

University of the Arts

MFA Book Arts & Printmaking

2022 Thesis Exhibition

Warm gratitude to...

- » Erin Zona for the catalog essay
- » Erin Elman, Jessica Kahle, and Gehia Davenport in the School of Art Dean's office for their support

and heartfelt congratulations to Elaina Brown-Spence, Erica Honson, and Meera Mittal for their ambitious and meaningful work

Lori Spencer, Director, Book Arts & Printmaking

Upon entering the Hamilton Hall Foyer and Aronson Gallery, I was inspired by the ambitious work, spanning a broad spectrum of topics and media. When introduced to the graduate students and their work I was struck by the clear dynamism of the University of the Arts Book Art and Printmaking MFA program, in fostering exceptional technical development and conceptual depth. Especially noteworthy is the clear friendship, support, and close camaraderie that this particular group has with each other. It is my honor to be invited as a guest critic by the faculty and I congratulate Elaina Brown-Spence, Erica Honson, and Meera Mittal on the collaborative friendships they have found in each other, and on the completion of their fabulous thesis work.

Erica Honson's series *Explorations of Gestures in Pulp Paint* is a stunning technical example of photo realistic large scale pulp painting methods. The presence of these works, in both scale and quantity, is immediately striking. As an artist, it is clear that Honson is an observer and has the power to take their audience into the poetic depths of the human experience. After viewing these works in person, I found myself later that day noticing the subtle details of individual gestures made by those who crossed my path and imaging my physical world in a rich and tactile gray scale reminiscent of the images created by

Honson. This work has lasting impact and charms the viewer to truly enter the picture.

Similarly, Honson's artist's book, titled *If shoeprints in concrete are urban fossils*, incited for me an immediate sense of cosmic depth. A graceful modified accordion book, beautifully designed and executed, the title alone positions the audience to dwell in a state of existential contemplation. As I opened and manipulated the structure, I found myself somewhat mesmerized, reading the stream of conscious text while flipping through the book repeatedly. Relatable to daydreaming or a very long walk, this artist's book takes the reader into a meditative state and asks them to sit there and consider the bigness of it all.

Meera Mittal's expressive installation *New thoughts on old stories* seems to be the remnants of a performance, but no physical body has been present. The objects and materials in the piece have been manipulated and placed independent of the audience's implied presence, but they seem heavy with spiritual and metaphorical meaning. Composed of broken bricks, flower garlands, cast paper feet, and a ghostly discarded pair of blue jean shorts, the physical rawness of these materials and the profound vulnerability are palpable. The objects themselves do not carry inherent metaphorical depth, but presented in situ these objects project spiritual meaning and one is faced with an intense lack of the human form. It is as if the artist has suddenly disappeared and left us there to make sense of

their absence through only what remains.

Alongside this installation is Mittal's *Daily monotypes* series. Hung in multiple rows on loose string, like an inverted rainbow, this series of prints invites the viewer to draw relationships between each image, and attempt to interconnect the details of these compositions and the process by which they were made. Mittal's thesis work speaks to spiritual truth and a search for understanding. Upon contemplation of this print series; like looking at a beautiful sunset, for fleeting moments, if you are open to it, one may gain human access to small bits of understanding.

Elaina Brown-Spence's interactive piece *Stitch Fix: the game of choice* prompted both joyful collaboration and a depth of internal tension for me in my experience. The complex participatory work asks each player to take a role in the imaginary development of a city - represented as a large white textile piece with a river of blue quilted squares running diagonally across representing a natural waterway. As players, this landscape is our game board and our goals are to develop the city by placing our assigned screen printed fabric patch squares appropriately. My assigned role was "Transportation" and my job was to build public transit lines. The cleverness of this game becomes immediately apparent as you and your fellow players begin to negotiate the complexities of city development, like whether to build a school adjacent to an industrial park, or if grocery stores are frequent enough to

serve our city's whole population. As we played, I quickly began to reflect on my actual responsibilities as a citizen and to question my own intentions, way of life, privileges and disadvantages. All of Brown-Spence's work has the powerful ability to place her audience into this kind of internal reflection. One immediately begins to confront and relate to the subjects of this work, while being cognisant to their own role and participation within these very real aspects of social oppression.

The powerful thesis work produced by these three artists is remarkable in their collective and individual abilities to make tangible the often invisible, personal, and internalized aspects of human life, from existential concerns, spirituality, daily meditation, social-political responsibility, and cultural bias. I am excited not only for the work that they will make in the coming years, but for a future shaped by contributions like these to the print, paper, and book art field.

MFA Book Arts & Printmaking, Class of 2022

Erica Honson

Meera Mittal

Elaina Brown-Spence



explorations of gestures in pulp paint
handmade abaca paper, abaca pulp paint
2022

Erica Honson

explorations of gestures in pulp paint is a series of pulp painted portraits. I have been investigating the properties of a range of eight fibers, using one for each piece. Both the handmade paper base sheet and the pulp paint were made with the same fiber. The exploration of materials is just as important to me as the content and image making. I excluded gendered anatomy in an attempt to queer the body and exhume the gestures from the confines of a strictly identity-based analysis. When I decided in which perspective to capture each gesture, I considered the theoretical concept of the male gaze — not based on its relation to gender, but rather power, force, and authority. I decided which gestures would be included in this series at the start of each new painting, depending on which was resonating with me or haunting me that week. I performed these gestures, taking note of where I was holding tension in my body, and in doing so trying to understand where someone else was holding this tension in theirs. It's a kind of introspective interrogation of the gestures not just to try to understand the emotion behind it, but also to provoke that emotion within myself. I'm interested in non-verbal communication and the things that are left unsaid; unknowns and assumptions; what is conveyed by individual images and what narrative emerges through them in series. When it comes to the meaning of a gesture without context, I appreciate that we both don't know and can't know its significance. These portraits are inconclusive; each is a fragment.



explorations of gestures in pulp paint
handmade cotton paper, cotton pulp paint
2021

(top right, both) handmade bamboo paper, bamboo pulp paint
(bottom right) handmade flax paper, flax pulp paint
2022





explorations of gestures in pulp paint

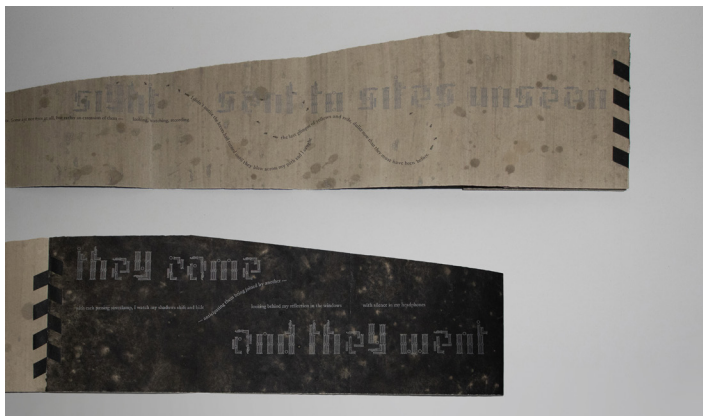
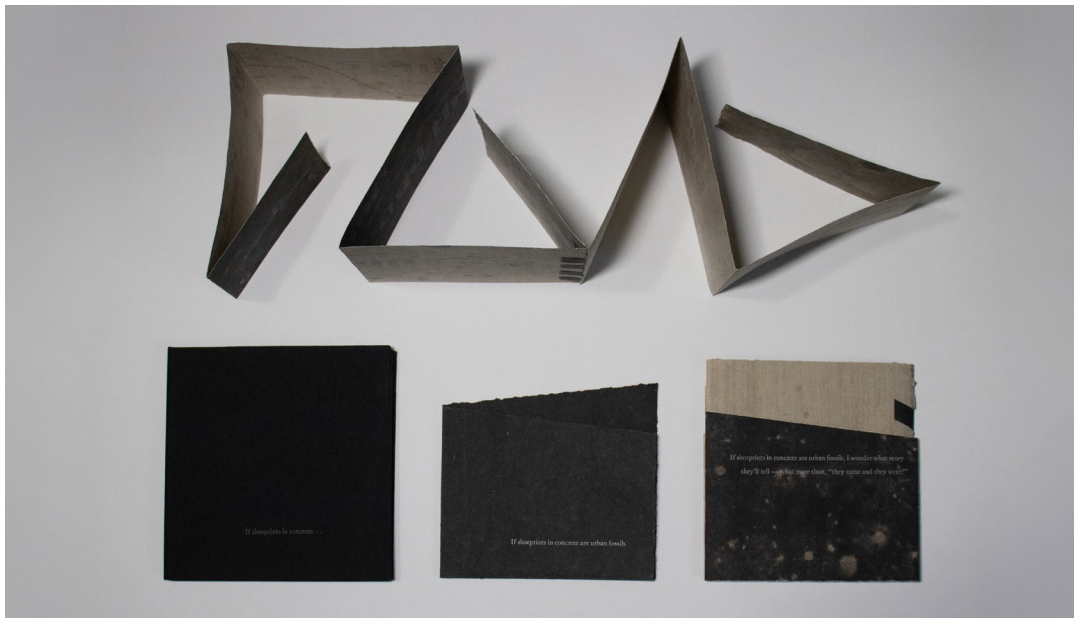
(left) handmade jute paper, jute pulp paint, (right) handmade hemp paper, hemp pulp paint
2022



explorations of gestures in pulp paint
handmade kenaf paper, kenaf pulp paint
2022



explorations of gestures in pulp paint
handmade sisal paper, sisal pulp paint
2022



If shoeprints in concrete are urban fossils
 handmade hemp paper, pulp paint, handmade abaca paper, letterpress
 2021



New thoughts on old stories
multimedia installation
2022

Meera Mittal

I search for meaning by creating art in collaboration with the qualities and limitations of the physical. Through handling, observing, manipulating, listening, sensing, and responding to materials, I explore connections between the self and the external world. I try to capture internal, intangible experiences which inform spiritual understanding.

My process is to construct pieces, combining intuitive, kinesthetic mark making and material handling with an overall vision that transforms as I respond to a work in progress. Evidence of construction is purposefully prominent, resulting in pieces which feel transitory rather than fixed. I strive to let the essence of each material have a voice within the creation of the work.

I am interested in examining memory, longing, desire, time, entropy, transformation, love, and capturing the preciousness of acts by the human hand. Through books, prints, multi-media installations, and video and sound pieces, I offer sensory, bodily experiences and invite viewers to visit their own internal spaces. Much of my work tries to activate the viewer's body by creating an environment they can navigate and explore physically and psychologically.



Flux
woodcuts on mulberry paper
2022





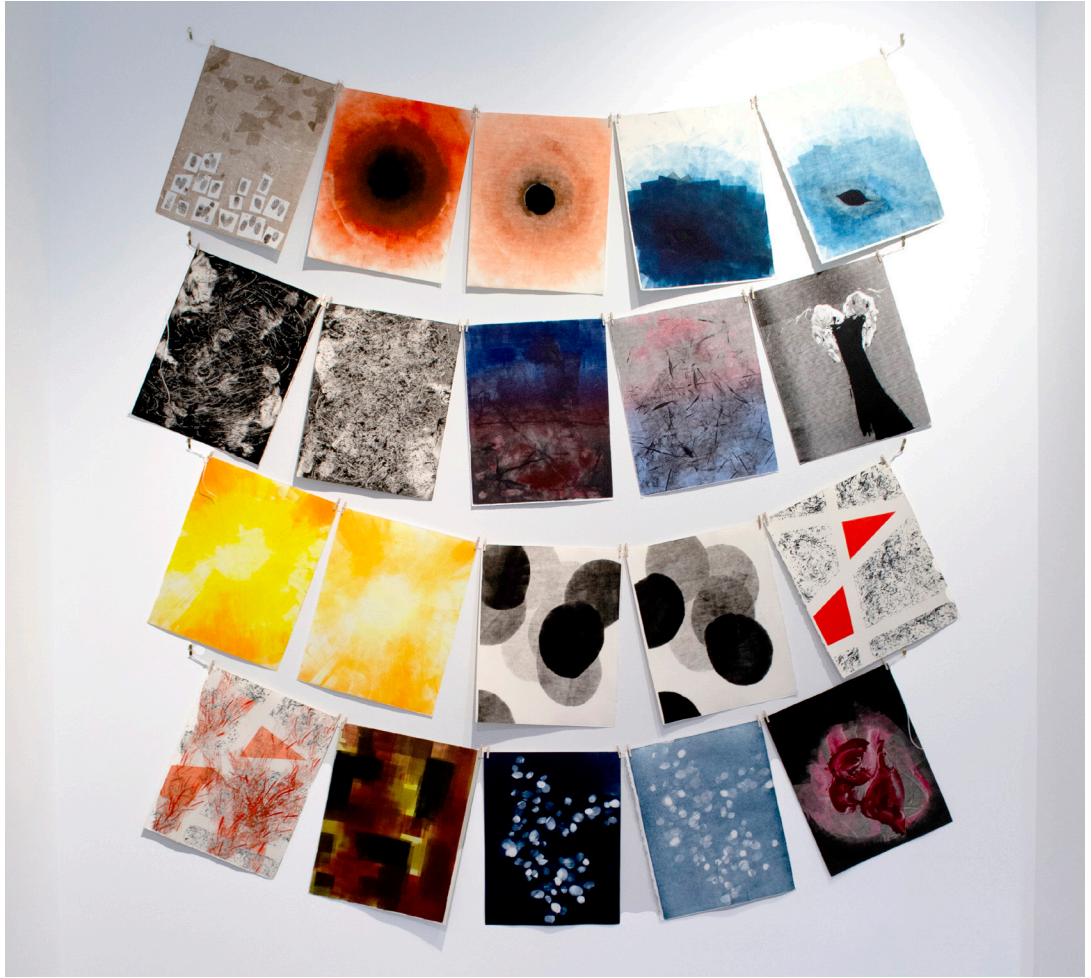
Discarded (1)
photolitho and watercolor
2022



She Sang / An Ocean in the Mouth
Video (mp4) installation
2022 (collaboration with Jasmine Wilson)



Daily Practice
monotypes
2021





I Am Still Looking for Love
handmade paper and pulp paintings
2022



To See
offset lithography and mixed media
2022

STITCH FIX



- The Key
- Park & Recreation
 - Industrial
 - Shopping
 - Healthcare
 - Transportation



Elaina Brown-Spence

