



The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

# 2022 MFA CATALOG

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**Suzanne Wright** | ART HISTORY

**Koichi Yamamoto** | PRINTMAKING

**Sam Yates** | MUSEOLOGY

**Baxter Stults** | CATALOG DESIGN

# F O R E W O R D

The University of Tennessee School of Art MFA exhibitions mark the culmination of a three-year degree program centered around the development of a rigorous, interdisciplinary studio art practice under the close mentorship of a committee of accomplished faculty from across the arts, art history, and humanities. Each student in the stellar MFA class of 2022 engaged us in a conversation with a distinct and individual voice. As a whole, these students collectively demonstrate the potential for contemporary art practice to serve as a vehicle for transformative individual and cultural discovery.

While the creation and experience of art are both mysterious processes that may never be fully understood rationally, they invite us into an inexplicable but meaningful dialogue through sensuous visual language and metaphor. At the University of Tennessee School of Art, we believe in the capacity of art to express beauty, evoke wonder, confront injustice, and test our values. The artworks created by the 2022 MFA class document the ever-evolving and unpredictable journeys of individual artists pursuing knowledge, understanding, and fulfillment.

These artists now join the expansive community of School of Art MFA alumni. As they move out into the world, they will continue to engage us in dialogue through their work and actively shape the future of creative expression in our broader collective culture. We value the time that they have spent with us and look forward to witnessing the fruits of their fertile imaginations.

**Christopher McNulty**

Director and Ellen McClung Berry Professor  
School of Art  
University of Tennessee



# NUVEEN BARWARI

## GULISTAN

Employing collage, painting, textiles, and installation, I study the intricacies within conditions of assimilation, displacement, and contradictions within diasporic identities. My expansive studio practice involves gathering and repurposing artifacts from my community such as worn Kurdish clothes, fabric, and used rugs to investigate the multiplicity of materials, their inherited history, and cultural meanings in a post-colonial context. Textiles, like language, are a material that can be cut, sewn, and utilized as a tool for small-scale forms of resistance. Inserting the deconstruction of Kurdish dresses and industrially manufactured rugs into the realms of Western painting conceptualizes and responds to generational patterns in which diasporic living connects and detaches from them, carrying the potential of referencing a person, place, or even a fictive memory. There is a sense of history and loss in the way elements of the body are presented in my work. The use and reuse of textiles evokes how they might have looked on a person, how they would have danced or even moved in them. The patterns and symbols that I abstract from textiles often shift from being decorative to interrogating cultural symbols, redrawing borders, remapping, and reconnecting to ancestral land. Blurring the lines between painting, sculpture, and everyday objects, I vigorously reflect, frame, and sift through the different shapes and symbols that are found when one is living between clashing cultures, languages, and materials. I draw on a wide range of influences from Kurdish literature and dance to US commodity culture, the *mise-en-scène* of West Asian bazaars, and geopolitical issues.





*text-tile, #001, rug cut out, acrylic paint, 8 x 10 inches*



*text-tile, #006, rug cut out, oil stick, 8 x 10 inches*



*gulistan, rug cut out, soil*





*landscape*, found fabric, denim, deconstructed Kurdish dress, canvas, gesso, velvet, thread, xerox paper, fabric ink, acrylic paint





*faceless, stateless*, found Kurdish dress, oil paint, oil pastel, acrylic paint, denim, canvas



*Cooking for the peshmergas*, thread, Kurdish dress, found fabric, xerox paper



*Gulistan*, gallery installation view

# MURIEL CONDON

## ILL BREAD

The work exhibited in *Ill Bread* examines American nostalgia and personal memories of class consciousness in the form of tactile, domestic comforts. Crafted moments of material paradox serve as a response to widening social divisions and disintegrating civil stability. The intention for the work, cooked in the settling dust of a pandemic, is to provide a space of tenderness and humor for the viewer, offering both respite and a farewell to the past.

Devoid of utility or accuracy, printed textiles, ceramic forms, and paper compositions examine both personal and social memories. In *Ill Bread*, the materials create a space of communal nourishment responding to domestic and public instability forged through misinformation. The unstable but soft materials in the work function as both a subconscious reflection of the times and a reaction to working during an era of political, social, and environmental upheavals.

