

MFA 2025 Thesis



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Founded in 1982 by artists, scholars and patrons of the arts, including Andy Warhol, the New York Academy of Art is a graduate school and cultural institution that combines intensive technical training in the fine arts with active critical discourse.

The Academy believes that rigorously trained artists are best able to realize their artistic vision. Academy students are taught traditional methods and techniques and encouraged to use these skills to make vital contemporary art. Through major exhibitions, a lively speaker series and an ambitious curriculum, the Academy serves as a creative and intellectual center for all artists dedicated to highly skilled, conceptually aware figurative and representational art.

On the day that I came to the studios of the New York Academy of Art, I was greeted by an arctic fox, a South American porcupine, and a baby crocodile. Carefully crated in the back of a white minivan parked just outside the school's entrance on Franklin Street, they were making their journeys home to somewhere far off outside the bustle of the city. I was told that such creatures made regular appearances in Tribeca, the stars of a life drawing class that even includes a cow fresh from pasture. I had to think that such an image would have made Warhol, one of NYAA's founders, chuckle—wild animals in the big city, packed into a freight elevator in an old loft building, all for the sake of art. The artist's beloved *Cow* series, reportedly the result of a dealer's demands that he make more "pastoral" work, is anything but placid or bucolic. Etched in my memory is the contrasting acid yellow background and the repeat pattern of a neon pink cow head pulsing with riotous colorful intensity across a fifty foot wall, part of my daily commute to my fifth floor office at MoMA, where I used to work. Warhol's psychedelic cow, an emblem for the age of Timothy Leary.

That my first introduction to this year's cohort of Chubb Fellows and MFA candidates was a committee of wild animals feels apt. We live in wild, unexpected, and in many ways absurd times. First a cow and crocodile in the city, what next? If only such encounters were the pinnacle of absurdity; who would have guessed that when Warhol was making his cows in the 1960s, in the midst of the Cold War, that 60 years later, we'd be staring down the complete realignment of the world order, where autocracy seems to have gained the upper hand? Who would have guessed that an algorithm would more or less control our minds, and that machines could generate images almost as fast as the human eye? Who would have guessed that hard won rights granted over a half century ago would be repealed and replaced with ever more draconian laws designed to wrest power over our bodies? Who would have guessed that the world would be melting before our very eyes, imperiling the very wild animals we once championed saving, and almost nothing was being done to stop it? Absurd, absurd, absurd, absurd. It's all too absurd for words, and yet here we are.

In this head-spinning era of kleptocracy and existential angst, where all we've ever known is being called into question, it is a welcome reminder that despite all the muck and the mire of the world, art goes on. NYAA, a wonderful jewel of an art school in a small slice of lower Manhattan, exists precisely because we still need art, to teach how to make it but also how to observe and regard the world around us. I took the presence of the beautiful white arctic fox as an omen for the beauty and strangeness that was to greet me across the threshold on Franklin Street—where the work of three Chubb Fellows and 51 MFA candidates would show that no machine was ever going to match the talent or tenacity of the human mind. What I discovered is an international cohort of artists whose rigorous training as technically precise painters and sculptors results in an impressive and wide-ranging body of work, drawing inspiration, yes, from life, but also from the potency of human imagination. These artists stake out territory mined from dream states, memory, and mass media to produce works that span genre and subject matter. Abstraction is here, too, in a gestural sense, but also as a method for obfuscation and occlusion. Rigorously researched works that explore personal narratives seamlessly coexist alongside faithfully rendered still-lives and portraits. The primordial soup of human creativity is, it seems, alive and well at NYAA.

