

44th

University of Houston School of Art
Master of Fine Arts

THESIS
EXHIBITION

Haoua Amadou
Jen Bootwala
Miriam A. Donis
Marcelese Cooper
Noelle Dunahoe
Liz Gates
María Jacinta Majithia
Tiffany Angel Nesbit
Sydney Parks
Brent Reaney
Ashita Sawhney
Douglas Welsh
Isabelle Zimmerman

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Blaffer Art Museum

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Unrecognizable

Thirteen students came to the School of Art MFA program in 2019 to ask questions, to learn and to make work. At the time, the work they knew how to make was good or good enough, but they were bold and mostly unafraid so good enough was ... good enough. And, yes they were bold and unafraid (mostly), but did they know their plans to ask questions and to learn and to make work would involve three-years of scrutiny—scrutiny of their questions, of their work, of themselves? Three years later, these thirteen students leave the School of Art with the confidence that will sustain them as professional artists and designers. They will continue to ask questions and to learn and to make work, but differently.

They now commit to a future that will demand much of them as artists and designers, and they are ready. Compared to 2019, they and their work are unrecognizable.

Beckham Dossett
Director, School of Art

Haoua Amadou

My work is an autobiography of my journey as a migrant child. I immigrated from Cameroon to France at the age of six. Subsequently, my family moved to Louisiana, where I often felt the francophone connection to my birth country. The distortion and confusion surrounding my family's immigration journey created a need to investigate my history further. I always found it unfair that the journey of the immigrant parent is acknowledged while the journey of the immigrant child is unaccountable. My practice explores my inner thoughts and emotions attributed to displacement. Therefore, I use my experience as an adult to revisit what was lost in my cultural transition using photography and interdisciplinary techniques to touch on issues of identity. In my work, recollection of lost memories is explored through family archives and oral stories once told by elders.



Untitled, 2022
Inkjet print
12 × 18 inches

Jen Bootwala

In my practice I explore craft as a graphic design medium, advocating for its unique material affordances. I am particularly interested in knitting, a craft whose rich history spans political and design movements and can be used to amplify visual communication through its inherent subtext.

The repetitive labor of knitting is transformative for both maker and viewer. The process is cathartic and communal, allowing for collaborative narratives across time and space. I believe that fiber is elemental, exists within us, and tells the story of our shared experiences. Through knitting I use my own labor to make visible the work of others—a reminder of the ties that bind us all together.



Women at Work, 2022
Acrylic yarn and blocking pins
Variable dimensions

Marcelese Cooper

Ever since I was a teenager, I've found myself without the words to fully capture what it is to be young, black, and queer in the U.S. at this moment. So, I looked to science-fiction and the surreal of art-house cinema as the vehicle for my thoughts. My work captures the odd beauty of human connection and the intricacy of fear. The work explores the intersections of my own identity—dreams, science-fiction, the black/brown body, and storytelling. What began as a dive off a cliff of uncertainty into an ocean of the bizarre became a visual language supported by theatrical makeup, optical illusions, experimentations with alternative means of lighting, and larger-than-life performances before the camera. My art practice is a metaphysical rain cycle of dreams and personal truths, these pieces change form but never truly lose their dark humor or message as they turn from medium to medium. Crushed by the vacuum that is existence, I make work so that I may breathe as I float in search of meaning. This work impacts the cannon of narrative storytelling by means of shouting my blackness, my queerness, my everything into the void of cosmic horror. By forging a way to stare into the darkness I'm able to question if it looks back. I believe I must make this work because I must live. For me, living is feeling and if I must feel then I will explore this human action through art or risk madness.



The Fool Admires, 2021
35mm film, aviation jumpsuit, workboots,
sorrow, a fool
51 × 32 inches

Miriam A. Donis

With so many cultures, histories, languages, and behaviors, there is always something new to learn or a new gap to bridge.

By deconstructing and understanding the topic, the intended message, and its future consumer, I like to reintroduce ideas in a witty or punny way. From visual storytelling to spoken or participative interactions, I guide my work to be playful and communicative. The resulting body of work varies in form and quantity, as it depends on the information, story, experience, or proposal in question. The medium is always changing! When you see the work and spend some time with it, I want you to learn something as you laugh, cringe, or perhaps even get a little mad!

Whatever the reaction may be, I want the viewer to make a connection with the work or the information, or even wonder why there was an emotional shift with this encounter. Depending on when you find us, me and my work, we may look different; you may see words, pictures, illustrations, videos, or different objects; however, you find us, that sincere reaction is what we look to inspire.



