

Past is Prologue

Rose Briccetti | Marcos Christodoulou | Yumiko Glover
Sunny Samuel | Peter Sowinski | Scotty Slade Wagner

The Art, Design & Architecture Museum | The University of California, Santa Barbara

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“Whereof what’s past is prologue, what to come.”
Act 2, Scene I, *The Tempest*

The title of the 2017 MFA Thesis Exhibition, *Past is Prologue* at once speaks to the importance of what has been, but more significant is the implication of that which has yet to come. For these six artists—though disparate in background, medium, and style—a shared prologue has developed as they engaged in a vigorous studio practice through the Master of Fine Arts program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Though their work is distinct in the concerns of the individual artist, it is also steeped in the shared events of the past two years—engaging with a range of issues deeply embedded in public debate and the national consciousness: science, technology, gender, sexuality, politics, war, citizenship, and the role of art in the public sphere. Across the artworks in the exhibition, a commitment to the possibilities of artistic making and the power of art to challenge, provoke, connect, and build empathy resonates deeply in each of the artist’s individual approaches. As the prologue to their professional careers comes to a close, these six artists collectively imagine a future where the production of art and individual expression not only matter, but are a vital and urgent part of society and public discourse.



Rose Briccetti

Rose Briccetti's paintings and installations tackle issues ranging from biology, taxonomy, histories of collection and display to feminism, biopolitics, and domesticity. Drawing upon a massive range of sources and materials—internet culture, art history, natural history, cultural myths, conspiracy theories, and lived experience—Briccetti's artistic practice rejects strict disciplinary boundaries to create work that flows organically across art and science. In *Frog Egg Surveillance Chair* and *Xenopus Lifecycle Damask Wallpaper in Arsenic Green*, Briccetti restages the space of a domestic interior. Using wallpaper decorated with the lifecycle of the African clawed frog (an animal widely utilized in scientific testing and initially implemented to test for human pregnancy), Briccetti creates a tension between traditional puritanical views of domesticity and sexual reproduction.

In *Taxonomy of Studio Ephemera (after Borges)*, Briccetti merges the ethos of the wunderkammer, reverence of an altar, and the feminine space of the boudoir. The display of objects of natural history alongside found images from the internet, magazines, and memes creates a discordant display that is carefully arranged and categorized according to the artist's self-fashioned taxonomy; a taxonomy which is inherently anti-hierarchical and centered around a feminine sensibility. In *Pom Wonderful*, Briccetti combines a menagerie of sources to explore the relationship between women, reproduction, violence and war. The form of the canvas mimics a religious altarpiece, raising the imagery on the canvas to the level of spiritual devotion and imposing a patriarchal hegemony of religion, war, and violence onto the control of women's bodies and reproduction.

