

# 42<sup>ND</sup> MFA THESIS

MARCH 28 — APRIL 11, 2020  
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON, SCHOOL OF ART

QINDEEL BUTT  
DANIEL CALDERON  
MARKUS CONE  
MAHA CLAIRE ELESTWANI  
SIMON GONZALES  
RYLEE HENSON  
ERIN JOYCE  
JOSH LITOS  
AMIRA MARUF  
HYUN PARK  
REEMA  
JOSE CHAVERO RIVERA  
JAMIE ROBERTSON  
MARYAM SOLTANI  
ERICK ZAMBRANO

# EXHIBITION 2020

**42<sup>ND</sup> MFA**

**THESIS**

**EXHIBITION**

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In the 2018 documentary film, *Hale County This Morning, This Evening*, Director RaMell Ross challenges his viewers with scenes of minimal action that seem to last forever. Ross describes these moments as the “monumental banal.” One of these scenes involves baby Kyrie, an African American child who runs back and forth across her living room while the television plays in the background. There are other people in the frame; we see only their legs as they sit on a couch watching the television. Kyrie runs from left to right, looks at the camera, then back across the screen from right to left. She makes 5 or 6 laps across the living room, eventually approaches the camera, and then goes back to running. This happens over the course of maybe 2 or 3 minutes, although it feels much longer.

This scene is indicative of the film as a whole, which is revelatory in how it creates space for interpretation. As the viewer watches Kyrie run back and forth, a full script of possible scene endings, climaxes or culminations emerge in one’s imagination. Will the child fall? Will her parents get annoyed by the running? Will she grow tired? Will Kyrie do something more attention-grabbing?

Ross rebuffs resolution here. There is no obvious or poignant ending. He simply ends this scene where the next scene begins. Ross compels us to look and watch, while Kyrie does what babies do. He points the camera as if to say, “Look at this, it’s important.” What’s on screen is such an effective launch pad for the imagination that it becomes less important than the machinations that take place in the viewers’ head. There is just enough information to stimulate the mind while not focusing it too much in one direction or another. Ross gives us a map with a myriad of destinations and directions, but no pre-determined notion of where we will end up or how we will get there.

The duration is important too. Without the distraction of plot, we have time to explore the uneasy ways our subconscious twists and turns and to then become conscious of those twists

and turns and reflect on them. Ross gives us the map, because he wants us to see this idiosyncratic thing happen. He also wants us to get lost in the scene and wander. He’ll lead us back, but before that he wants us to *think about what we’re thinking about*.

In art school, like Ross, we aspire to be unconventional cartographers, making visually arresting maps with multiple opportunities to enter, traverse and exit. We make navigable routes, passing by important landmarks, knowing that the viewer will inevitably find their own way, which is part of the fun. If we’ve done our jobs well, and created space for interpretation, the viewer will remember their journey long after and think about how it affected them.

How do we create space for interpretation? We slow down and observe. We create space through examination and discussion, trial and error, experimentation and risk-taking. We work to find the sweet spot between giving enough visual stimulus to motivate the viewer’s intellect and imagination, and accepting neat and tidy conclusions. We strive to pose questions without easy answers. Artists and designers achieve this by pursuing their own singular vision, while rejecting cliché and the expected.

## GRADUATING ARTISTS AND DESIGNERS

The “big picture” benefits of acquiring these skills are many. As we make space for interpretation we give ourselves time to think and reflect. We become more empathetic when we listen to one another’s interpretations. Looking at art together gives us the opportunity to see through each other’s life experience, and we become more visually literate when considering a range of possible meanings. Reflecting on our own interpretations can be life-altering as we confront deep-seated emotions and preconceptions.

We create space for interpretation during the production of artworks, too. Time spent meditating in the studio opens up opportunities to examine our thoughts visually through gesture and physical expression. New technologies emerge and artists gravitate towards them for efficiency and to engage a contemporary visual landscape. Still, painters use oils, photographers shoot film and sculptors use measured subtractive processes that force us to slow down and create space for interpretation while we make. My intention is not to promote the Romantic myth of the impassioned artist toiling away in their studio, relying only on some kind of elusive inspiration as a motivator. Rather, it is important to acknowledge just how intellectually rigorous and heavily research-based contemporary art practice is.

As artists cartographers, we face each new project as if mapping unexplored territory. We take responsibility to set our own course; a challenge that brings artists satisfaction and is evident in the final work. Laozi tells us “A good traveler has no fixed plans and is not intent upon arriving.” Dead ends and U-turns are part of the process as they help us understand the uncharted terrain. We discover, double back, perfect and repeat. We don’t need GPS or Waze. That defeats the purpose. We find our own way, take our time and pay attention so, next time, the path will find us.

**DAVID POLITZER**  
*DIRECTOR, SCHOOL OF ART*



# QINDEEL BUTT



My work is informed by traversing city sprawl, partaking in commuter culture, always being late or too early, and experiences that have made me feel like an outsider. I respond by projecting my feelings of loneliness onto inanimate objects, reacquainting myself with the familiar, recording fleeting glimpses of humor or curious scenes witnessed during my travels.

I archive daily life woven with memories of the past, the way things used to be and the way they've always been. Making attempts at understanding the absurdities of everyday life, realizing it's futile, and resigning myself to living with the absurd.

I paint to understand the strangeness of the world around me, to ask how I fit in it, or at least become comfortable living with its quirks. I paint things that I find to be helpless, to be humorous, and sometimes personal. Occasionally, it all overlaps. I carefully record these everyday objects—memorializing them, by simply taking the time to paint what may easily be overlooked. Much like I wish to be seen and remembered, I hope the same for the quickly produced and throw away knick-knacks that inhabit my paintings.



QINDEEL BUTT. *FROSTED*, 2019. OIL ON PANEL, 14 × 11 INCHES.  
QINDEEL BUTT. *IDLE*, 2018. OIL ON CANVAS, 12 × 16 INCHES.



# DANIEL CALDERON

There is much to admire about the way solid components are prefabricated, transported, and assembled into larger things. Modular elements reveal the way we build, piecing together smaller units into functioning systems of infrastructure. In my sculpture I create parts of unassembled forms that allude to prefabrication. Drawing from language associated with transportation, I contextualize the parts as logistical modules that exist somewhere between point of origin and point of

consumption. This in-between state is also embodied in my use of plaster, a sculptural material which has traditionally served a provisional and intermediary role between concept and final form. By bringing attention to the prefabrication and movement of these goods, I hope to illuminate one of the underlying systems that make our society possible, and how that system relates to art-making.



DANIEL CALDERON. *ASSEMBLY PART NO. 14B*, 2019. PLASTER ON CARDBOARD STRUCTURE, FOUND PALLET AND STRAPS, RUSTED METAL FRAME. 50 × 30 × 32 INCHES.

# MARKUS CONE

## *Personal*

One of my early pivots away from consensus reality involved exploring forested spaces between those districts where comatose compliance is revered. Crammed with concentrated flora and fauna that seemed to yearn for a breach of artificial borders, the regions were protected enclaves, sheltering any who wished to escape the uniformity of regularity. One of these areas contained trees that had woven together forming an alcove. Somewhat adjacent to the alcove but hidden behind more tree-covered areas was a perfectly burned circle.

I like to synchronously initiate the habitual familiar with the imagined when starting a piece. I call this 'spatial tesseracting'



(or to spatially tesseract), perceiving illusory textures as integrated within the visual/audio sphere. This integration of the conscious 'real' with a simulated cognizant 'real' can prevent suppositions from becoming substantiated. I never want them to. They can remain visceral, but not without the empathetic experience of the current consensus that is acknowledged but must be challenged.

## *Twin Lovers (Collective)*

Suspending the Narrative of Now, Sci-Fi Pop collective  
Twin Lovers sonically mirror echoed ciphers veiled within  
the specious present.



MARKUS CONE. *RIDER*, 2018. FUJI INSTAX WIDE. 3.4 × 4.25 INCHES.

MARKUS CONE. *CROSSING STREET*, 2018. FUJI INSTAX MINI. 3.4 × 2.1 INCHES.

MARKUS CONE. *CROSSWALK*, 2018. FUJI INSTAX MINI. 3.4 × 2.1 INCHES.



# MAHA CLAIRE ELESTWANI



The ability to create digital versions of ourselves through online profiles, blogs, or media feeds that are completely within our control has become nearly universal. The many social networks available in the Digital Age allow us to engage in active and deliberate dissociation. We are able to selectively perform different aspects of the self separate from the physical body

and choose whichever self-state is the most adaptive at a given moment. This dissociative behavior has produced a conscious othering of the body as a separate thing, a kind of “flesh packet” to be dragged around. I propose these alternative Packets as a touch-based therapy for those of us exiting our bodies.



CLAIRE ELESTWANI. *COUCH PACKET HELMET*, 2020. WOVEN AND STRETCH FABRICS, POLYESTER, BALL BEARINGS.  
CLAIRE ELESTWANI. *OUT BACK IN THE PACKET*, 2020. INSULATION, TULLE, TINSEL, HUMAN, BACKYARD.