Though no arctic foxes appear here, the wildness of the natural world undoubtedly inspires the work of many of these artists, who look to both flora and fauna to guide their varied practices. Chubb Fellow **Brendan Sullivan** incorporates discarded baseball leather to create his buoyant multicolored *Rooster* sculpture, while **Precious Osamuyimen Eboigbodin** assembles recycled metal utensils and vessels to create a fluid metallic horse's head entitled *The Resilient Beauty*. **Anna Hopfensberger**'s paintings often turn to zoology to render colorful renditions of similarly exotic creatures, while **Piper Grant** handmakes pasted up collages of child-like creatures and paints them with meticulous detail, paper creases and all. **Kristin Middleton**'s scaled up portraits of a mosquito and **Natalie Zeunges**' still life of a box of coyote tails speak to each artists' thoughtful exploration of historical concepts of nature and how it was depicted or documented. **Jeannette Lee Adams** and **Lauren Sanderfer**, meanwhile, consider the otherworldly beauty and sublime potentiality of the earthly realm, while **Zachary Le** draws on his experience as a forest firefighter to ponder the role nature plays in human existence—and our ongoing efforts to protect our only home.

The gauzy wildness of worlds both observed and imagined informs the work of several artists working across a variety of media. Among these are the dreamy apparitions of Chubb Fellow **Manuela Caicedo**, whose oil-based depictions of spirits and deities draw on mythology and mysticism, while the moody graphite and acrylic abstractions of **Heather Hanson** examine the mystery and wonder of western landscapes. Mythic storytelling guides the gestural figuration inherent in **Ruoyo Gong** and **Anuki Bujiashvili**'s mixed media paintings, whose works read as personal quests for knowledge and truth at the hands of a central protagonist. Meanwhile, ethereal childhood memories of life in her native country of Georgia form the central core of the work of **Lizi Budagashvili**, who uses diluted oil paint and a dry brush to create her soft focus compositions. **Daviti Nikolozishvili** relies on watercolor for a similarly diaphanous effect in his work *Sound of Despair*, a haunting evocation of howling sorrow.

Such sorrow reminds us of the way dream states give way to a more jolting reality, as in the case of some artists, who excavate imagery and symbols of lived experience to build their worlds. **Anna Kraske** develops her inconceivable paintings drawn from photographs of bombed out buildings in warzones—the detritus of human existence laid bare. **Søren Nellemann** similarly turns to detritus in his compositions of the refuse of humanity dotted with the cheerful visages of familiar cartoon characters that appear in Scandinavian comics. And **Judith Greengus** mines family images and collective histories to produce paintings on unconventional materials such as Tyvek that appear drawn from a bygone time. Elsewhere, **Cass Waters** creates perspective-shifting paintings of the quiet solitude of the urban canopy while **Sarah Dixon** plays with perspective as well in her work *Band-Aid on a Bullet Hole*, a slick black Corvette careening directly towards the viewer. **Elizabeth Newton**, meanwhile, draws out the peaceful serenity and intimacy of daily life in her still life *Lingering*, a depiction of ornate jewelry set across a lush green cloth.

How women move through the world or how they are perceived by those around them forms another central focus for several artists. **Tina Dion** delves into magazine portrayals of women in pre-revolutionary Iran to render often faceless or obscured portraits with glamorously coiffed hair, while **Kilia Llano** contemplates the social constructs of gender in her native Dominican Republic. Elsewhere, **Pragati Gunasekar** explores the history of the breast tax in southern India, a penalty reserved for lower caste women who refused to leave their breasts uncovered. The stain paintings of **Mariam Kvashilava** consider collective community and shared solidarity among marginalized women, while **Andrea Olivia** depicts the unshakeable strength and care that Black American women must project on a daily basis in her solemn portrait *Matriarch*. Interpersonal connection lies at the heart of works like **Luisa Zanforlin**'s *The Passerby* and **Alexander Shanks**' *Girl Dinner*, each of which depict the unshakeable bond between women as companions, friends, or perhaps, even lovers.

