THE CORE

PROGRAM

THE CORE PROGRAM LECTURE SERIES 2019/20

Unless otherwise noted, all events are held at the Favrot Auditorium
Glassell School of Art
5101 Montrose Boulevard
The Museum of Fine Arts
Houston

Thursday, October 17, 7 pm
Lecture: Clarissa Tossin

Thursday, October 24, 7 pm
Lecture: Jack Halberstam

Thursday, November 21, 6:30pm
Lecture: Helen Molesworth
Brown Auditorium,
Law Building, MFAH

Thursday, December 12, 7 pm
Lecture: Anand Patwardhan

Thursday, January 30, 7 pm
Lecture: Tania Bruguera

Thursday, March 26, 7 pm
Lecture: Lawrence Abu Hamdan

Thursday, April 2, 7 pm
Lecture: Hammam Aldouri

Thursday, April 23, 7 pm
Lecture: Darby English

EXHIBITIONS 2019/20

At the Leslie and Brad Bucher Gallery, Glassell School of Art
The Museum of Fine Arts
Houston

Prints and Ceramics from Little Egypt Enterprises and Related Studios
September 7 to November 17, 2019

Anand Patwardhan:
Ways of Struggle
December 13, 2019 to
February 16, 2020

2020 Core Exhibition
March 12 to April 17, 2020

FELLOWS

Qais Assali—3 Shobun Baile—9
Niloufar Emamifar—15
Gustavo Gomez-Brechtel—21 Will Harris—27

Ryan Hawk—41 Irmak Karasu—47
leo—53 Kara Springer—59 Ana Tuazon—65

QAIS ASSALI

Qais Assali is an artist, designer, and educator. His work with photography, video, installation, lecture performance, graphic design, and archives seeks to engage and subvert national geopolitical power dynamics and stages questions between site and the body in relation to his own identity and locale in order to rethink contested geographies. Assali has taught at a number of academic institutions in Palestine and at the Critical Race Studies Program at Michigan State University in 2018–19. Assali holds two master's degrees—an MFA from Bard College and an MA in Art Education from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Moslem is Family, 2019
vinyl billboard, 17×9 feet

It's Not About the House, 2019
billboard in Nablus, Palestine

With Amanda Assaley
Ahl Al Medinah, Shurafa' Al Ayn, 2019
concrete and velvet, dimensions variable

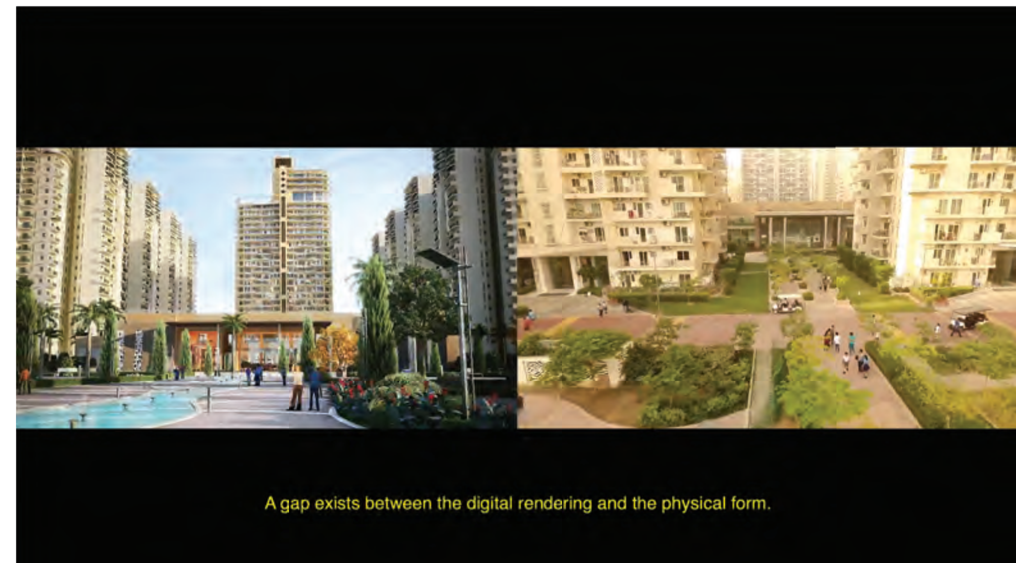
SHOBUN BAILE

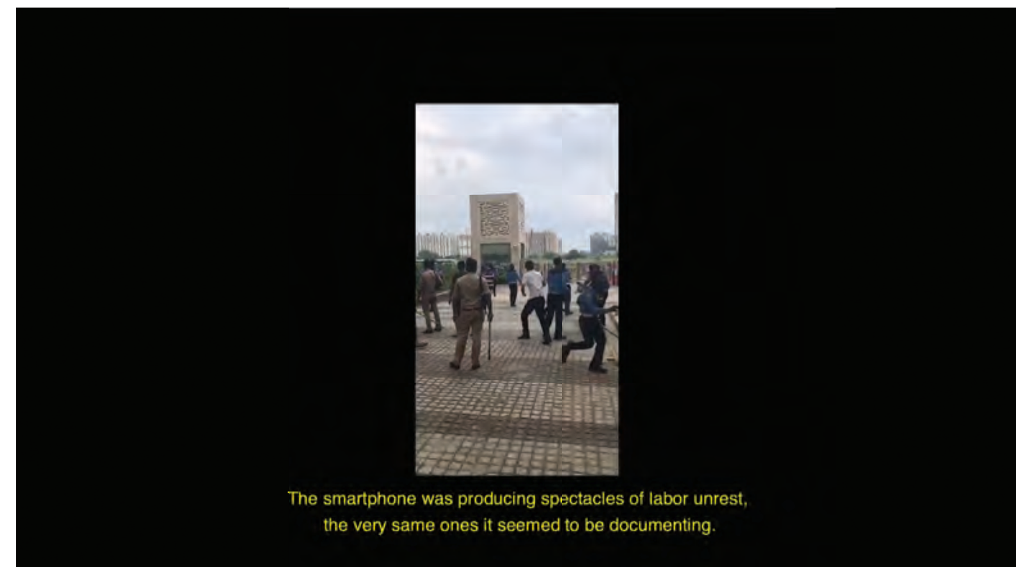
Shobun Baile is an interdisciplinary artist whose work deals with the politics and quiet ideologies of the designed world. He received a dual BS in Russian Language & Literature and Molecular Biology from the University of Michigan, and an MFA from Carnegie Mellon University School of Art. He has participated in residencies at the School for Poetic Computation (New York City), SOMA (Mexico City), and Storm King Art Center (New York). He also makes music. His work has been screened and exhibited in New York City, Mexico City, and Los Angeles.

Trust (Study #1), 2019
HD video, silent, TRT 12:32

Trust (Study #1) relays a conversation between the artist and a man who once worked as a banker within the informal money system commonly referred to as hawala. Hawala plays a key role in the remittance economies of South Asia by virtue of its ability to quickly move money across borders. The exchange between the banker and the artist is a negotiation of knowledge, the limits of which are dictated by the global "war on terror," and the perceived role of hawala within this war.

Trust (Study #1), 2019
HD video, silent, TRT 12:32



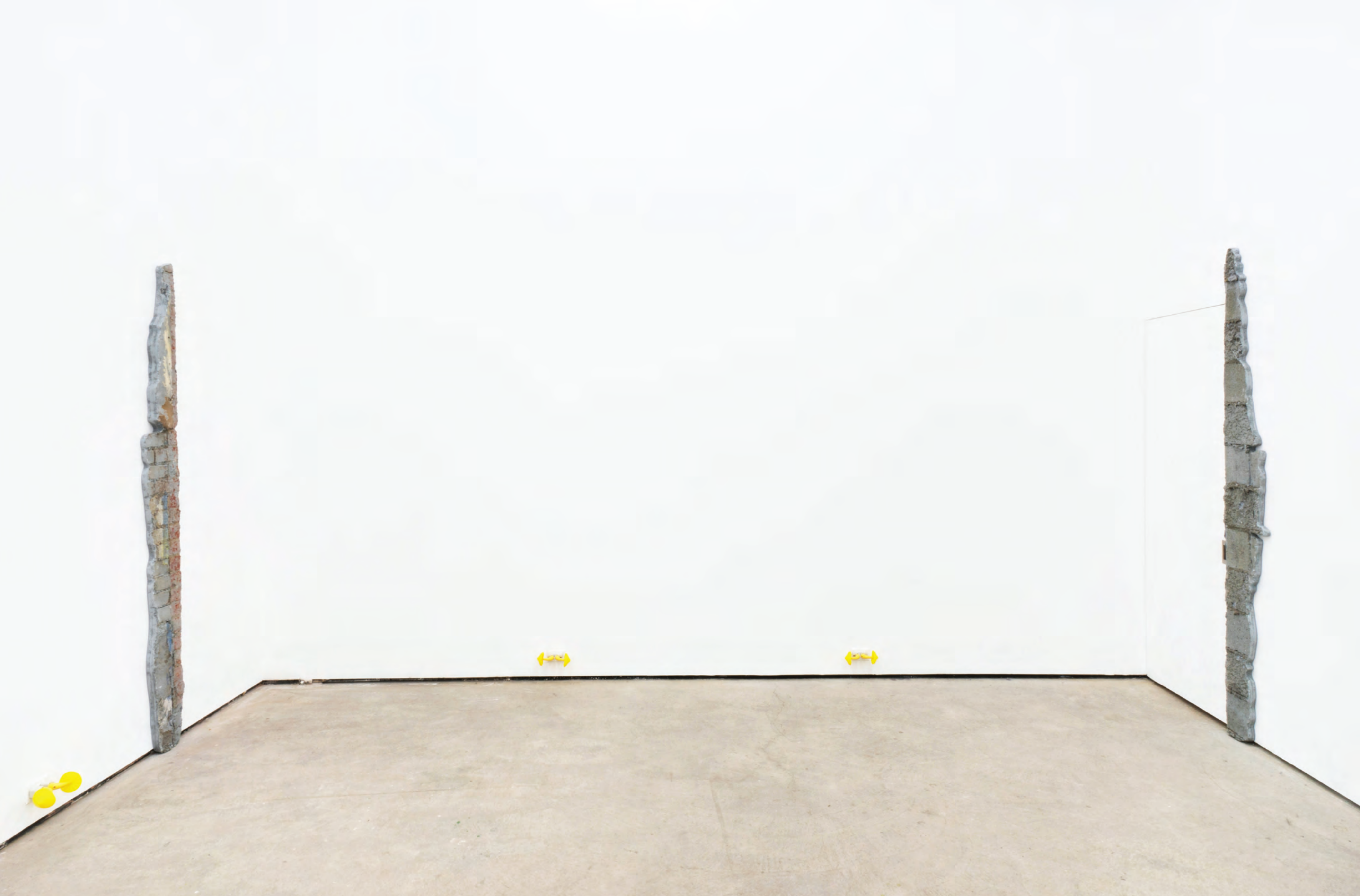


In-Camera Effects, 2019
HD video, stereo audio, TRT 15:12

A singular event of domestic worker unrest in the Indian city of Noida reveals a deep connection between the site of the uprising and the tools used to record it. *In-Camera Effects* proposes a different causality where architec-ture and its images are collapsed, leading to a question: how do you dig with a smartphone?

NILOUFAR EMAMIFAR

Niloufar Emamifar's project-based practice explores the interrelations between social and physical space and asks questions regarding urban interstices and their relational properties. She holds a BFA in Interior Architecture from Soore School of Architecture, Iran and an MFA in Studio Art from the University of California, Irvine. Her work has been exhibited at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions; the Venice Biennale of Architecture; the Iran Biennale of Architecture; Human Resources, Los Angeles; and SculptureCenter and Essex Street Gallery in New York City. She has participated in residency programs at London College of Communication and Grand Central Art Center, Santa Ana, California.



Three Inches and a Half, 2018
pigmented cast silicon, dimensions variable

[installation view of *Five Sculptures,*
Essex Street Gallery, New York City]

Three Inches and a Half (detail), 2018
pigmented cast silicon, dimensions variable

[installation view of *Five Sculptures*,
Essex Street Gallery, New York City]

The Impossible Theater (5th rev. ed.), 2016–19
video, TRT 15:22

The video displays a stationary shot from the auditorium of the Ferdowski (formerly Royal) Movie Theater in Tehran as a panning camera shot of the same theater's second floor interior is projected on the screen. The subtitles are conversations between the artist and the establishment's former manager. In their exchange, the pair disputes the genealogy of the theater and its historical significance at a moment of its questionable ruin.

GUSTAVO GOMEZ-BRECHTEL

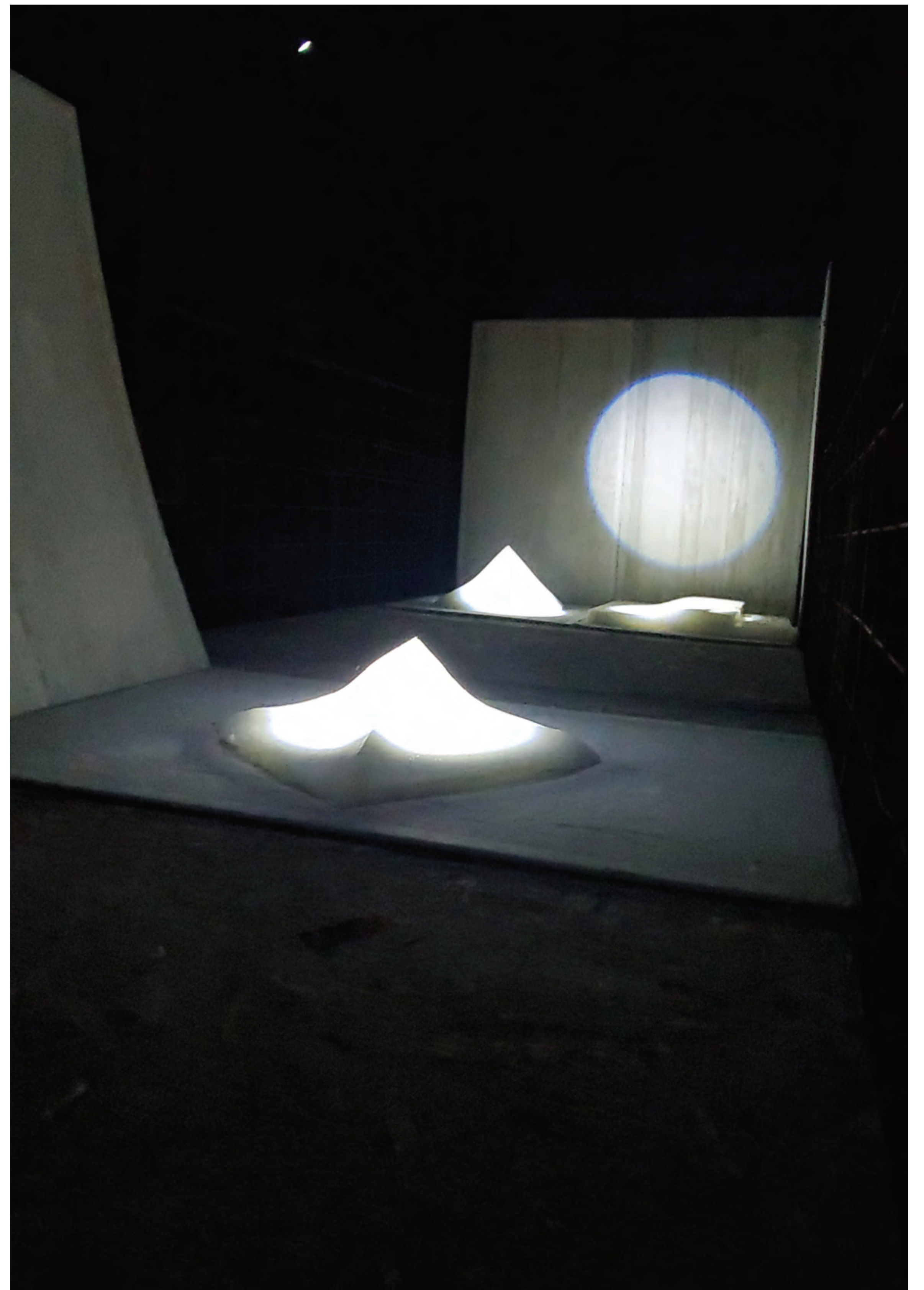
Gustavo Gomez-Brechtel's practice explores the intersection of epistemological and experiential concerns. The transitory nature of time, change, impermanence, and uncertainty are key themes in his work. After studying chemical engineering at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, he received a BFA in visual arts from the National School of Painting, Sculpture, and Printmaking in Mexico City in 2007, and an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in 2014. He was awarded a COMEXUS Fulbright scholarship for postgraduate studies in 2012, and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine in 2017.

He has shown his work in group exhibitions in Germany, Colombia, South Korea, Mexico, Italy, and Sweden.

Untitled (Solid Heat), 2019
metal gasoline containers, paraffin, air
conditioning unit, tarp, extension cord
134×47×12.5 inches

[installation view of the *2019 Core Exhibition*
at the Glassell School of Art, Houston]

Untitled (Copper), 2019
hot plate and copper, 48×12×12 inches



Untitled (Paraffin), 2019
paraffin and concrete, dimensions variable

[installation view of *Round 11: Untitled (Paraffin)* at Cage Match Project, Austin]

WILL HARRIS

Will Harris is a writer and critic who writes broadly on culture and politics, with a focus on the culture of the international left. He has an MFA in creative writing from the University of Minnesota. His essays have appeared in *n+1*, *The White Review*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Point*, and other publications.

REALISM AND THE CLIMATE CHANGE IMAGE

Perhaps the nearest thing to a consensus regarding our century's ecological condition is that we remain incapable of picturing it. Names have been proposed for this cultural failure: the great derangement, the hyperobject, the charismatic meta-category, climate change denialism, the climate change hoax. For the right, at issue is that one can't picture what isn't there. For the left, the problem is no longer one of believing in climate change, or even of sensing it, but one of complexity: how to organize into a grand narrative, singular yet differentiated, the experience of north and south, drought and migration, country and city, colonial violence and gender oppression, trauma and individual experience, capitalist accumulation and transnational solidarity? As ecological collapse interlaces with the more familiar totalizing forces of capitalism and modernity, the left faces a recast problem of totality. Among other things the problem is cultural—only through narratives and images and forms can the social complexity of climate change be given an experiential dimension, a density available in realist art, as the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács wrote, but not in "immediate experience in real life." This realism penetrates the world of appearance: in Lukács's conception, but also in that of the artist and theorist Allan Sekula, who aimed for "a realism not of appearances or social facts but of everyday experience in and against the grip of advanced capitalism." It elaborates underlying social constellations that bind individual experience to historical process. It strives to represent, in Sekula's terms, the detail and the panorama—a panorama whose horizon is now ecological—and to do so with pedagogical purpose, offering an experiential map through which social abstraction can be understood. But where might we find glimmers of this realism today?