# SIMON GONZALES



Here is a space, a safe place, your place, for you, to meditate. Search your mind, think inside, think outside to find or not. This is something that comes from you and only you in a world, your world, that you create. The work exists, here in place, birth by algorithm, a transformation, and a trace of history; but, subtract the context, subtract the artist, and

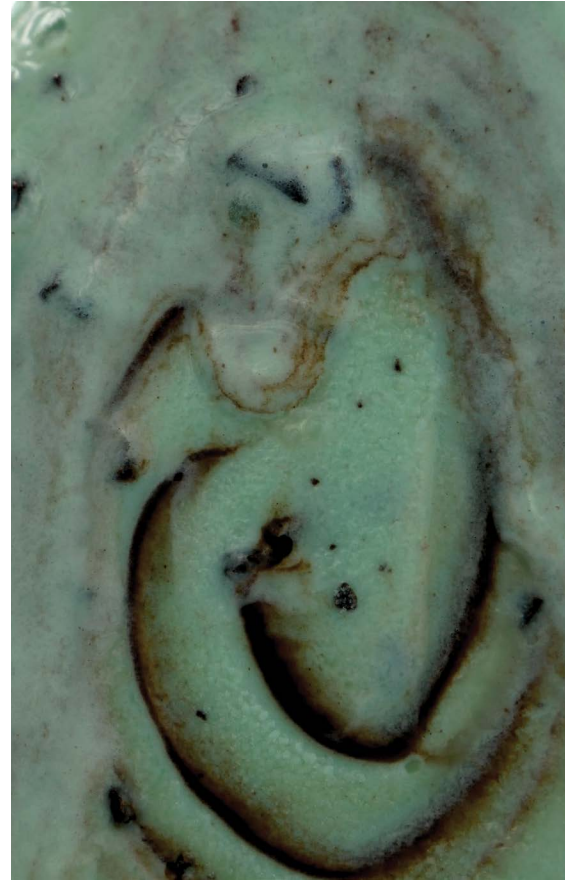
focus on what you feel. Take the work, as the aura, as a means, not the end, a catalyst, that transports. The journey is the art, and here is not the destination. Only you can know the truth: a phenomenon that cannot be seen, or read, only thought and felt... reflect and be free.



SIMON GONZALES. *INSTALLATION 2*, 2019. MULTIMEDIA. 11 × 4 FEET.  
SIMON GONZALES. *INSTALLATION 1*, 2018. MULTIMEDIA. 16 × 8 FEET.



# RYLEE HENSON



By closely framing popsicles as they morph and melt away, I offer an opportunity to sit in waiting, a brief moment to consider mortality and the sweet distractions in life. We are uniquely and keenly aware that our existence will inevitably end. We shape our lives and our communities around this awareness, an awareness that motivates us and gives intention. In this series of videos, I hone in, allowing the transformation

of the popsicles to reflect the entanglement of our desires, pursuits, and fears with our understanding of death. The videos focus narrowly on a slowly unraveling subject, encouraging us to look closely at what we might ordinarily overlook. What we see is like our experience—all color and soothing motion until, eventually, all that remains is a stick. It is only sweet for as long as we can keep it from melting.



RYLEE HENSON, *MELTING 1*, 2019. DIGITAL VIDEO.

