
MASTER *of* FINE ARTS

Thesis Exhibition / May 14 - 29, 2016

Emily Baker / Vanesa Gingold / Morgan McAllister
Tom Pazderka / George Sanders / Shannon Willis

Essays written by Holly Gore, Designed by Rose Briccetti. Generously supported by the Department of Art, IHC, and the AD&A Museum at UCSB.

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Introduction

Two years ago, the six artists in the 2016 MFA Thesis Exhibition joined a community within a community, bringing their projects and their selves to the Master of Fine Arts program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Since then, they have engaged in rigorous studio practice in the close quarters of the Harder Stadium Studios. As distinct as the work of each is from that of the others, there are points of convergence, with themes such as home, memory, technology, the individual, and the body surfacing and resurfacing again. In several instances, the act of making itself becomes a subject of investigation. Throughout the artworks in this show, such commonalities appear more as topics of conversation than as overarching categories. What emerges from this one-time gathering is a sense of the incredible range of expression materiality affords, and the specificity these artists have achieved through their individual approaches.



Emily Baker

Emily Baker's floor-to-ceiling paintings are traces of athleticism, documents of physical agility and strength. Having loaded her body with wet paint, she ascends a rope hung from the gallery ceiling, marking the wall as she goes. As anyone who has climbed a gym rope can attest, going up works the arms and core, and coming down requires a degree of control. In this and others of her performances, the artist—who is a former gymnast—captures the movements her muscles remember, and the love of flight her body knows.

The paintings belong to a group of works that explores athleticism's transience, and the possibility of its re-homing in the practice of art. Sculptural elements include bronze casts of artificial joints, and lengths of latex tubing that are strung through steel supports. The bronzes highlight the vulnerability of our skeletons to the grind of repetition, while the tubing recalls the elasticity of connective tissue and— as latex is known to degrade with age—the loss thereof over time. In placing the active body along a temporal curve, these works offer a counterpoint to the emphasis on peak fitness that pervades competitive sports.

