Fifty-Fourth Annual UC Berkeley MFA Exhibition
MITH & CO.
Fifty-Fourth Annual
UC Berkeley Master of Fine Arts Exhibition

For more than fifty years, BAMPFA and the UC Berkeley Department of Art Practice have collaborated to present an exhibition of works by Master of Fine Arts graduates. This year’s exhibition includes the work of four artists: Salimatu Amabebe, Anamaya Farthing-Kohl, Valencia James, and Nivedita Madigubba.

Titled MITH & CO., the exhibition takes its name from a reappropriated public sign located just a mile away from the MFA studios at Richmond Field Station. Either by intention or by incident, the S in the original sign, which read “SMITH & CO.,” is missing. The artists noticed that when read aloud, the phrase forms a homophone with the Spanish word mitico (mythic). This playful slippage is a reminder of how the unruliness of the world can create new language and meaning through poetic intervention. Exploring themes of queer kinship, mythmaking, postcolonial entanglements, late capitalist critique, and Black self-determination, this exhibition celebrates new bodies of work that represent the culmination of two years of intensive study through the MFA program at UC Berkeley.

MITH & CO.: The Fifty-Fourth Annual UC Berkeley Master of Fine Arts Graduate Exhibition is organized by BAMPFA staff and curated by Matthew Villar Miranda, Curatorial Associate, and Claire Frost, Art Program Senior Project Manager, Stanford Health Care (former BAMPFA Curatorial Associate). The annual MFA exhibition is made possible by the Barbara Berelson Wiltsek Endowment.
Salimatu Amabebe's work reveals the shapes of things. Tangled white tank tops obscure the chair beneath. No, the tops are the chair. A half dozen belts, woven and strung, form another chair. Clothes lie atop, take over, and become a large couch. A television monitor stands on a beige carpeted pedestal, playing a short film: a scene with the artist and his father, represented by three different men. Amabebe's objects shift and transmute from shape, to thing, to shape again. His works interrupt the fixity of objects as things, focusing attention instead on the multiple ways memory, imagination, and violence can transform and transmute their very shapes. Grounding the exhibition, a swath of ready-made beige carpet runs from the floor up the wall, its tactility inviting entrance and escape, orientation and disorientation. This invitation to touch and to flee shifts the stability of the exhibition to the transformative potential of a portal. Amabebe's living room is an unsettled and unsettling vessel. Carpet, couch, chair, and television take on strangeness and usher us toward revelation that runs from an unreachable conclusion. What is privileged is the significance of how one thing becomes another, rather than why.

Endria Isa Richardson
Salimatu Amabebe: *Kitchen Chair*, 2023 (detail); courtesy of the artist.
ANAMAYA FARTHING-KOHL

Through a braiding of dreams, memories of home, and a desire for tenderness, Anamaya Farthing-Kohl invites us to be among the pieces of our present. In this installation, fragments of found objects and industrial debris from the surroundings of the artist’s studio reflect on traces of modernity and craft imaginaries beyond the hierarchical rigidity of the modern grid. These fragments reach for the past-present-futureness of their now and to the multiple possibilities of life’s ongoing becoming. Thoroughly distributed in space, the debris welcome us in their circle. They mourn, they stare at us, and they wonder, how can we be in multiplicity? How can we exist outside of the fabricated myth of the grid? They invite us to hear their interiority, to feel tenderness through the solidity of the concrete, and
to be with our own rubble, as well as to imagine being in relation through deep care and intimacy. The work *Their* interweaves fragments of our present with an otherwise futurity, guided by the braids of those sustaining our sky.

The complex layering of materials, textures, and known or unrecognizable objects produces a landscape of familiar domesticity and an opening to an uncanny intimacy that is yet to be. In this sense, Farthing-Kohl’s practice offers us the possibility to sit with our situatedness in the world and ask ourselves how much we are willing to become new in order to experience life in multiplicity, with tenderness and deep care for one another.