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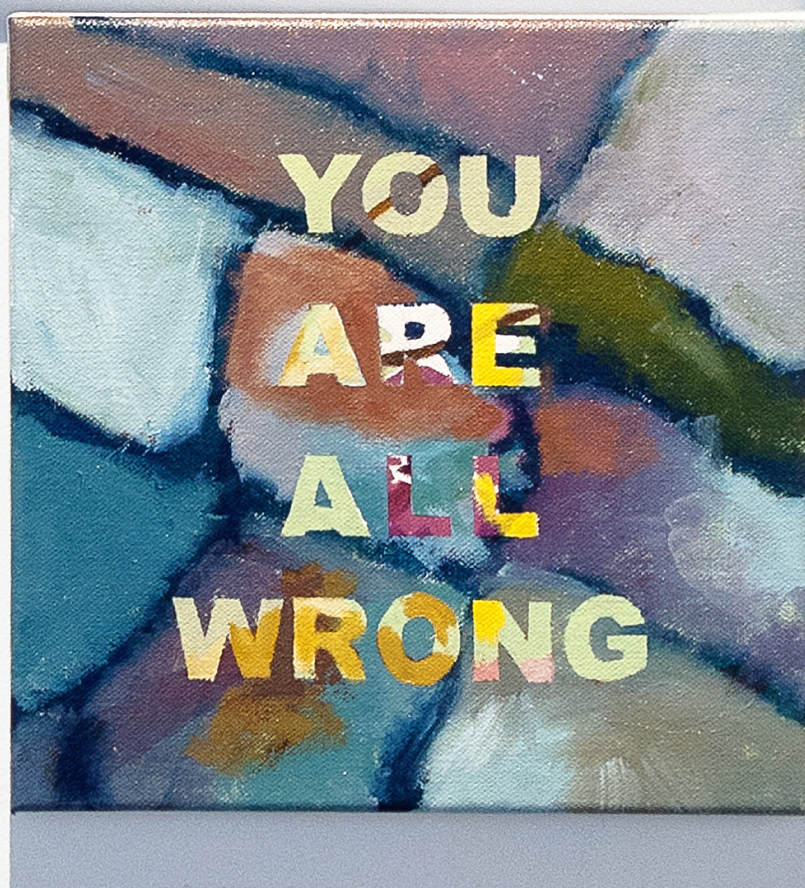
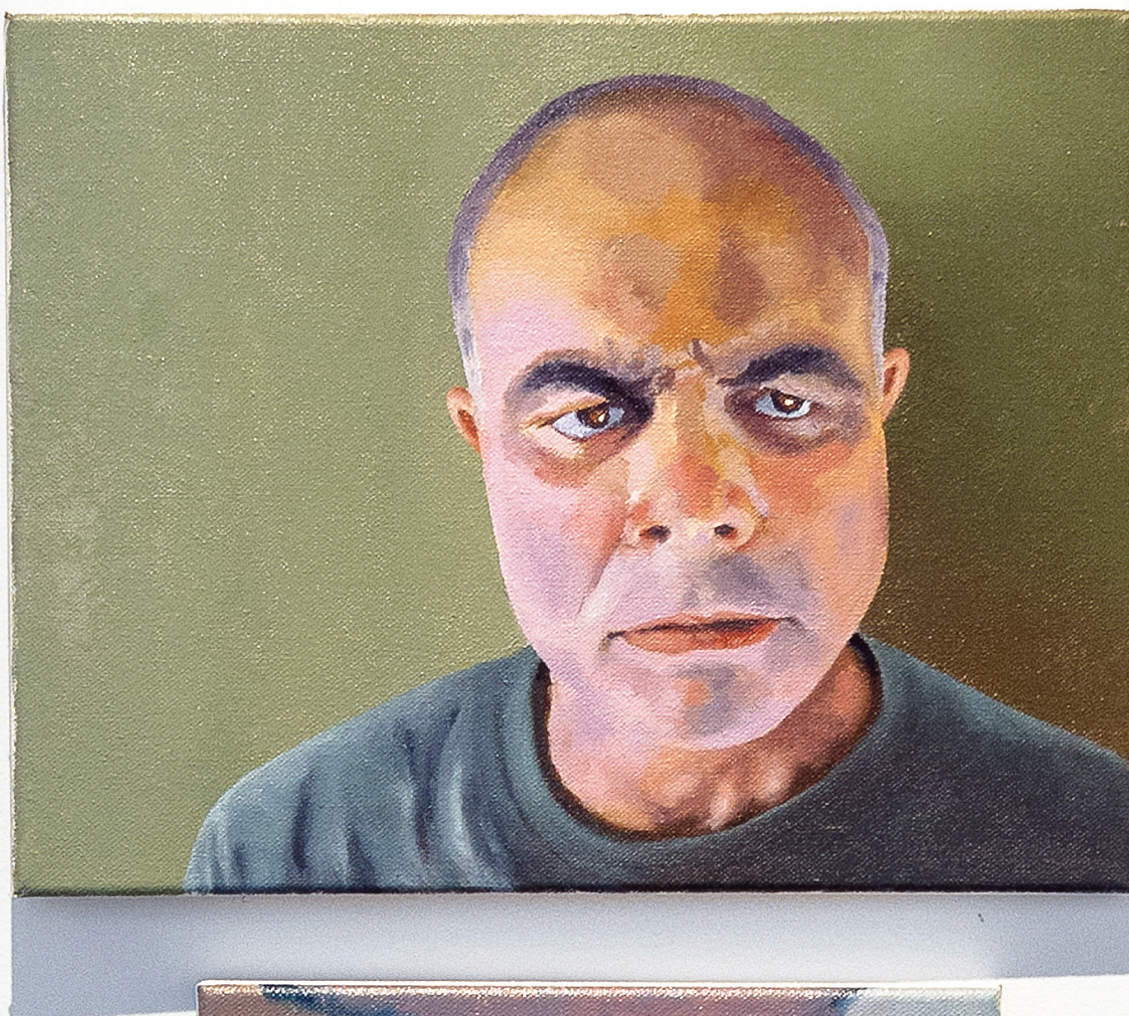
Previous page: *Xenopus Lifecycle Damask Wallpaper in Arsenic Green*, digitally printed wallpaper, dimensions variable.