Simultaneously lighthearted and darkly absurd, this work utilizes the invitational nature of domestic space to welcome in viewers. The reference to a still life through an assemblage of unusable food and interior objects brings an awareness of social fragility while also opening space for moments of comfort and humor. The pieces attempt to soothe anxiety through material and color, be it the exposed batting or dusty mauve. The paper, felt, unglazed clay and batting have soft surfaces that absorb light, an approachable and inviting quality. The gaudy satin feed sacks provide a visual foil to announce the humility of the other materials present. By contrasting these materials, I find both humor and beauty in the quiet and classless.







*Bouquet Residence*, monoprints on satin, corn, size variable: one filled sack is 22 x 20 x 16 inches



*Articulate Separation*, bisqued ceramic, found objects, cast paper made from tablecloths, industrial felt



*Wherever You Go, There You Are*, screenprint, quilt batting, acrylic paint, wool thread, recycled tablecloth, 118 x 57 inches





*Articulate Separation*, bisqued ceramic, found objects, cast paper made from tablecloths, industrial felt



*Ill Bread*, gallery installation view



# ASHLEY EKSTRUM

## FULLGERING LIGHT

The light stimulated in-between two spaces  
(such as the middle of a Venn diagram)  
as it transforms into a new expanse.

Seven sticks acknowledge you in *Fullgering Light*. These sticks were found in the woods on Cherokee land. In hiking, I meet with fallen trees in their decomposition and commune with them by weeping in joy, sorrow, life, death; tears in exchange for one of their limbs: a walking stick for my bad leg on the journey home. I also find popped aluminum balloons in the woods. They can't decay; glimmering toxic indestructible fool's gold. We dreamily celebrate watching these mystics float away into sunset sky and then disassociate from the immortality we've constructed and distributed to muse with dying, ancestral forests.

Engaging with natural dyes, recycled pigments, oils, and acrylics, I paint and draw between deterioration and the eternal through imagery of evolved, otherworldly flowers and trees. I dye canvas with natural pigments and shibori hand tying methods which gives the surface of these works a story before beginning to paint. Like perceiving the character of wood grains before carving, the histories and life cycles of the plants and bugs are crafted into the canvas and guide the paintings' rendering. I recycle the dye into pigment which is painted back into the surface. These layers and illusions of layers provide these materials an extended life cycle. Employing raw, recycled materials alongside hyper-processed neon colors, I am meditating with my hands on this expansion of points into a fabricated series of interconnected physical and phenomenological loops.





*The big sing*, oil, acrylic, and recycled weld and madder pigments on madder dyed canvas, 35 x 30 x 1 inches



*Looping births*, oil, acrylic, recycled weld, logwood, and madder pigments on logwood and cochineal dyed canvas, 35 x 35 x 1 inches



*Seven*, sticks and foil balloon found on Cherokee land



*Seven Infinities*, oil, acrylic, and recycled weld pigment on weld and madder dyed silk, 20 x 16 x 1 inches





*Fullgering Light*, gallery installation view



*Fullgering Light*, gallery installation view

# TASHA LEWIS

## THE OFFERINGS

This exhibition re-possesses the architectural elements of column, altar, and arch to frame and elevate symbols tied to the creative labors of women with thread. The spinning wheel, a figure with hand-spindle, and tatted lace have all become revered icons. They are both as familiar and as unfamiliar to the artist as they will be to most viewers. The rediscovery of, and reflection on, these technologies of textile are staged through the use of digital fabrication processes. CNC plasma-cut steel, 3D-printed figurines, digital embroideries, and laser-cut Plexiglas are interwoven with hand-dyed and stitched cotton, hand-modeled and cast clay and latex, hand-buffed steel and carved foam. The traces of the fingers and of the body of the artist are everywhere as she attempts to physicalize her relationship with small things, like family heirlooms of lace, and huge things, like the systemic devaluation of female-gendered work.



*Lacework and its Image* (left, detail view)



*The Persistence of Memory*, plaster and cast-latex, 34 x 18 x 9 inches



*The Spinners*, digital embroidery, wood, batting, and steel, dimensions variable





*Lady of the Wheel* (detail view), CNC plasma-cut steel, wooden spinning wheel, fabricated steel steps, plaster, wood, marbled textile, thread, digital embroidery, dimensions variable





*Omphalos III*, clay and copper-leaf, 16 x 22 x 16 inches



*Tatted Window*, laser-cut sand-blasted plexiglass, cast latex, epoxy clay, 52 x 78 x 4 inches



*The Offerings*, gallery installation view

# AMALIA MERMINGAS

## MUSE

The heart of my creative research addresses the bond that we as people develop with our natural surroundings. Coming from a multicultural family, each half on either side of the Atlantic, there is an integral sense of place and landscape within my work. I have strong memories from my home in Greece and its dazzling islands. Yet I vividly remember my arrival to the United States, sitting in the backseat of the car watching the endless open spaces, cities, and forests go by. This transition instilled in me an early love for travel, dramatic vistas, and the thrill of adjusting to a new place.

