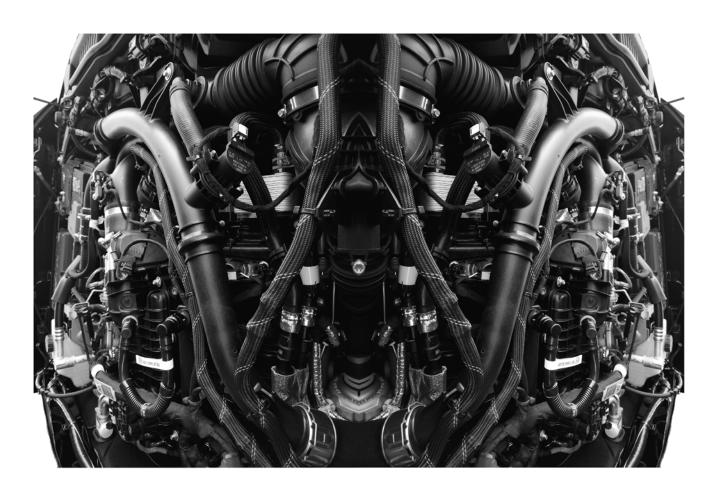
Graduate Exhibition

Master of Arts | Master of Fine Arts





Cover Image
Michael Montemayor
Mahayana: Duality of Samsara, 2023
platinum palladium print on Arches platine
30" x 22"

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Master of Arts | Master of Fine Arts Spring 2023



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Right
Melora Garcia
Carpets, Vaccines and Watermelon Dreams (portal no.3), 2022-2023
mixed media
86" x 49" x 30"

Essay

Lesley Krane Professor, Department of Art

Before American actress Jennifer Coolidge invoked "the core of the onion" in her role as beleaguered billionaire Tanya McQuoid in HBO Max's "The White Lotus" (season 1, episode 5), my best friend in graduate school (I'll call her Stella) wrote her Master of Fine Arts thesis as a collection of autobiographical, somewhat fictionalized, essays, entitled "Giving Birth to Onions" (University of New Mexico, 1997). In Part One, she writes about working in the produce section of a small grocery store, hauling out fifty-pound sacks of onions, slicing open their red plastic mesh with a paring knife, and reaching in to pull out the onions one by one. Because they were "frayed and dusty with mold," Stella peeled away their paper-thin layers of brown, desiccated skin with her hands still in the bag; she delighted in each layer's revelation, whether taut and shining or pierced and weeping, and saw that what mattered most was the process of discovering and uncovering what existed beneath the surface.

In "The White Lotus," Tanya's desperate declaration, "I just wanna skip all the layers, and just go straight to the crazy...you know, just show him the core of the onion," acknowledges her visceral expectation of rejection while revealing her dismissal of and fatigue with the important and necessary process of discovering and uncovering. She wants to

"...just cut to the chase" and arrive at a resolution without putting in the effort, labor, and time.

The sixteen students participating in this year's graduate exhibition have uncovered, examined, and looked beneath the many layers of their work during their time in the Visual Arts graduate programs at CSUN; the efficacy and rigor of their art practices depend on these processes. When asked to describe their work. students may say it's "about identity" or "memory" or "trauma," but these words have suffered from institutional use, becoming art world shorthand for categorical concepts that are unwieldy both in their broad application and their fraught power to halt further inquiry; they do a disservice to the artist and the work, guarding the core without

revealing its nuanced explorations.

Ceramics, drawing, illustration, painting, printmaking, sculpture, and lens-based media comprise the areas of concentration that students are institutionally required to identify as they matriculate through their Master of Arts and Master of Fine Arts degree

programs. But the beauty, and the value, of the Visual Arts graduate programs at CSUN are their encouragement toward multidisciplinary approaches and thinking. Whether that means photography students work in three dimensions or painting students use digital tools or illustration students consider time-based solutions, each of the

students completing their degree this academic year has created, discussed, evaluated, and reflected on their work within the larger context of contemporary art discourse.

While this exhibition of graduate projects partially fulfills the requirements for graduate degrees, the students are also required to supplement their visual artwork with a written abstract, erroneously called a thesis in this academic context (the Graduate Project is the thing). While writing this document presents a daunting task for dents who pavigate the world as visual makers.

this document presents a daunting task for students who navigate the world as visual makers and thinkers, this process encourages peeling away the layers of the onion, so to speak; it sustains the act of looking at and within and thinking about every aspect of the work, from conception, to planning, to process, to realization. Writing articulates and reveals intentions and unexpected discoveries that might otherwise go unacknowledged. Sometimes the discoveries belie the students' intentions, and the work uncovers meaningful and palpably resonant vulnerabilities. These revelations inform the soughtafter core of the work.

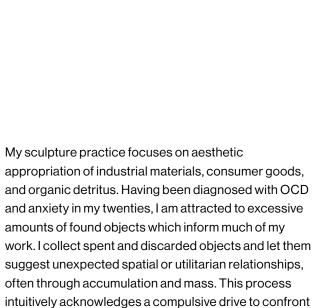
In "Giving Birth to Onions," Stella introduces Karen and describes her as feeling "...distanced from the world, like she was swathed in layers. She said she felt like an onion" and "...had to explain about the onion... to new people" in group therapy. Karen's words acknowledge her commitment to leaving the layers intact, refusing to be vulnerable in the process of self-discovery. But Stella wrote, "I have learned from experience that it is the dense core of the onion, the part where the roots once grew, that holds all the power."

Without fail, I am always humbled by students' faith in this process of making and discerning meaning beneath the chaos and density of their layers.

This compulsion to work in a world crowded with judgments and "shoulds" and stuff makes me hopeful.

Malayna **Busik**

MA Sculpture



elements that society has rejected and transform their

abject status through absurd or playful juxtapositions

and the application of lighthearted color palettes. The physicality of rendering unwieldy elements in balance is therapeutic, soothing my anxiety while fostering mental space to develop ideas. Aspects of scale and precarity encourage an investigation of the whole, both in the sum of its parts and as a cooperative endeavor of disparate parts. Sculpture is interactive in terms of physicality of occupied space, and I approach my work with an awareness that it will be completed by the viewers' physical and emotional encounters in communion with the object.

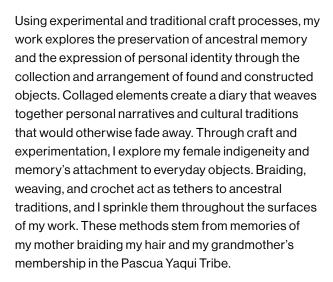


Canned Flowers, 2023 aluminum cans, rivets, staples



Melora Garcia

MFA Sculpture



Bulbous cysts and geometric forms made with wood and woven fabric, with detritus embedded



in their surfaces, become metaphors for the body, abnormalities, and remnants from the Anthropocene. I explore themes of preservation and decay through the gradual layering of materials ranging from dried nopales, paper, clay, and resin. Collaborating with ancestors and friends manifests in collage, sculpture, photography, and the transferring of images throughout my work. Many of the photographs I use are drawn from my grandmother's photo albums.

This body of work explores the interstitial spaces of identity and attempts to recover intergenerational histories through craft, experimentation, and collection. With an objective of giving form to indigenous stories, my work functions as a time machine embarking on speculative interventions that reimagine cultural histories.

acrylic, found polaroid camera with Manny's sticky notes, plastic bag, fabric remnants, chopstick wrapper and deflated balloon on wood

acrylic, fabric, symbolic organic material, paper clay, rocks, wheel, broken ceramics, Dorothy's crochet flower, wire, and found objects on wood

24" x 44" x 8"



Top Right *Murky (night occurrences), 2021*stop motion still 00:02:15

Bottom Right
Metamorphosis, 2022
stop motion still 00:02:26

Maxine Lemuz

MA Painting



Marionette Head, 2022 chicken wire, papier-mâché, popcorn ceiling paste, acrylic, glitter, and threads 1.5' x 8" x 2'

My paintings, sculptures and stop motion films explore textures, color and microcosms. These various manifestations of my practice invoke the hauntings of daily life soaked in anxiety, numbness, and the unease of futurity. My initial process of painting reveals only certain visual elements and then allows some of their features to become more evident. Inspired by pareidolic formations found in popcorn ceilings, I am interested in the depth and movement within the crevices of the textures in my paintings. Pierrot clowns, marionettes, and other theatrical characters populate my work. They captivate me as ambiguous and non-binary presences. My color palette brings a carnivalesque, playful, and festive twist to dark subject matter, and I capture these figures in vulnerable moments of isolation, self-reflection, and existential dread.

