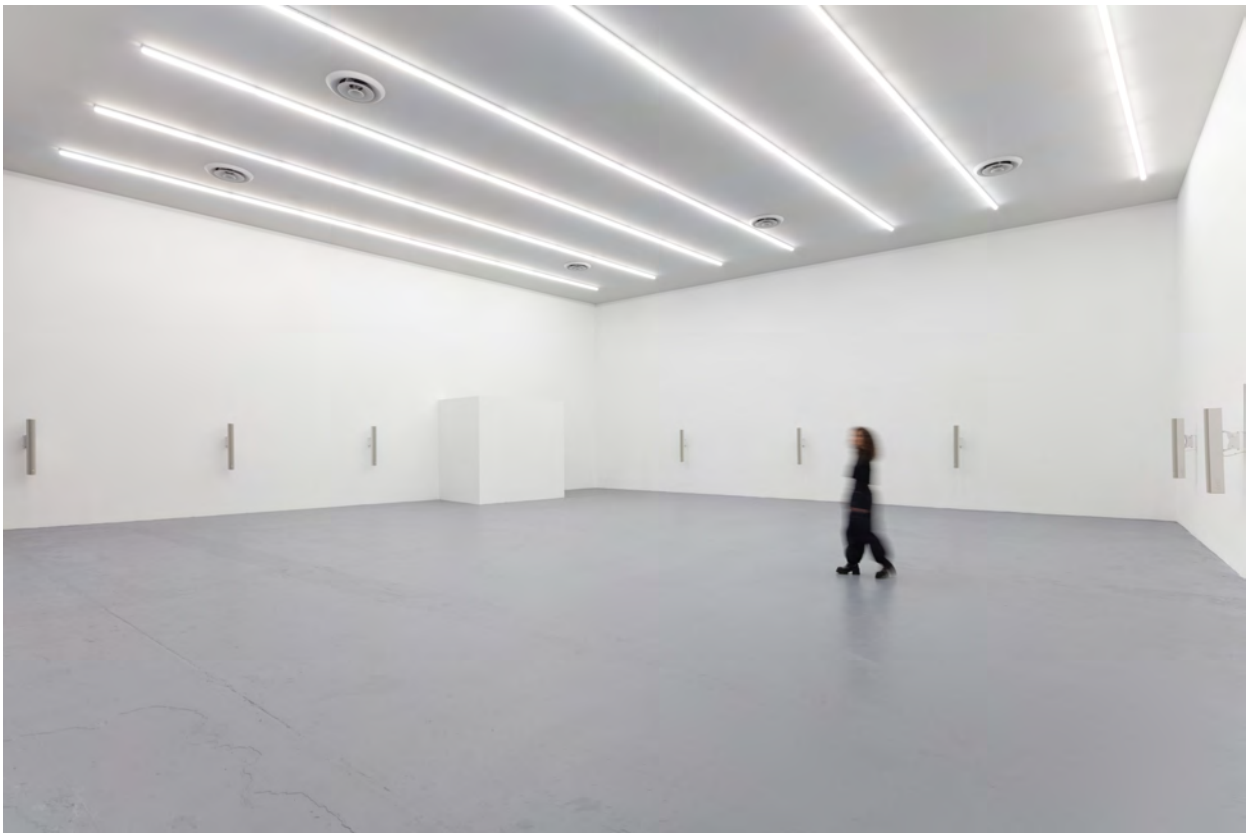
Matthew Barney's five-channel video work *SECONDARY* (2023), on view at Regen Projects this summer,

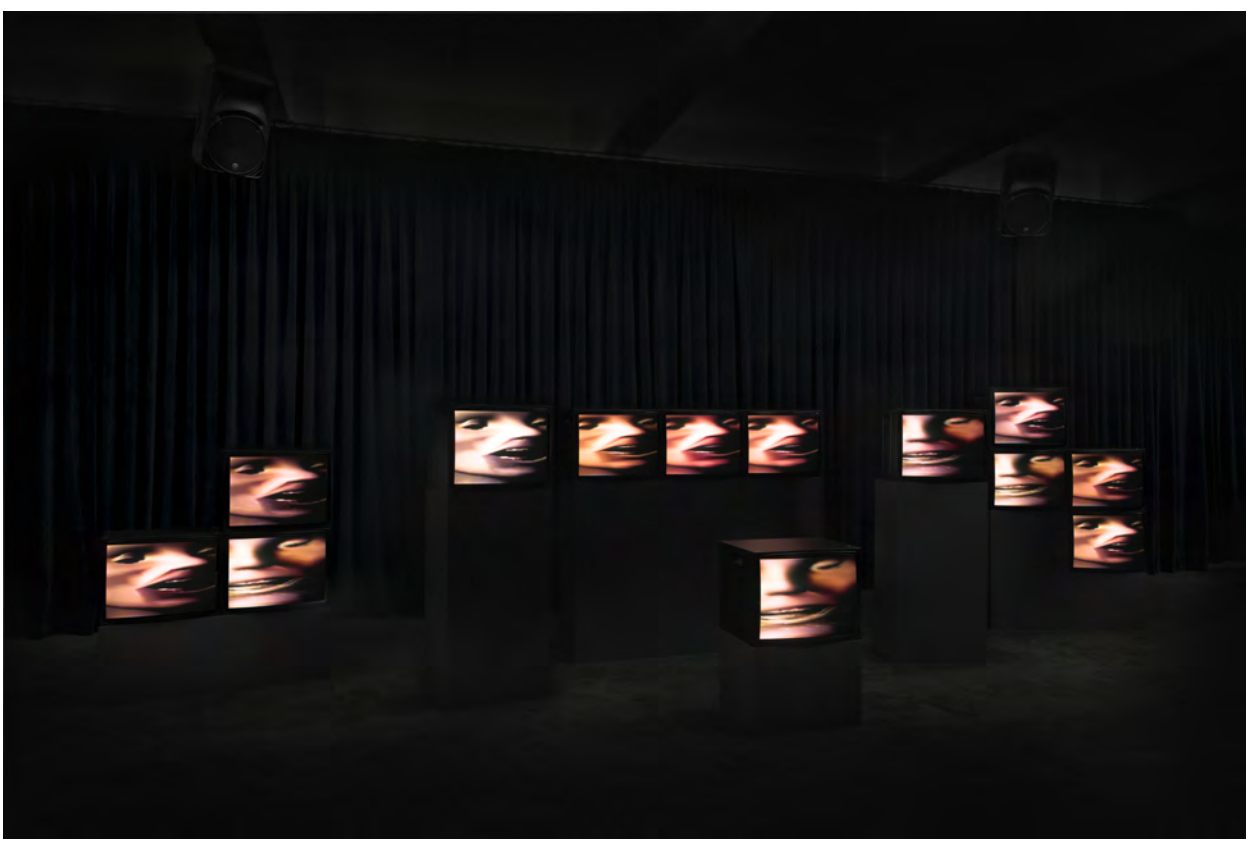
addressed the visual culture of a certain kind of violence—that of the sports arena—that is deeply ingrained in American culture. The work represents an infamous moment in American football history: the 1978 collision between Oakland Raiders defensive back Jack Tatum and New England Patriots wide receiver Darryl Stingley during a preseason game. Tatum's hit severely injured Stingley's spinal cord, severely and permanently affecting the 26-year-old's mobility. Although the hit was ceaselessly replayed in media coverage, its representation appears only during the final stretch of Barney's hour-long film. Most of the work depicts choreographed actors and dancers exaggerating the various elements of the scene that received less media attention—the players, the coaches, the fans—into absurdity on a turf field inside an industrial building. Dressed like Raiders and Patriots players, the slow-moving dancers mimic recognizable but enigmatic football-related movements while interacting nonsensically with substances like dirt, aluminum, and malleable polymers. Meanwhile, riotous Raiders fans are adorned in KISS-like makeup. Barney immerses viewers in a prolonged state of suspense, delaying the depiction of the central event for nearly 45 minutes.

In the installation at Regen Projects, a screen demanded attention everywhere you looked. Each corner of the gallery's ceiling featured a mounted screen, angled like those in a sports bar, and the center of the room featured a four-sided video screen resembling a jumbotron. Barney thus recreated the communal feeling of watching a game, either at the stadium or the bar. This mise-en-scène worked to counteract the potentially isolating, fragmented experience of individual immersion within the exhibition. Beneath stadium lights, a massive red, blue, and orange rug spread across the floor—it resembled an astroturf field but was accented with abstract shapes, including converging diagonal lines that met a lozenge shape near the center. Immersed within this arena-like space, visitors were left to wander from screen to screen, watching the cast of football players digging through mud, moving slowly through dance and calisthenics as though haunted by some unseen force. The videos on the various monitors would sometimes sync with one another, offering focal points within the installation, but more often, they offered differing perspectives on the characters. Trying to piece together the narrative threads across each character's disturbing performance was frustrating and unsettling, in stark contrast to the immediate legibility, slow-motion replays, and ample commentary offered on channels like ESPN.

Sports coverage resembles Doane's theory about how violence translates via the 24-hour news cycle, imposing narrative structure and creating urgency through endless replays and commentary. Instead of dulling the impact of Tingley's violent injury through visual repetition, Barney intensifies its psychological, emotional, and physical elements, making viewers acutely feel the unnerving qualities of the violence. Gallery attendees even stood on the same rug that served as the set piece for the choreography. Barney reinfuses the disturbing elements of this violent sport, transforming it from commonplace entertainment into a deeply unmooring recreation.

Similarly addressing sports culture and the media, Paul Pfeiffer's immersive installation *The Saints* (2007), recently on view at the Geffen Contemporary at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (MOCA), dominated the space with the intense, almost belligerent roar of a crowd, enveloping viewers in a soundscape of collective emotions that oscillated between excitement and aggression. Presented in a cordoned-off section of the Geffen's gallery space with stark white walls and alienating bright light, the work offered viewers minimal visual cues. Instead, it enveloped them in an intense, 17-channel audio installation of a screaming crowd





Top: Paul Pfeiffer, *The Saints* (installation view) (2007). Seventeen-channel sound installation; two-channel video loop projection (color, silent); single-screen video loop (black-and-white, silent); and LCD monitor; 31 minutes and 19 seconds. The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA, Los Angeles, 2023–24. Image courtesy of the artist; Sammlung Goetz, Munich; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Zak Kelley.

Bottom: Gretchen Bender, *Dumping Core* (installation view) (1984). Four-channel video with color and sound on thirteen monitors, 15 minutes and 21 seconds. © 2024 Estate of Gretchen Bender. Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles, 2024. Image courtesy of Sprüth Magers. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

that was loud enough to make the ground shake, making the experience haptic as well as aural. The overwhelming soundscape replicated the intense nature of communal fervor, creating a sense of unease and disorientation. The minimal visual cue—one small screen on the gallery's anterior wall showing black-and-white footage of a soccer match—felt like a footnote. It anchored the experience of the space to a historical event while allowing the assaulting audio to remain as the central medium of the installation. The immersive emphasis of sound over image disrupts our passive consumption of the often-violent spectacle of sports by foregrounding the visceral impact of collective emotion, akin to the active experience of the clamor of a sports event: Pfeiffer uses the immersive environment to allow viewers to feel what it's like to be a player on the field. Still, by emptying the installation of both spectacle and imagery, the echoing roar of the crowd took on an ominous tone. By highlighting the aural over image, Pfeiffer taps into a sense of communal joy and aggression—the crowd as both a generative and constricting force.

To create *The Saints*, Pfeiffer, who is of Filipino descent, orchestrated screenings of the 1966 World Cup final in Manila, instructing the local audience to chant and cheer. Their reactions were mixed into high-fidelity surround sound that mimics support of England over Germany. Behind a back wall at MOCA, a discrete 2-channel video projection revealed the original game alongside scenes of the passionate Manila audience. In some, they stand in a dimly lit interior, creating a subtle disjunction between their performed excitement and the genuine emotions on their faces—a nuance only discernible to those attuned to the production process. Pfeiffer's work operates on two levels: first immersing us in the overwhelming power of collective emotion with its inherent terror and potential for violence; and second, guiding us to reflect on the production of such media spectacles and the potentially sinister forces at play.

The immersive environment, here, was anything but calming; it instead invited critical reflection on power dynamics, agency, and the blurred lines between participation and spectatorship in collective experiences. The porous boundary between communal joy and mob-like aggression expressed within the soundscape is often felt at sporting events, which sometimes turn violent and even deadly. By immersing the audience in this unsettling atmosphere, *The Saints* exposes the latent violence within seemingly celebratory communal events. The visitor, stuck in an auditory barrage that simulates the intensity of mob-like atmospheres, is the central figure in this tumultuous sonic environment, akin to players who stand amidst a stadium's uproar.