My ceramic and paper works reference the natural world, and serve as tokens to a human experience with the land and sea. While playing with the unknowns in our past, I use repetitive marks, illegible writing, and curious imagery to create narratives that encourage the viewer to contemplate and look closer. Using mountains, islands, and horizons as a starting point, these ceramic monolithic works document and celebrate the things that have not changed throughout the millennia, our reverence for our natural environment.



*Muse with Graffiti*, (above, detail view), ceramic, steel, concrete, slip, oil paint, house paint, olive oil, 66 x 14 x 12 inches





*Journal Page From El Nido, Travel Series, crayon, ink, watercolor, gouache, mod podge, tracing paper, on paper, 5 x 7 inches*



*Journal Page From Sifnos, Travel Series, crayon, watercolor, ink, mod podge, on paper, 3 x 8 inches*



*Muse with Baby Amphora*, ceramic, steel, concrete, oil paint, house paint, olive oil, 65 x 14 x 12 inches





*The Empty Plinth*, (detail view), ceramic, steel, concrete, slip, oil paint, house paint, olive oil



*The Empty Plinth*, ceramic, steel, concrete, oil paint, house paint, olive oil 6 x 14 x 12 feet

# HANNAH OAKES

## ELLE SINGS

*ELLE SINGS* is an exhibition of black and white paintings that require presence, immediacy, spontaneity, improvisation, and devotion. The work examines failure, shape, and line, and how these things fight for dominance and attention. It's about finding balance among imbalance and control in unbelievable lack of control. It asks for understanding while it runs from all means of logic, all while singing the exact right song.



*Say*, oil on canvas, 46 x 42 inches (above)

*I Love My Hands*, (left, detail view)



*Here Is Where It Was*, oil on canvas, 60 x 72 inches

*The Perfect Painting*, oil on canvas, 60 x 72 inches



*ELLE SINGS*, gallery installation view





*Untitled*, oil on canvas, 60 x 96 inches



*I Love My Hands*, oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches



*ELLE SINGS*, gallery installation view

# NICHOLE SCHAPPERT

## DEPENDENT ARISING

These works encourage an experience of spiritual awakening. Diagrammatic installations and site-specific work illustrate a meditation on space, time, and identity. Probing the aesthetics of Minimalism, I use concrete, steel, and form to juxtapose cultural associations of male-dominated materials by using them to express my thoughts on female reproduction. Repetition and the re-contextualization of found objects examine the performative power of the female body while simultaneously embracing and rejecting the male gaze. Distinctly feminist, my process embraces imbalance, alienation, and vulnerability.



*Wall Hanging*, paint rags, silk, 53 x 53 inches (above)

*Axis Mundi*, (left, detail view)





*Untitled (Rib)*, concrete, bone, 24 x 16 inches



*Untitled (Woman)*, concrete, plastic tubing, galvanized chain, steel, graphite, 26 x 14 inches



*Fertility*, fabric, needlepoint (found), bone, wire, 64 x 96 inches



*Axis Mundi*, porcelain, wood, steel, nylon rope, brass, glass, paper pulp (February 2022), 64 x 14 inches



*Dependent Arising*, 833 sheets of handmade paper, steel tubing, rebar, steel log chain, cast iron, hi-vis spray paint, 12 foot diameter



*Dependent Arising*, (detail view)



# GARY WHITE

## KEEPING ALTARS

My work has been inspired by the history of the South. The history that I focus on is not of the typical masked smiling happy south with blood on its mouth, but the naked south. The truths that turn social norms on end, of whispered collaborations, and vanishing phantoms of heroines who questioned and rebelled. This is the history I seek to shed light on and bring into our present conversations as it relates to contemporary issues that we face as a region, as a country, and as individuals. The question of what history is made from, what it consists of, arises. The simple answer to an intricately complex question, is people. It is made of people, people who become Ancestors. This body of work utilizes stories, memories, ancestors, histories, spirituality and the present to weave a story that overlaps and creates a dialogue between the past and present. Moreover, the work allows history, ancestral memories, and spirituality that are intangible to become tangible.



