

SENIOR THESIS ART EXHIBITION

BFA EXHIBITION

DECEMBER 11, 2023 - FEBRUARY 20, 2024



MWAKA BRISTOL
TIFFANY HERNANDEZ
CHUNYING LIANG

MERYN MCFARLAND
CRISTINA MENDOZA
ANDREW OTOBA

CHLOE PORTALATIN
NICHOLAS TALAMO
SETH TRUMAN

AUDREY BRESLER

GALLERY DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This group exhibition features the work of nine practice-based art majors who each developed a body of work in their Senior Art Seminar class under the guidance and mentorship of Professor Beth Shipley.

The show presents a broad range of capstone projects that engage the mediums of digital illustration, painting, animation, photography and mixed media.

The work interrogates questions of identity in gender, religion, and culture. Personal histories are explored through self-portraiture and visual narratives.

The breadth and scope of media and styles attest to the diversity of approaches and the unique visions that are the hallmark of the art program at Marymount Manhattan College.

In addition, this year we had our inaugural BFA solo exhibition, *Picture Me Better*, by Audrey Bresler. The independent study was done with Professor Shipley.

Mixing 35mm and digital photography, Bresler created enhanced matte inkjet prints in a series of six themes exploring her fascination with girlhood.

Hallie Cohen | *Director, Hewitt Gallery of Art*



AUDREY BRESLER

Picture Me Better

Stories of girlhood are passed down through time, the core themes will vary, and so will the girl, her circumstances, and identity, but what remains the same is the realities of being a girl.

In this self-directed study, *Picture Me Better*, I explored my fascination with girlhood, more so, girlhood as a mythological being. Melissa Febos, the author of *Girlhood*, is the match to my flame that ignited uninhibited inspiration. There are so many poignant lines from this book. One passage resonated with me and served as a point of departure for this body of work. “*I imagine reversing the film of my personhood reeling the spool to find the single frame where it all changes.*”

The work started in the spring of 2023 during a conversation about girlhood with my therapist. Our discussion involved an exercise that allowed me to recount, reclaim, and remember life moments that shaped my individuality. Stemming from this exercise, I decided to interview six subjects about their girlhood experiences as a basis for a photography project. My aim was to listen to their stories, identify themes of girlhood, and visualize ways to convey their experiences. From this initial process, I discovered concepts of transformation, othering, queerness, confidence, despair, misogyny, relationships to food, and ideas of performance. To produce the work, I used a mix of 35mm and digital photography processes and created highly stylized photographic sets that involved lighting, costumes, props, hair, and makeup. I borrowed from cinematic genres, art history, and literary works. The artists who directly cultivated my vision as an artist are director and screenwriter Sofia Coppola, photographer Alex Prager, and, of course, the author of *Girlhood*, Melissa Febos.

Picture Me Better was a labor of love, not only on my part, but to all who collaborated— Julia, Eliza, London, Emmy, and Beverly— thank you for trusting me with your stories. I also want to express gratitude to Nicholas, Sophia, and Ricky for fully supporting my vision. My intention to cast a light on the collective complexities of girlhood through this body of work could not have been possible without your help.

The Disappointment of a Curiously Vivid Life

Enhanced matte inkjet prints,
(1 & 2) 24" x 15.5", (3 & 4) 34" x 22",
(5,6,7) 14" x 9"

Bloodstained Oranges

Enhanced matte inkjet prints, 34" x 22"

What will Happen to the Boy When the Circus Comes to Town?

Enhanced matte inkjet prints, 30" x 14",

Catillate: To Lick Dishes

Enhanced matte inkjet prints,
(1 & 3) 34" x 22", (2) 34" x 18"

In Other's Definition

Enhanced matte inkjet prints, (1) 34" x 18",
(2 & 3) 34" x 22"

Unfettered, Not Spectacle

Enhanced matte inkjet prints, (1) 30" x 19",
(2 & 3) 14" x 9", (4) 34" x 22"





MWAKA BRISTOL

Thank you, I'm still here.