Es Una Zorra (She's a Fox), 2020
Etching on paper
7 × 11 inches

Pulling the rug out—A transcript of an explanation of the idiom “to pull the rug out” (a possible conceptual model of the universe)

00:00 Pull the Rug Out From Under Someone’s Feet-Idioms-Meaning Examples Vocabulary

A full explanation of the idiom to pull the rug out from under someone’s feet, to pull the rug out from under someone, to pull the rug out from, to pull the rug out

00:00 hi this to pull the rug from out under somebody’s feet to pull the rug out from

00:10 under someone this means to take away from the support so when the bank

00:20 refused to lend him anymore money it pulled the rug

00:27 out the fact that the bank could be bankers and refused —ok—is to take the support

00:33 away from someone

00:36 it really pulled the rug out under his feet a rug is a small carpet so imagine

00:44 you’re standing on a carpet and somebody pulls the rug out from under your feet

00:49 you’re gonna fall ok so if you pull the rug out then it means you can’t

00:56 continue to do what you would do it makes it impossible because the

01:01 foundation has collapsed and disappeared

01:06 yes when they changed the law he pulled the rug out and the people couldn’t

01:15 continue the business they were doing they couldn’t continue the thing they

01:19 were doing ok so to pull the rug

01:37 and anyway enough

01:43 pull the rug out

– I SwearEnglish, April 24, 2016



A Weaving Carpet (detail), 2018, 2022
Found carpet
Variable dimensions

Liz Gates

Deconstructing and reimagining symbols of motherhood, the navigation of tension between competing forces anchors my process.

Through repetition, rearrangement, and reinvention, I'm exploring the dichotomy between parenthood and individualism, as well as the tension between the need for responsibility and the desire for rebellion. My practice is a conjuring of the internal processes that are imperative in severing old identities so as to create space for new understandings. The resulting body of work centers around questions of gendered labor, feminist mother identity, and self-manifestation.



Co-emergence, 2020
Diapers and felt on wooden stretcher
85 × 85 inches

María Jacinta Majithia

I like to create objects that are shiny and bright. One concept under development this past year is the revelation that bodies radiate color. Bodies exist and they have physical properties: weight, texture, color. All these qualities are part of the body and they are carried into every space they bring their presence into.

I build fluid objects by either modeling or joining, and then place them in a specific setting. Materials I find are selected by their potential as matter, which I then transform. Part of my practice is the selection of materials. I am attracted to tiles, wooden furniture, and mirrors. Many of the materials belong to the domestic space. I use these materials, many times in the literal way. For example, tiles are used as tiles, but they are not part of a human size construction, they are part of a surreal doll-like world. To further develop this agility of playing and constructing, I increase the potential weirdness of found objects by misplacing their essence. I like to bring attention to the beauty of decay, the beauty of the grotesque.



Mourning Shape, 2021
Ceramic tiles, wooden coffee table, satin fabric, mirror,
polyester fiber
120 × 100 × 100 inches

Tiffany Angel Nesbit

I stage situations in which stories take place. These narratives are influenced by nostalgic references to life living in tropical and wild areas of the Southern United States. The sculptures become theatrical props, set up playfully to engage the viewer and invite them into the story. My practice uses small individual characters that are physically tied together, sewn, or collaged to create large layers of bundles. The bundles represent the fullness or mischief that is possible when single living beings settle into larger groups. The structures are created from a mixture of found materials; obtained from roadsides, construction zones, and sentimental locations, these objects are combined with handmade elements like wood cuts, screen prints, ceramics, plants, paper, fabric, house paints and ropes. When exhibited, the sculptures are never shown the same twice. They are forever morphing into new piles and arrangements; creating environments for new tales and moments to be born.



Piles and Bundles, 2022

Ceramics, ropes and jute, zip ties, weathered metal wagons and springs, wood, paint, screen prints, wood cuts, paper, ink, coffee, and sewing thread
10 × 10 × 8 feet

Sydney Parks

Technology is an extension of our hands and minds. I utilize it to elicit haptic experiences that create tension between the human body and the virtual world. Ultimately, the work highlights the nature of an evolving humanity, while realizing the limitations of integration that still exist. I invite people to use their bodies to interact with and control technology, as they collaborate to conjure a work of art. Coding and sensors make this sort of interactivity possible. The physical materials I use represent the human form, while the digital materials allude to our inner selves.



Processing the Body, 2022
Wooden frame, latex, foam, spray paint,
looped video on embedded monitor
25 × 25 inches

Brent Reaney

As we continue to make more images of ourselves than ever, while thinking less about them, my work expands the conversation around photographic portraiture. Using an image, a series of images, words and sometimes objects, I represent people, places and myself while broadening what we might consider a portrait.

To accomplish this, I observe, interact with, and ask questions of individuals and locations. Working in America as a Canadian, I better understand this country through talking to people in and out of the studio. These exchanges, sometimes paired with quiet reflection, can build a raw, psychological surface within the resulting portrait, though any specific judgments usually say more about the viewer's experiences and biases than anything significant about the sitter.

