

**2023
MASTER OF
FINE ARTS
THESIS
EXHIBITION**

**ERIK CARRIGAN
JOHN DESOUSA
ROBIN DU PLESSIS
STAR HERRERA
PAMELA RAWDEN
KELSEY RENKO
PHOEBE ROTTER
JESS STAPF
CAMRYN WALSH**

University Art Museum
University at Albany
State University of New York

ERIK CARRIGAN

Since childhood, I have been living with visual snow syndrome, a neurological disorder that causes a static distortion between what my eyes perceive and how my brain processes images. This has shaped my artistic approach, driving me to create abstract watercolor paintings in earthy, organic palettes. I am drawn to the therapeutic nature of the creative process, finding inspiration in manipulating the medium and experimenting with new techniques and patterns. This process is both intuitive and ritualistic. I explore the fluidity and unpredictability of the medium, allowing it to guide my hand, creating intermingled patterns of spiraling mark-making and pockets of color. To further replicate my vision disorder as a filter, I digitally enlarge and print my paintings onto canvas using inkjet technology, resulting in a flattened image that echoes my unique perspective. The final product is a moody and psychedelic series of artworks that explores textures and colors. I hope to convey the beauty and complexity of my experience with visual snow syndrome and invite viewers to see the world through a different lens.

1



JOHN DESOUSA

I create fabric collages out of altered digital prints and mixed media. Inspired by scrolling on Instagram, where I screenshot imagery, I use a mix of memes, provocative pop culture images, wholesome and “cursed” images, and my own photography. I proceed to digitally manipulate the images and print them on fabric, allowing them to become more permanent and tactile. Via tearing, dyeing, drawing, spray painting, and stitching gestures I playfully degrade the material in a nonlinear fashion. I then sew them back together, sometimes as assembled rags and sometimes as bound quilts. They present an adolescent irreverence in their dark and cheeky sense of humor and chaotic treatment. This is fused with the soft and welcoming texture of the fabric. Through tenderness and violence, I want my work to simultaneously attract and repel with its familiar imagery, bright colors, manipulations, and unsettling combinations.

2



ROBIN DU PLESSIS

My work is about how we organize, describe, and make sense of our surroundings. I use repetition and accumulation to create images built up of thousands of tiny things, like grains of sand or insects. From a distance the masses are on the verge of being invisible, while up close each individual element is sharply focused. Other objects like vines or twigs are manipulated or twisted, as if created in a laboratory. By shifting the focus from micro to macro, I use scale and distortion to change perspective and address larger issues concerning our relationship to the environment.

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STAR HERRERA

I work primarily in installation, audio/video, and photography, while incorporating other practices and processes when I feel a pull for the piece to have more of a mixture of mediums. Creating work deeply rooted in the nuances of the human experience, I explore themes involving identity, vulnerability, and distortions—or a “glitch.” A blurred photograph of a place forgotten begs to be remembered by someone, anyone. A calming voice asks you to relax and then disturbs that peace. These small intrusions into an otherwise familiar environment provide revisitations to societies’ collective memories. In pressing on the boundaries between interior and exterior spaces—public and private, inside the body and out—I create hazy depictions of the failings in our attempts to gain clarity, acceptance, forgiveness, and a sense of wonder.

PAMELA RAWDEN

My curiosities spark my process. From a childhood full of upheaval and trauma, I now translate and seek the unpredictable. I use this as a tool to create a language that explores the mysterious.

I experiment with materials charged with haunting memories such as hair, foam, and fabric. I follow my attraction to a material and try to sense when it feels off. The possibilities feel limitless, driving me to investigate cause and effect. Sometimes an exploration leads back to the beginning. When accidents happen, I dive deeper into the process, and that triggers a new result.

The work is a conversation with the past to build a new language that does not want to be understood, but only offers a sense of wonder. Whether the pieces are being cared for, abused, or institutionalized, they are not meant to be read easily.

KELSEY RENKO

Much like the human experience, my paintings feel awkward, hairy, and quick—they are distilled from my memories of intimacy. I build up layers of paint that I eventually cover, abandon, and scratch away to evoke a sensory experience that draws from the feeling of physical and emotional closeness. Figures collide, hug, and reach for each other over fields of color, and outlines emphasize and distinguish one form from the next. I welcome how human I can make a shape feel by adding short, quick marks that are like two-day stubble or the way patterns can turn into clothes and blankets that wrap around them. Using expressive gestures, amplified by vibrant colors, I work with the push and pull between abstraction and figuration.

