

# Countermyths

**Zuhoor Al Sayegh**

**Eleni Berg**

**Kristiana Chan** 莊礼恩

**Swaleha Masude**

**Héctor Muñoz-Guzmán**

**Itzli OCIEL**

**May 13–July 26, 2026**

For over fifty years, BAMPFA and the UC Berkeley Department of Art Practice have partnered to present an exhibition of works by the department's graduating class of MFA students. This year's exhibition showcases work from the six graduates—Zuhoor Al Sayegh, Eleni Berg, Kristiana Chan, Swaleha Masude, Héctor Muñoz-Guzmán, and Itzli OCIEL.

Through painting, video, textile, ceramics, and installation, this cohort of artists explores varied approaches to traditions of mythmaking. The works on display contend with the limitations of how history has been written and offer alternative modes of collective memory. The artists look to coastal ecosystems, religious folklore, oral history, and the internet as sites from which to reconstruct the past and imagine new futures.

What emerges across their works is an approach to remembering the past that embraces the possibilities held in fiction, abstraction, and the natural world to explore the richness of the present. As the contemporary digital landscape fractures a shared sense of history, the artists in the exhibition explore the potential for realigning our strategies of memory and mythmaking.

*Countermyths: The Fifty-Sixth Annual UC Berkeley Master of Fine Arts Exhibition* is curated by Tausif Noor, Curatorial Associate, and Omar Jason Farah, Curatorial Assistant. The annual MFA exhibition is made possible by the Barbara Berelson Wiltsek Endowment.

**Zuhoor Al Sayegh**

United Arab Emirates, born 1997

عينك غابتا نخيل ساعة السحر

*Your eyes are two palm groves at the hour of dawn*

2026

Ceramic, wood, and single-channel video; color, sound; 5 min.



The ceramic sculptures, video, and sound elements in Zuhoor Al Sayegh's installation operate as ceremonial artifacts and archival fragments suspended between ethnographic speculation and documentation. These objects stand simultaneously as relics, props, and active participants in ritual processes of grieving. Drawing on anthropologist Lara Deeb's analysis of paradigmatic time (which moves cyclically) and syntagmatic time (linear history) in contemporary Lebanese Shi'i political life, Al Sayegh explores how history is continually reactivated through ritual repetition. Deeb notes how the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, a revered figure for Shi'i Muslims, is repeatedly relived through mourning practices during Ashura, a day of commemoration for Muslims.

Al Sayegh's installation also builds on pre-Islamic Arab traditions, in which vegetal life is understood as a repository of memory, ancestry, and spiritual authority. Central to the artist's research is the date palm, which moves through time in a paradigmatic way: not forward, but in return; not as progress, but as recurrence. By presenting her works within the conventions of a museum installation, Al Sayegh collapses the distinctions between past, present, and imagined futures.

**Eleni Berg**

United States, born 1996

*La Luna me hablo de la Flor que podría convertirse en Mariposa, y en la Mariposa que podría convertirse en Fuego*  
(*The Moon Told Me About the Flower That Could Turn into a Butterfly, and the Butterfly That Could Turn into Fire*)  
2026

Three ceramic sculptures

Eleni Berg's recent ceramic sculptures draw on the Indigenous histories of Mesoamerica, specifically the K'iche Maya origin story recorded in the Popul Vuh, the foundational sacred myth of the K'iche people. Dating to thousands of years before the region's colonization by Spanish settlers starting in the sixteenth century, this sacred myth was originally transmitted orally and later recorded by Spanish religious figures. The Popul Vuh features many stories of transformation, in which gods, human ancestors, and animals turn into stone. Fixed in place as eternal witnesses, these figures watch over the landscape, offering guidance and protection to the Maya—the "people of the maize"—across generations.

Sculpted from clay, with intricate details carved into their bodies, Berg's three ceramic figures reflect mythological processes of transformation. Here clay operates as a collaborator: as an organic material drawn from the earth, clay undergoes molecular transformations in the heat of the kiln to become stoneware, paralleling the metamorphosis of humans into stone. The three hybrid figures, whose bodies combine human and nonhuman elements, are representations of Alnitak, Saiph, and Rigel—the three stars comprising the Orion constellation, the center of creation of all life in the Maya cosmovision.



**Kristiana Chan** 莊礼恩  
United States, born Canada 1993

*Hollowed Ground*

2026

Ceramic, steel rebar, concrete,  
oyster shells, and patina



Kristiana Chan's sculptures draw inspiration from organic matter and cycles of nature to explore histories of survival, resilience, and timescales beyond human and linear time, including fossil records, crumbling infrastructure, and the emergence of future life forms. Chan's work privileges perspectives from the more-than-human world and its entanglements with the environment and adjacent human actors, imagining how different forms persist and survive within hierarchical systems. The artist speculates on past and present, melding these perspectives into hybrid forms to suggest a sense of futurity. These forms speak to the primordial origins and reintegrated reciprocities between humans and nonhuman species while simultaneously suggesting possibilities that these relationships may produce in the future.