My work has been a reflection on my experiences. I create an experience for my audience by allowing them to participate in an exploration of my memory. I share my experiences through the lens of intersecting identities of being Black, Hispanic and a woman. In my art, I have used my stories to navigate societal issues such as racism, colorism, and gentrification. The materials and processes I use are always in service of my concept. In my piece LIGHT BRIGHT DAMN NEAR WHITE, a set of two church fans, I need them to feel as close to the original object in order for me to use the religious imagery as symbolism for colorism. I decided to print them from a Xerox copier and cut them out by hand. This was the way the ladies at my church made the worship fans during their bible study. My goal is to physically engage the audience and get them to think deeply about those issues.

My audience is at the forefront of my mind at every stage of my work because ultimately I'm engaging them in conversation. From the conception of a piece, I am always thinking about what I want my audience to gain and experience. All my pieces require the audience to collaborate physically in their completion. I am challenging the audience to think critically and question these societal issues.



In my piece, *Stitch Fix: the game of choice*, I have created a large scale interactive board game that highlights aspects of gentrification. Woven into the game are pointed instructions designed to frustrate and challenge the players' thinking and help them gain an understanding of how little choice people have in their community to stop the effects of gentrification in neighborhoods.

By engaging the audience through this type of participatory work, my hope is that it would allow them to further reflect on their own experiences and interaction with systems of oppression.



Stitch Fix: the game of choice
interactive with mixed media
2022



Fortune Teller
laser printed
2022



Only Decedents of
African American Slavery
May Take and View This Book

Feel free to use a fan while you
view the art in the gallery,
please return to the baskets
when departing.





LIGHT BRIGHT AND DAMN
NEAR WHITE
laser printed
2021



TUT
silkscreen and pochoir
2021

TUT zine
laser printed zine
2021



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