

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
NORTHRIDGE

2014 Thesis Exhibition
Master of Fine Arts | Master of Arts



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May 17 – June 7, 2014

Art Galleries

The exhibition and catalogue are supported by the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media and Communication, Art Department and Art Galleries at California State University, Northridge.

Cover:
(Left to right)

Nicole Clarey
Master Bedroom

April Bey
Beyoncé the Feminist Right?

Garrett Pointer
Volcano

Katrina Castillo
Omid

Kristen Dikio
Eight Eighty-Eight

Mona Seyedin
That Scent from Displacement

Nichole Gawalis
Great White Shark

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Adaptable Methodologies:

Remaining Sensitive to One's Relationship to the World

By Mario Ontiveros

"It seems to me that being the right size for your world—and knowing that both you and your world are not by any means fixed dimensions—is a valuable clue to learning how to live."

Jeanette Winterson ¹

"...it is through the day-to-day activities by means of which we produce our existence, that we can develop our capacity to cooperate and not only resist our dehumanization but learn to reconstruct the world as a space of nurturing, creativity, and care."

Silvia Federici ²

Introduction: Being Aware

While the graduate program at California State University, Northridge emphasizes both the depth and breadth of a selected field/medium, its interdisciplinary approach remains one of its greatest strengths. Many students enter the Department of Art grounded firmly, if not also confidently, in their practice. Courses and seminars often encourage them to risk the certainty that can accompany groundedness and self-assurance. Less an ethos against most forms of certainty and more an embrace of risk taking, the program seeks to unsettle expectations about art's function, to question investments in forms and concepts, and to challenge presumptions about making and creating. Risk taking need not imply disavowal, but it can encourage self-scrutiny and clarify the stakes of one's practice.

The eight artists in this exhibition have taken risks. Although utilizing discursive processes and deploying various methodologies, they raise questions about personal and shared memories, push against the restraints of online environments, look closely at the domestic interior, and propose alternative personal and social worlds. Moreover, their projects indicate that, while current conditions and pressures are not always binding, the self is always entangled in the sociopolitical demands and expectations that precede it. They remind us that being aware of the material realities of everyday life requires vigilance.³

Reflections on the Artists' Work ⁴

Kristen Dikio's sculptures, gallery projects, and street actions engage the longstanding legacy of artistic collaboration. Organized around participation and generosity, her work explores the transformation of daily life through aesthetics. In a media saturated economy that privileges the desire to communicate over face-to-face interactions, Dikio uses art and the exhibition space to enhance individual imagination. She emphasizes the significance of the participant, stating: "The viewer becomes an indispensable and productive element in the creative process, establishing a give-and-take dynamic that yields infinite outcomes unique to each participant."

Creating analogue spaces and forums for exchange, Dikio creates an alternative to social interactions increasingly reliant on screens and virtual hangouts. Through instructions, guidelines, and sculptural forms, she extends invitations to participate. While she configures the work's organizing principle, she leaves room for participants to redirect and reimagine the outcome. Her thesis work does not simply encourage contact between objects and participants, but seeks to enact an ongoing circuit of exchange between participants, objects, and the exhibition space, which hopefully continues beyond the gallery.

April Bey's work also centers on the complexity of media saturation. Her work reflects on the mostly reductive and

reactive exchange shaped by the limitations of social media. Instead of deliberation and critique, online activity rapidly disseminates distortion and miscommunication. She is quite clear about the absence of nuanced dialogue. "Trash clogs the digital arteries of communication and casts a tarnished patina of filth," she writes, noting "human beings can relate to each other more than ever before while bonding over mutual misconduct. The ability to broadcast ourselves and rapidly share has fostered misinformation...."

Her thesis project offers a scathing critique of online exchange and communication breakdown. However, she also constructively deploys the restraints of the instant message format. She generates polemical memes and hashtags to engender reactions. For example, one meme asserts: "Beyoncé the Feminist Right?" Rather than let the discourse plunge into spite, she continually asks responders to clarify and elaborate their views. One of the strengths of Bey's work is her ability to nudge discourse along, sometimes forcefully and other times gently.

Ashley Mistriel's mixed media work on paper similarly explores the breaking down of social structures. Focusing primarily on the dissolution of the family unit, she grapples with today's efforts to easily abandon once lifelong marriage vows and commitments. For Mistriel, the lingering persistence of these social ideals and personal aspirations are increasingly threatened by a culture that emphasizes the self first. In this context, she questions what it means to initiate, to build, and to sustain a longstanding commitment with another.

Using found photographs of family life in domestic settings, she creates a new image via collage, drawing, and painting. She omits people, leaving only empty dwellings: uninhabited dinner tables, loveseats, bizarre clusters of chairs, and lifeless living rooms. "When using found imagery," she writes, "my personal narrative informs the work creating a hybrid of autobiography and social statement." Her small-scale collages and watercolors

demonstrate the difficult process of investigating what can only exist as a projection of wholeness onto images of family life from earlier times.

Mona Seyedin focuses on the experience of loss that accompanies migration. Throughout her book, *Displacement*, she examines both the challenges of leaving behind family, friends, and community and the difficulty of creating a sense of belonging in an unfamiliar region and culture. By the simple act of page turning, readers experience the gulf separating here and there. One page shows swirling branches of a tree as its leaves tumble and scatter across a landscape. Her text tells of a tree she once planted in Iran that now withers without her care, and how she increasingly relies on a surrogate tree to mediate loss and separation.