In representing people without their faces, I consider how images of places and objects can contain vital information about someone's identity. In responding to places, I focus on often-overlooked elements, such as shelter-giving shadows in the West-Texas desert town of Marfa.

Many of my current projects start as a book with a related exhibition, installation, print or online presentation coming afterward.

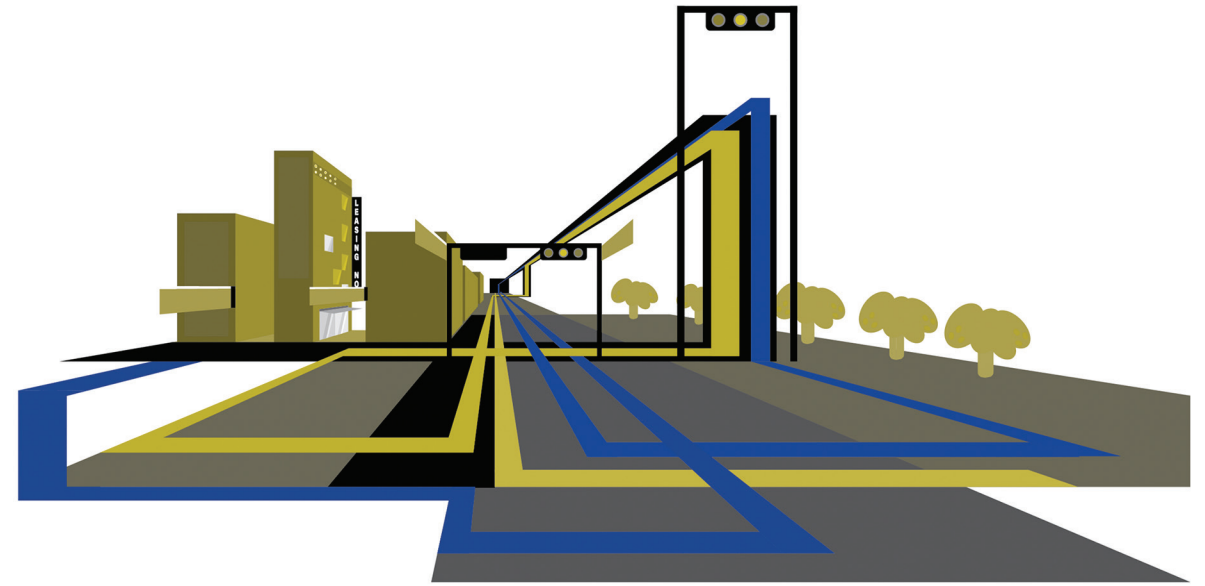


Elijah, from the Psychological Surface project, 2020
Digital C-print
40 × 30 inches

Ashita Sawhney

Design is educational. To me it is both learning and teaching. Advertising taught me the value of creative conceptualization to deliver the marketing goals for the target audience. Publishing furthered my perspective towards in-depth research.

In my creative projects, design is problem solving with functional aesthetics. Here the seed idea is intuitive and interactive as it engages the audience. Design can change a practice, belief, or behavior with an outreach of local or global participants. Studying these creative complexities has guided my process to explore traditional crafts and emerging technologies for new possibilities with material, format, and space. Here the craft adds historical and cultural identity with material study; and technology offers a learning platform to expand the idea.



City Square Deutan Map, 2021–2022
PETG lenticular sheeting, acrylic, and polystyrene
10 × 10 inches

Douglas Welsh

Life Raft, my current body of work, helps keep me afloat. It's a way of surviving, managing, and overcoming the ups and downs of my mood. *Life Raft* is a ritual during which I paint and listen to music simultaneously, often one song on repeat until a painting is complete. This process helps me access energies, feelings and memories, which I imbue into each work.

I resolve paintings because I want to resolve something within myself. The color and spatial relationships in my paintings can be lyrical, peaceful, disruptive, or tenuous, depending on my state of mind. I ebb and flow between control and release, and chaos and order, creating complex and dynamic abstract paintings.

