

THE 51ST ANNUAL UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
MASTER OF FINE ARTS GRADUATE EXHIBITION

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Fred Marque DeWitt

Emily Gui

Biz Iqbal

Anna Riley

Nadia Shihab

THE 51ST ANNUAL UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
MASTER OF FINE ARTS GRADUATE EXHIBITION

June 11–July 11, 2021

THIS EXHIBITION IS ORGANIZED BY BAMPFA
CURATORIAL ASSISTANT CLAIRE FROST. THE ANNUAL
MASTER OF FINE ARTS EXHIBITION IS MADE POSSIBLE
BY THE BARBARA BERELSON WILTSEK ENDOWMENT.

MFA Artists' Talk
Wednesday, June 23, 4:30

<https://bampfa.org/program/51st-annual-university-california-berkeley-master-fine-arts-graduate-exhibition>

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champoy: still from *Ancestors Calling Collect*, 2021; digital video (shot on 16mm and digital); 52 min.; courtesy of the artist.

champoy

champoy's work is deeply engaged with the lingering effects of colonialism and the structures of knowledge production that it perpetuates. The artist's use of video, drawing, sculpture, and performance comes together in maximalist, process-based spaces where cultural and imaginary worlds clash. The complexities and contradictions inherent in these spaces grow out of champoy's neocolonial education and ongoing inquiries into indigenous culture in the Philippines, particularly in their home province of Bukidnon. The focal point of this installation is a large painting and collage that rests horizontally. The painting's layered composition draws on the aesthetic traditions of history paintings and comics, depicting one-eyed, white-skinned figures water torturing a brown body in the foreground. This act is not only physical, but also aided by collaged dollar bills, commercial images, and mass-produced clothing that demonstrate the many ways that indoctrination occurs. Flames rise up behind the horrific act, producing black smoke that silhouettes the yellow glyphs crowning the composition. These graphic language references provide an impenetrable narrative that seemingly describes the scene below.

A dense arrangement of found and made objects, drawings, and video fills the spaces and walls around this central painting, inviting the viewer to explore and discover these material anchors to performances and rituals that have happened or will happen somewhere else. The objects' arrangement mimics the intuitive and improvisational nature of champoy's practice. Drawings and woodcuts that repeat glyphs similar to those in the painting implicate the space of the museum and its institutional structures in the same problematic power dynamics of colonization. champoy's film brings together narratives about sacred ritual objects held in American museum collections (including the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at UC Berkeley) woven with oral histories and personal home video footage. The installation builds a flourishing, playful world that nonetheless examines and critiques the tokenization and commoditization of the cultures it celebrates.



Fred Marque DeWitt: *The Bedroom*, 2020; oil on canvas; 72 × 96 in.; courtesy of the artist.

Fred Marque DeWitt

The condemnation of violence against Black people without depicting that violence and the reality that Black people do not feel safe anywhere are at the root of Fred DeWitt's work. His lush, layered paintings and public memorials meditate on acts of violence and protest while pushing beyond histories of pain to project future spaces of joy and safety through figurative images and references to plants and traditional rituals, as well as the evocation of sensory experience.

Shortly after installing his first memorial on UC Berkeley's campus, DeWitt found the ceramic elements of the work scattered and broken. He connected this to the tradition of placing broken goods at the heads of graves in slave cemeteries, a practice intended to release the spirits, which informs his continued work with ceramics. For the current exhibition, DeWitt made ceramic plates decorated with images inspired by traditional African designs and portraits of victims of police violence and stacked them like bodies on a slave ship. Assembling the plates into a sculpture in the gallery, DeWitt built new meaning around their form to convey a sense of hope. Several plates, which will be placed around campus, have hardened concrete rims and a center of unfired clay and plant seeds. When the unfired clay disintegrates with rain and time, the seeds will sprout within the concrete ring, marking sites of renewal emerging from acts of hate.

The exhibition also features a painting by DeWitt that incorporates ground pigments found at sites of protest and action around the Bay Area, referencing the resistance and action that bridge the space from pain and grief to change and growth. Finally, DeWitt invited active contemplation of the absence of safety for Black people by placing "Safe Black Space" circles on the floor of interstitial spaces in the museum. Just wide enough in diameter for a single person to stand within them, these circles announce the arbitrariness of declarations of safety amid the myriad actions and environments that inhibit Black people's sense of security.

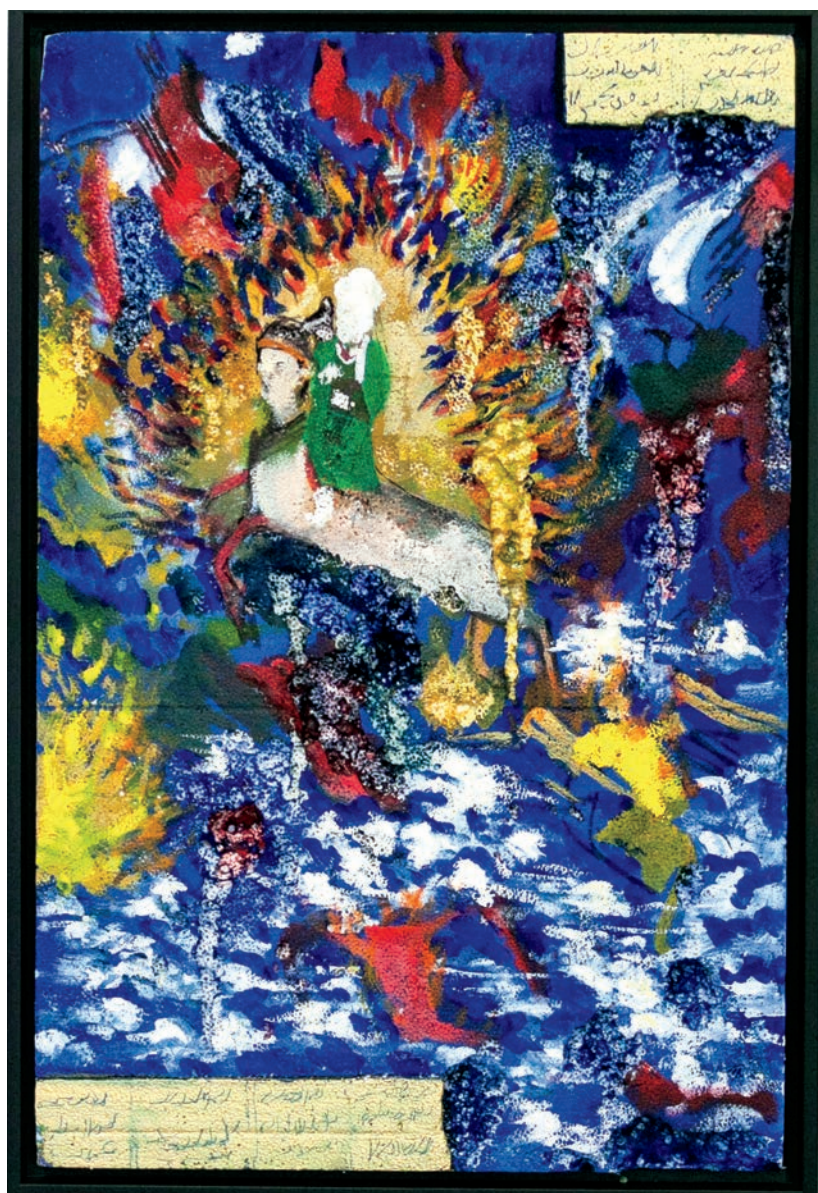


Emily Gui: *Fewer Better Things*, 2021; handmade paper from amazon.com boxes and found objects; 60 × 36 × 36 in.; courtesy of the artist.

Emily Gui

Predominantly a printmaker, Emily Gui focuses her work on the simultaneous absence and overwhelm of meaning and emotion that result from consumerist excess. Drawn to utilitarian spaces and the objects that fill them, she investigates the nuances that make unseen and unfelt things suddenly present themselves. While the process of printmaking, with its repetition and uniformity, lends itself to such themes, her recent turn toward wrapping and molding objects with handmade paper has introduced the intimacy of touch and craft—and inferences of individual hope and anxiety—to her consideration of the systems of capitalism we are helpless but to engage in. Harvesting cardboard amazon.com boxes from the constantly replenishing supply in the recycling dumpsters at the Richmond Field Station studios, Gui uses low-tech papermaking techniques to create sheets of brown paper. She then wraps or takes molds of objects from around her house and studio with the paper while it is still wet.

Central to Gui's installation for this show is a table heaped with everyday items that were acquired for free, having been gathered from the artist's belongings or found discarded, and still hold the potential for purposeful use. Gui wrapped the table and items together with paper to create a monolithic form, so that the individual items are no longer visible or useful as discrete objects. In this work, the collateral cardboard waste that results from the urge to collect overwhelms form and function, referencing the environmental destruction that is wrought as a result of the world's current economic systems. With the individual objects out of sight, the sculpture evokes feelings of impotence rather than the wholeness that we aspire to through such accumulation, while also maintaining our curiosity and desire for that which is just out of reach.



Biz Iqbal: *The Miraculous Inferno*, 2021; oil paint, acrylic paint, and markers; 28 × 18 × 2 in.; courtesy of the artist.

Biz Iqbal

The craters in Biz Iqbal's paintings are the result of oil paint thinners such as turpentine, which break down the Styrofoam he uses in place of canvas. The artist's substitution of substrate, along with his use of backgrounds of glowing spray-painted hues, recontextualizes images of war and battles depicted in traditional Persian miniatures with twenty-first-century materials and textures. While the erosions were a surprise that resulted from Iqbal's material experimentation, the accidental holes and fissures struck him with their resemblance to the bullet-riddled walls of buildings in Afghanistan that he witnessed while working as a cultural liaison with the US military. The physical residue of conflict in both the buildings and Iqbal's paintings resonates with the paintings' subject, layering histories in a way that emphasizes the continuity of violence without differentiating between that which is celebrated and remembered and that which is lived with and feared.

Engaging with similar themes at the intersection of violence and cultural tradition, Iqbal's wall sculpture, with its combination of the ancient (an antique rug) and the modern (a VHS tape), highlights the impact of war and ideological oppression via art objects. Throughout history, wool rugs, like the one on the wall, have often been rolled up and carried by people as they fled oncoming armies. The VHS tape represents the film and photo archives in Afghanistan that were destroyed by the Taliban. The rug and tape are draped and hung from nails on the gallery wall in a way that removes their function, reminiscent of trophies or warnings left after violent conquest. Together, they point to the symbolic power that is represented in both the preservation and the destruction of cultural heritage and how those acts occur on ideological and institutional levels, as well as through the choices and quotidian actions of the individual.



Anna Riley: *Gulp*, 2021 (detail); digital print; 11 × 17 in.; courtesy of the artist.

Anna Riley

Anna Riley's work considers extraction from both the earth and the body, as well as the objects and similarities that lie at the intersections between the two. Operating from a space of skepticism around the creation of new objects, particularly those intended for gallery spaces, she created an eight-fold paper takeaway for this exhibition that includes writing and images from her research. By presenting the content of her work in this form, Riley minimized the resources necessary to store and preserve artistic output after it leaves the gallery, instead emphasizing the creative process that generates the connections and meanings that drive her investigatory practice.

The content of Riley's takeaway brochure revolves around an antique glass breast pump and her mother's mastectomy. Both focal points relate to the breast (and to the body) as a site of wanted and unwanted production, as well as to the use or rejection of the body's resulting fluids. The artist's written reflections are collaged among photographs and diagrams that illustrate a constellation of potential connections related to glassmaking techniques, wine, and the feelings of tenderness and discomfort that coexist in relation to bodily functions and disfunctions. Riley chose an eight-fold style for her takeaway object for its nonlinear nature, opting away from the familiar trifold style, with its evocation of marketing brochures. While the items and processes described in the work relate to processes that are scientific and lend themselves to diagrammatic logic, the eight-fold style, combined with the arrangement of writing and images, opens it to interpretations that are not predictable. Available in the gallery via a wall holder, the takeaway pieces are dispersed as a result of the interest of visitors to the exhibition, who become responsible for their future life—saving and safekeeping them, discarding them in a few days or when they step out the door, or using them for taking notes or as wrapping paper, thus introducing a new purpose entirely.



Nadia Shihab: *Rough Cut*, 2020 (detail); inkjet print on cotton, embroidery, and acrylic paint; dimensions variable; courtesy of the artist.

Nadia Shihab

Nadia Shihab's practice evolves from collage, a method she applies to cloth, paper, photographs, sound, and film to build worlds that reflect on memory, grief, and family histories. Informed by her background in documentary filmmaking, her work diverges from linear narratives to consider what is communicated through the juxtaposition or alignment of images with visual and sonic textures. For this exhibition, Shihab brought all the elements of her practice together onto one wall in a layered composition that utilizes personal photographs and collaged pieces alongside a 16mm film.

Throughout the tableau, abstracted shapes and figures evoke relations and memories that are both emotionally resonant and detached from specificity, referencing the vividness of emotions that accompany memory. Images of lush leaves drawn from Shihab and her family's own domestic spaces and landscapes emphasize the organic ebb and flow of these affective responses across time and space. Within the images, Shihab made insertions and subtractions of figures and forms to signify how the particulars of certain moments can be gained or lost with the passage of time and the transition from one generation to the next. And yet, sharp lines of dark paper and bright thread build bonds between the various elements, placing each piece in relation to the others.

The film is intended to bring specificity to Shihab's more abstract collage work, referring to the content of the gallery wall through moving images. Filmed predominantly in the artist's home, the film gently explores the joys and limits of embodiment for Shihab, her daughter, and her mother. The persistent gestures of these three generations of women build playful and surreal spaces through shots of bright beams of sunlight on a studio wall, the feel of velvet on bare skin, and the sumptuousness of flowers in bloom, while pointing to the histories they hold in themselves, which are constantly modified by their joined but separate experiences.

champoy (b. 1980, Philippines) is an interdisciplinary artist and educator who received a BA in fine arts from the University of San Carlos. They have shown their work at numerous venues, including SOMArts, San Francisco; the Los Angeles Visitor Welcome Center; and on-off.site. In 2020 they were a recipient of the Murphy & Cadogan Contemporary Art Award. champoy lives and works in Richmond, California.

FRED MARQUE DEWITT (b. 1960, United States) studied filmmaking at San Francisco State University. His painting, sculpture, and performance are focused on deconstructing notions of white supremacy as it is promoted in early American art. He was the first Artist-in-Residence at Platform ArtSpace, the UC Berkeley Art Department's public practice venue, and was a 2020 recipient of the Murphy & Cadogan Contemporary Art Award.

EMILY GUI (b. 1990, United States) is a mixed media artist and educator working primarily in printmaking, sculpture, photography, and installation. She received a BA in studio arts from Bard College, and her work has been included in exhibitions nationally, including The International Print Center of New York; Kala Art Institute, Berkeley; Artist Television Access (ATA) Gallery and Window, San Francisco; and Rojas + Rubinstein, Miami. Gui received the Eisner Prize for Excellence in Creative Practice in 2019. She lives and works in Crockett, California.

BIZ IQBAL (b. 1976, Afghanistan) uses unconventional materials to reimagine the cultural and physical destruction that has taken place in Afghanistan, where he spent a significant amount of time as a cultural liaison with the US military. He received his BA in fine arts from the Academy of Art University and has showed his work and taught throughout the Bay Area. He lives in Castro Valley, California.

ANNA RILEY (b. 1992, United States) is a visual artist concerned with material chemistry. She received her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and has had exhibitions and residencies at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York; A.I.R. Gallery, New York; and the Corning Museum of Glass, New York. She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

NADIA SHIHAB (b. 1980, United States) received a BA in sociology from the University of Texas at Austin and an MA in city and regional planning from UC Berkeley. As a feature-length documentary filmmaker, she received five festival jury awards, including an IFP Independent Spirit Award in 2020 for her film *JADDOLAND*. She has shown her films and performed her sound work in the Bay Area, nationally, and abroad. She lives and works in Oakland, California.



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