While not focused on the spectacle of sports like Pfeiffer and Barney, Gretchen Bender's exhibition *The Perversion of the Visual*, on view this summer at Sprüth Magers, focused on the ways that corporatized mass media inoculates viewers against the gravity of violence, as if directly engaging Doane's idea about the constant drone of televised information. *Dumping Core* (1984) engages the viewer's senses of sight, sound, and physical presence in a dark space filled with 13 cathode-ray television sets stacked on top of one another to form a glowing wall. This setup environmentally rendered the unsettling experience of watching TV, where real-world horrors and violent events are shown alongside frivolous imagery and corporate logos. Bender's visuals shift from ABC or AT&T logos to news footage of military violence to computer-generated, abstract graphics created by Amber Denker in collaboration with the artist (of quasi-geometric forms, distorted faces, rotating dice, splitting cells, and flashing stars). By blending real war imagery with advertising and corporate symbols, Bender underscores the unsettling nature of media consumption, where the serious and the trivial are presented side by side. She adds playful animations to this mix, bringing the gravity of news media into a surreal,

experiential terrain and thus pointing out the medium's absurdity.

By immersing the viewer in this environment, Bender asks us to confront the unsettling reality of our daily media consumption, where the reality of violence is often masked by the glossy veneer of corporate and ancillary imagery. Bender's MTV-like editing style delivers a maximalist visual experience. Her rapid, abrasive cuts and sweeping neon graphics cultivate an almost claustrophobic sense of ceaseless energy. Further, her soundtrack features gunshots interspersed with glimmering synth music. It feels as though violence were ventriloquized by the form of the installation—its abrasive sounds and visuals—rather than expressed narratively, as we so often experience when watching television. Bender therefore opts to express some of the shock and overstimulation that attends a violent encounter abstractly, making the brief images of actual violence—mangled or dead bodies—profoundly more striking than they would be on the televised news. These aesthetic decisions also underscore viewers' distance from the lived reality of the violence appearing onscreen: We will likely never understand the experiences depicted by war correspondents across the globe, an impossibility embraced rather than resisted by Bender. For Bender, we ultimately cannot access violence felt by others, neither to empathize with its victims nor to normalize it via continual exposure.

A central issue of our current media landscape, nearly a quarter-century after Doane accounted for hers, is the growing indistinction between reality and its representations. Beyond the constant stream of live news broadcasts, the internet and social media have become even more totalizing forces that structure our daily lives. Now, life can feel as much like a movie (or a meme) as a movie can feel like life. The boundary between the real and the represented is slippery, uniquely positioning artists who create immersive environments to coax visitors into atmospheres distinct from their lived realities, ultimately revealing the constructs of the media itself. These interventions are particularly poignant when addressing violence, which we often experience in isolation, watching alone on our devices. Artists like Barney, Pfeiffer, and Bender use immersive techniques not to placate, but to challenge their audiences, confronting them with the mediated nature of violence and the complexities of collective emotion. As our lives become increasingly mediated, we will need more experiences that punctuate the unyielding drone of information.

Isabella Miller lives and works in Los Angeles.

1. Anna Wiener, "The Rise of 'Immersive' Art," *The New Yorker*, February 10, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-silicon-valley/the-rise-and-rise-of-immersive-art, emphasis original.

2. Wiener, "The Rise of 'Immersive' Art."

3. See, for instance: Christy Choi, "Immersive Art Exhibitions: Spellbinding, or Forgettable?" *The New York Times*, May 5, 2023, www.nytimes.com/2023/05/05/arts/design/immersive-art-exhibits.html; Alex Fleming-Brown, "Immersive Art Exhibitions Are Everywhere and They're Awful," *VICE*, January 26, 2023, www.vice.com/en/article/pkgngz/why-immersive-art-exhibitions-are-awful; Isabella Smith, "Who's afraid of immersive art?" *Apollo*, April 4, 2024, www.apollo-magazine.com/immersive-art-van-gogh-frameless-lightroom/.

4. For Doane, live television "deals not with the weight of the dead past but with the potential trauma and explosiveness of the present," obscuring the difference between mere information and catastrophe. While the artists discussed here are not working in the same temporal register as live broadcast media, their work responds to the media environment Doane articulates as marked by persistent, low-intensity anxiety. See Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," in *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, eds. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Thomas Keenan (New York: Routledge, 2005), 251–64.

5. Chris Fite-Wassilak, "New Rules of Immersion," *e-flux*, May 11, 2023, www.e-flux.com/criticism/538656/new-rules-of-immersion.

Top: Protest posters created by participants in the UCLA encampment on April 27, 2024. Image courtesy of the artists.

Bottom: Student protesters attempt to block police from advancing up the stairs and into the UCLA encampment, May 1, 2024. Photo: Keegan Holden.

The Connective Role of Art in UCLA's Pro-Palestine Encampment

Aidann Gruwell, Alex Bushnell, Alex Yang, Katherine Sanchez, and Ricky Shi

This spring, the pro-Palestinian campus occupation at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) quickly became the focus of major national news outlets. Over the course of the week—the encampment was set up early Thursday morning, April 25,[1] and swept by police one week later on May 2[2]—helicopters filmed the encampment's fluctuating perimeter[3] from overhead as press and student photographers on the ground documented the brutality against pro-Palestine protestors at the hands of police and Zionist counter-protestors.[4] Though images of violent conflict dominated the national narrative, as participants, we saw a different story unfold: Within the encampment, a vibrant cultural conversation flourished as people from diverse backgrounds utilized art to communicate and strengthen bonds. During our time in the encampment, we created daily zines documenting the art made by students, faculty, and the surrounding community, who used art to express and cohere their solidarity with the Palestinian people in the face of state-sanctioned violence.

The campus demonstration was primarily organized by the UCLA chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and the UC Divest Coalition, whose main demand was for the UC system—which currently has $32 billion in holdings invested in companies connected to Israel, many of them related to the manufacturing of weapons and surveillance technologies utilized by the Israel Defense Force—to divest from all entities complicit in the war.[5] Along with communicating solidarity with those in Gaza and demanding divestment, UCLA encampment organizers—in line with others across the nation and world—illustrated the historical context and current status of Israel's 76-year occupation of Palestine. Media outlets following the story (and the UC administration itself, who called the gathering "unlawful"[6]) focused largely on the violent attacks on the encampment, simultaneously overlooking the peaceful, educational, and community-centric aspects of the enclave. Even though there were news reports that seemed to express implicit support for encampment participants, such as CNN's independent investigation, which revealed the identity of multiple attackers who had violently sieged the encampment,[7] most mainstream news coverage didn't delve into the specific goals of the protestors. Those objectives included calls for full transparency surrounding UC's assets, such as investments, donations, and grants; severing ties with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD); and an immediate and permanent ceasefire.[8]

Since the media's narrative was narrow, and we could only delegate a handful of students to speak to the press, art created by the masses inside the encampment played a key role, setting the backdrop for media coverage and allowing us to take control of the narrative by speaking in a resonant, collective voice.

From the first day, the encampment's exterior walls were lined with dozens of informational panels detailing statistics about the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, as well as those more broadly and indiscriminately detained by Israel. One artwork painted on a salvaged door pictured a bearded man with his hands bound amongst chilling statistics about Palestinian children and families detained by Israel

since 1967 (for instance, 73% experienced physical violence following their arrest and 49% were detained in their homes in the middle of the night).[9] The top of the panel read "innocence behind bars" in bright red lettering, no doubt bringing to mind the blood that has been on the hands of the Israeli government for generations.

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Visual media has historically been at the heart of social movements, used to strengthen the unity and power of their messages. In the nineteenth century, Paul Revere spurred on the Revolutionary War with his engraving of the Boston Massacre, which illustrated the brutality and bloodshed of the conflict and was printed on hundreds of pamphlets.[10] Barbara Kruger's familiar *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* (1989) was created for the 1989 March for Women's Equality and Women's Life, where it featured on fliers at the 300-thousand-person rally.[11] And, of course, symbols such as the raised fist, peace sign, or the three-finger salute have become iconic symbols for popular resistance movements. Visual art's capacities —to agitate, to criticize, and to unify— were leveraged in the UCLA protest as well.

A vibrant collection of portraits and text-based signs emerged during the first few days of the encampment. Some participants took directly to the inner barrier walls, using them as canvases to broadcast their messages. Royce Quad, which encompasses Powell Library, Royce Hall, and the ground in between,[12] became an epicenter in which the community expressed their disdain for the colonial violence inflicted upon Gaza and rose up against the institutions complicit in it. Following an expansion of the encampment on the fifth day, protestors began filling the walkways and walls of Royce Hall with art and other visual media.[13] Text reading "free free Palestine" was stenciled on the ground at the building's entrance. Just above, purple

UCLA encampment occupying Royce Quad shortly before law enforcement began forcibly removing the demonstration and arresting more than 200 protesters, May 1, 2024. Photo: Keegan Holden.

spray paint reading “free Palestine!! death 2 Zionism” sprawled across the building’s doors. Bricks in the walkways boasted chalked-on calls-to-action such as “power 2 the people,” “we condemn genocide,” and “ceasefire now!” In paint and marker, other phrases echoed across the artworks, including “long live the Intifada” and “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” Common symbols of defiance popped up across the encampment, too: watermelons, a stealth motif of Palestine popularized in 1967 when Israel banned the display of the Palestinian flag in Gaza and the West Bank; the black-and-white keffiyah, a headdress with motifs of olive leaves, trade routes, and fishnets, representing the struggle for Palestinian self-determination; olive trees, a Palestinian agriculture staple and symbol of peace;[14] and broken chains, symbolizing liberation for Palestinians currently detained by Israel without a charge or trial. Handala, a cartoon of a Palestinian child refugee, also appeared across the artwork, depicted with his back turned as a gesture of witness and refusal.[15] By occupying our campus with our bodies and its walls with our art, we expressed our own refusal.

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Established in 1929, Royce Quad has long been a central campus landmark for student demonstrators who temporarily molded the classic UCLA mainstay into a place that better reflected their values. The first documented student activism occurred there in 1934, when 3,000 people protested the suspension of several students for allegedly working with the National Student League, an organization with revolutionary communist ideals.[16] In 1986, the UC Board of Regents divested $3.1 billion —then the largest university divestment in the country—from entities related to South Africa’s apartheid government following demonstrations by more than 2,000 students and community members the year prior.[17] Artist and musician Greyson Suchecki, a current UCLA student whose artwork we featured in one of our zines, stayed in the encampment for most of its existence. He explained that using Royce Quad as the protest venue was a key tactic in expressing the “massive amount of community support” to the UC administration. The use of notable campus architecture, particularly the placement of a giant Palestinian flag atop Powell Library, was “a reclamation of a UCLA landmark, to make it something that really represented the students,” he said.

As the encampment forged on, the community grew stronger. Voices from diverse backgrounds joined to support an intersectional cause —protesters used signage to identify themselves as “Latinos for Palestine,” “Kenya for Palestine,” “Lesbians for Palestine,” or “Teachers for Palestine.” Suchecki also spoke of music’s role in the camp, calling the communal use of chants, drums, and trumpets a “beautiful metaphor” for the idea that our voices are stronger together. He continued “[As a musician,] I want to be someone who can spread my belief in what is right with an audience who will hear my voice…gaining a platform and really using it is the best thing an artist can do to affect change.” Across the week, he grew close to other participants as they chatted for hours about what brought them to the encampment, explaining that everyone checked in on each other, making the peaceful space “feel like a home.” He also recalled that many fellow protestors had families stuck in Gaza, making the genocide “extremely personal.”

Throughout the week, there were numerous individual counter-protestor break-ins, which culminated in a violent attack late Tuesday night and into Wednesday morning, in which Zionists threw fireworks into the camp and sprayed protestors with mace.[18] While these attacks deeply threatened the community’s safety, the resilience and dedication of the protestors

Watercolor created by a participant in
the UCLA encampment on April 29, 2024.
Image courtesy of the artist.

Top: Watermelons, dozens of red handprints, and the Palestinian flag painted on wood panels inside the encampment barricade near UCLA's Tongva Steps, May 1, 2024. Photo: Keegan Holden.

Bottom: Sign detailing Israel's decades-long detainment and imprisonment of Palestinians without charge or trial created by participants in the UCLA encampment on April 25, 2024. Image courtesy of the artists.

persisted. Suchecki remembers rushing home to get mace out of his eyes, clothes, and hair after the attacks, but he came back the following day nevertheless. Through the struggles and traumatic events of the week, Suchecki said that art-making and a sense of community helped him feel solace in his personal, yet shared, fight for peace. From the first tent erected to the last one destroyed, participants continued to create art up until the encampment's final day.

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The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 displaced more than 750,000 Palestinians living in the region.[19] In the three-quarters-century that has since passed, little has improved for Palestine, and the Western world remains complicit, if not directly involved, in the Israeli occupation.[20] Today, half of the population of Gaza is under 18 years old, which means many Palestinians have known nothing but occupation.[21] Generational trauma does not stop at the borders of Gaza or the West Bank but is shared by the families who have fled and still have deep connections to the region; by diasporic students who study within our American universities; and by friends, allies, and all those who feel helpless in the face of genocide. The reality of these traumas, which are deeply embedded and challenging to move through, was at the heart of the UCLA protests, as was a steadfast resilience. One memorable watercolor painting depicted a student protestor surrounded by tents. Royce Hall looms in the background—the illustration features the encampment itself. Wearing a keffiyeh and mask, the solitary figure stares out into the distance, their shoulders slightly slumped, their eyes expressing a deep tiredness. Yet, on the barricades in the foreground, protest signs reading "Latinas for Palestine," "UCLA Divest," and "Fuera $$ Corruptos" communicate a sense of collectivity, energized through community to keep fighting towards a free Palestine.