A provocative tour of the vexations of climate change and cultural representation appears in Amitav Ghosh's 2016 book, *The Great Derangement*. "Serious literature," Ghosh argues, has proved all but incapable of representing climate change. Experientially, climate change often manifests itself through spectacular acts of seemingly non-human intervention: hurricanes, droughts, cyclones whipped into a heightened frenzy. Yet the modern novel looks skeptically on these interventions as desperate *dei ex machina,* preferring to narrate scenes of bourgeois regularity rooted in the quotidian desires of individual characters, unmoored also from any larger collectivity. As Ghosh writes, "the contemporary novel has become ever more radically centered on the individual psyche while the collective [...] has receded, both in the cultural and fictional imagination." Banished from the domesticated quarters of the contemporary novel's mainstream, climate-change representations, in Ghosh's telling, find themselves winnowed to the fantasy projections of hero movies and speculative fiction.

One doesn't have to agree with the full run of Ghosh's case to concur with the conclusion: even as more and more climate-change novels line the shelves of bookstores, a broad-canvassed realism, capable of capturing the present-day puzzle of climate change's social imbrication, remains elusive. Yet the problem is hardly literature's alone. From film to architecture, climate change has matured into a loud but cloistered subject, ripe mainly for allegory or add-on or background anxiety, and a survey of the cultural field reveals only one real possible exception: visual art. Here environmental concerns are prominent at a level surpassing that of any other cultural form, to the extent that it would be difficult to say—as Swedish human ecologist Andreas Malm writes of culture at large in *The Progress of This Storm*—that within the contemporary art museum climate change looms as a great unconscious. Biennials and mega-exhibitions, from *documenta 13* to *Sharjah Biennial 8* ("Still Life: Art, Ecology, and the Politics of Change"), have taken ecology as their guiding theme, and a quick stream of relevant art-critical books and anthologies continues to be turned out, with recent surveys including titles like *The World to Come: Art in the Age of the Anthropocene* and *The Edge of the Earth: Climate Change in Photography and Video*.

A representative "biennial" work might be Kristina Buch's *documenta 13* piece *The Lover*. Buch planted a flower bed full of vegetation for native butterfly species, installed 37 species of butterflies to hatch on the site, and then tended to the site throughout documenta's hundred days. The work's significance lies in its melancholic, twinned demonstration of ecological futility and ecological activism, with its restoration of "an absurdly tiny fragment of . . . biological riches," as Julian Stallabrass wrote in his exhibition review, intended to remind viewers of the "swarms of butterflies that filled the air in their millions" before the advent of industrialization. Its representativeness consists, as Stallabrass argues, in its refusal of closure and coherence ("The viewer has no way of knowing what effect this work has had on the environment"), but also through an emphasis on ecology, and ecological activism, which evades the ambitious social mapping inherent in left aesthetic realism. Other examples, here from *Sharjah Biennial 8,* different in approach but representative for similar reasons, include Tue Greenfort's raising of the temperature in the biennial's galleries by 2 degrees celsius, using the resulting savings to buy and preserve a plot of rainforest in Ecuador; Graham Gussin's littering of a man-made island off Sharjah's coast with an apocalyptic array of human trash, which the biennial ferried visitors to; and Luca Vitone's "monochrome" *Landscapes,* in which he exposed blank canvases to the smoggy air of particular sites (near an oil well, or a harbor) and exhibited the resulting discolorations.

Perhaps a more promising place to start, however, when looking over the varied territory of ecologically-minded visual art, is photography: for its "unavoidable social referentiality," to quote Sekula again, "its way of describing—albeit in enigmatic, misleading, reductive and often superficial terms—a world

of social institutions, gestures, manners, relationships," but more importantly for its ability to rove across different cultural registers, and its privileged place in the visual imagination of climate change. For no form has tried to picture climate change more exhaustively than photojournalism, and what's striking, when viewing art photography, Anthropocene-inspired art theory, and photojournalism all together, is the degree of overlap. Across this spectrum, climate change has acquired a core rhetoric, revolving above all around a tendentious view of totality: a totality not social, but bizarrely evacuated.

The place to start, when talking about climate-change photography and totality, is with Edward Burtynsky, a Canadian photographer whose photos monumentalize the already monumental industrial built environment. Starting in the 1980s, Burtynsky elaborated a body of work that navigates around the world and across industry, from his early series "Railcuts," or images of train tracks sliced into the bleak, austere sides of mountains, to recent projects like "China," "Quarries," "Mines," "Oil," and "Water."

As the titles indicate, the subjects have moved from industry at large to the symbols and pressure points of fossil capitalism, leading to Burtynsky's latest series, "Anthropocene," produced together with the Anthropocene Project, a collective composed of Burtynsky and the artists and filmmakers Jennifer Baichwal and Nicholas de Pencier. Yet each project remains definitively Burtynskian—huge, often aerial photos, starkly monochrome or arranged around a lurid band of polluted color, shot from enough distance to illuminate an abstracted industrial sublime. A Burtynsky photo might be an elevated image of an oil field, derricks sprawling into infinity like a sky-view of low-hung suburbia, the vehicle-marked tan of the California desert hemmed in by a smoggy white sky. Or an aerial view of a coastline adjacent to a power station in Mexico, a surreal turquoise ocean flecked by a dim brown, the coast beyond dried-up and pollutant-streaked, and the whole image flattened into abstraction. Or a distanced shot of a mountainous landfill on Nairobi's edge, piles of pastel plastics lumped together on top, spare streams of colorful trash running down the dark, compacted soil of its sides, the occasional worker sorting through or resting on top or walking by for perspective's sake below.

Burtynsky has his share of photographic predecessors (Margaret Bourke-White's heroic photos of industry, Bernd and Hilla Becher's conceptual classifications of industrial architectural types, Ed Ruscha's blank-faced aerial shots of Los Angeles parking lots). But Burtynsky represents more a spectacular break with these early industrial and conceptual artists than a continuation; today his aesthetic—sublime monuments of a human-altered landscape, each image a totality unto itself, emphasizing abstract pictorial power over human context or experiential detail—boasts not old masters but proteges, evident in particular in climate-change photojournalism. Here an exemplary figure is George Steinmetz, a longtime aerial photographer recently anointed the field's doyen. Illustrating Nathaniel Rich's 2018 *New York Times Magazine* piece "Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change," Steinmetz's photos and videos sweep over the world, drone-recording ships cutting through a melting Arctic, blocks of California suburbs torched by forest fires, penguins deprived of snow in Antarctica, cities subsumed by the Sahara in Mauritania, McMansions drowning in the outskirts of Houston. Like in Burtynsky's work, in Steinmetz's photos the aerial view and its technical achievement are crucial: now captured by drone, a technology enabling "nothing less than the grand democratization of aerial photography," Steinmetz's work previously involved strapping himself into a motorized paraglider and flying low over a city in Yemen or sand dunes in Chad, and the power of the photos is such that we're made to marvel at the sublimity of the perspective, and wonder at the technology behind it. From this aerial vantage both Burtynsky and Steinmetz conjure photos of such spectacular extremity, in form and subject, that climate change seems pictured in all its metaphorical potential, an instance beyond our daily perceptions that therefore implies the full phenomenon itself.

There are any number of ready-at-hand critiques of these photographs. They might be guilty of beauty ("translating scenes of destruction into compositions of aesthetic beauty," as critic T.J. Demos has charged), or of a false posture of neutrality or ambivalence, of claiming as Burtynsky has to be "responding without editorializing" while actually producing "the sensation of abstract visual pleasure that corresponds to the belief that industry is doing the right thing" (Demos again). These charges seem to imagine beauty and visual pleasure as straightforward things, but their kernel of truth can be glimpsed if combined with another complaint against climate-change photography. "Climate change has an image problem," the organization and open-source image library Climate Visuals claims: "polar bears, melting ice and arrays of smoke stacks don't convey the human story at the heart of the issue." There aren't many people in Burtynsky's and Steinmetz's aerial photos—a climate-change house style updating what Sekula once called, in reference to the empty suburban landscapes captured by the 1970s New Topographic photographers, the "neutron-bomb school of photography: killing people but leaving real estate standing."

Now even real estate is sinking, but industrial detritus remains. The detritus's abstraction in these images isn't beautiful in any uncomplicated or obviously affirmative sense, but it does rely on an evacuation of social dilemmas that doubles paradoxically as their depoliticized universalization. Nowhere in these images do you sense a relation between the people who profit from environmental degradation and the people who die from it. Instead you stare into a false totality: images whose power suggests climate change's drastic fullness, but whose depopulated severity mystifies the social contradictions at its root. As Burtynsky writes in his contribution to *Anthropocene,* "Now it is becoming clear that humankind [...] has in a very short period of time also become an agent of immense global change. [...] Our planetary system is

affected by a magnitude of force as powerful as any naturally occurring global catastrophe, but one caused solely by the activity of a single species: us." "Us": the conceptual blindspot behind the term Anthropocene—attributing climate change to humanity as a whole, rather than a historically-sited racial capital—here extends its logic to the image, picturing a totality that blindly resists differentiation.

A similar blindness mars a recent vogue in photographic theory. Examples abound—Joanna Zylinska's *Nonhuman Photography,* Irmgard Emmelhainz's *e-flux* essay "Conditions of Visuality Under the Anthropocene and Images of the Anthropocene to Come"—but the most ambitious of these theorizations comes from Susan Schuppli, an artist and member of the multidisciplinary research collective Forensic Architecture. In her 2016 essay "Dirty Pictures," Schuppli argues that the Anthropocene implies not just a new geologic era, but a new "optical regime," the launch of a "geo-photo-graphic era." Within this new regime, what she calls "dirty pictures," or "landscapes whose material technicity and toxicity is suggestively mediatic," figure as exemplary: an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, say, that rather than being represented by a lens-based apparatus becomes "a new form of cinema organized by the found footage of 'nature' itself," its "abstracted and lurid patterns of reflected light," similar to the material processes of film and photography, making it a new kind of unmediated aesthetic event—one brought about not by the mere "reproduction of reality" or conventional understandings of human agency, but through "massively entangled nature-culture hybrids." For Schuppli, oil spills have now become photos—new kinds of "images" made possible by the Anthropocene.

Two errors follow. First, as a Latourian model of nature-culture hybridity supplants a dialectical view of nature and society as distinct yet interlinked, the issue of agency becomes confused. The human intentionality inherent in film and photography, and also in political analysis, drastically shrinks, as the agent generating the "geo-photo-graph"—or oil spill—becomes an obscured mixture (the sea, oil, the sun, ExxonMobil's industrial apparatus) rather than the contingent errors of a corporation. People become displaced twice over: the agent behind the "camera" all but vanishes, while the agent responsible for ecological disaster becomes a mere collaborator in a post-natural, post-human aesthetic process. Second, as hybridity replaces human agency, so too "pure presence" replaces representation, leaving Schuppli the puzzle of how to convey the "knowledge" stored in these dirty pictures to other people. The essay never resolves this, gesturing to the poverty of data visualization and the constraints of "partial and local" "actual lived experience," and arguing finally for the usefulness of a world beyond representation, of "image-matter that adamantly refuses coherency and objectification." But this only returns us to an expanded field of "the neutron-bomb school of photography"—a representation-less world beyond human perception in which we barely figure at all, and in which even Schuppli can't remain for long. Since the essay, Schuppli has begun working on art projects that complement the argument of "Dirty Pictures," using computer simulation to make images which claim to circumvent representation. But the result—images, some quite beautiful, which blend together abstract-looking features of oil spills—fails precisely because the images nevertheless represent, only poorly, suggesting oil spills without doing much more than prettifying them.

Such is the people-less totality, interwoven across art photography, photojournalism, and art theory, that animates the core of climate-change photography. But there remains opposition: most obviously in the case of social documentary. Here, in both art and photojournalism, a counter-consensus reigns: that we need "to convey the human story at the heart of the issue." But which story? In photojournalism, a tour through the photographic archives of major publications—*The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian*—reveals the expected: the relatively sparse numbers of climate-change photos of people or social content tend to be over-narrativized, images of victimhood (a boy up to his neck in water, women holding up empty buckets amid a drought), heroism (a lone firefighter silhouetted against a blaze), tragedy (a city flooded or a neighborhood destroyed), banal portents (thick-clouded smokestacks), or the occasional chaser of something more upbeat (solar panels, wind farms, Greta Thunberg).

Art-world social documentary, however, devotes itself more frequently to less dramatized pursuits. In the related projects of Richard Misrach, Fazal Sheikh, Subhankar Banerjee, and the multimedia project World of Matter, sociological research entwines with photographic representation. Richard Misrach's 2013 project *Petrochemical America,* done in collaboration with the landscape architect Kate Orff, pairs maps and data visualizations of "Cancer Alley"—or an 85-mile stretch of the Mississippi River running through Louisiana, littered with oil industry infrastructure and therefore toxic to the area's communities and ecosystem—with photos of refineries, or of pea-green swamps cut through by rusting pipelines. Fazal Sheikh's 2015 project *The Conflict Shoreline: Colonialism as Climate Change in the Negev Desert* likewise works through collaboration. Sheikh's aerial photographs illustrate Forensic Architecture director Eyal Weizman's historical reportage on an ongoing episode in Israel's settler-colonial occupation of Palestine, in which state restrictions on the movement and settlements of Bedouin communities operate alongside the progress of climate change, as desertification erodes the frontier between fertile and arid lands. Subhankar Banerjee's work, similarly making use of aerial photography, documents the impact of climate change on the Arctic: its landscape, wildlife, and indigenous communities. And World of Matter, an online collective platform for sharing documentary work, features a variety of video and photographic engagements with global ecology: Ursula Biemann's work on pipeline construc-tion in Central Asia, Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber's video on small-scale cotton farmers in Texas, Nabil Ahmed's investigation into the ecological effects of post-independence development projects in Bangladesh.

Susan Schuppli, Billboard from the
“Disaster Film” series, 2019
Courtesy of the artist

Susan Schuppli, Billboard from the
“Disaster Film” series, 2019
Courtesy of the artist

This documentary work reverses the depopulated and thinly contextualized tendencies of much climate-change photography. By contrast, it emphasizes social infrastructure, the operations of specific industries, and hyper-specific attention to local detail. But it nevertheless lacks two qualities indispensable to a realist imagining of climate change: aesthetic relationality, in which individual experience is imbricated in a layered social whole; and, within this social whole, the internal pressure of montage and opposition, such that specific social groups are shown warring against others. Individual experience and social conflict are short-changed in these documentary projects, traded in for an almost academic approach to mapping and abstraction.

Moving beyond these documentary approaches, what signs are there in today's image world of a more deeply realist climate-change imaginary? Two practices stand out, quite radically different in nature but perhaps complementary in approach. First, a fledgling canon of crude images—readable, animated by social opposition, prone to propagandizing—that circulate widely through social media and mainstream journalism. If the twentieth-century life of the iconic photo has dimmed amid the dispersal of the twenty-first-century mediascape, these photos aspire to revive this iconicity, even if only for a brief season, contributing to a long line of left counter-icons. They shed experimentation for conventionality and eschew complexity for binary poles of Eisensteinian opposition, condensed into the singular frames of still images.

An early example is a 2004 photo by Brazilian photojournalist Tuca Vieira. Originally taken for a São Paulo newspaper, the image was presented to former Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as an embodiment of his social-democratic Workers' Party's political struggle; it served as the lead image for the exhibition *Global Cities* at Tate Modern in 2007; it was published by *The Guardian* alongside an interview with Vieira in 2017; and it continues to circulate through social media, museums, and magazines. It has seemingly nothing to do with climate change. Shot from a helicopter, it shows the edges of Paraisópolis, a favela in São Paulo, butting up against the wealthy neighborhood of Morumbi: a wall divides tightly packed homes from the lush lawns, tennis courts, pools, and winding garden balconies (equipped with pools of their own) of a high-rise luxury apartment complex. Asked what the image represents, Vieira replied: "social inequality." But more recently this registration of inequality turned in an ecological direction. Repurposed by *Jacobin Magazine* as the illustration for Daniel Aldana Cohen's critique of difference-blind forecasts of climate apocalypse, Vieira's image became anointed as "the classic image of eco-apartheid." Here it captures what more explicitly climate change-related photography tends to obscure: the sense, stark in the present and only intensifying in coming decades, of the drastic exacerbations of inequality and privatization that ecological disaster promises.

A related image, taken by the non-professional photographer Kristi McCleur, first surfaced on Facebook and Reddit, becoming viral after being shared by

Tuca Vieira, "A Foto da Favela da Paraisópolis,"
2004
Courtesy of the artist

David Simon, creator of the TV show *The Wire,* who tweeted that "in the pantheon of visual metaphors for America today, this is the money shot." The image soon became the subject of magazine articles and the background for memes and Photoshop add-ons. Taken in the fall of 2017, it captures a forest fire blazing in northern Oregon, its foreground occupied by a trio of shorts-wearing golfers serenely carrying on with their putts. On Twitter, someone superimposed onto the scene an image of a golf club-brandishing Donald Trump; various chapters of the Democratic Socialists of America turned the image into an advertisement, embossing it with "A Better World Is Possible. Join DSA." Golf, the supreme ecology-ruining sport of global capitalist dealmaking, works here as a metonym for a self-consuming capitalist process, lined with enough gaps for the complacent pursuit of business as usual. Similar to the shot of São Paulo, the image reduces to a politicized binary contrast, revealing that it is not so much temporality that climate change imbues with political meaning—whether through the century-spanning rhetoric of the Anthropocene or premonitions of apocalypse—as much as the sharp recasting of space, privatized fiefdoms nestled amid seas of poverty and ecological blight.

These crude images convey, with succinct populism, the sense of social conflict missing elsewhere in climate-change photography. But there is much this populism can't hold: individual experience, complex contradiction. Likewise crucial to the critical realist photography theorized by Sekula in the 1970s, these qualities today appear most intriguingly in the work of one of Sekula's disciples, schooled also by the examples of Carrie Mae Weems and Martha Rosler: the artist LaToya Ruby Frazier. Frazier's photography doesn't focus on climate change. But it does return over and again to environmental pollution—a recurring element in Frazier's realist aesthetic, which also interweaves individual self-invention with the silences of family life, deindustrialization with health epidemics, housing segregation with social alienation. Most impressive in her photo book *The Notion of Family* (2014), Frazier's realism grounds itself in the margins of the world economy. *The Notion of Family* centers on her hometown of Braddock, Pennsylvania; it opens with an aerial shot of a superannuated factory town, followed by a self-portrait equally grounding and destabilizing ("I feel a sense of imbalance," the caption reads), and then branching out novelistically to include the toxins emitted from "the last functioning steel mill in the region," her grandmother's cancer, the local hospital's closure, the town's history of housing discrimination, and the bleakness and bonds of family life. Each shot of domesticity—of curtained interiors, bedsheet backdrops for self-portraiture, thickly-figurined living rooms—seems weighted by the tensions of social fullness. Frazier's recent photojournalistic work sacrifices some of this fullness; her work on Flint's water crisis, or the shuttering of a GM factory in Lordstown, Ohio, appears tinged with the family-values conservatism her earlier work held at bay. But its mainstream context is itself an achievement: appearing in *The New York Times Magazine, The New Yorker,* and *Elle,* Frazier's realism regains a radical clarity—Rosler's and Sekula's 1970s Marxist prescriptions for reinventing documentary alive in the pages of Manhattan's prestige press.

And yet the obvious thing about much of this realist photography is how easily it can be misperceived, seen as disconnected from climate change. The images climate change cues up most readily convey not realist narratives of polluted communities or stark contradictions but an evacuated totality, people-less yet still aimed at people—at the world-historical subject conjured by the rhetoric of the Anthropocene, the universal figure of "a species-conscious planetary humanity," as the writer Benjamin Kunkel describes it. But "no collective actor can be conjured from a name," Kunkel continues, "and the literature of the Anthropocene so far fails to identify any historical process that might combine with moral exhortation to produce a borderless social movement in which human beings throughout the world effect their ecological solidarity as a political force." Criticism of Anthropocene discourse here doubles as critique of the bulk of climate-change photography. But what might a less idealist historical force be? Kunkel returns with a quasi-Marxist answer, dashed with populism:

> In short, where economies cease to grow, efforts to aggrandize private wealth threaten to shrink and discredit the capitalist class along with the economy as a whole; socialism stands a better chance at the full utilization of economic capacity, not to mention a fair distribution of the proceeds. The constituency for establishing such an order would simply be the growing numbers with reason to believe they would be better off that way.

The modest task of a realist aesthetic dedicated to this project would be to represent the contours of this constituency against its opposition (its populist register), along with the myopias and vexations in its way (its fuller realist dimension), threading a politicized, diagnostic view of ecological collapse into the rhythms of everyday life. It need not be photographic—though photojournalism will continue to cast an oversized shadow over the visual imagination of climate change—but it would need to engage with the representational ambitions of social mapping. In the US at least, this realist imaginary seems better represented on the infamously unpromising stages of electoral politics, as evidenced by the debates and totalizing programs around the Green New Deal, than within the artistic or mainstream image world. But this is a good problem. It's no longer up to aesthetic realism to wish this political project into existence; merely to contribute to it.

RYAN HAWK

Ryan Hawk is a visual artist who uses video, performance, sculpture, and site-specific installation to explore alternative corporealities and forms of embodiment. Solo presentations of his work have been held at the Lawndale Art Center in Houston, TX and the Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum and the Museum of Human Achievement in Austin, TX. Notable awards include an SMFA Traveling Fellowship for work and research at the Pitch Lake in Trinidad of Trinidad and Tobago; and the Arch and Anne Giles Kimbrough Fund from the Dallas Museum of Art. Hawk holds a BFA in Studio Art from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and an MFA in Studio Art from the University of Texas at Austin.

Untitled (blue), 2019
1080p video projection with sound,
speakers, blue carpet, drywall, steel studs,
vinyl door strip curtain, neon signage, and vari-
ous cables and hardware
installation dimensions variable,
TRT 7:30, looped

[installation view of the *2019 Core Exhibition*
at the Glassell School of Art, Houston]

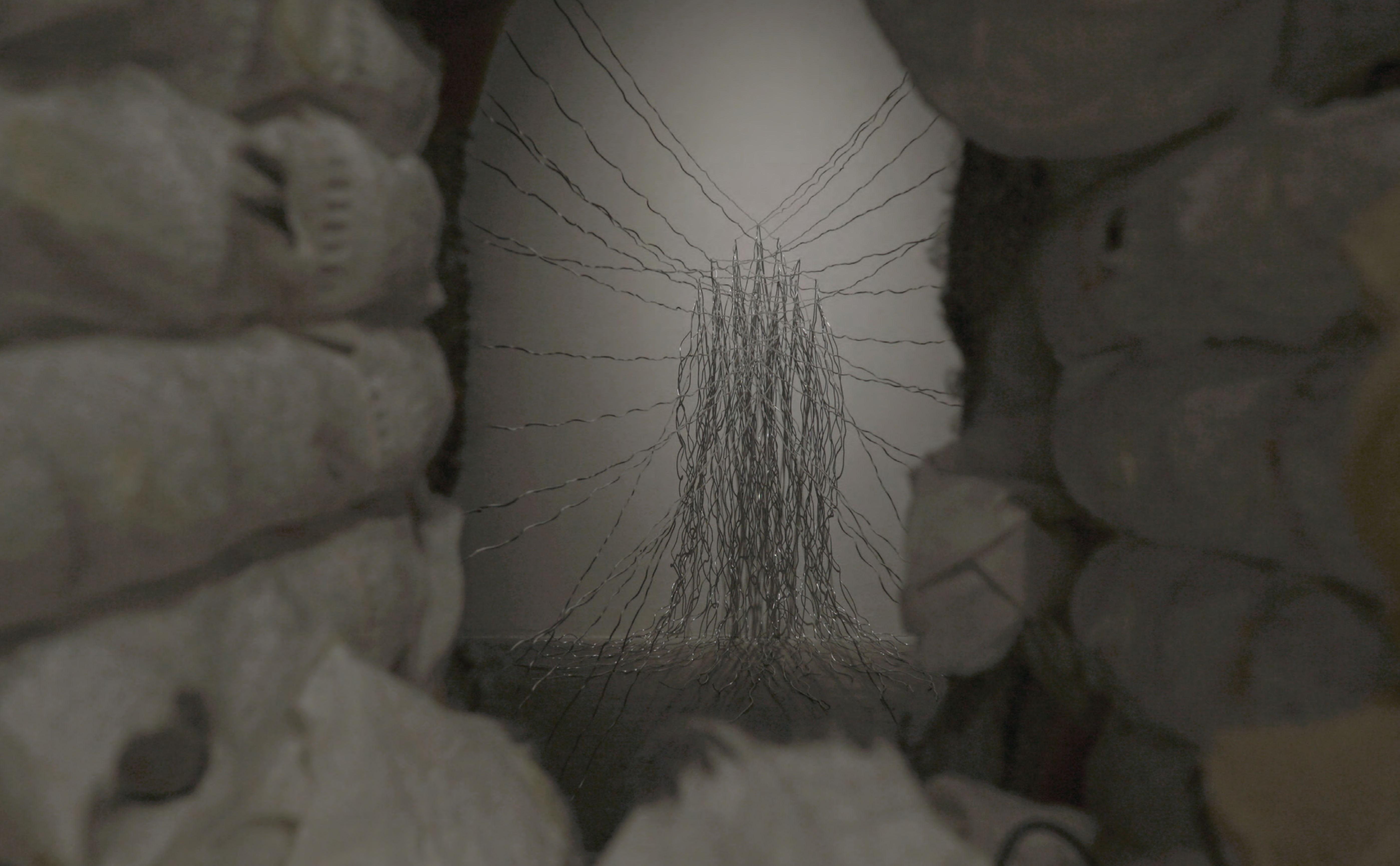
ordering things (door), 2019
2160p video on 65” flatscreen monitor
TRT 5:00, looped

{installation view of *Sculpture Month Houston 2019* at the Silos at SITE Gallery Houston}

Untitled (tattoo study #2), 2019
custom tattooing on silicone rubber,
silver piercing stud, synthetic hair, push-pin,
ink, paper, 11.5×8 inches

IRMAK KARASU

Irmak Karasu is an artist and filmmaker from Turkey. Working in film, video, performance, and writing, she constructs a language that explores haptic visualizations of the female psyche and body under pressure. She holds an MFA in Film/Video from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, and a dual BA in Film & Television and Psychology from Istanbul Bilgi University. She is the recipient of a James Nelson Raymond Fellowship, a Mithat Alam Education Foundation Achievement Award, and a New Artists Society Scholarship. Her works have been screened at a range of film festivals and museums in Helsinki, Istanbul, Shanghai, San Francisco, and Chicago.



In Passing, 2019,
performance and installation
dimensions variable

In Passing reveals the endless negotiations in claiming one's own space through activating a used mattress as a passage. By cutting open a hole in a mattress installed in a doorway and widening it layer by layer, I personify the struggle of passing from one state to another.

In Passing, 2019,
performance and installation
dimensions variable

Mamaville, 2019
film, TRT 20:27

In a small port town, fifteen-year-old Ferah is spending the summer at her grandmother's beach house. The grandmother indulges in watching dating reality shows, while Ferah craves her own sexual release. Pressure is palpable, desire doesn't still, and the summer wind blows strong through every opening.

LEO

leo's practice is focused on the intersection of philosophy, performance studies, and histories. Currently, leo is looking at traditional Western European ceremonies, rituals, canonical media pieces, and the roles performed within, and is researching the relationship between performance, aesthetics, and labor. leo studied Business Management and Arts and Design at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Brazil, from 2010–16; attended the School of Visual Arts of Parque Lage in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2013–14; and earned his MFA at the University of Arts Berlin in 2018.

"Just Another Shadie Bitch" (Act I), 2019
280 posters, extracts of Antigone by Sophocles
(trans. Ruth Fainlight and Robert J. Littman),
extracts of Carmen by Georges Bizet
(adapted and translated from the libretto
by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy)
dimensions variable

[installation view of the *2019 Core Exhibition*
at the Glassell School of Art, Houston]

"Just Another Shadie Bitch" (Act I), 2019
280 posters, extracts of Antigone by Sophocles
(trans. Ruth Fainlight and Robert J. Littman),
extracts of Carmen by Georges Bizet
(adapted and translated from the libretto
by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy)
dimensions variable

[installation view of the *2019 Core Exhibition*
at the Glassell School of Art, Houston]

Rite of Passage, The Graduation Ceremony,
The Crowning, or The be coming, 2018,
performance: read words, acrylic heels, tights,
make up, Turkish yarn, pearl necklace, 10mm
crystal earplugs, The Crown, pearl nail polish,
royal blue nail polish, paper, black latino
queer flesh, texts (Langston Hughes's *The Negro
Artist and The Racial Mountain,* USA, 1926;
Abolition of Slavery – The Golden Law, Brazil,
1888; *Law of Free Birth,* Brazil, 1871; *An Act for
the Abolition of the Slave Trade,* UK, 1807),
wallpaper glue, crinoline, corset,
duration 17:50

KARA SPRINGER

Kara Springer's interdisciplinary practice is particularly concerned with armature—the underlying structure that holds the flesh of a body in place. She utilizes photography, sculpture and site-specific interventions to explore precarity and brokenness in systems of structural support through engagement with architecture, urban infrastructure, and systems of institutional and political power. Springer has lived, worked, and studied in Toronto, Paris, Philadelphia, and New York, where she recently completed the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The Earth & All Its Inhabitants, 2019
ladder, lightbox, cart, dimensions variable

Ten Days Before Freedom, A Hymnal, 2019
twelve archival digital prints in
six double-sided frames, 5×7.5 feet each,
dimensions variable

ANA TUAZON

Ana Tuazon is a writer and curator who completed an MA in Art History and Criticism at Stony Brook University in 2018, where her research centered on the practices of women of color within and outside of feminist art traditions with a particular focus on art practice as a form of radical social and political engagement. In 2018 she co-curated the inaugural Southeast Queens Biennial through the nonprofit No Longer Empty, and she is a 2019 curatorial fellow organizing the opening exhibition of NXTHVN, a new arts space in New Haven, Connecticut. She has presented at conferences including the College Art Association and Theorizing the Web, and she has written for publications including *Temporary Art Review, Hyperallergic,* and *Art Practical*.

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS
PESTS' STRUGGLE FOR ART WORLD VISIBILITY IN THE 1980S

In addition to her decades-long career as a painter, Howardena Pindell has taken on a vast number of roles in the New York art world: she's been an associate curator at the Museum of Modern Art, co-founder of the women's cooperative A.I.R., and a cultural critic and activist. It's hard to imagine how anyone could claim she was discovered late in life, though this is the narrative told by a 2019 *New York Times* article about Black artists receiving long-overdue attention and commercial sales in their seventies. The article cites Pindell's signing, at 70, with a Chelsea gallery as her "breakthrough moment."[1] After years of erasure and a culture of neglect that has long been endemic to the mainstream art world, it appears that Black artists are finally considered a "hot commodity"—Pindell having now surpassed a threshold of commercial prosperity and financial stability that is undoubtedly very welcome at her age, though if it had come sooner (as the *Times* suggests) the pressure to produce more works might not have been the burden it now is. The article's angle, though, is misleading: Pindell's signing was as fortunate for her gallery as it was for her. This misrepresentation points to both the outsized power that the commercial gallery system holds in defining the careers of artists and the lack of awareness towards the critical role that alternative (and oppositional) spaces led by artists of color have held in shaping the field of contemporary art. If corrected, it might tell a different story of power, influence, and cultural transformation.

Like many artists in the 1980s, Pindell's response to the insularity of the art world was to create and occupy alternative spaces for cultural production. And for artists of color, the exclusionary nature of the mainstream art establishment wasn't just characterized by cliquishness or bourgeois political ignorance. It was functionally racist. Critic Michele Wallace argues for a wider acknowledgment of this form of exclusion (especially as it was deployed against Black artists) as a "culture war over race," one that had "everything to do with the programmatic suppression of African American culture."[2] Creating spaces for opposition was crucial, and Pindell did so with seemingly limitless zeal beginning in the late 1970s: she wrote criticism, organized protests, and curated group exhibitions, all with the aim of promoting artists of color and furthering the alternative support networks that helped sustain them. Surprisingly, Pindell's most direct attempt to create an oppositional, anti-racist group has now been all but forgotten. In late 1986, Pindell and several other artists of color, including Janet Henry and Nina Kuo, formed an anonymous activist collective to oppose the entrenched racial

1—Hilarie M. Sheets, "Discovered After 70, Black Artists Find Success, Too, Has Its Price," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), March 23, 2019, 1.
2—Michele Wallace, "The Culture War within the Culture Wars: Race," in *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America* (New York: NYU Press, 1999), 169.

PESTS posters, 1987
Courtesy Janet Henry

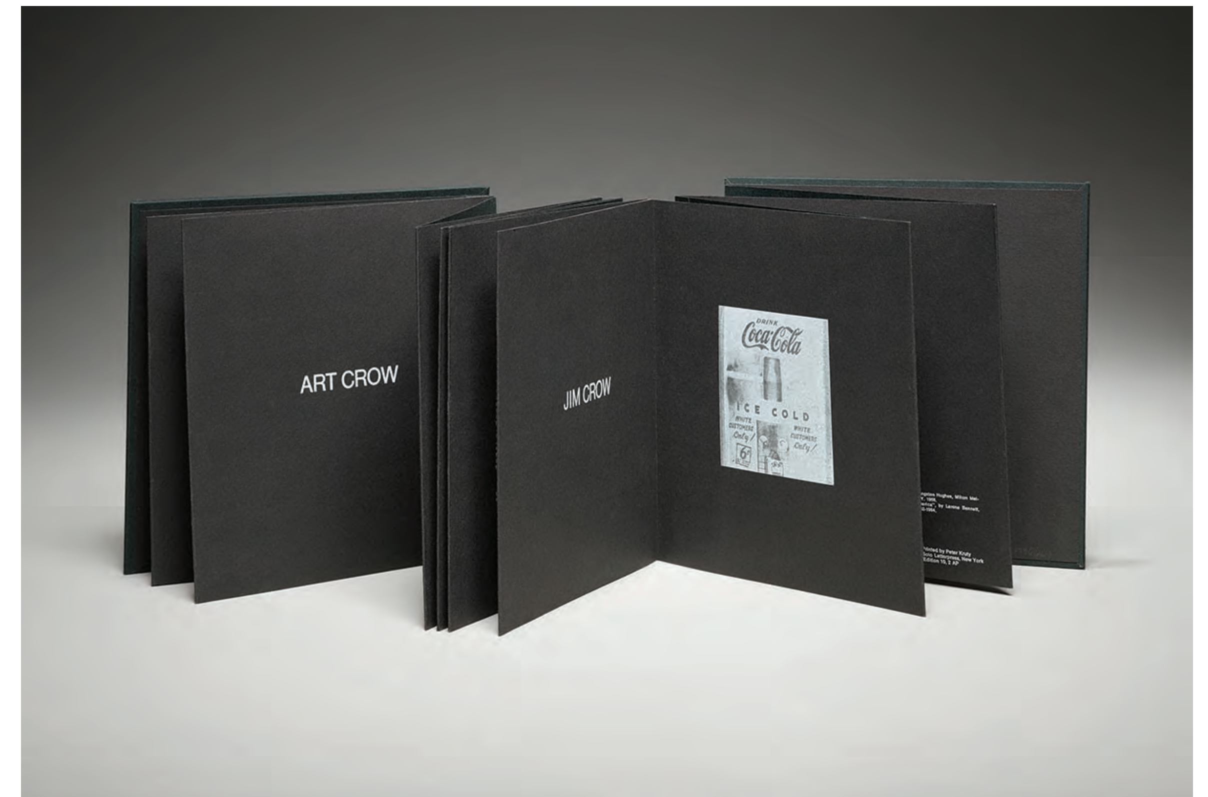
Cover of PESTS newsletter, Winter 1987
Courtesy Janet Henry

discrimination of the New York art world. Calling themselves PESTS, the group issued their first press release in December of that year, with a simple question as its headline: "How often do you see a one-person show by an artist of color?"

This press release, which was mailed to contacts on the members' mailing lists, makes a series of bold verdicts on racism in the art world, announcing that "it is time to reverse art world apartheid." It explains that PESTS' mission is to "publicize the myopia of the art establishment ... the serious omission and de facto censorship practiced by galleries, museums and art publications." Contrasting with the serious nature of their accusations, they end the statement on a playful note, declaring, "We plan to bug the art world!" PESTS, taking a cue from the Guerilla Girls, opted to operate anonymously to protect themselves from art world blackballing and limit the focus on their careers and personalities as individuals. The group made a clever decision in using an insect as their emblem: it gestured simultaneously at the undervalued status of artists of color within the mainstream and PESTS' willingness to strike (or sting?) back. It had been over two decades since the start of the civil rights movement, and liberal positions on equality and discrimination were, in theory, still popular. Yet, in the 1970s and 1980s, race-based exclusion plagued not only the major art museums and commercial galleries in New York, but also the city's alternative spaces. This atmosphere of exclusion didn't strictly manifest itself through gatekeeping, it was also revealed through complicity with white supremacist language and aesthetics—perhaps most notoriously in a 1979 exhibition at Artists Space of a young, white male artist's charcoal-on-paper works disturbingly titled *The Nigger Drawings*.

The protest of that exhibition (initiated and led by Henry and Pindell) has been well-documented elsewhere, but it is worth mentioning here because of the catalyzing effect it had on Pindell's political consciousness.[3] The frustration Pindell felt in dealing with Artists Space was part of what inspired her to create one of her most important works, the video *Free, White and 21* (1980), and to engage in the art world not only as an abstract painter and curator but as a critic who sought to raise awareness about inequality. *Heresies,* a feminist art and politics journal produced from 1977 to 1993, was a frequent publisher of Pindell's writing, and is a prime example of how crucial independent publications were in fostering dialogue and community outside of the mainstream. Pindell recognized this, making the argument that "artists' periodicals [are] important non-commercial alternative space[s]" in 1977.[4] Surely, her view also informed the production of the PESTS' newsletter, the first of which was circulated in early 1987 not long after their initial press release. The newsletter "profil[ed] an alternative version of the standard late-1980s art scene, one composed entirely of performances, lectures, and exhibitions by artists of color," offering listings for

3—Aruna D'Souza offers a thorough account in *Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts* (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2018).
4—Howardena Pindell, "Artists Periodicals as Alternative Spaces," in *The Heart of the Question: The Writings and Paintings of Howardena Pindell* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1997), 87.



ONLY 4 COMMERCIAL GALLERIES IN N.Y. SHOW BLACK WOMEN.*

ONLY 1 SHOWS MORE THAN 1.**

*Cavin-Morris, Condeso/Lawler, Bernice Steinbaum, Shreiber/Cutler
*Cavin-Morris

SOURCE: ART IN AMERICA ANNUAL 1986-7

Box 1056 Cooper Sta. NY, NY 10276 GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

Howardena Pindell, *ART CROW/JIM CROW,* 1988
Artist's book: photoetching and letterpress
Courtesy Yale University Art Gallery
A. Conger Goodyear, B.A. 1899, Fund

Guerrilla Girls, *Only 4 Commercial Galleries in NY Show Black Women,* 1986
Copyright © Guerrilla Girls, courtesy guerrillagirls.com

upcoming shows and events. In the first edition, they promoted an exhibition of Faith Ringgold's story quilts and a panel on the "Appropriation of Artist's Rights" organized by PESTS themselves and moderated by the painter Emma Amos at A.I.R. Gallery.[5] The third and final PESTS newsletter, a blend of exhibition announcements, open calls, statistical analysis, commentary, and humor, was released in the winter of 1987 and was undoubtedly the most dynamic. On the front cover, accompanying an image of a posh table setting complete with crystal glasses and silverware, was the headline "We Serve Whites Only." Instead of food, the plate at the center offers an open pamphlet that reads: "The Following New York City Galleries Are 100% White." Thirty-eight offenders are listed below. The back cover, under the banner "Artists Du Jour," listed galleries that showed some artists of color but still represented white artists in the overwhelming majority.

The act of illuminating statistics concerning representation and exhibition practices transformed what was previously an allegation into an evidentiary truth, again borrowing from the early activities of the Guerilla Girls, in which Pindell was rumored to have taken part. Like the Guerilla Girls, PESTS also created posters that were secretly placed around SoHo, adopting the guerilla-wheatpasting strategy that was also later used by groups agitating around the AIDS crisis during this time: ACT UP, the Silence=Death project, and Gran Fury. In downtown Manhattan, the proliferation of these protest messages led to what Kobena Mercer calls an "unprecedented realignment of private and public spheres," with artists occupying space meant for advertising with incendiary displays of political disenfranchisement.[6] PESTS, producing only four posters, were but a small part of this culture-jamming movement, but their motivation for taking to the streets to communicate their message aligns with those of the other activist groups—it was a demand for a space for dissent, and for visibility, which was indicated by one of their posters that read, "THERE ARE AT LEAST 11,009 ARTISTS OF COLOR IN NEW YORK. WHY WON'T YOU SEE US?" In fact, what appears most critical to PESTS' message is a rhetorical theme related to visibility and being seen: "Why don't you see us?" "Why won't you see us?" "We are not invisible." The succinct texts of these posters avoided calling out specific institutions by name, so that the "you" that is being addressed readily implicates not only art spaces but the white art viewer on the street. This represented a departure from the Guerilla Girls' strategy of "speaking truth to power" in their own posters, which tended to fault museums, galleries, and collectors for perpetuating inequity (though PESTS did opt to name names in their last newsletter).

Deploying this direct form of address out on the streets of Soho also differentiated PESTS' output from that of artists who appropriated advertising aesthetics to address social issues, like Barbara Kruger, who signed with the "rampantly commercial" Mary Boone gallery in 1987. The implied viewer of Kruger's work and that of many politically-motivated artists, argues Grant Kester, does not usually appear, instead becoming "a mythical father figure conjured up out of the artist's imagination in order to be shouted at, attacked, radicalized, or otherwise transformed by the work." Because of this, those who do visit the gallery experience the work at a remove, "consum[ing] the work simultaneously in the first person and the third person."[7] PESTS' posters, with their distinction of "you" versus "us," demanded a first person confrontation with a white audience, provoking an encounter that would lead these viewers to question their own patterns of art consumption.

It's likely that Pindell's influence pushed the Guerilla Girls to begin addressing how the art world discriminated on the basis of race, and not just sex, a direction first evidenced in a poster they produced in 1986, which stated: "Only 4 Commercial Galleries In NY Show Black Women. Only One Shows More Than One." The information that backed up the Guerilla Girls' claim was taken from the 1986–87 *Art in America Annual,* a fairly comprehensive directory of American art galleries and the artists they represented; the 1987–88 *AiA Annual* was also the resource used to create the "We Serve Whites Only" illustration on the cover of the third PESTS newsletter. And it didn't stop there: under her own name, Pindell delivered a report titled "Art (World) & Racism: Testimony, Documentation and Statistics" in June 1987 at the "Agendas for Survival" conference held at Hunter College using the same *AiA* statistics in addition to information she gathered from press releases and printed announcements. She also created an artist's book, *Art Crow/Jim Crow* (1988), which contrasted a list of New York galleries that had exclusively white rosters with images of anti-black Jim Crow-era signage, like a Coca Cola vending machine that sold sodas to "White Customers *Only!*"[8]

Art Crow/Jim Crow recalls a type of racial segregation in the United States that actually governed who could buy and consume certain products. It's an interesting vector by which to consider exclusion in the art world, though not an entirely parallel one. PESTS decried the discriminatory practices of galleries as "de facto censorship," but it wasn't as if galleries were telling artists of color not to express themselves, they were just declining to endorse their creative output by withholding representation. Presumably this was because wealthy collectors were, with few exceptions, white, and mostly interested in investing in white artists—an attitude, as Nina Kuo observes, of "why break the mold?" Even so, Pindell was correct to allege that "artists of color face an industry-wide 'restraint of trade,' limiting their ability to show and sell their work." In Pindell's "Art

5—Uri McMillan, "Is This Performance about You? The Art, Activism, and Black Feminist Critique of Howardena Pindell," in *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 186.
6—Kobena Mercer, "Where the Streets Have no Name: A Democracy of Multiple Public Spheres," in *This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s,* ed. Helen Molesworth (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2012), 142.

7—Grant Kester, "Rhetorical Questions: The Alternative Arts Sector and the Imaginary Public," in *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage,* ed. Grant Kester (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 124.
8—Pindell's motivation to make this book arose from her concerns that legal action (perhaps accusations of libel) might be taken against PESTS. She wanted to protect the group by creating an artwork that would allow her to serve as a target for such accusations. Conversation with Howardena Pindell, March 26, 2019.

(World) & Racism" report, she outlines how exclusion from commercial galleries guarantees similar treatment from supposedly public-minded institutions, because "museums often let the galleries do the primary sifting of artists. If you are locked out at this level you are locked out at all other levels because each feeds the other." The pragmatism of her assessment is reflected in something as seemingly mundane as IRS tax code: in order to claim your occupation as a "professional" artist, you have to sell a certain amount of work; otherwise, you're considered a "hobbyist."[9] It follows that the stakes of entering the art market were twofold: it was not only an issue of having one's art exhibited and seen, it was also necessary to generate capital, both for financial support and for art world validation.

The straightforward tone Pindell used to analyze these economic relationships was unlike the loftier rhetoric used by leftist critics like Lucy Lippard, famously an advocate for change in the art world. Lippard argues in a 1984 essay that "Cultural democracy is a right just like economic and political democracy, the right to make and to be exposed to the greatest diversity of expression...We have learned from Amilcar Cabral that self-expression is a prerequisite for self-empowerment." In the same essay, Lippard notes a decline in organizing activity by Third World and feminist communities, though she claims that they have not been forgotten, citing the examples of A.I.R., Basement Workshop, Just Above Midtown, and Taller Boricua who "made Hispanic, Black, feminist, and Asian art available to those willing to go 'out of their way.'"[10] Lippard's well-meaning observation reflects a difficult duality for artists of color, who were often tasked with representing cultural difference even though many desired to be evaluated for artistic talents unrelated to their ethnic background. But in order to get there, they formed solidarity groups that appeared to be divided along racial lines (and for feminist spaces like A.I.R., unfortunately, this usually meant a white majority). Along with Pindell, PESTS members Henry and Kuo were active also in some of these other communities: Henry, and to a lesser extent Pindell, in JAM; Kuo in Basement, and later an offshoot Asian American collective called Godzilla.