Seyedin's images and texts indicate the paradox of dislocation. Several pages situate the reader at the beginning of spring and the Persian New Year. In one scene, a budding branch supports a singing nightingale. Together they emphasize the joy associated with this time of renewal. Yet, such hope seems dashed on the following page. Text written across a solitary fish stresses personal loss during a time of rejuvenation: "...symbolic seven items of New Year, those seven S's are missing. My seven S's are suspended. My happiness, courage, strength are suspended." Seyedin's book makes clear the complexity of displacement: "As I recall details from my lost homeland, I create an imaginary world from memories of the past."

Nicole Clarey's photographs also focus on isolation. "As the wife of an Air Force officer living off-base in Lancaster, California," she writes, "I make photographs within and outside of the undecorated walls of our rented 'home,' betraying my preoccupation with the uncertainty of military life and the inevitable and multiple relocations over the next ten years." In her work, however, she underplays her particular experiences to address solitude, disconnection, and ephemerality. Her

photographs are mostly sparse, dimly lit, and people-less interiors. Windows create clear borders separating inside and outside, me and you, and us and them. They reflect the boundaries between an interior hollowness and a presumed wholeness outside.

In her thesis work, Clarey concentrates on photographic processes. Across the gallery wall she layers hundreds of recently shot images of Joshua Trees. Improbably, some photographs look decades old, others seem fragile; and, still others are too color saturated, too fuzzy, or too sharply focused. Format and materials transform the Joshua Trees, too: sometimes they appear alien to their surroundings, menacing, majestic, clumsy, or lonely. Clarey's photographs exhibit how experience and knowledge of a subject changes depending on the processes and the materials used.

Analogue equipment and outmoded technology are sources for Nichole Gawalis. Based on her ongoing travels, she photographs subjects, objects, and spaces without knowing how or if the images turned out until she develops the film. This process runs counter to today's instantly reviewable, always re-doable digital technology. For Gawalis, the time lag between event and final image stimulates recollection and reflection. The materiality of working with negatives and developing her work in the darkroom also encourages reengagement with the subject matter. "Photographing within a mostly digital culture," she states, "I want my images to take up actual space and provide a sense of scale for the subjects they portray. The images become souvenirs of the places I visit, and my quiet presence and occasional participation in each scene imply an aesthetic and emotional investment in the process."

Her subject matter is the overlooked: restaurant interiors, suburban yards, plates of food, and people trimming hedges. When captured on film, however, these scenes become absurd and strange. Using form, color, and shapes, Gawalis creates

intricate connections between disparate moments, places, and things. She makes small-scale worlds that allow viewers to concoct narratives and to seek affinities from one work to the next.

Katrina Castillo's work examines how living spaces reveal personalities. From cardboard, she fabricates a life-size bathroom. It contains a cat litter box, a scale, hanging sweaters, and various body care products. The objects in the cabinets are fastidiously arranged. The room's organizing economy accommodates the inhabitants. A single toothbrush and a lone towel might indicate a solitary life. Her room exposes how something about one's class, gender, region, etc. can be gleaned from what we use daily. "My illustrations of interiors invite the viewer into other people's domestic environments," states Castillo, "...allowing each arrangement and item to "speak" on behalf of the dwellers."

Castillo also addresses a consumer culture of desire. IKEA, Home Depot, and the HGTV network sell lifestyles. Home improvement is life betterment: redesigning a bathroom gives a fresh start, building a "man cave" restores vitality, and remodeling a kitchen feels like facelift. Castillo's handmade, cardboard bathroom sensitizes viewers to this fantasy. Precisely because her fabricated bathroom is a cardboard illustration, it stresses the surface of things and the power of objects to signify more than their material properties. Her bathroom as self-portrait emphasizes how objects construct identity and serve to augment a sense of self, real or imagined.

Garrett Pointer's sculptures also make the familiar strange. He uses found objects and discarded materials to address his overarching concerns: "...popular culture, post 9/11 politics, American war culture, pollution, food safety, corporate dominance, and media slop. I wish to salvage humor out of these terrible things while stripping them of their power." His human-scale and drooping sculptures, some resembling carrots, use exaggeration to indicate that the regularized produce found in supermarkets adheres to the ideas of what consumers think

vegetables and fruits should look like. On the farm, however, irregularity in shape and diversity in color are expected.⁵

Pointer builds on the tension between materials. With biting sarcasm and a flair for the abject, a current sculpture resembles a flowerbed. Upon closer inspection, the flowers are deflated and useless basketballs, soccer balls, and tennis balls. Each wilted ball rests atop a painted metal pipe that springs upward. He allows binaries to form (hard/soft, feminine/masculine, growth/decay) though he never offers resolution. Using available, castoff materials, he makes beguiling sculptures that provoke dialogue, instigate laughter, and maybe even gnashing of teeth. His work leaves viewers stranded.

Conclusion: Adaptable Methodologies

Sustaining an artistic practice after graduate school is seldom easy. It was not necessary easygoing in the midst of it, of course. Throughout the program so-called outside personal and professional demands, responsibilities, and obligations never switched off. Dedicating time to graduate studies alongside everything else required ongoing maintenance, finessing, and negotiations. Yet an ever-ready network of peers and faculty lent support, gave comfort, shared insights, and helped stave off debilitating doubt. Collectivity engendered sustenance. Looming deadlines and committee meetings enabled production. Work materialized. A system of support mattered.