emilyabaker.com

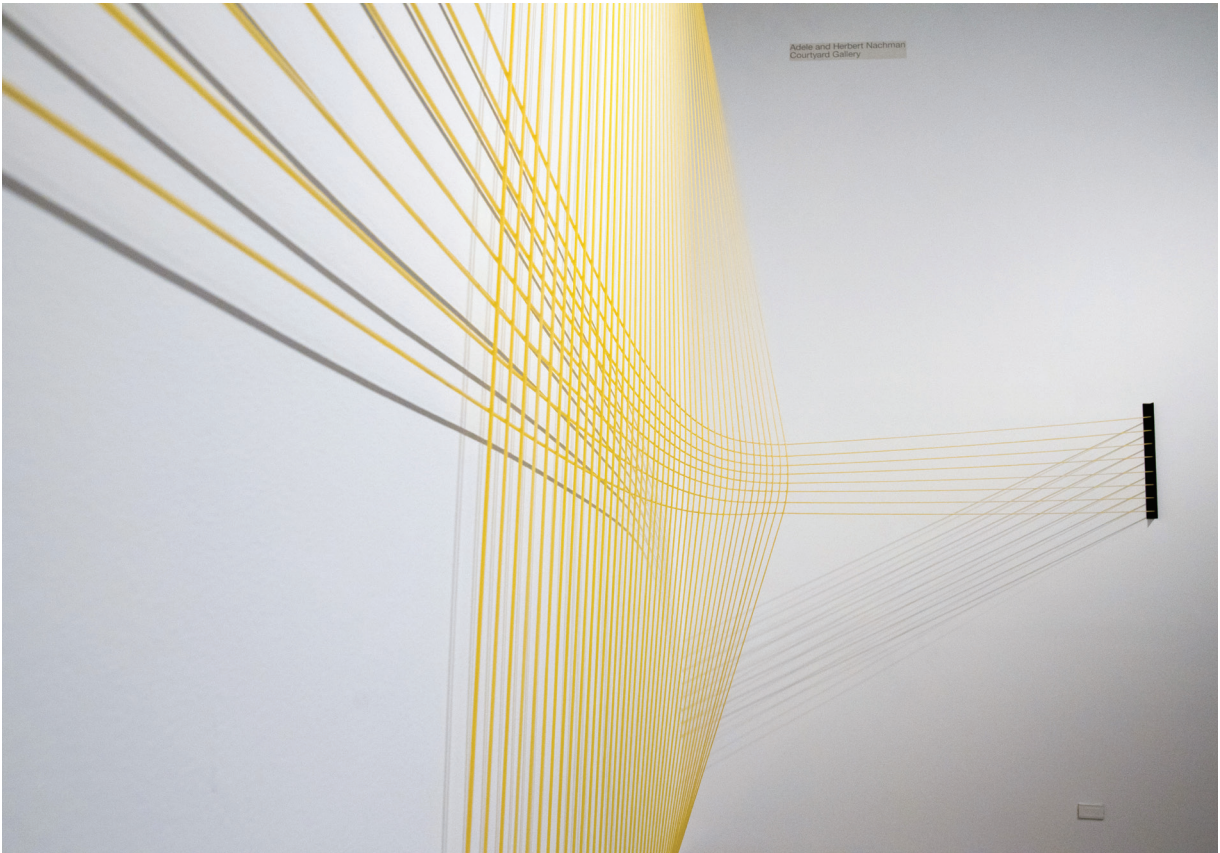


Previous page: Emily Baker
Left: *The Descent*, Middle: *Internal
dysTrophy*, Right: *Spinal Shift*
Photo by Tony Mastres

Left: Emily Baker
Quiet Practice, in progress
Photo by Mohit Hingorani

Below Left: Emily Baker
Spinal Shift, detail
Photo by Mohit Hingorani

Below Right: Emily Baker
Internal dysTrophy, detail
Photo by Tim Wood





Vanesa Gingold

Vanesa Gingold's sculptures convey an ethic of mindful interconnectivity. Their principal form is a convex circular armature that is skinned with wetted handmade paper. As the paper dries it shrinks taut, stretching lines into its surface and pulling open clusters of holes. The effect is of something natural or grown, but what that is remains a mystery. Are they seed pods? Insect secretions? These associations only partially stick because the works are clearly made by hand. It is in this tactile aspect that the human and the creaturely interlace. Repetitive, pattern-based craft techniques, such as wrapping, braiding, and gathering, speak of semi-automated modes of work, wired into the body, that are not so different from those we often ascribe to the builders of nests and hives.

Lovely as these pieces are, they do have an edge. The paper skin is petal-like in its translucency, but also reminiscent of nerve-rich membranes from deep inside a body. In this latter view, stretching could signify pain. As such, the sculptures invite us to feel our place in nature, and to empathize with other life that shares our capacity for beauty and suffering.

vanesa.gingold.org



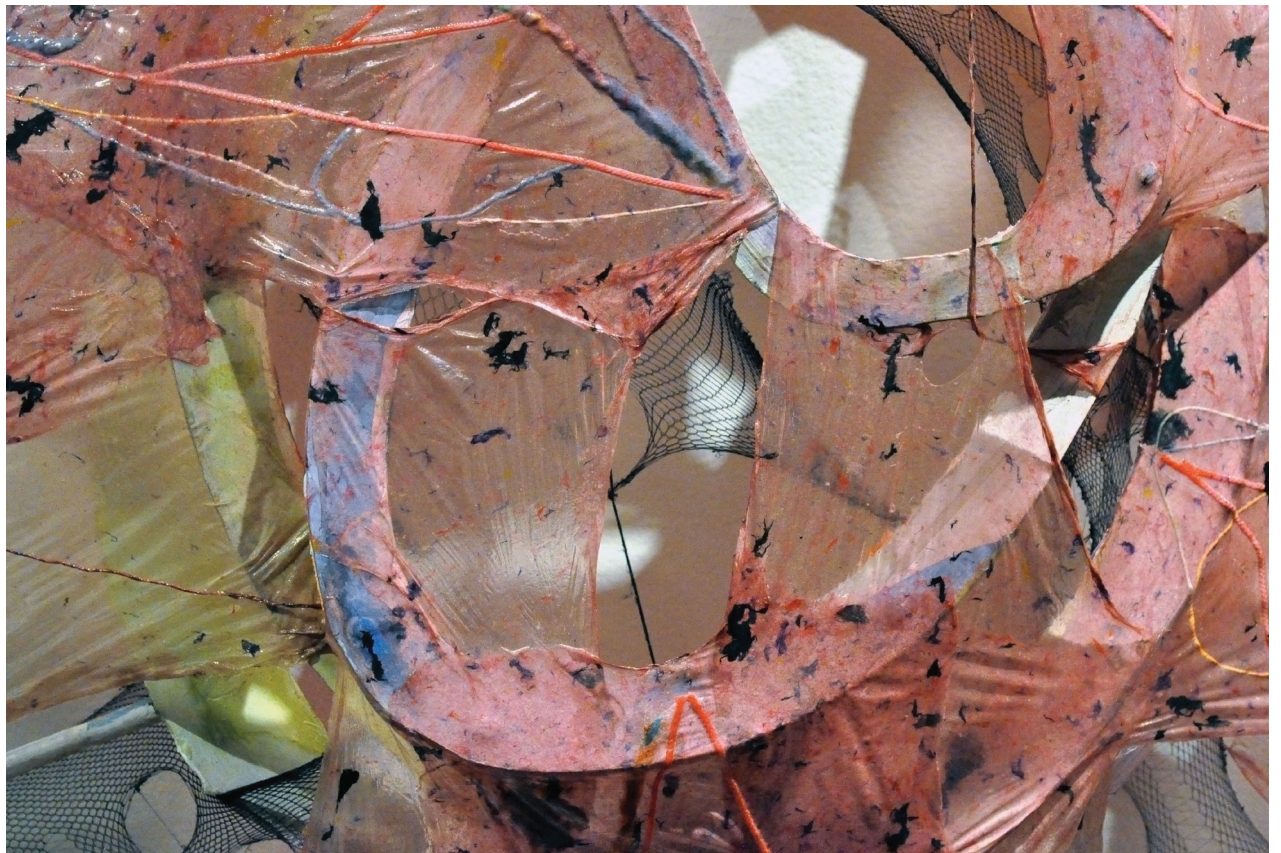
Previous page: Vanesa Gingold
Egg Case
Photo by Troy David

Left: Vanesa Gingold
Vessel
Photo by Vanesa Gingold

Below Left: Vanesa Gingold
Persied
Photo by Troy David



Below Right: Vanesa Gingold
Tenderness
Photo by Vanesa Gingold





Morgan McAllister

Morgan McAllister's paintings and assemblages explore the interplay between form and formlessness. Her canvases are, in one sense, writing surfaces where legible events occur. "Turn around don't drown," is clearly lettered on one. On another, a cluster of hard-edged shapes reads as the silhouette of a house. But throughout this grouping of largely abstract works, there are many more times when things are less clear. Writing is painted over, and recognizable motifs give way to the "stuff" of painting—color, gesture, line, compositionally implied movement, and patches of paint that give the illusion of depth.

The assemblages point to a similar investigation. The artist deconstructs a variety of upholstered furnishings, either make the object into a new work, or to harvest its materials to be incorporated into another. Through this process, "chair," "sofa," and "rug" dissolve into a series of verbs that intimate shelter—soften, dampen, insulate, pad, cover, and contain. Seen in light of these sculptural works, the paintings take the appearance of entities that are also becoming "unstuffed."

morganmcallister.com



Previous page: Morgan McAllister
*Choke my Chain, Dixon, and Jailbird to
your Jeep*
Photo by Troy David

Left: Morgan McAllister
*One Living Room Can Contain So Much
Joy and Pain*
Photo by Tristram Craig

Below Left: Morgan McAllister
Choke my Chain
Photo by Alec Hartnett



Below Right: Morgan McAllister
Dixon
Photo by Alec Hartnett





Tom Pazderka

Tom Pazderka has created a portrait gallery of notable and notorious cabin dwellers. There, authors Henry David Thoreau and Edward Abbey share space with Unabomber Ted Kaczynski and Varg Vikernes, a Norwegian musician whose advocacy of neo-pagan ideology has included arson and murder. Drawn in graphite on plywood that has been scorched to a sooty black, these likenesses appear as modulations of sheen, disembodied images isolated against an unlit ground.

The portraits are part of a body of works whose focal point is the cabin, and whose orientation is to the past. Black-and-white renderings of mountains and ocean recall the nineteenth-century Romantics' fixation on the sublime. A cabin-like structure built from salvaged wood evokes return—to origins, to essentials, and to one's self. Even the technology is retro: an overhead projector casts Steve Jobs' headshot onto Kaczynski's mug. If the unedited roster of cabin-bound activists makes for a troubled consideration of solitude, this latter merging of features is even more uncanny. With the formulation of a strange new face, Jobs' legacy enters the conceptual framework of the cabin, to be considered in light of individualism, authenticity, and nostalgia. What to make of a line of devices that refers so emphatically to the self—iPhone, iMac, iBook, iPad?

tompazderka.com



Previous page: Tom Pazderka
Walking
Photo by Troy David

Left: Tom Pazderka
Montani Semper Liberi
Photo by Tony Mastres

Below Left: Tom Pazderka
Freedom Club Cabinet of Ted and Henry
Photo by Tony Mastres

Below Right: Tom Pazderka
Somewhere Nowhere
Photo by Tony Mastres





George Sanders

Over the past several decades, the term DIY has come to signify a plucky refusal to take things as they are given, with popular projects ranging from Altoids tin speakers to homebrew biodiesel. George Sanders' sculptures re-ensconce do-it-yourself in its earlier context of house and garden weekend work, while indulging in the recent spate of appreciation for the inventiveness and aesthetics of amateur engineering. His constructions incorporate hardware store items—tarps, cup hooks, rope, and pressure-fit shower rods—while borrowing the forms of utilitarian furnishings such as trellises, drying racks, and modular shelves. Each work stages, in one way or another, an intervention into the manufactured regularity of its model.

In one instance, several clear acrylic curtains hanging from a wood framework, which looks like a shelving unit laid on its side, attain a taut, even drape by curious means. Smooth, pocket-sized beach rocks, each pierced by a water-eroded hole, are threaded with yellow cord and tied through grommets spaced along the plastic's lower edges. The result is a lean, purposeful, and wonderfully eccentric design whose focus is on everyday creativity and problem solving in the private spaces of the home.

georgeleosanders.com



Previous page: George Sanders
Supporting actor
Photo by George Sanders

Left: George Sanders
Draped up, dripped out
Photo by Tony Mastres

Below Left: George Sanders
High and dry
Photo by Tony Mastres



Below Right: George Sanders
Summering
Photo by George Sanders



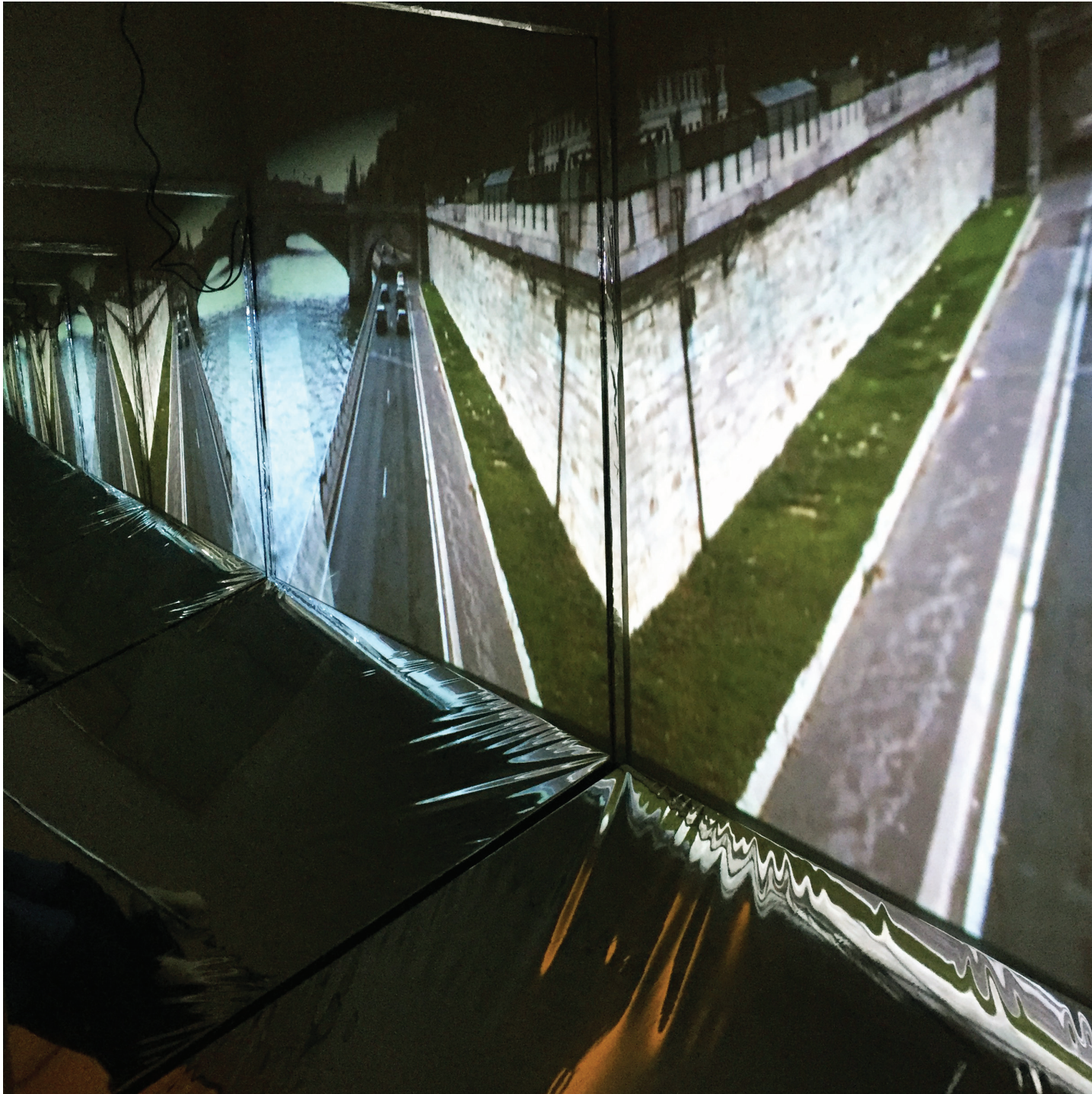


Shannon Willis

Shannon Willis' *Falling in Love while Drowning* is an immersive environment where time moves in cycles and in waves. A darkened space, it is lit only by digital projections and TV screens. A marked use of video looping subverts any notion of linear advance, as do the mirrored and sculptural surfaces that reflect, flip, multiply, and distort the many moving images. In one instance, wall- and floor-mounted mirrors transform a line of cars traveling on a road into a kaleidoscopic pattern that pulses with activity but does not progress.

In another video projection, repetition structures an overwhelming emotional event. Here, a changing assemblage of video frames coalesces as a scenario of intimacy and excruciating separation: a little girl dancing and laughing, a woman crying, a drive down the coast, dolphins, clouds, and the woman again but with longer hair and in a contemplative pose. The windows shift position, close, reopen, resize, and replay. A cursor's clicking "don't save" portends that next time something will be different. The fact of reconfiguration in reprise breathes air into the piece, varies the oscillations of love and pain, and distinguishes the woman from the closed circuit of moving cars.

artbyshannonwillis.com

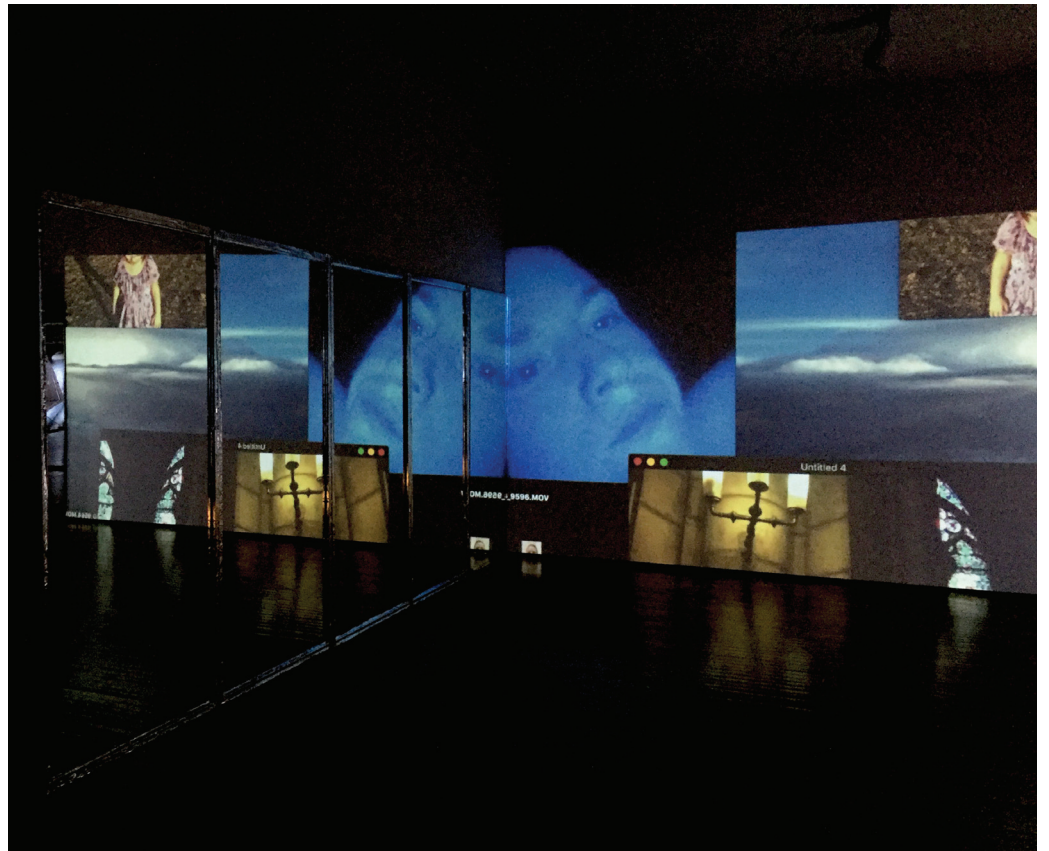
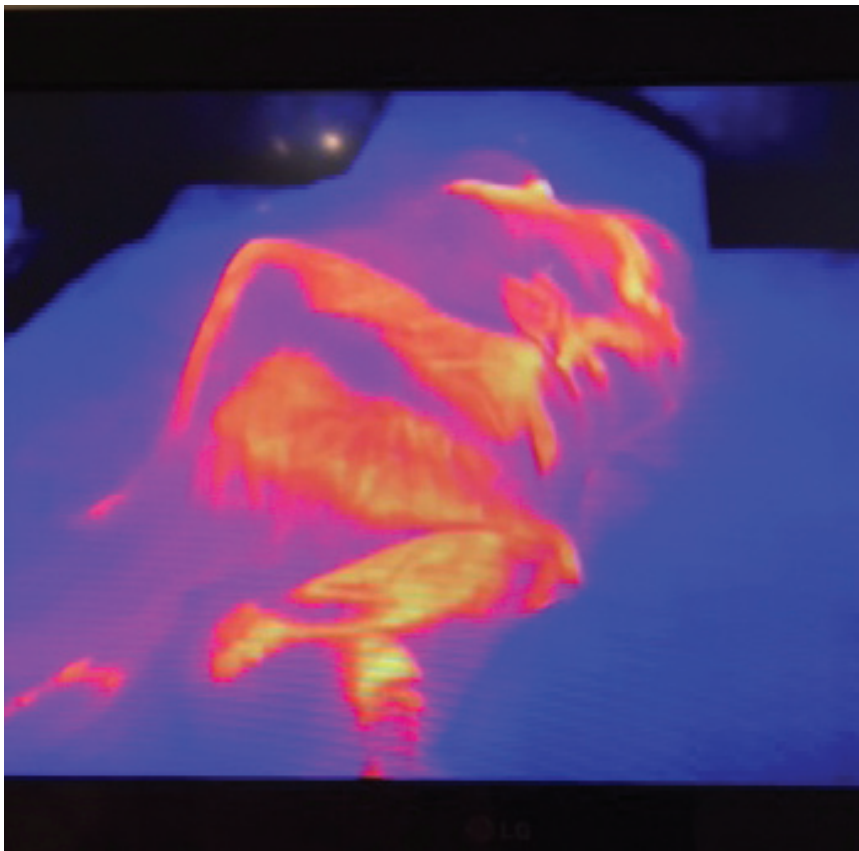


Previous page: Shannon Willis
Falling in Love While Drowning

Left: Shannon Willis
Falling in Love While Drowning

Below Left: Shannon Willis
Falling in Love While Drowning

Below Right: Shannon Willis
Falling in Love While Drowning



Acknowledgments

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Lastly (but not leastly), we would like to thank all of our devoted friends and family who have supported us throughout (you know who you are).

Each of you has contributed to our growth and successes for the past two years. Even as we diverge along separate paths, we cherish the community and relationships we've forged here.

This is not only a goodbye, or an end - but also a beginning, enriched by new experiences, we venture forth - always knowing and appreciating our continued ties, that we may always return and give back to those who have given us so much.

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