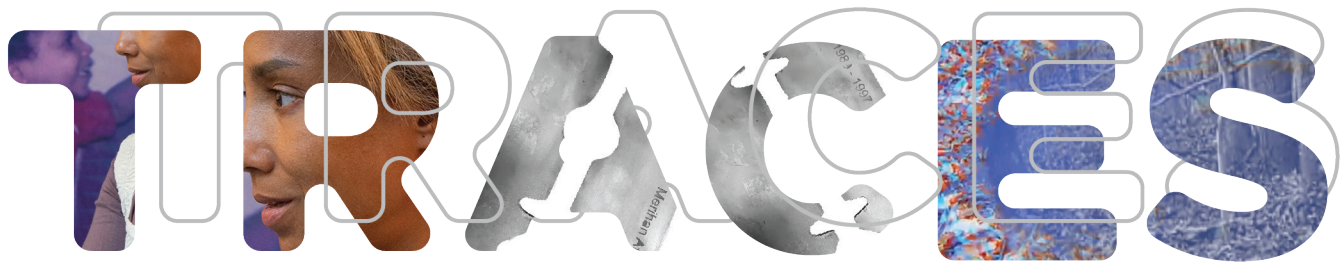


DIANA SALOMON

HAGAR MASOUD

RIA RAJAN



MFA THESIS EXHIBITION 2025 | MARCH 4 - APRIL 12  
ZUCCAIRE GALLERY | STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

TRACES

# Chair's Introduction

An MFA is more than a degree—it is an endurance test, an intellectual crucible, and a deep immersion into the possibilities and limits of artistic practice. Over the past three years, our MFA students have pushed themselves to experiment, question, and redefine their relationship to materials, histories, and ideas. They have challenged conventions, navigated critique, and expanded the vocabulary of their work, emerging from this process as artists with distinct voices and deeply considered practices.

Their time at Stony Brook has been shaped by the faculty, visiting artists, curators, and peers who have engaged them in critical discourse and technical mastery. They have moved between disciplines, crossing boundaries between painting and performance, sculpture and sound, digital media and archival practices. They have worked in the studios and the seminar rooms, in the Zuccaire Gallery, in online spaces, in public settings—each environment expanding their understanding of what art can be and how it operates in the world.

And now, they step forward into an art world that is rapidly evolving, one marked by political uncertainty, technological upheaval, and shifting cultural narratives. It is not an easy time to be an artist, but perhaps it never has been. The challenges they will face are real: the struggle for space, for visibility, for financial sustainability. The pressure to define themselves in an era of hyper-documentation and algorithmic sorting. The weight of history and the urgency of the present. But there are also extraordinary opportunities. As creative thinkers and makers, they are uniquely positioned to engage with these complexities, to find new ways of working, collaborating, and resisting. The skills they have honed here—critical thinking, material experimentation, conceptual agility—are not just tools for making art; they are ways of navigating the world, of responding to crises, of imagining futures beyond the limits of the present.

The work in this exhibition is a reflection of everything they have encountered during their time in this program—the conversations, the influences, the risks taken. But it is also a beginning. The themes they have explored—identity, history, trauma, transformation—will continue to evolve as their practices unfold in new contexts. The networks they have built, the resilience they have developed, and the ways they have learned to see and think will serve them in ways they cannot yet predict.

To our graduating artists: This is your moment. You are stepping into an art world that needs your vision, your voice, your persistence. Keep making. Keep questioning. Keep pushing. The work does not end here—it begins anew, with each piece, each project, each risk you take.

Congratulations, and *bonne chance*.

We will be watching, and we are always here to champion what comes next.

Linda O'Keeffe, PhD  
Professor and Chair, Department of Art



*No Me Conoces, 2024, digital photograph, 24 x 36"*

## Diana Salomon

Using photography as both a tool and a mirror, I construct the gaps in my family history—what I call ‘visual voids’—stepping into ancestors’ roles to confront absence, preserve identity, and explore how memory and inheritance shape who we are. These voids, created by lost or hidden images, have shaped my understanding of self and lineage, pushing me to investigate how a lack of visual records impacts our connection to our past.

Printed family snapshots hold unique value in my practice because they transform the intangible into the tangible. Unlike digital files, which often remain unseen, printed images invite interaction, spark conversations, and foster a sense of permanence. By engaging with these photographs—whether recreating or displaying them—I bridge the ephemeral and the tangible, turning silence into storytelling. Through my work, I aim to inspire others to uncover and preserve their histories, using photography as a means to reclaim and reimagine their narratives.



*Pantalon, 2025, aluminum, 4 x 8'*

## Hagar Masoud

My journey as an interdisciplinary artist is rooted in my upbringing in Cairo, Egypt. The cultural, social, and familial challenges I faced, shaped by the realities of a patriarchal society, have profoundly influenced my path. In a culture where discussions about gender, women's bodies, and feminism are often taboo, I witnessed the systematic silence surrounding issues like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and domestic violence. These experiences inspired my commitment to socially engaged art practice, using socio-political commentary to document oral history, collective memory, and trauma.

In this work, I present an 8-ft aluminum blade inscribed with survivors' aliases, dates of birth and dates of FGM, referring to it as death date. A wall drawing is part of an immersive audiovisual installation created in collaboration with women survivors of FGM. The installation emerges from online workshops where participants translate their FGM experiences into graphic scores, translating complex emotions and memories into audiovisual compositions that are displayed on the wall and voiced by the women.



*Finding My Center, 2025, video still, 1920 x 1080 pixels*

## Ria Rajan

As a digital nomad, I find myself reflexive about our relationship with the technosphere and the embodied technologies of our daily lives. My work focuses on the intangible, ephemeral and transient experiences—both IRL (in real life) and online—through ritual, performance, imagemaking, locative media, lens based media, video art, and mark making.

For TRACES, I am presenting a collection of video and paper works, centered around ideas of embodiment, personhood and inner mappings, exploring the ambiguity of identity and the conceptual and metaphorical shifts occurring in the process of assimilation. These works are meditations on the process of becoming, states of in-betweenness and the blurry lines between the multiple versions of self that exist simultaneously. Through the process of making, I'm interested in the corporeal, temporal and spatial dimensions of markmaking and the various forms of residue these meditations leave behind.

# Bergman Professor's Statement

TRACES—the thesis exhibition of Diana Salomon, Hagar Masoud, and Ria Rajan—culminates their creative and intellectual exploration over the past three years. The works in the exhibition are rich and multilayered, embodying the unique journeys, materials, and ideas each artist navigates in their practice. Across these three bodies of work, a thread emerges—the negotiation of the body as an archive.

TRACES explores memory, healing, transformation, and performance as pathways to an invisible archive—emotional and corporeal—one that is not inscribed onto material or language but instead exists within the body. Unlike the “traditional” archive, fixated on preservation and the past, the archive of the body is alive, fluid, ever-shifting, and never fixed.

In Diana Salomon's complex and deeply personal photographs, memory takes shape before our eyes—both constructed and continually becoming. In her studio, she moves seamlessly between being behind and in front of the camera, simultaneously embodying past and present. Through interwoven bodies and gestures, she generously invites us into her image-making process and the unraveling of family histories.

Within Hagar Masoud's immersive installation, a negotiation unfolds between disregarded or hidden oral histories and the artist's motivation to bring them into material form. In her medium-spanning practice, Hagar devises processes to metabolize trauma—through transformation, collaboration, and the creation of something new and unpredicted—an apparatus through which pain can be exhaled.

Ria Rajan's video and paper works are both the recordings and the records of rituals—the playful scripts she meticulously follows for days on end, composing them for herself to perform and for us to participate in. Her works function as a map, tracing the intuitive unfolding of corporeal knowledge over time. In their temporal progression, her rituals become a way to navigate the ambiguity of identity, reflecting the ever-shifting landscape of self.

Thank you, Diana, Hagar, and Ria, for your inspiring work. It has been a privilege to witness this journey, and I am excited to see where your creative practices take you next.

Congratulations!

Efrat Hakimi

Charles C. Bergman Visiting Professor of Studio Art

# Acknowledgements

The MFA Thesis Exhibition is the culminating embodiment of the intensive three-year MFA program at Stony Brook University. Preparing for the exhibition is a year-long process in which the students work with the gallery staff to prepare and refine exhibition proposals, write catalog statements, design the catalog, and install and light their work in a professional setting. I would like to thank Diana, Hagar and Ria for the process of creating and presenting their compelling work, and Ria for the elegant catalog design.

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

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