*How to Keep a Storm at Bay*, fabric, 35 x 35 inches (above)

*The Evil of Good and Bad Intentions as it Pertains to History*, (left, detail view)



*What It Means to Wear Ruffles with a Phenotype*, wood, watercolor pencils, graphite, gesso acrylic, 15 x 17 inches



*Altar 1*, wood, fabric, milk paint, ceramic, watercolor pencils, graphite, 54 x 12 inches



*The Bigger Picture*, fabric, ceramic sculptures, gallery installation view





*The Keeper*, ceramic, graphite, acrylic, steel, fabric, found objects





*Altar 2*, wood, fabric, milk paint, ceramic, watercolor pencils, graphite, 54 x 12 inches



*The Living Archive*, ceramic, acrylic, oil paint, 8,5 x 11 inches



*Keeping Altars*, gallery view

# THE MFA PROGRAM

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, is Tennessee's premier public research institution. A department within the College of Arts and Sciences, the UTK School of Art is committed to excellence in all of its programs. The School of Art's MFA program is ranked #22 and its printmaking area is ranked #3 among public universities by U.S. News and World Report. The NASAD-accredited, 60 credit-hour, three-year graduate program offers concentrations in ceramics, painting and drawing, printmaking, sculpture, and time-based art.

Our MFA program offers courses and opportunities that provide the fundamental skills artists need to develop and sustain a professional life. Embedded in the common curriculum are experiences that enable our students to plan, promote, fund, organize, and build community as part of their creative practice. Graduate students take advantage of university-wide graduate courses that relate to and expand their creative horizons.

MFA students work closely with faculty, visiting artists, and each other in small studio classes and participate in regular critiques, studio visits, and school-wide graduate reviews. The three-year degree provides students with the time necessary to research, experiment, and hone their practice. The final year is devoted to creating a thesis project that will serve as a springboard to a wide array of careers in the arts and education, including successful art practices as well as positions in industry, museums, and galleries.

The School of Art oversees a host of visiting artists' programs. Accomplished artists from a variety of disciplines visit the UT campus each semester for lectures, critiques, and week-long collaborations. Additionally, the nationally-recognized artist-in-residence (AIR) program in the painting and drawing concentration brings a different visiting professional artist to campus each semester to teach a graduate seminar. The AIR, who typically works in a major urban art hub, acts as a bridge between the university and the global art community.

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The School of Art offers multiple high-visibility opportunities for its graduate students to build their professional skills through public exhibition of their work. These opportunities provide the critical groundwork and experiences for sustaining a successful practice as professional artists.

### **ORANGE**

Curated by the School of Art faculty, the Orange exhibition coincides with the annual College Art Association conference and features exceptional work by current graduate students. Previous exhibitions have taken place at UNIX Gallery, Foley Gallery, and White Box Gallery in New York; Zg Gallery and Co-Prosperity Sphere in Chicago; The Fridge in Washington, D.C.; and Coagula Curatorial in Los Angeles.

### **UT GALLERIES**

The School of Art operates one on-campus gallery and two off-campus galleries. The Ewing Gallery serves as a cultural resource for campus, the School of Art, and the Knoxville community. Located in the heart of downtown Knoxville, the UT Downtown Gallery presents a series of innovative solo and group exhibitions that offer students and the community an opportunity to see international, national, and local artists' work. Gallery 1010, a completely student-run exhibition space, presents new exhibitions every week.

### **LIFE IN KNOXVILLE**

Knoxville has a population of nearly 190,000 and is home to Big Ears, a world-renowned avant-garde music festival, and countless other arts and culture events. Knoxville is also home to an urban wilderness of 1,000 forested acres with 112 miles of paved greenways and natural trails, and lake and river access. Only a 45-minute drive, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is an easy daytrip destination for hiking and other outdoor adventures.



## SUCCESSFUL CREATIVE THINKING REQUIRES THE PERSPECTIVES OF DIVERSE PEOPLE.

The School of Art reaffirms the immeasurable contribution of diversity to the arts and seeks through its programming and activities to incorporate diverse perspectives from the rich panoply that is the human race. Furthermore, we assume our responsibility to ensure a welcoming and conscientious environment for everyone without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical, or mental disability or veteran status. We recognize that exposure to all forms of diversity is essential to facilitating a creative artistic environment.

Contact the School of Art  
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SCHOOL OF ART

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