

Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery | Stony Brook University | March 9 - April 13

# *Poor Housekeeping*

MFA Thesis Exhibition 2024

Sarah Allam

Emma Fiona Jones

Sehee Kim

Josie Williams

Katie X

Emily Yen

Diana Mulan Zhu

## Chair's Introduction

As the newly appointed Chair of Art at Stony Brook, I have had the privilege of witnessing our Master of Fine Arts students share their practices and works in ways that have both astonished and impressed me.

Art serves as a medium through which we explore the world, opening new modes of understanding for our audience and creating aesthetic spaces filled with passion, terror, humor, and beauty. It offers a perspective on the world that transcends logic, fostering spaces where norms are questioned, ideas challenged, and awareness raised. Art can cultivate community inclusion and give voice to those traditionally silenced, enabling participation in decisions that impact lives. For an artist, the drive to create is not a choice but a passion—an innate ability to expressively engage and immerse audiences in sensory experiences that are difficult to ignore. Yet, choosing the artist's path is not without its challenges. Our commitment to creation and the continuous search for spaces to present, make, and have our art seen and heard is an ongoing journey. As artists, we dedicate our lives to reinventing, questioning, and evolving our practice, ensuring our work remains relevant to both ourselves and our audience.

Our MFA students have embraced this commitment to become artists, creating bodies of work that are at once wonderful, challenging, and sometimes both ugly and beautiful. As educators, our challenge is to support their passion and nourish their spirits. Over three years, some students have delved into the interrogation of historical artworks, rigorously examining art from the 20th and 21st centuries. They have critically explored movements from fin-de-siècle Vienna to Cubism and Futurism, from Dada and Surrealism to Minimalism and Popism, as well as performance and new media art. Others have examined feminist art theory, eco-art criticism, and the impacts of colonialism, post-colonialism, race, and class exclusion, along with the future of art in the age of AI. Some have focused on personal themes such as identity, family, migration, and the perspectives of outsiders and insiders.

The complexity of what constitutes art is precisely what our MFA students showcase in this exhibition. While this marks the culmination of three years of work, it is also the beginning and continuation of their journey as artists. This title is expansive and meaningful; as they move their practice beyond the university, they bring novel understandings of complex subjects, conceptualizing new futures through observation, experience, and information gathering. Our students are the future thought makers, critics, curators, community-engaged artists, climate change artists, independent artists, educators, and more.

This exhibition and the insights gained by our students would not have been possible without the collective sharing of ideas. I extend my gratitude to the visiting artists, guest speakers, lecturers, and professors who have supported their studies. The Zuccaire Gallery and its Director, Karen Levitov, have played a crucial role in keeping our MFA students intellectually and practically engaged with the wider art scene. Karen's course on curation has introduced our students to the complexities of developing, funding, commissioning, and promoting exhibitions—indispensable tools for entering the professional art world. To all involved, we say, "Thank You." To our wonderful students, "Bonne chance." Remember, we are here for you and are always eager to hear about your career developments.

Linda O'Keefe  
Chair, Department of Art

## Bergman Professor's Introduction

In this exhibition we view the outcome of seven artists' work spanning the last three years, a culmination of a study leading to works that demonstrate that they have now reached a level of mastership in their practice. Fully apart from the inherent challenges of the creative process, these have been years of great turmoil and chaos in the world, where we endured a pandemic, global and domestic instabilities and an ever shifting prospect for the future of our environment.

These artists have persisted through years, where hopes and coping strategies were in constant need of revision, at each new challenge. They have developed their thought and practice and have faced unprecedented isolation, distance and precarity with courage, humor, invention and originality. Their work spans a wide spectrum of critical and aesthetic contemporary issues: Diana Mulan Zhu works with personal histories interwoven with narratives of major socio-cultural shifts, augmented with algorithms, and thus looking both at present and past. Emma Fiona Jones' hybrid sculptures/drawings/writings in embodied space, layer themes of reproductivity and feminism at precarious times. Sarah Allam builds a spectacle as an allegory of encounters and masculine representations on dating apps. Sehee Kim fuses abstract reflection and phenomenology in her durational practice of painting. Katie X works with chance and grace, words and indeterminacy, merging traditions in a highly original way. Emily Yen transfers embodied energy within the realm of drawing as she traces personal histories. Josie Willams experiments with new technologies while calling attention to the deep social inequities and dangers inherent in the extraction of minerals for the very devices that bring us these technologies.

I can attest to the fact that the fellowship of these aspiring masters has been no less generous to the professor than to the student. It has been with great pleasure, interest and curiosity that I have kept my attention on their work over the last two years. It has been inspiring, rewarding, a profound gift to me to have had the opportunity to encounter them, their work and thought and to have been in their company. I wish them great success as they pass this milestone in their career.