This pair of self-portraits was born from an emotionally claustrophobic college life experience. I sought to capture feelings of suffocation and isolation by rendering myself as the subject matter. As both a model and an artist, I found ways to channel my subjective emotional state onto the canvas directly. I started with taking photographs of myself contorted in distressing poses under warm saturated lighting conditions. The use of bright colors hides a darker narrative. By confronting viewers with my own constricting, depressive image. The sensation further heightens confinement and breathlessness. On both frames, I hide my identity in both frames, erasing all sense of self, while putting my emotions on clear display.

The selected colors aim to lure viewers to the work before the worrying details take hold. This echoes the insidiousness of encroaching mental health pressures that are commonly suppressed. *Thank you, I'm still here* reflects the nature of hidden agony in individuals, often unnoticed due to its positivity and alluring hues. For me, displaying my own distressing experience in a stark visual image delivers a sense of control and cathartic release.

From photographed self-portraits to final lush oils, the development of this body of work externalizes a profoundly personal psychological struggle. I put my own tribulations on display, hoping that viewers might connect with the universally familiar demons that often lurk unseen in us all.

Plastic Pink

Oil on canvas, 30" x 30"

Bare

Oil on canvas, 30" x 30"





TIFFANY HERNANDEZ

Completely Letting Go

The process of making art helps me cope with my emotions and thoughts without speaking about them. It is a comfortable space that allows for experimentation and self-expression. This series of paintings represents some of the ways I distance myself from my life and escape from difficult realities.

Each painting depicts a figure engaged in some form of escape like reading, drawing, and pushing the world away. The figures are self-portraits that reflect who I am as a person and the feelings that I experience. When I start a painting, I begin by visualizing an image. I then develop reference photos and studies that help further express my ideas. Even though I have a clear starting point, the work continues to grow and change during the process. It is important for me to let go of control and let the painting itself take over. I experiment with color, physical distortion of the figure, juxtaposition of the layout, and the use of the paint.

My approach is influenced by my studies in psychology and studio art. The influence of Expressionism appears within the work, especially with the use of bold colors, exaggeration, and the movement in brushstrokes. I am also inspired by the psychological aspects of Surrealism, especially the Freudian theories of the unconscious, which appear in Salvador Dali's work. The theory suggests that there are levels of awareness within the unconscious mind that interact and effect one's personality and choices. For me, the process of painting is a way to tap into my unconscious mind and let my personality come through. When I enter this state of being, it informs the choices I make while painting in exciting and unexpected ways.

The Creator

Oil and acrylic on canvas, 36" x 48"

Escape

Oil and acrylic on canvas, 48" x 36"

Muse

Oil and acrylic on canvas, 36" x 48"





CHUNYING LIANG

A Tapestry of Art, Fashion, and Cultural Identity

This series of paintings explores my cultural roots and the rich tapestry of Chinese fashion as seen through the lens of women's attire, both traditional and contemporary. I have chosen oil paint as my medium, a familiar friend that allows me to bring to life the intricate textures, patterns, and play of light on the garments in a way that is both tactile and visually striking.

The series comprises three figurative portraits, each adorned in Chinese-inspired attire in hues of red, blue-and-white, and green. The figure viewed from behind is draped in a traditional red ensemble, a color that symbolizes luck and joy in Chinese culture. The figure in blue, turning towards the viewer, is attired in a modern dress, its blue and white glaze pattern echoing the timeless beauty of ancient Chinese ceramics. The figure in green, facing forward, is enveloped in the deep tones of a silk brocade changshan, a traditional robe that was in vogue during the Qing dynasty, its rich colors bathed in light.

The changshan holds a special place in my heart, both culturally and personally. I have seen old photographs of my grandmother, a young woman then, proudly wearing this garment. To me, it is a window into a bygone era. I see my grandmother, her hair elegantly coiled atop her head, standing tall in her changshan, her eyes radiating a dignity that I aspire to emulate. When I saw the photo, I felt overcome by these memories. It is as if I am transported back in time, connecting not just with my grandmother's generation, but with all the Chinese women who wore the changshan before her. Their energies and experiences seem to infuse my brushstrokes, their stories woven into the fabric of my art.

My high school years sparked a deep appreciation for fashion in me. Today, I see fashion as wearable art, a canvas on which I paint my emotions. It is a significant part of my identity, a language that allows me to express who I am and how I feel. It boosts my confidence - the more I dress up, the better I feel. I find that intertwining fashion, art, and elements of my culture helps me articulate my identity more effectively.

Tapestry of Blue

Oil on canvas, 20" x 16"

Tapestry of Green

Oil on canvas, 20" x 16"

Tapestry of Red

Oil on canvas, 20" x 16"





MERYN MCFARLAND

Blessed Art Thou Amongst Women

In this body of work, I wanted to breathe life into the Virgin Mary, her told and untold stories, even the ones with blurred lines. The subject matter came from within me. It needed to be pulled out by the strings that are wound up inside, that begged to breathe in air and gasp for relief from the tension they hold, finally catharsis. My mother, and the Virgin, no longer sat around on a chain around my neck; they were alive through me, personified through my hands, and onto canvas.

Painting is not like writing where you can erase or backspace, it comes with permanence. In generations to come, you will find my frustration when the underpainting shines through, where my sorrow couldn't be properly translated, and I needed to start over. In painting, like in life, the bad things that we cover up are still underneath the good things, they are still there, and they always will be. The harsh reality of trauma and grief don't go away, even if you take medicine or talk to someone tête-a-tête. The most you can try to do is feel your way through things, some people get violent, some people get creative. I was both in these paintings. They are blue and calm, oval shaped and feminine, comforting but solemn, and slightly unnerving, but not violent. The violence of creativity comes when you can no longer hold still, and it keeps you up at night. What could be better, what am I missing? Should I just change everything, scrap the idea entirely? The hardest part is to keep going. To stay and retry and retry and not accept failure is when I feel proud, when the first time you've ever spent months on a project finally feels worth it. I suppose that's the most exciting part of this. That's why I'm trying to breathe life into untold and told stories, even the ones that have blurred lines.

The Annunciation

Oil on canvas, 16" x 20"

The Nativity

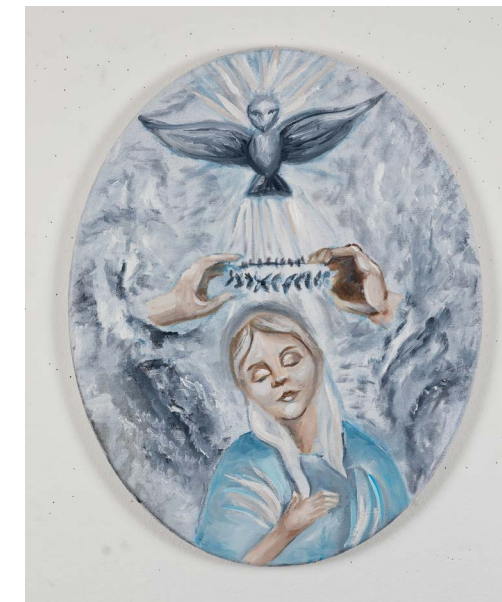
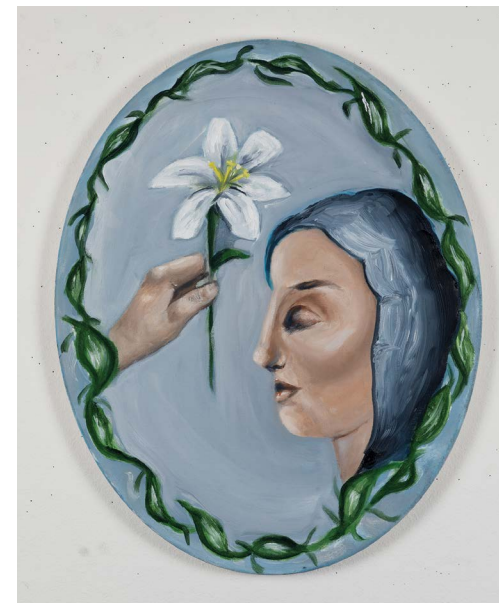
Oil on canvas, 16" x 20"

The Third Sorrow

Oil on canvas, 16" x 20"

The Assumption

Oil on canvas, 16" x 20"





CRISTINA MENDOZA

Stitching Identity: Venezuelan Wappas

I am profoundly honored to call myself Venezuelan. It's not only a passport or a birthplace. For me, Venezuela is everything from the flavors of the food, the traditions, the family ties, the ancestral lineages, friends, the rivers, the beaches, the deserts, and the Amazon jungle. At this moment, the Venezuelan diaspora spans the globe, but something intrinsic to being Venezuelan makes us feel that we are rooted, that in some ways, we never left. When Venezuelans meet abroad, there is an immediate bond, a product of the warmth of our Caribbean waters and the closeness of our family units. For any Venezuelan, the arepa is the American apple pie. Corn flour is the essential ingredient in Venezuelan cooking, used by all for centuries. Communities gather around the table, eating from wappas, traditional Venezuelan baskets. Their circular shape enables all to share not just food, but roots and dreams, uniting all, everyone has an equal place, a special seat.