This page top: *Pom Wonderful*, acrylic on birch panels, 36" x 96"

This page bottom: *Taxonomy of Studio Ephemera (After Borges)*, mixed media installation and sculptures, 96" x 132" x 24"



Top left: *Nature Morte au Chytrid & Candida*, archival pigment print with custom frame and plaque, 16" x 20"
 Top right: *Anguillifemmes*, mixed media custom wig and stand, 24" x 9" x 9"
 Bottom: *Your Touch So Foreign*, watercolor on paper with custom brochure, 24" x 36"



Marcos Christodoulou

Marcos Christodoulou's paintings weave together disparate sources that create surreal narratives for his audience to unpack. Drawing upon art historical subject matter, classic Hollywood cinema, and social media, Christodoulou fabricates imagery laced with expressly political subject matter which resonates with our current political moment (censorship, the international refugee crisis, individual agency in the face of political tyranny). The mish-mash of high and low cultural references combined with somewhat violent imagery and coloration forces the audience to slow down and engage with Christodoulou's canvases. Viewers are provided with a choice that mimics our own engagement with the global political crises: does an individual take time to unpack and formulate a narrative for the canvas, or simply walk away?

Each of Christodoulou's canvases employs space like a theatrical stage—there is a backdrop made up of color, basic decoration, and textures with a central scene in the center of the image. This play and distortion of space leaks off the flat surface of the canvas and into reality, either through Christodoulou's use of collaged three-dimensional materials or the gazes of his figures. This use of space combined with Christodoulou's use of familiar imagery—particularly the Hollywood publicity photographs—imbues his canvases with a seductive quality that demands interaction, or perhaps complicity in the violence occurring on the canvas.

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Previous page top: *Oil paint applied to a stretched piece of cloth in 2013*, oil on canvas, 11" x 14"

Previous page bottom: *Oil paint applied to a stretched piece of cloth in 2015*, oil on canvas, 10" x 10"

This page left to right: *They Could Have Been The Best Years of Our Lives Ben*, oil on canvas, 36" x 60"; *Mare Nostrum I (Where Have You Gone, Joe Géricault)*, oil on canvas, 48" x 36"; *Night of the Murdered Poets (Dovid Bergelson-End of the Road)*, oil on canvas, 48" x 48"; *Mare Nostrum II (Lepanto)*, oil on canvas, 48" x 48"; *It's no good I've got to go back Amy*, oil on canvas, 48" x 48"





Yumiko Glover

Yumiko Glover's paintings explore the devastating impact of war and its aftermath, focusing on the impermanence of life and the real material consequences upon people, objects, and our perception. As a native resident of Hiroshima, Japan, Glover is astutely aware of the cost of violence. In *Transience* Glover uses the patterns of kimonos—objects that often expressed individual feminine identity which were sold off during US occupation—to recreate the cloud of the atomic bomb. This gesture brings to the forefront of the canvas three motifs often relegated background of American imagination: the decorative, the feminine, and the atomic bomb.

In both *For Your Eyes Only I* and *For Your Eyes Only II* Glover's figures reference two ukiyo-e woodblock prints, Toyohara Chikanobu's *Azuma Fuzoku Nenju Gyoji* and Katsushika Hokusai's *Women with the Telescope*. In both paintings, Glover uses the human figure to explore the bodily consequences of the bomb through her fractal use of color. These blocks of color infest the body and break it apart, referencing the widespread genetic consequences for those exposed to radiation (and their descendants) as well as the obliteration of those killed during the blast. The gender of Glover's figures are rendered in an ambiguous manner, whose gazes play with the ideas of looking and being looked at—perhaps a reference to increased surveillance by the nation state of non-normative bodies that is a consequence of a continued investment in war and violence.

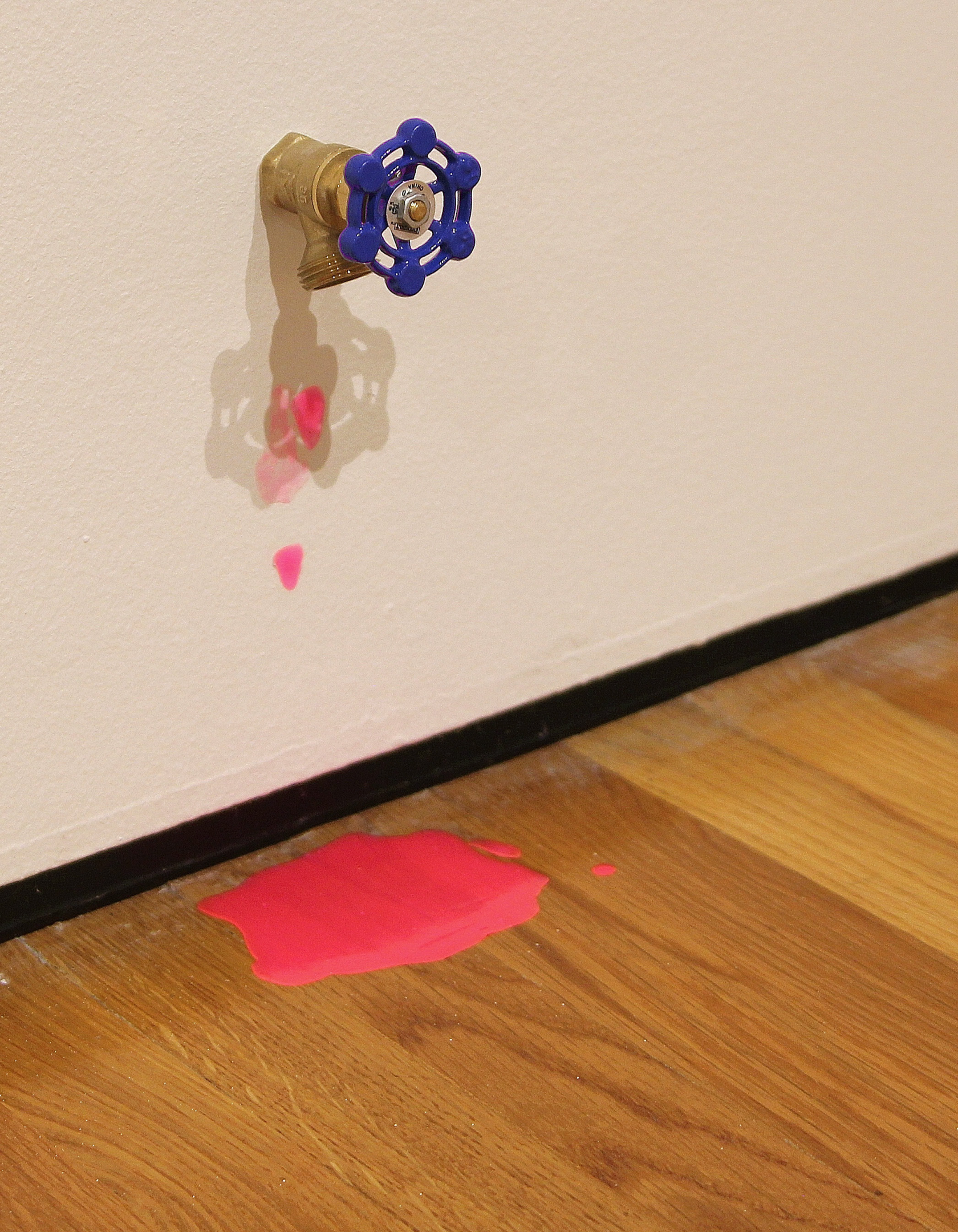
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Previous page: Detail of *Transience*, acrylic on canvas, 77" x 154" x 2"