I use various media such as clay, stop motion film, music, and painting to create a many-layered, other-worldliness. Using and manipulating various textures feature prominently in my work. Popcorn ceiling medium produces a bumpy residue while clay has a more controlled physicality. The handmade animation in stop motion evokes a numbed, static state of consciousness and an unsettling series of never-ending movements; together these elements establish an ambiguity of existence and lifelessness as well as anxiety and comfort. I use the essence of haunting dreams to recreate the eerie sensation found in my stop motion work and translate that into my paintings. The characters and overall tone of my films bleed into my paintings and vice versa.





Renming Liu

MA Photography/Video

I was born and raised in China, a country that chases white, young, slim aesthetics. I cared about my appearance because friends called me nicknames like "fat girl" and "cake face," and the boy I longed for called me "dinosaur," which means "horrid girl." I believed my face and body prevented people from loving me. I didn't take selfies and did not like being in photos.

When I decided to study abroad in the U.S., I discovered the diversity of aesthetics, but my mental health suffered, and I began taking medications. The medication helped my brain but altered my body, and I gained over fifty pounds.

But now I am not ashamed because I have seen many beautiful, confident, cool, "chubby" girls, and I ask myself, as long as I'm healthy, why I can't be one of them? But although I no longer engage in body shaming, my mom and family friends do.

Similarly, I recently rescued a cat; friends told me she was too skinny. As I nurtured her back to health, they called her



Goddess (calf), 2022 inkjet print 24" x 36"

"fat cat" and said she had to lose weight. No matter the body's kind or shape, shaming persists.

In my lens-based project "Goddess," I model the self-confidence and self-love everyone should practice.

Showing my "ugly" body parts and pretending to be in a beauty pageant, I use sound and video to share actual feedback from family and friends and present the idea that, although I cannot satisfy everyone, being confident and self-loving improves the world.





Goddess (belly), 2022 inkjet print 24" x 36"

Goddess (halo 2), 2022 inkjet print 24" x 36"

Stay Up, 2022 inkjet print dimensions variable

Eurice McNeal

MA Photography/Video

The Actor, The Gamer, The Observer

My photographs portray the parallels and dualities of my self, the introvert and the extrovert. In my private life I bask in solitude, preferring to stay out of sight, but in my life as an actor I become more animated and extroverted; as a gamer I function on a continuum from one extreme to another. Experimenting with several cameras, I use a DSLR for street photography and a smartphone for atmosphere, detail, and intimate photographs wherever I may be. Each approach offers different perspectives and calls attention to visual elements and relationships that are often overlooked or perhaps forgotten. Through abstraction, distortion, and various proximities, my images express comfort and solitude within my own established boundaries while



sometimes breaching them. Smartphone technology "fixes" images by smoothing the noise yet distorting compositions; similarly, any camera movement and optical blurring confuses the digital capture. These results transform ordinary scenes, whether artificially or naturally lit, into subjectively altered observations.

Lonely Road, 2021 inkjet print dimensions variable





I Miss You, 2022 inkjet print dimensions variabl

Below

Hongo de la Memoria (Memory Fungus) 2022 snow globe, glass, paper clay, wood, acrylic airbrush & watercolor 10" x 5"

Ramiro Meza

MA Painting/Sculpture

My work reimagines utilitarian spaces through multimedia installations that obscure boundaries and form immersive ambient environments. Using plexiglass boxes, exploded framing materials, plaster, clay, pastel and metallic paints, I merge sculpture, abstract screen prints, and sound design. The resulting sensory loops disrupt expectations of architectural and aesthetic order through fragmentation and dissonance. A dimensionless atmosphere invites viewers to engage in the plurality of memory, imagined worlds, metronomic vibrations, and rhythmic tension to defuse contemporary anxieties.



Right Fósil de Hongo (Mushroom Fossil), 2023 metallic silk screen ink on Artistico watercolor paper 300 lb. hot press



Michael Montemayor

MA Illustration

My work is driven by autobiographical content exploring identity, adaptation, fragility, and balance through the use of coded imagery. The work references everything from 80's and 90's pop culture, video games, heavy metal, Eastern car aesthetics, meditation, and nature. I fuse my imagery with the teachings of Shintoism and Zen Buddhism which serve as grounding philosophies for me. My exploration of these concepts through juxtaposing subject matter with light sensitive processes seeks to investigate the interconnections shared between humankind. Through processing our various surroundings and the machinery we utilize, we navigate overcoming the red-light overload of life and living in the danger zone. The mediums I use are reflections upon my arduous journey towards enlightenment, and simultaneously serve as a commentary about the passage of time and the relationship between decay and preservation.