For other artists, the liberation of one's corporeal flesh is not just a collective experience; it can be decidedly personal, too. For **Claudia Mullaney**, questioning gendered hierarchies and sexual mores lies at the heart of her sensual imagery, while **Sara Nevius** celebrates the fleshier parts of the human body, painting the rippling curves of a figure's backside. In **oneslutriot**'s *The Date*, a splayed nude woman takes on a powerful form, seemingly in command and control of a sexually charged encounter with a man. **Paola Yamel**, meanwhile, alludes to the soft contours of a female form with pink-hued her mixed media work *Pause, Progress: Press Play Two*. Queer liberation finds a home here too, as with **Matthew Conway**'s *Show Me The Steep and Thorny Way to Heaven* and **Gabriel Sanchez**'s *Holding on to Nothing*, each alluring portraits of people in states of rest, relaxation, and contemplation. And **Gracia Orah** renders highly personal and solemn self-portraits with clown makeup and costume, perhaps disguising the lived experience that exists below the surface.

Figure studies drawn from both life and from photographs inform the work of artists for whom the entire body becomes ground for fruitful exploration. **Holly Lowen**'s layered paintings of people shown from the neck down are largely studies of human limbs (often donning tennis whites) in the act of collective movement, whether reaching for the ball or each other. **Elif Olmez** shows a similar fascination with stretched bodies moving in concert with or in opposition to one another, as in her work *3 Figure Composition*. Meanwhile, **Bar Admonit Plivazky**'s work *El Hombre Peinado*, rendered in pastel on sandpaper, depicts a body either in a state of repose or falling through the air, the devious and arresting grin of a balding man peering out at the viewer—the watched watching the watcher. Elsewhere, a similarly contorted human form is the focal point of **Theresa Zhang**'s *Sinking Chivalry*, a body suited up in metal armor and contorted in fetal formation, perhaps constrained by the limits of the canvas or the stiffness of the outfit.

For still other artists, portraits come in all shapes and sizes, in two dimensions and in three, each a means of mining the depths of human experience. **Kathleen Simko** draws on old family photos and home movies to create richly hued paintings steeped in nostalgia, as in her portrait depicting a man with glasses and cigarette, set against the pastel hues of a midcentury kitchen. An even more brilliant palette defines the technicolor hues of *Purdy Lady* by **Sierra Orosco**, a portrait of a perfectly coiffed glamorous woman painted in magentas, blues, blacks, yellows, and greens.

A palette of more earthen tones marks **Amanda Boyd Yin**'s gestural work of a mysterious bearded man donning a blue overcoat, looking off into an expansive distance. Meanwhile, sculptors **Colin Dawson** and **Lisa Silas** create exacting busts using gypsum cement, each producing human figures that are as foreign as they are familiar.

Elsewhere, artists working at the limits between figuration and abstraction span carefully composed still lifes and imaginative compositions of seemingly extraterrestrial lifeforms.

Rina Kim's explorations of perspective are the result of painstaking studio set-ups of everyday objects remixed in unexpected ways, a marked departure from the shimmering still-life paintings of shining metallic flowers by **Carla Youbi**. Meanwhile, **Tom Letson**'s surreal *Organ of the Body of World* reads as a series of interconnected amphibious human-cellular life forms, while **Ally Cotton** paints molecular, bubbly curving forms in electric hues, the result of meticulous clay studies of globular humanoid forms. **Lyla Levis**' abstract work *The Lovers* bridges abstraction and figuration fluidly, an evanescent watercolor of two figures seemingly in the midst of embrace.

Abstraction is not as anomalous at NYAA as one might assume, with several artists mining gesture to create dynamic works on canvas, panel, and Yupo paper. Chubb Fellow **Benjamin Staker** takes to oil stick in his electric abstract landscapes sometimes painted en plein air, producing works in a perpetual state of motion. **Lauren Cheng** produces decidedly different abstracted panoramas, as in her work *Even When No One is Around*, a blue tidal wave awash in streaks of pinks and yellows. **Susana Aldanondo** literally takes to the city streets to create her interconnected gestural abstractions, painted on location in Soho. **Vera L. Melo** relies on a similarly restrained palette in her ink work on Yupo *24 Cell*, lines of white against black crisscrossing to form a dynamic circular shape that recalls molecular structures. And **Alexa Huang**'s work *What is Left after Looking* is a symphony of splotches of white and yellow against black and copper green, a swirling mass just on the cusp of motion—a work, like so many of these talented artists, at the edge between form and anti-form.

