

# yearbook

## Curatorial Statement by Christina Leslie

*SUMMA 2024: Yearbook* represents an exposition that showcases the artistic metamorphosis of the fourth-year visual arts graduates. Throughout their senior year, these students have actively participated in dynamic discussions and fearlessly challenged entrenched creative paradigms. Their combined body of work transcends conventional boundaries, nurturing inclusivity within the art community. *Yearbook* presents a diverse array of mediums, ranging from cutting-edge VR/AR and 3-D printing technologies and projection mapping, to traditional forms such as sculpture, painting, and drawing. Each artwork grapples with contemporary issues including social consciousness, cultural identity, memory, sexuality, and sustainability, inviting viewers to embark on profound explorations of these thematic landscapes.

A notable highlight of the exhibition is the exploration of installation art by several students, centering on themes of individual space and identity. Zeina Hamada offers an interactive exploration of Muslim devotion, creating a quasi-sacred space for contemplation. Matthew Bailey's work constructs a spatial sanctuary that amalgamates protection and comfort, symbolically delineating drapery to fully immerse the observer in their surroundings. The artworks of Eli Nolet and Ardyn Gibbs collectively delve into the realms of non-binary life, offering poignant reflections on the queer experience within historically restrictive settings.

Examining social consciousness through sculptural forms, Camryn Hardaker-Schabauer's sculpture emerges dynamically from the wall, prompting reflection on the integration of significant fungi and decay into our environments. Shay Guan's luminous light installation transcends its source, evoking intricate geometric wonders on the gallery walls.

Jenny Kim's distinctive vase, housed in an acrylic box, explores cultural identification and capitalism by combining the Jollibee emblem to represent Asian identity while also addressing museums as organizations that acquire and profit from cultures. Oliver Fu incorporates 3D-printed dragons as symbols of Chinese culture and New Year, reflecting on how commercial stores have monetized and profited from significant elements of his heritage.

Geneva Cooper constructed an elaborate angelic frame housing a childhood photo of herself, juxtaposing it with the word "savage" in beading to highlight derogatory colonial labelling of Indigenous peoples. Anthony Rizkalla's pieces draw on cultural stereotypes and the scrutiny immigrants

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Curated by Christina Leslie

On view April 9 - 26, 2024 at McMaster Museum of Art

Opening Reception Thursday, April 11, 4-7PM

Artists: Matthew Bailey, Brooke Bielak, Melissa C. Iza, Geneva Cooper, Leah Corrigan, Stefanie Croning, Emma Eichenberg, Hannah Essex, Oliver Fu, Anna George, Ardyn Gibbs, Shay Guan, Jessica Hadall, Zeina Hamada, Rebecca Han, Camryn Hardaker-Schabauer, Jenny Kim, Pippa MacDonald, Jacob Micallef, Eli Nolet, Olivia Outlaw, Paryse Reed, Anthony Rizkalla, Cameron Russell Roberts, Ren Tolbert, Sara Notdorf

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face. The eyeballs represent the collective Western gaze and surveillance immigrants experience. Mirrors act as self-portraits for both the artist and the viewer, while trading cards symbolize how marginalized people have been caricatured with exaggerated facial features, perpetuating racist rhetoric.

Stefanie Croning's artwork is multi-layered in meaning and mediums. It employs AR technology when projected onto the painting, to address how religion and white standards of beauty have been used against marginalized communities, particularly women. Paryse Reed combines the themes of mixed-race identity, Caribbean carnival, queerness, and fashion to address the concept of intersectionality and identity.

Melissa Iza's bodices utilize fashion and materiality to provide a personal examination of femininity, sexuality and the idea of antiquity. Likewise, Olivia Outlaw employs conventional oil painting techniques to explore femininity through symbolic representations of flowers and the female figure.

The exhibition intentionally blends iconography and recognizable objects to address broader themes, exemplified by Cameron Russell Roberts' insightful commentary on capitalism's commercialization of marine life; he has said the "Nautilus has lost its aura". Through the commodification of goods, the creature has been ripped from its shell savagely and then put on display and packaged as pop-figures.