Despite the protestors' resilience, in the early morning of May 2, police officers in riot gear swarmed the area, using tear gas and flash bangs. Protestors reported that officers shot rubber bullets that whistled through the air, ripping through the artwork and causing injuries. Officers smashed through the protective wood barriers, asserting their authority over the protestors. While helicopters roared overhead, the world watched with tired eyes as hundreds were arrested, zip-tied, and loaded into buses.[22] The pro-Palestine encampment now numbers among the historic student-led movements and uprisings staged in the gigantic, nearly century-old Royce Quad, its own kind of canvas.

Many young people in today's political climate share feelings of isolation and powerlessness in the face of global challenges. Combating the policies of entire countries can feel overwhelming. Surrounded by hundreds of protest signs and art pieces, the encampment community cultivated an environment where no one would feel alone—we also saw firsthand the power of art to communicate, humanize, and mobilize. While UCLA has yet to divest, let alone fully disclose its ties to Israel, the mass collective action on the part of the students demonstrates what is possible. This type of energetic vigor within a protest movement is precisely what large institutions fear most. At UCLA, the chalk-covered pavements and the painted buildings have been washed away, but they remain a vital part of UCLA's history—a message of peace and healing in the face of our violent political landscape, the call to act on our convictions.

Aidann Gruwell is a first-year music industry student at UCLA and a co-founder of *Cyanide*. A San Francisco native, Gruwell is a vocalist, guitarist, songwriter, and producer and has played in bands her whole life. She seeks to combine her computer science skills with her love of music, leaning into music technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Alex Bushnell is a visual arts student at UCLA. He is a co-founder of *Cyanide* and an avid consumer of music, film, television, and games. Bushnell primarily works in physical genres such as ink, pen, graphite, and oil paint, though he also creates video and written work. He is heavily involved in politics and interweaves his political beliefs into his work.

Alex Yang (he/him) is a first-year undergraduate music industry and prospective communications student. A co-founder of *Cyanide*, he is immersed in the wide world of art but is mainly involved in music and fashion—he plays bass in multiple bands and writes for *Forward*, a UCLA fashion magazine. Yang is interested in history, politics, geography, anthropology, and linguistics.

Katherine Sanchez is a music industry student at UCLA and a co-founder of *Cyanide*. Sanchez was born and raised in Los Angeles and Lancaster, California, and enjoys writing, playing guitar, and producing music. She is passionately involved in feminist and climate activist movements.

Ricky Shi is a first-year communications student at UCLA. A co-founder of *Cyanide*, Shi is enthusiastic about art, music, transnationalism, and marketing research. Born in Shanghai, China and based in Atlanta, Georgia, Shi aspires to channel his multicultural perspectives into enriching conversations around media censorship, intersectionality, international politics, and social justice.

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Interview with Sofía Córdova

Sofía and I met on the first day of grad school. I was sitting alone in a dark auditorium amidst a sea of other first-day students, and then, suddenly, she was next to me. There, one of my life's great love stories began. Along with a third member of our cohort, Rebecca, we found the kind of closeness that comes when each member of a group is inventing a new self at the same time. In a photography program that was dense with students and sparse with mentors, we became one another's teachers and comrades. When our truly great teacher, Larry Sultan, was diagnosed with cancer in the summer of 2009, between our first and second years of the program, and died within several months, we drew even closer to one another, holding his words and presence between us like a shared trust.

How is it that we have stayed so close in the decade and a half since, living in different states, managing our work lives and our small children? One reason is Sofía's laugh, which is wonderful. Another is that I love listening to her speak on the phone, her Puerto Rican Spanish so fast and rhythmic that it sounds like a single word, the "s" dropped from the end of each syllable. A final rationale, I think, is an affinity in our political commitments, and the way those commitments have spilled over into our creative practices. Our methods and outcomes are different—Sofía is braver when it comes to material exploration, and willing to venture further from photography—but we share a foundational belief that a different, more liberated world is possible. Somehow, it was not until this conversation that I realized just how much our curiosities overlap: in decentralized movement leadership, in the mundane moments that constitute political organizing, in centering the role of imagination as a force of both artmaking and worldbuilding. Perhaps our friendship holds not only because of our shared desires but as a form of solidarity in itself.

Sofía's recent exhibition at JOAN—her first solo, institutional project in Los Angeles—was materially dynamic. She engaged a variety of forms: painting, drawing, video, text, ceramics, taxidermy, and light. She included two video installations from her ambitious *GUILLOTINÆ WannaCry* series (2019–present) along with a newly commissioned installation. At its heart, the show contended with Indigenous resistance to colonial exploitation and erasure of both people and land. But its sense of imagination was so much bigger than that neat, historiographic sentence allows. Drawing from strategies of speculative fiction, Sofía insisted upon alternate readings of both the past and the future, braiding together recorded fragments (of the Sandinistas, the Black Panthers, and the Russian Revolution) with invented scenes: dancers speak without moving their mouths, actors embody leaves and seeds. In *The Wreck and Not the Story of the Wreck*, as across Sofía's work, it all felt vivid and wild and a little dangerous, as if to ask over and over, what if things were different? What if that feeling of wildness was the beginning of making them so?

Carmen Winant: Because I'm also deeply into her work, I am aware that the title of your show at JOAN is from Adrienne Rich's 1973 poem "Diving into the Wreck": "the thing I came for: / the wreck and not the story

Photo: Matthew Gonzalez Kirkland.

Top: Sofía Córdova, *GUILLOTINÆ WannaCry*, *Yellow: Break Room* (video still) (2019–21). Three-channel video with color and sound, TV stands, and ceramics, 25 minutes. Performances by Kevin Lo, alex cruse, Stephanie Hewett, and Sofía Córdova. Image courtesy of the artist and JOAN.

Bottom: Sofía Córdova, *GUILLOTINÆ WannaCry*, *Green: Savage Sauvage Salvaje* (installation view) (2022). Video, color and black-and-white; 34 minutes and 35 seconds. Original sound composition with Matthew Gonzalez Kirkland; performances by Rashaun Mitchell, Meg Jala, and Sofía Córdova; narration by Imani Mason Jordan. JOAN, Los Angeles, 2024. Image courtesy of the artist and JOAN. Photo: Evan Walsh.

of the wreck / the thing itself and not the myth."[1] Why did you choose this specific part of this poem?

Sofía Córdova: What has always attracted me to Rich's work is the way that she can hold the weight of political situations while holding the intricate emotional ways those same situations sit in the body. That is something that I'm always trying to do with my work. I was spending a lot of time with that book in general—*Diving into the Wreck*—but that phrase in that poem particularly jumped out at me because on the most basic level, on the sort of foundational seedling level of it all, it felt like it quickly elucidated what it felt like to grow up in a colony.

CW: Will you elaborate on that? You grew up in Puerto Rico and moved to the States when you were 15. So much of your practice, and life, are grounded in that experience and trajectory—not only growing up in a colony but observing how your colonial status is narrated from the perspective of the mainland.

SC: Exactly. The media-scape presents a tidy story of a colony and its collapse, most recently with the hurricane [Maria, 2017]. But that isn't the reality of the wreckage, right? Something that I love about that poem is the idea of actually *diving*. There's this idea of a diver going into a wreck underwater—I imagine darkness and a flashlight illuminating things in pieces. You never have the whole picture. I think that there's something about my upbringing in this colony and then the [island's] colonial status that felt like that image really resonated. The idea that we're always getting a little bit of a picture, but that if you're underwater living in that wreck, you know it really well, even without having to see it all. It's more of a felt experience. From there, it became a phrase and kind of a mantra through which to look at how that foundational experience of growing up in Puerto Rico has colored how I look at everything.

CW: One of the major subjects of your work is Indigenous organizing and resistance to colonial order, with a particular focus on Cimarrónes' resistance.[2]

SC: In Puerto Rico, we all grow up with this narrative of the three races—that we're all "trigueño," the product of Spanish, Taíno (Arawak), and African blood existing in harmony within each of us and the culture. As I came up within political circles that were actively fighting the U.S. Navy's interventions in Vieques, for example, a sharpness started to emerge for me around that fiction. That led me to start to look at Puerto Rico and the Caribbean at large as this kind of unstable place that this narrative of colony has actually created.

So, [I began] not seeing [these histories] as a very tidy, linear, one-dimensional story, but rather an extremely complex and in some ways unknowable kind of network of positions. [It] taught me a way of being with history and politics and storytelling that is about a lack of linearity, or a lack of singular understanding. And I think that it's important to [acknowledge that] as the door through which I enter the United States.

CW: It is so interesting how you answered that question about the impact of growing up within a colony—your response was ultimately to say that it taught something larger than a theme or a politic, something about how to read history and the uprisings that make it go.

SC: I think the moment we say we know how revolutionary struggle works is the moment we know it the least. What I've learned most about these processes is that, again, the way they're historicized and taught to us is extremely simplistic. That's why I am very invested in the future as being conversant with the past…looking at past revolution and past struggle as something that is indeterminate,

as something that is messy. I'm looking at all of these positions as being part of the soup… [They offer the potential] to actually have true and kind of horizontal conversations. Otherwise we become too adherent to an idea of hierarchy.

CW: Let's talk more specifically about your show at JOAN. It is hard to describe neatly as it's so materially diverse. There are multiple videos, some projected on makeshift screens and others appearing on monitors. The video work in the show contains text, audio, and dance. There are ceramics, there's gel lighting, there are taxidermied birds, there's graphite on canvas. You always joke with me about this, like, "I am a ceramic artist now! I am a light artist now!" But there is some truth to it, how open-ended your approaches can be.

SC: I think because photography is such an inherently technical medium, by the time I started walking away from it, I had become a very technically *good* photographer, right? So it was formulaic, it was mathematical. [But] I am interested in, within the art-making project, being surprised. And that surprise is really important because I think that's where I learned the most about my own interest.

Even when I was making pictures, my research was never linear. I make [up] historical voices. I force them to talk to poetry. I needed a material engagement that could reflect that [process], which is how I started to work in video and performance. I was messing up constantly. But in every one of those errors, I was finding something new and exciting. They weren't frustrating dead ends, but rather new openings. Maybe my medium is like…trying something new, you know?

[My practice] is never fixed. It's in and of itself unstable. And that causes me stress sometimes, but instability is a really great place for me to work out of because again, the ideas that I'm working with do want to avoid fixity. The moment they become stuck into something, I think they become dangerous, because in the things that I'm talking about—which ultimately are liberation—I never wanna have a singular, authorial voice.

CW: Let's talk about the two works in the show from the *GUILLOTINÆ WannaCry* series, *Yellow: Break Room* (2019–21) and *Green: Savage Sauvage Salvaje* (2022). Can you describe how they function? They have a deep emotional resonance, but I think it would be useful to set the stage first.

SC: These are a series of color-coded videos. Each color addresses a separate arm of this larger proposition: What are the gestational necessities for revolution? The reason that they're color coded is because, once the series is complete, I want them to have an intuitive, synesthetic relationship to one another, rather than a chronological or linear relationship. This goes back to the idea of thinking through these processes as having organizational moments that don't often make the annals of history—these organizational moments belong to women time, queer time, Black time, Brown time. These are the moments of meeting and struggle and discussion that again, don't make the movie version of revolution.

CW: Color is so profound in the show. It really seeps everywhere, materially and immaterially. It is so interesting to think about it as another organizational system, and one related to how our bodies remember.

SC: I hope to open sensorial and relational pathways, to demonstrate that they are more available than we think…As Che [Guevara] famously said: "The true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love."[3] Color is a way for me to coax emotion as a tool of collective struggle.

CW: The definition of feminism that I live by centers the role of imagination,

insisting that our imperative is to believe that another world is possible, makeable. There is some element of fantasy that is necessary to world build. How do you think about the relationship of fiction to groundwork in your film *Green*?

SC: *Green* has a more straightforward relationship to color. Green as a color really speaks to the land. The colonial lens we look through is inherently tied to land, right? Particularly in relation to the Caribbean, which was a laboratory for the plantation system in the southern United States. The colonial project conflates our bodies with the land to render us extractable—a "free" resource. *Green* looks at the conflation of Black and Indigenous peoples as one with these other natural resources. While *Yellow* was extremely constructed and hermetic—a closed set—in *Green*, we move into the land itself. We're so anthropocentric, so divorced from understanding the land, its methods, its seasons; *Green* manifests a struggle to re-tether.

CW: Can you talk a bit about building the script for *Green*? I am aware that it is rooted not only in the forest and the jungle, but also in the history of Indigenous and Black fugitive uprisings that happen there, in the United States and beyond.