Venezuela is a place, a memory, and a feeling, and I seek to stitch all three together in the shapes, colors, and patterns that tell my own artistic journey.

For my Senior Thesis project, I am choosing wappas as my medium because they allow me to weave my story, just as Indians have woven theirs for many generations. Stitching them gives expression to my journey as an artist, drawing on my national and cultural roots, fulfilling my perpetual longing for home. Surveying the rich indigenous Venezuelan culture, I have decided to focus on four of the biggest and most culturally representative tribes of my country whose aesthetics and folk practices I want to honor.

Venezuela

Silk embroidery thread, black and copper beads, 14" diameter

Wayu

Silk embroidery thread and acrylic, 11.5" diameter

Yanomami

Silk embroidery thread, acrylic, Amazon seeds, Macaw feather, 13" diameter

Yekuana

Silk embroidery thread and acrylic, 13.5" diameter





ANDREW OTOBA

Listen to how the beautiful game whispers

In the realm of football, often identified by its spectacular moments, there exists a quieter side that goes unnoticed—an intimate collection of subtle gestures and overlooked instances that define the essence of what is called “the beautiful game.” It is within these moments, both on and off the field, that I find a profound connection between football and the tranquil, yet powerful, medium of photography. Having visited my relatives in the Netherlands, I’ve seen firsthand the diverse facets of football culture in Rotterdam. As my aunt drives, we aren’t able to go 5 minutes without seeing a football field. Watching my two teenage cousins, who play for the same club, walk to training at each other’s hip. This has all fueled my curiosity to go into communities in Spanish Harlem, the Bronx, Astoria, and Brooklyn and document how they have cultivated a relationship with football. Watching young children, college students, and beer-bellied old men, I was at first, a silent observer.

Breaking my silence, I began to have conversations. Whether initiated by myself, a player, or a spectator, these would linger in my mind as I returned to my camera. Those dialogues shaped the composition of each frame. In line with this approach, I draw inspiration from black British artist Johny Pitts’ *Home is not a Place* series. The images in this series, Pitts says, “don’t necessarily draw attention to themselves but hopefully demand repeated views.” Such a simple yet impactful sentiment that informed my philosophy as I made this work. What you see is a visual testament to the profound influence that extends beyond the played experience. I can remember being 9 years old, hollering at the TV screen with my grandfather as we watched Manchester United bang in goals. But the beautiful game is not just about scoring and victories; it’s about the silent echoes that resonate and remind me of the enduring cultural force that is football. This force has etched an impression upon my life, and I hope that, as you devote time to these images, they may also leave a mark upon you.

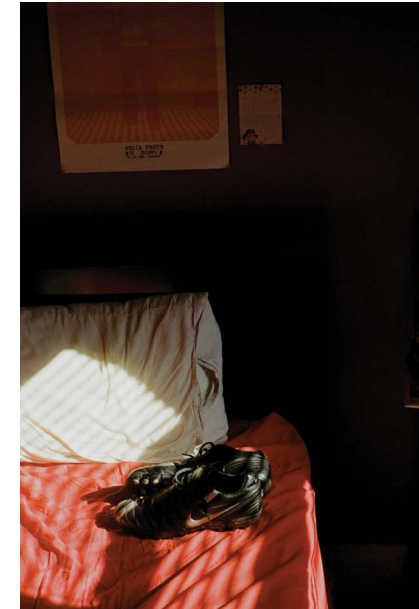
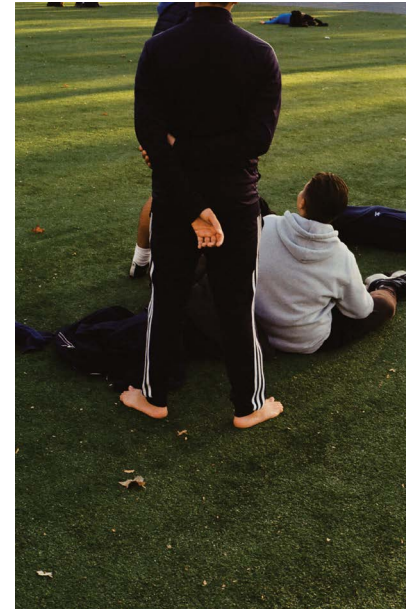
All pieces are Luster Inkjet Prints:

Gaffer, 12” x 18”

Get your damn boots off my bed, 12” x 18”

Bootlegged goats, 8” x 10”

Valverde, 24” x 36”





CHLOE PORTALATIN

Vidas Bonitas/Beautiful Lives

I am an Afro-Latina of Puerto Rican descent. Although I was not raised knowing much of Puerto Rican culture aside from staple cuisines and ingredients such as sofrito, pernil, avena, pasteles, and others. Over the past two years, I taught myself more about my Puerto Rican heritage and culture, which is a combination of influences from African, Native American Ta no/Arawak, and Spaniard peoples. My thesis project, “Vidas Bonitas/ Beautiful Lives”, comes from my desire to bring awareness to myself and others about the diverse and complex history of the Puerto Rican culture.

In the process of creating this body of work, I appropriated works of European artists John William Waterhouse’s “The Charmer,” Thomas Francis Dicksee’s “Miranda,” and Sir Thomas Lawrence’s “Portrait of Lousia Montagu Viscountess” as a base for the compositions. As an act of appropriation, the use of a person’s or cultural production, or the adapting another person or cultural production, is also an aesthetic and style within the art world and does not equate to oppression. I address the history of colonialism through my artistic appropriation of European artworks.

Unlike in the United States, the idea of separated races is nearly nonexistent in Puerto Rico. Most families come in many different skin colors and appearances; there can be a white skinned brother and have a full-blooded sister with much darker skin, and yet they would not consider themselves entirely White/Caucasian or Black/African simply because they appear that way. The Native Americans of the Caribbean, the Ta nos/Arawaks, continue to exist today as individuals and make up much of the genetic population of Puerto Ricans today. Their culture, as well as the Africans, still live on in Puerto Rican music such as the maracas and guiro (a percussion instrument), and drumming music and dance styles of Bomba, brought by the Africans.

La Sirenita/The Siren

Digital Art - Procreate, 18” x 36”

La Ta na/The Ta no Woman

Digital Art - Procreate, 18” x 36”

La Boricua/The Puerto Rican

Digital Art - Procreate, 18” x 36”





NICHOLAS TALAMO

Looking Glass

Although my physical form is masculine, my spiritual nature is more attributed to the feminine. Growing up, I could identify with my male peers, but I always felt a distinct emotional divergence; I identified more with my sister and female friends. Through this body of work, I am drawing you into the space in between—a dimension both known and unknown, as I navigate these uncertainty and experiences of myself. Through my photographic studies, John Dugdale and his book *Life's Evening Hour* found their way into my awareness. I could see myself in him; it felt like I was looking into a mirror. Dugdale lost most of his vision through complications of HIV, but his ability to “see” did not affect his investigation of his unsighted self. He stated in an interview that his clarity of sight came so strongly from inside. His deep Prussian blue cyanotypes mesmerized me, eliciting a visceral response within. Channeling Dugdale’s vulnerability and honesty into my project, the outcome is the subsequent cyanotypes on silk.

This work continues a series regarding identity and gender expression. I have always been behind the camera, projecting through my subjects, trying to express myself; however, it is time for me to step in front and reveal my intimate nude self as my previous sitters have. The more significant aim is to capture the intangible beyond my physicality. I included a still life: Madonna lilies, a fragmented skull, a miniature torso bust, and a pearl necklace. These elements serve as nods to the history of Western Art, as well as a reflection on my own studies, and give any onlookers more to engage with.

The Front and Back
Cyanotype on silk, 38” x 24”

Recline
Cyanotype on silk, 24” x 18”

My Objects of Desire
Cyanotype on silk, 27” x 21”





SETH TRUMAN

The Cephalo Squad VS Piercing Pierre!!

The human mind's inherent ability to establish connections to specific ideas is extremely fascinating. Obviously, the potency of this ability differs from person to person, as well as the ideas in question. But it's all something that we share. Part of it is because we're constantly looking for elements of ourselves in the work we consume. Through different forms of media, television, video games, movies, music, fictional or otherwise, our perspectives on the world widen. Still, a sense of groundedness keeps things interesting and allows us to forge connections in the real world, as well as allow a fascination for a person, place, thing, or idea to grow exponentially.

With this, I find myself drawn to stories that embrace the fantastical but still allow for a compelling and sympathetic look into the characters and world. The Cephalo Squad is one of those worlds, one of which I've been in the process of creating for several years now. It stars a cast of misfits on a mystical island, who form a grassroots team of supernatural heroes standing for justice, peace, and looking cool...

Within each of the characters of Cephalo Squad, I find a part of myself. Asto is a bit of a snarky nerd who is unknowingly touch-starved, Val tries to make others around them happy but suffers from immense stress and a sheltered early life, etc. I've tried to consistently stick with these characters, as they provide an outlet of release and comfort for me personally while also being very individual with their struggles. With the cast of my works such as Cephalo Squad becoming increasingly diverse, both in terms of the character's identities and personality traits, I truly hope that someone can find themselves in one or more of the characters.

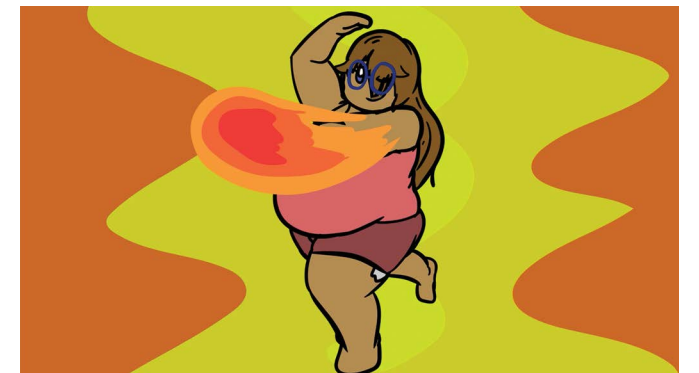
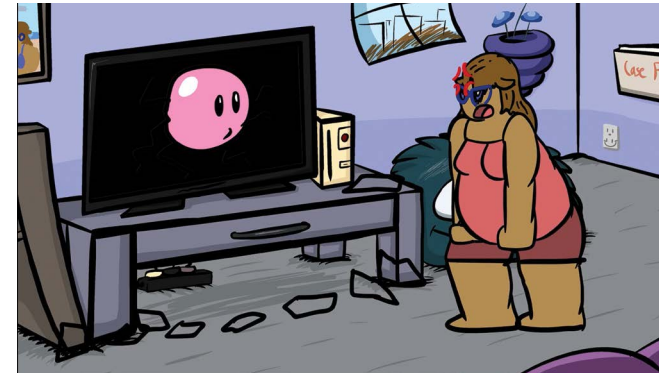
These stories can potentially make the world a better, more conscious and diverse place. Above all, I hope the Cephalo Squad is a compelling little cast of characters that people can find themselves attached to, and I hope to continue my endeavors with them in this field.

The Cephalo Squad VS Piercing Pierre!!

2D Flash animation, 3840 x 2160 pixels

Featuring the voices of:

Seth Truman, Cameron Kurtz, Kylie Rivera,
Zaida M'Boirick and Kayla Pellegrini





ABOUT THE HEWITT GALLERY OF ART

The Hewitt Gallery of Art, located in the main esplanade and adjacent Black and White galleries, is a laboratory for and an extension of the pedagogy of the Art and Art History Department. In addition, it is an alternative exhibition space for contemporary art of emerging, mid-career, and established artists displaying a wide variety of media and styles. The Gallery provides opportunities for art majors and minors to gain first-hand experience in exhibiting their capstone and junior work, for students to curate and organize shows in conjunction with the Gallery Director and for faculty and alumni to present current work to the community.

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THE HEWITT GALLERY OF ART
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