This page left to right: *For Your Eyes Only I*, acrylic on canvas, 77" x 100" x 2"; *For Your Eyes Only*, acrylic on canvas, 55" x 55" x 2"; *Transience*, acrylic on canvas, 77" x 154" x 2"



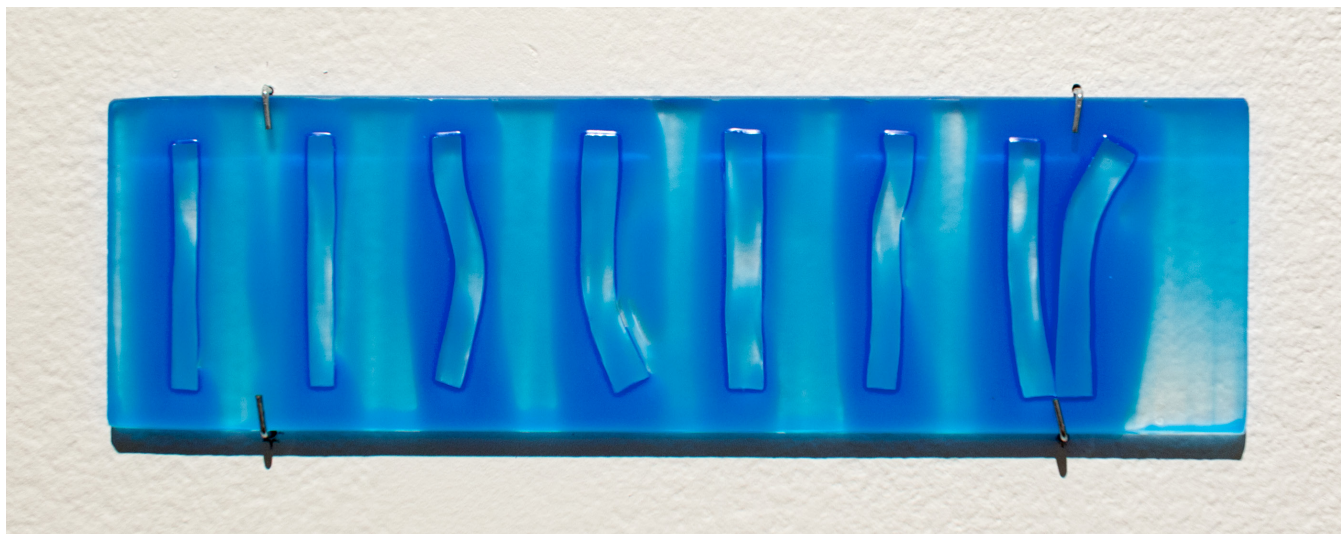


Sunny Samuel

Initially trained as a biologist, Sunny Samuel's artistic practice seeks to explore the intersections and overlaps between science and art. Samuel's drawings, paintings, and installations create a dialog between these two disparate fields that occasionally need reminding they have much in common. Samuel uses a variety of materials in his work (glass, paint, light, ink) that demonstrates a fluidity mimicked in the blobs and parasites he depicts. In *Bag of Spores (Matter Exchange)*, Samuel props a large circular sheet of glass—reminiscent of a petri dish—against the gallery wall. His application of paint and the oozing life forms found therein bring the traditionally microscopic world to a macroscopic scale. The transparency of the glass reflects the shadows of Samuel's painted creatures onto the wall of the gallery—expanding the inhabitable space of these lifeforms. The creature's shadows leak out into reality, causing an interaction between the human viewer and Samuel's other-worldly alien lifeforms.

Samuel's investment in the materiality of glass is a nod to its scientific usage through microscope slides, test tubes, and mixing rods. The artist appropriates these uses and makes them the site of his creative activity—a value essential to the hard sciences, that is nonetheless often overlooked. Samuel's *Primordial Soup* series of rectangular acrylic panels explore the possibilities of life. Within forms recalling microscope slides, Samuel has provided for the viewer the potential for a different world and different modes of existence.

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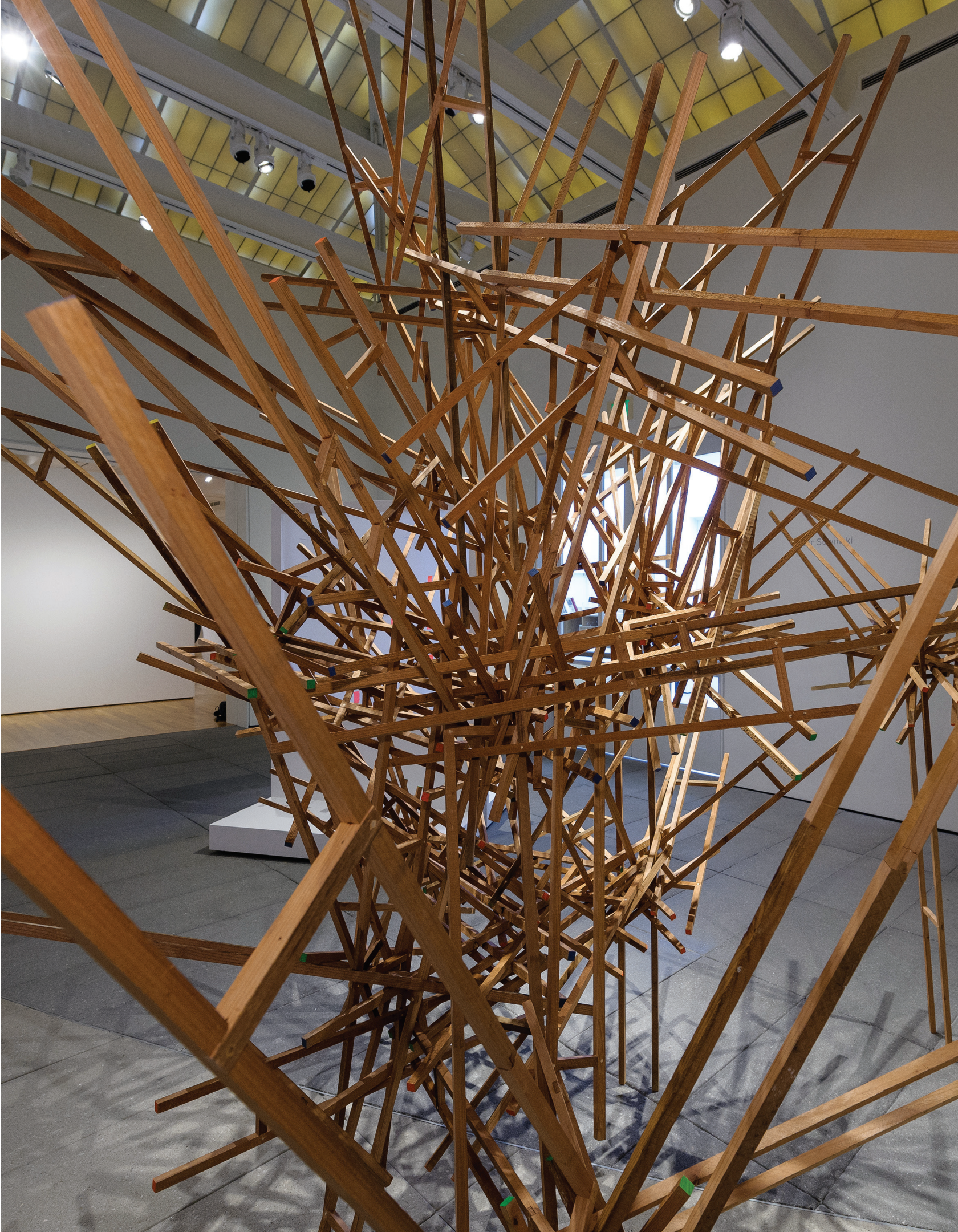
Previous page: *Drip, Faucet* and acrylic, 4" x 9" x 4"