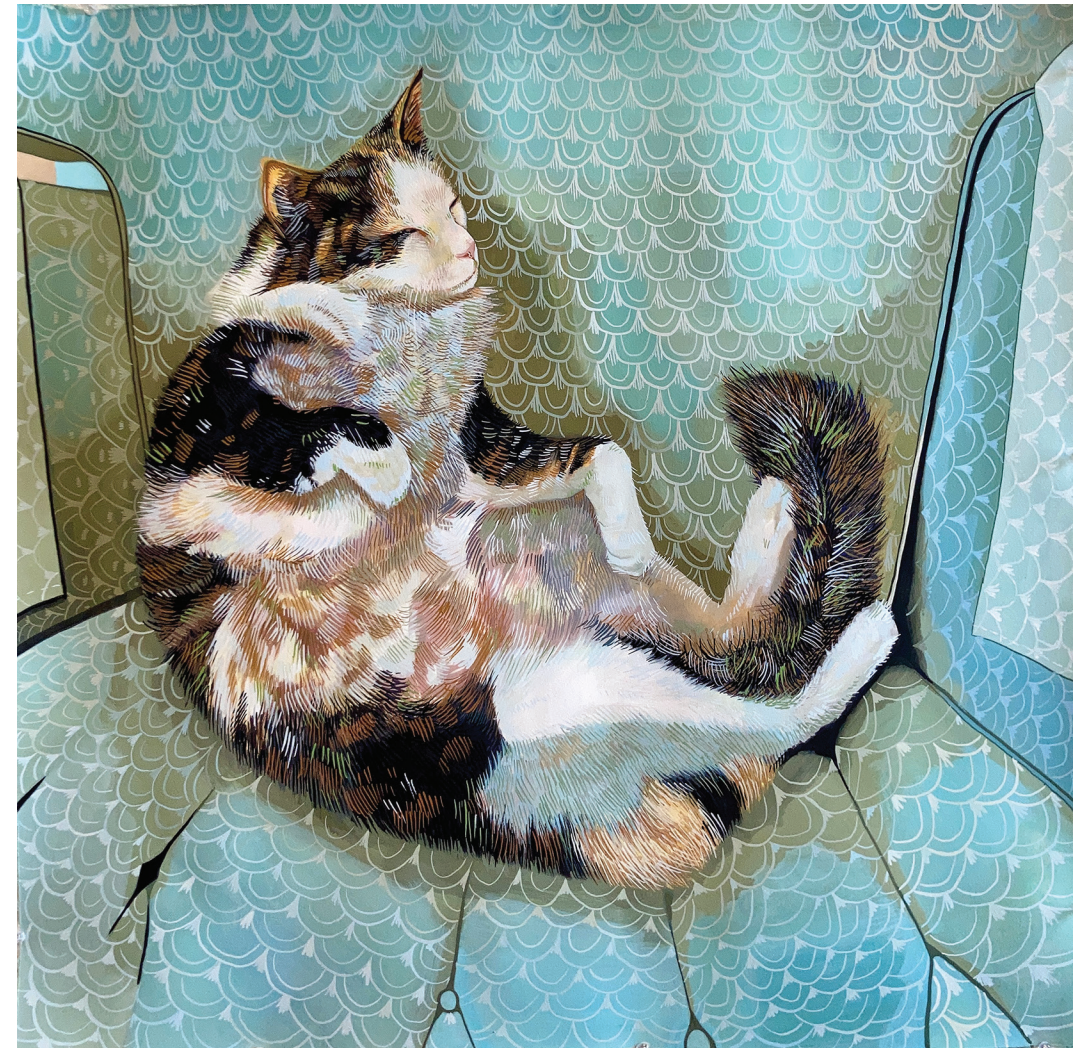
Ultimately, I seek harmony and balance in the interaction of these elements. This search for synergy is mirrored in my life, but I am secure on my *Life Raft*, for now.



Don't Go Dark, 2021
House paint on canvas
36 × 48 inches
Private collection

Isabelle Zimmerman

My paintings capture quiet moments from my everyday life. I anthropomorphize objects, whether it be a black cat, a bouquet of flowers, or a leather armchair, to represent human personalities, or memories that have affected me in significant ways. A lily symbolizes the extension of forgiveness, an empty seat signifies both an absence, and an invitation. A caged bird, or cat becomes an avatar for self portrait. The color world that my characters live in aids in supplying the emotional landscape of my paintings, invoking different moods and emotions such as peace, contemplation, or loss. My characters interact with each other and their environment, coexisting in a narrative. These stories allude to, and allow me to process experiences from my life such as feeling othered due to my racial identity, being objectified and stereotyped, or existing in both the safety and anxiety that exists within social isolation. My paintings are often quiet moments. Liminal spaces between one moment of action and the next. A cat lounging on a rug, bathing in the sunlight, or a drooping pink and green Christmas cactus resting on a table. The majority of my life consists of quiet, unremarkable moments. These moments are where I feel safest to explore and examine the world and the people in it, free of judgement or external social expectations. There is beauty and significance in the ordinary, and in being alone. Genuine connection with others is achieved when I bring my honest self to the world. This sense of self is molded by external circumstances, but can only be developed within the quiet, self reflective moments that make up my work.



Cat's Cradle, 2021
Gouache on paper
25 × 26 ½ inches

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