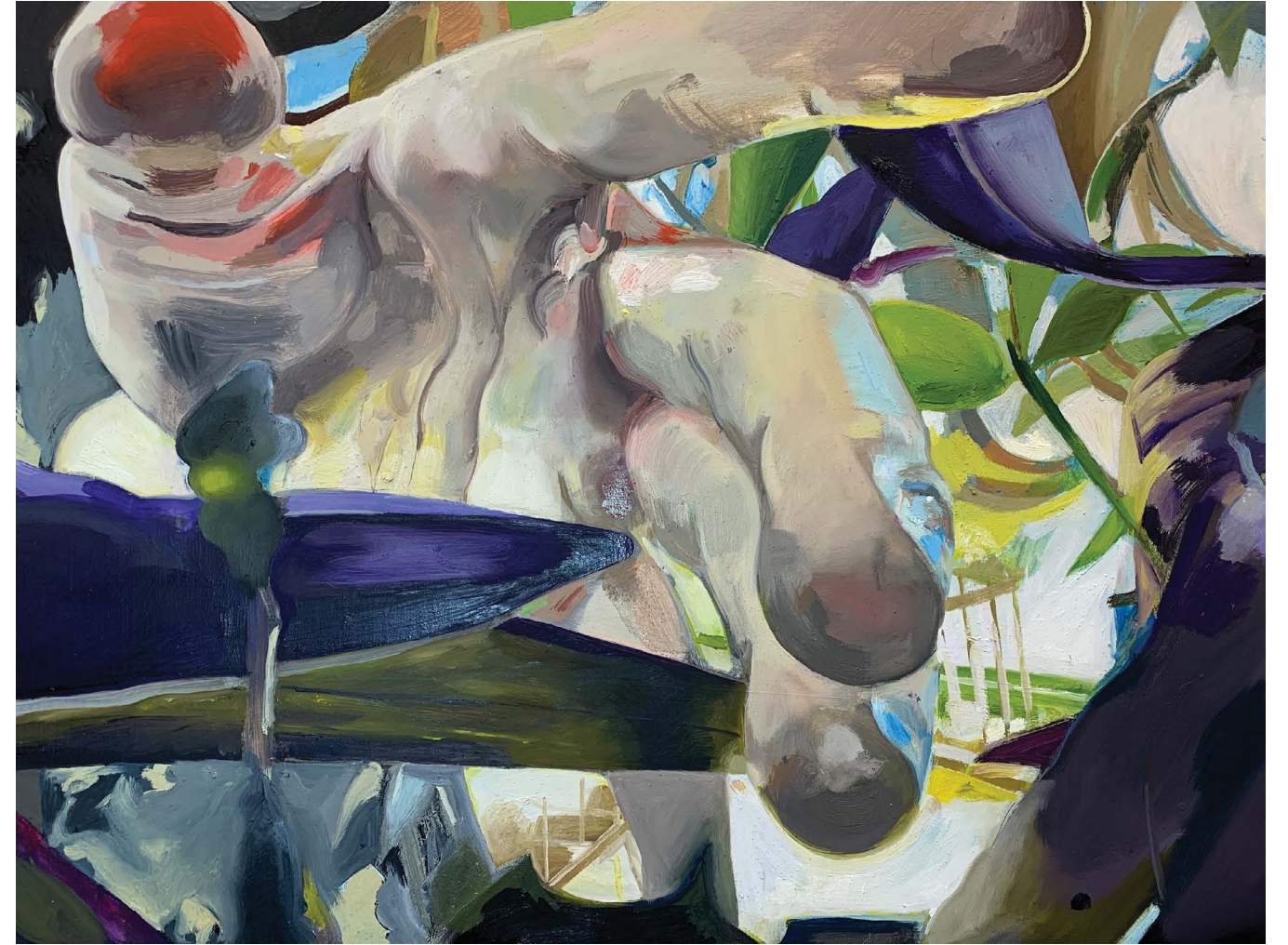
RYLEE HENSON, *WALLS COULD TALK.*, 2020. DIGITAL VIDEO.

# ERIN JOYCE



My paintings are an ongoing process of owning my vulnerability and honoring the personal. Images of my hands and feet are larger than life to convey the first-person perspective and become occasions for meditation on the sensitivity of flesh. The hands go about their business in a banal contemporary setting, while evoking a history of hands in art, symbols of which they are blissfully unaware or even actively defy. The images

embody the feminist idea of “taking up space.” They are an expression of an actual self, rather than a false narrative that has been selected from one of the stories a person is supposed to tell about themselves. By emphasizing changing light conditions, I assert my relationship to the actual (nature) over the ideal. Through the act of painting, I express a will to surrender my body and mind to the light of truth in time and space.

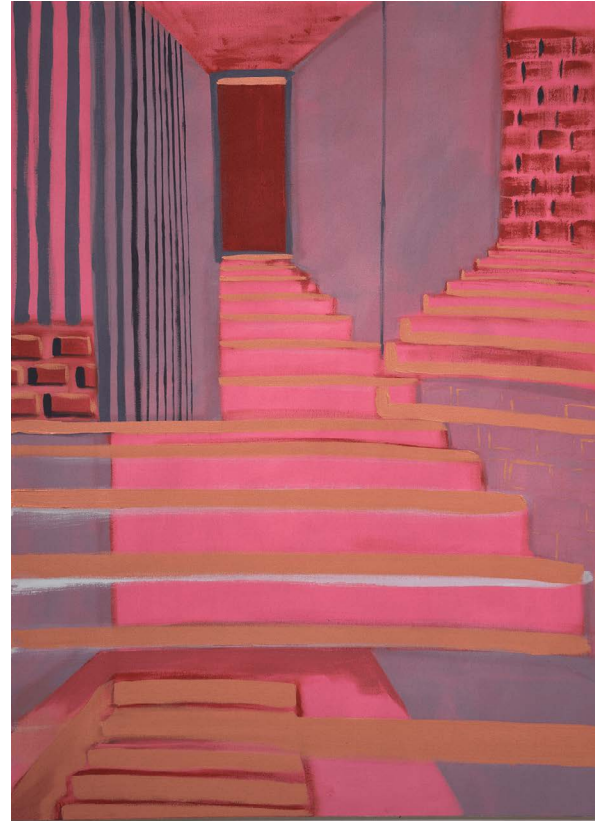


ERIN JOYCE, *UNTITLED (HAND 1)*, 2019. OIL ON CANVAS. 18 × 24 INCHES.

