

THINGS DON’T SEEM THE SAME

2026 MFA Thesis Exhibition



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Cover: Diana Sosnowska, *Gravity*, 2025. archival pigment print; 30 x 24 in.
Back cover: Patrick Michael Carew, *Please, don't look at me like that*, 2025. silver gelatin print; 16 x 20 in.
Frontispiece: Darlene Gold, *Untitled*, 2025. archival inkjet print; 18 x 12 in.

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INTRODUCTION

Andrew Scott Ross

We are deeply proud of this graduating cohort. The work gathered here is as multifaceted as our interdisciplinary studio program itself. Comedic abstract sculpture sits alongside work that confronts the physical reality of the body. Images move from the intimate to the visceral, including meditations on blood from gay bodies. The supernatural appears and reappears across various materials and forms. One artist both embraces and questions the role of AI in creative practice, holding its possibilities and its tensions in the same frame. Scale moves from expansive installations that span entire walls to objects that fit easily in your hands. With each turn, the viewer is thrust into a different emotional register: joy, fear, thirst, wonder. These works remain grounded in the urgency of 2026, shaped by the intensity and unpredictability of the present moment.

Installed in the USF Contemporary Art Museum, the exhibition carries the clarity and care of a professional setting. Students work closely with museum staff to realize their visions with precision. Lighting, placement, and sequence are considered with true care. The result is not simply a presentation of objects, but an environment shaped by dialogue between artist and institution. It is a threshold moment, when studio practice meets the public.

The USF MFA program is structured over three years offering a rigorous and deliberate experience. Guided by a distinguished faculty and aligned with the broader mission of a leading public research university and AAU member, the program fosters rigorous inquiry and critical risk. Beneath the surface of critiques and seminars lies a careful attention to experience: engaging with peers through extended conversation, experiential learning in the classroom, and in studios where ideas are tested and refined over time.

That experience extends beyond the course curriculum. Visiting artists and scholars meet with students in their studios, offering direct and candid engagement with the work. This past fall, through the Kennedy Family Visiting Artist and Scholar program, we welcomed Seph Rodney, Thierry de Duve, Blake Gopnik, Evan Tedlock, and Roger Palmer. Their conversations with students were thoughtful and generous. Cohorts also travel together to New York and Miami, visiting studios, galleries, and museums to situate their practices within a larger field. We know that these encounters can shape an artist's trajectory for years to come. Faculty and staff devote focused attention to cultivating these moments, understanding that a single exchange can transform a practice.

Our NASAD-accredited, 60-credit program is offered tuition-free, with stipends provided to each student. Many MFA candidates teach during their time here, gaining skills that will support them as educators and cultural workers. Within the College of Design, Art and Performance, they are part of a vibrant community that includes architecture, music, theater, and dance. The conversations that unfold across these disciplines often influence the work you see in this exhibition.

We are grateful for the leadership and commitment that make this program possible. Chris Garvin, Dean of the College of Design, Art and Performance, offers steadfast support. We extend our deep appreciation to Noelle Mason, MFA Graduate Coordinator, and Ryne Heslin, Graduate Program Facilitator, for their care and guidance. We thank Sarah Howard, Assistant Director of the program, whose stewardship has been essential to this catalog and many of our initiatives. We are equally thankful for the dedication of Don Corbin, Irineo Cabreros, Forrest MacDonald, Chuck McGee, Marie

Patrick Michael Carew, *Untitled (Remember me?)*, 2025. lumen print with archival pigment print collage; 5 x 4 in.



O'Neil, and Cassidy Santos, whose daily work upholds our students and the program at large.

The team at the USF Contemporary Art Museum provides an extraordinary platform for these thesis projects. Their expertise in exhibition design, installation, lighting, labeling, and documentation ensures that each presentation meets the highest professional standards. We are indebted to them for their collaboration and care, and I especially want to thank Don Fuller for designing this catalog.

We also extend special thanks to the Stanton Storer Embrace the Arts Foundation. Their generous support has made this catalog possible and continues to strengthen the MFA program through meaningful patronage. Their partnership propels not only this publication, but also the broader ecology in which our students' work can thrive.

Finally, we thank Seph Rodney, this year's guest catalog writer, for his commitment to our program. His public lecture, his sustained time in the studios, and his thoughtful essay on this graduating class reflect a deep engagement with the work. His writing meets these artists where they are, attentive to the risks they take and the questions they leave open.

—
Andrew Scott Ross
Professor and Director
USF School of Art and Art History

Enoch Appiah, *Stillness*, 2025. plastic, electrical wires, plastic bags, HDPE bottles, metal, and cardboard; dimensions variable.



TRANSPORT

Seph Rodney

The graduating MFA class of the University of South Florida doesn't share a similar aesthetic outlook, or artmaking strategies, instead they have quite disparate ways of making. But there is a covert feature that these artists do share. The bodies of work created by Darlene Gold, Patrick Michael Carew, Atia Shafie, Enoch Appiah, Brogan Willis, Mike Cannata, and Diana Sosnowska aim to transport the artist and the viewer or document the transit that the artwork has facilitated. The movement that they generate is between distinct geographies, realms of psychic action, artmaking mediums, cultures, and their own corporal bodies and the larger body politic. They guide us, the viewers of their work, through the transitions between here, where enlightenment is rare, to there, places they have excavated with their own hands, developed through painstaking research, or found inside themselves, precious because only they could find these dwelling places.

Diana Sosnowska's explorations, in accord with the cultural zeitgeist, lead her into highly unstable territory where neither institutional knowledge nor personal perception seems reliable. She has researched the United States Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) Stargate Project (1978–1995), intrigued by the agency's investigation of psychic phenomena such as remote viewing to gain strategic advantages over its Cold War adversaries. By feeding transcribed accounts from remote viewers involved in the Stargate project into an AI image-generating program, she creates photographs that hover between documentation and fiction. Further illustrating how speculative practices can jump the gap to become authoritative data, the artist also takes photographs that feature devices such as dowsing rods and prisms. These images form a narrative of travel beyond the provinces of ordinary perception, leading Sosnowska to a realm where knowledge, belief, trust, and perception are all in flux.

Mike Cannata's drawings, paintings and sculptures express the movement between the artist's mental pictures, two-dimensional representations of these images, and three-dimensional elaborations of the same. Cannata's experience of synesthesia gives life to these transitions. For him, sound exists as both color and motion, particularly when influenced by certain music. Thus, all the work he produces across his mediums is more about form, like a kite, bobbing with the currents of his imagination. As a result, the shapes articulated in his drawings and paintings, along with the physical forms of his sculptures, vary widely in their textures, colors, and materials. And feeding into the exuberance of the work is his avocation as an avid skateboarder. The combination of the sights, smells and sounds that the city offers while encountering them at high velocity engenders a euphoria he carries into the studio—one form of artistry guiding him into another.