For the eight graduating artists in this exhibition, what ways can a system of support develop outside the academy? What are the necessary conditions needed to continue a studio practice? The methodologies developed in the graduate program will provide guidance as issues and demands intensify after graduation. Yet different and unforeseen questions and pressures will require new models, patterns, and parameters. Will the methodologies formed in the graduate program adapt? Will they continue to serve as an enabling resource? Hopefully, the methodologies will encourage sensitivity and awareness. Being aware is

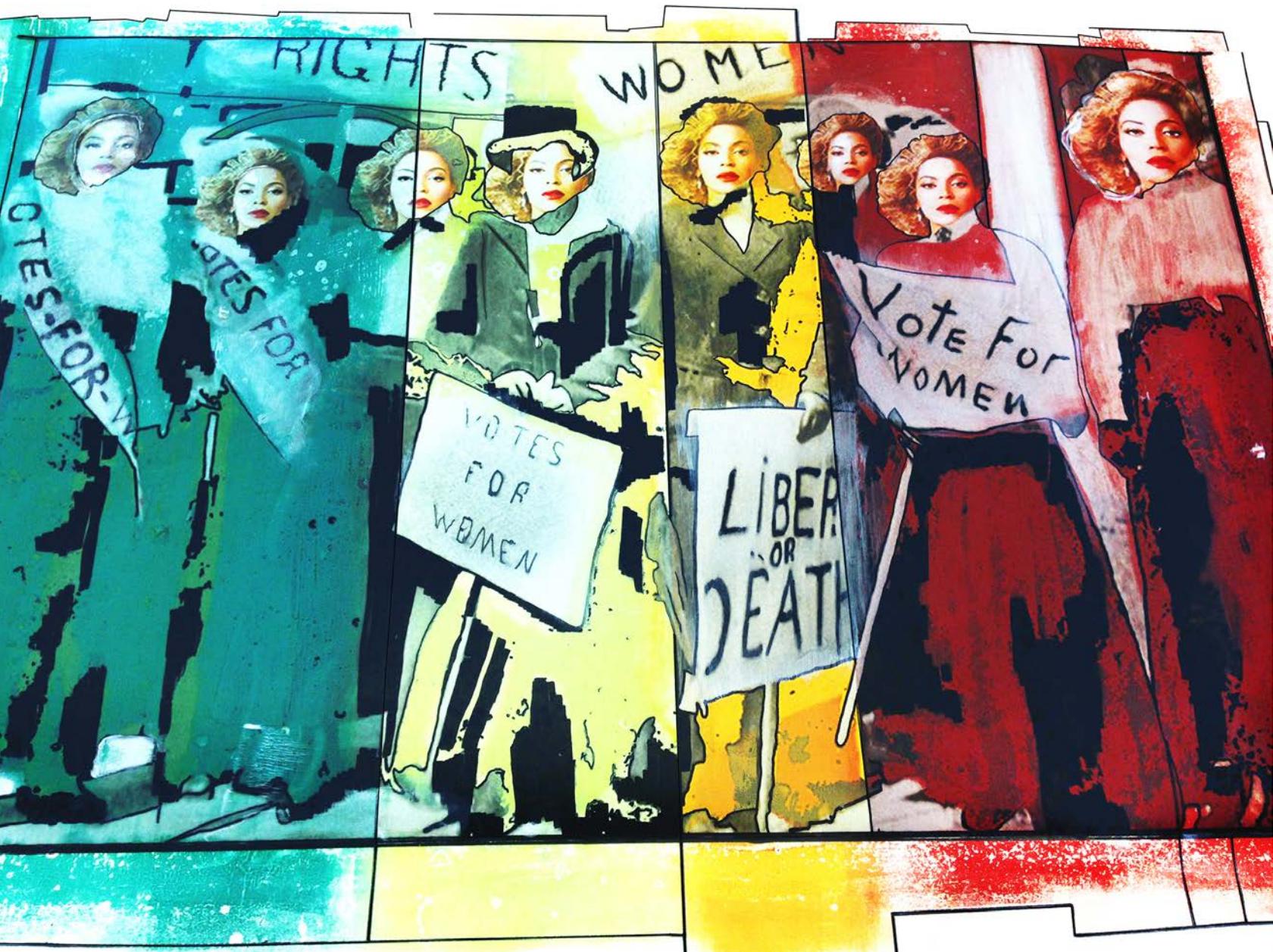
seldom easy, of course. In her story "Solitude" Ursula K. Le Guin's narrator Serenity states this unequivocally: "Being aware is the hardest work the soul can do, I think."⁶ Undoubtedly, these artists are keenly prepared for this hard work. May their commitment to their practice bring them success and continue transforming their relationship to the world.

Acknowledgement:

For her invaluable feedback, I would like to thank Ellen Fernandez-Sacco, PhD.

(Endnotes)

- ¹ Jeanette Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (Grove Press, 2012), Kindle edition: Chapter 4.
- ² Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (PM Press, 2012), Kindle edition: Introduction.
- ³ I borrow the phrase "being aware" from Ursula K. Le Guin's "Solitude," in *The Unreal and the Real, Selected Stories of Ursula K. Le Guin, vol. 2 of Outer Space, Inner Lands* (Small Beer Press, 2012), Kindle edition.
- ⁴ Unless stated otherwise, the artist quotes are based on the artist statements reproduced in the exhibition catalogue.
- ⁵ This information is based on a group critique with the artist, March 14, 2014.
- ⁶ Le Guin, "Solitude," Kindle edition.