The works in *Hollowed Ground* nod to the prevalence of creation myths across a wide range of cultures, in which living organisms such as humans are said to be fashioned from clay. Chan's sculptural installations incorporate found oyster shells and industrially manufactured materials such as rebar, concrete, and bronze. The artist manipulated their shapes and surfaces to suggest the processes of accumulation and erosion that occur over time, lending the works a sense of history that simultaneously renders them timeless.

**Swaleha Masude**

United States, born Saudi Arabia 1999

*A Young Woman's Guide  
to Attaining Sainthood*

2026

Mixed media and single-channel video;  
color, sound; 17:54 min.

The playful, immersive video installation *A Young Woman's Guide to Attaining Sainthood* is a spiritual epic for a new age. The video follows a pious heroine as she searches for answers and peace. Through the ritual of Islamic prayer, the young woman develops a bruise on her forehead. Though this is a sign of devotion among male believers, her bruise grows into a horn—a mark of unquenchable desire rather than holy standing. Swaleha Masude's work critiques the harshly gendered realities of religious practice and visualizes the path to sainthood for a practicing Muslim woman. Islam imagines egalitarian access to piety; however, as Masude's video highlights, the structural breadth of patriarchy is a recurring impediment to women's freedom to express public spirituality.

The visual world that Masude conjures, both in her video and in the material expanse of her sculptural installation, offers an imagined alternative to the strict gender binaries that can police religious practice. Masude's video oscillates between live action and animation, embracing hybridity to build mythology across multiple planes of reality. The artist adapts motifs from traditional Islamic texts, rendering them anew with an often humorous and vernacular style that confronts the absurdity and quirks of her story while remaining earnest in its spiritual message.





**Héctor Muñoz-Guzmán**

United States, born 1999

*Las gemelas de South Tepaberkeley*

2026

Acrylic, acrylic markers, house paint,  
and colored pencil on canvas

Héctor Muñoz-Guzmán's monumental painting *Las gemelas de South Tepaberkeley* remembers the residential communities of South Berkeley, where the artist's family immigrated from Mexico. Because these communities are now facing rapid gentrification, Muñoz-Guzmán's painting calls upon personal memory and familial oral histories to reconstruct an image of the predominantly working-class Chicano community that raised him. The painting depicts twin sisters in the foreground, demonstrating their centrality in the community around them. The parking lot of the apartment complex, as the artist recalls from his youth, served as a vibrant gathering point for neighbors and family. This sense of life reverberates in the vivacious flora, rendered in tiny brushstrokes and bright colors, that Muñoz-Guzmán scattered across his scene.

In the background of the painting is the apartment complex itself, filled with windows that serve as portals into the past and present. The scenes displayed in the windows capture real people from the artist's community and incorporate images drawn from Muñoz-Guzmán's other paintings. Some of the vignettes look to the past, with scenes of childhood SpongeBob outfits and graduation portraits. Others show scenes from daily life—two uncles cutting each other's hair, a couple on the dance floor—in moments of enjoyment and togetherness that continue to animate the lives of the artist's community.

**Itzli OCIEL**

United States, born 1994

*I BECKON YOU FROM THE PERIPHERY,  
MY RADIANCE DEMANDS FLUX*  
2026

Secondhand fabrics, velvet, suede, cotton,  
sublimation print, taffeta, jacquard, interfacing,  
rhinestones, glass beads, gems, thread, brick,  
steel pipe, and steel cables

*I BECKON YOU FROM THE PERIPHERY, MY RADIANCE DEMANDS FLUX* is a text-based textile collage that spells out its title to produce a statement from the perspective of a rhinestone. The work is inspired by a moment in the artist's studio. In the process of documenting their artwork, Itzli OCIEL discovered that the reflective quality of rhinestones makes them difficult to photograph; they found this material refusal to be deeply resonant with trans and queer subjectivity.

OCIEL's work draws upon the legacy of the AIDS Memorial Quilt—the largest community art project in history and a groundbreaking moment in the national fight for awareness during the 1980s AIDS crisis—as a compelling model for co-opting scale and spectacle to raise political consciousness. OCIEL's artwork demands a willingness to shift from fixed positions to follow the roaming glisten of the textile's jeweled embellishments. It assembles smaller works to point toward ongoing global violence and fragments from the artist's painting archive.