Thanks to all of you and congratulations,

Katrín Sigurdardóttir  
Charles C. Bergman Visiting Professor of Studio Art

My work is an absurdist reimagining of the phenomena of online dating through painting and installation. I focus on the contemporary structure of male mating competition and how the creation of a dating profile facilitates this rivalry. By caricaturing patterns of masculinity found across dating apps, I draw attention to digital mechanisms of self-identification, algorithmic influence, and the performativity of gender motifs in online dating.

Dating apps are a social game in which players must adopt a flattened, digitized identity that an algorithm then deems as winner or loser. Given that over seventy percent of active users of dating apps are male, women fall into the role of 'prize.' I draw inspiration and imagery from card games, carnivals, and circuses to then airbrush paint my own caricatured male forms. By rendering these familiar digital mechanisms of labeling, swiping, and selfieing as material, I hope participants will feel the discomfort of such a contortion and the strangeness of this modern condition.

*A Contortionist's Best Friend* addresses this contortion by surrounding viewers who step within the circus tent with paintings of bending and dancing men whose limbs are strewn around their torso as if paper dolls. Each, distracted by his own dance, must rely on his pet to both fight competition for a mate and attract one. Silhouetted wooden figures of dogs fill this role, painted with sharp, slobbering, thirsty teeth just under the glassy adorable eyes of a puppy. A victor may emerge or the dance may continue until they tire.

Sarah Allam

Sarah Allam, *A Contortionist's Best Friend*, 2024, airbrushed acrylic paint, canvas, wood, 6' x 4'



I use textiles and installation to evoke unwritten histories that are instead inscribed on the body, embedded in the earth, stitched into clothing, veiled in euphemisms, passed down in whispers. Merging traditional markers of femininity such as velvet and beads with organic materials such as salt and rotting fruit, my work addresses birth and decay, desire and repulsion, control, disorder. I draw on the work of feminist writers and scholars such as Hélène Cixous, Audre Lorde, and Silvia Federici, exploring the corporeal and spatial dimensions of the power structures that they articulate.

My current work seeks to envision conceptions of motherhood and reproduction beyond the bounds of heteropatriarchal socioeconomic systems. *in vitro* reimagines the ancient Greek festival known as Thesmophoria, an annual three-day series of rituals dedicated to Demeter and her daughter, Persephone, carried out exclusively by women. The rituals themselves, known only to the participants, celebrated Persephone's return to her mother following her abduction to the Underworld. Fusing imagined pasts and speculative futures, *in vitro* suggests the potential for queer feminist ecologies of care.

*Emma Fiona Jones*

Emma Fiona Jones, *hysteria* (detail), 2023, plaster, gauze, wax, wire, glass beads, faux pearls, chain



## Sehee Kim

In my large-scale abstract paintings, I explore the question of being through the format and characteristics of oil paint. Oil paint does not dry or settle instantly; it is ongoing and in process. Reflecting on these qualities, I aim to shift perception and pose questions in my work.

In *The Edge*, I invite viewers into an immersive experience of walking along a forty-two-foot mural made up of thirteen canvases. This work started out from the question: how can we deal with negative emotion? *The Edge* specifically reflects anxiety. The gesture of letting the diluted red oil paint progress over the canvas demonstrates the anxiety of not having control. At the same time, it suggests that we do not necessarily have to be in full control. Red signifies the disturbing emotion we face in our life. The colors that fill the negative space between these lines were chosen based on how uncomfortable the color is when juxtaposed with red. However, the progression from one color to the next is in subtle gradation, so the overall painting becomes symphonious.


Sehee Kim, *The Edge* (detail, 13th panel),  
2023, oil on canvas, 40 x 500"

## Josie Williams

*Eye to eye* is centered around the genocide actively occurring in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the pursuit of the mineral cobalt. Cobalt is an essential component to almost every lithium-ion battery which powers almost every smartphone, tablet, laptop, along with a vast majority of electric vehicles. In this way, the bloodshed of the Congo is a critical component to satisfying modern and future demand. *eye to eye*, and the associated body of work, highlights the gross discrepancy between the seemingly post-apocalyptic mining conditions and the shiny devices at the end of the line. As part of my practice, this work investigates the semi-temporal and the quasi-physical attributes of technology and examines how these qualities affect my body, community, and, on a larger scale, massive global supply chains. *eye to eye* showcases six conversational chatbots, each taking on the various personas that represent players in the cobalt global supply chain. These personas, presented as abstracted figural forms, are placed into conversation with each other in a virtual “think tank” and tasked with coming to collective solutions for complex and transcontinental problems regarding cobalt mining.