This page top: *Primordial Soup*, acrylic on acrylic panel, 70" x 20"

This page bottom: *New Language*, acrylic on glass, 4" x 10"



Left: *In the Beginning*, acrylic on acrylic panel, 66" x 22" x 24"; *Drip, Faucet and acrylic*, 4" x 9" x 4"
 Right: *Bag of Spores (Matter Exchange)*, acrylic on glass, 60" x 60"
 Floor: *Port*, acrylic on glass rods, 0.15" x 59" x 59"



Peter Sowinski

Peter Sowinski's sculptural work is a meditation on craft, process, and art's interaction with the public sphere. Sowinski mines the materiality of public space and domesticity—plastic construction cones, utility marking flags, matches, salvaged wood, and everyday construction materials—in order to explore conceptions of citizenship in a post-truth world. In *Ideas of Order*, Sowinski combines the mass-produced with the hand built by inserting orange utility marking flags (used to signal telecommunication cables or alarm lines) through two shower curtain scrims supported by two matching wooden platforms, binding them together with the metal stakes of the flags. Sowinski creates a void-like space between the two platforms. The emptiness of this separation of the platforms is punctuated by the thin metal rods of the flags—their thin, metallic forms being all that creates a connection between the platforms. Using Sowinski's title as a guide—*Ideas of Order*—this division can be understood as an ideological one.

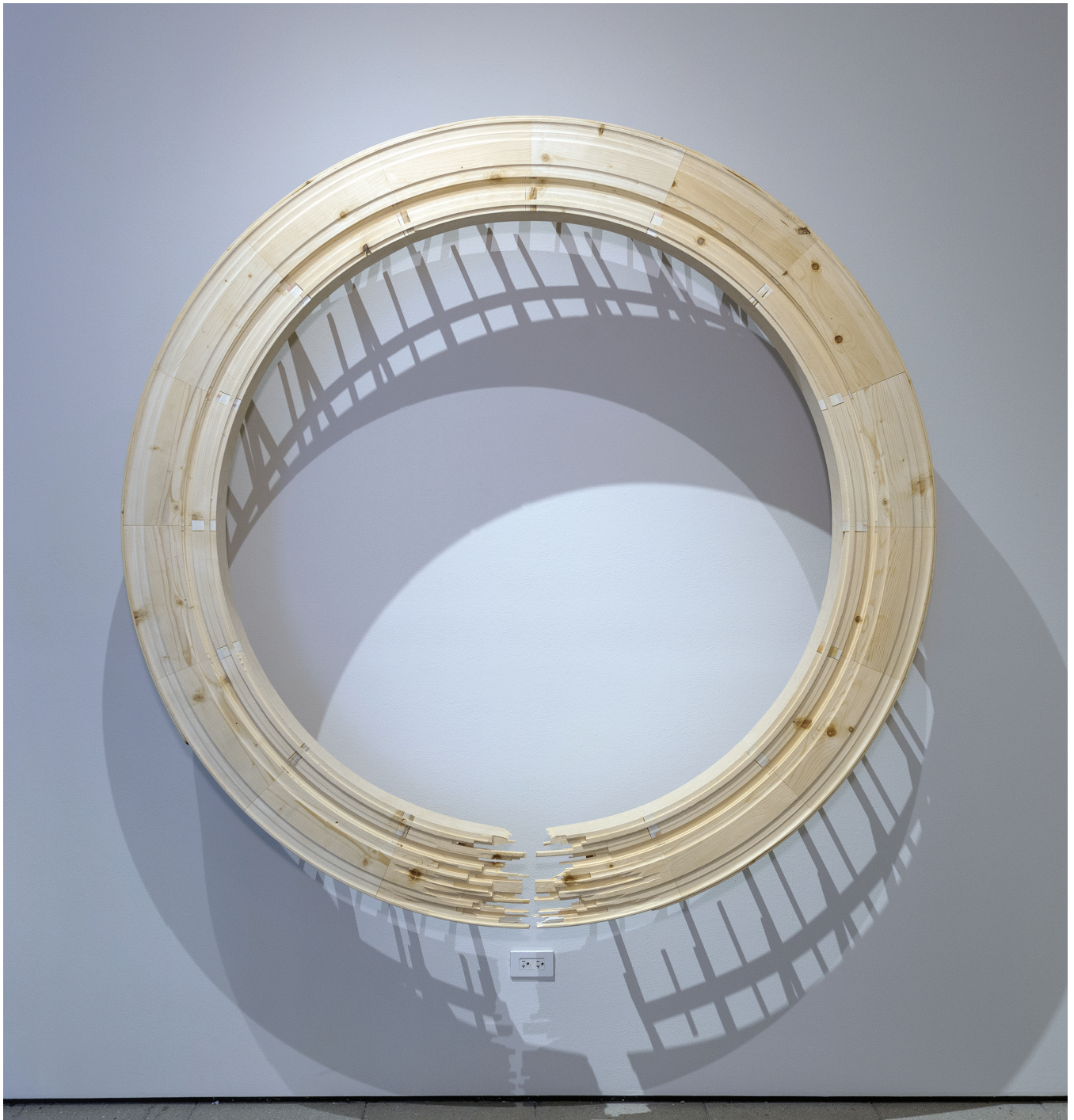
In *A Free Form Does Not Assure Freedom*, Sowinski plays with the Cageian idea of chance. The use of common, humble materials, Sowinski's reference to freedom in the title, and the assemblage of individual units that together to form a whole is an allusion to the precariousness of democracy and the public sphere. Each piece in this large sculpture form is delicately balanced, reminding us that the entire structure could collapse given too much pressure.

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Previous page: *A Free Form Does Not Assure Freedom*, redwood, dimensions variable, in this case 132" x 96" x 96"

This page left to right: *Ideas of Order*, wood, shower curtain, utility flags, 88" x 60" x 60"; *A Free Form Does Not Assure Freedom*, redwood, dimensions variable, in this case 132" x 96" x 96"



Ring (for Martin Puryear), wood, 76" x 76" x 14"



Scotty Slade Wagner

Scotty Slade Wagner's multi-character performances and videos deconstruct gender, sexuality, and the essence of humanness. Wagner's *Trial Child* video performance and set installation puts forth a hypothetical scenario in which parents are given an artificially-intelligent child (the trial child) while considering having a 'real child.' This performance calls into question the nature of the real, paternal lineage and parenting techniques, how human beings form relationships with one another, and importantly the ethics of how human beings treat (and imagine) robotic technology. As a whole, Wagner's performances reveal human nature, gender, and sexuality to be as artificially constructed as the clothes we put on every morning to create our daily costumed identity.

Wagner's characters across his performances explore different performed selves that often challenge the expectations and assumptions of a live audience. In *Stand Up*, Wagner performs at a comedy club presenting a character to the audience that reads as a straight-laced, somewhat homely looking young man. Wagner's set disrupts the assumptions the audience makes based upon his performed identity by regaling the audience with stories of his first homoerotic sexual encounter. By challenging audience perceptions of truth and/or falsehood, Wagner nods to the artificial boundary between staged performance and 'real' life; in Wagner's constructed world, this imagined boundary evaporates.

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Previous page: *Trial Child: Nurture a Better Nature* (Video Still), 4k Digital Video
This page top: *Trial Child: Nurture a Better Nature*, video installation, 96" x 144" x 96"



Stand Up, digital video

Thanks.

The UCSB MFA class of 2017 would like to thank some of the amazing people who have helped make this exhibit possible.

Our wonderful friends and family.

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