Uncharted Drifter, 2022 toned cyanotype on Arches paper 22" x 30"





Chromatic Groove, 2022
platinum palladium print on Arches platine



Mahayana: Synchronization of Raijin, 2023 platinum palladium print on Arches platine 30" x 22"

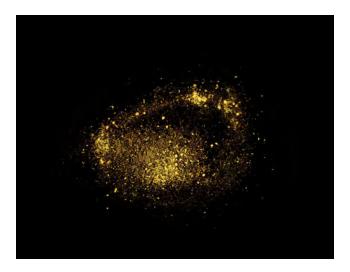
Matter (17), 2022 inkjet print from scanned photogram, 32" x 40"

Teresa K. Morrison

MFA Photography/Video

My photographs and videos highlight dichotomies implicit in connection, longing, and opacity. Ambiguous subjects and transitional sites reify liminal states: between insider and outsider; between interior and exterior; between genders and sexualities; between having been and becoming. Outmoded image technologies inform the work aesthetically and physically, and my approach identifies intersections between popular and art photography in archival materials and historical practice. I invite elements of chance and highlight the degradation of film and prints to destabilize both the visual integrity of compositions and notions about photography as documentary truth. The camera's capacity to slow or freeze action unsettles commonly accepted properties of time: that it flows unceasingly; that its direction is absolute; and that the present is privileged. The undefined tense reflects asynchronous memory production and recall.





Matter (12), 2022 inkjet print from scanned photogram, 32" x 40"



Emergent, 2023 layered silver prints, entomology pins, 82" x 48"

Untitled, 2023

oil, house paint, acrylic, translucent glaze, fabric powder, biodegradable glitter, watercolor ink, colored dye, powdered pigments

of "X 48" x 9"

Riley A. Polek-Davis

MFA Painting

My work establishes a visual and psychological language that acknowledges the complexities of human emotion through the use of color and the physicality of paint. I pour paints and glazes to create abstract surfaces that speak to the diversity of human emotion, representations of bodies, and the magic of color. While referencing the figure, my paintings disengage from it in fragmented and distorted ways to address the split nature of our perceptions about bodies, ourselves. Paint and translucent mediums mix into corporeal, body-like moments, intimating "screenshots" of bodies, both inside and out. The paint becomes human-like, primal, a skin, viscerally alive. Add some shine and suddenly these "disgusting" moments become seductive. The challenge of making the abject gorgeous guides my process, and I always seek balance. Too messy? Clean it up. Too glossy? Pour matte medium. Opacity vs. translucence; chaos vs. harmony; the painting's surface initiates a sensory conversation about being alive and the intangible aspects of human experience.

Portrait Of A Man, 2022 oil, house paint, watercolor ink, biodegradable glitter, 18" x 11"







Left
Crack Me Open Like An Egg, 2021
house paint, posca pen, gold leaf, sharpie
48" x 48" x 2"

Maria Pulido

MA Painting

My process develops through deep observation of nature and subsequent abstraction of form and color to create vibrant paintings that represent the mystical qualities of life. My work is created with embroidery floss and glass beads and intricately painted with brightly colored acrylics. Rooted in nature and inspired by my cultural background, my paintings and works on paper draw on Huichol ancestral ceremonial creations, and through a meditative process, I create abstract representations of life's infinite elements. Using organic shapes and vibrant colors I reflect the flow of life in my work, which embodies the beauty of the natural world and encourages others to see it.



Maiz, 2023 ink, acrylic on paper, 22" x 30"



Detail Above, Full RightFuerzas Naturales (Natural Forces), 2022
acrylic, yarn, glass beads, ceramic on wood panel, 48" x 48" x 2"



Francis Robateau

MFA Printmaking

My existence as a Belizean American is a direct result of colonization. Belize established its independence in 1981, and it remains part of Britain's commonwealth, ruled by the King of England. Throughout Central American history, indigenous and free slaves struggled to win respect for claims over ancestral land, resources, and identity. The Caribbean identity continues to thrive through a history of resistance against imperialism. As part of the Belizean diaspora, I think about the interconnectivity of race and culture in candid photographs of the inhabited Belizean environment and those living in the United States. Born in Los Angeles, I experienced racism and witnessed the deportation of family members. This leaves me in a state of limbo in terms of my identity: Am I black or am I Latinx?



