

# The Myth of Normal: A Celebration of Authentic Expression

October 5, 2023 – May 19, 2024

*The Myth of Normal: A Celebration of Authentic Expression* looks at societal norms that have been codified over our collective past. Focusing on the achievements of MassArt's alumni, this exhibition is guest-curated by Mari Spirito '92 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

Gabor Maté's 2022 book, *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture*, written with Daniel Maté, examines beliefs and behaviors that are generally considered normal even though they are in fact making us emotionally and physically sick. Because of unhealthy norms, such as overworking, human beings are contorting themselves in order to survive day to day life. The Matés emphasize authentic expression as a means to work towards becoming whole. Building on the Matés' writing, Spirito proposes that art, as a form of self-expression, plays a pivotal role in overall wellness.

Spirito's *The Myth of Normal* exhibition takes over the museum: moving from the exterior to the lobby, and into both galleries. Three thematic, interrelated groupings guide the visitor. The first zone holds artworks that address architecture as an extension of the body; the continuum of consciousness; breaking containment; and violence and violation. Deeper into the Bakalar Gallery, untold and unheard histories are revealed and personal stories interwoven. Ascending to the Paine Gallery, we encounter the way in which painful experiences can precipitate optimistic innovation and forward-looking dynamism. Belief systems are challenged and accepted traditions questioned. Each of the exhibition's artists have put authentic expression into action, encouraging mutual re-learning and well-being.

## Bakalar Room 1: Body as architecture

This room brings together artworks that use buildings as extensions of the human body. By framing the body as architecture these artworks express feelings of being oppressed, held down, or contained in their physical existence. These artworks use buildings as metaphors for social constraints and manipulation. It is important to be aware of the social conditioning that has shaped the world we live in today. In this room, artists reveal the inescapable feelings of exploitation that emerge from systemic and structural racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism. Here, breaking out of a building is an act of freedom, a continuum of consciousness, an escape from containment. By illustrating such a flight, these artists imagine a world in which pain, violence, or violation could become a thing of the past.

## Bakalar Room 2: Untold or Unheard Stories

This room gathers the tellings of histories that have gone untold and/or unheard due to systemic and structural racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism. Artists in this room put forth their specific experiences and histories. These artworks weave together stories, fibers, hair; some lines are drawn, while others are storylines. This moment is undeniably a time of breaking all existing systems, institutions, governments, genders, family structures; Western ideologies are crumbling. It is important to be informed of the destruction these systems have caused in order to move forward towards rebuilding and re-creating. This pain needs to be acknowledged, to be told, to be heard.

## Paine Room 3: Authentic Expression in Action

This room is an exhale of expression. Among the Matés' complex research are findings that human emotional systems and immune systems are one and the same. This analysis is important, because it reveals that when we push down our emotions, we also push down our immune system. We do this when we are not expressing our honest feelings. We are forced to not be ourselves in order to survive in what has become a toxic modern society. This conformity makes us sick and gives us life-threatening diseases. One way to counter this maladjustment is to share our real feelings with people we trust. Another way is to express our authentic ideas and emotions through art. Say what needs to be said, honestly and openly.





## Freedom Baird M'16

with Emily Canales '24, Emily Elliott, Ethan Flematti '25, Nell Gould '99, Elodie Hornedo '25, Gabby Kay '23, Kylie Marden '24, Jonise McCalla '25, Dylan Reid '23, Michelle Stevens '19, Faeryn Seddon '24, and Paul Swenbeck '91

### *Floreal*, 2023

Lichen, sponge, flock, pine, maple, beech, cotton, paint, beads, bones, stones, figurines, planters, soil, living and synthetic plants

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

Freedom Baird's installation for the museum foyer provides a calm transition area. Our eyes and minds adjust from busy streets outside of the museum to the quiet galleries inside. Part distraction, part subversion, Baird captures our imagination first by creating an escapist miniature topography on the surface of the welcome desk. She then subverts our assumptions by mimicking nature by using plastic plants intermingled with real foliage. Are we able to distinguish the real from the artificial in a world that is increasingly made of fakes, imposters, and charlatans? *Floreal* gives us pause to consider what is authentic and what are decoys and trickery. How might we slow down to notice details? How might we learn to differentiate? Do we have agency to make our own choices?



**Paul S. Briggs M'16**

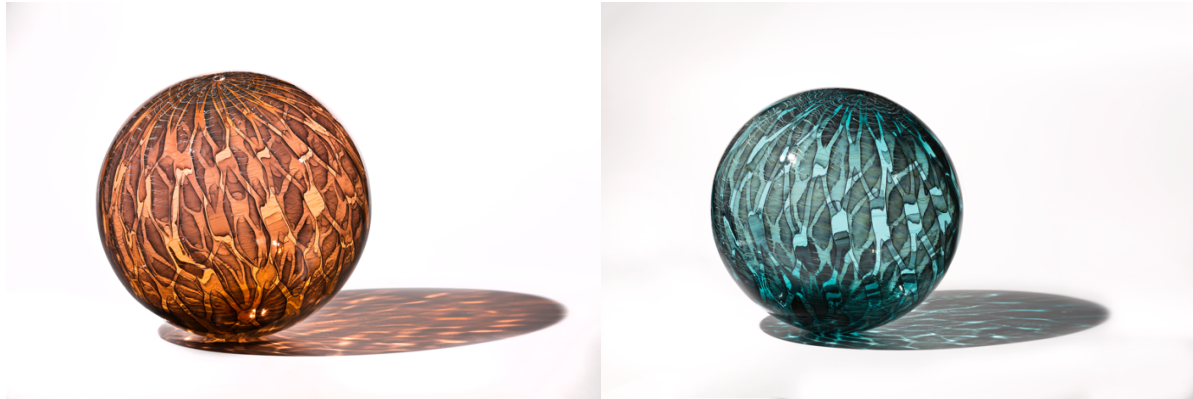
*Cell Personae: The Impact of Incarceration on Black Lives*, 2019

Stoneware clay

Approximately 8" x 6" each, 25 parts

Courtesy of the artist and Friedman Benda, NY

Briggs is an artist and teacher. *Cell Personae: The Impact of Incarceration on Black Lives* grew out of the artist's work as a Baptist pastor and his wide-ranging social justice initiatives, such as facilitating interfaith study, working to mitigate and prevent domestic violence, and advocating for affordable housing. As the artist has explained, "tortured ceramics are a vision of bound souls." Using rectangles and tubes, Briggs demonstrates containment and boundaries, as well as penetrations and escape. In this work, the human mind, body, and spirit are figuratively restrained. Each of the 25 components in this artwork measure approximately eight by six inches, reflecting the proportions of prison cells in the U. S., which measure, on average, approximately eight by six feet.



## Nancy Callan '96

*Apricot Shimmer Orb*, 2018

*Laguna Shimmer Orb*, 2018

Blown glass

16" diameter

Courtesy of the artist and Schantz Galleries

Callan's glass orbs shimmer with movement, seeming to turn like disco balls. They are made of two different glass viscosities, a thick black cane under a softer, transparent layer, to give the sensation of running water. The work brings to mind dualities between what we see and what we imagine. Like the poet Paul Éluard writes, "the earth is blue like an orange" (*La terre est bleue comme une orange*), Callan's sculptures express joy in the essence of many things being true at once, and bringing into awareness the spaces between our dreaming selves and waking mind. Non-conscious revelry and play set our minds free of self and societal limitations, embracing change while simultaneously being suspended in this moment. Callan describes how her patterns form a synergy between slow cane and soft cane, molten glass, and "the spell that it puts on you."



## Cedric “Visel” Douglas ’11

*Majestic*, 2023

Spray paint on vinyl

109.5” x 257” and 109.5” x 257”

Courtesy of the artist

MassArt students Kai Buffonge and Shurvina Herald face each other above the entrance of *The Myth of Normal: A Celebration of Authentic Expression* exhibition at the MassArt Art Museum. Douglas’s portraits function primarily to instill confidence and a sense of belonging in his subjects. The artist partnered with MassArt’s Compass program, a mentorship for first-generation college students from Massachusetts. This collaboration highlighted first-year Black students, celebrating their individuality and putting a “glow” of positive attention. Douglas shows his subjects as individuals with their own ideas and experiences. Douglas’s intention is to dismantle misrepresentations of Black people, to focus on their strength and resilience, and to have an honest conversation about race. Surrounding the subjects are Jamaican plants, a nod to Douglas’s heritage. *Majestic* is a celebration of Black excellence, beauty, ingenuity, and empowerment.

*The artist is grateful to Studio Foundation Professor Amber Turlentes for photographing the MassArt Compass students.*



## **Rashin Fahandeh '06**

*Layegheh, Woman Who Carries a Bag of Dust, 2016*

Video (62 minutes)

Courtesy of the artist

Fahandeh's film is "a poetic documentary based on the life of Layegheh Doorandish, the first woman TV anchor and producer in Abadan, Iran. Her life stories revisit the early days of TV in Iran, revolution and war, and rebuilding life in exile." Surviving the years of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini dictatorship, this female newscaster describes delicate, interrelated aspects of Iran's complex history. Ever since the death of Mahsa Amini (Persian: مهسا امینی) in 2022, there has been ongoing civil unrest and protests. In order to achieve gender equality in many places, it is important to understand how the fight against sexism looks different from one culture to another.

*With deepest gratitude to Layegheh Doorandish*



## **Kate Finneran '92**

*Lead Paint*, 2023

Oil on canvas

70" x 62"

Courtesy of the artist

*Lead Paint* tells the story of a cat backed into a corner, indoors, where the cat ought not to be. She is by an open window that looks out onto a woody yard at dusk. Lady's slipper orchids, which grow in the Northeast and Midwest U.S., are named after an Ojibwe legend. During a plague, a native woman got lost while going out to search for help. She was found dead, with bloody feet that resembled this flower. This plant has medicinal properties, it is a home remedy for headaches, menstrual cramps, labor pains, and calms the mind. Representing the artist's eight siblings are fireflies outside, who mingle with other fireflies that represent the souls of those who have already died.





## Stephen Hamilton '09

*Worshippers of the Water Spirits*, 2022

Acrylic and natural dyes and pigments on copper, wood, denim, and handwoven cotton cloth

110" x 108"

Courtesy of the artist with special thanks to Laisun Keane, Boston

Hamilton is a diasporic African multimedia artist and educator. He went back to Nigeria to learn traditional Yorùbá artistic techniques: woodcarving, metalworking, resist dyeing, and weaving. His artworks are made as an act of reclamation. West African culture sees the physical world (*Nseke*) and the spiritual, ancestral world (*Mpemba*) as separated by a watery boundary. Lifetimes are passages between worlds. Human souls cycle around these worlds, in the same way that the earth circles the sun. Water is sacred and to be honored. Hamilton invites people he knows to model for his paintings so that they may be empowered by seeing themselves in the roles of these deities.



## Stephen Hamilton '09

*Iya Ogun*, 2022

Acrylic and natural dyes and pigments on copper, wood, denim, and handwoven cotton cloth

114" x 84"

Courtesy of the artist with special thanks to Laisun Keane, Boston

Ogun is the Orisa of Iron in the religious traditions of the Yorùbá people, of West Africa, who are Hamilton's ancestors. Ogun represents the masculine, hot, aggressive, and destructive forces that necessitate creation. He is deeply connected to all industries that use iron, war, hunting, wood carving, and the clearing of brush necessary for agriculture. *Iya Ogun* (Ogun Priestess) represents a high-ranking Ogun priestess who embodies both feminine beauty and masculine agency. Her lips are blackened with indigo, and she wears a delicate *kolo* tattoo on her arms. This artwork was inspired by images of Yorùbá Ogun priestesses from Egbado, Nigeria, and interviews with the model for this painting, Poet Laureate of Boston Porsha Olayiwola.





## Maya Hayuk '91

*Tryzub Trio*, 2023

Acrylic paint

18' x 48'

Courtesy of the artist

Hayuk has been making colossal murals with house paint and rollers for over twenty years. Her early life was spent embroidering with her Ukrainian grandmother, who taught her to create hard-edged geometric patterns out of plant-dyed threads. Hayuk is constantly developing complex patterns, which in recent years began to incorporate the *Tryzub*, an ancient Ukrainian trident symbol. At the same time Hayuk was painting in Boston, workers in Kyiv removed the Soviet hammer and sickle from the shield of the Motherland Monument. They replaced it with Ukraine's national symbol, a trident. Written on the bottom right of this mural is *СЛАВА УКРАЇНІ*, which means "Glory to Ukraine," in protest of the ongoing war.



## Gail Hendricks-Hill '75

*Lost and Found*, 2023

Mixed media

11" x 9"

Courtesy of the artist

Hendricks-Hill is a Wampanoag native person who makes artwork that “addresses a time in history, the 1600s, when Europeans imposed their lifestyle on us [North American native people] as if we did not have a culture.” At that time, native people in “praying towns” were protected from European violence by performing Christian activities. The Bible was used to teach English to native people for the sole purpose of entering into land transactions, which had the illusion of civility but were, in fact, violent exploitations. William Apess, for example, was a native preacher who was able to advocate for his people, and not be murdered by Europeans because he was a priest.



## **Gail Hendricks-Hill '75**

*From the Belly of a Nation, 2023*

Mixed media

11" x 9"

Courtesy of the artist

The turtle is a North American native person symbol for earth, now and for over 20,000 years prior to the arrival of Europeans. Hendricks-Hill says that her “round cooking pottery symbolizes the woman’s stomach, male and female at the center of creation.” The broken pottery and protective glass are a statement about her feelings towards Christianity. The empty gallery wall surrounding Hendricks-Hill’s artworks stands for the many native persons who are now missing in the U.S. Growing numbers of Americans acknowledge the complex cultural lives of North American native people and that the suffering they endured continues to this day by our current society and government. Many people are working for reparations, better living conditions, and towards healing these deep wounds.



**Steve Locke** '97, M'01, H'22

*NORMAL*, 2023

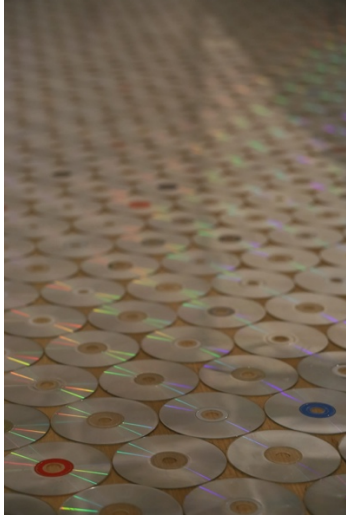
LED lights in an aluminum structure

12'2" x 1'9"

Courtesy Massachusetts College of Art and Design

*NORMAL* is a site-specific installation created to honor the history and legacy of the college, as MassArt celebrates its 150th anniversary. Inscribed on the lintel of the building when it was built in 1906 is “Boston Normal School.” The artwork traces the existing word “Normal” in hot pink illumination. The installation literally highlights MassArt’s longstanding history as a teaching institution. Established in 1873 as a “Normal School” (the 19th-century term for colleges educating and preparing teachers), the college still excels at this mandate today.

Light, and in particular fluorescent signage, has historically been a form of announcement, or a call for attention. In *NORMAL*, Locke uses light to affirm MassArt’s landmark status, while marking the campus as a point of orientation for the neighborhood. “By framing and focusing on the word ‘normal,’ the work affirms the arts as a site of commonality,” said Locke. “The arts are not outside of everyday experience. MassArt is a public college of art and design that trains people to creatively affect every aspect of life. The work makes claims to the arts as normal and available to all.



## **Christian Marclay '80**

*Echo and Narcissus*, 1992/1999

Compact discs

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery

*I went to SIM after being kicked out of the sculpture department at MassArt because I was making a lot of sound work and performance.*

A celebrated visual artist and composer, Marclay makes the invisible visible. His engagement with both art and music infiltrates his thinking process, for him, these two forms are merged. Physical carriers of sound, among them: telephones, vinyl records, and, in this case, hundreds of CDs, make us think of songs that we cannot hear. All of these CDs have music on them and refract light as we walk over them. Our movement is an integral aspect of this artwork. Learning from mid-twentieth-century avant-garde composers, such as John Cage, Marclay uses elements of chance combined with participation by the audience.



## Chandra Méndez-Ortiz M'05

*Parks Entrance*, 2023

Acrylic, collaged papers, magazines, photographs, and charcoal on canvas

60" x 40"

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Kayafas, Boston

Méndez-Ortiz centers the Black woman in her homage to Gordon Parks's 1956 photograph *Department Store, Mobile Alabama*. Mendez-Ortiz kept the central figures of this iconic image and dramatically altered the setting by collaging found photographs from magazines and personal archives. She further abstracted the context by painting and offering layered narratives. Various textures, scarring, and mending of paper and canvas evoke tensions and symbolize trauma manifesting in our collective psyche. *Parks Entrance* documents the everyday activities and rituals of one extended African American family living in the rural South under Jim Crow. This painting is part of a series titled "Love Letters to the Culture," which draws on the lineage of Black creators, including August Wilson and Octavia Butler.





## Tony Millionaire '81

*Maakies Presents: Gabby's Journey*, 2022

Comic book

Courtesy of the artist

Millionaire is a celebrity cartoonist whose syndicated comic strips *Maakies* and *Sock Monkey* ran in American newspapers, including the *Village Voice* and *L.A. Weekly*. Millionaire comes from a family of artists, and his grandfather was friends with the cartoonist Roy Crane. Comics are funny, cheap, and accessible to all kinds of people. Inspired by comforting children's companions made from worn-out socks during the Great Depression, Millionaire's main character, Gabby, is a ruckus monkey. *Maakies Presents: Gabby's Journey* tells the tale of Gabby finally getting sober, late in life, much to the dismay of his drinking buddy, Mr. Crow. Millionaire chronicles Gabby's overcoming of addiction and pain so that he is eventually able to live in the moment.



## Felipe Ortiz '09

*Nature is the norm*, 2023

Acrylic paint

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

Ortiz embraced Gabor Maté's calling out of capitalism, competition, and individualism as the driving forces behind today's sick societies. These forces are represented with a glut of urban development and despair. Ortiz paints plants and buildings from his early life in Colombia and his current life in Boston. The left side proposes nature as space to be still, to have time to look at ourselves deeply. Here we are able to reconnect and move beyond the alienation of modern life. There is hope that we could work with our relationship to our trauma, to care for it, to acknowledge it, and integrate it into our (increasingly) whole self.





## Shannon Palmer '92

*We came only to sleep*, c. 2005

Acrylic on antique barn door

53 ¾" x 29 ¼"

Courtesy of Jeremy Palmer and Family

On this artwork, Palmer has inscribed in Spanish:

*We came only to sleep, only to dream... It is not true, it is not true, that we came to live on this earth, we became as spring weeds, we grow green and open the petals of our hearts. Our body is a plant in flower, it gives flowers and it dies away...*

This text is a poem by Nezahualcóyotl, poet king of Tenochca Aztecs, in pre-Columbian Mexico. Palmer reflects in this work on mortality and loss, the pain of being misunderstood, and yearning for clarity of life's purpose. The intergenerational relay across culture and consciousness is made more poignant by the passing of Palmer in 2020.



## Loretta Park M'16

*Pair*, 2014/2023

Secondhand fabrics, acrylic paint and oil pastels on wood, plastic twist ties, yarn, thread, nylon ropes, mesh net bags, plastic c-link hooks, ribbons, metal screws, sea glass, plastic wrappers, beads, chandelier parts, broken plates, bingo chips

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

A pair is inherently two parts that make a whole. Park's *Pair* is closer to an imprint, in the way that a fallen leaf makes a close replica of itself in the mud on a rainy day. What is created is not the leaf, yet a close version of it. Similarly, the newly popular use of the word "accessible" has the categories of all groups of people who do not have access inscribed on it. Park's materiality is resourceful, authentically warm, and welcoming, while her use of abstraction resists expectations of gender, sexual orientation, race, and class.



## Jack Pierson '86

*Boston #1, 2023*

Folded pigment print

57" x 44"

Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Folded and then unfolded, as if stored between the pages of a book, Pierson's photograph harkens back to his early years of the now historic Boston School artists. Known as renegade, dirty, and experimental, Pierson ran with Mark Morrisroe, Nan Goldin, Shellburne Thurber, Kathleen White, and Tabboo!, to name only a few. Many friends were runaways who found each other to create their own found families during a conservative time of heightened homophobia. These images were on the first few rolls of film Pierson shot in the early 1980s, and they are intentionally grainy and out of focus portrayals of the underground gay scene, with Pierson's intimate sensitivity to exquisite pain and raucous beauty.



**Jack Pierson '86**

*ARE YOU FUCKING SHITTING ME?, 2017*

Metal, plastic, and enamel

130" x 95" x 8"

Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Composed of abandoned, mismatched signage from movie marquees and diners, Pierson's text sculpture is the perfect example of authentic expression. Sometimes it feels good to say it out loud. In light of the relentless ecological and economic crisis, the title of Pierson's artwork is a legitimate question. Emerging from the 1980s Boston School photographers during the HIV/AIDS era, Pierson's artworks honestly embody both pain and warmth. By using discarded, broken letters, Pierson shows us that he values those of us who may feel neglected or damaged ourselves. He embraces the vulnerable parts of himself and, in turn, of us.



## Luther Price '87

*Kittens Grow Up*, 2007

Video (29 minutes)

Courtesy of Ed Halter

“If you were any kind of a man, you would be supporting your family, instead of drinking away your paycheck every Friday night!” yells the mother of three to her drunk husband. This found footage of a working-class family in a tense crisis is intercut with found footage of well-loved kittens. Experimental filmmaker Price tells us the story of what were previously considered “normal” home circumstances. Constantly fighting parents, fear, and financial pressures create long-term stress that impedes brain development. Price is known for radical films that deal with race, class, and hardcore queer sex that he scratched, painted, cut holes in, and buried underground.



**Erin M. Riley '07**

*An Accident*, 2020

Wool, cotton

82" x 100"

Courtesy of the artist and P.P.O.W., New York

Riley is a truth-teller, the one member of her family that has the courage to step into the light. With the fluidity of a painting, her tapestries literally weave together the pain and crisis of her working-class family's story. A small female hand is center stage, covered with bruises. It is evident that these bruises are the aftermath of brutal violence. What we do not know is who is inflicting the abuse, or why, or for how many years. Gabor Maté's reminder to "ask not why the addiction, but why the pain" is about how society deals with anguish. What are the conditions that made this so-called accident possible?





## Heather Rowe '93

*The Entity III*, 2019-2023

Glass, mirror, plywood, wallpaper, paint, steel, fabric, and video

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

This installation takes the story of a haunting of a Los Angeles woman by an invisible and oftentimes violent presence as a starting point. In 1974, research associates from UCLA's former parapsychology laboratory spent several nights at the woman's home attempting to capture the entity with photographic equipment. The only possible evidence of this spirit appeared as mysterious floating arcs of light, which inspired Rowe's video. In *The Myth of Normal: A Celebration of Authentic Expression*, this work presents us with an example of how the past can come back to harm us, and repeat itself in the present, if left unaddressed. The viewer can pass through fragments of a domestic setting, representing our emotional, spiritual, and psychological selves.



**Mark Skwarek '01 and Joseph Hocking**

*digital sky*, 2023

Augmented Reality

Courtesy of the artist and Joseph Hocking

Instructional video on floor 1, QR code to enter with smart phone on floor 2

*digital sky* is a new augmented reality artwork that digitally opens the roof of the MassArt Art Museum. When using the app from the gallery, viewers will see the sky above in real time via their devices: Sunny days, clouds, or birds flying give the sensation of being outside. Skwarek has a long record of creating augmented reality works that engage in political conflicts. For example, one work that he made on site “erases” the DMZ battlements between North and South Korea. The large-scale QR codes mounted on the ceiling signal that there is a digital world always around us, which we are immersed in. When activated on a device, *digital sky* suspends us in the illusion of being completely liberated from social constraints and suggests that anything is possible.



## To experience the artwork

*digital sky* requires the Snapchat app

Open Snapchat, and scan the code with your camera



Using the artist's filter, direct your device at the QR codes on the ceiling to view *digital sky*



## Mimi Smith '63

*Recycle Coat*, 1965/1993

Plastic, plastic bags, bottle caps

50" x 34" x 5"

*Steel Wool Camisole*, 1992

Silk, lace, steel wool

Courtesy of the artist

28" x 18" x 5"

*Nonuplets*, 2010

Fabric, plastic domes, dolls

43" x 20" x 5"

Courtesy of the artist

Smith is a feminist artist who started making artwork about the lack of women's rights before the term "Feminist Art" was coined. For almost six decades, Smith's artwork has deftly articulated misconceptions of sexism and mirrored the progress (and lack thereof) surrounding relentless gender biases. By referencing clothing, her work reminds us that women

are often unpaid home/childcare laborers and interchangeable commodified objects.

Smith's *Steel Wool Camisole* is sexy ladies underwear with steel wool for scrubbing dirty pots and pans. Her *Recycle Coat* is made of discarded wrapping from household goods, including paper towels, napkins, toilet paper, and paper cups. The coat simultaneously protects and defines its wearer, shielding her from the elements yet imprisoning and encasing her in a limiting domestic shell.

*Nonuplets* is a cute sleeveless dress with nine buttons that run down the front in increasing size, each with a plastic baby in it. This artwork is about the normalization of hyper-competitive approaches to the production of everything, including human life. In a recent conversation, the artist referenced a 2021 *Guinness World Records* of nine babies being born in a single birth, actual nonuplets. Births like these are very high risk for both the mother and children. Striving for these records, and the related conversations, underscore how women's bodies are a place of contention. Today, wars on women's right to medical care, such as safe abortions, birth control, are often coupled with the dangers of pregnancy and miscarriages.



## Mimi Smith '63

*Nothing*, 1983

Acrylic, paint, ink, Xerox on clock

11" diameter

Courtesy of the artist

*Mimi Smith has been making clock pieces since 1975 in response to both the increased awareness and obsession with time which has characterized the end of the twentieth century and her own interest in everyday objects whose forms that are so familiar that their content and meaning is often overlooked... Nothing depicts a clockface charred and stopped in Hiroshima at the atomic moment which forever altered man's understanding of natural time.<sup>1</sup>*

Unforgivable crimes against humanity continue today, “hidden in plain sight” due to the normalization of pathological unlawfulness of our current sick societies. Circling this sculpture are words that read “time heals nothing,” repeatedly.

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<sup>1</sup> Katy Kline, “Mimi Smith,” in *Clockworks: Timepieces by Artists, Architects, and Industrial Designers*, ed. Katy Kline and Dana Friis-Hansen (Cambridge: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1989), 48.





## Corinne Spencer '10

*Like Muscle to the Bone*, 2016

Video (10 minutes, 53 seconds)

Courtesy of the artist with special thanks to PearlArts

“What was buried in the ground?” Spencer uses poetic imagery, hands in the ground, a young, black performer bending like a tree, to remind us that we are interconnected, and a part of this earth. Her video references dreamscapes, Greek and West African mythology, and historical mystics to commune with us about mortality. The artist tells us softly that death, the most unspeakable subject, is just part of a cosmic cycle. Even this video itself is part of a larger installation of performances, sculptures, and interwoven, non-narrative videos, called *HUNGER*, for which Spencer quotes the Bible: “Not a separate being in the world but the world itself.” One day we will all be buried in the ground.



## Corinne Spencer '10

*This Eternal Thread*, 2019

Video (7 minutes, 49 seconds)

Courtesy of the artist with special thanks to Meerkat Media Collective

Part of the *HUNGER* video cycle, *This Eternal Thread* features three young Black women performing the strange task of pulling threads from an unknown origin. They are shown both as a group and as individuals, pulling and weaving the thread as milk and water drip around them from within their stone setting. The central image of three women pulling thread is mythological, drawn from the Greek story of the Three Fates, who measured out the lives and destinies of humanity. But where the mythological image focuses on the Fates drawing forth threads for the world, the three women in *This Eternal Thread* are inwardly focused—their presence and actions being for themselves, and not the world.



## **Richard Streitmatter-Trần '03**

with Patrick Brennan M'24, Lexie Dowgiert '23, Arielle Gordon, Matthew Hingman '93, Elodie Hornedo '25, Gabby Kay '23, Harry Liao M'24, Jenn Lima '24, Janna Longacre, Kylie Marden '24, Dylan Reid '23, Willow Trodden '26, Reid Drum, Michelle Stevens '19, Paul Swenbeck '91, and Trần Thị Thu Trang

*Gluskabe Comes Home*, 2023

Mixed media, steel, clay, stucco, plaster, plant material

71" x 40" x 82"

Courtesy of the artist

*Gluskabe Comes Home* is about the artist reflecting on his own past. Gluskabe (Klose-kur-beh) is a woodchuck/beaver figure of Northeastern Woodlands, North American native people's cosmology. The artist's adoptive grandfather is descended from the Penobscot tribe. There are many stories of Gluskabe that differ across the region. One is that Gluskabe created humans out of trees. Gluskabe is known for generously bringing knowledge essential for survival and moral codes to live well by, but he also punishes those who break these codes. Emerging from this beaver is the figure of a child which could be his grandfather, father, the artist, or his child, an intergenerational continuum.





## Tabboo! '81

*KISS, KISS, KISS*, 2021

Acrylic on canvas

20" x 20"

*Le Chapeau Noir*, 2019

Acrylic on canvas

60" x 50"

Courtesy KARMA Gallery and Gordon Robichaux, NY

Pleasure and love emanate out of every seemingly casual drop in Tabboo!'s paintings. His expressive style radiates the pure joy of being alive, though his works are also tinged with great loss. The character of every line captures the spirit of the man who made it. Cult legend drag queen Tabboo!, a.k.a. Stephen Tashjian, has been an East Village superstar for over 40 years. In the early '80s, Tabboo! performed as a singer and go-go dancer at the Pyramid Club, Mudd Club, and the Palladium. Along the way, many of his friends have died of AIDS and HIV-related illnesses. Fear and death have the capacity to generate an unyielding appreciation of everyday moments in life.





## Kathleen White '86

*Spirits of Manhattan*, 1993-1996

Hair, synthetic hair, hairnet and ties, monofilament, dental floss, starch, powdered glitter

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of The Estate of Kathleen White with Rafael Sánchez, and Martos Gallery, New York

White's installation is made of 39 individual sculptures hung in all directions. Some of this hair in the work is real, some synthetic, some was given to the artist, while some was recovered from belongings thrown out onto the streets. Most of these wigs belonged to drag performer friends who had died of HIV/AIDS. Others are from those who survived—Lady Bunny, Billy Erb, and Jojo Americo. White was an important member of the Boston School-era artists, and she was affected by the U.S. government's intentional erasure of the queer community during the (still ongoing) HIV/AIDS crisis. A poignant yet glorious homecoming, this is the first time *Spirits of Manhattan* has been exhibited in Boston.



**Kathleen White '86**

*Untitled (Blonde Fall Spirit)*, c. 1995

Hair, thread, monofilament

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of The Estate of Kathleen White with Rafael Sánchez, and Martos  
Gallery, New York



## Jackie Winsor '65

*Pink and Blue Piece*, 1985

Mirror, wood, paint, cheesecloth

31" x 31" x 31"

Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery

Winsor is a pioneering minimalist sculptor who famously expanded hard-edge abstraction, making it about our relationship with the object. Her use of a mirror reflects the viewer back to themselves, yet softens the surfaces with pink natural wood. Her humanist approach focuses on interconnection; it is almost non-dualistic. In her own words, Winsor explains: "In the mirror you also get to see yourself, so it projects your physical presence. When you look inside the sculpture, however, the intimacy there is your own internal intimacy and the mirror reflects only itself. You never can see your reflection in there. Your inner reflection is more illusive."



## Ezra Wube '04

*Una Favola Vera (A True Fairytale)*, 2020

HD single-channel video, sound (8 minutes, 9 seconds)

Courtesy of the artist and Microscope Gallery, NY

Wube's stop action animation tells the history of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia during WWII. His source imagery comes from political propaganda distributed via mass-produced postcards, calendars, posters, and pamphlets. Some of this disinformation made it into schools on the covers of notebooks or games that taught geography. Wube's images bleed into each other, the struggle depicted is with the land as much as for the land. Made of plasticine, a putty-like modeling material, Wube's work gives us the feeling that war continues endlessly. Russia was the only nation that defended Ethiopia, a concerning fact considering the current rise of fascism worldwide.



## Bahar Yürükoğlu M'11

*And*, 2023

Fake leaves, fake flowers, vintage jewelry, fake hair, feathers, chains, mannequin hand, Plexiglas

72" x 36" x 36"

*If*, 2023

Fake leaves, fake flowers, vintage jewelry, fur, feathers, chains, silicone, mannequin hand, Plexiglas

72" x 36" x 36"

Courtesy of the artist

Yürükoğlu's sculptures *And* and *If* are made of flower arrangements, much like those found in hotel lobbies or funerals. These plastic plants are honest and forthcoming about what they actually are as they burst into wide-open space. Each sculpture is physically weighed down by medical books and emotionally intertwined with each other. *And* is a portrait of the artist's mother, composed of her colorful expressions, similar jewelry, her drinking straws. *And* embodies multiple truths and the complex emotions that come with family relationships. *If* is the artist, her hair, her fingernails, and her considerations of "What if ..." the parts of our unlived lives are brought out into the open.



## Zhidong Zhang M'20

*Backyard Portrait*, 2022

Transparency in a lightbox (ed. 3)

60" x 48"

*Lumination*, 2022

Transparency in a lightbox (ed. 3)

28" x 35"

Courtesy of the artist

Zhang's photographs are made in spaces near home yet outside of it. These liminal spaces are both safe and dangerous. They are in a backyard, domestic, contained by a modest wood fence, exposed to neighbors known and unknown. There is a feeling of intimacy, his boyfriend helped with one picture. Zhang refers to Trinh T. Minh-ha, the Vietnamese filmmaker, to explain his intention to "not to speak about/just speak nearby," in this case their queer community. Zhang calls for incremental intimacy, caution, and self-protection, with the backlighting telling of coming out of darkness. Light boxes are typical of bus stops or advertising. Are the artworks being presented as a product for sale or flirting?