ERIN JOYCE, *UNTITLED (HAND 2)*, 2019. OIL ON CANVAS. 18 × 24 INCHES.

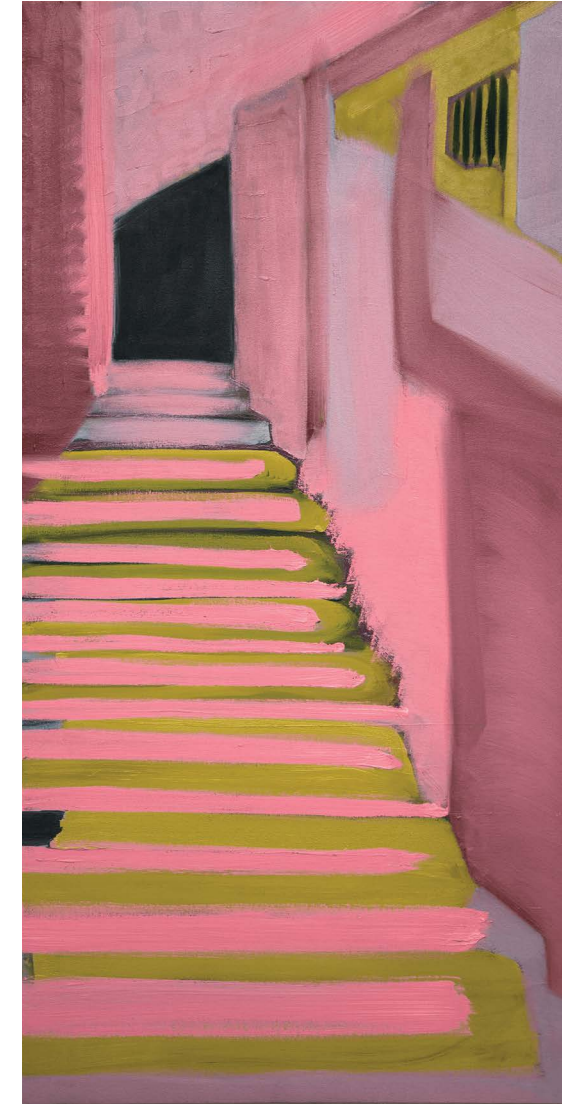


# JOSH LITOS



Using a range of techniques, and with paint and color as the primary stimulant, I've worked to develop a visual vocabulary that is both familiar and strange. My current subject matter is the contemporary urban environment, with reference to the work of Gordon Matta Clark and Giorgio De Chirico. My painted spaces are devoid of figures to suggest searching, and I create color-driven psychological atmospheres that are often

reduced to pure abstraction. I'm interested in how line, pattern, and shape inform space, and transforming the basic image with color and paint handling is central to my work. I want my paintings to be enticements and invitations to a curious viewer, and I hope that time spent with the paintings can reveal unique and meaningful insights.



JOSH LITOS, *ON THE BACKBURNER*, 2019. OIL ON CANVAS, ON PANEL. 48 × 36 × 1 ¼ INCHES.

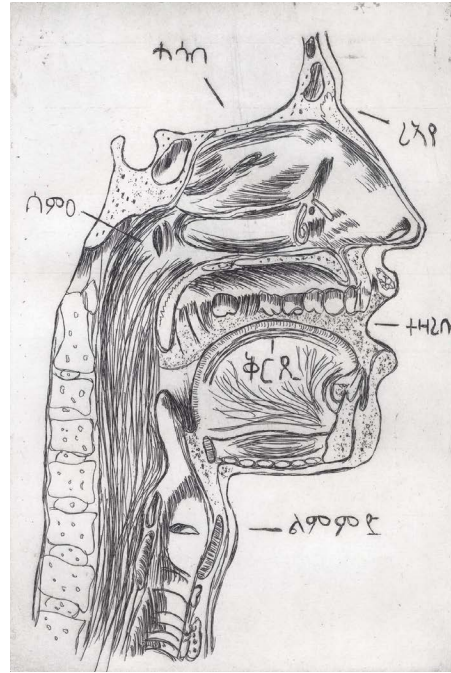
JOSH LITOS, *SLIPPIN SIDEWAYZ*, 2019. OIL ON CANVAS, ON PANEL. 48 × 36 × 1 ¼ INCHES.

# AMIRA MARUF

Being the daughter of an African immigrant has made me sensitive to topics of displacement, social injustice, and cultural preservation. I know first-hand how cultures, languages, and histories can be passed down and/or lost from one generation to another, from a country of origin to one of repatriation. My work, as a result, examines my Eritrean heritage—its history, language, colonization, and sociopolitical unrest—as a vehicle for asking larger questions about the restoration and preservation of diminished and forgotten histories of lesser-known groups of people.