PHOEBE ROTTER

I’m fascinated by suspended movement—a reaching hand, echoing a gnarled branch, the momentum clear even in

drawings pinned to a wall. Using black paint and mylar, I draw from shadow theater, art history, and personal video recordings to conjure large, shaped compositions. Some imitate cinematic conventions—a drawn “jump cut” jars the viewer—while wider, juicier collages overflow their edges, brimming with desire, ferocity, and deeply personal mythology. I’m particularly interested in tales of transformation, the idea of an overwhelming gaze, and conventions of beauty and monstrosity. What of the spaces in between that false and centuries-old binary, and why not both at once?

I examine closely how my own body matches or transgresses beauty ideals, and project snapshots of my own form, both vulnerable in its exposure and mighty in its scale and starkness. The mark making, the gesture, and the freedom to freehand are all vital to the final images. This work can be as huge as the space it occupies, or as delicate as the crescent of a bitten fingernail. From a distance, these figures strike; upon closer inspection, they sing.

JESS STAFF

My artwork is an act of queer world-building, constructing queer, feminist spaces through textile and fiber-based craft techniques. Using symbols of windows, wooden boards, and bricks, I use rug-tufting to communicate themes of gender and domestic space. My work is firmly rooted in the use of craft mediums, tools, and skills, and I don’t shy away from paying homage to all the connotations that come with the label as well as questioning them.

By rendering hard objects in soft materials, distorting images, and subverting functionality, I make props and false facades that construct a theatrical space, existing somewhere between our lived reality and our dreams. I use a bright color palette and minimal imagery to evoke cliché perspectives. The never-changing skies are so perfectly dotted with clouds that they feel as uncanny as they do serene. Softness is transformed into a language of its own, imbuing the work with the emotional, the comfortable, and the domestic.

GAMRYN WALSH

There are times in an athlete’s journey that are often overlooked: slipping on shoes or pulling down goggles and looking out at the water. To me, these are the moments of anticipation that stand out as the most important. I paint cropped, fragmented sections of the body with a humorous emphasis on socks and goggles found in different sports. I isolate the figures in unknown vibrant spaces, using the paint to create a sense of movement, representing aspects from my life on an immersive scale so that the viewer can be engulfed in my world. These athletic moments are as significant to me as choosing which brush to use, what color to mix, or even the right image to paint.



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2023 MASTER OF FINE ARTS THESIS EXHIBITION

April 27 – May 14, 2023

We are pleased to present the work of Master of Fine Arts degree candidates Erik Carrigan, John DeSousa, Robin du Plessis, Star Herrera, Pamela Rawden, Kelsey Renko, Phoebe Rotter, Jess Stapf, and Camryn Walsh for the 2023 Spring Semester. The 60-credit M.F.A. is the terminal degree in studio art. A tradition since 1983, the M.F.A. exhibition is an important way in which the University Art Museum and the Department of Art and Art History collaborate to enhance the academic environment at the University at Albany. The exhibition represents the culmination of these students' intensive training and study in studio art practices. It provides an opportunity for them to exhibit in a professional museum setting and to share their efforts with the academic community, alumni, and audiences of the Capital Region and beyond.

We are grateful to the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, The University at Albany Foundation, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Ann C. Mataraso Endowment Fund, in honor of Professor Emeritus Mark Greenwold, for support of the exhibition and this publication.

Sarah R. Cohen
Chair, Department of Art and Art History

Corinna Ripps Schaming
Director/Chief Curator, University Art Museum

Image credits:

1. Erik Carrigan, *The Line Between*, 2022, gouache on watercolor paper, 36 x 29 inches
2. John DeSousa, *HEALING*, 2023, printed canvas, polyester, cotton, and batting, 19 x 13 inches
3. Robin du Plessis, *Artificial Renaissance* (detail), 2023, mixed media on vinyl, 120 x 180 inches
4. Star Herrera, *Intrusive Thought Meditations*, 2023, installation with video, 10:20, color; sound; found objects; cloth, dimensions variable
5. Pamela Rawden, *Taking, Folding, Feeding, Bonding, Discard, Repeat* (detail), 2023, glycerin, various fabric, a fly, apple seed, ox tail, eggshell, hair, baby powder, cotton, dye, ants, resin, wood clay, NyQuil, DayQuil, tissue, dirt, wheat, dimensions variable
6. Kelsey Renko, *we fit together*, 2023, acrylic and dye on canvas, 72 x 72 inches
7. Phoebe Rotter, *Before and After/Hands Holding* (detail), 2023, Golden high flow acrylic paint, single matte drafting film, dimensions variable
8. Jess Stapf, *Inside Out / Outside In* (detail), 2022, acrylic yarn, cotton backing, wood, 187 x 120 inches
9. Camryn Walsh, *Nervous About Pace Time (Running out of Wall Space)*, 2022, oil on unstretched canvas, 66 x 45 inches