

**University of Oregon  
2024 MFA  
Terminal Project  
Exhibitions**

2024 MFA Terminal Project Exhibitions



Ditch Projects

# Introduction

This year's MFA terminal project exhibitions showcase the diverse and innovative works of six emerging artists. Held at the intersection of tradition and experimentation, these exhibitions serve as a testament to the creativity and critical inquiry present in today's contemporary art landscape. Each of the artists featured in these exhibitions bring a unique perspective and artistic practice to the table, contributing to the rich conversation around visual practice and exploration. From painting to sculpture, photography to fibers, this year's shows offer a multidisciplinary exploration of themes ranging from colonization and the cosmos to kitsch, to the sublime. Through their varied approaches, the boundaries between the physical and the digital, the personal and the universal, blur as each artist navigates their own unique terrain. Drawing inspiration from a myriad of sources – from cultural heritage to social justice – they invite viewers to join them in exploring the complexities of the human experience.

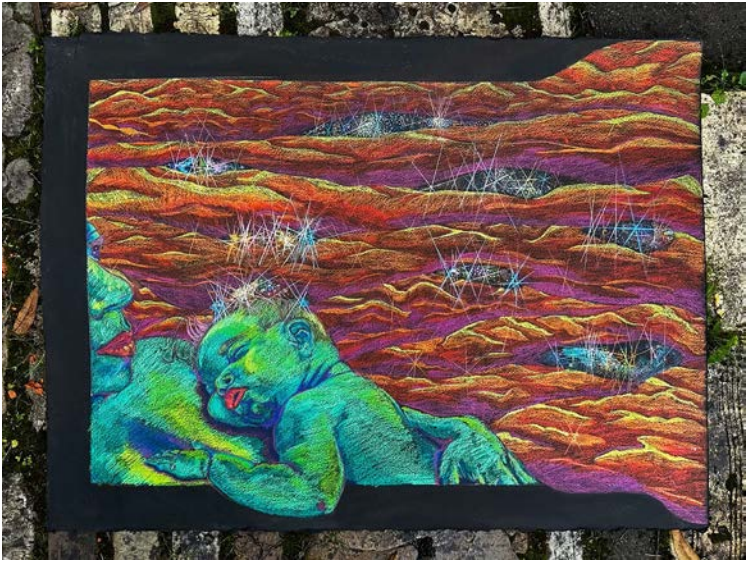
For each of these artists, this exhibition is the culmination of three years of intensive study, including academic research and creative studio output, as well as an immersion in the Department of Art as instructors in undergraduate courses and labs. Through continuous mentorship from the faculty, as well as guest artists, critics and curators, the grads in our program are given a high bar for their creative output. This catalog and these exhibitions represent not only a punctuating moment of the past three years, but also a departure point for these six artists, as we look forward to following their creative endeavors in the years to come. We invite you to join us in celebrating the culmination of these artists' MFA journeys as they embark on the next chapter of their careers as artists.

RON JUDE  
Director of Graduate Studies



Christian Alvarado (they) is an afro-latinx artist whose practice sails between the realms of drawing, sculpture and writing. Influenced by afrofuturism, and latinx speculative fiction, their artworks resemble mythological scenes bursting from the darkness in rich color across the stars. Through their dynamic use of color and material, Christian constructs a personal cosmology for how an interstellar diaspora may come to be. Their works have been shown at the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, PA, Foundation Gallery in Tulsa, OK, Gallery Aferro in Newark NJ, and The Museum of Early Trades and Crafts in Madison, NJ.

# Christian Alvarado



## SCENES! FROM THE PHENOMENOMICON!

The artwork in SCENES! FROM THE PHENOMENOMICON! is a means of preemptively establishing a shelter in the distant cosmos. It plays with personal and cultural myths by merging autobiographical, fictional and historical figures and events. Across a variety of hexagonal drawing-sculpture hybrids, shaped after space-faring projects that symbolize a quest to establish contact with life from far away, the heavens and its inhabitants are stumbled upon in dazzling darkness and cosmic color.

The word “phenomenomicon” is a makeshift carrier bag – a shelter I’ve constructed to hold the feelings, dreams, and people of a little world I want to share with you. It is a portmanteau of the words “phenomena” which means a speculative person, thing, or event, and “Necronomicon”, in reference to a fictional book of evil gods found in the science-fiction subgenre of cosmic horror. Thus, the stage upon which these Scenes! are set is a speculation that shelters us from the horror of the cosmos.

What is this horror? It is not the cosmos itself. Not while wishes are cast from comet tails. Not while the moon rhymes with an ebbing tide. Even here, the explosions of colorful mayhem and gasping lights and whirling plasma storms appear in their terrestrial form, the tumultuous waves that breathe glittering foam and curl around my ankles and pull me deeper into the sand. Just as how gravity pulls me into the stars. This is not horror. This is home.