In my project, I use language as the site for this investigation. Using my father's native language, Tigrinya, I designed a typeface as a way of grappling with my hereditary disconnection, while at the same time, creating a functional tool for Eritreans

and the Eritrean diaspora to communicate. To examine my place in the diaspora, I use 3-D wooden typography and 2-D prints to explore what it means to have one's identity inextricably tied to exile, injustice, and colonization. In the early twentieth century, Mussolini invaded Eritrea and colonized it with Art Deco and Italian architecture. In the mid-1970s, my father, like so many other Eritreans, fled during the country's fight for independence. In a recent, detailed report by the Human Rights Watch, Eritrea has experienced rights violations that have elicited, yet another, national migration. As a result of this exodus, Eritrean decedents are an increasingly expatriated diaspora. Some are able to pass on the language and culture; others may not; and most find ourselves stuck somewhere in between, in a silence filled with wanting to speak and relate and remember but not entirely, if at all, being able to.

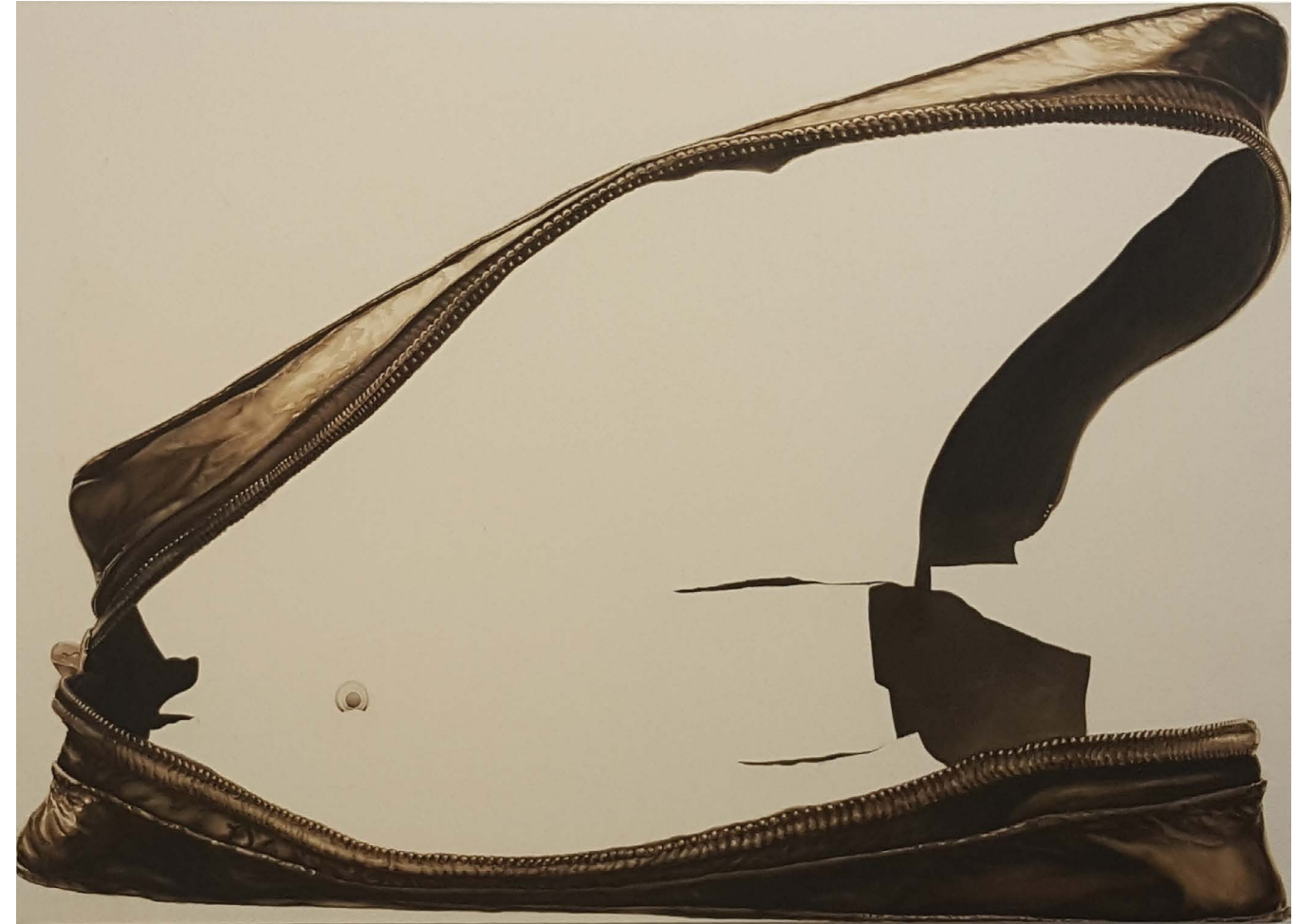


# HYUN PARK



Duality is not just the presence of opposites, but it can also define a complementarity that promotes balance in the world. “Tall” is only “tall” when it is next to “short,” and darkness is recognized after experiencing light. Duality is the structural concept underpinning my work. In the objects around me, I look for binary attributes, pairings such as revealed and concealed, present and absent, full and empty, detailed and undetailed, positive and negative spaces, and representational

and abstract. In my paintings, I manipulate the forms of objects to create (or leave out) unpainted space. This space might suggest an absence of a body in one painting, color in another, or just a nondescript area of raw canvas next to a painted area. Arranging and creating realistic depictions of objects and empty space in a dual state of tension is an essential part of my paintings. Ultimately, they reveal the extraordinary in ordinary objects.



HYUN PARK, *PILLOW*, 2019. ACRYLIC ON CANVAS. 60 × 60 INCHES

HYUN PARK, *REVEALED*, 2018. ACRYLIC ON CANVAS. 40 × 56 INCHES. COLLECTION OF UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON.



# REEMA



Over the millennia, our ancestors passed down records through performance art, pictograms, and aural recantations. More recently, our knowledge seems to be isolated within increasingly specialized industries and modern technologies.

As a child, I used my imagination to make up tales, and much like my ancestors, I used any media available to tell them. Today, I draw inspiration from ancient artistic traditions and modern technologies to create interconnected worlds that cross media platforms in a unified and coordinated way. The narrative-line is not what I find interesting, rather it

