

I am sending you love from the future

MFA Preview Exhibition

**Cuyler Ballenger Maddie Butler Coralys Carter Nykelle DeVivo
Olivia Kayang Moe Penders John Singletary**

For the time being, let's say there are two kinds of moments: those of continuity, and those of inflection. The first might be an object in space, such as a physical boundary like a wall or a river or a home, and the other a point in time, such as when that boundary is challenged. You can diagram this in two dimensions on X and Y axes, yet these gridded points are, of course, imaginary, hypothetical. The spaces and times they plot can and do exist elsewhere, far from that grid. And these moments are constantly in flux, always evolving, impacting things and actions beyond them, sending out waves of change as beings in time.

You might think about an artwork—an object, a performance, writing—as a moment in space, a declaration of an incident. As a record. A fact, even. Yet within a larger context—say, a news story about contested destinations, or an institutional archive or exhibition, or a dinner table conversation—this so-called fact is part of a larger social environment, another durational context. It hovers and lingers, changing meaning along the way as it's retrieved, added to, redacted, forgotten, and revived again, mapping and counter-mapping¹ itself, as if following and crossing diverse migration paths². Inevitably, differences of perspective, intention, and interpretation encircle this object, this ever-evolving fact, because norms, laws, and convictions change, even if materials don't³. The movements between objects⁴ cultivate new facts synergistically. In this way, you are not locked into the present.

Time, like the power of invisibility,⁵ seems easy to understand until you try to explain it. Art objects function as artifacts of time travel, of historic narratives and future imaginaries made tangible in the ever-changing continuum of the present. This is a circumstance you must negotiate, regardless of the media at hand. Interstices⁶ are themselves material. Artworks become diasporic⁷ as they move through infinite contexts. Art is in a perpetual state of transition, always becoming something else as it is regarded by another.

Space and time, like memory, diagrams, and artworks, are subjective, open to discourse and judgment and the vagaries of social construction. Up, down, across, and spiraling around time, you do the work of this. You get to make the art. Aided by your invitation and your generosity, the rest of us then get to imagine other possibilities.

And with that, from this time being, I am sending you love from the future.

— Irene Georgia Tsatsos, Curatorial Advisor

Except where indicated, all notes quote in-person conversations between the author and the artists at the UCSD MFA studios on May 31, 2024.

¹“Disrupting etymologies . . . counter-mapping.”

Moe Penders.

²“Family history . . . looking at work and migration paths, using images of travel, such as cars and trains.”

Cuyler Ballenger.

³“Convictions change, even if materials don't.”

John Singletary.

⁴“Not so much narrative, but transformations. . . . Not about objects, but movement between objects.” **Maddie Butler.**

⁵“Invisibility . . . how to signify presence without an actual replica of the body . . . power between who's making and who's looking.” **Olivia Kayang.**

⁶“[I'm] thinking of myself and my family and these interstices.” **Coralys Carter.**

⁷“Black diasporic spirituality . . . spaces to commune with spirit for healing.” **Nykelle DeVivo**, in conversation via Zoom with the author, June 12, 2024.

The MFA in Visual Arts Preview Exhibition is an annual group exhibition showcasing work by soon-to-graduate MFAs in advance of their final solo thesis shows held in the Spring 2025 quarter. Acclaimed Los Angeles-based curator Irene Georgia Tsatsos worked as the Curatorial Advisor for the 2025 exhibition, where she conducted studio visits with the cohort and devised the exhibition's title and theme.

Artist Biographies & Statements

Cuyler Ballenger is a filmmaker. His films have been supported in part by the Houston Arts Alliance, Kala Art Institute, The Dita and Erwin Gumpel Judaic Studies Endowed Fellowship, the Qualcomm Institute, the Suraj Israni Center for Cinematic Arts, the Russell Foundation, and the Houston Cinema Arts Society. Ballenger has a BA from University of California, Berkeley. He is currently finishing an MFA at University of California, San Diego. He has taught film to people of all ages, inside and outside of academic institutions.

Dual Solo Thesis Exhibition (with John Singletary):
May 19-24, 2025 at Main Gallery

Artist Statement:

I make films that take up specifics of my family history in order to discuss broader, contemporary truths. This is done through two approaches: one, the explicit exploration of macro socio-economic and political issues linked to my family, such as forced migration, the Holocaust or the opioid epidemic, and two, the implicit expression using memory, suggestion, and metaphor. As such my process is a combination of journalistic documentary and experimental narrative filmmaking. My work often addresses painful and challenging histories. I therefore work closely with my family – as collaborators and guides, actors and crew.

– **Cuyler Ballenger**

www.cuylerballenger.com

Maddie Butler was born on an island in the middle of a lake in Minnesota. Her interdisciplinary art explores the way machines shape human relations. Much of the work springs from her research into the evolving material conditions of the image, from pre-cinema animation technologies to AI. In the past year Butler has been a fellow at the Banff Centre (Alberta, Canada), the Sass-Fee Summer Institute of Art (New York, NY) and the Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles, CA). She has exhibited internationally and received support from the Qualcomm Institute, the Suraj Israni Center for Cinematic Arts, the Russell Foundation and the Andy Warhol Foundation. Butler holds a BA from Yale University and is currently pursuing her MFA at the University of California San Diego, where she also teaches media history and production courses.