The true horror is the destruction of the cosmos by the evil gods. They dreamed of connecting islands in the sea like constellations. And when they finally were, they found that the real constellations are made of islands in the sky. The history of colonization is a prophecy of cosmic horror. When the next explorers land at the doorstep of Mars or beyond, will they leave a path of horror in their wake as they make their way to further and further worlds, just as they had done before? Through this phenomenomicon, we take a detour from a potential colonial future. Members of my family are illustrated against an abstract celestial expanse, representing our presence in a turbulent cosmos. In doing so, a place is secured for us in the new world.







Ashley Campbell is an interdisciplinary artist from Los Angeles whose work probes the intersection of digital and physical realms, exploring themes of alternate realities, commodity fetishism, and the continuous transformation between tangible and digital forms.

# Ashley Campbell



My artistic practice is rooted in process-based research, manifesting as a type of pastiche—an interdisciplinary collage of video, ceramics, sound performance, and sculpture. I rely on spontaneity and experimentation, beginning my work in a predominantly formal manner—responding and reacting rather than planning and organizing. By remaining open to circumstance, instinct, and impulse, I find that ideas coalesce and form around particular objects or materials. Gathering and arranging this information becomes an almost stream of consciousness-like endeavor, bringing a piece into being. This approach allows me to engage critically and conceptually along the way. Processes and ideas form an interwoven structure, each relying on the other to expand the possibilities and potential meaning of the work.

Central to my practice is the exploration of alternate realities and parallel universes as lived experience. I create spaces that feel familiar yet warped, as if existing in a dream. Through the lens of commodity fetishism, I visually represent the insane and bizarre accumulations of our existence in re-contextualized arrangements. This serves as the conceptual bridge throughout all my work. Oscillating between the digital prime and the physical prime, I contemplate how to portray the liminal—a threshold of transformation, the in-between. I approach the digital/physical relationship in a more literal manner. A.I. text-to-image technology is not fully refined; it often yields very strange, glitched results. This generated image is used as a reference for a ceramic sculpture, then scanned and inserted back into the digital realm via a video. I take figurines and create images with a flatbed scanner and digitally alter the image using the clone stamp in Photoshop. These images are then printed and placed in overly adorned frames of mixed materials. The physical becomes digital becomes physical and so on.

This process of layering allows me to point at the concept of digital space and blur the boundaries between ideas of high and low. My work purposefully walks a fine line between visual pleasure and tackiness, drawing inspiration from kitsch. Kitsch, in its classical definition, is something that strives to be art and fails. A.I. text-to-image generation also strives and fails in this regard, and therefore, I view it as modern kitsch. I use the poodle icon, a quintessential kitsch object and class symbol, and digitally "overbreed" it. By repeatedly replicating and transforming it, its original form gets more removed from its origin, akin to how a meme infinitely reinterprets an image.

I question what it means to work with a material like clay that has traditionally been used by humans for thousands of years and



combine it with artificial intelligence, which is being referred to as the biggest technological advancement of the modern era. A machine or object gives nothing and also everything—how do I visualize this tension? What is the symbol of desire? Why does one desire? From what source does desire emerge? As I navigate the interplay of these materials, aesthetics, and symbolism, I strive to create immersive work that invites viewers to explore the complexities of contemporary existence, where the physical and the digital converge and diverge in a continuous state of transformation.