is the way a story is articulated through different media, and the method in which various platforms deliver a story. Each distinct medium shapes the mechanics of a narrative, and the transitions from one platform to the next immerse the audience in the story. This is why, in one project I used photos, prose, social media, and augmented reality to record personal memories in a non-linear, interactive autobiography that celebrates each type of media and its strength in storytelling.



REEMA. ALL ROADS LEAD TO HOME: MEMORIES, 2019. DIGITAL IMAGE.

REEMA. ALL ROADS LEAD TO HOME, 2018. PAPERBACK BOOK AND AUGMENTED REALITY. 5.5 × 8.5 INCHES.



# JOSE CHAVERO RIVERA

Nearly 15 million Americans have some form of speech dysfluency. Lack of awareness about these ways of speaking, however, has led to prejudice, stigma, and a bias toward corrective, “normalizing” speech therapies. Stuttering, like most speech disorders, must be corrected, overcome, and erased. As a person diagnosed with stuttering, my thesis project contends with this narrative of overcoming. Using motion graphics, photography and 3-D typography, my project

presents stuttering as a visual, linguistic, and physical space that is rich with poesis and strife, materiality and meaning.

Situated across a long museum corridor, the work occupies a physical space designed to generate greater speech-related inclusivity. It takes stuttering out of erasure and into an open forum, asking the viewer to reconsider his/her own beliefs of what it means to speak “dysfluently.”



# JAMIE ROBERTSON



My creative practice is an autobiographical examination of my family history. These inherited histories are constantly shifting, evolving as I sort through the living storehouse that is the African Diaspora. The story of an axe that becomes a lightning rod and Bibles opened to Psalms 91 in every room, become more than superstitions. These stories and the images they conjure are the foundations of my work and the beginning of my understanding of the African retentions present within my family.

The excavation of archives and a growing understanding of African Metaphysics, such as Bântu-Kôngo expressions of the

universe through the ideogram *Dikenga*, inform my art. My immersion in the Diaspora creates a new understanding of the world, thus building a matrix of Africanness and Blackness. The 'Home Place,' the land my family has owned for generations, is the site of my creative practice. My family's collective memory of our Africanisms is a trace that serves as the beginning of reconciliation to ancestral concepts of place, time and the sacred.

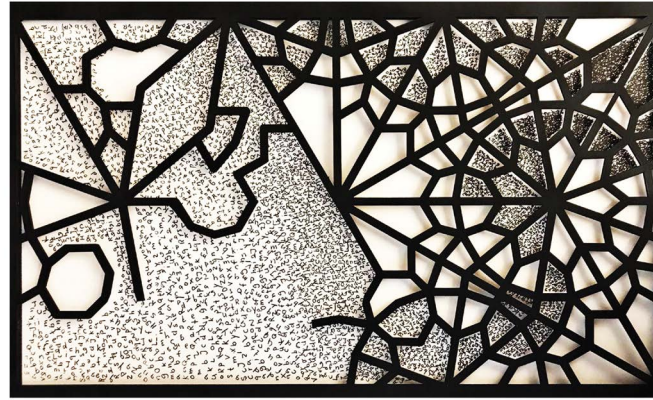


JAMIE ROBERTSON. *BIG DADDY'S HOUSE IN HOPEWELL, TX*, 2019. INKJET PRINT. 30 × 45 INCHES.

JAMIE ROBERTSON. *SELF PORTRAIT ON AUNT CONNIE'S STAIRS WITH COW HORN*, 2020. INKJET PRINT. 30 × 45 INCHES.



# MARYAM SOLTANI



Growing surrounded by the impressive art and elegant architecture of the city of Isfahan, I fell in love with the patterns and geometries of my native Iranian culture. My current work investigates the forms and systems of Islamic patterns as well as Persian patterns more broadly. To accomplish this, I designed a computer application that uses the shapes, grids and geometries from historic architectural Persian patterns as a starting point for generating new, contemporary patterns. This application

invites users to explore these systems to make their own unique patterns. For this project, I have selected a pattern that I generated, printed it on fabric and tailored it into multiple pieces of traditional Iranian women's clothing. My hope is to re-contextualize Iranian cultural objects into a more open-ended system. By displaying the application in the museum, I invite viewers into this conversation as well, using a twenty-first century technology to engage with century's-old history.

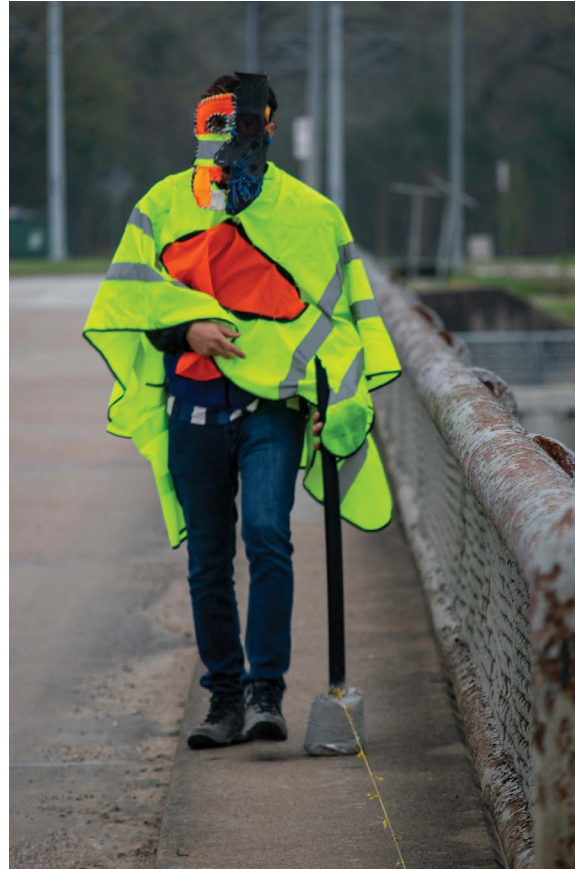


MARYAM SOLTANI. *FRAME TO REFRAME*, 2018. WOOD/PAPER.

MARYAM SOLTANI. *TRADITION OF IRANIAN PATTERNS*, 2020. FABRIC.



# ERICK ZAMBRANO



Must one fully understand the social constructs and value systems that shape our lived reality in order to work against them and open up new opportunities, new openings for transcendence? By playfully poking at imposed value systems, one can gain understanding while tearing them open. Learning from ancient indigenous knowledge in weaving, binding, and knotting; while reshuffling and remaking materials of the now, I intend to open new ways of understanding and invite

the shaping of new myths for the future. I am a laborer and myth maker. I move between realms: the world of “art” and the physical world of construction sites, dumpsters, and parking lots — places in transit where I collect and extract materials to make objects and enact performance rituals. Taking one world apart to make another. Enacting silent attacks on my audience that question their place in the chaos, hoping that through my work they can reimagine and re-mythify their everyday world.



ERICK ZAMBRANO. *300 FOOT WALK WITH STRING*, 2019. PHOTO DOCUMENTATION OF PUBLIC PERFORMANCE USING STRING, MASK, AND SAFETY VEST PONCHO. 1 HOUR, 20 MINUTES.

ERICK ZAMBRANO. *NO FLAG*, 2019. WINDOW FRAME, TYVEK, ELECTRICAL WIRE, CAR FENDER INSULATION, SAFETY VEST, EXERCISE BAND, CARDBOARD, PLASTIC, AND PALLET STRAPS. 8 FEET × 3 FEET × 3 INCHES.



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