Whether through compelling modes of abstraction or through intriguing and highly personal approaches to figuration, the 2025 Chubb Fellows and MFA graduates present a forceful reminder that in times of great upheaval and darkness, art always manages to show the way. At the epicenter of the city's thrumming gallery scene, one encounters an art school seemingly out of time and place, where the craft of artistic mastery is shared abundantly, giving students access to ever more inventive tools to expand their horizons and grow their artistic voice. Realizing stories of personal and collective truth, these artists point to the urgency and value of a rigorous art education, which now, more than ever, feels about as radical an act as ever there was. And who knows, maybe next time you find yourself on Franklin Street, you too will have the pleasure of encountering a baby crocodile.

2025

Chubb Fellows

Manuela Caicedo

Benjamin Staker

Brendan Sullivan



Manuela Caicedo

La llegada al sol (The Arrival at the Sun), 2025

oil on wood

15.5 x 18.5 inches



Benjamin Staker
Another Light in the Distance, 2025
oil stick on Yupo mounted to panel
60 x 48 inches



Brendan Sullivan

Rooster, 2024

baseballs, basketballs, footballs, baseball gloves, foam, wood, steel, and clay

63 x 22 x 40 inches

Class of 2025

Susana Aldanondo

Lizi Budagashvili

Anuki Bujishvili

Lauren Cheng

Matthew Conway

Ally Cotton

Colin Dawson

Tina Dion

Sarah Dixon

Precious Osamuyimen Eboigbodin

Ruoyu Gong

Piper Grant

Judith Greengus

Pragati Gunasekar

Heather Hanson

Anna Hopfensberger

Alexa Huang

Rina Kim

Anna Kraske

Mariam Kvashilava

Zachary Le

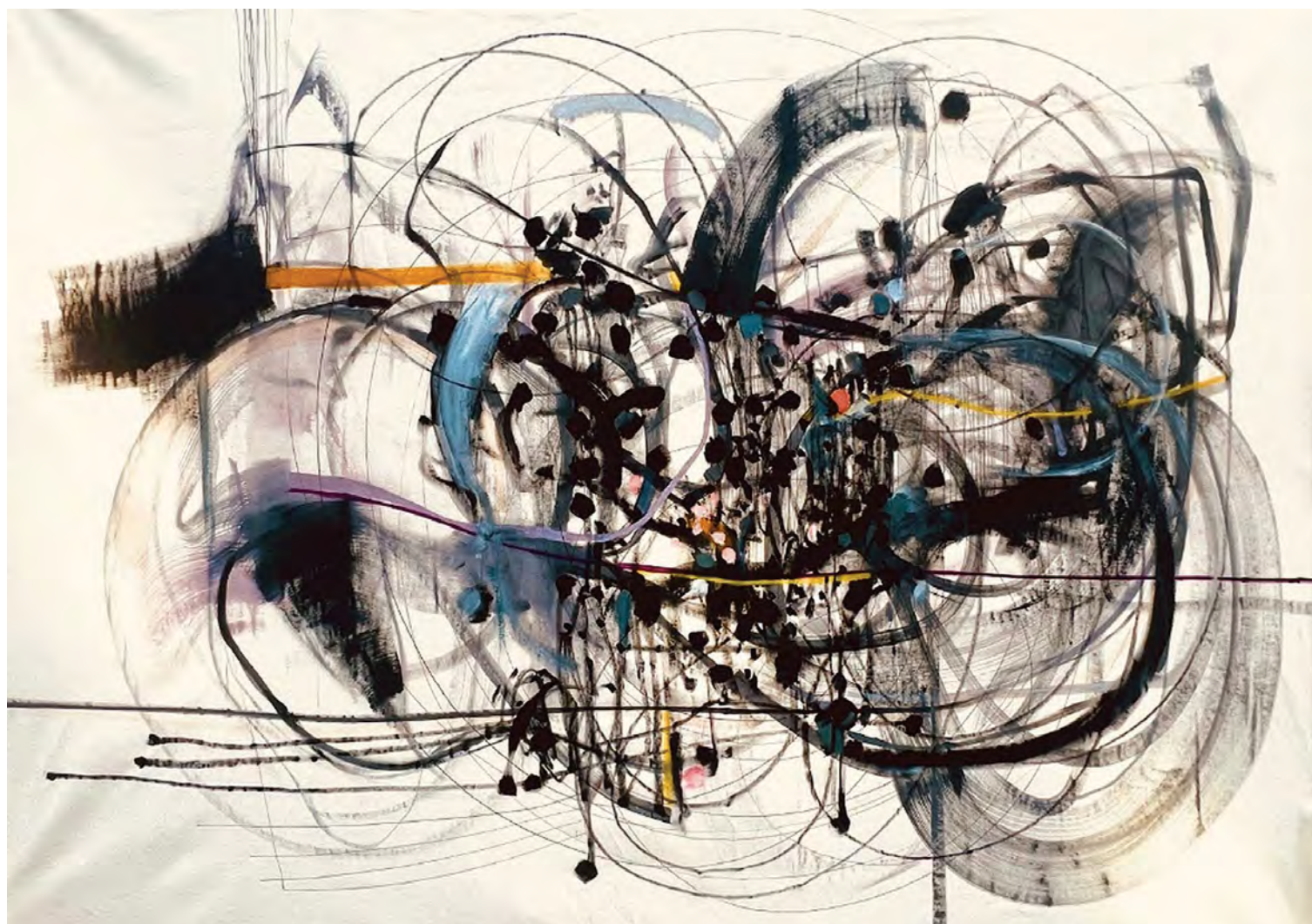
Jeanette Lee Adams

Tom Letson

Lyla Levis

Kilia Llano

Holly Lowen
Vera L. Melo
Kristin Middleton
Claudia Mullaney
Søren Nellemann
Sara Nevius
Elizabeth Newton
Daviti Nikolozishvili
Andrea Olivia
Elif Olmez
oneslutriot
Gracia Orah
Sierra Orosco
Bar Admonit Plivazky
Gabriel Sanchez
Lauren Sanderfer
Alexander Shanks
Lisa Silas
Kathleen Simko
Cass Waters
Paola Yamel
Amanda Boyd Yin
Carla Youbi
Luisa Zanforlin
Natalie Zeunges
Theresia Zhang



Susana Aldanondo
SoHo, 2024
acrylic on canvas
59 x 68 inches



Lizi Budagashvili
Second Elegy, 2025
oil on canvas
40 x 28 inches



Anuki Bujiashvili
Symposium, 2023
acrylics and oil on canvas
48 x 48 inches



Lauren Cheng
Even When No One is Around, 2024
acrylic, oil, and glass paper on panel
48 x 36 inches