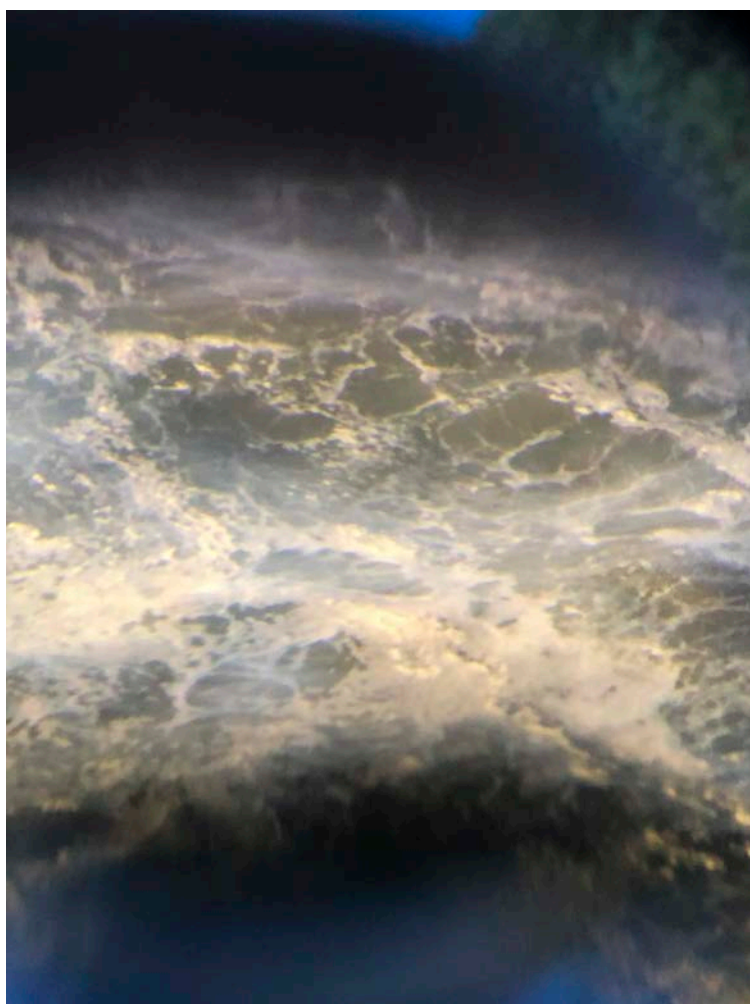




Conner Gordon (b. 1994) is an Oregon-based artist exploring photography as unreliable narration. By weaving together photographic sequences through books and installations, he works to retool photography from a pillar of documentary representation into an instrument of experimental narrative. His images have been exhibited at venues including Solas Gallery in Seattle, WA, Blue Sky Gallery in Portland, OR, The Humid in Athens, GA, and Filter Space in Chicago, IL. He was a 2019-2020 Fulbright Research Grantee to Serbia, where he photographed the legacy of Yugoslav-era modernist urban planning. He has self-published three photobooks, with more in the making.

# Conner Gordon

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## THE OVERLOOK

There is a spot out near Seal Rock where the ocean drops away and reveals the most incredible tide pools I have ever seen. I have spent hours craning over them while visiting the Oregon Coast, marveling at anemones and starfish while barnacle-encrusted sea stacks tower overhead. I return to these spaces again and again, scouting for whales from the nearby overlooks and taking photos atop the rocky lattices where earth and tide meet.

At its core, this continual return is about desire—a desire for stillness and for the sublime, rendered accessible by coastal highway and scenic overlook. It is this same desire I pursue in my images that document these trips, as I zoom in on my phone to take in the subtle curve of a wave or a spray of foam. Yet there is always a point where this access is refused: the tide starts to come in, the ground underfoot is unstable, the layers of intertidal life are too thick, the photograph begins to pixelate. The best tide pools, I begin to notice, are those I cannot reach.

The Overlook is a photographic exploration of this relationship between desire, representation, and refusal in the landscape of the Oregon Coast. This work begins within the state parks and scenic overlooks that dot the coast, which attempt to frame the landscape into a definitive vista. In these spaces, I photograph the landscape through strategies that embrace this framing; some images, made on a large format camera, reproduce scenic overlook infrastructure in exacting detail, while others depict the coast through the tunnel-like view of a pair of binoculars.

However, it is these same processes that compromise the images from their outset; the large format photographs never reveal the spaces their subjects are meant to frame, while the binocular images become peripheral abstractions where optical aberrations, pixelation, and fragments of landscape intermingle. Instead of fulfilling their role as photographs about landscape, the images instead become photographs about looking, as the sublime manifests not as a fixed element of the terrain, but as an elusive resonance that evades photography's attempts to document it.

I work in this manner to undermine the logic of total representation and definitive view that shapes our understanding of spaces like the Oregon Coast. Drawing from concepts such as Édouard Glissant's opacity and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's contaminated diversity, I work against singularizing views of landscape that have sought to flatten these spaces into consumable,