It's natural to think of PESTS as a point within this larger constellation of alternative spaces run by artists of color because they shared members with these organizations (that happened to be longer lasting and better-known). The rise of these spaces from, roughly, 1975 to 1990 speaks to the power of multiracial coalition building and network formation for artists of color responding to both a hostile mainstream art scene and an alternative space movement that had different concerns. Though Basement and JAM were founded in response to the cultural exclusion of Chinese and Black New Yorkers, respectively, both groups opened themselves up to participation by those who did not identify with these categories.[11] Adopting this kind of cultural porosity was critical to resisting the hegemonic view that non-white artists perform difference, and to instead build generative, supportive assemblies for experimentation. "There was more solidarity among these different groups than I see today," Kuo recalls. "It was necessary, because if you were not getting reviews or press, no one knew about your show."[12] Henry speaks about her experience as an artist in 1980s New York City as positive and inspiring, explaining that even as she was aware of how discrimination affected her opportunities, "there was a whole world revolving around this community of creative people of color," though "making money from it was another matter."[13]

PESTS turned out to be a relatively short-lived collective largely because of issues related to money. When the rent was raised on Pindell's SoHo loft, she decided to move uptown, leaving the collective without a central meeting location. Internal correspondence shows that PESTS applied for a grant from the Art Matters foundation in early 1987. They were denied the grant, and began to run out of funding less than a year after announcing their formation. Art Matters, a nonprofit private foundation started by a philanthropist in 1985, distributed grants to artists and groups that engaged with social issues, and had awarded funding to the Guerilla Girls in 1986. The foundation also developed a record of funding other collectives and alternative spaces including Artists Space, The Kitchen, Group Material, and Gran Fury. In the 1980s, spaces and collectives run by artists of color generally fared worse when seeking funding from philanthropists or public sources like the New York State Council on the Arts or the National Endowment for the Arts, which Henry attributes to widespread thinking that "these colored folks can't handle a lot of money, don't throw it at 'em!"[14]

Ironically, the primary goal of groups like PESTS and the community surrounding JAM—for artists of color to be able to exhibit and sell their work—was (at least on a surface register) less radical than those of, say, Group Material, whose mission was to represent through art the social issues affecting the working class or "non art" communities. Group Material's initially activist project, like PESTS', demanded a "more inclusive and democratic vision for art" that would foster a "new social art order."[15] However, Group Material saw this order emerging primarily through a movement away from "rely[ing] on winning validation from bright, white rooms and full-color repros in the art world glossies," while PESTS conceded the benefits of these forms of validation, insofar as they provided crucial leverage into the art market.[16] From different angles, both identified contemporary artists' positionality as deeply rooted in class tension, and that successful artists were, generally speaking, not of the working class. Kester

9—Howardena Pindell, "Art World Racism," in *The Heart of the Question: The Writings and Paintings of Howardena Pindell* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1997), 16-20.
10—Lucy Lippard, "Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 342; 353.

11—Basement saw itself as an open cultural space/platform, hosting exhibitions organized by and featuring artists who were not Asian American, like the show *Angry Art* (1982) curated by Henry and Reine Hauser, with work by Leon Golub, David Hammons, Edgar Heap of Birds, Kuo and Pindell, among others. Kuo likewise exhibited her work at JAM and was featured in the first issue of the gallery's periodical, *Black Currant*.
12—Nina Kuo, conversation with author, September 28, 2019.
13—Janet Henry, conversation with author, November 17, 2019.
14—Ibid.
15—Jan Avgikos, "Group Material Timeline: Activism as a Work of Art," in *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism,* ed. Nina Felshin (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 101; 89.
16—Ibid, 101.

argues that the working class solidarity being grasped for by Group Material was largely one-sided, as "the withdrawal from the elitist art market into a nonprofit enclave doesn't necessarily bring the artist any closer to various segments of the non-art public—nor does it allow artists to transcend their own class and cultural privilege."[17] The core members of Group Material had ambitions to be recognized as artists that eventually outmatched some of their activist principles, and the collective ultimately collaborated with major institutions that hosted their political "exhibitions as art," reaching a much wider audience than they would have otherwise—which prompts critic Jan Avgiko's question of "whether independence from prevailing systems is at all desirable or even possible."[18]

PESTS wasn't shy about disclosing the reality of their financial struggle, calling for donations and stating in their final newsletter in winter 1987 that the collective "has burned all of our financial bridges." No additional newsletters or posters were produced, however, and members returned to focusing on their individual careers as artists. "Everyone in PESTS was so committed to their art," says Kuo, "but we all had to sacrifice that to do this work."[19] And it was truly work, the labor of compiling statistics, exhibition listings, and mailing addresses, in addition to seeking funds to continue publishing their newsletter. Very few people joined PESTS after encountering their posters and newsletters, sensing, perhaps, that such a commitment might detract from the time they had to make art, as it did for Kuo and Henry, who nearly stopped making art during their involvement with the collective. But it wasn't all about sacrifice—PESTS was also, in essence, a consciousness-raising group, one whose members could "express conscious or unconscious ways of dealing with the art world" and its exclusions and rejections.[20] Only by airing these thoughts in a community could individual struggles be understood as systemic ills.

Cultural historian Uri McMillan observes that PESTS' absence from contemporary art discourse is almost "as if its anonymity ensured its swift erasure," but also argues that "the paucity of PESTS' visual and textual remains makes them all the more important."[21] Why? The collective was active for under two years, their very ephemerality seeming to prove their relevance. Unlike other collective efforts, and even art objects, that have been read into an emergent "activism as art" canon, PESTS barely registers in accounts of New York City's artist activist groups of the time.[22] Perhaps what PESTS' case reveals is that rather than the politically-driven artworks of the 1980s, activist organizing is the true harbinger of progress in the art world—but because this kind of work doesn't enter into an art-historical record that is designed to recognize individual authors, it is easily forgotten. However, by the turn of the decade, promising developments signaled that the change PESTS had demanded was finally on the horizon. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality," giving a name to an already well-written theory; *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s,* an ambitious collaboration between The New Museum, The Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, and The Studio Museum in Harlem, attempted to understand American art in the 1980s through an inclusive and multivocal exhibition held across all three institutions. The –extreme cultural, social, and political polarization of the 1980s had given way to the pluralized cultural field that "we take for granted today."[23] In the broadest strokes, PESTS' demands that artists of color receive greater representation in the cultural field were beginning to be met.

However, as Kobena Mercer puts it, this "culture driven triumph of inclusion," enabled by neoliberal corporate interests, also went hand-in-hand with the erasure of spaces of dissent and oppositionality, neutralizing the public sphere. "The fact that the social movements of gender, 'race,' and sexuality won out in achieving recognition for the value of difference did not fully mitigate the ever-deepening inequalities produced by market forces," Mercer argues, and this is a state of affairs deeply felt today.[24] Artist and gallery-complicit gentrification, "toxic" philanthropy, and institutional extractionism (perhaps all of which fall under the umbrella of "artwashing") have replaced identity-based representation and access as the issues central to a conversation on building a more just contemporary art field. Today, this struggle locates its core agenda not in identity-based representational practices, but in questioning the underlying economic structures that continue to mire the leading art institutions in a neocolonial paradigm. This is, as shown by the activities of groups like Decolonize This Place, a struggle for decolonization—but wasn't it always?

If so, the location of the crisis has dramatically shifted from the ideological to the material, and the ideal of "cultural democracy" Lucy Lippard spoke of in 1984 may be more out of reach than ever as independent art spaces and publications struggle with the dearth of public funding while museums become more reliant on private donors. PESTS protested commercial galleries to show that artists of color were not allowed to even enter the art world's playing field—to obtain the representation and financial stability that would allow them to ascend the ladder of institutional recognition—a circumstance indicating wider-reaching structures of racial discrimination and erasure within the American cultural consciousness. But today, increased scrutiny towards the relationship between art and capital has found that elevating artists from historically marginalized groups does little to address the conditions causing marginalization. For artists of color in the U.S., this paradoxical condition tests a long-held model of artistic success, that of the "hot commodity," which is, at its core, deeply imbricated in capitalist inequality no matter the identity of the artist.

17—Kester, 117-119.
18—Avgikos, 108.
19—Kuo, September 28, 2019.
20—Ibid.
21—In *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (2015), McMillan identifies Pindell as a member of PESTS for the first time, drawing connections between her artistic and critical practice and the group's activism, and positioning them within a greater legacy of "insurrectionist visual strategies" used by Black/Third World feminists. See "Is This Performance about You? The Art, Activism, and Black Feminist Critique of Howardena Pindell," pp. 156-185.
22—They do make a notable appearance as the concluding entry in Julie Ault's chronology of alternative spaces and artists' groups active in New York City from 1965-85 (even though they weren't formed until the end of 1986). See Julie Ault, "A Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artists' Groups, and Organizations in New York City, 1965-85," in A*lternative Art New York,* ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 74.
23—Mercer, 146.
24—Ibid, 139.

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The Core Program awards residencies to exceptional, highly motivated visual artists and critical writers who have completed their undergraduate or graduate training and are working to develop a sustainable practice. Established in 1982, the Core artist residencies encourage intensive and innovative studio practice; the Core critical studies residencies, added in 1998, provide an opportunity for writers to pursue independent curatorial and writing projects, broadening the scope of the critical dialogue that is central to the practices of all Core residents.

Residents participate in a yearlong seminar and engage with a wide range of distinguished artists, critics, curators, and art historians who are invited to meet individually with the residents, lead group seminars, and deliver public lectures. The visitors who helped shape this year's program included Hammam Aldouri, Tania Bruguera, Huey Copeland, Darby English, Hannah Feldman, Jack Halberstam, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Helen Molesworth, Anand Patwardhan, Rit Premnath, and Clarissa Tossin.

The residency term lasts nine months, from September to May, and fellows may apply to be readmitted for a second year. Each spring the program mounts an exhibition of work produced during the residency. This yearbook, which is published in conjunction with the exhibition, documents the practices of the artists by including images of past work and provides an opportunity for the writers to publish essays based on their original research. First term participants in the 2019–20 Core Program are Qais Assali, Niloufar Emamifar, Irmak Karasu, Kara Springer, and Ana Tuazon; second term participants are Shobun Baile, Gustavo Gomez-Brechtel, Will Harris, Ryan Hawk, and leo. This year, the fellows proposed various initiatives to enhance their relationship with the Houston arts community, including a monthly roundtable to which the fellows invite their peers to participate in a dialogue about topics related to contemporary art practice.

This is the program's second year in the new Glassell School of Art, a 93,000-square-foot building designed by Steven Holl Architects, which houses state-of-the art facilities for painting, sculpture, ceramics, photography, and printmaking as well as an auditorium; a street-level café; an expansive public plaza and atrium; and the BBVA Compass Roof Garden, a sloping, walkable green roof offering dramatic views of the museum's entire Sarofim campus.