The distinction between different methods of fabrication is crucial to Brogan Willis's approach to making. Willis was and remains an athlete, playing Division 1 lacrosse at the University of South Florida and competing in track and field at Penn State. However, Willis also possesses the dual mindsets of an artist and designer, combining the technical aptitude of craft with the unrestrained exhilaration of making nonfunctional objects. Having come of age in a sneaker culture where athletic shoes shifted from being solely utilitarian tools to collectible objects, he navigates between these two realms of production. One pair of his shoes sports a sole seemingly made entirely of plaster human toes. The shoe turns back on itself: initially a mediation between the

Atia Shafie, *Apart*, 2022. fabric, fiberglass, resin, and paper on canvas; 60 x 48 in.

human foot and the outside environment, which then transforms into a stylized version of the foot itself, but a foot that is not meant to be worn. His creations are not intended to be touched or handled but rather represent the distance between the arena of lived experience and the space of visual art display.

Enoch Appiah exists in the gap between distinctly different cultures. The artist grew up in Ghana, influenced by native traditions of weaving and pottery. Since the age of six, he has lived abroad. Having found himself a stranger in the unfamiliar land of the United States, he has not blithely accepted his status of being neither here nor there but instead incorporated this transitory nature into his work. He combines high-density polyethylene (HDPE) canisters (the kind used to contain laundry detergent) with ceramic in the form of clay spouts of various lengths, so that the resulting forms appear not only as a blend of customs and traditions, but also a mix of epochs. He also riffs on the raffia baskets that are part of his heritage, replacing the traditional leaf fibers with industrial cardboard and metal materials. The work he creates resembles the artist himself—hybrid and complex, with materials interwoven and combined, representing the journey from port to port.

Atia Shafie has also experienced a suspension between two vastly different cultural spaces. Her painting allows her to bridge this distance while using various anchors that support and sustain her personal psychic experience. In the painting series "On My Mother's Land," she incorporates soil from Iran, her parents' original home, and her own from ages 10 through 20. That terrain is fraught for Shafie. It serves as both a place and an archive, providing data she uses to create a narrative of herself as she travels across landscape, memory, and loss. In creating what she calls a "stratified archaeology of the self," she incorporates her mother's calligraphy ink, the color of pomegranates and blood, with remnants of her quilted childhood clothing, and a stratum of handmade mulberry paper saturated and sealed in resin. The work concerns her coming to terms with her displacement by creating a set of maps through which she can trace where she had to go to become who she is.

Looking over the shoulder at his past is a central part of Patrick Michael Carew's work. As a queer man who is HIV positive, he has sought to shift this diagnosis from the realm of the horrific to a place where life is lived with curiosity and buoyancy, rather than fear or shame. Much of his source material features images from gay male pornographic magazines. As Carew attests, this sexualized imagery is among the first places where queer people see themselves represented. He also incorporates images of his blood and saliva to explore his own body within the context of stigma and unease that is also part of the queer experience. Additionally, he creates collaged images that emphasize the precarity of the body, representing those who died during the AIDS epidemic, along with those living with its lasting effects. For Carew, queer bodies are permeable membranes through which the most poignant questions of human mortality pass.

Sexuality and copulation are also a significant part of Darlene Gold's work, though it is not the endpoint. She uses documentary photography of herself engaged in sex acts with her romantic partner to bear witness and invite the viewer to see something happening subcutaneously in these moments. Unlike pornography, where the relationship between the viewer and the actor is primarily transactional—money exchanged for titillation or visual access—Gold's work is not intended to elicit sexual desire. Instead, it aims to represent the transport Gold experiences during lovemaking, where her inner gaze expands and deepens, beyond her physical boundaries. Gold recognizes that the human body, when engaged in such acts, seeks connection, presence, and myth, and that the quest is ongoing because this seeking can only be temporarily satiated. The act of sex brings us closer to a truth about human existence: for those who deeply desire to know themselves, sexual congress is a practice through which this knowing is only possible through the body, and when it arrives, it shakes us to our core.

These artists tap into a crucial aspect of our humanity: our physical, intellectual, and emotional need to move, develop, and change position. We are built for locomotion in all key parts of our being, and this artwork demonstrates how we benefit from the movement impelled by it. We are pushed to question how we come to what we believe is common knowledge. We are asked to join an artist on the roller coaster of his sensory expeditions through color, texture, and shape. We crisscross the gap between the utilitarian tool and the art object and are led to more deeply appreciate their differences. We follow the intertwining of distinct cultures to find that life is made at their intersection. We trace the effects of a hybrid acculturation on an artist's mind to better understand what can constitute a home. We are invited to shift our fear of the body's hidden aspects to understand how they make life possible and beautiful. And we are moved to recognize that the body is always a means to transcendence, a means to find parts unknown.

—
Seph Rodney, 2026



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Seph Rodney, PhD, is a regular contributor to *The New York Times*, and a former senior critic and opinions editor for *Hyperallergic*. He has also written for CNN, NBC, *Art in America*, *Art Forum*, *The Guardian*, and several other publications. In 2020, he won the Rabkin Prize for arts journalism, and in 2022, won the Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant. He is also a curator of contemporary art exhibitions, recently co-curating *Get in the Game*, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the largest show that the museum has undertaken. He is also currently co-curating a show on the American landscape, *This Land*, set to open at The Church at Sag Harbor in June of 2026.



ENOCH APPIAH

Sitting in Enoch Appiah's studio at the start of our conversation in November 2025, I'm impressed by the array of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) bottles that are combined with clay spouts to create hybrid pitchers. Together they resemble a flock of nesting, cross-bred birds, their beaks open, waiting for food to be delivered. Over the course of our conversation, I begin to make out the differences among them. The HDPE canisters are mostly royal blue and the red of fire alarm switches. There are also green, orange, and some in lavender, black, or white among the throng. Their spouts vary greatly: some are short, shaped into a wide, symmetrical aperture with a defined lip, while others are pinched and curved to form a rim typically seen on an ewer. Still others have a smokestack neck, with the cylinder measuring up to 12 inches. And still others have an opening rounded inward, better suited for drinking from than pouring. What does all this variety signify?

Appiah talks candidly about his own hybrid identity. The 30-year-old artist grew up in Abeadze, Ghana, and spent the majority of his life there. He arrived in the United States just three years ago to further his studies at USF. Among the viable models for integrating into a new culture is Appiah's: to hold on to his native traditions and ways of making while creatively adapting them to his current environment. From this perspective, each canister represents a version of himself—craning his neck to look over the host of artistic approaches and techniques, or sitting still and quiescent as an experience unfolds to understand how to render it in material form. He carries the bounty of his cultural inheritance, and his eyes, ears and mouth remain open, seeking and absorbing sustenance. A way of making becomes a way of living, or perhaps the living arrived first.

Appiah's woven vases and pots are more surprising. They are made of multicolored cardboard strips from the boxes used to transport large-screen television monitors. Cardboard is an unfamiliar material for the artist. Previously, he had mostly known these vessels to be made of clay and raffia. This lack of familiarity frees him to further question the form. Through his curious hands, the vases become baskets, lampshades, and chandeliers. These pieces also trace the gradual changes he has observed in Ghanaian culture which has been altered by migration, travel, and education—mirroring his own experiences. This work marks the ways in which foreign products have infiltrated Ghana and the broader African continent.

Appiah's work also serves as a model for navigating modernity, which, since the start of the Industrial Revolution, has involved the deracination of people from small communities who move to large municipalities seeking to improve their lives. The work demonstrates how the weaving of a hybrid life is done precisely in this spirit of ambition collaborating with assurance.

Enoch Appiah, *Aposo I*, 2025. clay, tire, plastics, and wire; 108 x 30 x 48 in.



Enoch Appiah, *Migration I*, 2025. clay, plastics, and tire; 48 x 16 x 24 in.



Enoch Appiah, *New environment, my new hybrid*, 2025. clay, plastics, and plaster; 29 x 17 x 72 in.





photo: Forrest MacDonald

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Enoch Appiah is a Ghanaian artist with a focus in ceramics and mixed media. He earned his undergraduate degree in Ceramics from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana. His practice is rooted in a hybrid approach that brings together ceramics and repurposed materials such as cardboard, wire, and plastic waste. By combining traditional hand-building and wheel-thrown clay techniques with discarded industrial materials, Appiah creates sculptural forms that explore the intersections of culture, identity, environment, and systems of consumption.

His interest in working with found and recycled materials stems from a personal and cultural connection to resourcefulness and adaptation, a common practice in many Ghanaian communities. Plastic containers, packaging, and wire, often regarded as waste in the West are integrated into his work to highlight the contrast between the organic and the synthetic, the ancient and the contemporary. These materials are not merely aesthetic choices but carry embedded histories of use, labor, and place.

Appiah's sculptures and installations often reflect a quiet but intentional commentary on sustainability, collective memory, and transformation. He views the studio as a site of repair and reinvention, where overlooked materials are reshaped into new narratives.

Enoch Appiah, *Momentum and Stillness*, 2025. clay, plastics, plaster, and wood; 63 x 14 x 14 in.



MIKE CANNATA

For Mike Cannata, a city's lights have a certain smell, its palette of hues and textures a specific set of sounds, and its constant kinetic hum is visual. His paintings, drawings, and sculptures aim to translate these experiences into a visual register. That is, he seeks to place us inside the lyrical flow of his synesthetic experiences, where stimulation of one sensory pathway triggers another. This swirl of sensation, particularly in Cannata's sculptures, feels like a collision, of momentum built up in a form so strong that its intersection with another seems inevitable, aligning with the primary rule of the worlds he creates: unending and unexpected encounters.

This sense of speed and random movement reflects how Cannata negotiates his physical presence in his surroundings. He grew up in a Chicago suburb, learning to skateboard from his older brother. From a young age, Chicago's urban landscape became his terrain to explore and expand the borders of his being. Cannata recalls, "Me and my friends would take the train and skate around the city at night so that we could skate spots without getting kicked out, and we would skate the skateparks during the day. I also skated in…DIY spots we would make in abandoned spaces." This activity, enhanced by music, is the engine for his art. As he admits, "I make paintings and sculpture with the same energy as I put in skateboarding."

Cannata's experience of performing skateboarding maneuvers, such as a kickflip into a grind, may be translated into a smoothly glazed ceramic arch with small stair steps inserted where a knee might be, bursting into a wildly textured ring of jagged shards. Or it may become a painting dominated by red, pink, and green tones that contend for the viewer's eye, and where one might recognize a bare elbow scraped along asphalt before being immersed in a garden space. Cannata's hand hums through his marks on paper and on canvas, recalling speed and the sensation of moving freely through the textures of the landscape. As he says, "Play is the language through which I navigate the world." Thus, his work is relentlessly exuberant.

Crucially, the act of translation isn't just from sense to sense; it occurs across different mediums. His thoughts and visions are transformed into odd non-objective shapes cavorting with each other in space, blending organic and inorganic forms in unexpected ways. On canvas, these feelings and intuitions are built up with texture and weight, while in sculpture, they become even more whimsical and unruly. The work asks us to join Cannata on his sensory excursions, surfing and exploring the surfaces that sing.

Mike Cannata, *Urban Body*, 2025. clay and glaze; 65 x 56 x 38 in.





Mike Cannata, *Urban Body* (sculpture), 2025. clay and glaze; 65 x 56 x 38 in.
Synesthetic Playground series (paintings), 2025. house paint, spray paint, and oil stick on canvas; multiple dimensions.

Mike Cannata, *Environmental Flux*, 2023. dirt, ceramics, steel rod, found items, and living plants; variable dimensions. Installation view, Carolyn M. Wilson Gallery.

Mike Cannata, *Liquid Stillness Series Sculpture 1*, 2022. ceramics, glaze, metal, plaster, oil paint, and resin; 60 x 72 x 44 in.
Mike Cannata, *Liquid Stillness Series Sculpture 2*, 2022. ceramics, glaze, concrete, wood, metal, plaster, oil paint, and resin; 72 x 14 x 20 in.





photo: Forrest MacDonald

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mike Cannata (b. 1996) from Chicago, IL is a multimedia artist who works in large-scale painting, sculpture, installation, and ceramics. He has been working primarily in ceramics over the past 10 years, creating larger-than-life sculptures and utilizing oozing and expanding glaze concoctions. Cannata creates narrative through his gestural and emotive paintings and sculptures.

Cannata received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from The New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University (Alfred, NY). From 2021 to 2023, Cannata took part in a long-term residency program at the Morean Center for Clay (St. Petersburg, FL). In 2020, Cannata participated in two residency programs at Guldagergaard International Ceramic Research Center (Skaelskor, Denmark). His artwork has been exhibited throughout the U.S. and internationally in Denmark, Russia, South Korea, and Romania. Cantata's work has been shown in numerous group and solo exhibitions, including in the U.S. Capitol Building (Washington DC), The Chihuly Collection (St. Petersburg, FL), and the Museum of Nonconformist Art (St. Petersburg, Russia). This winter, he exhibited at the Satellite Art Show (Miami, FL) during Miami Art Week. In the coming months, he will participate in *Pathways*, an exhibition at the Rollins Museum of Art (Winter Park, FL) and the University of Central Florida Art Gallery (Orlando, FL).



AP "To Imagine Dissolution" PAC '25

PATRICK MICHAEL CAREW

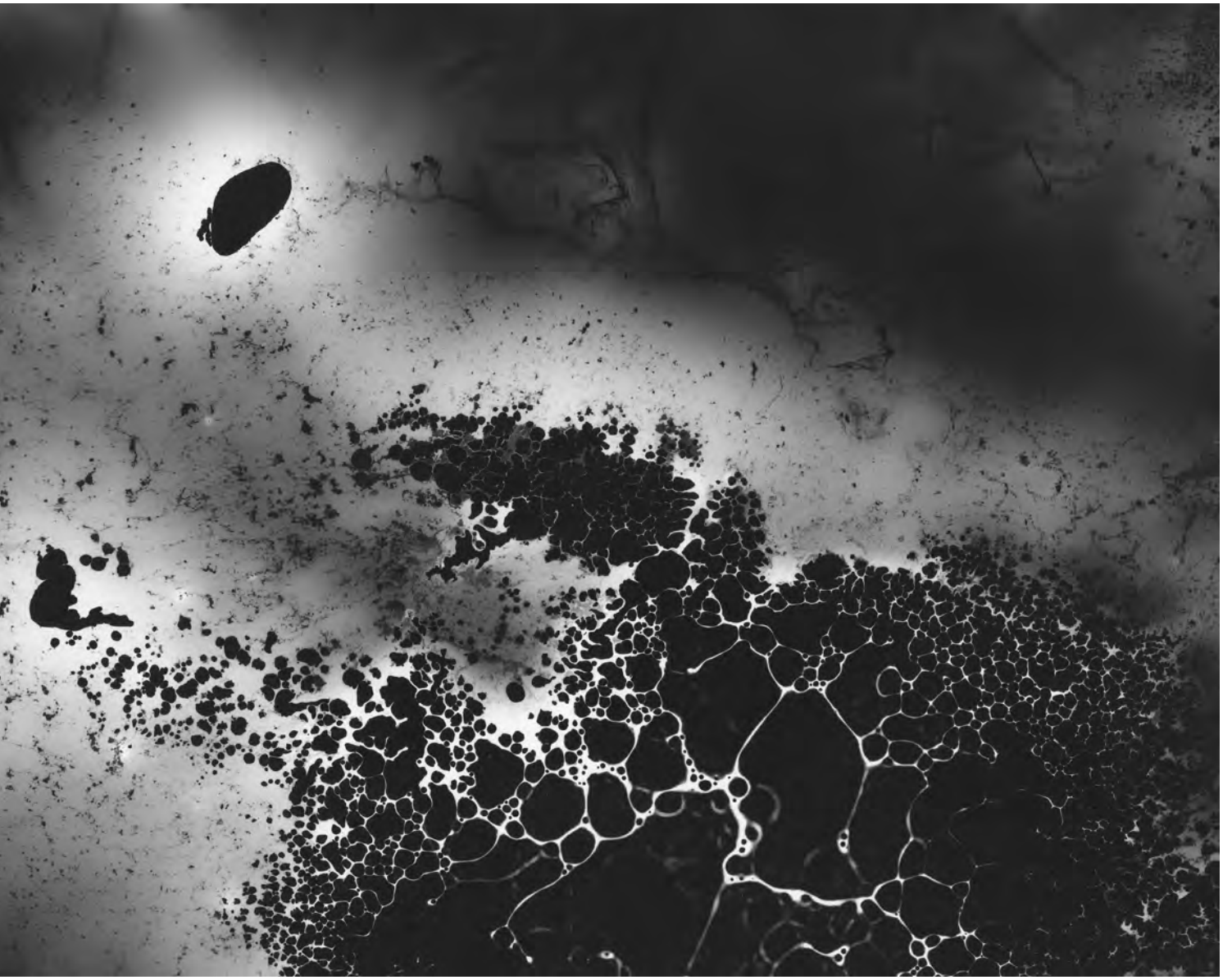
Our bodies are made up of genetic material, cellular structures, vessels, organs, blood, and bone. But there is more to it, more to us. Some aspects of corporeal experience that escape physical documentation and traverse the adjacent realms of human will and spirit. The connections between the physical and the emotional or spiritual become especially visible in mainstream culture during moments of crisis, such as the AIDS epidemic of the 1970s and ’80s, which claimed nearly three-quarters of a million lives in the United States. Living with HIV, Patrick Michael Carew has intimate knowledge of this crisis’s impact and understands the complexities of his body’s intersection with questions of visibility, beauty, presence, desire, and empathy. Through his work, he embraces these themes and questions what a body can signify, and what it can mean in its most veiled states.

Carew’s work largely consists of collaged photographic imagery that captures glimpses of the nude male body in moments of provocative poses or performing sexual acts, images typically found in pornographic video, film, and literature. Carew grounds his work in queer pornography because this kind of publicized sexual display is where he believes many queer people first encounter their sexuality in a way that isn’t shameful. He explains, “Utilizing pornography and its connection to the queer experience, I am positioning it as the first gay archive. For many young queers, porn is what allows them to begin to see themselves in the world.”

One such photograph depicts a virile, male figure striking a bodybuilder’s pose while wearing jeans and seemingly naked above the waist against a verdant background. However, his torso and head have been roughly cut out of the image and collaged onto a larger print of blood with small, black aporia floating within the fluid. Intersecting with the man’s absent body, on his left shoulder, is a black-and-white image of an older woman’s hand grasping the hand of what reads as a younger man. Carew made the underlying image by using his own blood in place of a photographic negative.

The entire work gives the impression of a flood of bodily fluid on which moments of physical connection and masculine performance float. The work urges us not to turn away but to examine the interior of the human body—the chemical soup that fosters our abilities to see, communicate, desire, and connect. But this substance carries with it the tang of horror and remains mostly hidden, surfacing only during moments of physical crisis and sexual elation. Carew invites us to confront what is both unpalatable and desirable, because doing so acknowledges his presence and the truth of his being.

Patrick Michael Carew, *To Imagine Dissolution*, 2025. copperplate etching and collage on rag paper; 15 x 12 in.



Patrick Michael Carew, *Blood Slide #25*, 2026. silver gelatin print from unique bloodslide; 16 x 20 in.

Patrick Michael Carew, *Cameron*, 2025. silver gelatin print; 14 x 11 in.







photo: Forrest MacDonald

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Patrick Michael Carew (b. 1996, Utica, NY) is an image-based artist working at the intersection of photography and printmaking. His practice integrates darkroom techniques, digital imaging, and traditional print processes to explore the body and the image as a means of preserving queer identity while reflecting on shared narratives within history and community. Working with his own blood, archival queer photographs, and layered collage, Carew examines how the body functions as both matrix and record, navigating the politics of exposure, touch, and survival within the ongoing reverberations of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Carew's work has been exhibited at INK Miami Art Fair (Miami, FL), Tempus Projects (Tampa, FL), REVERB Gallery (Tampa, FL), The Munson Museum (Utica, NY), and Pratt Manhattan Gallery (New York, NY), with features in publications such as *Upstreams Deadfalls* (Deadfall Press), *PRIMAL SIGHT* (Gnomic Books), *Queer Anthology of Wildness* (Pilot Press), and *MATTE Magazine* (MATTE Editions). Beyond his studio practice, Carew teaches at the University of South Florida and has previously worked as a studio technician at Pratt Munson and holds a BFA in Photography from Pratt Institute.

Patrick Michael Carew, *Love came along*, 2025. hand tinted silver gelatin print with archival pigment print collage; 14 x 11 in.



DARLENE GOLD

In one photograph, a nude woman displaying rosy flesh with gold highlights on the left side of her body has her arm wrapped under a man's leg. Her head is turned away from the camera and toward his crotch, her intent obscured but apparent. Crepuscular blue-white light shines between her thighs, brightest where her vulva is, and the same illumination highlights the contours of the man's legs and arms as he reclines in apparent ecstasy. In the background, an iridescent sheet glimmers in shiny yellow and resplendent violet, pulled tightly and straining at its anchors. The fabric's tension echoes the tension between the two figures. They are striving, seeking something in each other's bodies. This isn't imagery meant to titillate. These photographs made by Darlene Gold are part of a probing body of work that seeks to explore how the body can be a bridge to elsewhere.

Gold experiences a kind of awareness that only arises during sexual intercourse, a sense that our desires are greater than our bodies, that we have wants we can barely contain. As a result, the act of sexual congress is only a brief accommodation of this deep longing. Because the hunger for another is so all-encompassing, such intimate connection also becomes the space where what Gold describes as the ego—"the chattering, witnessing mind that wants to control, protect, micromanage"—can be momentarily dissolved. It's no wonder that some lose themselves in the act; they fall, tumbling into the other, *if* they can allow this kind of vulnerability in the first place.

Gold has spent much time engaging with the life of the mind, earning a doctorate in English and teaching academic and creative writing as a tenured professor at a small college in New York State. The act of writing is mainly about organizing information, shaping thoughts and feelings in ways that the reader can readily grasp. Now Gold means to find other ways to cogitate. She says, "Making this work, I have discovered a freedom when the body's way of knowing is in the forefront of the consciousness."

In another photograph, a man lies on top of Gold, their faces clasping in a kiss, his hand smothering her left breast, their bodies pressed together—all the composition drenched in green with gold and black highlights. Here she is vulnerable, revealing to the viewer the unfiltered body of a woman in her sixties, whose power is not her sexual allure, but in her liberty from societal expectations about age and propriety. It is counterintuitive to imagine that we can find freedom through intimate physical connection when we are utterly dependent on what a partner does with our trust, with our tender anatomy, and our supple wants. But this is where Gold shows the viewer that she is most weightless, most able to take wing, her body already on its way.

Darlene Gold, *Untitled*, 2025. archival inkjet print; 30 x 20 in.



Darlene Gold, *Untitled*, 2025. archival inkjet print; 18 x 12 in.



Darlene Gold, *Untitled*, 2025. archival inkjet print; 18 x 12 in.



Darlene Gold, *Untitled*, 2025. archival inkjet print; 12 x 18 in.

Darlene Gold, *Untitled*, 2025. archival inkjet print; 12 x 18 in.





photo: Forrest MacDonald

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Through self-portraiture that foregrounds pleasure, vulnerability, and connection, Darlene Gold's photography challenges cultural assumptions about age, sexuality, and female visibility. Her self-portraits position the aging female body as an active subject of desire. She extends this inquiry through performance and image-text works that explore erotic self-disclosure as both risk and agency.

Her work has been recognized in juried exhibitions including the Carolyn M. Wilson Gallery: *48th & 46th Annual Juried Student Art Exhibitions*; Image City's *Magic of Light Exhibition*, Rochester NY; State of the Art Gallery's *32nd & 31st Juried Photography Exhibitions*, Ithaca NY; and Schweinfurth Art Center's *Made In New York* (MINY) Auburn, NY. Gold's photography awards include: Judge's Pick at State of the Art Gallery's *32nd Juried Photography Exhibition*; "Top Honor Prize," WSKG's TV Portraits and Dreams 2021 Photography Challenge. Video and photography-text performance pieces include: *Night Reading for Foxes*, featured in the award-winning documentary: *Liminal Worlds*, and *Never Before Has a Window Seemed So Much Like an Ear*: for Gary Sczerbaniewicz's *Tower and the Shard*, performed at SUNY Dowd Gallery, Cortland NY.

After a career as a college professor and creative writer in New York, Gold (b. 1964) left her tenured position to pursue studio art at the University of South Florida, deepening her commitment to image-based practice. Gold holds degrees in English and Creative Writing (BA, Boston University; MFA, Columbia University; PhD, Binghamton University), which inform her interdisciplinary approach to image and text.



ATIA SHAFIE

In the pre-modern world before the Industrial Revolution, it was typical for peasants, farmers and laborers to live their entire lives within an estimated 30-mile radius from their place of birth—a place they understood as home. For highly skilled artisans, their lives involved traveling extensively for work even before mechanized production emerged.

Atia Shafie intimately knows the contemporary version of this story, having been born to a mother who was studying computer science and a father who was an itinerant microbiology graduate student during most of her formative years. Born in Oklahoma City, her family moved frequently across the American South, living in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Indiana, so she never completed a full school year in the same city. When she was 10 years old, her family moved to Iran. She eventually returned to the United States and subsequently moved between Springfield and Chicago, Illinois, with sojourns in Rockville, Maryland, Iran (again) and Mönchengladbach, Germany. In 2014, she earned her associate's degree in painting, followed by a bachelor's degree from Otis College in Los Angeles at age 32. Deepening her isolation was the bullying she experienced in both the US and Iran, in the former primarily for her Brown identity, and in the latter because she struggled to understand Farsi and Iran's school curriculum.

In response, Shafie has made a home out of being unhomed. As she says, "This inherited sense of displacement forms the bedrock of my artistic practice." Bedrock is a felicitous term for her body of paintings that treats this poignant personal history like an aggregation of archaeological remains. The paintings consider and depict the order and position of the layers of her psychological and physical self. Shafie has traveled far and wide and uses painting to turn her inner eye to trace the paths she's trod.

There are several layers to this work. Soil taken from southern Iranian territory constitutes one stratum, a complex one. While she felt ardent resentment for the place she was expected to call home, these feelings changed as she witnessed the June 2025 bombing of areas she had walked as a teenager, places that had become part of her interior landscape. Another layer consists of the red ink her mother used to compose Persian calligraphy, a color that also represents Iran's pomegranates—a sacred symbol of the land for Shafie—and the blood that has been shed on it. Still another lode comprises quilts constructed from remnants of childhood clothing, handsewn by her mother and held together with masking tape, a provisional and fragile metaphor for attempting to keep whole what constantly threatens to fall apart.

Lastly, Shafie has added a unifying stratum of handmade, traditional mulberry paper sealed onto the other surfaces with clear resin as if to fuse what has been disparate and diffuse. In her work, she has gathered and assembled parts of a piecemeal self as vulnerable as she is indomitable.

Atia Shafie, *Falling*, 2020. fabric, fiberglass, resin, and paper on canvas; 60 x 48 in.



Atia Shafie, *Imagine Burning*, 2020. fabric, fiberglass, resin, and paper on canvas; 48 x 68 in.

Atia Shafie, *Mother (Original Cookie)*, 2021. fabric, fiberglass, resin, and paper on canvas; 48 x 60 in.





Atia Shafie, *She*, 2021. fabric, fiberglass, resin, and paper on canvas; 60 x 48 in.



Atia Shafie, *One Hundred Seventy-Six*, 2022. fabric, fiberglass, resin, and paper on canvas; 48 x 58 in.



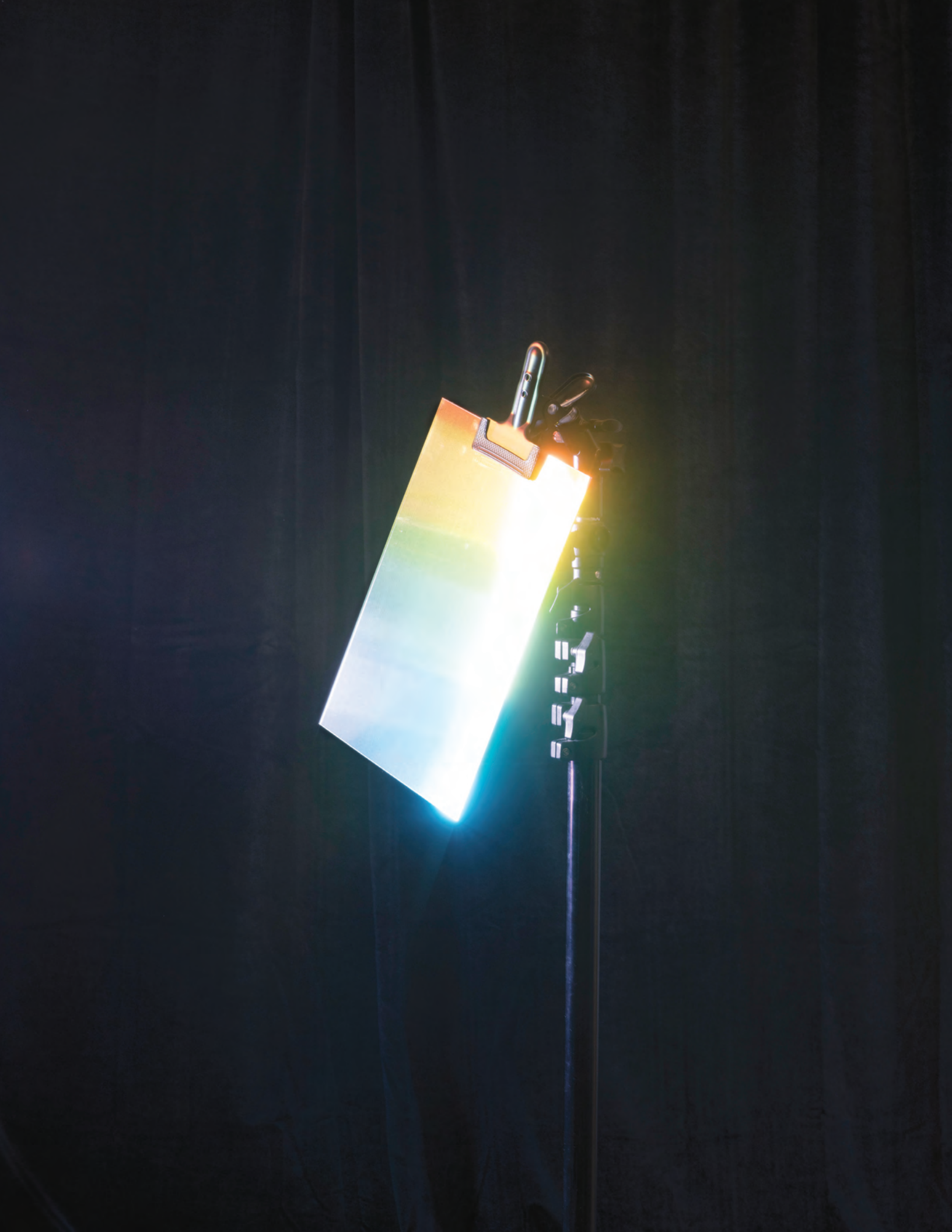
photo: Forrest MacDonald

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Oklahoma in 1984 and raised across Texas and the American South, Atia Shafie's childhood shifted dramatically in the mid-1990s when, at the age of ten, she migrated with her family to Iran. The decade she spent there—negotiating new cultural codes while holding onto the remnants of another life—became the foundation of her artistic sensibility. Returning to the United States in 2005, she rebuilt her life independently. She pursued art studies, moving from graphic design to painting before ultimately finding her voice in sculpture and completing her BFA in Los Angeles, CA.

Working through painting, collage, and layered material processes, Shafie treats her gathered fragments as active participants—both witnesses and storytellers. The paper scraps, fabric remnants, dirt, resin, and domestic fragments she collects spark a dialogue with the objects and symbols in which people place faith—personal, cultural, and collective. Her compositions form a tangible, physical cacophony, reflecting the layered tensions between the individual and society, and between memory and myth.

Rooted in the complexities of migration and hybrid identity, her practice operates as an archaeology of personal and cultural history. Through cycles of accumulation and erasure, she constructs dense, stratified surfaces that emulate the fragile, shifting nature of recollection. In merging painterly sensibilities with sculptural materiality, Shafie maps the emotional terrain of living between languages, geographies, and histories—creating works that ask viewers to look closely, dig deeper, and confront the many-layered realities that shape who we become.



DIANA SOSNOWSKA

The questions posed by Diana Sosnowska are epistemological; they concern how we know what we know, particularly when the information is conveyed through photographic images. As a technological innovation for knowledge transfer, the photograph is particularly well-suited to such research because it performs multiple functions simultaneously. It allows private revelations to become public experiences; by creating sequences or provocative juxtapositions, it suggests narratives; it documents real-world occurrences in ways that provoke significant political action and yet is often shown to be utterly fictional; it asserts a particular viewpoint by excluding what does not align with the creator's perspective. In short, it is a powerful tool, but its effects can be unreliable.

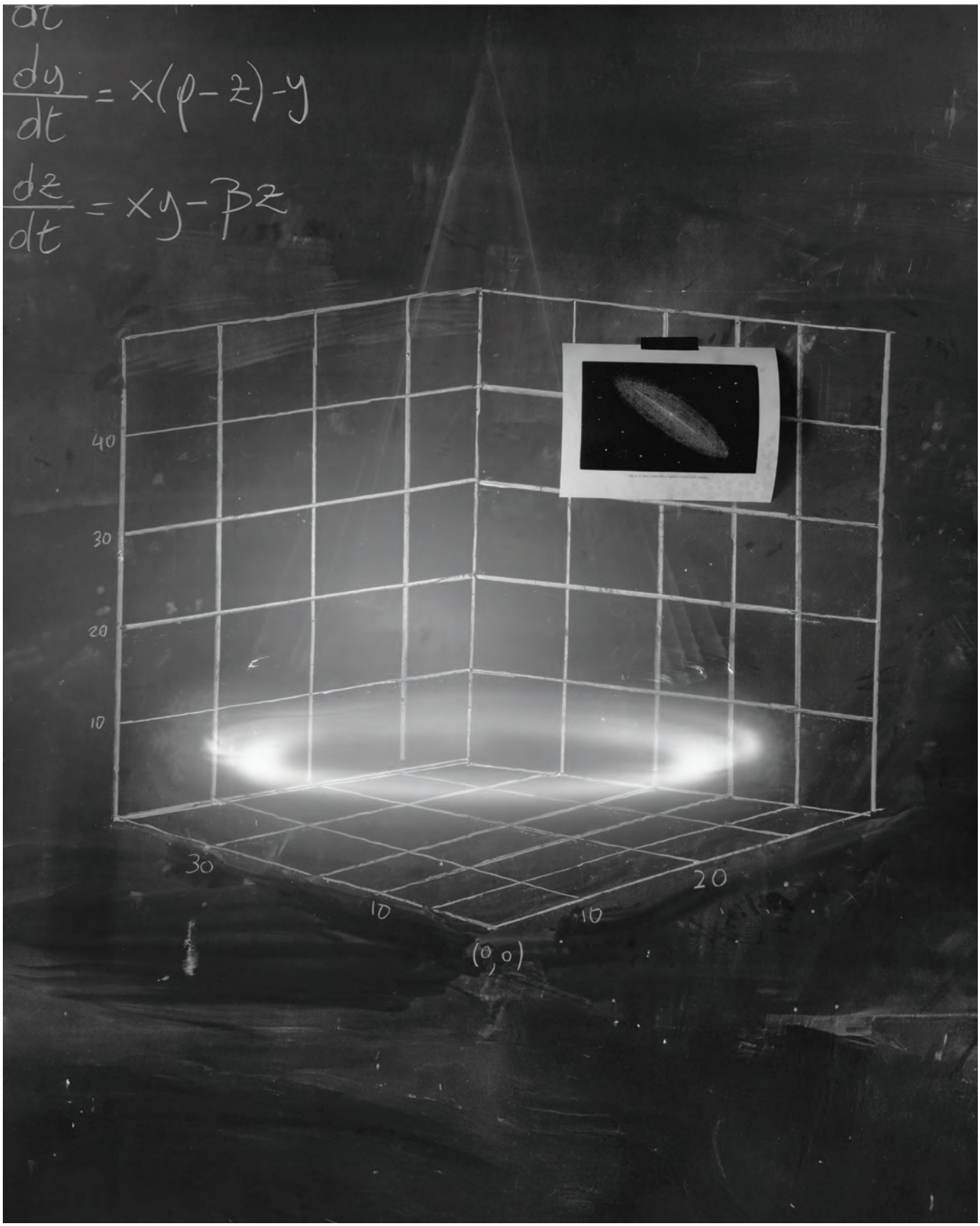
For the past few decades, artists and researchers have grappled with the medium's powers and paradoxes, particularly as the human population has seemingly become both more suggestible and more distrustful. Sosnowska, who was born in Poland, raised in Italy, and earned her undergraduate degree in photography in Scotland, brings a layered sensibility to her investigation of the photograph. She says that "Knowledge emerges only through the negotiation between belief and perception, where truth, fiction, and imagination converge." However, at the moment a famous photograph appears to me, it is not clear what part of the image—of a man in a white shirt and dark trousers confronting a line of armored tanks in a public square—is truth, belief, or fiction. Sosnowska dissects the photograph to identify its constituent parts.

Her research on the Central Intelligence Agency's Stargate Project (1978–1995) deconstructs the photographic images generated by that program, revealing the practical agendas that underpinned their production. The CIA's interest in alternative intelligence-gathering tools that could give it a strategic advantage over its rivals led the agency to investigate the psychic phenomenon of remote viewing, a form of extrasensory perception that purportedly allows access to information from physically distant targets. To better illustrate the intertwining of belief and image construction, Sosnowska fed remote viewers' descriptions of their perceptions into an artificial intelligence image-making program to visually render what had previously existed only as a speculative story.

The resulting photographs are evidence, but of what? They are a verification of the persistent aspiration and craving to expand our perceptive abilities beyond our physical bodies' limitations.

Sosnowska's questions about the nature of our knowledge construction have led her to further questions about perception, such as, "What counts as seeing?" Even more intriguing questions are: Where does storytelling end, and where does the work of seeing ourselves begin, and can they be separated at all?

Diana Sosnowska, *Light Study #3*, 2025. archival pigment print; 30 x 24 in.



Diana Sosnowska, *The Lorenz System*, 2025. archival pigment print; 30 x 24 in.



Diana Sosnowska, *Magic Box*, 2026. archival pigment print; 30 x 24 in.





photo: Forrest MacDonald

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Diana Sosnowska (b. 1995) is a Polish-Italian visual artist working between Florida and Italy. She holds a BA in Photography from Robert Gordon University, Scotland.

Her practice investigates how institutional regimes and scientific knowledge systems both record and construct knowledge. Through the manipulation of institutional, governmental, and vernacular archives, staged photography, and sculptural interventions, Sosnowska challenges dominant understandings of history and memory, exploring the spaces where truth and fiction converge.

Her work has been exhibited in juried group exhibitions at The Bridge and Tunnel Gallery (New York, NY), Le Stanze della Fotografia (Venice, Italy), and Photofusion (London, UK), and in solo exhibitions at Studies in Photography (Edinburgh, UK) and the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts (Tampa, FL). She is a recipient of the British Journal of Photography's Female in Focus Award (2022) and the SPE Student Award for Innovations in Imaging (2026).

Diana Sosnowska, *Session DC-221*, 2025. archival pigment print; 30 x 24 in.



BROGAN WILLIS

One version of a pair of shoes fashioned by Brogan Willis features soles made from a row of small steel tubes attached to a chassis of cold-rolled pencil rod, with a collar jutting up like bird wings denuded of flesh and plumage, balanced against a half-moon tongue. The rest of what we might call a sneaker has hemp rope and cream-colored yarn woven and wrapped around the metal armature. An Iron Age ancestor might have dreamt of this one night, imagining protection from the rough and unpredictable ground, although the contraption would have been an excruciating hardship to wear. In another version, Willis combines a series of black and red interlocking plastic, geometric shapes that form the toe, upper, and vamp of a boot with wide chrome-colored soles, each shoe seated atop a pair of elongated springs. You might wear this if you were cosplaying as the kind of robot fantasized in the American post-war fervor for a mechanized future.

These are shoes only in theory, intended to operate not as practical tools meant to protect the feet and enhance their ability to grip and balance, propel us forward and halt our motion, but as an art object, never to be worn. This alchemy has been happening in mainstream sneaker culture of the past few decades: Perhaps beginning with the advent of the Air Jordan shoe, sneakers have become heavily aestheticized and obsessively designed collectibles that signal the owner's discerning taste and cultural knowledge.

Willis, a 25-year-old artist born in Cleveland, Ohio, knows this culture intimately, having been a Division 1 lacrosse athlete at the University of South Florida and a track and field athlete at Penn State during his undergraduate studies. His work, which incorporates design ingenuity and skilled craftsmanship, is generated by the impulse to push the boundaries of what constitutes a shoe beyond the traditional limits.

This has everything to do with Willis's athletic background. He explains, "I've always loved pushing myself physically and mentally, and I think a lot of my art stems from the same drive." The drive to find out what the body can do under duress is found in many places in culture, but certainly in some of the most spectacular ways through competition. Willis experienced this transformation happen to his own body in training: "to force, shape, and challenge material into becoming something new."

Another model of Willis's shoe features a high-top sneaker body made of white plaster over mesh with white laces and a sole of plaster formed into a row of human toes, as if the very idea of a shoe has been turned inside out. Yet in this surreal, utterly impractical rendition of footwear, we are impelled to imagine or remember what it feels like to engage in locomotion with no equipment with which to soften our landings.

Brogan Willis, *Tension*, 2025. steel and woven textiles; 40 x 16 x 16 in.



Brogan Willis, *Flight*, 2025. repurposed Nike hightop and leather twine; 8 x 12-1/2 x 4 in.



Brogan Willis, *Wave Runner,* 2025. repurposed shoe material and leather twine; 6 x 12-1/2 x 4 in.



Brogan Willis, *Genesis,* 2025. repurposed textiles and shoes with a wooden box; 16 x 11-1/2 x 6-1/2 in. Photo: Jason Lazarus.

Brogan Willis, *Prismatic,* 2025. Sheet metal and steel tubing; 56 x 12 x 12 in. Photo: Jason Lazarus.





photo: Forrest MacDonald

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Brogan Willis, born in 2000, is a sculptor and designer from Cleveland, Ohio, and was raised in Charlotte, North Carolina. He completed his undergraduate studies at Penn State with a BFA in Sculpture. Willis's work explores the intersection of athletic discipline, material labor, and cultural memory. Approaching sculpture through a process-driven lens, he tests how ordinary objects, particularly sneakers, can be transformed through repetition, endurance, and physical constraint. His practice reframes the "unnecessary," reimagining footwear as vessels of identity, labor, and personal history.

Rooted in years of competitive athletics, Willis channels the same rigor, persistence, and physical demand found in sport and sculpture. This embodied approach shapes his relationship to materials, pushing them beyond expected limits to reveal new structural and conceptual possibilities. His sculptures merge craft and critique, functioning simultaneously as artifacts of memory and examinations of value, function, and cultural symbolism.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Kristina Keogh

The USF Contemporary Art Museum (CAM) is pleased to present *Things Don't Seem The Same*, an exhibition featuring work by the seven students graduating in 2026 with an MFA degree from the College of Design, Art and Performance's School of Art and Art History. MFA candidates Enoch Appiah, Mike Cannata, Patrick Michael Carew, Darlene Gold, Atia Shafie, Diana Sosnowska, and Brogan Willis have demonstrated their rigorous preparation throughout their program following substantive creative research, collaboration with faculty mentors, and studio practice culminating in the work displayed throughout CAM's galleries.

Each year, the MFA candidates participating in the exhibition are partnered with CAM's professional museum staff, who introduce best practices for loaning, installing, and promoting their artwork. This culminating experience is a critical component of the MFA program and cements the museum as an important resource and guiding partner within the education of these emerging artists. In fact, each incoming class is introduced to CAM from the moment they step on campus and there are multiple opportunities for these graduate students to engage with learning and professional opportunities at the museum throughout their time at USF.

More broadly, CAM's mission and commitment are to contribute to the learning experiences of all students by bringing established and emerging world-class artists to the campus and the wider Tampa Bay community. CAM presents lectures, symposia, artist talks, publications, and other related educational events. Students may access the USF art collection of over 5000 artworks to conduct research and learn about contemporary art. Graduate assistantships, internships, and directed study opportunities in the museum enrich the student experience and prepare students for careers in the arts and cultural fields.

I wish to thank Curator of the Collection and Exhibitions Manager, Shannon Annis; Curator of Education and Public Art, Jennifer Miller; Exhibitions Designer, Gary Schmitt; Chief Preparator, Eric Jonas; and Preparators Alejandro Gómez and Madison Andrews. All work closely with each student to develop installation strategies while introducing them to best practices for exhibition in the museum environment. New Media Curator Don Fuller and Digital Media Specialist Kenzie Ferrell collaborated with the students to design this catalogue and other printed materials. Many thanks also to Program Coordinator Amy Allison, Chief of Security and Visitor Services David Waterman, Curator-at-Large Christian Viveros-Fauné, and CAM's student assistants for their work supporting operations and programming across the museum.

Thanks go out to the faculty and staff of the School of Art and Art History, including Noelle Mason, Associate Professor and MFA Graduate Coordinator; Marie O'Neil, Office Manager; Cassidy Santos, Academic Program Specialist; Ryne Heslin, Graduate Program Facilitator; Sarah Howard, Assistant Dean of Student Success and Assistant Director of the School of Art and Art History; and Andrew Scott Ross, Director of the School of Art and Art History.

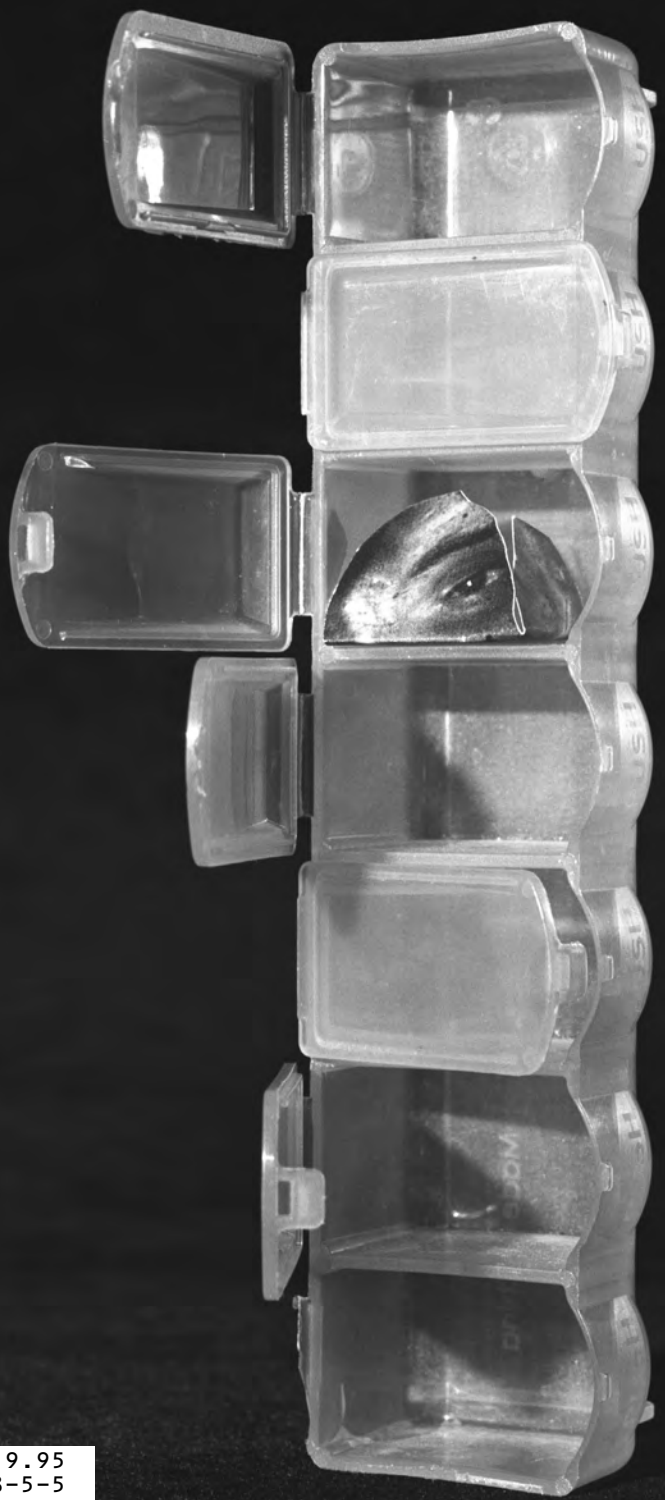
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Dr. Kristina Keogh, Acting Director
USF Contemporary Art Museum

Diana Sosnowska, *Hella Hammid's Back*, 2025. archival pigment print; 30 x 24 in.

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