Jacob Micallef's artwork is a fusion of diverse materials, including silicon, clay, magnetite, and polymer. Through these elements, he evokes the essence of Long Point, or the

minerals found in tide pools. His creation forms a geological collage, rich in topographical intricacies. This sculpture embodies a concept of transformation, suggesting it could embody a myriad of forms.

While the exhibition broadly tackles contemporary issues, numerous students demonstrate a profound investment in introspection and reflection. Through mediums such as self-portraiture and the exploration of memories and personal history, these students convey these themes in compelling ways. Brooke Bielak, Leah Corrigan and Sarah Notdorf utilize self-portraiture to dig into their narratives and deeply self-reflect. Bielak's artwork directly addresses her diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, symbolized by multiple hands representing her ongoing struggle to reconcile with it, while Leah adeptly integrates self-portraiture and tattooing, employing her tattoo machine to craft drawing inspired by "The Fool" tarot card. Sarah Notdorf's drawing resembles an illuminated manuscript, to depict physical illness as an extension of self-portraiture. It also plays on fairy tale vs reality.

Pippa MacDonald creatively integrates video montage and projection mapping onto painting, to explore the connections of memory and personal history through family photographs. Rebecca Han explores memory through social interactions, constructing a full installation surrounding the concept of a birthday celebration as this was absent from her childhood. Emma Eichenberg's anti-aesthetic artwork delves into the intricate challenges of losing one's eyesight, providing viewers with a unique perspective on colour and spatial perception in the face of degenerative eye problems.

The display also sparks a conversation about sustainability, as seen by the works of Jessica Hadall and Anna George. Hadall's investigation of animal endangerment in the Hamilton region highlights environmental deterioration, motivating her to employ sustainable materials in the form of a wood-burning piece. Anna George investigates food consumption trends to debate sustainability, using bananas as a metaphor to critique issues of accessibility and affordability in nutrition, as well as our wasteful tendencies.

Abstraction and experimentation appear as essential characteristics in the creative imagination of this graduating class. Hannah Essex's artwork probes into experimental themes, exercising the body to explore the interconnectedness of spirituality, queerness, and the land through a diverse array of materials. Ren Tolbert's abstract paintings capture the struggle of solitude amid a deep yearning for companionship, conveying the tension and frustration of isolation.

In summary, this exhibition stands as a testament to the remarkable talent and thought-provoking insights of our graduating class. As they prepare to embark on their next journeys, these artists leave behind a remnant of creativity, social consciousness, and introspection. Their works invite us to contemplate the complexities of the world we inhabit and inspire us to embrace diversity, empathy, and dialogue.



Produced by Eli Nolet and Ardyn Gibbs in consultation with the cohort.

**Christina Leslie** is a lens-based artist from Toronto, who earned a B.F.A. from OCADU in 2006 and an M.F.A. from the Savannah College of Art and Design in 2022. Notable speaking engagements include SPE conference in Philadelphia (2010), Royal Ontario Museum's Position as Desired symposium (2011), and the McMaster Museum of Art (2022 and 2023). Her work has appeared in prominent art journals such as MURZE art magazine, Divide Art Magazine, Art Seen Magazine, CAP Art Magazine, and Pitch Magazine.

Her most recent photographic series "Sugar Coat" received praise from Ain't Bad Magazine, Featureshoot.com, and PetaPixel.com, and was exhibited at BAND Gallery with support from the Honda Canada Foundation (2023), at RIT City Art Space in Rochester, NY as part of the Homecoming Photo Biennial (2023), at the Exposure Festival in Calgary (2024), in "ERODED TERRITORY" at Patel Brown Gallery (2024), and in an upcoming solo exhibition at Robert McLaughlin Gallery this November.

Leslie's photographs have been exhibited at various institutions across the globe, including The GAMU in Prague, Oakland University in Michigan, The Royal Ontario Museum, Canada's Pier 21, The Art Gallery of Windsor, The Caribbean Art Fair in Jamaica, The McMaster Museum of Art, Paris Photo art fair and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Toronto. Her "EveryTING Irie" series is part of Dr. Kenneth Montague's "The Wedge Collection" and is in the permanent collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Her art practice focuses on themes that delve into decolonization, identity, history, memory, race, and her West Indian background, which she explores via various experimental photography methods and text. Leslie is represented by the Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto.