

Master of Fine Arts

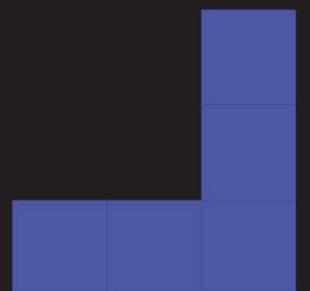
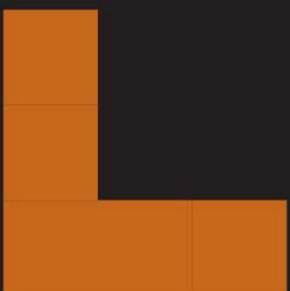
Studio Art Candidate Exhibition 2023

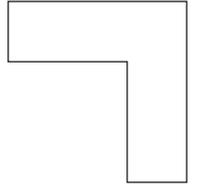
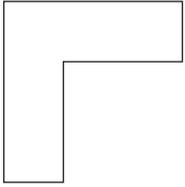
Jill Hannon

John Klaiber

Alberto Lozano Ruvalcaba

Dafne Navarro





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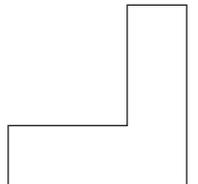
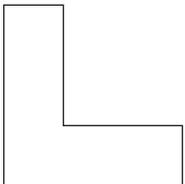
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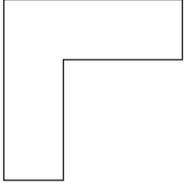


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ENERGIES IN BEING

The 2023 Inaugural Master of Fine Art Exhibition

By Julia Couzens, Curator

The backdrop for this inaugural Master of Fine Arts exhibition is a multifaceted and increasingly decolonized period in art's history. The exhibiting artists are the first Sacramento State graduates to be granted MFA degrees, achieving acknowledged voice and standing in this liberated moment.



Jill Hannon, *Imagine*, 2023 (detail)

Their education has flourished in a generation-shifting time. Eurocentric and patriarchal

histories that trampled indigenous cultural histories are no longer preeminent. Feminist and craft-based practices are not dismissively pushed aside. Digital media and new technologies are now global platforms for artists formerly siloed in rural backwaters. The urgency of identity politics, social justice, and environmentalism, leveraged by traumas and complexities of contemporary life, are breaking down the doors of socially cloistered studios. Self-absorbed notions about what constitutes artistic success or failure are being tested by new intersectional models of community and inclusivity. As Andy Warhol famously observed, "If everyone isn't beautiful, then no one is."¹

The drawings, paintings, and sculpture that comprise this exhibition demanded significant effort. Deploying research, humility, and imaginative muscle, Jill Hannon, John Klaiber, Dafne Navarro, and Alberto Lozano Ruvalcaba have crafted their accomplished work through resolute grit. Countless hours making and unmaking their chosen forms have taught these artists how to move their efforts forward. They have learned how to meaningfully pay attention

¹ Andy Warhol, *The philosophy of Andy Warhol: from A to B and back again*, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975)

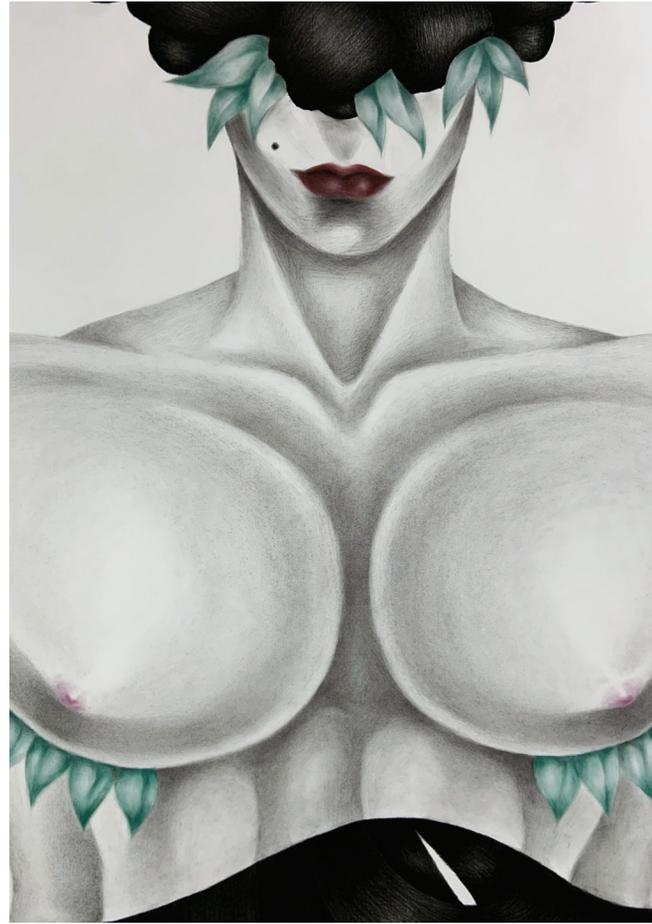
to themselves. Their sensory triggers no longer founder unrecognized and left for dead.

These triggers activate the artists' primary world, the world as it is, not as it's expected or told to be. To maximize productive studio life, the artists have teased out material form and critical elements unique to each of them and put those components into play. The abiding character trait or lifeline defining a rich, authentically worthy, and creative life is knowing how to work on the work. That is the mastery. Not the work itself.

The works on display are framed by this unsettling and divisive moment. The works are not immutable, definitive, and absolute ideations. They are energies in being -- expressing, living. They are lives in which we involve ourselves as viewers. They are trembling beginnings bubbling into consciousness – fledgling starts in tune with the truth of our interconnected humanity and porous, mutable experience.

Jill Hannon focuses on the profound possibilities and challenges of abstract painting. Her massive gestural works recirculate the trajectories of abstract expressionism. Retooling AbEx formal delivery systems, such as gesture, stains, and spills, Hannon's paintings celebrate open-hearted awkwardness drawn from her experience. Her negotiations with color possess jarring collisions between vexing dissonance and domesticated, harmonic blends.

The clunky, unsettled nature of Hannon's palette is the bracing slap in the face that keeps the adventurous viewer looking. This wildness pokes at canonical and conditioned notions of taste, notions so tamed that they no longer challenge us to examine who we are. In a work such as *Intervals*, she joins equally sized painted canvases into a giant grid of flat-footed paint scrapings larded with looping calligraphic lines. The harsh



Dafne Navarro, *Vidina*, 2023 (detail)

shingles of chalky pigment push back against the sinewy vitality of dripped and leaking line, arguing for grand, untamed exuberance as a still evergreen human need.

John Klaiber hand-builds muscular ceramic sculpture suggesting devotional vessels, baskets, and funerary urns. Thick rolls of clay are coiled and stacked with a technique known as Roman style to create forms of archetypal simplicity. Poked and punched, his forms allude to expressive intentions laden with a potent sense of history and to the spiritual concerns of memory, reverence, loss and pathos. To the extent Klaiber finds creative ground in these



Alberto Lozano Ruvalcaba, *Law of Entropy*, 2023 (detail)

realms, the work's formal references to such noted Sacramento/Davis ceramic sculptors as Robert Brady and Robert Arneson give congruence and meaningful lineage to his work.

But Klaiber's newest work, *Rebirth Bassinet AKA King of Trash* lands on more restless ground. It feels fresh, urgent, and itchy. Colorful, hastily painted letters and cryptic notations are slapped on to a bifurcated urn. This is birth propelled by heat-seeking need and not the solemnity of slow-baked homage.

Dafne Navarro's drawings combine an exceptional sensibility with an exceptional control over material. Their superbly crafted works on paper writhe with an aggressively erotic charge. Polymorphous sexuality, fetish-y ornamentation, and unstinting reveries of dark, gleaming, rendered light grant singular power to their figurative drawings. Formal strength is the engine driving speculations on androgyny, queerness, and dream state transformation. These mural-sized, ecstatic works liberate desire from our repressive

society and macho culture. The work's seductive sheen is a graphic siren, summoning the viewer to examine private language, difficult beauty, and human connection.

Navarro writes of "the bodies we wear." The diptych *Habibi* critiques our constructs of gendered intimacies, sexual desire, communion, and entrapment. Outsized, elongated skeins of shiny black hair swath two muscular bodies in strappy connection. Dark, surrealistic eyes stare out from parted, stylized chignons, signaling Georges Bataille's 1928 erotic novella, *The Story of The Eye*. Bataille's themes of transgression and the unconscious are closely intertwined, manifesting his belief that they are fundamental to understanding human behavior and the nature of existence. This philosophy informs Navarro's challenging work and speaks to the deeper connection and embracing mysteries that Navarro's work evokes.

Alberto Lozano Ruvalcaba clobbers, molds, rolls, and pummels clay into tubes, stumps, chards, and amorphous globules, literally forming the



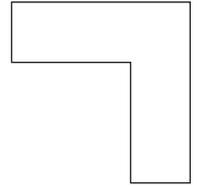
John Klaiber, *King of Trash AKA Rebirth Bassinet*, 2023 (detail)

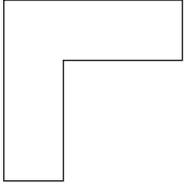
bedrock of his ceramic installations. Creating his own version of nature, Lozano Ruvalcaba deploys earth to address earth. He disguises nothing, and with an insistence, shows the guts. Attuned to the marks and traces that time imprints on both inert and living things, there's a roughness to his textures -- lumpen, crude, and pocked. Once fired, he stockpiles the index of forms in accumulating heaps, like dredged piles of earthly debris. Practicing kiln-fired particle physics, the shape and scale of Lozano Ruvalcaba work expands and contracts contingent upon the scope and gesture of his installations.

Lozano Ruvalcaba is a student of nature and cultivates a mindful relationship to the natural world through extended backpacking trips over designated wilderness and mountainous terrain. His culminating installation, *Law of Entropy*, retrieves from the memory of these sojourns. It is a material rumination on notions of origin, the inevitable transformations of the body, and earthly grace.

Julia Couzens has exhibited drawings and textile constructions throughout the United States and internationally. Her work has been recognized with a Louis Comfort Tiffany Fellowship and twice nominated for the SFMOMA SECA Award. Public collections include the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, Berkeley Art Museum, Crocker Art Museum, Manetti-Shrem Museum, Weatherspoon Art Museum, and Yale University. Her critical writing has appeared in *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, *Sacramento Bee*, *SquareCylinder*, and *Two Coats of Paint*. She received her MA from Sacramento State and her MFA from U.C. Davis.

Alberto, Dafne, Jill, and John
– Working with you has been my honor and pleasure. Good luck and stay fierce! Julia





Acknowledgements

As Sacramento State's inaugural MFA class, we would like to express our deep gratitude for the opportunities provided to us in accomplishing our goals of becoming better artists and people.

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Dafne Navarro would like to personally and affectionately thank their brother, Cristobel, their sister Miranda, and mother Maria Dolores, as well as their partner-in-crime Valentin Benner, and their pet companions & friends, particularly Hughie and Scott Ward, two cherished mini pigs.

We would also like to thank the curator of this exhibition Julia Couzens, the gallery staff Kelly Lindner, and Mustafa Shaheen for their commitment in sharing with us their expertise in gallery operations.

And finally, we are grateful for the opportunity of working together, as colleagues and as fellow creators, for all the time and meaningful conversations that we've shared throughout the length of this life-altering program.

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