Matthew Conway

Show Me the Steep and Thorny Way to Heaven, 2025

oil on wood panel

30 x 30 inches



Ally Cotton
Whitewater, 2024
oil on canvas
36 x 36 inches



Colin Dawson
New Age Mystics, 2025
Hydrocal and casein
18 x 12 x 12 inches



Tina Dion
Today's Women, 2024
oil on canvas
48 x 36 inches



Sarah Dixon

Band-Aid on a Bullet Hole, 2025

oil and charcoal on linen

74 x 96 inches



Precious Osamuyimen Eboigbodin

The Resilient Beauty, 2024

spray paint, stainless steel silverware, and mild steel

49 x 16 x 39.5 inches



Ruoyu Gong

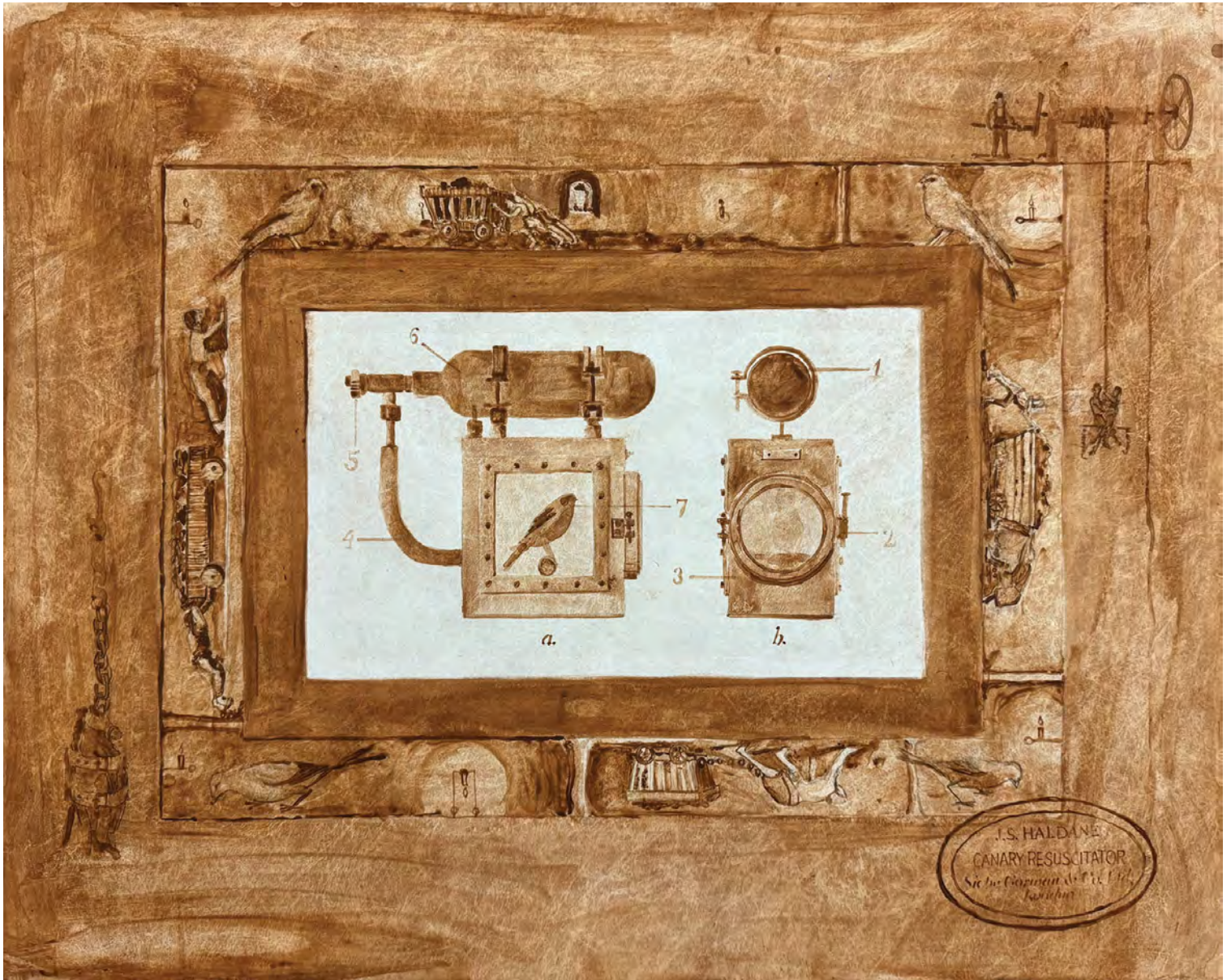
Regression — Babes' Battle, 2024

oil, oil pastel, acrylic, and paper on canvas

48.75 x 61 inches



Piper Grant
Sheep, Dog, and Crows, 2024
oil on panel
20 x 48 inches



Judith Greengus

Canary Resuscitator, 2024
graphite and Flashe on Tyvek
24 x 30 inches



Pragati Gunasekar
Nangeli, 2025
oil on linen
24 x 36 inches



Heather Hanson
Character No.1, 2024
graphite and acrylic on panel
8 x 10 inches



Anna Hopfensberger
Let the Heads Roll, 2025
oil on canvas
36 x 36 inches



Alexa Huang

What Is Left after Looking, 2025