SC: When I started working on the script, I was reading Luis M. Díaz Soler's *Historia De La Esclavitud Negra En Puerto Rico [History of Black Slavery in Puerto Rico]* (1953). Again, these histories and legacies are complex and various. Our story is still narrated by European superpowers—in some sense, they still have us in a mental bind—which I think prevents organizing on a basic level.

The characters in the work are debating this position. In writing the script, I was thinking about everything from the Haitian Revolution to Captain Jack's stronghold here in California—places where Indigenous and Black runaway fugitives were organizing against white colonial violence from within the land. The work moves forwards and backwards in time. Its references are historical and poetic; for example at one point the characters read from Alice Walker's "Karamojans" (1968), which is the poem she wrote about a fictional African tribe as narrated by a white colonial-like framework.[4] In this way, it interrogates the way that otherness is narrated by colonial powers.

CW: As we talk about the wilderness, I wonder if you could elaborate on the botanical and zoological elements in the show.

SC: *Green* is video that is split into three acts. In the first act, the characters each exist as non-human forms: One is a seed, one is a leaf, one is a rock. Climate change and anthropocentrism are part of this story. I consider climate change to be the direct legacy of racial capitalism, of its extractive colonial practices… I had become kind of fed up with human stories, and I was thinking about the ways that part of our problem [with] the climate crisis comes from us always seeing things through the anthropocentric vision of events.

We humans have main character syndrome; we think only of climate collapse for how it will affect us. I started thinking: What about viewing it through the lens of how it will affect anything else? A tree, a bird, a mountain? What followed were somewhat sci-fi ideas of mutation. I started thinking of mutation as another place where we can imagine liberation.

Sofía Córdova, *Green is A Solace, A Promise of Peace (where small birds hide and dodge and lift their plaintive rallying cries)* (detail) (2022). Taxidermied birds (doves, parakeets, and canaries); hair dye; brass; and birch wood; dimensions variable. JOAN, Los Angeles, 2024. Image courtesy of the artist and JOAN. Photo: Evan Walsh.

Carmen Winant is an artist and the Roy Lichtenstein Chair of Studio Art at The Ohio State University. Her work utilizes installation and collage strategies to center modes of feminist exchange and social movement building, with particular emphasis on intergenerational and multiracial solidarity. She is a mother to her two sons, Carlo and Rafa, shared with her partner, Luke Stettner.

Sofía Córdova lives between Puerto Rico and Oakland and makes work that considers sci-fi as alternative history, dance music's liberatory dimensions, and revolution. She works in performance, video, sound, and installation. Her work has been exhibited at The Whitney Museum of American Art, Tufts University Galleries, and the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, among others. She is a recent recipient of an Artadia and Creative Capital Award.

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2. Cimarrónes were enslaved Africans and/or African descendants who escaped the colonial empire to form free settlements, often in rugged places. See: Anthony McFarlane, "Cimarrones and Palenques: Runaways and Resistance in Colonial Colombia," *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 6, no. 3 (June 2008), 131–51, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01440398508574897.

3. Che Guevara, "Socialism and man in Cuba," in *The Che Reader* (Ocean Press, 2005), https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism.htm. Originally published as "From Algiers, for *Marcha*. The Cuban Revolution Today, " *Marcha*, March 12, 1965.

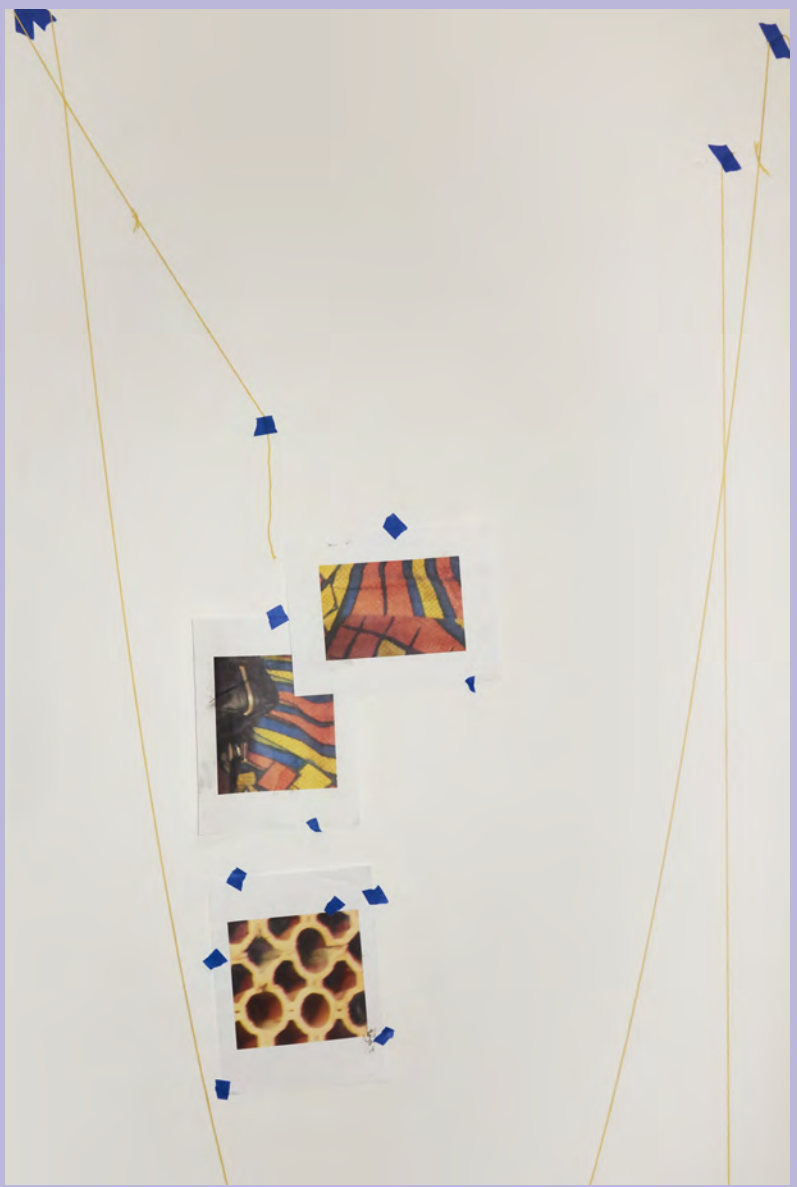
4. Alice Walker, "Karamojans," in *Once: Poems*, 1st ed. (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), https://alicewalkersgarden.com/2010/09/book-poetry-once-1968/.

Njideka Akunyili Crosby scours the internet and enlists the help of family members in Nigeria to track down the unique source imagery that she transfers onto her densely collaged paintings. Most of Crosby's process involves slow, researched decision-making, but she is a spontaneous composer. Once a photograph is transferred, it can't be moved or re-used; the most decisive moment of her practice is also the most intuitive.

Works in Progress

Njideka Akunyili Crosby

Photos by Leah Rom

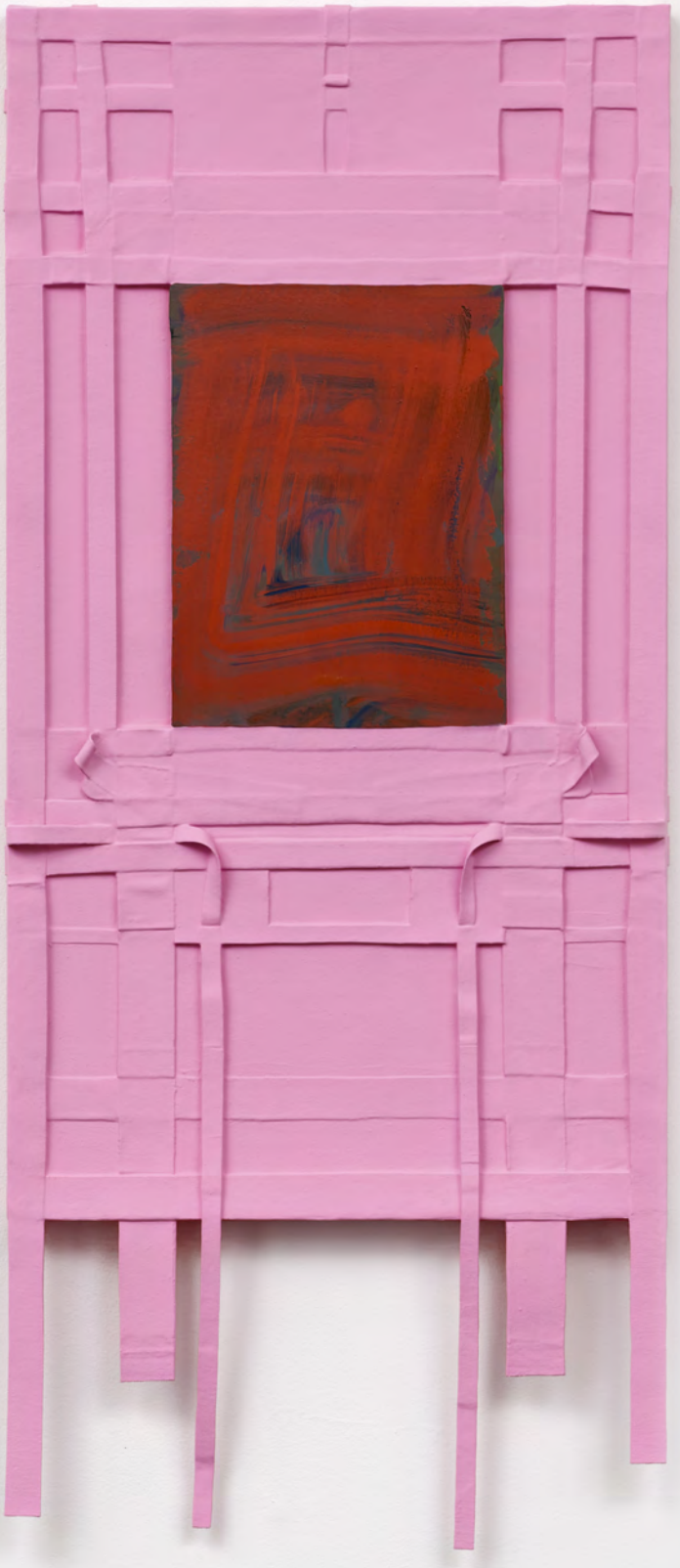


"In my works, there are many windows—both literal and figurative—that open into disparate spaces, worlds, and time periods. The image transfers function the same way, imbuing historical, cultural, political, and familial content."

“I often photograph my work in progress and use Photoshop to try alternative colors for whatever I’m going to paint next. I’m experimenting a fair amount, just on a small, quick scale rather than on the big piece of paper itself.”


Photo Album
WITHOUT A SILVER SPOON
Macmillan Primary English Course
2018 • CALENDAR
03 March

“My process is fairly intentional, but when I’m transferring, I work pretty spontaneously to pick where and how to transfer each image. It comes down to trusting my gut.”



Annabeth Marks, *Slipper* (2024).
Acrylic on canvas, 41 × 17.5 × 2 inches.
Image courtesy of the artist and Parker Gallery,
Los Angeles. Photo: Paul Salveson.

Annabeth Marks at Parker Gallery

March 16–April 27, 2024

The crosshatched and woven canvases in *Continuous Time*, Annabeth Marks' first solo show at Parker Gallery, were either intensely monochromatic or utilized only a handful of hues, as carefully selected as musical notes. Color can arouse an instinctual psychological response, which Marks seeks to channel into an active emotional encounter with her work. As the artist has noted, "[Color] is the matter that moves between forms and projects out towards the viewer…I am interested in the gut level emotional currency that highly saturated color provokes."[1] By turns melancholy, seductive, threatening, and peaceful, the high chroma paintings in *Continuous Time* employed intricate layering techniques and deft manipulations of color to explore our matrix of perception, reflection, and cultural mediation.

Marks' sculptural paintings often extend beyond the typical parameters of stretcher and frame into something more uncanny. In *Slipper* (2024), six strips of canvas hang past the bottom edge of the frame in alternating lengths and thicknesses, ranging from about half an inch to an inch and a half. They conjure unwound gauze bandages, limp stirrups, a garter belt with the stockings unclipped —some array of slackened bodily constraints that hovers between the medical and the erotic. *Slipper* is almost entirely coated in an unctuous layer of pink that recalls bubblegum-flavored cough syrup or an inflamed throat (rather than the satin ballet slippers the title might connote). Girlishness, for some, is a contagious phenomenon with the capacity to absorb the living body: a 2023 survey found that nearly one-third of adult men would be "uncomfortable" wearing pink.[2] In *Slipper*, likewise, girlhood breathes from the drenched pink canvas like a virus. The only exception is a stark, haphazardly smeared red rectangle in the middle. To call it vaginal doesn't cover it—Marks' crimson rectangle is a wound, the kind that needs years of medical management. Beneath it, two mirrored strips of canvas arch and twist like ribbons, before again falling beneath *Slipper*'s viscous pink surface. *Slipper* seduces and disgusts, its red rectangle as crude as the blood at the center of biologically-prescribed femininity. Marks' exploration of this highly charged color evokes gender as a constraint as much as an expression.