Josie Williams, *Bust of AI Persona* (detail of *eye to eye*), 2024, styrofoam, cotton fabric, speaker, 24 x 12 x 16”



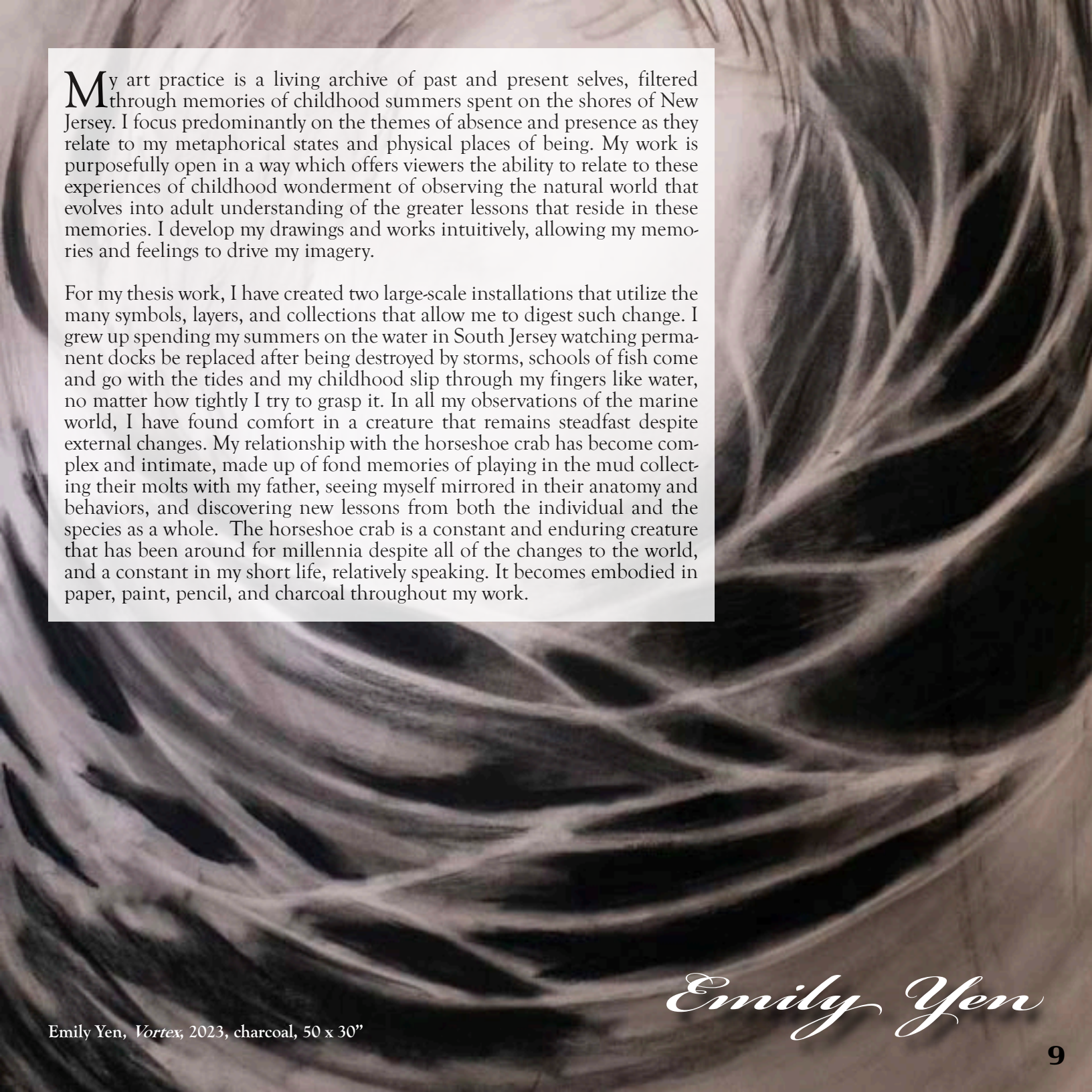
My artistic practice, extending across various forms and media, is tightly bound to my unique perception and complex relationship with my surroundings. Interpreting visual and non-visual concepts, I seek the direct reflection at a specific point in the space-time continuum (the perfect moment) of both endogenous and exogenous notions that are instantaneous, unmediated, and non-replicable.

As my artist journey comes full circle, it is important for me to return to my original heart and always remember where and why I started. I am still, and will continue to be, making the same kind of art as I started with: I meditatively mark my immediate space-time, regard everything I touch with great respect and reverence, and open myself completely to the universe in hope for the perfect moment. My thesis project is a collection of those “perfect moments” preserved through the mystery of creation, utilizing experimental techniques devised and perfected by both the magic of serendipity and the scientific approach.

*Katie X*


Katie X, *Her Amber Streams* (from “Through Glass of Wildish Wonder”), 2023-24, acrylic, alcohol ink, pearlescent pigment and glass flakes on clear plastic sheet, 18 x 18”





My art practice is a living archive of past and present selves, filtered through memories of childhood summers spent on the shores of New Jersey. I focus predominantly on the themes of absence and presence as they relate to my metaphorical states and physical places of being. My work is purposefully open in a way which offers viewers the ability to relate to these experiences of childhood wonderment of observing the natural world that evolves into adult understanding of the greater lessons that reside in these memories. I develop my drawings and works intuitively, allowing my memories and feelings to drive my imagery.

For my thesis work, I have created two large-scale installations that utilize the many symbols, layers, and collections that allow me to digest such change. I grew up spending my summers on the water in South Jersey watching permanent docks be replaced after being destroyed by storms, schools of fish come and go with the tides and my childhood slip through my fingers like water, no matter how tightly I try to grasp it. In all my observations of the marine world, I have found comfort in a creature that remains steadfast despite external changes. My relationship with the horseshoe crab has become complex and intimate, made up of fond memories of playing in the mud collecting their molts with my father, seeing myself mirrored in their anatomy and behaviors, and discovering new lessons from both the individual and the species as a whole. The horseshoe crab is a constant and enduring creature that has been around for millennia despite all of the changes to the world, and a constant in my short life, relatively speaking. It becomes embodied in paper, paint, pencil, and charcoal throughout my work.

A video still from the installation 'Hand Me Down' showing hands holding a small object over hydrangea flowers. The image is a still from a single channel color video, showing a close-up of hands holding a small, dark object, possibly a dumpling, over a cluster of light purple hydrangea flowers. The background is a soft-focus green and blue, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall mood is intimate and nostalgic.

*Hand Me Down* is a multimedia installation including video, sound, and hybrid paintings that trace intergenerational conversations between my grandmother, my mother, and myself. Our stories weave between grand historical meta-narratives and intimate experiences of girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood from Cultural Revolution era China to 1990s suburban America. The installation includes 16mm Bolex footage of my mother sharing our family recipe for dumplings as well as generative AI and found archival footage. The paintings are a remix of multiple analog-digital hybrid processes such as oil painting, digital painting, glass photographic prints, family polaroids, and generative AI prompted from excerpts of Asian American diasporic literature. The layering of tangible mediums such as oil paint on top of digital manufactured surfaces like glass suggest the slippery encounter between human bodies, screens, and inherited memory. The cycle between “legacy” and “new” media refers to my murky attempts to understand my immigrant mother and grandmother’s lived experiences as I grapple against algorithmic bias, racist media coverage, internet misinformation, political propaganda, and language barriers as a second generation Asian American. The “legacy” media not only refers to anachronistic technologies such as 16mm motion picture film production and oil painting but also the inherited “legacy” of values and stories handed down to me from my family.

*Diana Mulan Zhu*

Diana Mulan Zhu, *Hand Me Down*, video still from single channel color video

## Acknowledgements

The MFA Thesis Exhibition 2024 is the culminating embodiment of the intensive three-year MFA program at Stony Brook University. I would like to thank the artists for the process of creating and presenting their compelling and engaging work.

My gratitude to Dr. Linda O’Keeffe, Chair of the Department of Art, and Katrín Sigurdardóttir, the Bergman Visiting Professor of Studio Art, for their contributions to this catalog. I also want to express my appreciation to the staff of the Staller Center for the Arts, especially Director Alan Inkles and Zuccaire Gallery Public Programs Manager Georgia LaMair Tomczak, as well as our student gallery assistants.

The 2023-2024 Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery exhibition schedule is made possible by a generous grant from the Paul W. Zuccaire Foundation. Additional funding has been provided by the Friends of Staller Center. We are extremely grateful for their support.

Karen Levitov  
Director and Curator, Zuccaire Gallery  
Professor of Practice, Department of Art

Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery  
1220 Staller Center for the Arts  
Stony Brook University  
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5425

631.632.7240  
ZuccaireGallery@stonybrook.edu  
ZuccaireGallery.stonybrook.edu

Designed by Sarah Allam

© 2024 Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery, Stony Brook University

Paul W. Zuccaire  
**G A L L E R Y**

**STALLER CENTER FOR THE ARTS | STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY**