Otherwise Obscured

ERASURE IN BODY AND TEXT
We are grateful to our exhibition sponsors. This exhibition is made possible, in part, thanks to a generous grant from the Connecticut Humanities, a nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The show’s library of poetry books was made possible thanks to an in-kind donation by The Ferguson Library, Stamford, CT.
Otherwise Obscured: Erasure in Body and Text, continues Franklin Street Works’ commitment to creating original exhibitions that support emerging curators and artists. At FSW we strive toward equity and inclusivity, nurturing a caring community that welcomes all. Our guest curators, exhibiting artists, and financial supporters are collaborators in this. I am profoundly grateful to our artists who choose Franklin Street Works as an organization worthy of their work—a place to share their knowledge, perspectives, and talents. I am also in constant amazement of the FSW community, their openness to new ideas, the insightful questions they ask at our programs, and the embodied manner in which they share observations about the work we exhibit. It’s when our artists and community come together that the magic happens—conversations are generated, moments of world building are emitted, and interpersonal connection is palpable. Our financial supporters are an important part of this ecosystem. Contributions from foundations, individual donors, our members, and our Board of Trustees support our ability to pay artists honoraria for new works and have helped make this exhibition possible.
This group show, curated by emerging curator Danilo Machado, epitomizes and expands on these values of inclusivity. His curating brings an exhibition to FSW that improves and enriches our foundation, expanding upward and digging deeper. Visible to the public, Otherwise Obscured goes beyond ideas of equity, working actively to decenter whiteness, heteronormativity, and ableism. Behind the scenes the values that guide Otherwise Obscured created discussions, raised consciousness, and informed decisions about FSW’s choices when hiring vendors and freelancers for this exhibition and our programming moving forward.

Personally, I am grateful to Danilo for his generosity of spirit and his modeling of the “radical kinship” he writes about when evoking that phrase by Johanna Hedva in his exceptional exhibition essay. Working with him, I was perennially in awe of his collaborative practice and curatorial vision. Franklin Street Works is proud to have partnered with Danilo Machado on his first curatorial project and is thrilled to share the work by this intergenerational group of innovative and compelling artists with our visitors.

“Erasure | a rōSHA | a form wherein a poet takes an existing text and erases, blacks out, or otherwise obscures a large portion of the text, creating a wholly new work from what remains.”

—Ángel García, Lessons on Erasure, 2019

“Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science; whether it is the malignant language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek—it must be rejected, altered and exposed. It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed-out mind. Sexist language, racist language, theistic language—all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas.”

—Toni Morrison, Nobel Prize Speech, 1993

“this is the oppressor’s language / yet I need it to talk to you”

Much after I learned English well, it revealed itself as broken. Bright-eyed seven-years-old, I absorbed a second language, outgrew ESL classes like old shoes.

I started writing about writing, asking questions and finding answers, then asking different questions, but also some of the same ones.

Eventually, poems started, too. I relished the way words wound and bent and turned liquid.

English gave me language about queerness and race and gender and art.

I underlined Baldwin and Anzaldúa and Ginsberg. Still, English started slowly unraveling in front of me—exposing itself as rigid, stubborn, nonsensical; as still not-mine, still on the side of form and policy.

And then, my body. A body ambiguously brown enough not to get stopped in high school halls; a body short, a body leaning forward, over books.

I tried to foolishly neutralize this body with language, but it made its presence known—demanded my attention. I tried to listen as it spoke wordless. I still try. This thankful body inhabits boxes of immigration forms, lives in between stanzas and pink bed sheets; on subways with drafts and other bodies, surrounding shelves of books, and sculpture and arms and

Frameworks

Tactics of erasure can be used to uphold systems of oppression and colonization, but can also be counterpoints—artists can turn a subtractive act into an additive one, poke holes in the colonizer’s language and logic, and queer temporal spaces and histories. Otherwise Obscured: Erasure in Body and Text examines relationships between the erasure of text through redaction and illegibility and the erasure of bodies through policy and violence. The group of intergenerational artists presented engage with a range of source materials—including government legislation, museum catalogs, and archival photography—to create work in poetry, video, performance, painting, sculpture, sound, and other media.

The works in Otherwise Obscured blur distinctions between obscuring and revealing, and show how acts of erasure can subvert notions of authority. The exhibition centers the body (quite literally in the subtitle), asserting it as a place of both erasure and resistance and refusing a single relationship or hierarchy to language. In part, the show was sparked by persistent questions: When systems of oppression demand legibility from marginalized bodies, can illegibility become resistance? When visibility becomes—to use the titular phrase from an essential volume—a “trap door,” can obstruction be transgressive? Can erasure expose the flimsiness of language, especially that which is coded with “authority”?

The show’s title riffs on poet Ángel García’s definition of erasure in Lessons on Erasure (2019). Blending historical and personal narrative, the essay meditates upon the consequences and possibilities of erasure, considering what it means to erase, to efface, to redact; to scab and scar. In this meditation of “relief and wound,” the body is ever-present. García writes,

Even our pain [as People of Color] is redacted. Even our trauma is reduced to nothing . . . I know and feel this in my body. Redaction cuts and wounds . . . Just as I have had to pick at the scabs, I have had to parse through language, uncover it, dig out what is beneath the words.

\[1\] Tourmaline, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Eds.), Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility, MIT Press, 2017. The book focuses on the simultaneity of trans representation and violence, considering the “traps” and the “doors” posed by cultural production.

\[2\] Published by Sundress Publications as part of their free Craft Chap Series. See http://www.sundresspublications.com/craft.htm
Even so, the essay sees possibility in poetry to “serve as a process of healing,” or even as a tool of dissent. García’s essay, a guiding text for the exhibition, is visually interpreted by designer Mai-Phuong Bui and included as a takeaway here.

The values of this exhibition also informed my approach. Values of accessibility, transparency, and multiplicity were touchstones throughout the curatorial process, including programming and interpretive materials. It was important to consider, for example, different kinds of accessibility, including: an updated accessibility statement in the exhibition materials, programming such as Verbal Description, Spanish Language, and American Sign Language tours, multiple entry points such as the library, self-guided tour in two languages, and interpersonal discussion and walkthroughs offered daily by the Franklin Street Works staff. It was also important for the exhibition to continue Franklin Street Works’ connections to the local community. Otherwise Obscured presents the inclusion of Connecticut-based artist Noah Fox and several programs in collaboration with local organizations and institutions.

Another key element of the exhibition is the rejection of singularity in favor of multiplicity and variability. This is seen in the multimedia, multidisciplinary practices of the artists, as well as in the collaboration, seriality, and fluidity that form much of the work. For example, Alex Dolores Salerno’s collaboration with Francisco Eraso, Jr., Perfect Lovers, is both ongoing and ever-changing. In Otherwise Obscured, the artists are presenting a site-specific iteration of the work. This will be one of several site-specific installations and activations. Jennifer Tamayo and Joey De Jesus will also be presenting commissioned, site-specific works and performances that build and expand on previous projects. This continuum of an artist’s practice is also reflected in a selection of three films by Ana Mendieta, shown throughout the run of the show, each for approximately one month.

Otherwise Obscured centers marginalized artists. The exhibition follows the artists’ leads in rejecting a single genre or approach, decentering the White, normative gaze in the process. This essay is one piece of a multi-faceted project, and is not meant to hold “authority” over any works in the show. One of the central themes of the exhibition is how artists question, redact, and upend “official” documents and language. This essay aspires to reject the single author and insists on carrying out the exhibition’s collaborative values. This essay serves as, at best, a documentation of a rich and fluid constellation of artists and practices, and an accessible tool for contextualizing them.

History

Some art histories trace engagement with erasure to conceptual artists of the 1950s. One of the signposts in this history is Robert Rauschenberg’s Erased de Kooning Drawing (1953). Rauschenberg was interested in exploring the ideas of his White Painting (1951) through drawing, and nervously approached prominent Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning about doing an erasure. Inscribed and framed by fellow artist and friend Jasper Johns, the work shows the result of Rauschenberg erasing a drawing by an older artist he idolized. Scholars and viewers continue to analyze the meaning of this erasure, with some seeing it as a destructive act, others as paying homage, still others as a joke. In an interview, Rauschenberg states that the work is “not a negation, it’s a celebration.”³ The exhibition winks at this history with Peter Baldes’s 2007 video parody, where de Kooning’s body is selected then erased digitally from a photograph. Baldes further contextualizes the work, stating “This piece, like many works made at this time is a quick reaction to a historical art idea being translated into the still new context of Internet Art.”³ For Baldes, it conjures ever-present questions about ownership, manipulation, permanence in digital space, asking “What is erasure in a space where things can’t be forgotten?”³

³ Interview, SFMoMA, 1999.

³ It is worth noting that Chicago’s Dinner Party, with its Western focus and tokenizing of only a few women of color, participates in its own erasure. See Alice Walker’s 1979 critique in Ms. Magazine, among others.

³ In the 1970s and 80s, social movements led by People of Color, women, LGBTQ+ people, and other marginalized groups took up the issue of political and social representation in conjunction with visibility in art. Feminist artists and critics, for example, noted the historical erasure of women in the arts, exemplified by Judy Chicago’s The Dinner Party (1974-1979)⁴ and Linda Nochlin’s 1971 essay...
“Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” During this period, artists and activists established institutions, galleries, and collectives to counter still-present gaps in representation.

Charles Leslie and Fritz Lohman’s collection and exhibitions, which started in the same year as the Stonewall Uprisings in 1969, became the foundation for the Leslie–Lohman Museum—the only museum dedicated to LGBTQ+ art and lives. El Museo del Barrio began the same year to tell the history of Puerto Ricans and their diaspora after parents saw it erased from their children’s studies. Other examples include the Just Above Midtown Gallery, established in 1974 and led by Linda Goode Bryant to center art by Black artists; and the editorial work of artist Harmony Hammond, who is featured in this exhibition. Two major publications critical to countering the erasures of the gay and feminist movements were Hammond’s catalog Statements by Lesbian Artists (1978) and her book Silueta del Laberinto (Labyrinth Blood Imprint) (1974), which featured Kaphar’s etched portraits of incarcerated men who share their stories, this exhibition seeks to map some of the ways histories, this exhibition seeks to map some of the ways histories, this exhibition seeks to map some of the ways emerging artists working today are considering many kinds of erasure.

Engaging language and material to consider different modes of legibility in their work, 1990s artists like Glenn Ligon, Paul Pfeiffer, and Jenny Holzer, continue to work in these modes. Carrying on this legacy are contemporary artists like Titus Kaphar and Alexandra Bell, who have practices deeply concerned with the erasure of body and text. Kaphar’s work appropriates old-world painting techniques to center Black bodies, particularly those impacted by racist criminal justice systems. In The Jerome Project, Kaphar uses tar and gold leaf to obscure portraits of incarcerated men who share his father’s name. Most recently, MoMA PS1 presented Redaction: A Project by Titus Kaphar and Reginald Dwayne Betts, which featured Kaphar’s etched portraits of incarcerated people overlaid with court documents redacted into poetry by Betts. That exhibition featured the Redaction font, which is intentionally used here in the cut vinyl stanzas of Joey De Jesus’s poem PROMESA that are applied to walls throughout the space. During the 2017 TED Talk “Can art amend history?,” Kaphar takes white paint to his replica of a Dutch Frans Hal painting to recenter the young black figure. Because the white paint is mixed with linseed oil, the brushstrokes covering the white figures will eventually fade. The work, titled Shifting the Gaze, is currently on view at the Brooklyn Museum in One: Titus Kaphar.

While Kaphar’s Shifting the Gaze comments on (art) historical erasure, the work of Alexandra Bell has a focus on media. In Bell’s Counternarratives project, the artist annotates and enlarges pages from The New York Times to reveal bias around race and gender. Wheaptasted in public spaces, Bell interrogates articles that report on the killing of Michael Brown, Olympian Usain Bolt, and the 2017 Charlottesville attack. Her new series, No Humans Involved: After Sylvia Wynter (2018-2019), part of the current Whitney Biennial, examines the New York Daily News’s coverage of the Central Park Five. In Bell’s words, “Highlighting and redacting are two critical techniques to my practice. I’m really trying to figure out how to force the viewer’s eye into particular information” (akin to Kaphar’s efforts in Shifting the Gaze). Bell continues, stating that in No Humans Involved, she “use[s] blackout to cover up images, to cover up text that really focuses on the victim.” Through this series, she is looking to “reorient the viewer around the idea of the victim and thinking about these young boys as also victims.”

Kaphar and Bell are just two of the most visible examples of artists considering erasure today, weaponizing both the archive and current pieces of culture as “evidence.” Their practices, and the practices of many of the artists in Otherwise Obscured, recall the words of Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-88), whose canvases were full of crossed-out text and bodies, “I cross out words so you will see them more; the fact that they are obscured makes you want to read them.” While considering these (art) histories, this exhibition seeks to map some of the ways that emerging artists working today are considering many kinds of erasure.

The history of art and erasure has also intersected significantly with poetry, particularly since the 1970s. Key works in this history include Ronald Johnson’s Radi

6 Mendieta’s Silueta del Laberinto (Labyrinth Blood Imprint) (1974) was featured in “The Great Goddess” issue, published in 1978. (This is recounted in Howard Ornansky’s Forward to Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta, University of California Press, 2015.)

7 The Redaction font is by Jeremy Mickel and Forest Young.
Os (1977), sourced from John Milton’s Paradise Lost, and Tom Phillips’s A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel, which was first published in 1970 and is represented in our library. More recent works of erasure poetry include The 0 Mission Repo by Travis Macdonald (2008), sourced from the 9/11 Commission Report, The ms of my kin by Janet Holmes (2009), sourced from Emily Dickinson’s poetry, and M. NourbeSe Philip’s Zong! (2011), also featured in our library. Along with the volumes in the exhibition library, Otherwise Obscured considers the ongoing legacy of erasure poetry with the inclusion of poems like Joey De Jesus’s PROMESA and Noelle de la Paz’s UNCONTAINABLE TOPOGRAPHY: An Erasure, and with public programming featuring poets Candace Williams, Malcolm Tariq, Jan-Henry Gray, and others.

“Official” Documents As Source Text
De la Paz, De Jesus, Pollari, Chun, Maravilla, Holzer, Bebahani

Exhibiting artists Noelle de la Paz, Joey De Jesus, Niina Pollari, and Jesse Chun all shape-shift “official” government documents into reclamatory poems. De la Paz’s video UNCONTAINABLE TOPOGRAPHY: An Erasure (2018) presents the poet’s “process of stripping a colonial text,” specifically the 1903 Description of the Philippines compiled by the War Department “with the aid of the Chiefs of Bureau and experts in the Philippine Government.” De la Paz notes that the handbook was written as part of the United States’ efforts to develop a “The Philippine Exposition” for the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis (which took place the same year as the Louisiana Purchase Exposition). The fair included a “living exhibit” of more than one thousand indigenous Philippine people, primarily Igorot people. Between natural imagery and red handwriting, the document’s language fades to reveal de la Paz’s poem, where the province of Abra and the Sierra mountains “run riot” and “are free.” The poem utilizes erasure to reveal and “overwrites the dominant narrative with a story that centers who and what the original text claims ownership over.”

Also reconsidering government documents is Joey De Jesus. De Jesus’s sestina (a six-stanza form where each stanza contains six lines) PROMESA is a redaction of the 122-page Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (H.R. 4900), signed by President Obama in 2016. A response to the island’s debt crisis, PROMESA (meaning “Promise”) established the Fiscal Control Board to oversee the restructuring of Puerto Rico’s debt, which has resulted in significant cuts to education and health care. The year after the Act was signed, the island was struck by Hurricane Maria, resulting in, to use De Jesus’s words, “No electricity, water, nothing to board.” The current Administration denied the size of the death count from the hurricane and their recovery support remains insufficient.

Under the context of these tensions, Puerto Ricans recently organized protests against Governor Ricardo Roselló, who had been in the office since 2017. Days of mass demonstrations followed after nearly 900 pages of sexist and homophobic messages mocking Puerto Ricans were leaked by the Center for Investigative Journalism. The sustained protests, which resulted in his historic resignation, also made a connection between the Governor and his involvement in the junta (board) established by PROMESA, with many declaring it the next target. The poem is presented throughout the galleries and ends with a call to action, a call to “challenge unlawful board.” De Jesus activated the poem with a performance at the show’s opening reception using overhead projectors, transparencies, and voice.

With permanent marker, poet and translator Niina Pollari blacks out two pages from United States naturalization forms and transforms them to paraphrase poetry. In doing so, Pollari reveals the core anxieties in the form’s euphemistic bureaucracy (“Have you been in total terror,” it asks, with two checkboxes for “Yes” and “No”) and captures an ongoing era of xenophobia, racism, and nationalism.

Immigration forms are also the starting point for multimedia artist Jesse Chun, whose erasure poems Valid From Until (2014) isolate bits of their bureaucratic language. One page wonders “who will bear the cost?” another asks, “can you return?” While Pollari uses marker to black out most of the language of the forms, Chun works digitally to create vast blank space on linen pages.
In her *Blueprints* (2016) series, Chun strips these forms of all their language, leaving only the outlines of boxes and rectangles on vellum paper. The Minimalist series, which resists easy material categorization (each is at once photograph, drawing, sculpture, and collage), considers complex ideas around home-making by overlaying erased and manipulated immigration forms in a manner that at once conjures bureaucracy and architectural blueprints.

To create both series, Chun uses a scanner—a common tool of bureaucracy—as a camera. Once scanned, she digitally erases the forms into poems and blueprints, a process she describes as therapeutic. In her own words, Chun is “concerned with the conditions of language generated by bureaucracy, migration, and systems of communication,” using her work to investigate “how language is used to validate or categorize people” and how English functions “as agency and currency.”

As with many of the artists and writers represented, Chun has a personal stake in her practice, as her body of work becomes documentation for her immigration process. Another example is in the show’s library, where Jan-Henry Gray’s book *Documents* appropriates and erases the author’s own immigration paperwork.

*Otherwise Obscured* also features Chun’s collaboration with Guadalupe Maravilla. Maravilla’s multimedia practice considers fictions, rituals, and border crossings. Chun and Maravilla’s sound piece is a documentation of a 2018 performance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music entitled *Liquid Myths*. The multilingual performance blends folklore music to consider “the traditional, mythical, failed, and contemporary tales of land, displacement, and mobility. . . sonically mixing fragments of their cultural memories [to] author a new kind of folklore—one that subverts the homogenous and nationalist narrative, and opens up a transcultural geography of sound.”

Much of Jenny Holzer’s work is about the hyperlegible and hypervisible. In series like *Truisms* (1977–79) and *Inflammatory Essays* (1979–82), Holzer’s pithy, political language often occupies public spaces: her words inhabit T-shirts, billboards, and theater marquees, and are projected onto buildings and mountains. Since these series, Holzer has shifted her relationship to language, taking a long hiatus from writing her own texts between 2001 and 2017. “I found that I couldn’t say enough adequately,” she has observed, “and so it was with great pleasure that I went to the texts of others.”

The “texts of others” are central in her series of Redaction Paintings, which began in the 2000s. For these large-scale works, Holzer mines archives for letters, memos, statements, and reports from the Department of Defense, the president, the FBI, the CIA, and other sources to portray an era of war, torture, and terrorism. The documents are a visual blend of typed language, handwriting, seals, stamps, and signatures at different stages of redaction. In some, the only legible text is “For Official Use Only.”

Holzer seeks to make her oil on linen paintings “as precise, as clear as possible,” adding that “most of the paintings are only three times page size because I wanted them to refer to the actual documents. Other ones I made very tall, so that they would be physically overwhelming.” An early grouping of these was exhibited at Cheim & Read in 2006. In the catalog, critic and artist Robert Storr writes: “By reversing her earlier strategy of articulating psycho-social riddles, confusions, and ambivalences, Holzer is, to the extent that her research will allow, locating the exact sources and sites of institutional misdeeds and naming the names of those who have taken it upon themselves to abrogate or rewrite the law,” making it “inescapably clear that planned as well as collateral deaths and disasters are the underpinnings of our social ‘well-being.’”

This precision and research were not taken lightly. Holzer states:

> I know that my researchers and I have had to stop, at various times, reading the material for these redacted paintings. Sometimes it’s a relief to come to the pages that are wholly blacked out because then, for at least a page or so, you don’t have to read what was there.

*Otherwise Obscured* is, in part, interested in the consequences of reading violent text. Holzer’s process underscores the impact of these kinds of documents and even considers their redaction as relief.
When asked if these large-scale works are a form of protest, Holzer stated: “Presenting the documents about torture is a protest. Showing love poems is not.”16 In Otherwise Obscured, the pastel colored rectangles of WERE WILLING TO PAY (2014) momentarily transform the sinister documents into a Minimalist painting, a distraction from the redacted intelligence they represent.

In her research-based practice, exhibiting artist Bahar Behbahani also uses official documents as source material. In the Garden Coup series (2015-2016), Behbahani considers Persian garden scholar Donald Wilber (1907-97), the CIA operative who led the 1953 coup against democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq. Made after a significant period of reading and research, Behbahani’s large-scale paintings allude both to the redacted documents and garden landscapes. Mining more than 200 pages of CIA documents, Behbahani transfers the exact black redaction blocks atop her intricate abstract surface of patterns, color, and flowers. The document is projected onto the canvas, its redactions determining which sections of Behbahani’s work becomes obscured. The exhibition features Consolidating the Plan (2016), which epitomizes this process of intricacy and erasure.

Even before this series, Behbahani was drawn to Persian gardens as a site of metaphor, colonialism, and power, describing them as “represent[ing] traces of what’s lost.”17 Through her research, their “politically coded” nature—“a garden plot of sorts”—became evident; realizing they had “more to do with geopolitics than anything else, and that Persian history reflects a history of colonialism.”18 This meeting of metaphor and politics is particularly present in the Garden Coup series. Behbahani states, “I look at the coup metaphorically through the Persian garden, following our tradition of storytelling and poetry, but I also refer to some real facts from that unfortunate incident.”19 The coup, approved by President Eisenhower and executed in conjunction with Great Britain, sought to “effect the fall of the Mossadeq government” and “replace it with a Pro-Western government.”20 Many consider the coup one of the causes for the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and a blueprint for other destabilization efforts conducted by the United States.21

20 “Campaign to install a Pro-western government in Iran,” released CIA document. This and other documents were released as part of the United States National Security Archive at George Washington University in 2013, sixty years after the coup.
22 Joel Lang, Norwalk artist Noah Steinman confronts biased thinking on sex and race, on view in Library of the Archive, 2017, CTPost.

Books & Additive Gestures
Red Star, Fox, Hammond

While some artists in the exhibition remove language, Apsáalooke (Crow) artist Wendy Red Star counters erasure through an additive process. In 1880, six Native American chiefs traveled to Washington, D.C. to discuss the Northern Pacific Railroad expanding through Crow land. Charles Milton Bell’s photographs of the chief’s become the source for Red Star in the Medicine Crow & The 1880 Crow Peace Delegation Series (2014). Red Star’s digital, red text annotations of the archival photographs from the Smithsonian collection assert the individuality ignored by Bell and, more broadly, by the non-Native, settler-colonial gaze. The artist’s selection for Otherwise Obscured details Medicine Crow’s “hair extensions made from people in mourning,”23 quotes Plenty Coup saying “The ground on which we stand is sacred ground. It is the blood of our ancestors,”24 recounts Old Crow’s participation in 1884’s “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West,” and tells of the nineteen wives of Pretty Eagle. Through the addition of these details—and in her broader, multimedia practice—Red Star activates the archive to address the ongoing political and visual erasure of Native people.

Also altering objects from the archive is Connecticut-based artist and educator Noah Fox (formerly Steinman). Three of Fox’s books, A Parent’s Guide to Preventing Homosexuality, The Intimate Male, and Female Sex Perversion will be on view throughout the run of Otherwise Obscured. The artist uses a mix of materials, including paint, ink, and found images to transform these objects containing sexist and homophobic messages. Fox describes his process as “less about concealing their intent” and more about exposing it by covering the book’s “pleasantries and packaging.” Fox is interested in removing these books from circulation “so that they couldn’t be used for their intended purpose,” and instead “creating something beautiful, or at least interesting, out of these dark, offensive texts.”22 Fox’s alterations poke at the authority of the book, covering in order to reveal.

Harmony Hammond’s A Queer Reader (2010), on view in the exhibition library, also considers a book from the archive. To create the print, Hammond scanned the jacket of a vandalized copy of 1993’s A Queer Reader: 2500 Years
of Male Homosexuality}, edited by Patrick Higgins. The cover features *Le Marin* by French photographers Pierre and Gilles, who were “well known for their highly stylized and heavily retouched performative portraits of gay male archetypes.” Their “idealized . . . rosy and sanitized” sailor is contrasted by the sharp lines of the vandal and the continued realities of homophobia. This tension, along with Hammond’s enlargement and cropping of the original cover all question the many meanings of “reader” and “reading,” particularly in the context of erasure, censorship, and vandalism. Hammond’s decade-spanning, multimedia practice has included influential archiving, curating, and publishing of feminist and lesbian artists.

Time-Based Media & The Body
Black, Muñoz, Mendieta

In Hannah Black’s *My Bodies* (2014), cropped images of White men flash over a soundtrack of back-to-back R&B samples sung by women of color (Beyoncé, Rihanna, Ciara, among others). They sing the words “my body,” yet their bodies are not seen. Instead, sometimes-grinning stock photos of White men fade into images of caves. These natural constructions contrast the human ones, alluding perhaps to a place where sound travels and echoes. In overlayed text, a mythic poem tells of a death “bathed in the light of your laptop . . . your phone still in your hand scrolling without end.” It is a death where you wake up “beside the water of forgetting . . . translated back into yourself and back . . . into the Manhattan of your next life with no cops or broken hearts.” Black’s imaginings blur the digital and the natural, as well as the sonic and the visual, to question how bodies are mediated, heard, and seen. Like Chun and Maravilla’s *Liquid Myths*, the work rejects borders of genre and borrows broadly to suggest new possibilities.

Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz and Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta contemplate the transformed body in nature using the moving image. In *Re/trato* (2003), Muñoz enacts both meanings of the title: “retrato” is portrait—here, the ever-fading face of the artist painted with water on hot concrete—and “trato” means having tried, with the prefix “re” implying an “again.” The silent video becomes a meditation on the futility of permanence and the fading of memory, themes key to Muñoz’s ongoing multimedia practice. In an earlier steel work, *Aliento (Breath)* (1999), viewers fogging the surface with their breath reveal obituary portraits from Colombian newspapers. Like *Re/trato*, the work considers bodies and memory, particularly in the context of a country impacted by political violence and disappearances.

Ana Mendieta’s body of work also contains many kinds of erasure and disappearance. While made in the art historical era of Land, Body, and Video Art, Mendieta’s work refuses a single categorization. Mendieta’s multi-disciplinary practice often suggests a faded moment with only traces of what remains, often engaging the natural through new technology. In “Difficult Times: The Films of Ana Mendieta,” Rachel Weiss writes that “Mendieta’s version of film time refuses the usual consolidations of the narrative, which means we need other, more difficult kinds of time to set them in,” suggesting the lenses of “Memory Time,” “Liturgical Time,” “Natural Time,” “Shrouded Time,” and “Narrow Time.”

In *Otherwise Obscured*, three silent films show the artist’s engagement with nature and the body, including the elements of fire and water. They are part of Mendieta’s *Silueta* series (1973-80), which shows “her interest in the earth as a site to address issues of displacement by recording the presence of her body—or the imprint it left behind.”

In *Alma, Silueta en Fuego* (1975), Mendieta’s *Silueta* is surrounded by dead November leaves and sits on the space the artist dug for *Silueta Sangrienta*, which was filmed earlier that month. The cardboard *Silueta* is wrapped in a white sheet soaked in combustible fluid. Leaves rustle as the white cloth catches fire and becomes engulfed, leaving only the flames visible. The fire begins to die and the blackened cloth, surrounded by earth, is revealed before the film cuts. Although the film rolled off, Mendieta did make a slide of the scorched figure and later created a print of the image.

17 Weiss’s essay is part of the catalog *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*, University of California Press, 2015.
Water ripples, reflects, and runs around the raised outline of a figure with raised hands in the Super 8 film Silueta de Arena (1978). The water’s gentle downstream running through and around the sand does not dramatically transform the figure during the length of the video, but does allude to the long, geological formation of sand and the ever-renewing cycle of water. For Mendieta, it was critical to use materials like “dirt and sand . . . because these speak about the history of the earth, of nature, too.”

Lastly, Energy Charge (1975) presents a central tree, perhaps an allusion to the biblical Tree of Life, and a figure who walks towards it. The figure, shaped like many of Mendieta’s other Siluetas, is blazing red; its raised arms echo the tree’s main branches. The Silueta fades before the video does, leaving seconds of absence to fill the frame. To create this effect, Mendieta adjusted the color of her film in a video processor, then filmed that footage “off the monitor with a special 16mm camera . . . designed . . . to copy video without the usual flickering produced by the frame rate differential between video and 16mm film.”

Cuban Conjuring
Tamayo, Salerno, Eraso, Jr.

Otherwise Obscured presents an intergenerational range of artists considering many artistic legacies. Jennifafer Tamayo expands upon her 2014 redactions and protest of Dia:Beacon’s Retrospective Carl Andre: Sculpture as Place, 1958–2010, presenting new, commissioned works addressing the erasure of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta.28 Tamayo works to “dig up” Mendieta “from a language that worked hard to obscure her” by blacking out pages from Mendieta’s other Siluetas, is blazing red; its raised arms echo the tree’s main branches. The Silueta fades before the video does, leaving seconds of absence to fill the frame. To create this effect, Mendieta adjusted the color of her film in a video processor, then filmed that footage “off the monitor with a special 16mm camera . . . designed to copy video without the usual flickering produced by the frame rate differential between video and 16mm film.”

Tamayo’s broader practice engages many modes and media to grapple with language and the political body.

In her book Red Missed Aches Read Missed Aches Red Mistakes Read Mistakes (2011), which is featured in the exhibition’s library, Tamayo manipulates text and image to stitch together experiences of femininity, citizenship, and agency. The book appropriates personal memento and government forms (like Pollari, Chun, and Gray), blurring borders between Spanish and English, between the personal and the political.

Alex Dolores Solerno and Francisco Eraso, Jr. are working in the legacy of another Cuban artist, Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996). Their ongoing collaboration Perfect Lovers (2019-) presents medical paraphernalia in glass jars and references González-Torres’s dual, synchronized clocks, “Untitled” (Perfect Lovers). Salerno and Eraso are partners whose individual and collaborative practices explore queerness, disability, and care. In their site-specific iteration for Otherwise Obscured, Eraso and Salerno present two antique show globes, connecting to their historical use in apothecaries, where, filled with brightly-colored liquid, they signaled a place one could receive care, much like a barber pole at barbershops.

Utilizing paraphernalia from many people in their circle of friends, this dual portrait centers the collective. It speaks to the necessity of care networks, particularly under the limitations of the medical industrial complex. This connects to Johanna Hedva’s Sick Woman Theory, which “redefines existence in a body as something that is primarily and always vulnerable,” and reminds us that the body and mind are sensitive and reactive to regimes of oppression.” Hedva argues that

what is so destructive about conceiving of wellness as the default, as the standard mode of existence, is that it inverts illness as temporary. When being sick is stigmatized, it allows us to conceive of care and support in the same way. Care, in this configuration, is only required sometimes. When sickness is temporary, care is not normal.”29

Solerno and Eraso, Jr. counter this erasure of needs with their gestures of care which, like their collaboration, are ongoing and in community.

26 Ana Mendieta interviewed by Joan Marter, February 1, 1985, Ana Mendieta Archives, Galerie Lelong, New York; as referenced in Howard Oransky’s “Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta,” in the volume of the same name.

27 Laura Wertheim Joseph, Filmmography Production Notes in Mendieta Archives, Galerie Lelong, New York.

28 Andre, Mendieta’s partner, was indicted and acquitted in her death in 1988.
In Pillow Fight (2019), Alex Dolores Salerno fills used pillowcases with personal medical paraphernalia and that of their friends. The stained pillows’ obscured content refuses the legibility and diagnosis often demanded by the medical establishment. Salerno is influenced by French philosopher Édouard Glissant’s Poetics of Relations, where Glissant defines opacity as “that which cannot be reduced” and clarifying that “[t]he opaque is not the obscure, though it is possible to be so and accepted as such.” Pillow Fight, which also recalls Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s billboard of an empty bed (“Untitled,” 1991), evokes acts of both rest and fight.

Materials of Color
Lewis, Pope.L

Chicago-based artists Tony Lewis and Pope.L both explore the term “People of Color” by stretching language and layering materials. In Lewis’s large-scale People of Color Series, words and letters floating on the page are literally strung together, presenting many kinds of visual and linguistic relationships to the phrase. For Lewis, his own relationship to it has morphed, stating, “It’s nonsense, on one level, but at the same time it’s charged, and feels like it’s supposed to mean something. It does tend to make sense, sort of, when you break it up into fragments and start moving parts of it around, which is what I do in the drawings.” In Otherwise Obscured, his work fear the elpoep (2019) evokes both the panic towards racialized bodies and the resistance potential they hold. Lewis also engaged with erasure in his 2018 Hirshorn exhibition, Anthology 2014-2016, which featured redactions of the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes. Two works from Pope.L’s Skin Set series proclaim “Green People Are Pumice” and “Purple People Are What Holds Our Look Together” within layers of ink, marker, ballpoint, and oil stick. The series takes “People of Color” literally, playing with language and material to consider race, the limitations of categories, and the potentials of layering to achieve depth. (Others from the series read “Orange People Are Famous” and “Black People Are Cropped.”) The series stemmed from the artist asking, “Do I, as an illegible person, have the right to legibility and if so, what would that legibility look like as a project?” Pope.L is specifically interested in weaponizing humor “as a lubricant to loosen up, make wobbly or even instrumentalize legibility for [his] own uses.” This idea of the illegible body is explored in Pope.L’s decade-spanning practice, and throughout the exhibition.

The Skin Set series recalls the work of Jewish lesbian artist Louise Fishman (b. 1939), whose Angry Paintings from the 1970s named women around her in energetic blends of acrylic, charcoal, and pencil. Angry Harmony (1973), for one, references the artist Harmony Hammond, whose work is included in this exhibition. Fishman describes the painting—filled with X’s and shades of blue, green, and red—as “formal and strong, just like Harmony’s work at the time.” Like Pope.L’s Skin Set series, Fishman’s iterations weaponize painterly materiality to shout a language of protest, with a similar sense of cheek and outward gaze.

Conclusion
Counters to Erasure

In Otherwise Obscured, artists face different kinds of erasures through a range of media. In handwritten red annotations, in lush landscapes of caves or sand, and in black blocks of blocked language, the artists reclaim, reduce, and react to the erasure of bodies and text. I’m left thinking about what is at stake for marginalized bodies who are erased by language, by action, and by others—especially when that erasure is violent and oppressive. Many of the artists in this exhibition make their tactics of countering those erasures known, but here at the conclusion I want to consider two.

One of Phil America’s flags from the Colors of Progress series is installed outside Franklin Street Works as part of Otherwise Obscured. The flag, made in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Uprisings, quotes comedian Wanda Sykes and proclaims “I AM HERE TODAY BECAUSE I REFUSED TO BE UNHAPPY.” Its message, overlayed over the colors of the gay and trans
flags, is one of resistance. The flag uses the updated gay flag developed in Philadelphia in 2017, which adds a brown and black stripe symbolizing the inclusivity of People of Color, who continue to be erased from LGBTQ+ histories and spaces. These colors are combined with the flag colors representing trans people, another community that continues to face specific violence and exclusion. America describes the series, which quotes from LGBTQ+ people and protests, as “a disruption to a complacent landscape, a reconstitution of a material that has historically served to uphold regressive notions of power changed so that it may be a site for visual discourse and dissent... Appropriating the flag in this way seems to almost neutralize it, stripping it and using its own tactical agency against itself.” The series and the flag’s statement is unapologetic, and suggests one strategy to counter systems of erasure: showing up and taking space as fully yourself.

In considering counters to violent erasures, I also want to re- evoke Sick Woman Theory, where Hedva concludes that

*(t)he most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other’s vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care.*

I hope that the bodies and words in this exhibition, essay, and set of programming help remind us of this radical kinship—because no matter the cross-outs, the denials, the blank forms; it is what is going to imagine us forward and vibrant and vulnerable, together.
Checklist
Phil America
“I Am Here Today Because I Refused To Be Unhappy” —Wanda Sykes, 2019
Fabric, sublimated ink
Made as part of the interactive artwork Colors of Progress on the occasion of Pride 2019 and the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising
Courtesy of Colors of Progress

Peter Baldes
de kooning, November 12, 2007
Photoshop, Quicktime Screen Capture
Running time: 00:02:12
Courtesy of the artist
Bahar Behbahani
*Consolidating the Plan*, 2016
Mixed media on canvas
Courtesy of the artist

Hannah Black
*My Bodies*, 2014
HD color video with sound
Running time: 00:03:30
Edition of 3 plus II AP
Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa
Jesse Chun
Blueprint #13, 2016
Pigment prints on blueprint vellum paper
Edition of 3 with 2 APs
Courtesy of the artist

Jesse Chun
Blueprint #26, 2016
Pigment prints on blueprint vellum paper
Edition of 3 with 2 APs
Courtesy of the artist

Jesse Chun
Blueprint #24, 2016
Pigment prints on blueprint vellum paper
Edition of 3 with 2 APs
Courtesy of the artist
Jesse Chun
Valid From Until, 2014
Erasure poems printed in pigment on linen,
linen box
Edition of 3
Courtesy of the artist

Jesse Chun and Guadalupe Maravilla
Liquid Myths, 2018
Sound lecture documentation
Running Time: 00:17:46
Courtesy of the artists

Noelle de la Paz
UNCONTAINABLE TOPOGRAPHY:
An Erasure, 2018
Video/Animation, no sound, includes
excerpts of colonial document with notes
and photographs by the artist
Running time: 00:03:28
 Courtesy of the artist
in such noncompliance, the governor
deadlines instrum-, deadfreeze, mean
bankruptcy of public faith in oversight.
Privatization, redeem this Act, section
on behalf of debtor submits to board
no coven to pleiscite ‘cept budget
Francisco Eraso Jr. and Alex Dolores Salerno
Perfect Lovers (2018–ongoing)
Glass jars and medical paraphernalia
Dimensions Variable
Courtesy of the artists

Noah Fox
Female Sex Perversion, 2013–2019
Altered books, acrylic paint, watercolor, matte medium, ink, found images
Courtesy of the artist
On View December 17, 2019–January 26, 2020

Noah Fox
The Intimate Male, 2017
Altered books, matte medium, found images, ink
Courtesy of the artist
On View November 5–December 15, 2019

Noah Fox
Altered books, acrylic paint, watercolor, matte medium, ink, found images
Courtesy of the artist
On View September 21–November 3, 2019
Harmony Hammond
*A Queer Reader*, 2010
Archival inkjet print on Museo Silver Rag paper
Edition 2 of 15
Courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York
© Harmony Hammond/Licensed by VAGA via ARS, New York

Jenny Holzer
*WERE WILLING TO PAY*, 2014
Oil on linen
© (2019) Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY
Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Tony Lewis
*fear the elpoep*, 2019
Pencil, colored pencil, and graphite powder on paper
Courtesy of the artist, Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago; Massimo De Carlo, Milan; Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

Ana Mendieta
*Alma, Silueta en Fuego*, 1975
Super-8mm film transferred to high-definition digital media, color, silent
Running time: 00:03:07
Edition of 6 with 3 APs
Courtesy The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection LLC and Galerie Lelong & Co., New York
On View: September 21–November 3, 2019
CHECKLIST

Ana Mendieta
*Silueta de Arena*, 1978
Super-8mm film transferred to high-definition digital media, color, silent
Running time: 00:01:33
Edition of 8 with 3 APs
Courtesy The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection LLC and Galerie Lelong & Co., New York
On View: November 5–December 15, 2019

Ana Mendieta
*Energy Charge*, 1975
16mm film transferred to high-definition digital media, color, silent
Running time: 00:00:49
Edition of 8 with 3 APs
Courtesy The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection LLC and Galerie Lelong & Co., New York
On View: December 17, 2019–January 26, 2020

Oscar Muñoz
*Re/trato*, 2003
Color video, no sound
Running time: 00:28:00
Courtesy of the artist and Sicardi | Ayers | Bacino, Houston
Niina Pollari
Form N-400 Erasures, 2017
Paper, permanent marker, two framed pages
Courtesy of the artist

POPE.L
Green People Are Pumice, 2010
Ink, marker and ballpoint on paper
Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash

POPE.L
Purple People Are What Holds Our Look Together, 2011
Ink, marker, ballpoint and oil stick on paper
Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash
Wendy Red Star  
*Peelatchiwaaxpáash / Medicine Crow (Raven)*, 2014  
Artist-manipulated digitally reproduced photograph by C.M. (Charles Milton) Bell, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution  
pigment print on archival photo-paper  
Artist proof  
Courtesy of the artist

Wendy Red Star  
*Déaxitchish / Pretty Eagle*, 2014  
Artist-manipulated digitally reproduced photograph by C.M. (Charles Milton) Bell, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution  
pigment print on archival photo-paper  
Artist proof  
Courtesy of the artist

Wendy Red Star  
*Alaxchiiaahush/Many War Achievements / Plenty Coups*, 2014  
Artist-manipulated digitally reproduced photograph by C.M. (Charles Milton) Bell, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution  
pigment print on archival photo-paper  
Artist proof  
Courtesy of the artist

Wendy Red Star  
*Peelatchiwaaliash / Old Crow (Raven)*, 2014  
Artist-manipulated digitally reproduced photograph by C.M. (Charles Milton) Bell, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution  
pigment print on archival photo-paper  
Artist proof  
Courtesy of the artist
Jennifer Tamayo
WOMAN WEEPING TOO LOUDLY BY TIN RIBBON (1969)

or,
WE FUCKED UP HIS LITTLE METAL SCULPTURES WITH STRIPS OF ANA MENDIETA’S NAME AND OUR HOT BLOODED TEARS OF RAGE. THEY WILL LIVE IN EVERY CRACK AND CREVICE. ANA MENDIETA WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN EVEN IF WE HAVE TO COVER ALL HIS SCULPTURES WITH OUR BODILY FLUIDS FORRRRREVER, 2019
Commissioned audio work
Running Time: 00:05:20
Courtesy of the artist

Jennifer Tamayo
A$ANA, 2014/2019
Digital print on poly canvas
Courtesy of the artist
Artist Biographies
Phil America (b. 1983) is a California-raised artist, writer and activist. He has worked and lived throughout the US, Europe, Asia and Africa, concentrating on individual moments of freedom while looking at relationships with class, gender and race. In his work, he uses installation and sculptures, performance, photography, video, and fashion in searching for a better understanding and connection to his subjects while bringing about an interpersonal relationship between the viewer and himself. Recently he has started to focus more on using conversation as a medium as well as looking for ways to activate unused spaces. In 2018 he has continued his focus on education, helping in the development of DEAR Burma, a free school for migrants with over 1400 students per semester and opening more schools in 2018. He has given 3 TED Talks and has lectured at numerous universities and events. He is also the founder of No Flags. Phil's most recent monograph, Above The Law: Graffiti On Passenger Trains, shows photos from his series Above The Law which has been shown internationally in museums and galleries. Our Side Of The Tracks, another of 3 books featuring the series, was released in 2012. His texts and photos have appeared in a number of books and newspapers and he has been featured in magazines internationally.

Peter Baldes

Peter Baldes began making artworks for the screen and the browser in 1996. He holds an MFA from Alfred University’s Electronic Integrated Art program and has been teaching media arts and printmaking at VCU since 2001.

Bahar Behbahani

Bahar Behbahani’s research-based practice approaches landscape as a metaphor for politics and poetics. Her work has been featured in a solo exhibition, Let the Garden Eram Flourish, curated by Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi, at the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire in 2017. Garden Coup, her multidisciplinary series, has been shown in Thomas Erben Gallery in New York and the 11th Shanghai Biennale, China in 2016. Her work has been featured in the 7th Moscow Biennale, Russia; The 18th Biennale of Sydney, Australia; Sharjah Biennial 10, UAE; The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, MI; The Tribeca Film Festival, NY; Drawing Center, NY; EMPAC, Experimental Media And Performing Arts Center at Rensselaer, Troy, NY; among others. Bahar Behbahani has also been awarded Creative Capital (2019); a fellowship at the MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, NH (2017); and an Art Omi International Artists Residency, Ghent, NY (2013), in addition to others. Behbahani’s first public art, All water has a perfect memory will be on view at the Wave Hill Garden in the Bronx, NY until December 2019.

Hannah Black


Noelle de la Paz

Noelle de la Paz is a writer, artist, and all-around storyteller. Her stories are inherited, lived, made up—almost always some combination of the three—and often explore girliness, brownness, languaging, and movements through borders, real and imagined. Her recent work appears in Newtown Literary, Ano
Ba Zine, and Elastic Magazine. Born and raised in San Francisco, she now assembles words, colors, and food in her magic lab in Queens.

JOEY DE JESUS


ALEX DOLORES SALERNO

Alex Dolores Salerno (b. 1994, Washington D.C.) is a conceptual interdisciplinary artist. Informed by issues of care, interdependence, and the multiplicity of bodies: in their practice Salerno explores the labor of embodiment under capitalism to disrupt the self as singular, legible, linear, and normatively human. Borrowing from the aesthetics of minimalism, the work incorporates conceptual support structures and used objects from the material traces of entanglements both interpersonal and institutional. Salerno received their B.S. in Studio Art from Skidmore College and their M.F.A. in Fine Arts from Parsons School of Design. They have exhibited at Westbeth Gallery (NYC), IA&A at Hillyer (Washington D.C.), The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum (NY), Amos Eno Gallery (Brooklyn), among others. They are currently participating in the 2019-2020 Art Beyond Sight (ABS) Art & Disability Residency Program. They live and work in Brooklyn, New York.

FRANCISCO ERASO JR.

Francisco Eraso Jr. is a Colombian-American interdisciplinary artist, writer and performer. Their work navigates the overlaps of trans politics, decolonizing latinidad, disability justice, and hauntings through magical realism and the color gold. Eraso draws from traditional Colombian and queer crip DIY practices of ornamentation in order to speak to the violences of colonial extraction. They have received a BA/BFA in Fine Arts and Visual Studies from the New School. They have exhibited in venues such as at the Sheila C. Johnson Gallery (NYC), 25 East 13th St. Gallery (NYC), Skybridge Gallery (NYC), Chelsea Space Gallery (UK), The Cluster Gallery (Brooklyn), Amos Eno Gallery (Brooklyn) and The Indianapolis Museum of Art (IN). Francisco has been the recipient of a CESJ grant for community organizing and Sekou Sundiata Award for Outstanding Creative Projects in the Arts. They live and work in Brooklyn, New York.

NOAH FOX

Noah Fox is a queer contemporary artist from Connecticut currently working at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum as the Coordinator of Public and Academic Programs. Fox graduated from Oberlin College with degrees in Studio Art and Art History. Fox received his Master of Fine Art from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Departing from his early foundations in bookmaking, Fox’s practice has since transformed into an ongoing process of altering and transforming American books published within the last century. The books he chooses are alarmingly misogynistic, homophobic, and racist, and often written and published in the name of education. Through the reclamation of these texts, Fox aims to shed light on the oppressive foundations of American culture while exposing the ways in which these systems and rhetoric persist today.

HARMONY HAMMOND

Harmony Hammond (b.1944) was a leading figure in the development of the feminist art movement. In the early 1970s, she was a co-founder of A.I.R., the first women’s cooperative art gallery in New York and co-founder of Art & Politics. Since 1984, Hammond has lived and worked in northern New Mexico, teaching at the University of Arizona and the University of Colorado, Santa Fe. For more than forty years, Jenny Holzer has presented her astrident ideas, arguments, and sorrows in public places and international exhibitions, including 7 World Trade Center, the Venice Biennale, the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Her medium, whether formulated as a T-shirt, a plaque, or an LED sign, is writing, and the public dimension is integral to the delivery of her work. Starting in the 1970s with the New York City posters, and continuing through her recent light projections on landscape and architecture, her practice has rivaled ignorance and violence with humor, kindness, and courage. Holzer received the Leone d’Oro at the Venice Biennale in 1990, the World Economic Forum’s Crystal Award in 1996, and the U.S. State Department’s International Medal of Arts in 2017. She holds honorary degrees from Williams College, the Rhode Island School of Design, The New School, and Smith College. She lives and works in New York.

TONY LEWIS

In an ever-expanding engagement with drawing, Tony Lewis (b. 1986,
Los Angeles, CA) harnesses the medium of graphite powder to confront such social and political topics as race, privilege, and labor. The material provides a literal and conceptual foundation for the artist’s work, as it is stretched, smudged, rubbed, spliced, and folded across a variety of handmade and found surfaces. In a process of erasing, editing, and reassembling words from the source, Lewis pushes the boundaries of drawing, and expands upon the use of another medium central to his practice, the “material” of language. Lewis lives and works in Chicago. His work has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions including Anthology 2014-2016, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (2018); Plunder, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA (2017); Alms, Comity and Plunder, Museo Marino Mariní, Florence, Italy (2016); and nomenclature movement free pressure power weight, Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH (2016). Lewis participated in the 2014 iteration of the Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, NY and was the recipient of the 2017-2018 Ruth Ann and Nathan Perlmutter Artist-in-Residence Award at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.

*Guadalupe Maravilla*

Guadalupe Maravilla creates fictionalized performances, videos, sculptures and drawings that incorporate his pre-colonial heritage, personal mythology, and autobiography. Through his multidisciplinary studio practice, Maravilla traces the history of his displacement, interrogates the parallels between pre-Columbian cultures and our border politics. Maravilla has performed and presented his work extensively in venues such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, ICA Miami, Queens Museum, Bronx Museum, El Museo Del Barrio, MARTe (El Salvador), Central America Biennial X (Costa Rica), XI Nicaragua Biennial, Performa 11 & 13, Fuse-Box Festival, Exit Art, Smack Mellon, Rubin Foundation and the Drawing Center. Maravilla has upcoming solo projects at the ICA/VCU in Richmond Virginia, Jack Barratt Gallery in NY and a major performance at Knockdown Center in Spring 2020. Awards and fellowships include; Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship 2019, Soros Fellowship: Art Migration and Public Space 2019, Map fund 2019, Creative Capital Grant 2016, Franklin Furnace 2018, Joan Mitchell Emerging Artist Grant 2016, Art Matters Grant 2013, Art Matters Fellowship 2017, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellowship 2018, Dedalus Foundation Grant 2013 and The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation Award 2003.

*Ana Mendieta*

In a brief yet prolific career, the Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta created groundbreaking work in photography, film, video, drawing, sculpture, and site-specific installations. Amongst the major themes in her work are exile, displacement, and a return to the landscape, which remain profoundly relevant today. Her unique hybrid of form and documentation, works that she titled “siluetas,” are fugitive and potent traces of her ancestrality, personal inscription of the landscape, often transformed by natural elements such as fire and water. The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC, in collaboration with Galerie Lelong & Co., recently catalogued and digitized the entirety of Mendieta’s moving image works, discovering that the artist remarkably made more than 100 in the ten-year period in which she worked in the medium. The groundbreaking exhibition of her ephemeral multimedia works, Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta, was organized by the Katherine E. Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota in 2014, and has since travelled to several institutions worldwide. Mendieta’s work has been the subject of six major museum retrospectives, including: Ana Mendieta: Traces, organized by the Hayward Gallery, England, in 2013; and Ana Mendieta: Earth Body, Sculpture and Performance 1972–1985, organized by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., in 2005. Mendieta was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1948, and died in New York City in 1985.

*Oscar Muñoz*

Born in Popayán, Colombia, Oscar Muñoz studied art at the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Cali in the 1970s. As an art student, he began making drawings based on photographic images and, although his studies did not specifically include photography or video, they eventually became central to his artistic practice. Muñoz is also known for his use of ephemeral materials, in poetic reflections on memory and mortality. Muñoz often bridges the media of film, video, photography, installation, and sculpture. In 2006, he founded a dadas, a cultural center and residency program for artists. Located in Cali, lugar a dadas has become a focal point for young artists to work through ideas and participate in a dialogue and public debate about art and politics. Oscar Muñoz’s works are represented in several major collections including Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá, Colombia; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX, USA; Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zürich, Switzerland; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, USA; Los Angeles County Museum (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA, USA; Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA, USA; Tate Modern, London, UK; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), TX, USA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMoMA), San Francisco, CA, USA.

*Niina Pollari*

Niina Pollari is a poet based in Brooklyn, NY. Her first book, Dead Horse, was published by Birds, LLC in 2015; her most recent work, with the writer merit k., is the split book Total Mood Killer, out from Tiger Bee Press.

*Pope L*

Pope L is a visual artist and educator whose multidisciplinary practice uses binaries, contraries and preconceived notions embedded within contemporary culture to create art works in various formats, for example, writing, painting, performance, installation, video and sculpture. Building upon his long history of enacting arduous, provocative, absurdist performances and interventions in public spaces, Pope.L applies some of the same social, formal and performative strategies to his interests in language, system, gender, race and community. The goals for his work are several: joy, money and uncertainty—not necessarily in that order.

*Wendy Red Star*

Artist Wendy Red Star works across disciplines to explore the intersections of...
Native American ideologies and colonialist structures, both historically and in contemporary society. Raised on the Apsáalooke (Crow) reservation in Montana, Red Star’s work is informed both by her cultural heritage and her engagement with many forms of creative expression, including photography, sculpture, video, fiber arts, and performance. An avid researcher of archives and historical narratives, Red Star seeks to incorporate and recast her research, offering new and unexpected perspectives in work that is at once inquisitive, witty and unsettling. Red Star has exhibited in the United States and abroad at venues including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fondation Cartier pour l’Art Contemporain, Domaine de Kerguéhennec, Portland Art Museum, Hood Art Museum, St. Louis Art Museum, and the Minneapolis Institute of Art, among others. In 2017, Red Star was awarded the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award and in 2018 she received a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship. In 2019, Red Star will have her first career survey exhibition at the Newark Museum in Newark New Jersey. Red Star holds a BFA from Montana State University, Bozeman, and an MFA in sculpture from University of California, Los Angeles. She lives and works in Portland, OR.

Jennifer Tamayo

Jennifer Tamayo is a queer, migrant, formerly undocumented poet, essayist, and performer. Her poetry collections include [Red Missed Aches] (2011) selected by Cathy Park Hong for the Gatewood Prize (2010), Poems are the Only Real Bodies (Bloof Books 2013), DORA/ANA/ GUATAVIT@ (RSH 2016), YU DA ONE (2017 reprint Noemi Books & Letras Latinas’s Akrilica Series) and her latest publication, TO KILL THE FUTURE IN THE PRESENT (Green Lantern Press, 2018). Most recently, her writing has appeared in Contemporary, Perigee, and The Capilano Review. JT lives and works on Ohlone & Patwin lands.
Franklin Street Works is committed to providing a space that is safe, accessible, and welcoming to all bodies. We believe that all of our community should be able to participate and engage with our exhibitions and programming. Our continued accessibility efforts have been made possible by the work of community members, generous donors, and funding from the ARTE Access Grant from the Connecticut Office of the Arts.

The front entrance to Franklin Street Works is on Franklin Street and requires climbing eleven steps from the sidewalk to the gallery. The stairs have a sturdy railing, but are relatively steep. Franklin Street Works has an ADA compliant access ramp that is entered from Franklin Street. The ramp takes visitors to the first floor back door of galleries and can be opened from the inside for guests. To request the door be opened, please call (203) 595-5211 during gallery hours (Thursday through Sunday, 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm). If you would like to arrange entry ahead of time, please contact Creative Director Terri C. Smith at terri@franklinstreetworks.org or call/text her cell, (203) 253-0404 between 12:00 pm and 5:00 pm, Tuesday through Friday.

Once inside the space there is an elevator that allows access to all galleries. There is an all-gender bathroom on each floor and the upstairs bathroom is spacious but does not have grab bars. Motorized wheelchairs are allowed in the space. There is no designated accessible parking for Franklin Street Works, but there is metered parking on Franklin Street, and there are always spots where visitors can be dropped off if parking is not available nearby.

Service Animals are welcome and must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the Service Animal’s work or the individual’s disability prevents using these devices. In that case, the individual must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal, or other effective means. The staff will communicate any relevant information to visitors so that everyone is working together to ensure object safety. Personal Care Assistants and caregivers are welcome to attend ticketed events and outings at no additional cost.

Accessible programming for the exhibition Otherwise Obscured: Erasure in Body and Text includes a American Sign Language tour, two one-hour Spanish Language tours, and a Verbal Description tour. RSVPs for ASL and Visual Description Tours are required, and encouraged for the Spanish Language tours. To RSVP, email info@franklinstreetworks.org or contact our creative director, Terri C. Smith at (203) 253-0404 between 12:00 pm and 5:00 pm, Tuesday through Friday. Spanish translation for all artworks with text is available, and a high-resolution digital copy of the exhibition catalog is on our website at www.franklinstreetworks.org. Additionally, the exhibition’s self-guided tour will be available in English, Spanish, and large type. All of the video and film in Otherwise Obscured is either silent or captioned.

Please contact us for other accessibility needs and we will do our best to accommodate.

Our goal is to initiate future projects for increasing accessibility, including installation of an ADA compliant ramp to the patio area, a door-bell entry from the ramp entrance, more captioned archival video, and bathroom grab bars. If you would like to be part of these ongoing efforts through volunteer work or a community collaboration, please contact Creative Director Terri C. Smith at terri@franklinstreetworks.org. Tax-deductible donations can be made by visiting our website at www.franklinstreetworks.org.
AC K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

First, my deepest gratitude to each and every artist that makes this show what it is. Thank you for your generosity and the generosity of your work. Thank you for your time and kindness through studio visits, phone calls, grant applications, and many, many emails. Special thank you to Joey De Jesus, Jennif(f)er Tamayo, Alex Dolores Solerno, and Francisco Eraso, Jr. for their site visits and site-specific iterations. Thank you to Jesse Chun and Bahar Bbehbahi for having us in their studios.

Thank you to all of the galleries, studios, and Estates who made the loans for the show possible, especially to Margaret Ewing and Gena Beam at Alexander Gray Associates; Rózsa Farkas at Arcadia Missa; Dorian Harley Lynde and Colors of Progress; Isabelle Hogenkamp, Sheldon Mukamal, and Peter Tecu at Mitchell-Innes & Nash; Sarah Landry, Bianca Cabrer, and Danielle Wu at Galerie Lelong & Co.; the Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC; Lauren Murphy and Nichole White at Hauser & Wirth; Annalisa Palmieri Briscoe at Sicardi | Ayers | Bacino, Houston; and John Schmid, Chenée A. Lewis, and Shane Campbell at Shane Campbell Gallery.

Thank you to all of my friends and mentors, to my fellow poets, educators, curators, and co-conspirators, especially to the Education and Public Programs Departments at the Brooklyn Museum, my fellow 2017-18 Museum Education fellows, Ezra Benus, Pamela Brown, Meg Dalton, Carmen Hermo, Marwa Helal, Claire Kim, Ximena Izuierdo Ugaz, Ingrid Semaan, Fred Roden, Grégory Pierrot, Thyrza Goodeve, Charlie Schultz, and the team at The Brooklyn Rail. Thank you to the many spaces and organizations that have shaped and welcomed me, including Connecticut Students for a Dream, University of Connecticut-Stamford English and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Funders for LGBTQ Issues. Thank you to everyone who helped discover many of these incredible artists, including Constantina Zavitsanos, Nontsikelelo Mutiti, and the Bard MFA Listserv.

Thank you to all of our program partners, to Maura Frana and Mai-Phuong Bui for their brilliant design work, to all of the authors and artists in our library, which could not be possible without the support of Susan LaPerla and The Ferguson Library, and especially to Sundress Publications and Ángel García.

Thank you to Elisabeth Schifrin and Ricardo Maldonado for your dedicated translation work, to Christopher Hartley and Tracy McKenna for their thoughtful edits, and to Ezra Benus, Malcolm Pelletier, and Claire Kim for being such kind readers of the essay.

I could not have imagined what would have come out of visiting Franklin Street Works for the first time as an undergraduate in Pam Brown’s Creative Writing class. From that moment, now more than five years ago, I have admired the connected community they have built on the same street I moved to from Colombia almost twenty years ago. Many thanks to their amazing team past and present, including

Bonnie Watlle, interns Aram Russell and Ken Zheng, Loribeth Talbot, the Franklin Street Works Board of Trustees, especially the Exhibition Committee, Gallery Manager Natasha Kuranko, Executive Director Carole Southall, and the incomparable Terri C. Smith. Thank you for your commitment to community-building, to listening, and to kindness. This exhibition would not have been possible without your care, belief, and guidance. Of course, to my family and communities, who won’t be erased. And of course, to Malcolm.

Danilo Machado
Guest Curator
I am very grateful to guest curator Danilo Machado for his labor on this exhibition, which included research, multiple site visits, studio visits, meetings, authoring the show’s essay, and more. The artists we work with are the lifeblood of FSW, and thank you to the amazing artists in this exhibition for contributing your time, talent, and labor!

As always, I’m so appreciative of the Franklin Street Works staff, volunteers and Board of Trustees. A special thanks to: FSW Executive Director Carole Southall for her great questions and helpful input; Gallery Manager Natasha Kuranko for her warmth, enthusiasm, and openness in passionately tackling a variety of tasks; and the amazing exhibition committee, many of whom are also dear friends. Also thanks to our summer interns Aram Russell and Ken Zheng.

Thank you to all of the folks who have volunteered their time to brainstorm community outreach partners and informally help us think through ways to make FSW more accessible to our community, including: friend and special education professor, Alex Hollo; translator and Spanish language docent Elisabeth Schifrin; Director of UConn Interpreting Services Audrey Silva; and community outreach brainstorm partner and digital media expert, Loribeth Talbot.

A special thank you to the artists and thinkers who suggested artists for this show, including Christoph Cox, Tamara Dimitri, Sarah Fitchey, Riley Hooker, Richard Killeaney, Richard Klein, Emily Larned, David Livingston, Jeff Ostergren, Denyse Schmidt, Liz Squillace, Paul Soullis, Christopher Udemezue, Stephen Vitiello, Constantina Zavitsanos, and the Bard MFA hive brain.

Thank you to all of the galleries, artist estates, and artist studios who contributed their time and labor to this exhibition. For a complete list, see Danilo Machado’s thank you page.

I would also like to thank Ozzie Acuna, Beau Bardos, Tye Hardeman, Natasha Kuranko, Miguel Machado, Japeth Mennes, and Jonathan Stone for help with install, Jack Dingas of Tad Day Trucking for art shipping, Simply Signs for their work on producing vinyl lettering and Jennif(fer) Tamayo’s digital print, Scott Gargan for wordsmithing our press releases, Maura Frana and Mai-Phuong Bui for their phenomenal design work, Elisabeth Schifrin and Ricardo Maldonado for translation services, SquareWheel Marketing for their help with catalog printing, and friend Dan Tressler (and his van) for helping me transport pedestals to and from off-site storage.

Personally, I would like to thank my friends and family for always being supportive and for understanding why I disappear for two weeks during install. In the day-to-day, it’s the small things that make a difference.

I am very grateful to the nonprofit radio station WXNAfm (Nashville, TN) for streaming amazing music into my ears as I’m writing, worrying, installing, emailing (so much emailing!), and more. Most importantly, each day is better thanks to my dog Morty whose pure verve makes me laugh out loud and whose in-the-moment nature reminds me to do the same.

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If you are reading this, you are most likely a person who cares about contemporary art, social justice issues, or both. You might also be seeking a community of like-minded souls with whom to actively, and with activism, share these passions.

You have found your home here at Franklin Street Works and we thank you.

Here we are, a contemporary art space focused on artists who challenge the status quo, and yet somewhat ironically located in a city with one of the densest concentrations of corporations and hedge funds in the nation. By exhibiting artists who critique and challenge existing systems, we think of ourselves as a beacon of light, a small-but-mighty counterpoint, in this midst.

Individual philanthropy has thus played a role that is larger-than-life at Franklin Street Works. Our founding began with the vision and generosity of Stamford resident and benefactor, Kathryn Emmett, and our first board members, Tom O'Connor and John Fifield, all of whom are still actively and generously engaged with FSW's life and future. In addition, our nascent years would not have been so fully realized without the early and munificent multi-year grants from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and many others.

With appreciation for our brainy, compassionate, generous Board of Trustees, led by Sharon Chrust, and our stalwart donors, who have redefined the word “believer.”

Contributors of $250+
Renata Bauman
Michael Bischoff
Christine Bockelmann & Floyd Norris
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Nan Lvoff
Barbara Marks
Tracy McKenna
Will Nixon
Mark Nowotarski
Tom O'Connor
Diane Parrish
Margaret Roleke
Lee Ann Schneider
Lynn Vaillency-Cohen

And many thanks to our members, friends, volunteers, neighbors, artists, curators, and, of course, the dedicated Franklin Street Works staff.