Many of the works in *Continuous Time* feature a central panel that, like in *Slipper*, is accented by several looping, lace-like tentacles of canvas interwoven around a structural frame. The patterns change in density and intricacy in each piece, lending a different affective structure to each experiment with color. In *Silver Spirit* (2024), the crossed central section is composed of a gleaming, sinuous mass of plaited, twisted, and layered canvas strips. Like Walt Whitman's "noiseless patient spider" who spins "filament, filament, filament, out of itself / Ever unreeling,"[3] Marks' weaving conjures the intangible layers that comprise each of our subjective worlds. Emanating a cool yet brilliant shine, *Silver Spirit* recalls the meditative minimalist paintings of Mary Corse or Agnes Martin's tranquil grids. As with Corse and Martin, Marks' repetitions gesture towards metaphysical vastness. While from a distance, *Silver Spirit* looks completely symmetrical, its lattice is imperfect; minor imbalances and awkward corners reveal themselves up close. While *Slipper* externalizes how femininity is imposed, projected on, and assumed by the body, *Silver Spirit* explores the mysterious, sometimes warped integrations of our internal psychic apparatus.

Inevitably, Marks' exploration of perception reflects the layered associations that inform both our sense of identity and how we perceive the external world. Color forms a path not just between the work and the viewer, but between the viewer and themselves, proving itself discernable only through a multitude of personal and cultural affinities. *Reflector* (2023), which hung beside *Silver Spirit*, proffers a structure for the obscure triadic relationship highlighted in *Continuous Time* between what we see and what we perceive, what we perceive and what we remember. Combining earth-toned greens and browns with strips and squares of different blue shades, *Reflector* holds the sky in its web. There's the blazing blue of high noon, the dusky blue right after the sun falls,

Natasha Boyd

the deep navy of a night sky. Each shade summons the colors of a day cresting and falling away, recalling time itself. Marks weaves these hues into a domestic shape. The central panels are a gentle, inviting mustard, as though we're looking at a lighted window. The passing days, in all their different blues, form a "house" in *Reflector* —the house in which our lives take place. From here we can't see the exact shape of what's within, but we can feel the glow.

1. Parker Gallery, "Continuous Time," press release, March 2024, https://parkergallery.com/content/1-exhibitions/5-annabeth-marks/annabeth-marks-press-release_final.pdf.

2. Matthew Smith, "What makes men uncomfortable?," YouGov, September 8, 2023, https://yougov.co.uk/society/articles/46046-what-makes-men-uncomfortable.

3. Walt Whitman, "A Noiseless Patient Spider," in *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Osgood, 1891), https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45473/a-noiseless-patient-spider.

Maura Brewer at Canary Test

March 30– April 25, 2024

Early in Maura Brewer's 32-minute video *Offshore* (2024), the artist says that money laundering might be the definitive crime of our era. She is likely right. The constant flitting of capital across borders in search of lower taxes and laxer regulations seems to support her claim. In the simplest terms, money laundering is the process by which money generated from unsavory or illicit means is converted into "cleaner" cash which can then circulate free from the stigma of its illegality. As Brewer explains in the video's voiceover, the art market has increasingly become the method by which the world's wealthiest launder their money, using the vagaries of art valuation and the anonymity of the market to grow their wealth. Meanwhile, the artists that produce this value teeter on the edge of a more precarious anonymity. *Offshore* shows how the individual—both artist and collector—seems to vanish within complex networks of global capital.

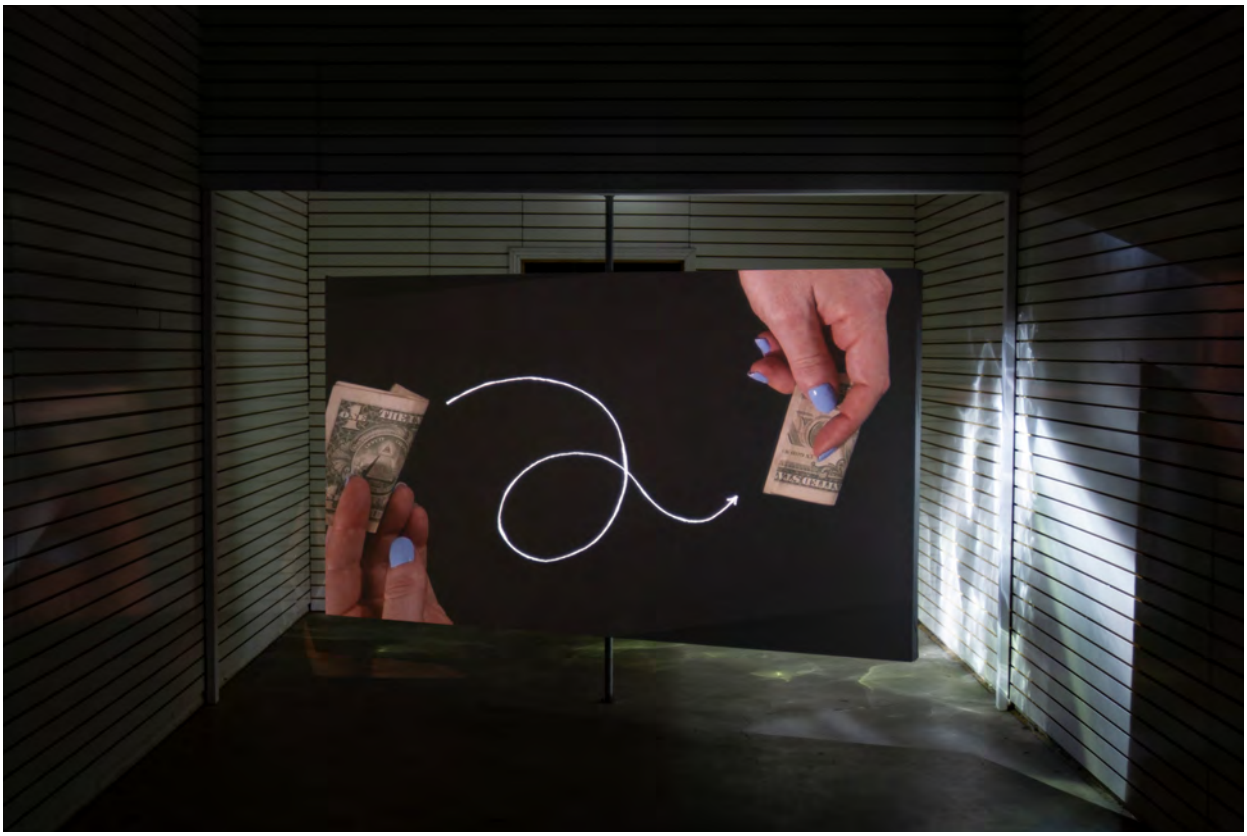
Recently on view in her solo show at Canary Test, the video begins with Brewer explaining the project's conception. Curious about the inner workings of an art market that constantly seemed to slip beyond her grasp, Brewer used $4,000 to enter the market not as an artist, but as a collector. (She received $115,000 in additional grant funding from Creative Capital and the Guggenheim Foundation, which she used to hire a lawyer and set up shell corporations.) The video then documents her journey as she cosplays around the globe as a member of the ultrarich. Brewer does not show us her travels directly—instead, she films a tablet and phone that display photos and videos she took while traveling. Our engagement is thus mediated by an additional layer of digital redundancy, formally paralleling the system of nesting doll shell companies Brewer describes in the voiceover.

The video was projected onto a temporary wall that divided Canary Test into two rooms— viewers could push the wall, swinging it open like a door, to enter the back gallery space. It begins with Brewer traveling to the Canary Islands to set up an offshore LLC, free from the prying eyes of the IRS. Next, she visits Geneva, Switzerland, where she attempts to set up a Swiss bank account before learning that the country's infamous secretive accounts require minimums of several million dollars, a sum significantly larger than the $4,000 Brewer brought with her —a revealing crack in the façade of Brewer's project.

While in Switzerland, Brewer also visits the Geneva Freeport, where thousands of paintings making up a significant portion of the Western art historical canon are stored until anonymous collectors flip their investment-art into hard cash. Brewer's documentation only reaches the Freeport's lobby, while the art stored below ground remains unseen. Given the enormity of the Freeport's holdings, the scene is perversely funny —at the Freeport, the artwork cannot be displayed, let alone photographed. In place of direct footage, Brewer fills the gap with cheeky digital animations reminiscent of "how-to" videos, visualizing the process by which dirty money is exchanged for artwork that then sits in freeports gathering both dust and value before being flipped into cleaner cash.

Finally, Brewer travels to Hong Kong, a region that has become a leader in the global art market via fairs such as Art Basel.[1] Brewer's pursuit of economic transparency ends with her purchase of a drawing by Abigail Raphael Collins from Canary Test itself.

Sampson Ohringer



Maura Brewer, *Offshore* (installation views) (2024).
Images courtesy of the artist and Canary Test.

Entitled *Redaction* (2024) and drawn with redaction ink, the drawing is a sly allusion to the very subject of Brewer's video. The drawing embodies the paradoxical place of the artwork in this regime: It must be made to generate wealth, but its actual contents are insignificant. Notably, Brewer makes a point of not taking possession of the drawing, avoiding taxation and keeping her investment liquid.

Brewer's performance of relying on the tenuous system of artist grants to enact her foray into money laundering is a clever way to both draw attention to the vast wealth and power gap separating artists from their collectors and also to dematerialize art itself. Freed from the materiality of the art object, Brewer's performance withholds the very thing that wealthy collectors rely on to launder their wealth. As a performance, Brewer's art acquisition is a sharp and thoughtful meditation, but its critical edge is blunted by animations and interviews that nudge the video towards something closer to a news report. Interspersed with the footage of Brewer's travels are conversations with journalists and lawyers who advise her on this global schema—including its legality. These interviews are informative, but they also emphasize the project's didacticism, tethering the video more to journalism than institutional critique. While the former can explain important contemporary socioeconomic phenomena, as a practice grounded in art, institutional critique has latitude to explore deeper, destabilizing questions about what art *is* when treated as an investment. Brewer's tendency towards reportage comes with the cost of evading difficult questions about the work of art itself within this system.

In the second gallery, three drawings made on mirrors that depict the video's locales invited the viewer to contemplate and appreciate the funhouse hall-of-mirrors that is the international finance system. The drawings were hung on a dry-cleaning rack, free to sway as people walked by. Each one depicts notable features in the locations Brewer visited: the Cayman Islands' Seven Mile Beach, Hong Kong's Repulse Bay, and the Swiss Alps. On the Swiss Alps drawing, rows of floating rectangles, which also appear in one of the video's animations, seem to resemble the storage lockers of the Geneva Freeport or shipping containers, actualizing the abstractions of the global economy (*Frozen [Mont Blanc]*, 2024). Looping video clips of each location were projected onto its corresponding mirror-drawing: The light beams of several projectors crisscrossed through the gallery and onto the mirrored surfaces, resulting in a bewildering tangle of imagery that was so densely layered as to be almost illegible.

This illegibility was productive, though. As they stared at a distorted and blurred reflection of themselves in the drawings, the viewer was asked to consider the disappearance of the individual within a complex network of global capital. The layered representations of the sites Brewer visited seemed to emphasize their global importance while simultaneously acknowledging that no single locale will provide the final, complete truth about a financial network that thrives on its fluidity *between* states. In these drawings, Brewer offers us something that lawyers and journalists cannot. The works are not an explanation of the whole system but an embodied experience of its particularities—the dizzying ping-ponging of capital shrunk down to the scale of Canary Test's back gallery.

1. Gareth Harris and Lisa Movius, "As Art Basel Hong Kong gets off to brisk start, young buyers make their presence known," *The Art Newspaper*, March 27, 2024, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/03/27/as-art-basel-hong-kong-gets-off-to-brisk-start-young-buyers-make-their-presence-known.

Familial Technologies at Commonwealth and Council

March 16–April 27, 2024

Next to the waxy gleam of hardwood flooring, the adobe path was dense with energy, almost alive, like an earthen tongue. Beginning at the gallery threshold, the path extended along one wall into the center of the room: To enter *Familial Technologies*, the recent group show at Commonwealth and Council, I had to cross it. I walked slowly, looking down. The bricks were uneven and irregularly sized, their rough, ochre surfaces flecked with mica and straw. Formed from Los Angeles mud by the artist rafa esparza and his collaborators, *banqueta* (2017/2024) combines the traditional

Ashlyn Ashbaugh

techniques of adobe-making esparza learned from his father Ramón with minimalist sculptural intervention.[1] Such composite relationships between material, cultural, familial, and personal histories resonated throughout *Familial Technologies*. The exhibition's artists explored inheritance not as a unidirectional transfer of knowledge, but as an ongoing reciprocal alchemy —an active, participatory process in which we reimagine and reconfigure the inherited knowledge and relationships that shape our present.