acrylic, oil, marble dust, and Chinese ink on canvas

24 x 18 inches



Rina Kim
Still Life: Osservanza Variation, 2024
oil on canvas
60 x 48 inches



Anna Kraske
2022 (*Zaporizhzhia*), 2025
oil on canvas
36 x 48 inches



Mariam Kvashilava
Constant Echo, 2024
acrylic on canvas
48 x 36 inches



Zachary Le

Widow Makers, 2024

oil on aluminum

54 x 36 inches, 62.75 x 44.75 inches framed



Jeanette Lee Adams
Cherry Picking, 2025
oil on linen
36 x 36 inches



Tom Letson

Organ of the Body of the World, 2025

oil on canvas

30 x 40 inches



Lyla Levis

The Lovers, 2025

watercolor, ink, gouache, and charcoal on paper

30 x 22 inches



Kilia Llano

The Boogie Man Is in the Streets, 2024

oil on canvas

38 x 60 inches



Holly Lowen
Triples, 2024
oil on paper
47.5 x 60 inches



Vera L. Melo

24 Cell, 2024

ink on Yupo

8 x 8 inches, 14 x 14 inches framed

edition 1 of 4



Kristin Middleton
A Most Prolific Psychopomp, 2025
charcoal and white pastel on toned paper
18 x 24 inches



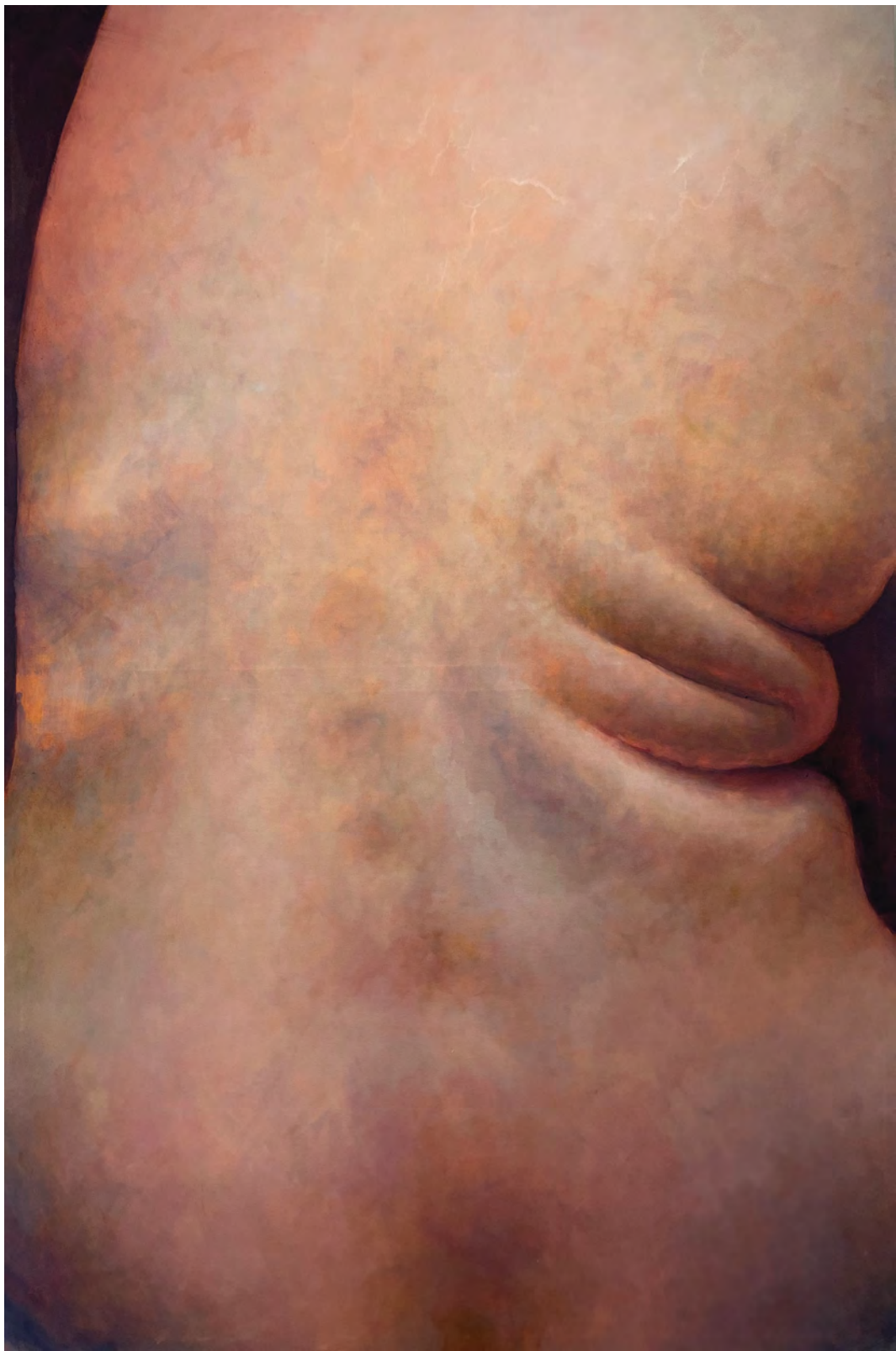
Claudia Mullaney
Window, 2024
oil on canvas
58 x 52 inches