Luíza Bastos Lages
Valencia James: Ceremonial, 2024; courtesy of the artist.
VALENCIA JAMES

Valencia James is a movement artist and performer whose work is rooted in historical and interview-based methodologies. She works at the epistemic site of the personal, the ancestral, the communal, and the geographic. Building on her previous work on Barbados’s Landship traditions, Ceremonial is an immersive installation combining sculpture and video that invokes the maypole plaiting traditions practiced in Barbados.

This new work builds on research into colonial and cultural histories in Barbados while attending to broader possibilities beyond a singular origin or identity. The materials invoke the oceanic as well as Afro-diasporic cultural and spiritual practices. Ropes, textiles, found maritime objects, metal rings, mirror-carpet, video, and sound meet to create a material-visual-sonic scape. The open space below the meeting of ropes and netting invites the witness-collaborator to stand in the center and become the pole (maypole/ceremonial center post). To embrace this invitation—to physically heed its call with one’s body—is a ritual process in both its initiatory movement and resultant “reverberations.”

James’s facilitation of this encounter encourages those who participate in the piece to “think of their bodies as ceremonial conduits of communication with their ancestors.” The invitation to participate speaks to James’s commitment to communally honor and revisit “innovative systems of care.” Ceremonial refuses the totalizing narratives of the ongoing coloniality that characterizes the Caribbean and Barbados. By placing primacy on the body as a conduit, James creates an opening for the witness-collaborator to refuse compulsory forgetting and consider that our communal survival is rooted in the discontinuous continuity of ancestrally informed transformation.

Franchesca Araújo
Nivedita Madigubba skillfully weaves together an ethos of translation and visuality in her works. She captures these complexities through media ranging from sculpture to print. In her latest work, छाप | chhāp | imprint, impression, mark (2024), she takes up the notion of imprint as a critical category to communicate how techniques of printing are replete with traces of hierarchical modes of thinking. The word chhāp in its literal translation suggests an imprint, stamp, impression, or mark.

The work is a multimedia installation printed on paper using rubber stamps. It calls attention to cultural entanglements by referencing an image of the wallpapered interiors of the 1964 Satyajit Ray film titled Charulata, set in 1879 in Calcutta during the British Raj, and by juxtaposing designs appropriated from the British artist William Morris (1834–1896). In Madigubba’s installation, a haptic speaker made from a modified wooden table reverberates, the sentence “listen with your palms” etched into its surface. The total effect highlights how embodiment is deeply intertwined with experience. Madigubba’s work questions what it means to “leave a mark” and how artistic production negotiates the vestiges of colonial articulations. It looks closely at inhabited spaces—the interior as intimate—that shape our own relationship with nature through hybrid motifs composed of human and nonhuman forms. By bringing design to the forefront, her work critiques the ways that empires often bring the periphery into the center, sometimes making ornaments of their colonies—traveling beyond strictly preconceived ideas of cultural entanglements.

Brishti Modak
TOP
Nivedita Madigubba: still from छाप | chhāp | imprint, impression, mark, 2024; courtesy of the artist.

BOTTOM
Nivedita Madigubba: before the words roll off our tongues, 2023; courtesy of the artist.
Photo: Julia Fairbrother.
**ARTISTS**

**Salimatu Amabebe** is a trans Nigerian American chef and multimedia artist, working in food, film, photography, sculpture, and installation. His work centers community activism, African diasporic performance traditions, and Black queer/trans liberation. Amabebe is the founder/director of Black Feast—a culinary event celebrating Black artists and writers through food.

Amabebe’s work has recently been presented at the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; BAMPFA; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; Portland Institute for Contemporary Art; SOMArts, San Francisco; David Ireland House, San Francisco; and CounterPulse, San Francisco. He is a recipient of the Museum of the African Diaspora’s 2023–24 Emerging Artists Program Award, a 2023 Murphy & Cadogan Contemporary Art Award, the 2022 Black Immersive Creators Grant, and the 2021 Eater New Guard Award. His work has been featured in *Vogue*, the *New York Times*, and *Eater*. Amabebe’s work and recipes can also be found in A24’s cookbook, *Horror Caviar*, and Klancy Miller’s recent cookbook *For the Culture*.