My work reveals these intersections as I move through nuances of my culture's complexity. I use mixed media as a metaphor for this complexity. The process of layering, sanding, and revealing becomes a bridge for transformation, exploration, and self-reflection. The work responds to surface quality and is inspired by colors found throughout Belize and its architecture. Seemingly chaotic and in various states of disarray, the paintings and prints use layering to embody the interrelation of mark making and to represent the cultural experience of transformation.

.eft

Left English Tea, 2021 screen-print on canvas 5' x 6.25'

Right

Pins and Needles, 2022 acrylic, screen-print on canvas 48" x 64"

Bottom

Hybrid Moments, 2022 screen-print on canvas 37.5" x 62.5"





Right Unknown marked, 2023 glazed ceramic 9"x 17"

Nicholas Ross

MFA Ceramics

My work comprises a vocabulary of marks made by the hand directly or tools held by the hand. Both clay and handmade marks connect to the history of human artistic expression. This material investigation not only connects to my own life, but also connects me to the practices of ancient humans. I use found materials and gestures, including objects on the ground covered in clay. Incorporating paper, glass, and plastics into my ceramic objects and vessels establishes a visual language as I layer marks and found materials and build them into abstract clay compositions. I am interested in the details that slip through the cracks of perception and enjoy discovering what is hidden or has been lost. My work suggests that the possibilities of human expression might be infinite, and I believe all human made objects are sculptures.



Psychic revelations of the age of Aquarius, 2022 glazed ceramic, bronze 20" x 15" x 27"



Gevork Sherbetchyan

MA Illustration

Born in Los Angeles, and raised as an Armenian, I am an Illustrator who works primarily in digital media but also uses analog media from time to time. My work illustrates a visual narrative that I experienced in my lifetime, in my personal culture, or in the world from which I try to escape. Influenced by artists of the Romanticism Movement for showcasing the sublime, entertainment industry artists from animation and games for continuously redefining their medium, and my Armenian culture for my personal connection to my work. Feelings of alienation and displacement as a result of the Armenian Diaspora inform my Los Angeles series, and the Armenian Landscape series acknowledges my Armenian heritage by showcasing the history, mythology, architecture, and scenery. Using the aesthetics of pixel art, I harken back to the days of sitting in front of the TV and playing video games; this establishes a nostalgic bridge with eye candy. This hybrid approach in style and influence welcomes viewers into my world.

Ara Mountain, 2022 digital print 24" x 36"





Neighborhood, 2022 video 1080p Hollywood, 2022 digital print 24" x 36"



Homeless Encounter, 2022 digital print 24" x 36"



Elizabeth Souza

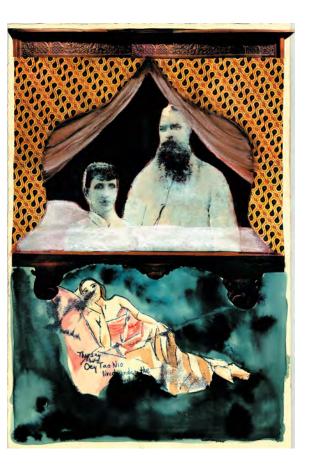
MFA Painting

Indo Arcana, 2022, watercolor on paper 30" x 22"

Stories permeate my work; some stories are true, some are not, and I share them to build connections that follow a maternal line, instead of those that have been forcefed by patriarchally influenced, mainstream history. My history paintings transform shame into vulnerability as I grapple with memories on the brink of erasure. Archival and vintage photographs, from both found and personal sources, are layered with natural and textile patterns. They allude to a dream-like internal space tinged with earthen hues.



My work functions as Herstory, appropriating, othering, and objectifying to reclaim something lost. These tools of subversion salvage dignity for myself and women like me. Beauty becomes an entry point into my work, making the conversation accessible to a broad audience. But this work is twofold; while documenting the past it also reaches into the future, creating a new story, rematriating (a term Indigenous women of Turtle Island use) and restoring balance to my culture, both intellectually and spiritually.