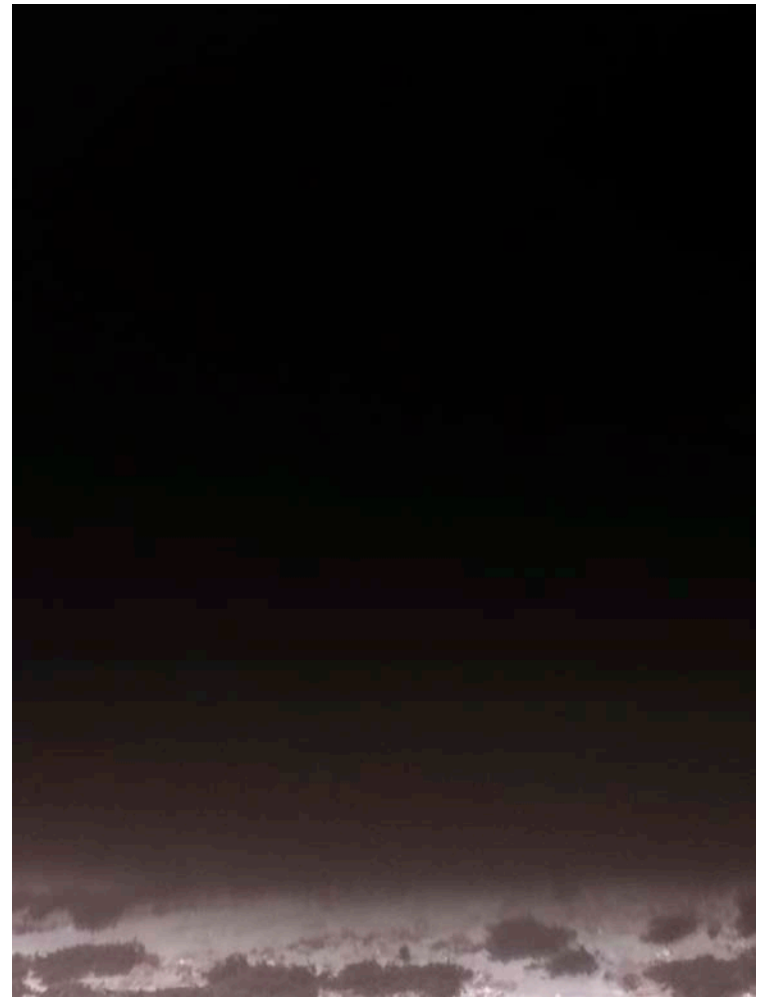


photo-ready experiences, from Manifest Destiny to the wanderlust Instagram feed. I see the fallibility of the images in *The Overlook* as a necessary counterpoint to such views: a way of looking that engages with the desire at the heart of the photographic impulse while remaining rooted in the peripheral, the multifaceted, and the irreducible.

BELKNAP CRATER  
2 MI.

LITTLE BELKNAP  
CRATER 2 MI.

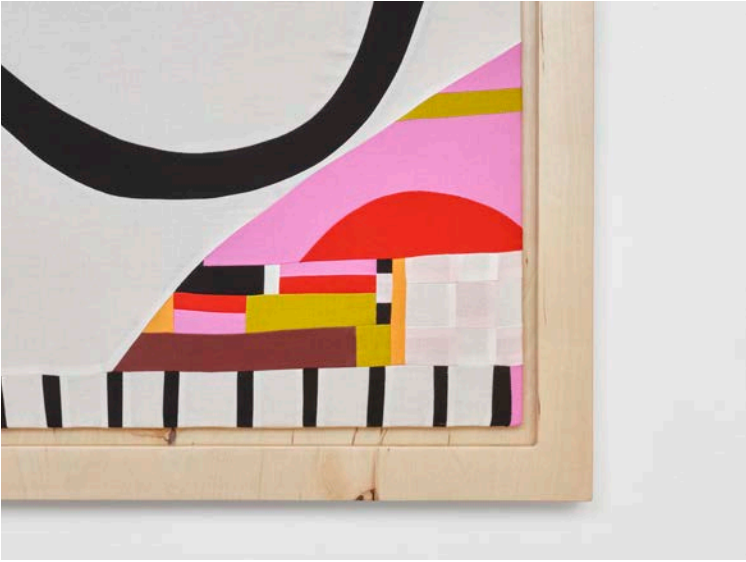
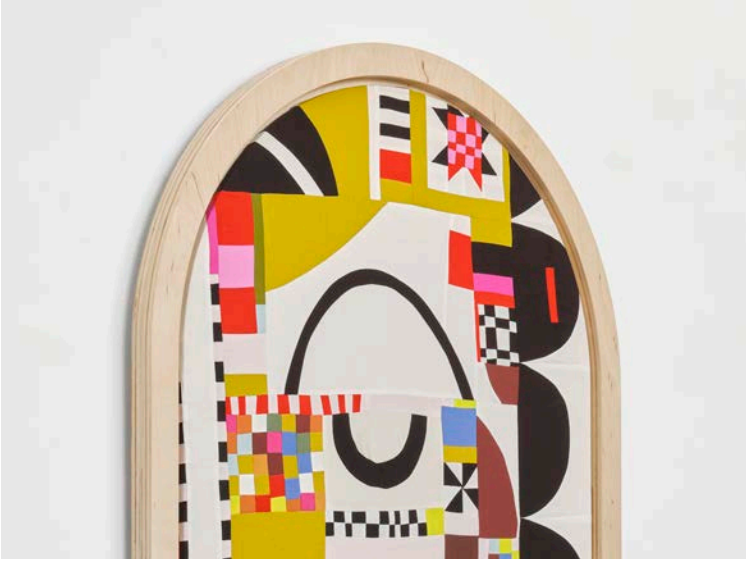
MT. WASHINGTON  
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Sydney Lee is a seventh generation quiltmaker from Raleigh, North Carolina. Sydney's quilts transcend tradition, embracing a contemporary aesthetic while honoring her traditional craft heritage. Influenced by both traditional quilts and modernist paintings, her quilts challenge perceptions of the medium, blurring the lines between art and craft. Her work explores the use of color, surface, function, and the grid. Sydney has exhibited works across the country, including the Hub-Robeson Gallery at Penn State University, the Cabarrus Arts Council in Cabarrus NC, Montgomery College in Rockville MD, New York Arts Practicum in New York, NY, and Ox-Bow School of Art in Saugatuck, MI.

# Sydney Lee

@sydneyleart



There is knowledge in our fingertips. My hands know the distance required between stitches better than my mind does, and they can understand the qualities of fabric just by rubbing a cloth between my pointer finger and thumb. My hands know the importance of generational knowledge and never resist the urge to reach out and touch to understand better. My hands are my hands, but they're also my mother's hands.