Solo Thesis Exhibition: May 3-24, 2025 at SME Gallery and SME 149

Artist Statement:

My primary subject is the mediation of everyday experience – by screen, by psyche or by spirit. Through wide-ranging media I explore such topics as: the politics of fantasy in the age of the Internet, the temporal complexity of device-mediated communication, and the way tools shape human conceptions of self and other. My materials are the detritus of contemporary digital existence. I shape them using highly tactile and labor-intensive processes, re-introducing touch to the disembodied. The resulting films, sculptures and installations mimic virtuality, testing how the bounds of consent change as one moves between psychological, technological and “irl” spaces.

– **Maddie Butler**

www.maddiebutler.com

@mb_00_dm

Coralys Carter (b. 1996) is a multidisciplinary weaver living and working in Southern California. Currently pursuing an MFA in Visual Arts at the University of California, San Diego, Carter is furthering her material exploration into the concept of bodies rooted in spaces and places rooted in bodies.

Obsessed with locating where memory lives, Coralys layers craft processes such as weaving, printmaking, and sculptural techniques to collapse time – the works themselves existing between a space of being “done” and coming undone. Coralys has exhibited internationally and has received support from the Longenecker-Roth AIR Fellowship (San Diego, CA), Black Studies Project (San Diego, CA), Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop (New York, NY), Textile Art Center (Brooklyn, NY), Flux Factory (Queens, NY), and Processing Foundation.

Solo Thesis Exhibition: April 4-12, 2025 at Main Gallery and Performance Space. Opens April 4th, 2025.

Artist Statement:

My work is a confabulatory practice and meditation on my ancestral convergences, domestic spaces, memory, and labor. I use heritage craft as time travel. My material-based process/ing coexists with a research practice focused on literature, myth, craft, poetry, history, religion, and family lore. In my work I attempt to reimagine human and non-human bodies beyond their static physical and physiological constructions. I wonder if it is possible to collapse linear time by stitching together the material and immaterial.

I wonder how domestic objects and tools of craft become organs of memory, both shaping and absorbing our experiences of place. In using myriad material approaches from weaving, casting and printmaking to assemblage and handbuilding, I aim to discern where memory and trauma live and to explore alternative taxonomies and topographies of the bodymind.

– **Coralys Carter**

www.coralyscarter.com

@coralyscarter

Nyelle DeVivo is a Southern California visual artist working with light through various mediums to navigate the crossroads between the physical world and that of their ancestors. They studied theory & photography at the San Francisco Art Institute before becoming an inaugural Google Image Equity Fellow, internationally exhibiting their work and having their photographs acquired by permanent museum collections nationwide. Nyelle is currently working on publishing their first monograph while pursuing their MFA in Visual Arts from the University of California San Diego, where they expect to graduate in 2025.

Solo Thesis Exhibition: May 3rd, 2025 at Main Gallery

Artist Statement:

In the wake of mass death, I propose we honor violence as living spiritual beings through the visual representations of Black rage and resistance. I follow in the legacy of a family of matriarchs who spoke to God through various forms of divination, using my practice to channel higher powers. I primarily speak to (or through) Anarkata, the embodiment of Black anarcho-revolutionaries, as well as the unnamed Masquerade who holds within all our ancestors martyred by

the devil that is white supremacy. I wear their faces as stand-ins for what was lost through the inherent racism of the archive, reconstructing their likenesses through a process of critical fabulation. I understand our skin to be a sign of the apocalypse coming for western modernity and fertile ground for worlds we have yet even to be free enough to imagine. The spirits I speak to are here to help us transition into the end of a world never meant for us as an act of love from our ancestors.

– **Nykelle DeVivo**
www.nykelledevivo.com
@nykelle_devivo

Olivia Kayang is an artist living between Ghana and the U.S. who uses mark-making to signal possibilities of presence. Working with imprints and images interacting with paper, Olivia creates spatial and two-dimensional works that explore the duality of presence and absence while reflecting upon Black histories embedded in the Atlantic Ocean. Olivia is currently working towards an MFA degree at UC San Diego.

Solo Thesis Exhibition: May 19-24, 2025 at Performance Space

Artist Statement:

My approach to making is a process of questioning and re-questioning. I come into my work with a desire for each question to yield possibility. I ask, can a body escape a dehumanizing gaze, can a mark hold space for a body no longer present, can an empty room speak? I am concerned with how a body, a Black body, is viewed. I am also searching for the possibility of bringing a loved one who has passed into the present, as a means of remembering. I work with the dualities of light and shadow, and transparency and opacity, in tandem with my words, my hands and my body to answer these questions.

– **Olivia Kayang**

Moe Penders is a Salvadoran artist, whose practice is mainly framed in traditional photography. They moved to Houston in 2009 to attend the University of Houston where they received their BFA in Photography and Digital Media and are currently completing their MFA at UC San Diego. Moe's work explores the social construction of home, intersectionality of identity and gender expression. Recently Moe has been developing maps which explore translation within cuirnes (queerness) and migration, these maps also serve as graphic scores to be interpreted and presented by musicians.

Solo Thesis Exhibition: April 7-26, 2025 at SME Gallery

Moe Penders es un artistx Salvadoreñx, su práctica se enfoca en fotografía análoga y técnicas experimentales. Moe se mudó a Houston TX en el 2009 para atender a la Universidad de Houston adonde recibió su licenciatura de Bellas Artes en fotografía y medios digitales. Actualmente reside en San Diego y está terminando su Maestría en la

Universidad de California San Diego. El trabajo de Moe explora esquemas sociales del hogar, la intersección de identidad y expresión de género. Recientemente Moe ha desarrollado mapas abstractos que sirven como partituras gráficas para ser interpretados por músicos. Su trabajo hace uso de la traducción o la idea de la traducción de diferentes maneras, pensando en cómo nos comunicamos y lo que percibimos.

Artist Statement:

This work has an obscured image of the inside of a bus in El Salvador. The buses in El Salvador are 1960s school buses from the US. In 2023 I returned to El Salvador after two years of my transition. I chose to avoid seeing my family and people I knew out of fear. While there, I asked a new friend if he could accompany me on my travels. We planned to go to a few places and moved within the country on buses. When I was young we would mainly travel on the bus with my mum and brother. After my father's passing, that started changing. My mother's fear grew more and more after many experiences including physical fights/attacks, being shot at (she didn't get hit), robbed, etc.

This image is a reference to that time and memory, temporality and movement. The piece is weaved silver gelatin paper, processed with paint rollers allowing certain parts of the bus to come through and others remain unrecognizable. Fragmented memories of movement and travel during the civil war and life.

Este trabajo tiene una imagen oscurecida de la parte interior de un bus. Los buses que sirven para transporte público en El Salvador son buses escolares de los Estados Unidos de 1960. En el 2023 regrese a El Salvador a dos años que empecé mi transición. Escogí evadir a mi familia y amigos con temor a su reacción. Estando allá le pedí a un nuevo amigo si él estaría dispuesto a viajar conmigo. Planeamos ir a unos cuantos lugares dentro del país y nos movíamos en bus. En mi infancia mi mamá, mi hermano y yo siempre viajábamos en bus. Después que mi papá falleció eso empezó a cambiar. El temor de mi mamá creció después de muchas experiencias que incluyeron ataques físicos, le dispararon (aunque no le dieron), asaltos, etc.

Esta imagen es una referencia a ese tiempo y memoria, movimiento y temporalidad. La pieza está tejida con papel de impresión de plata, procesada con rollos para pintura, que permite que ciertas partes sean visibles y otras permanezcan irreconocibles. Memorias fragmentadas de movimientos y viajes durante la guerra civil y la vida.

– **Moe Penders**

John Singletary was born near Chicago, Illinois. He earned his BFA in Fine Arts at Baylor University in Waco, Texas in 2016, and is now finishing his MFA in UC San Diego's Visual Arts program. John has had work exhibited on the cover of TIME magazine, work included in MoMA PS1's "Greater New York" exhibition, in the Houston Museum of African-American Culture, and has exhibited internationally. John's work has been supported by the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, the Russell Foundation, and

The Black Studies Project. Today, John lives and works in San Diego, California.

Dual Solo Thesis Exhibition (with Cuyler Ballenger): May 19-24, 2025 at Main Gallery

Artist Statement:

My practice is involved with death, family, religion, and mysticism by way of painting and drawing mediums, their materiality, and the signs and images they allow me to conjure. I use biblical stories, folk tales, and connect myself to the long traditions of painting signs and gestures. The convergence of the stories and images is a core pillar in my work. My work is always pulled from lived experience. And while I enter a piece with intentions, and handfuls of stories and images that allow me to process these things, ultimately, they are not successful until they become something foreign to me completely.

– **John Singletary**
www.johnsingletary.work
@uhatejohn

Public Programs

Thursday, January 9, 2025, 6-8 pm: *I am sending you love from the future* opening celebration. Tour by exhibiting artists at 6:30pm.

Wednesday, January 15, 2025, 5-6pm: *New Writing Series* presentation of readings by first year MFAs in UC San Diego's Department of Literature.

All events are free and take place in person at the Mandeville Art Gallery unless indicated otherwise. Please consult mandevilleartgallery.ucsd.edu for a full description of programs.

About the Mandeville Art Gallery

The Mandeville Art Gallery, previously known as the University Art Gallery, is a long-standing fixture on the UC San Diego campus with a five-decade history of presenting innovative art in the context of a major research university. Managed by the School of Arts and Humanities and located on the west end of Mandeville Center, the Mandeville Art Gallery operates as a venue for artistic exhibitions and events serving both the university and the local community, and it newly re-opened after extensive renovations in March 2023.



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Production Assistant:**

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