

2023

2024

MCAD

JEROME FOUNDATION

Jerome Fellowship Exhibition

FEATURING WORK FROM

Zoe

CINEL

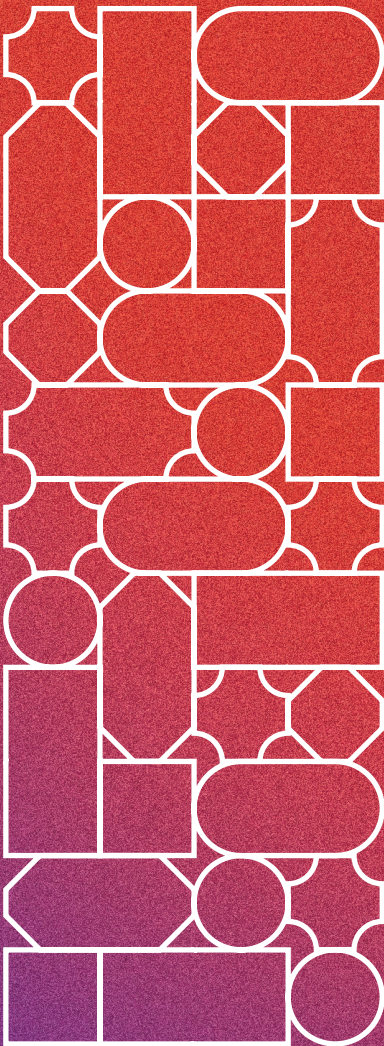
Leeya

ROSE JACKSON

Perna

Ziba

RAJABI



This catalog was published on the occasion of the exhibition for the 2023/24 MCAD–Jerome Foundation Fellowships for Early Career Artists.

January 17–March 1, 2025
MCAD Gallery

Essays by Juleana Enright
The Jerome Foundation generously supports this fellowship program.

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Contents

4	Zoe	CINEL
14	Leeya	ROSE JACKSON
24	Prerna	
34	Ziba	RAJABI
44	Biographies	
48	Acknowledgements	
50	Past Recipients	



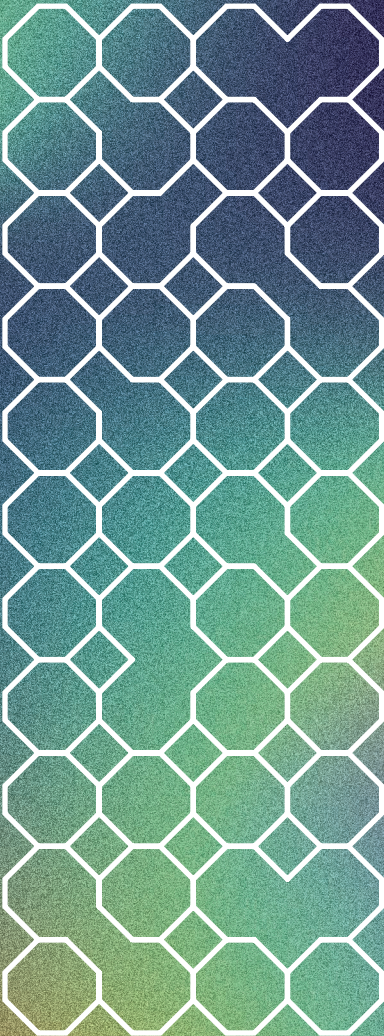
2023

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Zoe Cinel

cinelzoe.myportfolio.com





"The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. . . . To take seriously each other's vulnerability, fragility, and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice a community of support. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care."

*Natura Morta with
adalimumab-adaz,
hollyhocks, and mold,
2024, Digital photograph
Dimensions variable*

¹ Excerpt from Johanna Hedva's
Sick Woman Theory

–Johanna Hedva¹



When I arrive at Zoe Cinel's home studio I immediately encounter the central themes grounded in their work: impermanence and permanence; decay; community care and succor. We saunter through their backyard, a garden of towering wild flowers, hollyhocks, rosemary. On the deck is an array of flowers and herbs in glass vessels in various states of decay, viscous and putrescent liquid soaking the stems—moldy matter awaiting incorporation into the artist's work. I think of the invisible within the visible. I consider the subterranean, symbiotic organisms below the soil. The earthworms, microbes, mycorrhiza archaea, cyanobacteria, actinomycetes, fungi, algae, lichen, protozoa, all essential to the soil fauna that spend all or part of their life underground, in isolation yet in synthesis with community.

As Cinel and I walk through this space, they reflect on flowers as symbolism. Synonymous with rituals of care, they act as solace gifts we bestow and seek to preserve despite the fact that they are in their own perpetual state of decay and sickness. Similarly, if our bodies are in a constant state of decay, how can we harness the beauty and depth of this decay? What does preservation look like for ailing bodies? How is this preservation a revolutionary act?

Placed at the intersection of queerness and disability, Cinel's work explores the preservation of the body through resistance to pathologized language, subverting perceptions, challenging ableist "standards," and bringing the lived experience to the forefront. Expressing the nuances of identity, their work posits that preservation of the body depends on the understanding of intersections, acts of communal care, and the rituals of self-care.

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

—Audre Lorde²

In *Sick Woman Theory*, artist/author Johanna Hedva's seminal text in disability activism, Hedva reframes illness as "not just a biological experience but a social one." Hedva postulates that "under capitalism—a system that limits our worth to the productivity of our bodies—we must reach for the revolutionary act of caring for ourselves and others."³

As an interdisciplinary artist, curator, and educator, Zoe Cinel's practice ranges from installation, sculpture, performance, public and video art, deeply rooting all in collaboration, community care, and activism. An O1B immigrant and chronically ill artist, Cinel navigates the understanding of others and self through an exploration of the radical kinship of solidarity, visibility, and anti-capitalism in the act of caring.

In Cinel's ongoing print and photography series, *Natura Morta With* (2024), the artist explores the revolutionary act of caring for oneself juxtaposing harvested dead flowers and the liquid created from their decomposing state, with medications used in their daily care routine to treat rheumatoid arthritis. Stationed as an altar to the rituals of self-care, this work lives as an embodiment of visibility, resistance and a social commentary on the oppression imposed upon our bodies by the western medical system.

Natura Morta With (2024) lives as an autobiographical journey and paradigm-shifting perspective from the commonly understood conceptions of disability, through the use of a visual narration of the artist's personal care routines developed with side effects of medicine. Mold and decay—allegorical references to frequent infections due to having a compromised immune system. The pendulous petals and drooped appearance flowers assume when drying—symbolizing the experience of chronic fatigue. Cinel's work exists as a counternarrative, a protection from the probing, patronizing, ableist encounters of access.

Through their curatorial practice, Cinel evokes the responsibility of a curator by embodying the origins of the word (as derived from the Latin word "cura," to care). They consider participants' experience in their exhibitions by creating spaces designed to be inviting multiple access points. In their curated work, *Chronicles of the Chronic* (2023), Cinel invited thirteen artists whose work reflects intersectional identities and holistic healing approaches to living with a chronic condition.

Ode to My Medical Bills, 2021
Immersive installation made of
artist's MRIs and X-Rays, monitors,
custom-made walls
Sound mixing by Eric Anderson
20 x 20 ft
Photo: Rik Sferra

² Audre Lorde (*A Burst of Light: Essays*) – also lauded as guardian goddess *Sick Woman Theory*

³ Johanna Hedva, *Sick Woman Theory*



The exhibition posed the question: “What can we learn from artists who navigate this multilayered experience creating spaces for self-reflection, sense of belonging and connection?”⁴ A celebration of resilience and visibility as activism, *Chronicles of the Chronic* (2023), shown at the Rochester Art Center in late 2023-early 2024, addressed the interchange of grief and cathartic joy through artistic practice. Through programming, artwork, and artist roundtables, the exhibition sought to “build a stronger community that moves beyond unsustainable binary ideas of illness and wellness.”⁴

In *Conversations About Care* (2022-ongoing), Cinel expands this element of community-building through a series of communal experiences designed to hold space for cross-cultural, cross-disability solidarity and visibility. Through community feedback and dialogue, the series incorporates hospitality and inclusion to explore intersections of care and mutual aid, of space and access and foster unification and non-hierarchical approaches. Conversations encourage dialogue between artists, creators, and medical professionals, creating collective acts of resilience and resistance and offering tools for an anticapitalist, anti-ableist shift.

Expanding on visibility, Cinel’s multimedia installations, *Ode to My Medical Bills* (2021) and *Self Portrait with Flare* (2023), reconcile the chronically ill body—often subject to the medical gaze and dehumanizing analysis—by peeling back the layers of “invisible” disability. In *Ode to My Medical Bills* (2021), several video monitors, split by custom-built sheetrocked walls, played a series of video

Conversations About Care, 2022-ongoing
Series of participatory events
This conversation was hosted in September 2024 by Amplify MN: A Disability Justice Collective as part of the programming for the exhibition *The Art of Disability Justice Now* in the Twin Cities (Mill City Museum in Minneapolis).

⁴ Excerpt from *ArtDose Midwest Arts Magazine*, on *Chronicles of the Chronic*, curated by Zoe Cinel. Published by Frank Juárez, Oct. 29, 2023.

⁵ Quotation from artist Zoe Cinel



6 “History is crucial to any culture, and it is essential to Disability Arts. It is through a sense of history that we define who we are, what journey we have undertaken and how far we have come. We also, implicitly, map out the future.” —Chronology of Disability Arts 1977-2017 by Allan Sutherland, an ongoing project sourcing Allan Sutherland’s personal archives, *Disability Arts in London magazine* (DAIL), *Disability Arts magazine* (DAM), *Shape Arts* and *Disability Arts Online*.

7 Tricia Hersey of The Nap Ministry and Resurrect Rest School quoting Black-Latine transdisciplinary artist, Bronte Velez. Resurrect Rest School is a gathering space dedicated to the deep study, teaching, and practice of the Nap Ministry’s rest-as-resistance framework. The school serves as an intensive intervention and provocative space to understand and embody the 4 Tenets of the Nap Ministry, a series of core principles infused with the principles of Black Liberation Theology, Afrofuturism, Womanism, somatics, and communal care.

collages, and archival images of the artist’s x-rays and MRIs, evoking the feeling of living in a state of suspension. Cinel cites this work as a self-portrait of “coming out” as chronically ill and their journey navigating life in their own internal ableism. “As dehumanizing as it is to see your body that way through x-rays, it is still a point of seeing your body.”¹⁵

With physical capacity and sustainability in mind, Cinel hopes to evolve this body of work by substituting drywall with soft sculpture materials that mimic walls, harnessing the softness of trauma. Using material forms associated with sickness and bed rest via interactive installations, Cinel bears witness to textured lived reality.

Cinel’s latest work embodies Allan Sutherland’s belief that “History is crucial to any culture, and it is essential to Disability Arts”¹⁶ as they explore the history of disability justice, crip advocacy, and ancestral healing. Using research conducted on recent trips to Italy, Cinel’s newer work is a continuation of their installation *Rest With Me* (2023) focused on healing and holistic medicine through a lens of traditional decorative arts and craft from their homeland, Italy. Visiting museums and sites that hold historical significance to witches and healers erased by the patriarchy and the medical caste, Cinel highlights the historically misrepresented and persecuted. Inspired by stories of healers who held ancestral plant and medicinal knowledge, and incorporating dialogue from participants in *Conversations About Care* (2022-ongoing), Cinel creates an altar to healing that contains generational wisdom. Cinel is working on an interactive work inspired by the ornamental Maioliche designs found on vases and ceramic jars called albarelli, used to store herbs and healing potions, created in the Tuscan region of Italy from the 1400s to the early 1800s. The work is designed to be held, activating the desire to care for ourselves and others, and elevating the objects that we surround ourselves with or use when sick.

Cinel’s work of cultivating critical dimensions for self-preservation and self-representation reminds us that rest and self-care is resistance. I think of the words of the Nap Ministry artist Bronte Velez: “How will you be useless to capitalism today?”¹⁷ As we contemplate our bodies—not in a perpetual state of rotting, but as a constant act of fermenting, effervescing, simming, bubbling, stewing—we can use this framework to foster collective healing and radical kinship, redefining what it means to preserve ourselves and others.



Rest With Me (detail), 2023
Set of cushions and mattress
made of repurposed hospital
mattresses, donated fabric and
pillow stuffing, cyanotype prints
Collaborator: Gretchen
Gasterland-Gustaffson
Materials were donated by
Kerry Morgan, Kriss Zulkosky,
and Maggie Scanlon
30 x 80 in.

*Disabled bodies are
queer bodies, 2024*
Cyanotype on jacquard
pretreated fabric
17 x 12 in.







"enter the darkest room in my house and speak with my own voice."

—Lucille Clifton¹

I can't help but think of the words of Lucille Clifton when viewing Leeya Rose Jackson's work. I feel myself drawn to the darkest parts of her paintings. Gazing into the caliginous sectors, I feel the crackle of infinite space, where mercurial moments embrace multiplicity, for it's often in the most sepulchral details where we experience the most light.

Combining her disparate media into a series of pieces that encapsulate her neurodivergent Black girlhood journey, Jackson's practice incorporates painting, woodcarving, wood burning, typographic design, animation, and coding through the use of tech components such as Raspberry Pi/Waveshare displays. The purpose is both perpetuation and celebration.

In *Mountain to Lie On* (2023) we see an ephemeral body outstretched into the territory of desire, deeply engaged with the natural world and the planetary dynamics of biology. Its subject lies in an ethereal space created through rupture, on a mountain of vulnerabilities and fantasies. In the realm of speculative fiction, transcendental magical realism, and the mystical, *Mountain to Lie On* (2023) embodies a sense of freedom and otherworldly alienation, designed to exist as a playground of affirmation where one can explore the breadth of cosmic pan-reality.

In Jackson's multimodal body of work, *Loud Joy*, the artist explores the abundance of human emotions and highlights their inherent counterparts—shame, grief—and the chimeric cabinets that hold them all. I am reminded of Nietzsche's adage: "One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star."

These works act as portals into the remnants of memory, into the subconscious remembrance of shame, of ancestral ways of knowing, and as a conduit for past, present, and future. She playfully beckons us into these temporal spaces, collecting treasures of the past and imagining futures as she builds them right in front of us. Her rich, deep, dark pigments—dark enough to wormhole into—and velvety black tones play radiant tricks on the eye and are reminiscent of '70s revival theorem stencil.

Metamorph.i.is., 2024
Acrylic, mixed textile on canvas,
phone digital animation
48 x 72 x 2.5 in.
Photo credit: Rik Sferra

¹ Lucille Clifton, from *The Book of Light* (1993)

Jackson's *Metamorph.i.is.* (2024) is a collaboration of maternal memory, nesting and nurture, circular denotations, and the



endurance of celestial time throughout ambient cycles—birth cycles, life cycles, generational and regenerative cycles. The painting encapsulates different modes of the artist throughout the years and cyclical patterns of existence. It culminates with an amorphous idea of a child whose identity is still unknown—a reference to her own journey as an expectant mother. Ruminating on the possibilities of future generations she's creating through the journey of motherhood and of the infinite arrival, Jackson emotionally soars through cycles, asking: what can I sift through, and what do I want to leave, bring forward and leave behind?

Jackson's latest work incorporates hand-designed textile patterns and painting, and acts as an ode to Black mothers, showcasing not simply the act of survival but the embrace of joyful resilience. Her work focuses on Black mothers of the past—women who were lost in the labor process—thinking of them as ancestral figures in support and advocacy in her own birthing journey, for future life-bearers, and all the different souls that have led to where we are now and will come forward after. It whispers: my hands come from your hands.

In *Mind Map* (2023), Jackson plays with gaps in memory and celestial surrealism by inviting us into a portal of mind and universe interconnectivity through various depths in pigment of black paint, representing voids and places where information is consigned to oblivion. To create these "voids", Jackson uses the darkest paint she can find, ones that contain new resin that holds more pigment than other acrylic, capable of trapping in more light. Where most black pigments appear shiny, these pigments create a matte-like quality, which fosters a distorted visual experience, like sinking into a black hole. Similar to British Indian artist Anish Kapoor's experimentation with and attraction to Vantablack², Jackson's fascination with the void and her efforts to create the illusion of bottomless depth and areas beyond being are seen in these pigments.

Metamorph.i.is. (detail), 2024
Acrylic, mixed textile on canvas,
phone digital animation
48 x 72 x 2.5 in.
Photo credit: Rik Sferra

² Vantablack is a paint that was said to be one the blackest materials in the universe, absorbing 99.8 percent of all light.

Continuing to explore elements of illusion, Jackson experiments with technology through the use of QR codes, augmented reality, and



baby built-in screens. She adds a sci-fi and glitch element to her digital work, breathing life into her paintings through animation and manipulating user experience through Raspberry Pi. In the Raspberry Pi experience, a series of small single-board computers assist in her small-scale video installations as looped videos, with interactive sound created through code-based programming. These tiny video installations, purposefully hidden within a body of work, create an “Easter egg” viewer experience only for those inquisitive enough to discover it. On the miniature screens play looped videos of found childhood footage rooted in memories of being a little Black girl, of identity, of liminal place, and of the exuberance of youth.

In the installation work *Universal Change* (2022), Jackson deploys woodworking, typography, carving, woodburning, and painting to dive further into the universal experience of humanity. A nod to Octavia E. Butler’s pivotal dystopian series, *Parable of the Sower*, Jackson elicits the powerful spirit hope brings as the catalyst for change. Regarding the spiritual transcendence of time not as a linear experience but one with connective tissues between the nows, these works exist where pasts, presents, and futures flow like currents and vibrations in a navigable slipstream. In this series, *Affirm. Adage* (2023) acts as an altar to memory and sources of childhood shame. Existing as a consideration to past and present parallelism, the work presents Black ancestral figures existing in harmonious union and in conversation with their descendants as starscapes illuminate them. *Universal Change* (2022) is a nod to worldbuilding and Afro-futurism that welcomes the imaginative and proposes a responsibility to embrace unseen and celestial.

Secret Garden, 2023
Acrylic, mixed textile on canvas
36 x 48 x 2 in.
Photo credit: Rik Sferra



Hill to Lie On, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 30 x 2 in.
Photo credit: Rik Sferra

That on That, work in progress, 2024
Acrylic, mixed textile on canvas
8 x 72 x 2.5 in.
Photo credit: Rik Sferra





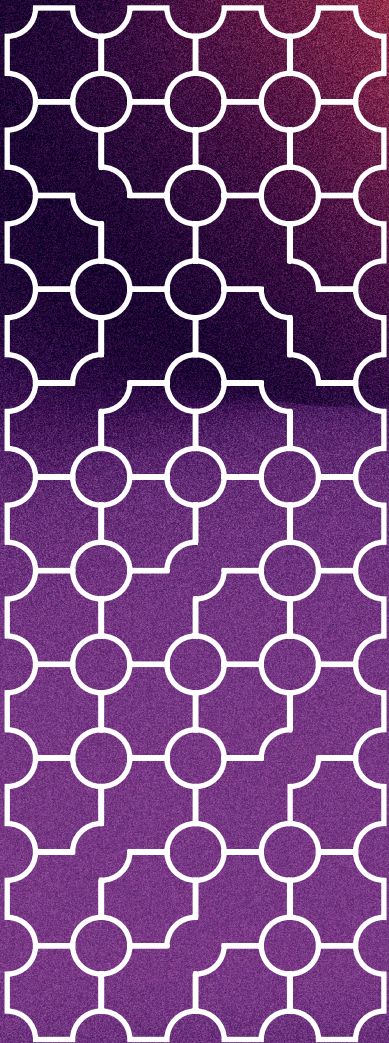
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Prerna

prernaunknown.com





"How we experience memory sometimes, it's not linear. We're not telling the stories to ourselves. We know the story; we're just seeing it in flashes overlaid."

—Frank Ocean

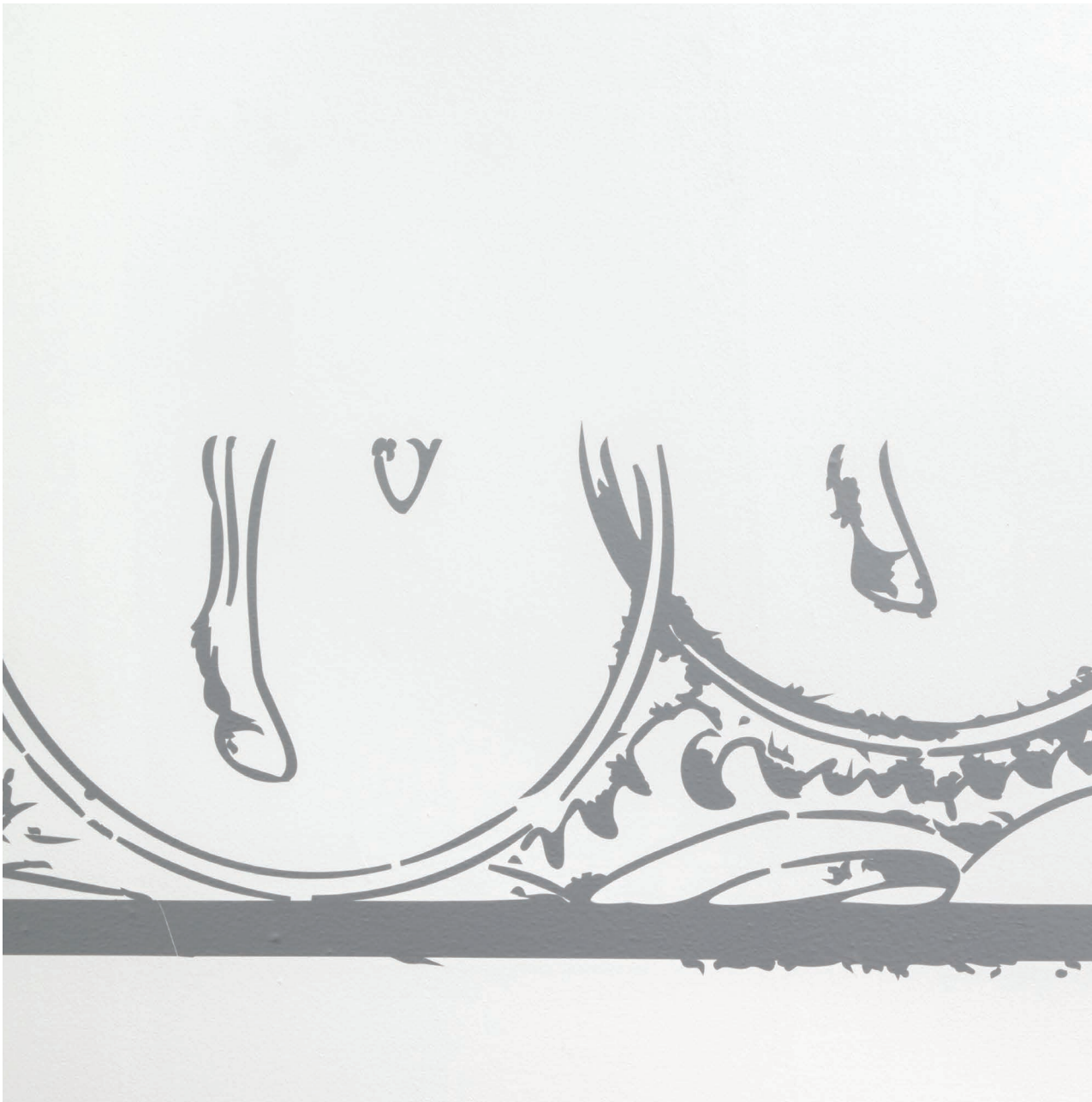
I am standing under stark fluorescent tube lighting staring up at a thinly veiled transparency print of a negative suspended by metal hardware. In the photo is a woman sitting on a swing in a green outfit which perfectly matches the verdant foliage behind her. I get a sudden urge to rewatch the movie *Brazil*. There's something about Prerna's body of work—titled *Falseiling* (2017)—and how it juxtaposes minimalist and industrial materials with these intimate artifacts that calls to mind the futuristic dystopian film and its absurdist critique on bureaucracy. The Orwellesque film follows a protagonist as he escapes the monotony of his low-level bureaucrat job through a recurring virtuosic daydream. Made in 1985, *Brazil* imagined a society controlled by a bleak and blundering authoritarian regime where disturbing and senseless acts become desensitized through the use of constant and incessant bureaucratic procedures and rules that have no purpose other than to perpetuate their own existence.

Prerna, a recent immigrant with no last name and a temporary status in the United States, uses her sculptural practice to investigate the absurdities and contradictions of bureaucracy as it intersects with memory and superstition. Through archival evidence of a life lived, memory objects, and ancestral lore, Prerna explores identity and self while challenging believable truths and the deception between them.

Much as *Brazil* pairs dismal dystopia with ephemeral, dreamlike states of temporary existence, Prerna's work plays with materials, language, and objects that mimic the rigidity of bureaucratic spaces collocating them with their material counterparts—intimate, temporal spaces—in a way that's both purposefully alienating and, by contrast, warm and familiar.

Prerna's artistic content and process involves probing childhood artifacts, intergenerational superstitions, and memory objects—a shared family journal filled with familial handwriting, recipes, budget

Mirage of the Mahabharata
(heads), 2024
Security dome, vinyl chair, saree,
cast aluminum horse head
24 x 35 x 24 in.
Photo credit: Rik Sferra



planning, and other musings—to explore a reconnection to her culture and mother tongue, Tamil. She reckons with documents of government categorization to examine what holds more authenticity to self: memory or the bureaucratic system. Prerna explores a reactive relationship with bureaucracy, “collaborating and corroborating” her citizenship status identity through personal materiality of the home and archival journals reflecting on how one prescribes memory, and the mechanism of credibility and legibility. Prerna sifts through family archives, referencing negatives and her doctored memory, in an effort to piece together evidence and legitimacy of self.

In *The husk of a swing* (2023), industry spars with intimacy pulling the viewer in close, like a lure in the sea to a memory chest. We experience the softness of her mother’s handwriting etched into ceramics, transparency prints of family photos, braided fabric from



Mirage of the Mahabharata (tails), 2024
Chrome cut vinyl, cast aluminum,
carved drywall
72 x 12 in.
Photo credit: Rik Sferra

her grandmother's sarees juxtaposed with punched steel, sterile LED lights, and other bureaucratic aesthetics existing in symbiotic harmony, holding their own elements of the truths of time. Thinking about the text of handwriting versus the exuded text of bureaucratic documents, we are challenged to ponder which holds more validation of self. As Prerna reflects, is it "the hand? Or the machine?"

Working in mirage surface textures—aluminum and mirror chrome vinyl—Prerna engages with disparate and distorted layers of perception to achieve an element of transparency as a means to discombobulate the viewer while imploring them to delve into their own contradictions of self. At first glance, it's simply a reflection, but within the surface materiality of Prerna's works—like the skins from archival images, and the skins from childhood home—the sense of self becomes translucent. She asks, "How does bureaucracy



know me, even at my most vulnerable?" Where the seemingly random intersects, Prerna's work shapes the arbitrary into a state of impermanence in duality with object permanence.

In *If bureaucracy was a chair* (2023), Prerna incorporates a fascination with chairs of her childhood and love of mirrored effects through a security dome fashioned to a vinyl chair. While we view the chair, we view ourselves through a distorted and blurred lens. Calling to mind elements of surveillance and evasion of privacy it begs the question "What if we looked at bureaucracy the way it looks at us? Are we allowed?"

In this invitation, Prerna explores bureaucracy as an entity to engage with—surveying and analyzing—as a way to find solace in a reality existing through both societal systems and the more sentimental moments of remembrance. Conceptualizing flaws in the system and highlighting contradictions, Prerna's work addresses a desire to learn more about one's "personal history within a bureaucratic system designed to incriminate" and acts as a portal, a negative space, inviting superstition into the conversation.

Fascinated by the strange tension of bureaucratic aesthetics, Prerna captures glimpses of a moment in time, to decipher a sense of belonging and find connections between temporal gestures. Which traces and remnants we leave behind are the most valid? What kind of tension does temporal space and impermanence create? Prerna performs the ultimate collaboration, with bureaucracy corroborating her story.

If bureaucracy and memory were in an interrogation room, who would answer the questions with the most accuracy? And, if we speak of confabulation in memory, then cannot bureaucracy, in all its idiosyncrasies and manmade machinations, be in fact fallible? Do bureaucratic texts exert more authority than identity because of the faltering and precarious nature of our own memory?

The husk of a swing, 2023
Punched steel slotted angle,
transparency printed photo, LED
light, chains, extruded ceramic
handwriting, braided sarees
60 x 24 x 132 in.
Photo credit: Jaysen Hohlen

Stretched, 2021
400' of saree, paracord, rope
Dimensions variable





You are a subject, 2020
CNC routed MDF and drywall,
intaglio print
24 x 35 x 24 in.

In *Mirage of the Mahabharata* (2024), Perna uses chrome-cut vinyl to recreate a large painting of running horses depicting the battle scene in the Indian epic *The Mahabharata*. Folklore holds that any imagery of the Mahabharata predicts an impending family feud. This vinyl recreation—which features a painting from her family home often seen in photos as only a cropped image of horse legs—explores the enigmatic realm of the spaces unseen. Navigating the contradiction of her family owning this painting and the historical context of superstitions, Perna encapsulates a mirage of the past, the rebellion of the mind, and gaps in the void. She invites us into the strange and precarious space where disparate things—bureaucracy, superstition, memory, and intimacy—all exist together as a way to hold the truths of time.



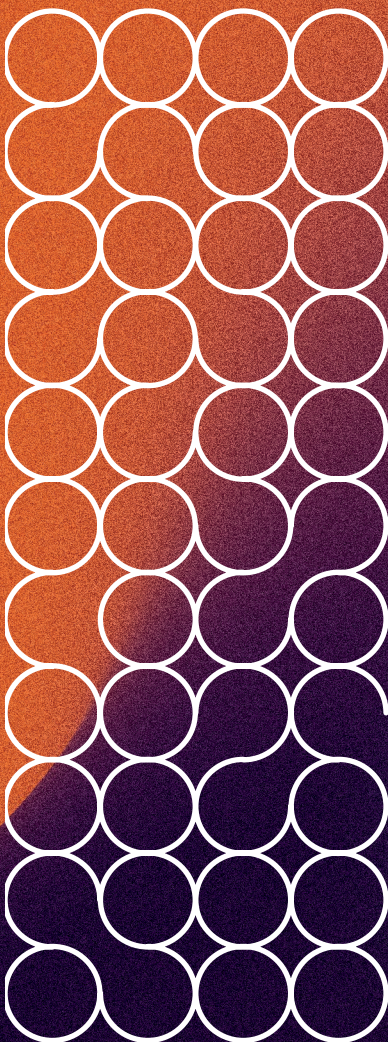
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Ziba Rajabi

zibarajabi.art





"Suddenly my feet
are feet of mud
It all goes slow-mo
I don't know
why I'm crying
Am I suspended
in gaffa?"

–Kate Bush¹

We begin suspended in a metaphorical web, as some sort of inescapable pull through ascension traps us in the archways of color. The diaspora of the body creates a diaspora of the mind and spirit, called back and reconnected by language. It is a phonetic cathartic release, a poetic reunion.

On this transient journey we can only feel through impermanence, only read text through translucency. We long for it, we desire it, and yet when we attempt to remember it, everything is slightly changed. We leave gifts on the tiny altar of the altered; we time warp into a place that doesn't exist any longer. This strange sympathetic limbo of memory is the entry point of Ziba Rajabi's practice.

During our studio visit, Rajabi shared a Persian word with me that I have been tenderly obsessing over for months: *ghorbat* (غربت). In English, it might mistakenly interchange in its translation to "homesickness" but the emotion is infinitely more complex. In context, *ghorbat* refers to a place that isn't or doesn't feel like home, a place where you are a stranger, existing in isolation from the culture, the language, the social conventions. I ponder this word as I consider the themes in Rajabi's work, themes which cohabit with desire to reconcile memory, alluding to elements of her homeland through abstract shapes and architectural textiles. Through a process of dismantling fabrics—cutting and restitching patterns—and use of Persian calligraphy, Rajabi's work examines the disruption of painting and poetry as recognizable mediums and reveals an identity in repetitive flux and fluidity.

An Iranian, mixed-media artist who combines the mediums of painting, drawing, and fiber-based installation, Rajabi explores her fragmented identity disrupted by, yet temporally tethered to, two distinct spaces: her homeland of Tehran and her current residence in the United States. Exploring the themes of death, physical distortion, and distance, Rajabi's work challenges the principles of painting through geometric design, and examines the traditional and rudimentary rules of sacred

Untitled, 2024
Acrylic on muslin, thread
16 x 16 in.
Photo credit: Rik Sferra

¹ "Suspended in Gaffa" was the third single release from Kate Bush's 4th album *The Dreaming* (1982)



structures and spaces that mimic glitches in existence. Drawn to fabric for its ephemeral and temporal qualities of lightness, mobility, and malleability, Rajabi explores the perpetual state of suspension and the instability of displacement.

When we talk about our memories fading, we first imagine the details slipping away, like grains of sand slowly slipping through our hands or drops of rain dissolved by the sea. As the vibrancy of memory fades, visual qualities become less vivid, grains become dust, dust merely air. Harnessing the energy and emotion of a misplaced memory, Rajabi's paintings feel both palpable and strangely familiar. Devotion holds its first glance; language another. Distance is an unknown dance; we paraphrase its forgotten steps.

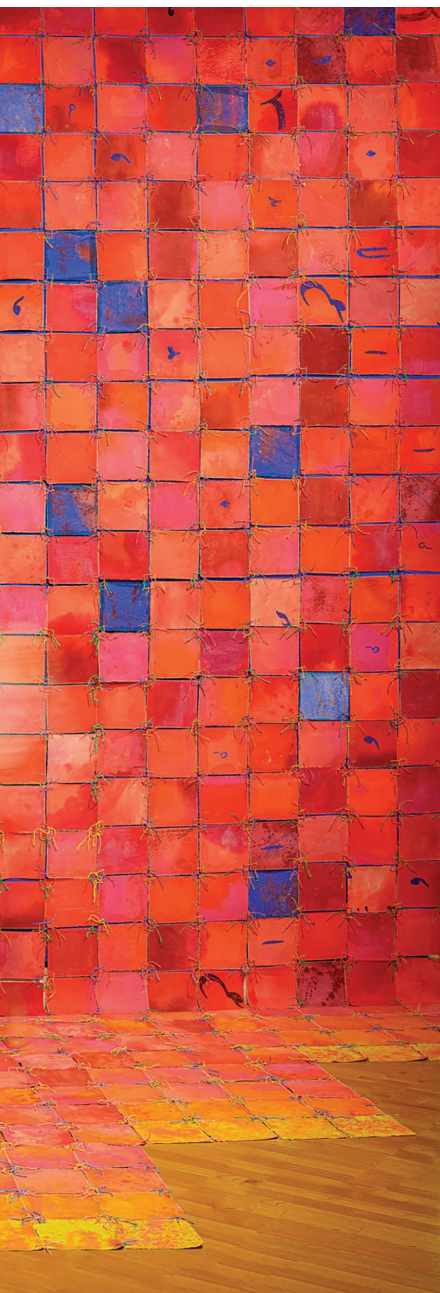


That Lost Folio Vol. II
(site-specific installation),
2024
Colored pencil, ink,
spray paint, pastel on paper
Dimensions variable

Joy, resistance, and persistence are celebrated in Rajabi's latest series, featured in the group exhibition *So Far, So Close* (2024), which premiered at the Q.arma Underground Gallery in Minneapolis this summer. Featuring art by Iranian women, the exhibition explored the experience of displacement from the motherland by artists who reside outside of Iran "by choice or force." Through watercolor monotypes and monoprints, Rajabi highlights '80s and '90s song verses by Iranian female pop singers who have been living in exile from 1979 until now, and whose music was banned in favor of war propaganda during the Islamic regime. Recalling the joy of listening to and viewing smuggled audio and video tapes of Iranian dance music, these works are an ode to exile and resilience.



In her most recent solo exhibition, *That Lost Folio Vol. II* (2024), Rajabi continues a installation-based project influenced by a tiled wall in one of the oldest opulent palaces in Tehran, the Golestān Palace. Originally built in the 16th century, the wall has been renovated, restored, and preserved through time, often using random, mismatched tiles varying in design and size. In this body of work, which includes nearly 300 small tile drawings spanning five large walls, Rajabi explores the complex histories of Persian art and Iranian architecture. Examining how we consider drawing in contrast with painting, each gold-sprinkled pattern is margined by geometric borders which draw inspiration from Iranian bookmaking and the lavish, richly illustrated designs prevalent in Persian paintings.



Unlike the masterful preservation present in other spaces of the palace, repairs on this specific wall feel intentionally improvised, as if the wall is attempting to catch up to its contemporary surroundings and glitch time. Rajabi says this wall “speaks to viewers with contemporary slang.” Contemplating the lost and forgotten, the destroyed and exploited, *That Lost Folio Vol. II* (2024) contemplates lost culture and translation as a tool of colonialism; most of these illustrated manuscripts were cut up, destroyed, or misinterpreted by European and American collectors during political upheavals. As described in Pond Gallery literature, “By reassembling her own wall of fractured narratives, Rajabi creates a repaired history told with the power of lived experience.”²

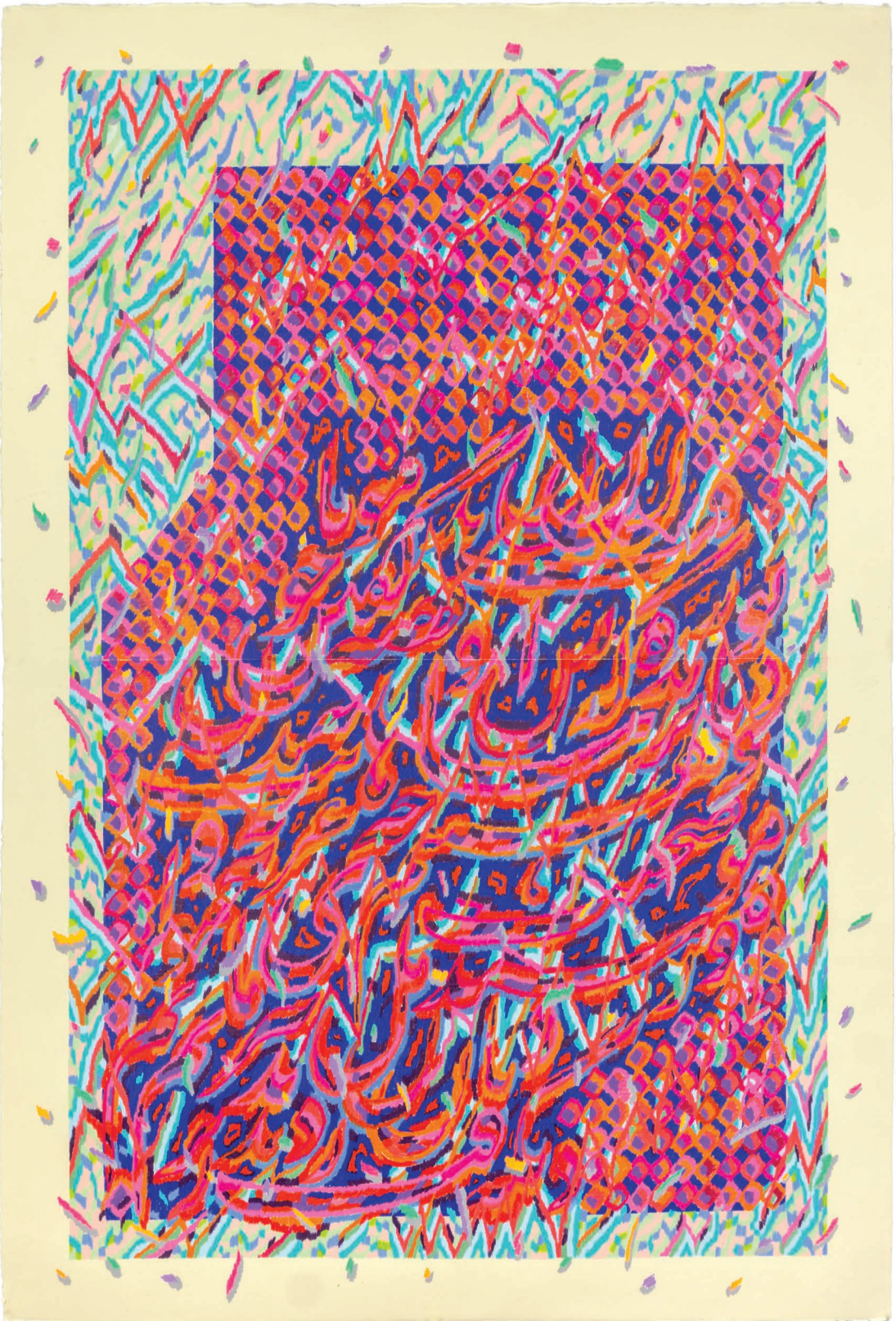
In *Glitched Home* (2021), Rajabi expands the concept of fleeting memory in a large-scale, site-specific installation for the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. Composed of over 2,500 pieces of painted canvases, stitched and sewn together using dyed threads, *Glitched Home* (2021) is a metaphoric take on social media and digital communication as often the only means of interface between loved ones under the complex bureaucracy of immigration. Incorporating pieces of home—architectural components, windows, Persian rugs, door frames—Rajabi evokes the feelings of “ghorbat” and showcases displacement from culture and land through visual storytelling. Reminiscent of the pixelated double exposure images, noise, and grain and color degradations found in the distorted layers of glitch art, these works mimic digital art through textile and highlight that despite its convenience, technology can never replace physical closeness and connection to land.

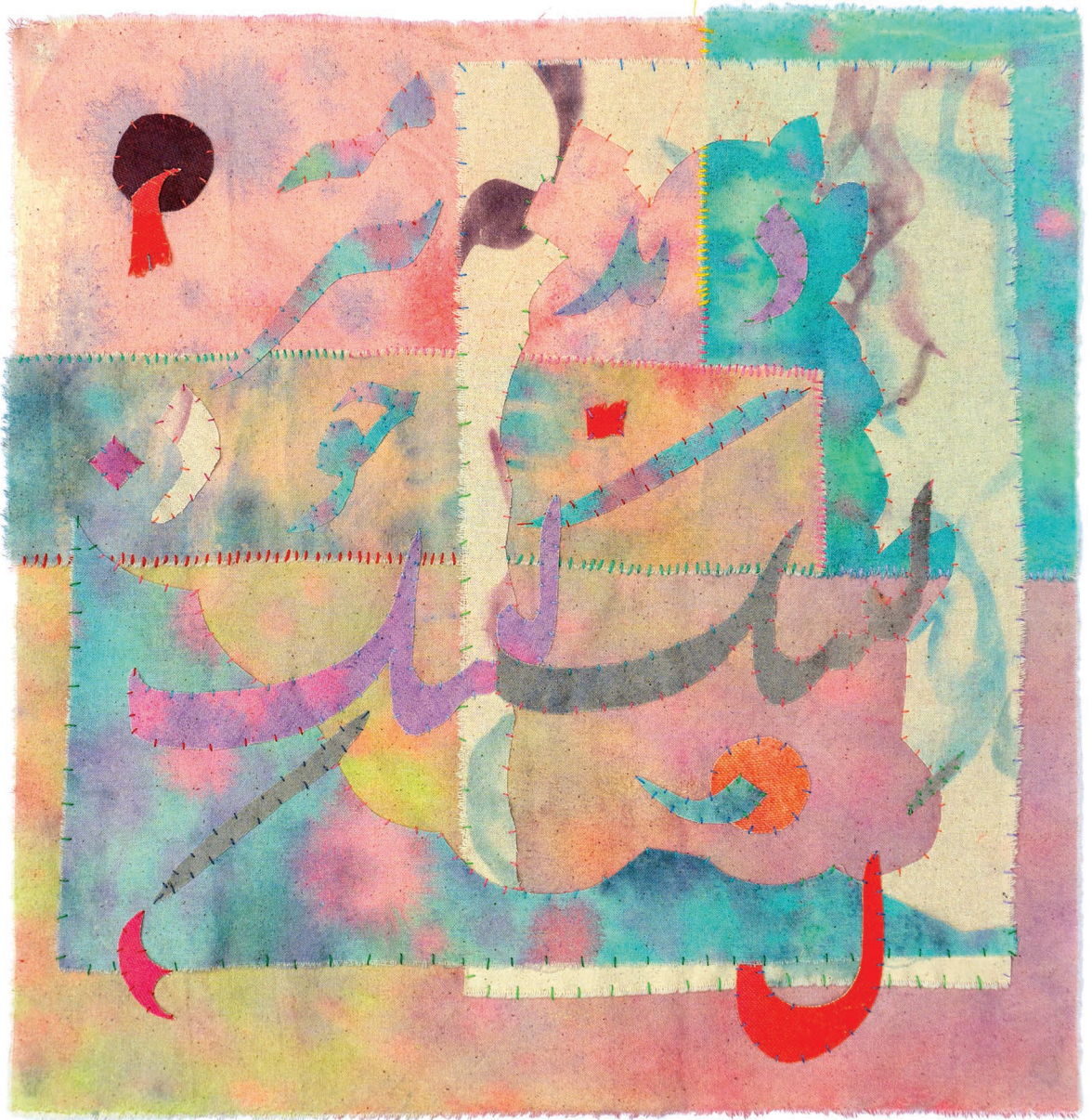
If we see memories as the containers of self, Rajabi’s work *Misordered Story* (2019) is a memory chest of identity. Exhibited for the annual *Solidarity Street Gallery* in St. Paul, Rajabi created a massive tapestry of interwoven painted canvas, beginning as one continuous panel and then chopped up, scattered, and reassembled—each piece holding a semblance of its wholeness yet slightly altered, warped by time, and betrayed by memory. While these works convey the disintegrated sense of self, warmth, and intimacy of memory remains present and uninterrupted through Rajabi’s use of soft materials and tactile fabrics. Closeness to home isn’t diminished by time, but enduringly treasured, committed to limerence.

Rajabi’s work poses the questions: Do we long for the land itself, or our relationship to the land? Is identity shaped by place, or do we shape place? If we exist suspended in gaffa, how do we remain tethered to the inexplicable truths of our identity?

² Excerpt from the Pond Gallery, in Arkansas, where *That Lost Folio Vol. II* debuted.

Glitched Home (site-specific installation), 2021
Acrylic on canvas, cotton thread, mirror, Dimensions variable





Untitled
from *That Lost Folio* series,
2024
Colored pencil on paper
30 x 44 in.

Deltang, 2023
Acrylic on muslin
and canvas, thread
15 x 15 in.



Zoe Cinel

Is an interdisciplinary artist, curator, and educator from a Mediterranean culture. They are based on Mni Sota Makoce, homeland of the Dakota people, home of the Anishinaabe people, and Indigenous people from other Native nations. Through art, Cinel builds community around human experiences that are isolating and complex to navigate. Starting from their personal journey as an O1B immigrant and a chronically ill artist, they work collaboratively to produce social change. They research nonbinary, interconnected, and interdisciplinary ways of healing and care. Community building is the foundation of Cinel's practice. Since 2017, Cinel has contributed to CarryOn Homes, an artistic collective dedicated to centering stories of immigration to Minnesota. More recently, they have collaborated with Amplify MN: A Disability Justice Collective on *The Art of Disability Justice Now* (2024-2025), an exhibition rooted in principles of disability justice. Cinel has received notable awards, including a 2023-2024 University of Minnesota Liberal Arts Hub Residency with the collaborative project *Sound Stories*, an MRAC Arts Impact for Individual Grant to support the event series *Conversations about Care* (2022-ongoing), a residency with Second Shift Studio, and more. Their artistic and curatorial work has been exhibited at institutions such as Walker Art Center, Mana Contemporary Chicago, Rochester Art Center, and Gordon Parks Gallery, among others. They hold a master's in visual studies from Minneapolis College of Art and Design. Cinel has taught at Carleton College, Metropolitan State University, and Minneapolis College of Art and Design.



Leeya Rose Jackson

Is a multidisciplinary artist from Detroit. Now based in North Minneapolis, she works as a painter, printmaker, creative director, filmmaker, and designer. Leeya is the creative founder of Noisemakers Studio, specializing in design, art direction, and illustration. Her work explores identity focusing on Blackness, neurodivergence, femininity, and queerness—and is characterized by vibrant celestial, floral patterns, and magical realism motifs. Jackson earned her BFA in fine art, painting and printmaking, from Illinois Wesleyan University. She has exhibited her work across the Twin Cities, Detroit, Italy, Fargo, California, and Boston, and completed a printmaking residency with Pears Studio of NDSU and Arthouse of Moorhead, Minnesota. Jackson is an active member of the Roho Collective and AdWomxn, and part of the Public Functionary Studios Program. Her public artwork has been commissioned by a wide range of institutions including the Mall of America, the Four Seasons Mpls, Hello Adorn, and University of Minnesota. She has also received illustration commissions from University of Minnesota Press, Playwrights Canada Press, Target's Black Beyond Measure, MPR, American Public Media, the Coven Mpls, Sony Music, Giphy, Metro Transit, AdCouncil, Teach for America, and the National Parks Conservation Association.



Prerna

Is a multidisciplinary artist born in Mumbai, India. In her most recent works she engages with familial archives and government documents to discern the overlapping elements of bureaucracy and superstition, arguing that they are two sides of the same coin. Prerna is interested in her relationship to being the subject and being subjected, using the materials and language found in government buildings, airports, classrooms, and other spaces, where the body undergoes categorization and evaluation. Through these actions, images and objects blur the lines between the domestic and the institutional, the intimate and the formal, the hand and the machine. Prerna earned her MFA from University of Minnesota. She has been awarded several global opportunities and residencies, including the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, *Artists for Artists Edition 4: Language Is Never on the Ground*, and Artists' Cooperative Residency & Exhibitions (ACRE). Prerna has exhibited at galleries including SooVAC, Lump Gallery, SNAG Gallery, and Papa Projects. Her work has been published in *the Other Way Around*—a catalog of artists at University of Minnesota and Weißensee Academy of Art in Berlin, and the visual art magazine *FAKE*.



Ziba Rajabi

Earned her MFA from University of Arkansas and her BFA from Sooreh University, Tehran, Iran. Her primary practice is focused on painting, drawing, and fabric-based installation. She is the recipient of the MCAD-Jerome Foundation Fellowship for Early Career Artists and the Artist 360 Grant, a program sponsored by the Mid-America Arts Alliance. Rajabi's work has been included in a number of exhibitions nationally and internationally, including Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and 21C Museum in Arkansas; CICA Museum in South Korea; Masur Museum in Los Angeles; Conkling Gallery at Minnesota State University; Araan Gallery in Iran; and the Il Platform in the UK. Rajabi has been an artist in residence at Vermont Studio Center, the Terrain Residency in Illinois, and Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Colorado.

Acknowledgments

As I reflect on the last year, one word comes to mind: wholeheartedness. Defined by complete dedication, enthusiasm, and commitment, this word characterizes not only the fellows who have worked tirelessly to push their artistic practices to new places, but also the fellowship program staff, who continue the mission-driven work of supporting artists in our communities.

For over forty years, the MCAD–Jerome Foundation Fellowships for Early Career Artists has dedicated itself to advancing the careers of over 200 early-career artists. Since their time with the program, each of those fellows has gone on to contribute positively to our creative communities on a local, national, and international level. In many ways, the impact of this fellowship is incalculable. However, in my opinion, the most tangible proof is the continued excellence of selected artists who join and build upon such a prestigious legacy.

Continuing this four-decade legacy are the 2023/2024 cohort: Zoe Cinel, Leeya Rose Jackson, Perna, and Ziba Rajabi. Authentic voice, expansion of material techniques, innovation, empowerment, and an appreciation of energy were noted consistently throughout the selection process. The panel of jurors recognized in each artist a dedication to their work, a service to their craft that reverberated beyond their studios—and a readiness to advance their work in new ways. Since their selection, I've had the privilege and honor of witnessing these four incredibly talented and dedicated artists step into their work, challenge themselves, and emerge on the other side, affirming their place in our world's creative makeup. Is this process easy? If you ask them, they'll likely laugh and say absolutely not. But what it does is push them wholeheartedly through to the completion of their eighteen-month fellowship as confident and affirmed artists.

For this year's jurors, that was the express hope. Alex Buffalohead (Bdewakantowan Dakota; director of communications, branding, and partnerships at the Native American Community Development Institute and All My Relations Arts Gallery), Carol A. Stakenas (director and chief curator of Providence College Galleries), and Jade Yumang (artist and associate professor in the Department of Fiber and Material Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago) were selected as jurors because of their understanding and appreciation for this opportunity.

Tasked to identify four outstanding artists from a pool of 94 talented applicants, jurors' dedication to and deep investment in the review process have directly impacted the lives of these fellows. I thank each juror for their service, empathy, and investment in the artists of the future. Jade Yumang reflected on the panel process: "I am excited to see the rise of early-career artists coming from Minnesota, especially with the caliber of applications we saw. There is an intense dedication to research and craft. They are pushing their work with such inventiveness and thought-provoking questions. I can't wait to experience the diverse worlds that they open up."

I want to congratulate each of our fellows and thank them for creating a welcoming, open, and thought-provoking space. Zoe, Leeya, Perna, and Ziba, it has been a joy to connect with each of you and spend time in your studios. I can't help but glow with pride as I witness your journeys. I would also be remiss not to acknowledge the tiniest and perhaps most adorable addition to the cohort, Solana Rose, the baby girl welcomed by Leeya in September 2024. While we all jokingly nicknamed her "baby Jerome," she is now an honorary member of the cohort.

This fellowship's longstanding and vital work is made possible with continued collaboration with the Jerome Foundation staff and board of trustees. They ensure that Minnesota is a place where artists can live and thrive. On behalf of this year's fellows, I thank Jerome Foundation President Eleanor Savage for her endless support and leadership. I'm also grateful to Jerome program officer Melissa Levin, who works directly with the MCAD program staff to ensure the continued success of this fellowship. I also want to acknowledge MCAD's leaders: President Sanjit Sethi, Vice President of Academic Affairs Robert Ransick, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs Melissa Rands, and all of the dedicated MCAD staff and faculty who ensure that we continue leading in cultivating creatives of the future.

A great deal of labor goes into supporting this fellowship. Our work is only possible through collaboration with many departments at MCAD. I want to thank them for their continued assistance as we steward this fellowship program. Their understanding and appreciation of early career artists allows our artists to excel.

Throughout the year, our colleagues in DesignWorks and Communications and Marketing Strategy work with us to ensure the fellowship, from the application open call to the exhibition, reflects MCAD's unique combination of professionalism and creativity. This team includes Vice President of Communications Annie Gillette-Cleveland and Creative Director Kayla Campbell; Korey Walgren, who designed this year's identity; and Anh Tran, Jordan Hazen, Steven Candy, Jane Magyar, and London King, who ensure the fellowship reaches larger audiences.

I would also like to thank Rik Sferra, our longest-serving collaborator on our fellowship programs, for his continued support. For decades, Rik has expertly documented the fellows and their work. Additional support for producing this catalog is through the careful work of catalog copy editor Susan Maas.

Directors and managers across MCAD have provided invaluable support to our fellowship program through access to particular facilities. They include Diana Eicher (PrintShop), Don Myhre (3D Shop), Amy Naughton (Library), Tyler Page (Service Bureau), Pam Hoffmann (Campus Safety), Chris Danforth (Media Center), and Lara Roy (Continuing Education).

The MCAD Gallery Team, composed of work-study students, graduate students, and exhibition technicians, ensures our fellows' work is impactfully presented. Without their dedication, this would not be possible. We're also lucky to have the support and assistance of Ian Chandler, Exhibition and Studio Services manager; Molly Froman, Exhibition Services lead specialist; and Lynaea Russom, operations and installation specialist.

Lastly, I thank Melanie Pankau, associate fellowship and gallery coordinator, without whom we would all be significantly less organized. For over eight years, her careful coordination, investment, and expertise have ensured our fellows have a meaningful experience from application to final presentation.

Keisha Williams
Director and Curator of MCAD Galleries and Exhibitions
Program Director, MCAD-Jerome Foundation
Fellowships for Early Career Artists

Past Recipients

2022	Roshan Ganu, Erika Terwilliger, Moira (Miri) Villiard, Peng Wu	2007	Matthew Bakkom, Monica Haller, Colin Kopp, Liz Miller, Rosemary Williams	1993	Mary Esch, Damian Garner, Shannon Kennedy, Linda Louise Rother, James Whitney Tuthill
2021	KOBI, Sarah Sampedro, Brooks Turner, Shun Yong	2006	Ernest A. Bryant III, Brian Lesteberg, Cherith Lundin, Monica Sheets, Marcus Young	1992	Angela Dufresne, Tim Jones, Chris Larson, Andrea McCormack, Shawn Smith
2020	Katayoun Amjadi, Kehayr Brown-Ransaw, Nooshin Hakim Javadi, Dej Txiaj Ntsim Kuab Maiv Yaj Koua Mai Yang	2005	Janet Lobberecht, Megan Rye, Angela Strassheim, Dan Tesene, Megan Vossler	1991	Hans Accola, Sara Belleau, Franciska Rosenthal Louw, Colette Gaiter, Annette Walby
2019	Sarah Abdel-Jelil, Zachary Betts, Sophia Chai, Kaamil A. Haider	2004	Michael Gaughan, Kirk McCall, Abinadi Meza, Lisa Nankivil	1990	Andy Baird, Mark Barlow, Keri Pickett, Ann Wood, Christopher Wunderlich
2018	Mara Duvra, Marjorie Fedyszyn, Tucker Hollingsworth, Boone Nguyen	2003	Tamara Brantmeier, Lucas DeGiulio, Jesse Petersen, Matthew Wacker, Troy Williams	1989	Lynn Hambrick, Vince Leo, Stuart Mead, David Pelto, Alyn Silberstein
2017	Alyssa Baguss, Josette Ghiseline, Sarah Kusa, Joshua McGarvey, Lela Pierce	2002	Joseph del Pesco, Helena Keeffe, Charles Matson Lume, Justin Newhall, Grace Park	1988	Phil Barber, JonMarc Edwards, Jil Evans, Dave Rathman, George Reboloso
2016	Nikki J. McComb, Kelsey Olson, Edie Overturf, Jovan C. Speller, Amanda Wirig	2001	Jay Heikes, Markus Lunkenheimer, Alec Soth, Peter Haakon Thompson, John Vogt	1987	Michelle Charles, Leslie Hawk, Paul Shambroom, Viet Ngo, Diana Watters
2015	Star Wallowing Bull, Emmett Ramstad, Holly Streekstra, Lindsay Rhyner, Samual Weinberg,	2000	Santiago Cucullu, Alexa Horochowski, John Largaespada, Gene Pittman, Cristi Rinklin	1986	Gary DeCosse, Christopher Dashke, Jennifer Hecker, Michael Mercil, Randy Reeves
2014	Miranda Brandon, Regan Golden McNERney, Jess Hirsch, Sieng Lee, Jason Ramey	1999	Amelia Biewald-Low, Jason S. Brown, James Holmberg, Anne Sugnet, Inna Valin	1985	Betina, Judy Kepes, Peter Latner, James May, Lynn Wadsworth
2013	Kjellgren Alkire, Pao Houa Her, GraceMarie Keaton, Robin Schwartzman, Nate Young	1998	Amelie Collins, Brad Geiken, Rollin Marquette, Don Myhre, Thor Eric Paul	1984	Doug Argue, Remo Campopiano, Timothy Darr, Audrey Glassman, Robert Murphy
2012	Susannah Bielak, Amanda Hankerson, Michael Hoyt, Melissa Loop, Lauren Roche	1997	Jean Humke, Carolyn Swiszczy, Amy Toscani, Cate Vermeland, Sara Woster	1983	Jana Freiband, Janet Loftquist, David Madzo, Jeff Millikan, Steven Woodward
2011	Richard Barlow, Gregory Euclide, Lauren Herzak-Bauman, Alison Hiltner, Jehra Patrick	1996	Therese Buchmiller, Todd Deutsch, Celeste Nelms, Mara Pelecis, Mike Rathbun	1982	Jane Bassuk, Frank Big Bear Jr., Laura Blaw, Matt Brown, Kevin Mangan
2010	Greg Carideo, Teri Fullerton, Julia Kouneski, Brett Smith, Jonathan Bruce Williams	1995	Robert Fischer, Anne George, Stephanie Molstre-Kotz, Todd Norsten, Carl Scholz	1981	Ricardo Bloch, Bruce Charlesworth, Alison Ruttan, T.L. Solien, Scott Stack
2009	Steven Accola, Caroline Kent, Tynan Kerr/Andrew Mazorol, Tony Sunder	1994	Terence Accola, Mary Jo Donahue, Jonathan Mason, Karen Platt, Elliot Warren		
2008	Evan Baden, Barbara Claussen, Kirsten Peterson, Benjamin Reed, Lindsay Smith				

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About the Jerome Foundation

The Jerome Foundation, founded in 1964 by artist and philanthropist Jerome Hill (1905–1972), honors his legacy through multi-year grants to support the creation, development, and presentation of new works by early career artists. The Foundation makes grants to vocational early career artists, and those nonprofit arts organizations that serve them, in all disciplines in the state of Minnesota and the five boroughs of New York City.

Values

The Foundation's core values, which we strive to model in our practice as grantmakers and to support in our grantees, are:

Diversity: We consciously embrace diversity in the broadest sense. We support a diverse range of artists and organizations, including but not limited to those of diverse cultures, races, sexual identities, genders, generations, aesthetics, points of view, physical abilities, and missions. We support a diverse range of artistic disciplines and forms, created in a variety of contexts and for different audiences.

Innovation/Risk: We applaud unconventional approaches to solving problems and support artists and organizations that challenge and engage the traditional aesthetic and/or social dimensions of their respective disciplines.

Humility: We work for artists (rather than the reverse) and believe that artists and organizations are the best authorities to define their needs and challenges—an essential humility reflective of Jerome Hill, our founder. The artists and arts organizations we support embrace their roles as part of a larger community of artists and citizens, and consciously work with a sense of purpose, whether aesthetic, social or both.

jeromefdn.org
Minneapolis College of Art and Design

About MCAD

Since 1886, Minneapolis College of Art and Design—a private, nonprofit four-year and postgraduate college—has been the preeminent art and design educator in the region. Today MCAD is a strong national leader in fine arts, design, entrepreneurship, and sustainability education. Through degree programs, continuing education courses, exhibitions, and a number of other community programs and events, MCAD cultivates the next generation of creative cultural leaders.

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Minneapolis College of Art and Design provides a transformative education within a community of support for creative students of all backgrounds to work, collaborate, and lead with confidence in a dynamic, interconnected world.

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