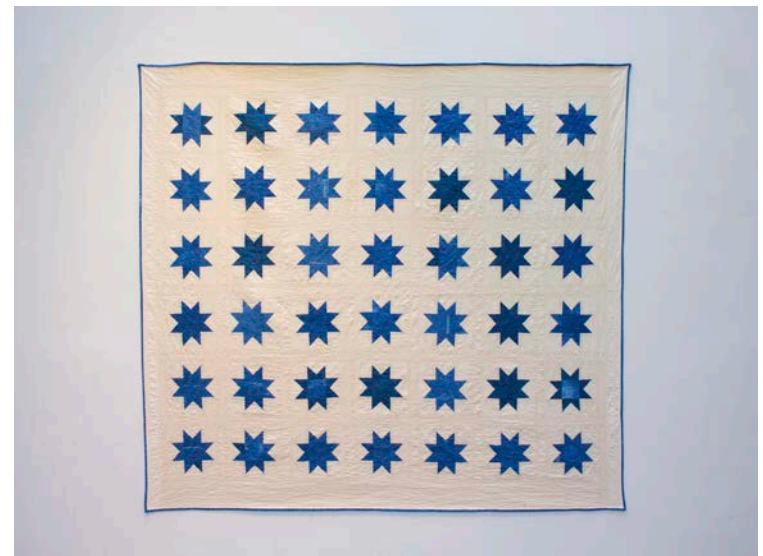
I am a seventh-generation quilter on my matrilineal side, and that history informs the function of quilts in my practice for both the material richness and my personal connection with the medium. My decorative drive steers towards an interest in the surface, where composition and color become the main focus. I am creating quilts in a traditional method of making; utilizing my hereditary knowledge, while conceptually I am focusing on mark making and composition that relates to modernist painting. In my work, I am utilizing the parameters of quilting as a jumping off point, using the traditional structure of a square and bound edges that relate to a frame or the harsh edges of a painting. My studio practice has led up to a moment of synthesis between quilts as a form and a method of communication. Quilts have an inherent tie to the body due to their functionality and historical context as domestic objects, however I am questioning the relation of function in the domestic sphere by framing them in the context of paintings, existing purely for visual communication. My work is understood through the cultural connotations of craft, color, and form.

I aim to position my practice as a bridge between craft and fine art, with an emphasis on the intricacies of craft being the cornerstone of the work. Elissa Auther, in her book *String, Felt, Thread*, discusses how quilts and their presentation on the wall align with contemporary trends in painting. This positioning allows quilts a new aesthetic significance, elevating them to the realm of high art due to their resemblance to the more prestigious category of painted textiles. Both socially and artistically, my goal is to leverage my expertise in quilting to contribute to the discourse of the status of craft as a subset of fine art. I aspire to achieve exactly what Auther articulated — to grant quilts the same aesthetic standing as high art.

My terminal project, *When I Dream I See Real Things*, focuses on large scale quilts installed on the wall as a reference to painting. These quilts are fully functional as domestic objects, but are rendered non-functional through installation methods. I am questioning the divide between craft and fine art by looking



towards both traditional textile craftswomen and modernist painters from the 20th century. The inclusion of both functional and non-functional, painterly objects ties to my desire of blurring the lines between craft and fine art by using both languages of painting and quilting.



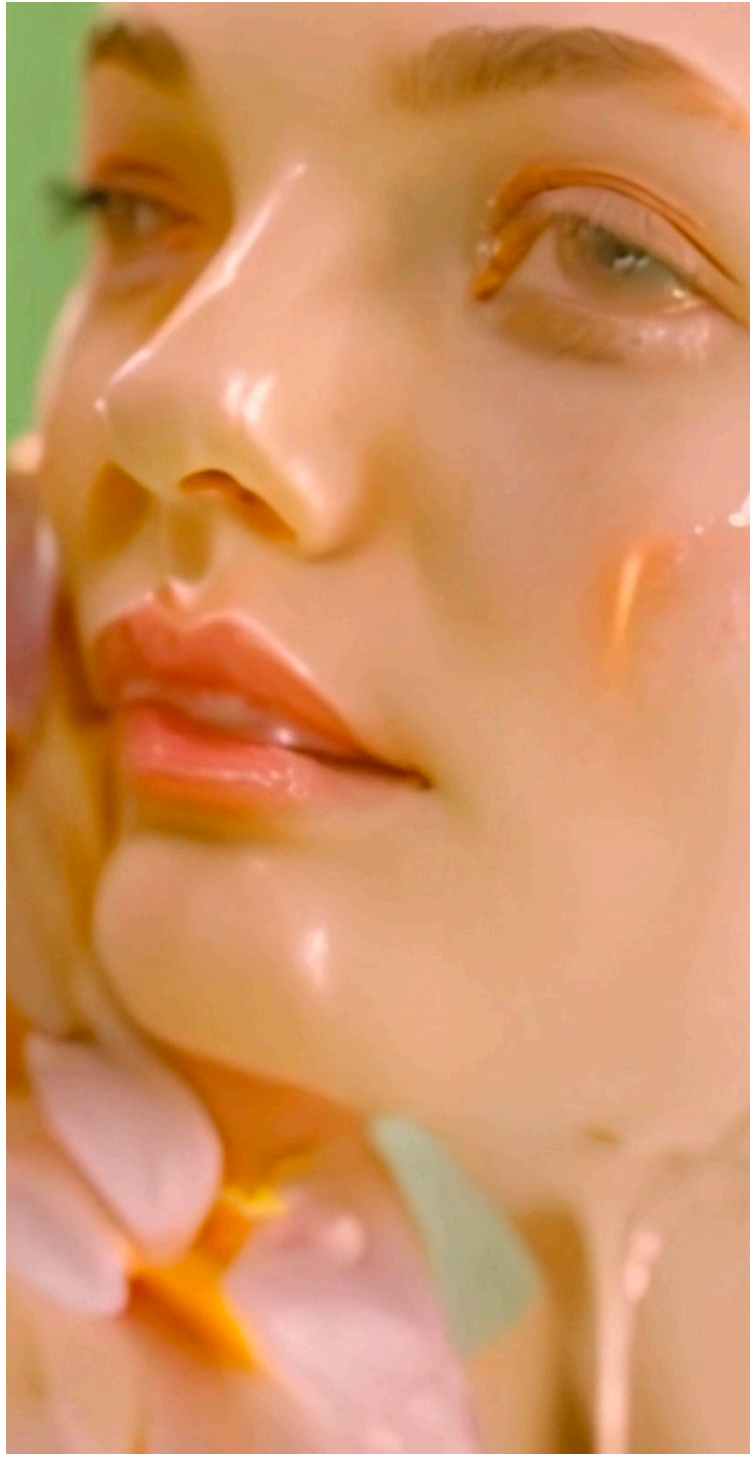




Ellen O'Shea was born in Saint Louis, Missouri. She earned a Bachelor's in Fine Arts from Webster University in 2017 and has exhibited work at Gallery Zeke, Grease Three, the Granite City Art and Design District, Bermuda Project, and the LaVerne Krause Gallery. Using a variety of mediums, from sculpture to mixed media installations, she aims to disrupt the veneer of feminine culture, revealing the underlying mechanisms of manipulation at play.

# ELLEN O'SHEA

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@\_emoshea



Ellen O'Shea's work investigates the intricate trappings of societal influences that shape identities, particularly through the lens of female consumerism. In a world inundated with messages designed to manipulate desires, she surveys the pervasive phenomenon of being brainwashed by the allure of paraphernalia.

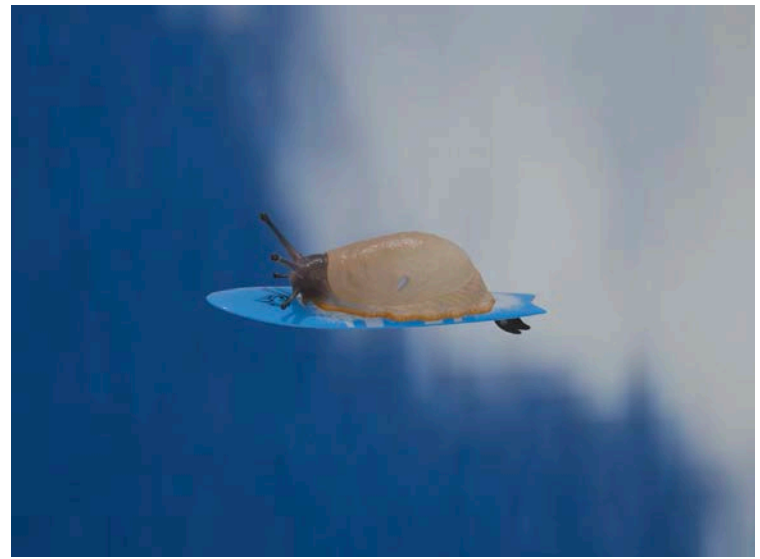
As a female artist, O'Shea possesses acute awareness of how corporations capitalize on women, feeding them a constant stream of superficial ideals and materialistic desires. She occupies a unique position as both an outside observer and an inside participant, critically examining the dynamics of the beauty advertisement industry. With the rising popularity of 'slugging'—a routine involving excessive layers of moisturizer applied to the face—she finds herself drawn to this trend while simultaneously questioning its underlying impulse.

Traditionally, women are conditioned to covet shiny, glossy things, often equating them with personal worth and fulfillment. Yet, they are bombarded with conflicting messages about empowerment. The act of slugging transforms one into a sticky object, conforming to a social trend, yet potentially becoming a source of repulsion. O'Shea confronts these paradoxes, adopting the notion that embracing the grotesque nature of slugging may lead to enlightenment.

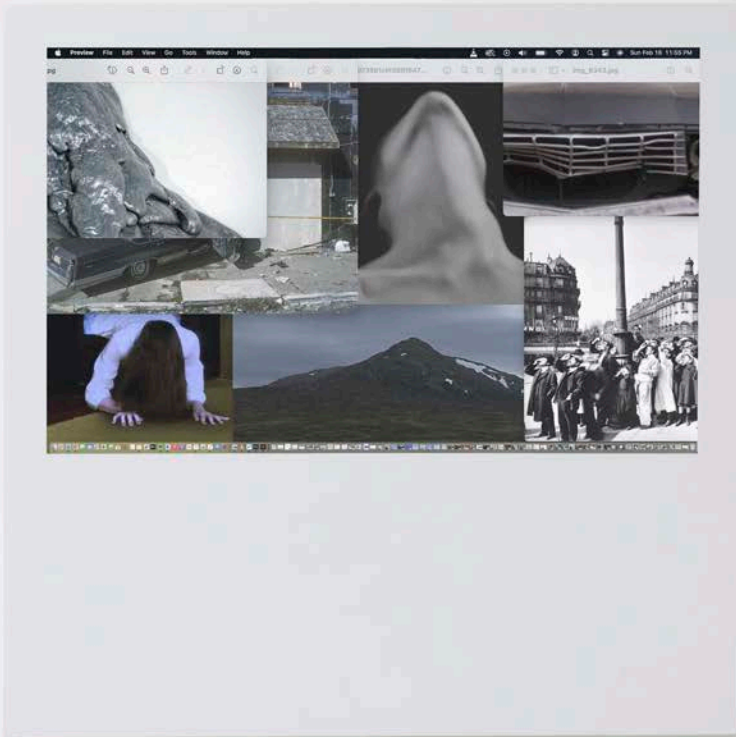
She uses feminine iconography as a starting point. The mudflap girl dressed in reflective material is the point of origin. She is shiny, new, and full of promises. As the narrative progresses, the metamorphosis takes place, a moment of chrysalis. AI generated faces covered in a sheen melt slowly into goo, decomposing. The images are cut close in, obscuring a sense of space and time.

The final phase is the slug. The body of the slug poses seductively, harking back to the original reclined gesture of the mudflap girl. The slug is content, it has survived the transition. It transfigured into its final state of gloss, just like the skincare ethos intended. In the labyrinth of societal expectations, the female must be a shapeshifter, a canvas for endless manipulation. It bends and twists under the pressure of degradation.

Women morph into fleeting ideals, existing between the lines of conformity. Yet, the period of change from the male gaze to bodily acceptance brings a sense of peace. We are witnessing not the cliché transmutation of a caterpillar to butterfly, but a transcendence from female to slug. It is a journey of liberation, a reclaiming of one's innate worth and authenticity.



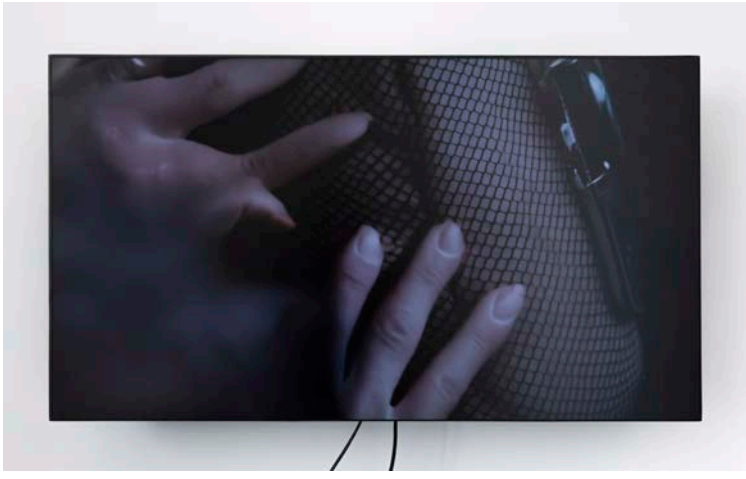




Noa Taylor is an interdisciplinary artist working primarily in photography, AI, video, and installation. Taylor's work deploys contemporary digital aesthetics and context collapses to revisit and recuperate the problematically and superficially queer representations in our collective visual media inheritance.

# Noa Taylor

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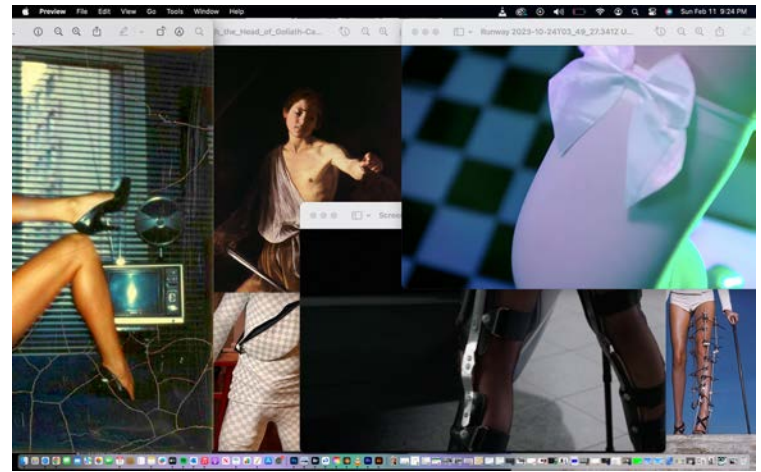
“We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality.”