**Zuhoor Al Sayegh** is an Emirati artist and writer based between Berkeley and the United Arab Emirates. Working primarily in ceramics, her practice extends across installation, text, and moving image, tracing the entanglements of material culture, botanical life, and collective memory in the Gulf region. Central to her work is the date palm, which serves as a symbol, archive, and temporal form, and through which she examines displacement, ritual, and the nonlinear persistence of place. Al Sayegh has exhibited at Acre Projects, Chicago; the Textile Arts Center, New York; Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai; Warehouse421, Abu Dhabi; Tashkeel, Dubai; Bait Al Mamzar, Dubai; and K.B.H.G, Basel. She received the Sheikha Salama bint Hamdan Emerging Artists Fellowship for 2021–22 and holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2019).

**Eleni Berg** is a multidisciplinary artist and lifelong Bay Area resident. She holds a BFA from California College of the Arts with a focus on ceramics. Her work reflects her background as a Guatemalan American artist, and she seeks to unveil the root causes and systems that have contributed to our severed relationship with the natural world and the continued erasure of Indigeneity from a contemporary context. Berg’s interest in vintage items, textiles, wild mushrooms, and plants—often in contexts of Westernization—as well as the relations between humans, objects, and the spaces they inhabit inform the aesthetic and conceptual choices in her practice. Having worked with ceramic for over a decade, Berg seeks to use clay as a medium to create engaging and activated compositions that draw the viewer’s eye with small details and visually endearing figures.

**Kristiana Chan** 莊礼恩 is a multimedia visual artist from the American South based in the Bay Area. Her work examines the material memory of the landscape as a living archive, which serves as evidence of survival and resilience. Chan is interested in themes of science and speculative fiction, and often considers littoral coastal zones in her artistic practice, gleaning ancient wisdom from environments and organisms that have adapted to rapidly changing conditions. Expanding her scope into cyclical, cosmological, and geological time, Chan investigates evolutionary morphologies, both real and fictive, and more-than-human interspecies entanglements with the anthropocentric built environment.

Chan is a recipient of the Murphy Cadogan Award and the Rydell Visual Arts Fellowship, and has held residencies at ACRE, Steuben, Wisconsin; Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, Colorado;; Tides Institute of Art and History, Eastport, Maine; and Stelo Arts, Portland, Oregon. She has received support from the Arts Research Center, Asian American Research Center, Art and Climate Action Network, and NCECA Graduate Student Fellowship. She has exhibited at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco; the Montalvo Art Center, Saratoga, California; the Bolinas Museum, California; the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History; Morgann Trumbull Projects, Emeryville, California; SOMArts, San Francisco; Vessel Gallery, Oakland; Kearny Street Workshop, San Francisco; and the Monterey Art Museum.

**Swaleha Masude** is a Pakistani American artist based in Seattle and the Bay Area working in new media and social practice. Her work explores ritual, performance, memory, gender, and their physical manifestations in the world, with a focus on the experiences of Muslim women through social practice. Masude has exhibited across the West Coast. She is the cofounder and curator of Dou Number Club, a collective dedicated to bringing together Muslim artists, and runs Bhains Shop with her sister.

**Héctor Muñoz-Guzmán** completed his foundation year at Parsons School of Design and studied at the Rhode Island School of Design before pausing his formal education due to a bipolar diagnosis and financial hardship. He continued to work outside institutional settings, developing his practice and exhibiting locally. His first solo exhibition, *Tocando tierra*, was presented at Room 3557 Gallery, Los Angeles. Select group exhibitions include the RISD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island; Bureau Gallery, New York; Good Mother Studios, Oakland; Pt. 2 Gallery, Oakland; Watts Towers Art Center, Los Angeles; Personal Space, Vallejo; the Berkeley Historical Society Museum; and Marin MOCA, San Rafael. The artist's work has been featured in publications including *48 Hills*, *Berkeley Times*, *Overstandard*, *Juxtapoz*, *Mousse*, and *New American Paintings*. He was a finalist for the Headlands Center for the Arts Tournesol Award and was nominated for the SFMOMA SECA Award in 2023. He is also a facilitator at Creative Growth Art Center and is based in Oakland.

**Itzli OCIEL [GG]** is an artist, designer, educator, and writer based in the Bay Area. They were born in the unceded Tongva land of Los Angeles and came of age in the unceded Lenape land of New York City. They received their BA from UCLA's Design | Media Arts Department in 2016. Their work weaves through design thinking, textile production, rave poetics, critical theory, archive study, protest, queer and trans visual culture, and their own impulses as a painter. They build dense, unstable, hyper-saturated, technicolor compositions and have exhibited in the United States and El Salvador.

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