Oey Tao Nio Lived Under the Bed, 2021 mixed media collage 22.5" x 15"



Don't You See, 2022 tapestry woven oil on canvas 38" x 24"

Right
100 Simple Pleasures
100 girls' tights, poly-fill, fish wire, yarn, 24"x 3"

Paty Torres

MA Sculpture

I make sculptures that emphasize repetition and ritual, like sewing. My family and life experiences inform my work, which incorporates found and reused materials to establish humorous and visceral relationships.

Growing up, I felt pressure to perform conventional roles, because, in Hispanic households, women are expected to do all of the chores. When I was 10 years old, my mother woke me early to clean the house, despite my resistance. I wondered why I had to clean and the men didn't, and my questioning these roles resulted in my having to do more work.

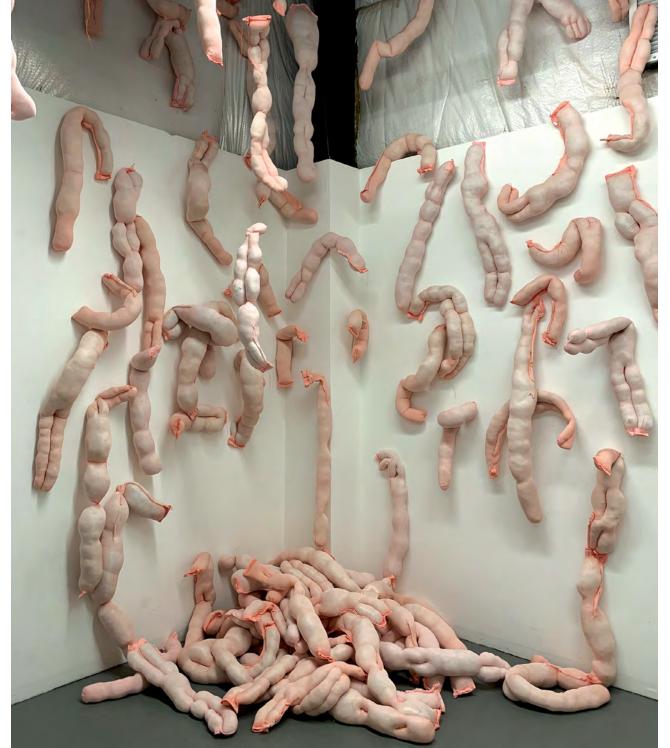
Shortly after my eighteenth birthday I started working nights cutting thread for medical equipment at one of my mom's several jobs, an environment that placed



Untitled, 2022 women's tights, poly-fill, 48"x 3"

me among other women, who were constantly talking, laughing, and sometimes crying about their personal lives while they worked. This was my introduction to blue collar life and work that my mother performed both in factories and at home. My mother not only demonstrated a solid work ethic but also inadvertently nurtured my love for fabrication, despite it being on my own terms.

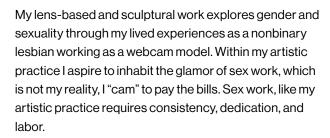
My factory job instilled an affinity and obsession for repetition and multiples, but I have established my own rituals and traditions to add humor, sewing non-functional objects that have no purpose. Unlike factory made products, my sculptures never take the same form twice, despite the repeated processes, because found fabric, odd materials, and their instability yield one-of-a-kind results.



Major Trans, 2022 rhinestones, found cardboard box, 23" x 15" x 15.5"

Thanos Valentine

MA Sculpture/Video



Bedazzled cardboard boxes embody the contrasts of high and low. These extremes acknowledge states of mania and depression as well as my dual roles as artist and performer; sex work is a job however glamorized or maligned both online and in media. The usage of cardboard in the work also means to explore class relations, the accessibility of materials, and connecting accessibility with the reality of survival sex work.



Rhinestones are meant to pay homage to the glamour of sex work specifically that of burlesque dancers. A palette of pink and purple convey warmth, playfulness, and perhaps romance.

Time-based works explore themes of voyeurism while turning the male gaze on its head. The viewer sees me through my phone and not my webcam which creates separation between what I'm doing for myself as an artist and what I am doing as part of my job. Such instances are meant to humanize myself as a sex worker as well as sex workers in general. The dichotomy between these two extremes allows me to stay close to home, I find meaning in the domestic environment, discovering the elements and relationships that evoke a sense of gratitude, happiness, and safety.





Above

GRWM/the g-string, 2022 video still, 1080p

Let

Amoroso Porn Set #1, 2022, rhinestones, clippings from 1980s Architecture Digest, found Amoroso bread box. 19 "x 16" x 17.5"

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2023

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