— José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*

Digital autochronicity is a framework that arises from the method of image consumption and circulation on sites like Pinterest and Tumblr, both of which value formal and thematic through-lines over maintained chronology. On these sites, disparate images invite comparison simply by virtue of being viewed together; regardless of historical origin, medium, or location, reposting images in succession inscribes each with new meanings through shifting contexts. In this way, the framework of digital autochronicity is imbued with queer potential. Rather than prioritizing nostalgia, these spaces are always in motion, the past, present, and future conversing, activating each other, a subversion or queering of chronology. Horizon lines are contained in windows, interrupted by their neighbors sitting in front and behind them — a queering of perspective. *Machines of Loving Grace* aims to activate digital autochronicity to recuperate problematic queer representations in our cultural inheritance.

One such representation is *Crash*, a 1996 film directed by David Cronenberg based on the 1973 novel by J.G. Ballard. Following a group of car crash fetishists — at once a death cult and public sex/queer kink subculture — the original media is simultaneously marked by an undercurrent of queer hesitancy and the possibility for queer utopian interpretations. My own first viewing of *Crash* places it amongst the autochronic — a decade ago, on my phone, bouncing between apps, streaming the film through an illegal site during the wee hours of the morning. Experiencing *Crash* in this manner contextualized the film amongst the other content I consumed and circulated online — these context collapses are made visual through screenshot collages. Ultimately, the languages, structures, and filters of the digital became the lens through which I understood the film and its queer potential.

*Crash (2024)* is an AI remake the film; it is a revisiting, a recuperating, a queering of *Crash* through current software. Recreating *Crash* through AI reaches towards queer potentials because its datasets are autochronic: a grand accumulation of our collective pasts and presents, hopes and biases shuffled together, activated simultaneously. In *Crash (2024)*, the warped visuals of AI makes bodies and machines merge, the gender expressions of figures shifting in and out of recognition and specific binary



assignment. AI's failure to render accurate bodies is a queering of representation, as the divisions between sex and gender, technology and biology, collapse.

On the one hand, as these moments of failure (glitch, kink, accident) become the expectation rather than a disruption, they reflect back on the systems that deem them erroneous. On the other hand, because of community guidelines and internal biases, there are moments in *Crash (2024)* that AI won't generate. Rather than deleting these moments, or finding a work-around, the lost cuts are filled in with dead screen blue. The blue screen serves as a space holder: as an indicator of a computer crash, it archives AI's failure within its ever evolving and ever learning progress, a gesture toward what could, would, or will be. These moments of failure are the places through which we might reach towards a recuperation of queer representations, the gaps between the cogs of our cultural inheritance where the light of something else trickles through.



**2024 MFA TERMINAL PROJECT EXHIBITION  
DITCH PROJECTS, SPRINGFIELD, OR**

Exhibition #1 on view from May 3rd—May 12th, 2024

Exhibition #2 on view from May 17th—May 26th, 2024

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**2023-24 VISITING ARTIST LECTURE SERIES**

Aurora Tang, Motomichi Nakamura, Gracelee Lawrence, Leslie Jones, Ari Melenciano, Sandy Rodriguez, Alfredo Jaar, Jesse Harrod, Robert Trafford, Julian Watts, B.Wurtz, Kahlil Robert Irving, Tallmadge Doyle, Angela Hennessy, Dionne Lee

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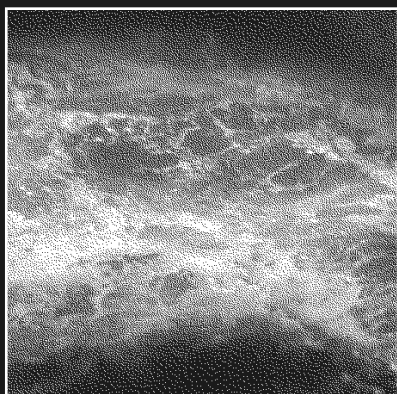
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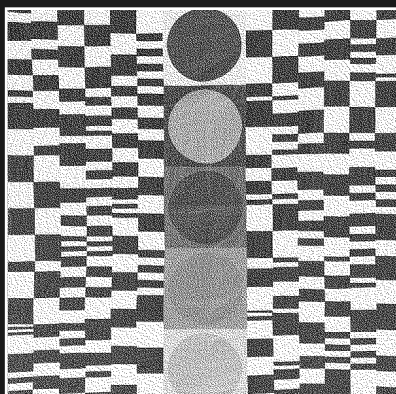
**Christian Alvarado 04**



**Ashley Campbell 12**



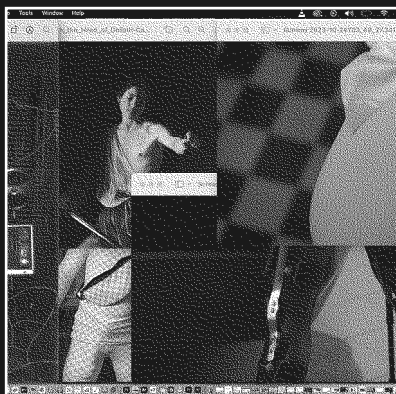
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**Sydney Lee 28**



**Ellen O'Shea 36**



**Non Taylor 44**