As I stepped off the pathway and walked through the exhibition, I was struck by the formal resonances connecting the works on display—not unlike resemblances between distant relatives. *Familial Technologies*' artists engaged ancient materials and archives to refashion inheritances into something immediate and alive. Pencil drawings by Kang Seung Lee and Gala Porras-Kim played with traditional methods of recording and archiving information. Lee's *Untitled (Tseng Kwong Chi, Cape Canaveral, Florida, 1985)* (2021) is a drawing of a framed photograph. The original photograph's subject is the deceased artist Tseng Kwong Chi, who died of an AIDS-related illness in 1990.[2] In Lee's drawing, Tseng's body is replaced with a smoky smudge, departing from the realism of the source photograph and pointing to the more abstract experience of loss. The smudge denotes individual and communal grief, embodied in the marks made by Lee's hand.

Porras-Kim's luminous colored pencil drawing, *San Vitale, Ravenna, marble floor reconstruction* (2023) also plays with representation —the drawing carefully reproduces a patterned section of Italian marble flooring, textured with centuries of chips and scuffs. Here, the inevitable inconsistencies of Porras-Kim's hand-rendering add to the floor's real fissures and flaws, as if in a visual game of telephone. If inheritance entails slippage between then and now, there and here, Lee and Porras-Kim's drawings speak to the generative potential in the gaps.

Some of the most arresting works in *Familial Technologies* were Lotus L. Kang's sculptures. *Mother (Spore, 2022–2023)* evokes the process of food fermentation: Spread across the gallery floor as if in answer to esparza's path, the work comprised a grouping of stainless steel bowls containing food items cast from aluminum—cabbage, kelp knots, dried pears—and other debris half-submerged in pink and amber pools of silicone. Here, the fizzy chemistry of fermentation, a staple of the traditional cuisine of Kang's familial homeland, Korea, is suspended in deathless, inorganic substances whose tints and textures render the process strange and unfamiliar. Fermentation preserves food, and Kang's sculpture preserves the practice—but not without literally and figuratively recasting it as something else. In this way, the sculpture points to the limitations and possibilities of sustaining traditions across great temporal, geographic, and psychic distances.

Similar themes suffuse Kang's *Mesoderm (Market)* and *Mesoderm (Holes)* (both 2023), which hung on the wall adjacent to *Mother*. In each work, a tiny, gestural image of Seoul and New York[3] is drawn in darkroom chemicals on photographic paper and layered atop a pinkish, pimpled silicone rectangle. Kang borrows images from personal and historical photographs that span her family's diasporic history (her grandmother fled North Korea for Seoul, eventually moving to North America, while Kang lives in New York). Her drawings are loose impressions, evocations that, like Lee's drawing of Tseng's photograph, playfully subvert any claims photography might lay on authoritative representation. By layering these drawings on top of silicone squares that are at once flesh-like and jarringly artificial, Kang extends her exploration of the slippery relationships between the past, our representations of the past, and our embodied present.

In a far corner of the gallery, Cayetano Ferrer's marble sculptures employed patching and fusing as a material means of exploring the interdependence of inheritance and creation. *Quarry Composite (Wall Plate)* (2014) loomed on the wall, a hard-edged rectangle of white-streaked serpentine green, smooth but for two irregular, darker green patches of stone in its center, outlined by jagged white seams as if the stone had torn and been repaired. The work combines marble with synthetic infill; I couldn't tell which was which. "Real" marble is a metamorphic

Familial Technologies (installation view) (2024).
Image courtesy of the artists and Commonwealth
and Council, Los Angeles / Mexico City.
Photo: Paul Salveson.

Bruce Richards, *Clef* (2020).
Oil on linen, 19.5 × 14.5 inches. Image courtesy
of the artist and Sea View, Los Angeles.
Photo: Nice Day Photo.

stone formed over centuries as limestone is exposed to high heat and pressure, creating its characteristic mottling. In Ferrer's sculpture, as in Kang's, this geology takes on a metaphorical aspect as organic materials and synthetic fabrications fold together, compress, and alloy, becoming mutually constitutive. Side by side, the marble and the infill activate—even co-create—each other (one is "real" because the other is fake, one ancient because the other is new). A productive tension gathers in the seams that join the two.

Each past implies a present, each entrance an exit. I returned to the adobe path. *banqueta* is a composite of many things: earth, straw, water, and sun; bricks and gaps; a family legacy; a collaborative labor; the first piece in the show and the last. The path orients us, forces us to adjust our balance; and as we move, we, in turn, add marks of our own. In *Familial Technologies*, the path is a two-way channel, a dialogue that invokes the past in the present and remakes it, making it new.

1. Willy Blackmore, "Mexican Artist Rafa Esparza's Physical Representation of Immigrant Nostalgia," *Pacific Standard*, updated September 15, 2018, https://psmag.com/magazine/rafa-esparzas-adobe-brick-installations.

2. An exhibition of Tseng's photographs, titled *VISITOR - VISITEUR*, was on display in the adjoining gallery. In this way, Lee's drawing also extends *Familial Technologies* beyond the exhibition, suggesting a "familial" relationship with larger curatorial projects and artistic histories.

3. Commonwealth and Council, "Familial Technologies," press release, March 2024, https://commonwealthandcouncil.com/exhibitions/familial-technologies1/press.coolest-new-neighborhood.

Bruce Richards at Sea View

June 2–August 10, 2024

One of the most striking paintings in *Soundings*, a retrospective of the Ohio-born, San Bernardino-raised, UC Irvine-educated artist Bruce Richards, depicted a Red Delicious apple with a hefty bite taken out of it. If you stared at the wound in its white flesh, painted with such precise, painstaking detail that you could almost taste its tart crispness, your spine might have tingled with déjà vu. The bite marks resemble the wings of an insect, or maybe the trunk of a skeleton. The background has been sucked away, suspending the subject in an eerie, green-hued gradient. This mysterious isolation of the subject matter invites additional questions: Why an apple? Why this shade of red? Stepping closer, you'd see that the grooves in the apple's flesh couldn't possibly be made by human teeth, a painterly trick reminiscent of René Magritte (who painted his fair share of apples, too). "Ceci n'est pas une pomme," you'd think, glancing at the checklist in hopes that the title might clear up this riddle. It does. *Adam's Ribs* (1990) recasts the subject as a visual summation of our origin story. As if to hammer in the punchline, an identical sculpture of the forbidden fruit sat, ominously, on a bookshelf to the right. The title: *Eve* (1989).

These works are textbook examples of Bruce Richards' approach, honed over the past 60 years. He grabs your attention with representations of everyday objects charged with allegorical trappings, even if he leaves it up to you to connect the interpretive dots. After spending summers in high school working in a commercial art studio, specializing in mechanical drawing, he enrolled at the University of California, Irvine during the 1960s, where at the time most of the faculty (Tony DeLap, Craig Kauffman, Robert Irwin) spoke the language of minimalism.[1] With a couple of exceptions—a notable one being Vija Celmins—he admitted feeling like an odd duck. "Drawing," Richards told me dryly, shortly after his exhibition at Sea View opened, "was considered a nineteenth-century skill." To fit in, he jumped on the minimalist bandwagon, making conceptual paintings in which he would stretch rope and twine across black canvases to explore the process of painting itself. But by the late 1970s, he had returned to representation with a renewed vigor, painting bright, lucid objects in blank voids of nothingness. He's been doing this ever since.

The Sea View exhibition, *Soundings*—a retrospective of 15 paintings and one sculpture created between 1981 and 2023—investigated the cognitive triangulations among artist (who poses ideas), art-object (which visualizes them), and viewer (who derives meaning by tapping into underground reservoirs of experience, thought, and emotion). While Richards heavily references both folklore and historical events (*Washington's Dilemma* [2007], for example, does both by depicting a pair of cherries), his paintings work more as open-ended templates rather

India Mandelkern

than puzzles to be solved. Human figures are always absent from Richards' paintings, even if our fingerprints are all over them (a half-eaten apple, a burning match, a spilled glass of milk), suggesting that unexplained stories are unfolding just beyond the frame. Little wonder that the show's title draws from a method of measuring the depth of bodies of water, unquantifiable with the naked eye.

Richards' inspirations reflect an omnivorous cultural appetite: Aesop's fables, Bruce Springsteen's lyrics, references to art history. Many of his paintings seem to comment on political events; *Nightcap* (2009), for example, which depicts a bottle of Dom Perignon dwarfed by a massive fire exploding from its mouth, evokes the corporate greed that led to the Great Recession. Yet to describe these paintings as unidirectional political statements is to miss Richards' point; to the contrary, the abstruse nature of the subject matter lends itself to countless interpretations. In *Clef* (2020), thick serpent-like bands of fire wind around a tire suspended in space, creating the elegant signature of the work's musical title. While burning tires are widely used as messy and toxic symbols of protest against state authority (in this case, the image's calligraphic shape, with its subtle resemblance to Arabic script, gestures to conflicts in the Middle East), there's nothing uncontrolled about the image. Instead, nodding to the clef or "key" that sets the pitch of a musical score, Richards elevates the burning tire into a koan-like symbol that sparks more questions than answers.

Since abandoning abstraction for representation in the late '70s, Richards has taken pride in his rigidity of purpose and the absence of evolution in his work. Look closer, however, and you'll find small departures. *Paradise Lost* (2023), the most recent painting presented in the show, abandons his explicit painterly style in favor of a faint pencil and oil-painted sketch of a woman's shoe upon a blue textured background. Drawn on raw, unprimed linen that creates a rougher surface than most of his other works, the image evokes Cinderella's glass slipper in the moments before midnight. There's a childlike urgency to this image that the others lack, like you could blink and it would disappear. While the slipper still does its share of the interpretive heavy lifting—an allusion, perhaps, to our provisional existence in the face of ecological disaster—here, the background and subject are in tension, one threatening to swallow the other whole. It's as if Richards is painting for a world in which he will no longer exist.

"Minimalism to me is a short essay," Richards told me. "You can only keep reducing it before it disappears altogether." Richards ultimately rejected its hyper-focus on observational perception, finding more inspiration in current events and cultural ether than the spare purity of space and line. Nevertheless, Richards' practice shares with conceptual art an obsession with presence—that there is no substitute for the experience of standing in front of an artwork beckoning you to step closer as the cogs in your mind start to turn. Richards also shares with his minimalist and conceptual predecessors a belief that the viewer's participation is, in fact, part of the artwork, the artist's intervention being just the starting point. At the end of the day, Richards' painterly "soundings" work as screens or reflections rather than images—the private connections made between viewer and object become the center of each work.

1. Suzanne Muchnic, "Bruce Richards: *Soundings*," press release, Sea View, June 2024, https://www.sea-view.us/bruce-richards; "Craig Kauffman Estate," Sprüth Magers, accessed July 11, 2024, https://spruethmagers.com/artists/craig-kauffman/.

Maya Buffett-Davis at Soldes

May 4–June 7, 2024

One of the earliest writing systems, cuneiform, was derived as a simple and economic means of consolidating information that the mind could not hold. Clay, abundantly available, could be easily marked with a reed stylus, worked into the shape of a tablet, and left to dry in the Mesopotamian sun.[1] Thousands of years later, it's evident how this early impulse to preserve and share data has brought us to the information age, in which binary code, a language made of zeros and ones, provides instruction for an infinite computational network. *Computer Lab Loveseat*, Maya Buffett-Davis' debut at Soldes, used ceramic,

Hannah Tishkoff

Maya Buffet-David, *Computer Lab Loveseat* (detail) (2024).
Image courtesy of the artist and Soldes.

one of the oldest artistic media,[2] to construct patchwork sculptures of laptops and cellphones that greet the digital age with analog materiality. By representing these electronic devices, which increasingly dissociate us from material reality, as static objects in wood and clay, she invites viewers to reimagine transient digital ephemera as enduring artifacts of human life. Buffett-Davis makes a case for artmaking as its own kind of technology—a tool for communication, sharing, knowledge, and information that exists in the same lineage as both the computer and cuneiform.

Computer Lab Loveseat transformed the gallery's ground-floor, eight-by-three-foot vitrine into a speculative computer lab reminiscent of a classroom or library. Two early-model ceramic iPhones sat on a white enamel, plywood, and maple classroom table (designed by Nico B. Young) between reproductions of three Apple laptops ordered from smallest to largest. Each laptop was meticulously assembled using layers of found wooden scraps, including antique yardsticks, while the display screens, keyboards, and trackpads were ceramic. Clever details are hidden throughout, like the time displayed on one laptop as "12:34:56 PM" and the letters on a keyboard reordered to spell "LOVE." To generate these details, Buffett-Davis used her vast collection of rubber stamps —a tool of analog reproduction dating back to the 1860s[3]— which she pressed into the clay while damp. Similar to how banal images accumulate meaning when shared mimetically online, the varied collection of stamps used across the works drew our attention to the temporal relationship between clay, the computer, and the human project of collecting and sharing knowledge.