Søren Nellemann

oil, acrylic, and pen on linen

50 x 80 inches



Sara Nevius
Back, 2024
oil on canvas
108 x 72 inches



Elizabeth Newton
Lingering, 2025
oil on canvas
12 x 16 inches



Daviti Nikolozishvili
Sound of Despair, 2024
watercolor on paper
15 x 11 inches



Andrea Olivia
Matriarch, 2024
oil on wood
60 x 48 inches



Elif Olmez

3 Figure Composition, 2024

oil on canvas

60 x 40 inches



onestutriot
The Date, 2025
oil on canvas
72 x 90 inches



Gracia Orah
Act 3, 2025
oil on wood panel
12 x 18 inches



Sierra Orosco
Purdy Lady, 2024
oil on canvas paper
18 x 18 inches



Bar Admonit Plivazky
El Hombre Peinado, 2024
pastel on sand paper
51 x 27.5 inches



Gabriel Sanchez
Holding on to Nothing, 2024
oil on canvas
30 x 40 inches



Lauren Sanderfer
Self-Portrait with Bird Fetus, 2024
oil on canvas
40 x 60 inches



Alexander Shanks
Girl Dinner, 2024
oil on linen
40 x 32 inches



Lisa Silas
The Kiss, 2024
Hydrocal and oil
20 x 15 x 15 inches
edition 1 of 7



Kathleen Simko
Cig Break, 2024
oil on wood panel
18 x 24 inches



Cass Waters

Apartment, 2024

charcoal, ink, acrylic, pastel, plaster, oil, and wax on canvas

96 x 48 inches



Paola Yamel

Pause, Progress: Press Play Two, 2025
graphite, ink, marker, oil pastel, and watercolor on canvas
20 x 20 inches



Amanda Boyd Yin
Man in a Blue Henley, 2023
oil on canvas
14 x 11 inches



Carla Youbi
Night-Sight, 2024
oil on linen
24 x 18 inches



Luisa Zanforlin
The Passersby, 2025
oil on canvas
36 x 28 inches



Natalie Zeunges
5\$ Coyote Tails, 2024
oil on panel
6 x 12 inches



Theresia Zhang
Sinking Chivalry, 2025
oil on panel
18 x 24 inches

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Greg Lindquist

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