Beyoncé the Feminist Right?, 2014
Mixed media monoprint, 20"X30"

APRIL BEY

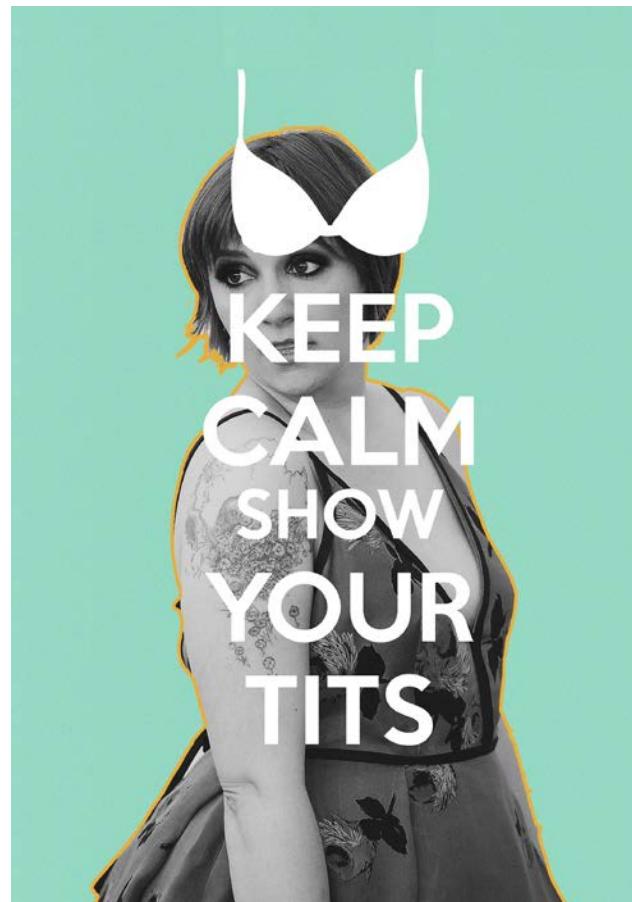
M.F.A., PAINTING

#WhoDoYouWorship?

Trash clogs the digital arteries of communication and casts a tarnished patina of filth; human beings can relate to each other more than ever before while bonding over mutual misconduct. The ability to broadcast ourselves and rapidly share has fostered misinformation, compelling the consumer of popular culture to be editors of their own content.

The images and text in *#WhoDoYouWorship?* depict celebrities glamorizing trash culture in a digital age. Selected are four contemporary icons adored by millions, represented in meme format but executed using traditional painting techniques. The deities represented are Beyoncé, Olivia Pope (Kerry Washington), Miley Cyrus, and Lena Dunham.

Ghetto culture is accessorized by the wealthy and deemed "swag" while at the same time circumventing the real issues of the actual ghetto. Culled from the Internet, this installation is a presentation of what we typically consume, broadcast digitally and the aspects of being human we maintain and relinquish.



#WhoDoYouWorship? (Hannah Horvath's Tits), 2014
Digital maquette, 48"X36"



#WhoDoYouWorship? (Hannah Montana's Swag), 2014
Digital maquette, 48"X36"



#WhoDoYouWorship? (Beyoncé the Feminist), 2014
Digital maquette, 48"X36"



#WhoDoYouWorship? (Washington's White Hat), 2014
Digital maquette, 48"X36"



Shoes, 2013
Brush and ink,
digital, 6.3"x11"



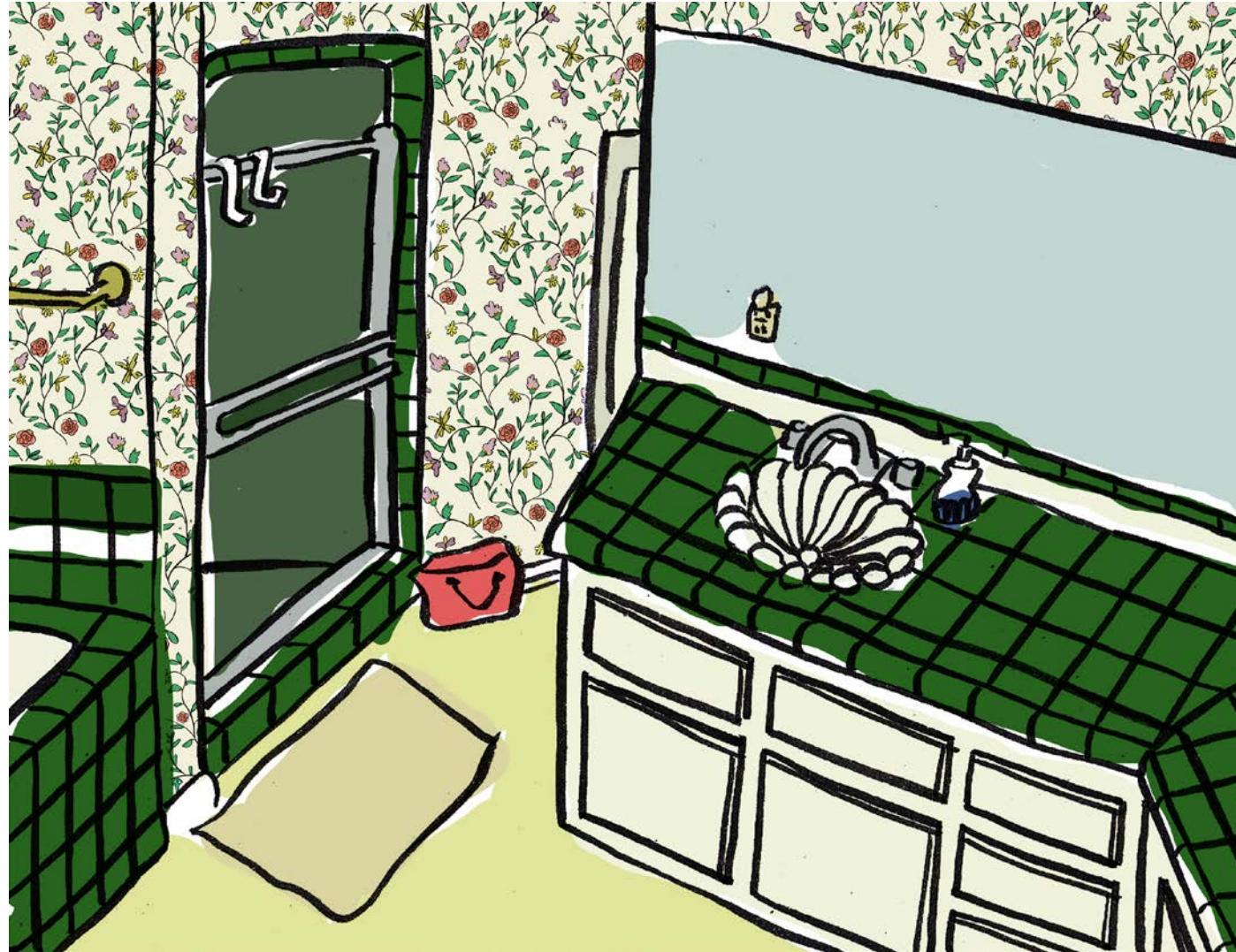
Gamer, 2013
Brush and ink,
digital, 6.3"x11"

KATRINA CASTILLO

M.A., ILLUSTRATION

My work is inspired by personal observations or experience. I am interested in how people choose to present themselves to others, either through clothing, things they collect or how they choose to display their home.

Shelter culture also plays a large part in my work. My illustrations of interiors invite the viewer into other people's domestic environments. Populated by the essential and elective items life entails, these illustrations exclude the inhabitants, allowing each arrangement and item to "speak" on behalf of the dwellers. While the different interiors are rendered with the same hand, mine, each home's belongings and décor reflect the inhabitants' distinct personalities and lifestyles. My drawings are playful, affording viewers a voyeuristic look into other people's lives.



Omid, 2013
Brush and ink, digital, 8.5"x11"



Cat Bathroom, 2013
Brush and ink, digital, 8.5"x5.5"



Pink Bathroom, 2013
Brush and ink, digital, 8.5"x5.5"



Fernie, 2013
Brush and ink, digital, 14"x11"