Stamped images also featured throughout 29 vibrant ceramic infographic posters hung on the back walls. Sprinkled with inspiring messages and silly images, they read like the collected digital detritus of a shared computer. On one poster, a screengrab of a Google search "how to…" lists suggested responses such as "kiss," "draw," "hack," and "meditate" (*Google Poster*, 2024). In another poster, *How Many Flashlights on Earth?* (2024), the titular question is stamped into the clay alongside a carving of a flashlight. The flashlight's beam has a glassy, liquid appearance, the alchemical result of vitrifying car safety glass during firing. Ephemeral online activity, including the screen's light, is captured in these posters as an enduring totem. While archeologists a thousand years from now won't find physical evidence of our digital activity, they could uncover this ceramic tablet. To the left of the table, a sign with red lettering reading "lending library" directed the viewer below to four shelves displaying a collection of handcrafted ceramic and wooden toys. While these items could not *actually* be taken from the exhibition, their lack of clear form or function conjures a space of experimental, open-ended play. This suggestion of participatory exchange reminds us that the computer is, in its essence, an interactive library of data where collective information is borrowed.

Deep engagement with materiality was present across each component of the installation—the evidence of Buffett-Davis gathering wood, scouring thrift stores for stamps, and laboring in the process of sculpting, drying, glazing, and firing the ceramics. In one of three laptop sculptures, the screen is glazed with a loose, purple-speckled rendition of Apple's classic galaxy screensaver; in the center, a pop-up window displays a person carrying a stamped sign that says, "Just What We Wanted." The phrase (also the work's title) conjures the collective uneasiness around digital technologies: the prevailing sense that technocratic institutions and greater mechanization threaten human values, or at the very least feel toxic and disembodied. Yet, this adage might also apply to cuneiform, which brought us recorded language in the first place—is this world, the one we've created, just what we wanted?

While *Just What We Wanted*'s crafty materiality marks a stark contrast to the minimalist, mechanically produced Apple laptops that are ubiquitous in our lives, the difference might not be as vast as we think—one of the first materials used in computer manufacturing, silicon dioxide, mined from the earth as silica sand,[4] is also found in the clay body Buffett-Davis used to create these sculptures. As she cuts down vintage rulers, glazes colorful screensavers, and stamps symbols and

letters to create "keyboards," Buffett-Davis' handcrafted approach counters our current digitally disembodied state, underscoring the computer as a constructed, material object as well.

Each aspect of *Computer Lab Loveseat* cohered into a joyful, pedagogical environment that recalled the early, anticipatory promise of the World Wide Web, whose historic logo read "Let's Share What We Know." *Computer for Two* (2024), a laptop sculpture that includes two trackpads for users to surf the internet side by side, perhaps best embodies this value. By situating private screens in a public environment, Buffett-Davis reframes our interaction with these technologies as communal rather than solitary.

While clay may seem an unusual medium for reflecting upon our digital condition, *Computer Lab Loveseat* brought technology back to earth. Art, like the computer, is an assemblage of disparate, raw materials that when melded together form a portal to another world; even the word "digital" stems from the Latin "digitalis," an attestation that human hands drive technology, not the other way around. Just as a computer "works" by transporting users into the interconnected temporal world of the internet, art works because of the transfer of knowledge and information from an artist's mind into a static object and back into the mind of the viewer. Buffett-Davis is clear that these are not *replications* of computers, but computers themselves —at the opening of the exhibition, when a child asked if the computers work, she responded, "Yes, just in a different way than we're used to."

1. C.B.F Walker, "Cuneiform," in *Reading The Past: Ancient Writing from Cuneiform to the Tablet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 17.

2. "A brief history of ceramics and glass," The American Ceramic Society, accessed July 8, 2024, https://ceramics.org/about/what-are-engineered-ceramics-and-glass/brief-history-of-ceramics-and-glass/.

3. Projit B. Mukharji, "The Art of Rubber Stamps," Calcutta by Gaslight (blog), January 2, 2021, https://web.sas.upenn.edu/mukharji/2021/01/02/the-art-of-rubber-stamps/.

4. Vince Beiser, "The Ultra-Pure, Super-Secret Sand That Makes Your Phone Possible," *Wired*, August 7, 2018, https://www.wired.com/story/book-excerpt-science-of-ultra-pure-silicon/.

(L.A. in N.Y.) Jesse Stecklow at Dracula's Revenge

April 28–May 26, 2024

An analog clock hung in the back of Dracula's Revenge, an itinerant art gallery operating in Lower Manhattan, as one of seven sculptures by Los Angeles-based artist Jesse Stecklow displayed in his solo exhibition, *Timekeepers*. Known as *Untitled (10:10:44)* (2023), this clock, like some of Stecklow's previous works, was outfitted with air samplers —cylindrical devices used to collect air for quality testing. These were lodged in front of the clock's hour, minute, and second hands, blocking their rotation. While the work's assessment of New York's air quality was inaccessible during its exhibition, *Untitled (10:10:44)* drew a subtle connection between clocks and toxicity, invoking both the technologies of mechanized timekeeping that jumpstarted the nineteenth-century industrial revolution and the deleterious effects on air quality that resulted from this rapid development.[1] More occlusive than revelatory, *Timekeepers* pointed wryly to our misconceptions about history and progress in the face of anthropogenic climate change and proposed, through its formal eccentricities, that we re-envision time not as a narrative of progress but as a process of material and linguistic transformation.

In the main exhibition space, five altar-like assemblages on fiberboards wrapped in paper corresponded to the ancient past, recent past, present, future present, and deep future.[2] The first, *From Ear to Ear* (2024), featured a pair of bone conduction headphones that played an ocean-themed meditation. Sitting beside it were the fossilized inner ear bones of a whale—two wrinkly specimens, scatological in shape and coloration. Further research prompted by these specimens revealed that human noise pollution contributes to whales' endangerment by disrupting many species' ability to hunt and communicate via echolocation.[3] Juxtaposed with the meditation track, the excised fossils reminded viewers, with clinical brutality, that our relationship with these marine mammals is far from reciprocal.

Tongue-in-cheek vinyl labels accompanied Stecklow's assemblages, each an anagram of the exhibition's title: *From Ear to Ear* was tagged "timekeepers," and the next work, *From Pipe to Light* (2024)—which featured, among other curios,

Jenny Wu

Top: Jesse Stecklow, *From Ear to Ear* (installation view) (2024). Fossilized whale's inner ear bones, bone conduction headset, paper, MDF, and sound, 13 × 18 × 3.25 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Dracula's Revenge, New York and Sweetwater, Berlin. Photo: Jason Mandella.

Bottom: Jesse Stecklow, *Cornspearacies* (installation view) (2024). High fructose corn syrup; Avon Golden Harvest Hand Lotion bottles and lotion; beeswax candles; Lemonlights (beeswax, LED light bulbs, lamp bases, and hardware); jam jars; glass; UV print on acrylic; corian; springs; and fans; dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist and Dracula's Revenge, New York and Sweetwater, Berlin. Photo: Jason Mandella.

a drained vintage aftershave bottle—was marked "empties reek." Deeper in the narrow gallery, *Database (empty)* (2022), which comprises metal nails protruding from a silkscreen print of an empty data set, was labeled "re-meet spike," a phrase that (along with the nails in the assemblage) alludes to golden spikes—geological features in the earth's sediment that we use to identify past climatic shifts. Fittingly, the six faint parallel lines representing the empty data set visually mimic the bands of white calcite (indicating human activity) found in the sediment of a pond that was proposed last year as the site of the golden spike marking the beginning of the Anthropocene.[5] The next sculpture, *What time?* (2024), featured an aluminum plaque that read, "What time is it in 10 million years?" and was labeled "meek respite," as if relief from our climate anxieties may be found in projections of the far future. *Timekeepers*' penultimate work, *Cornspearacies* (2024), included bottles of high fructose corn syrup and candles shaped like corn cobs, extensions of an agricultural motif the artist began employing when air samples from previous exhibitions came back showing high levels of ethanol.[6] This altar stood on the floor beside *Untitled (10:10:44)*, the final work in Stecklow's progression of sculptural forms.

In its march through various objects, from fossil to clock, *Timekeepers* seemed to ask how we evolved into a state of efficiency-obsessed capitalism in which industrialization has narrowed our focus down to the minutiae of each second of an administered hour. This connection between time, capitalism, and ecological collapse harkens to the Climate Clock, an installation on the facade of a high-rise on the south end of New York City's Union Square. Conceived by activists in 2020, this digital countdown displays the time left to curb CO_2 emissions before we risk levels of ecological endangerment deemed unacceptable per the 2016 Paris Agreement.[7] Its massive orange numbers—which showed 5 years and 41 days at the time of this writing—remain relentlessly in motion, a self-evident spectacle that few stop to contemplate.

By contrast, Stecklow's sculptures offer a polemic disguised as a riddle. By couching our abstract sense of time in specific yet obscure objects, Stecklow thwarts our tendency to skim for meaning, default to alarmism, and, paradoxically, return to business as usual. His sculptures slow down our reading, and in turn, offer an alternative to our usual narrative of environmental annihilation. Like anagrams, geological epochs are subject to further transformation. The future implicit in the question, "What time is it in 10 million years?" may still come to pass, though the answer will likely be in a form we haven't yet imagined.

1. David Fowler et al., "A chronology of global air quality," in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A*, vol. 378: September 28, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2019.0314.

2. Dracula's Revenge, "Jesse Stecklow: *Timekeepers*," press release, April 2024, https://draculasrevenge.net/jesse.

3. Andie Bulman, "The wrong news about North Atlantic right whales: How human noise affects the animals," *CBC*, January 22, 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/right-whales-noise-1.6713077.

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5. Paul Voosen, "Pond mud proposed as Anthropocene's 'golden spike,' defining human-altered geological age," *Science*, July 11, 2023, https://www.science.org/content/article/pond-mud-proposed-anthropocene-s-golden-spike-defining-human-altered-geological-age.

6. Art @ Bainbridge: Princeton University Art Museum, "Components in the Air / Jesse Stecklow: November 6, 2021–January 2, 2022," exhibition brochure, https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/files/js_brochure_final.pdf.

7. Justine Calma, "Time is running out on the Climate Clock," *The Verge*, July 22, 2023, https://www.theverge.com/2023/7/22/23803197/climate-change-clock-deadline-new-york.

Photo Essay Contributor and Featured Artist
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Njideka Akunyili Crosby was born in Enugu, Nigeria, in 1983 and currently lives and works in Los Angeles. She was a participant in La Biennale di Venezia, 58th International Art Exhibition, *May You Live In Interesting Times*, curated by Ralph Rugoff (May 11–November 24, 2019). She is the recipient of an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts Degree from University of the Arts (2020), an Honorary Doctorate of Art from Swarthmore College (2019), a MacArthur Fellowship (2017), and a United States Artist Fellowship (2021). Akunyili Crosby's work is held in significant museum collections throughout the world.

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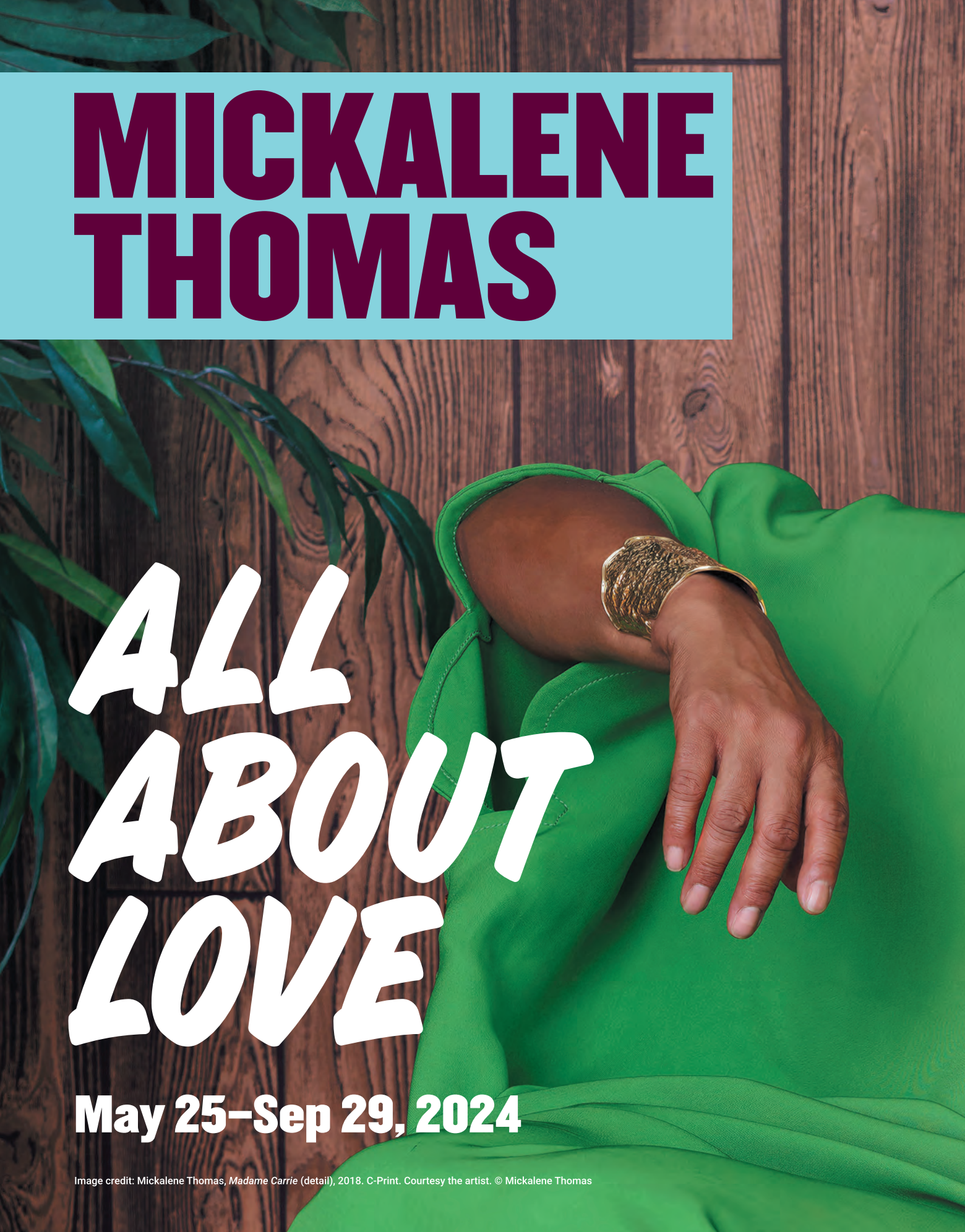