0800 Hours, 2013
Image 3, chromogenic print, 8"x10"



0800 Hours, 2013
Image 8, chromogenic print, 8"x10"



0800 Hours, 2013
Image 18, chromogenic print, 8"x10"



0800 Hours, 2013
Image 20, chromogenic print, 8"x10"

NICOLE CLAREY

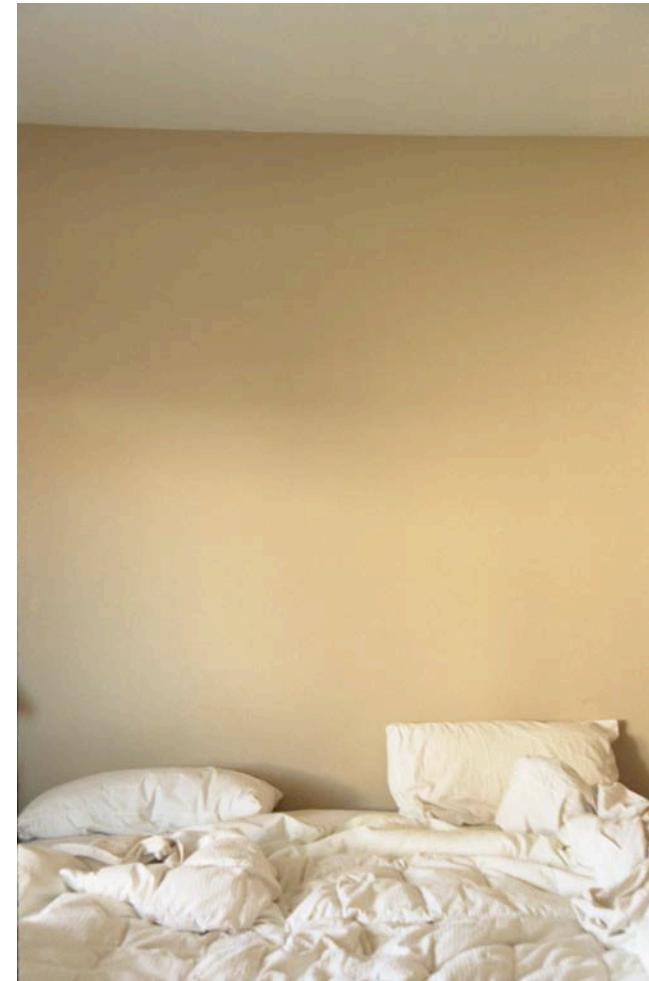
M.A., PHOTOGRAPHY

Observing and documenting the passage of time, I photograph ordinary details in and around the domestic environment, emphasizing the tenuousness of the light as the world changes outside. This attempt to salvage beauty in an unlikely space cultivates a profound visual silence amid impermanence. While the photographs make the psychological environment tangible, the flat affect and reductive compositions deflect the physical world of specifics and attempt to preserve that which is fleeting and ineffable.

The series *Transient* uses traditional photographic processes to explore physical and emotional states of impermanence and isolation. As the wife of an Air Force officer living off-base in Lancaster, California, a perpetual outside to the community, I make photographs within and outside of the undecorated walls of our rented "home," betraying my preoccupation with the uncertainty of military life and the inevitable and multiple relocations over the next ten years.



Joshua Tree 02, 2014
Chromogenic print, 11"x14"



Master Bedroom, 2014
Chromogenic print, 16"x20"



Neighbors, 2014
Chromogenic print, 16"x20"



How to forget
Gum ball machine, gum balls, metal, wood, jars, saliva.
50"x 24"x 36"



*For your convenience at social gatherings
especially at art openings (detail)*
Installation, dimensions vary.



Trash from the pockets of people looking at art
Yellow sweater, resin, metal, trash. 53"x24"x20"



13 hours of chewing the gum from a gum ball machine
Saliva, jars, wood. 6"x 24"x 4"

KRISTEN DIKIO

M.A., SCULPTURE

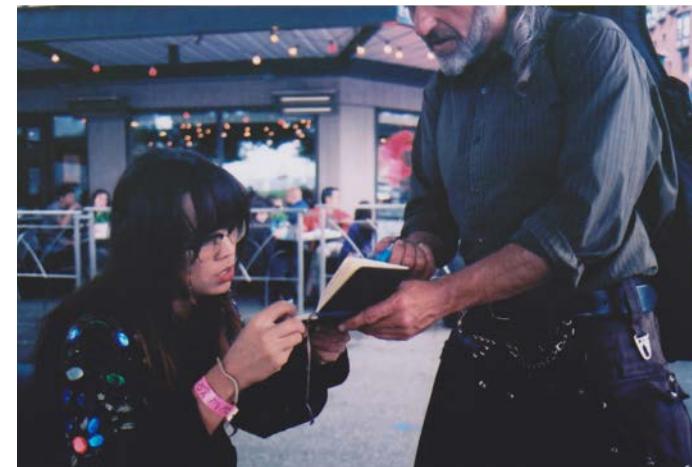
I create experiences through constructed objects, performances, and installations that are accessible to an inclusive audience. Through engagement, the viewer is unified with the exclusive, rarefied gallery space. I explore themes regarding collaboration, public and personal space, and finding inherent beauty in seemingly insignificant moments. My process challenges passive viewing by inviting the audience to exert its curiosity, oftentimes contributing to the outcome of the work. The viewer becomes an indispensable and productive element in the creative process, establishing a give-and-take dynamic that yields infinite outcomes unique to each participant.



Eight Eighty-Eight (Installation)
Performance. Dimensions vary



All Moved In
Installation. Dimensions vary



Eight Eighty-Eight
Performance. No dimensions.



The big wheel and all the little things
Installation. Dimensions vary



Palm Springs, 2011
Chromogenic print, 24" x 20"

NICHOLE GAWALIS

M.A., PHOTOGRAPHY

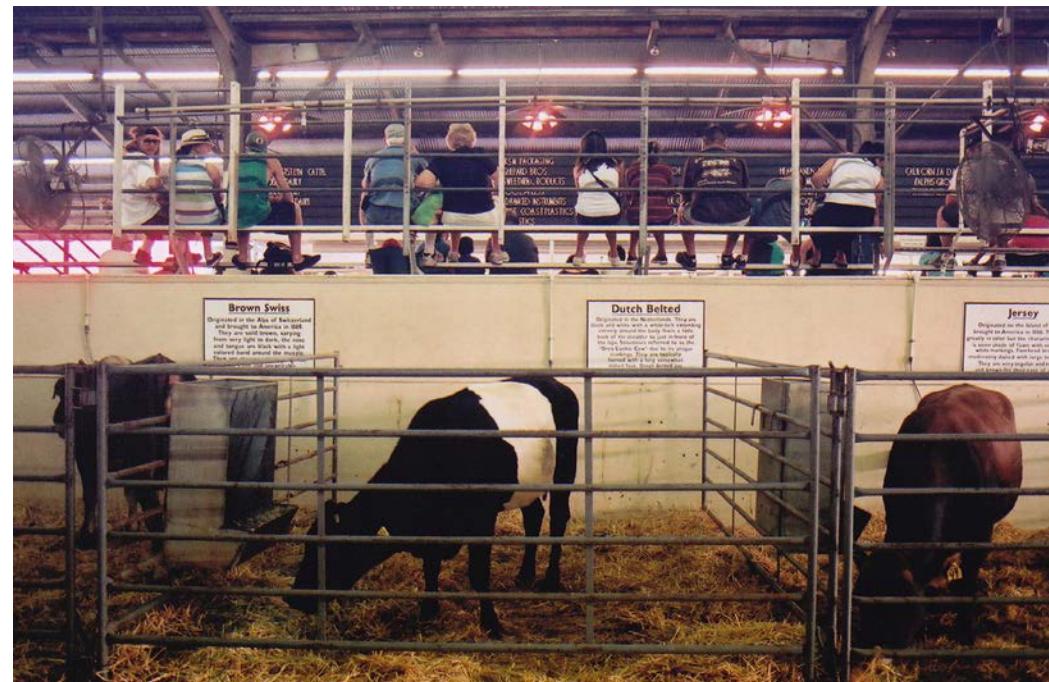
Restlessness permeates my photographic practice. I seek out new but strangely familiar places and experiences, and this quietly adventurous mood informs the work. I am drawn to the narrative possibilities of photography, and I use film to photograph unaltered environments and the objects and people that inhabit them. The 35mm cameras I find in second hand stores allow me to exploit the surprising visual effects created by these broken and outdated tools. I print the negatives in a darkroom, because I enjoy the control, process, and tangibility of working with analog equipment. Each print's nuanced color, highlight and shadow detail amplify the individual moments, unassuming objects, and unlikely places I photograph. Photographing within a mostly digital culture, I want my images to take up actual space and provide a sense of scale for the subjects they portray. The images become souvenirs of the places I visit, and my quiet presence and occasional participation in each scene imply an aesthetic and emotional investment in the process.



Great White Shark, 2011
Chromogenic print, 24" x 20"



Dennys, 2013
Chromogenic print,
24" x 20"



LA County Fair, 2011
Chromogenic print,
24" x 20"



Sitting Rooms, 2014
Gouache on Paper, 22"x22"

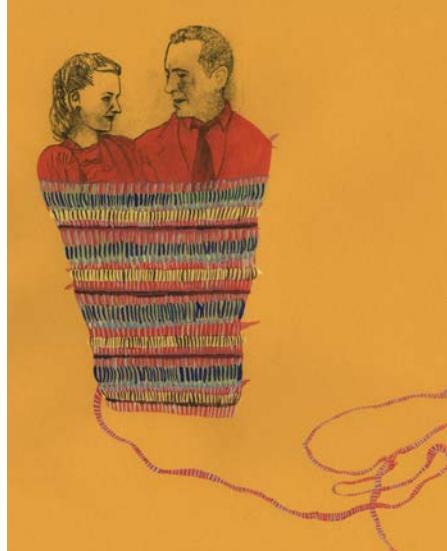
ASHLEY MISTRIEL

M.A., ILLUSTRATION AND PAINTING

Through a combination of drawing, painting, collage, and printmaking my work explores the complex relationships within the family unit, specifically the breakdown of those relationships. I reference personal and found family photographs of the mid-twentieth century to explore and compare a shift in cultural values towards commitment, accountability, and responsibility. When using found imagery, my personal narrative informs the work creating a hybrid of autobiography and social statement. I approach my illustration work in a similar mindset and allow for works to develop naturally. Embracing experimentation, failure, and repetition have become key components in my studio practice.



Fracking Sinkholes, 2013
Photo Collage and Ink on Paper, 14"x11"



Sweater Weather, 2013
Xerox Transfer and Acrylic on Paper, 12"x12"



Lord, 2013
Photo Collage on Paper, 14"x11"



I Want More, 2013
Xerox Transfer and Gouache on Paper, 8"x10"



Swimming Pool, 2014
Gouache on Paper, 22"x22" (Detail)



Volcano

GARRETT POINTER

M.A., SCULPTURE

I work to be Mickey Mantle, chasing the Babe, stepping in a drainpipe. To bludgeon like George "The Animal" Steele. To be cunning like a bunt lay off the bat of Brett Butler.

My work encompasses concerns pertaining to: popular culture, post 9/11 politics, American war culture, pollution, food safety, corporate dominance, and media slop. I wish to salvage humor out of these terrible things while stripping them of their power. Concepts of the abject, such as those proposed by Julia Kristeva inform my work and are mashed with icons to expose vulnerability, futility, and defeat. I utilize found objects, or better, orphaned treasures and trophies of insignificance to execute conceptual pieces. I infuse energy into my work through touch, using repetition, bastardization, and my sweet caress to implant the desired energies into sculptures.

My studio practice is inspired by intertwined glories and tragedies present in the spectacle of sport, best highlighted by Los Angeles Dodgers announcer of 65 years Vin Scully. The pace, athleticism, and improvisation in sports inspire my actions when in the studio. I am in battle with materials, applying the Figure-Four Leg Lock, making them submit.

I represent forms that express an elusive abject hilarity in the oppression of the human animal. By focusing on this I hope to expedite a greater freedom and dismantle illegitimate powers.

I work to be like Ty Cobb sliding into third base, spikes up, sneering.



Carrot (The Future Is Malign)



Wish Column



Sexy Boy (Still)



MONA SEYEDIN

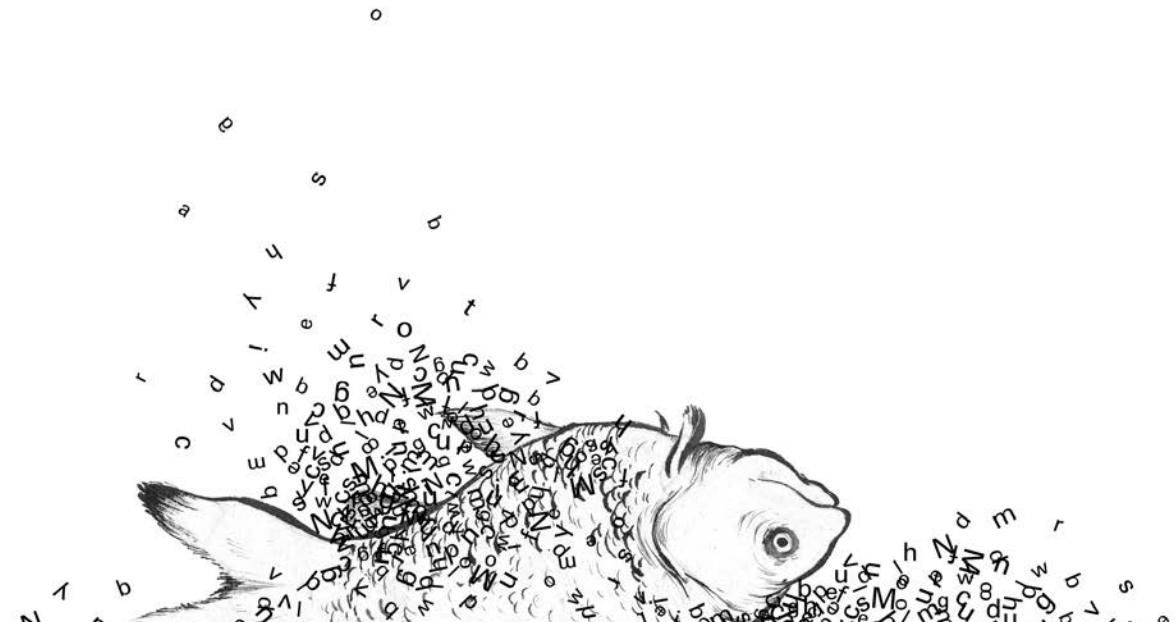
M.A., GRAPHIC DESIGN

Displacement is a book that contains visual interpretations regarding my separation and resettlement from my native Iran to the United States. The narrative chronicles my struggle to adapt to a different community and culture within an unfamiliar geographical setting. As I recall details from my homeland, I create an imaginary world from memories of the past.

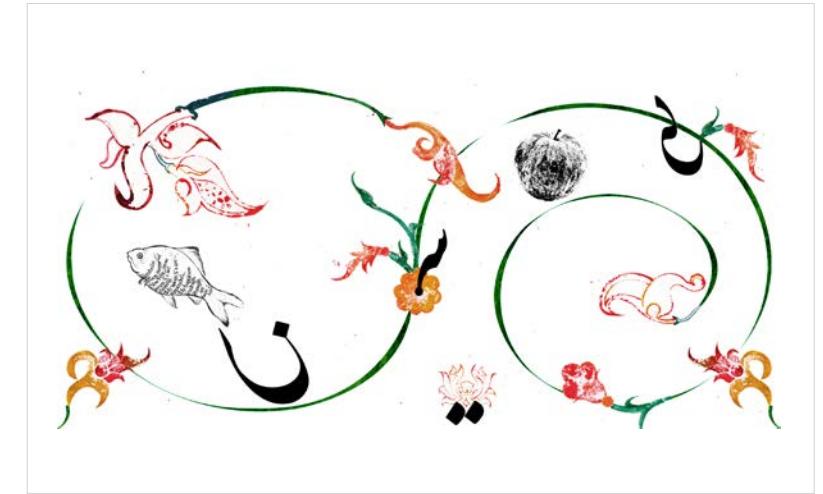
Utilizing symbolism (such as the tree, the rose, and the nightingale) and a range of analog and digital graphic techniques, each two-page spread in *Displacement* conveys various complexities of my experience as an émigré. By combining poetry and design in the form of a book, *Displacement* allows a more personal and sequentially accurate conveyance of my experience to the viewer.

Detail, *That Scent from Displacement*, 2014
Limited edition artist book containing
archival inkjet prints.
9.125" X 9.125"

Detail, *It Couldn't Jump from Displacement*, 2013
Limited edition artist book containing
archival inkjet prints.
9.125" X 9.125"



Detail, *It Wouldn't Ring from Displacement*, 2014
Limited edition artist book containing archival inkjet prints.
9.125" X 9.125"



Detail, *Confusion from Displacement*, 2013
Limited edition artist book containing archival inkjet prints.
9.125" X 9.125"



Detail, *Notice Sound from Displacement*, 2013
Limited edition artist book containing archival inkjet prints.
9.125" X 9.125"

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Special thanks to Cynthia Rawitch, Dean of the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication;
Edward Alfano, Chair of the Art Department; Samantha Fields, Graduate Coordinator; Mario Ontiveros, Essay Author,
Graduate Faculty; California State University Northridge Art Galleries; Jim Sweeters, Gallery Director;
Michelle Giacomuzzi, Exhibitions Coordinator; and Brian Herbst for the catalogue design.

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