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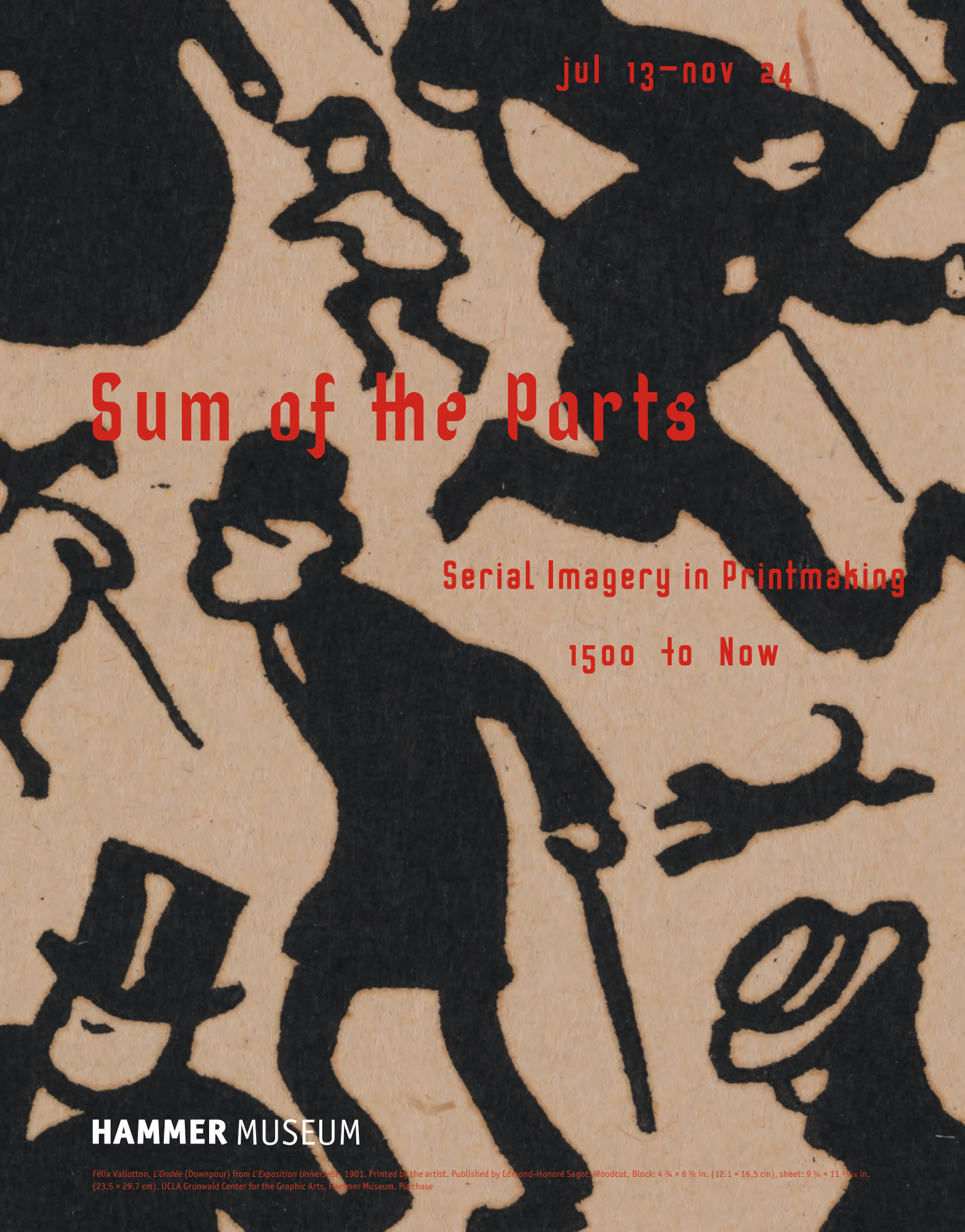

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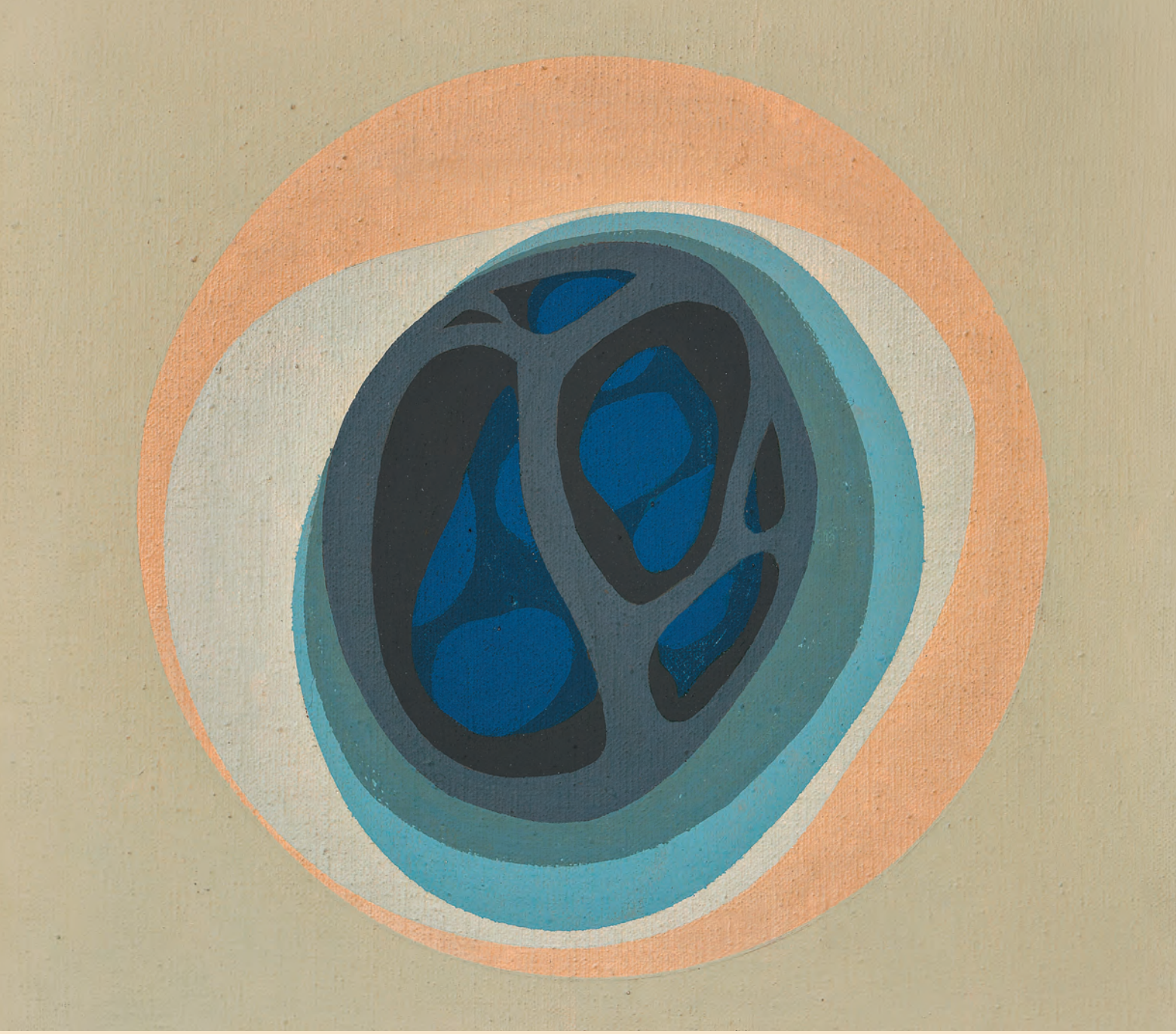
Cameron Harvey, *Ancestor 32* (detail), 2024, acrylic on canvas, 121 x 100 in. © Cameron Harvey. Photo: David Daigle



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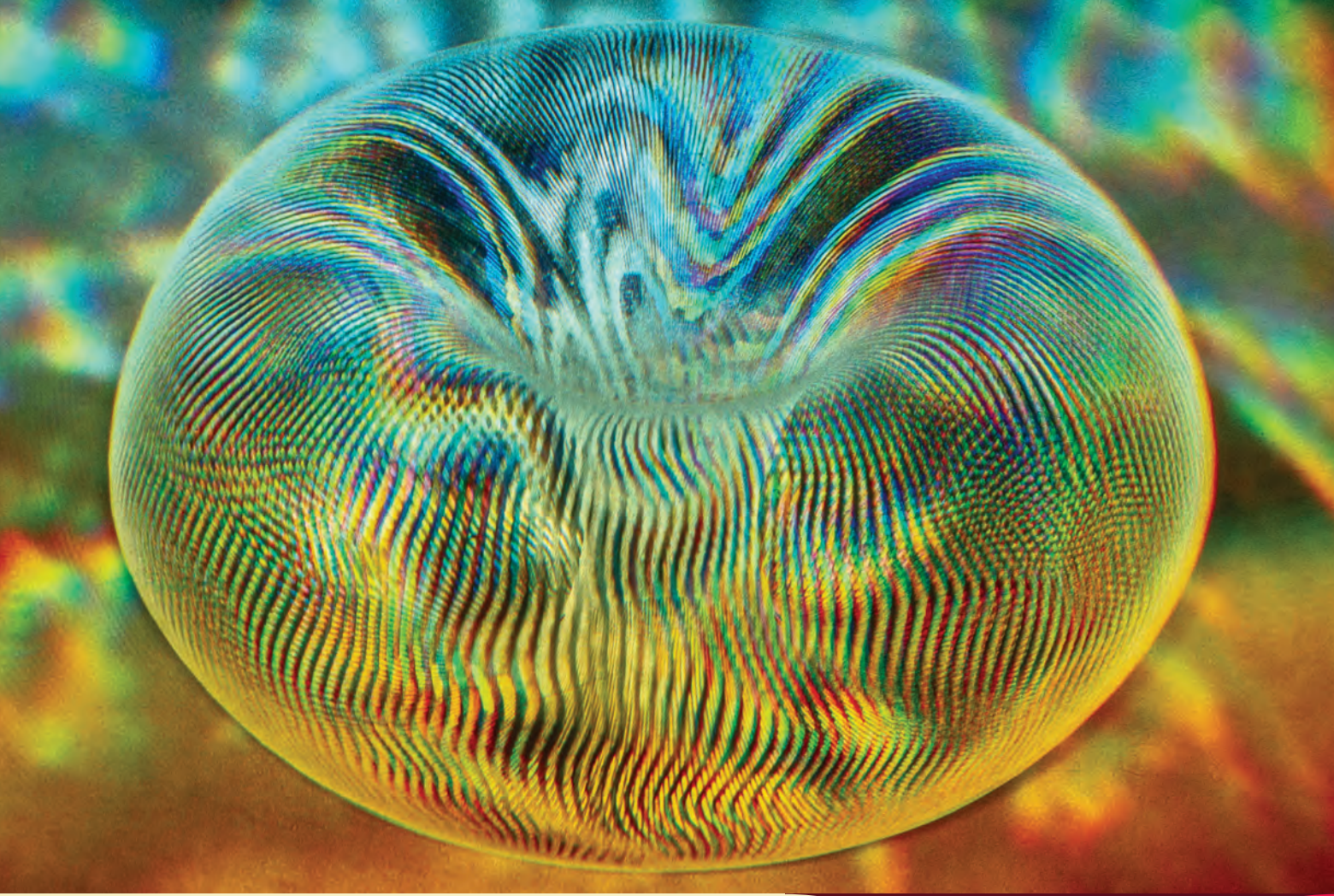

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