**Anamaya Farthing-Kohl** makes work in collaboration with the public, often asking for help in defining, circulating, or discovering their work. The things are projects for participation: they are nuclei for thinking. The artist attempts to remove themself as the sole author by inviting others to participate, with the hope of making each thing a producer-place. The network of authors is held together by one central nucleus: the thing. Farthing-Kohl is less interested in that thing than in the network of interconnected parts that circulate it.

Farthing-Kohl has had residencies at RAIR (Recycled Artist in Residency Program), Philadelphia; Kiosko Galería, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia; NKF, Stockholm; Luminary, St. Louis; and Centro Rural de Arte, Buenos Aires. They have also received grants from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Globus Opstart/Nordic Culture Fund, Stockholm Stads, Fulbright Program, and AMEXICD. They have participated in shows at the Galleries at Moore, Philadelphia; Parsons School of Design’s Aronson Gallery, New York; Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City; Museo de la Ciudad de México, Mexico City; Galería 10.000, Mexico City; Galería Ladrón, Mexico City; La ENE, Buenos Aires; Casa Maauad, Mexico City; and Cráter Invertido, Mexico City, among others.
Valencia James is an interdisciplinary artist from Barbados interested in the intersection between dance, theater, technology, art installation, and activism. Her earlier works explored remote interdisciplinary collaboration, artist-driven open-source software tools, and the combination of live performance with immersive interactive technologies. Currently, she is researching the relationship between performance and play and how traditional Caribbean cultural and spiritual forms have been used by communities in active resistance and problem-solving in the face of colonial systems. James was a 2020 Rapid Response Fellow at Eyebeam NYC and a 2021–22 Sundance Interdisciplinary Fellow. She has presented work at the International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence (2015), SIGGRAPH (2021), and the New Frontier exhibition at the Sundance Film Festival (2022). She has participated in group exhibitions in Istanbul, Buenos Aires, Budapest, and San Francisco, and at UC Berkeley. In 2023 she was awarded a Cadogan Scholarship by the San Francisco Foundation and SOMArts.

Nivedita Madigubba was born and raised in Hyderabad, India. She is curious about the collision of different knowledge systems brought on by colonization and the social and political forms they take today. Her practice engages with products of cultural processes as materials that embody memories to reframe them and visualize counternarratives. Madigubba holds a BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and was awarded the Barbara McKee Memorial Scholarship and the Leap Prize. She was the 2023 recipient of the San Francisco Foundation’s Cadogan Award.
WRITERS

Franchesca Araújo is a Black Studies PhD candidate and writer rooted in Caribbean and political theory and Afro-Caribbean anti-colonial philosophies. She is currently writing about Black Dominican (Dominican Republic) articulations/cultural productions of unruliness and deviance. Her work explores how deviance, deficiency, and excess are produced and ascribed onto people, Black cultural productions (especially from the Hispanophone Caribbean), and spaces as a central part of normative humanness, colonial world craft, state making and formation, imperial violence, and resource deprivation. More specifically, she is committed to affirmations of place rather than nation, and an Aimé Césaire-ian impulse to end this world.

Luíza Bastos Lages is a PhD student in the Department of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley whose doctoral research centers the contemporary art practices of Indigenous, Black, and brown artists from Latin America, and their diaspora in the United States, with a focus on how particular aesthetic practices articulate non-modern (non-Western) knowledges and interrogate the concept of coloniality of gender—and its intrinsic hierarchies of racial categorization. Adopting abolitionist and decolonial frameworks, Bastos Lages considers how art practices may reconceptualize the human as delinked from the imposed modern colonial episteme, affirm multiple ways of existing, and elicit “a sensory-erotics of affinity carved out of—and in spite of—difference.”

Brishti Modak studies the intersections between sculptural histories and architectural histories of nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Asia. Her research also looks more broadly at art institutional histories, materiality, and feminist art practice. She has a BA in philosophy from Presidency University (Kolkata, India) and an MA in art history from Jamia Millia Islamia (New Delhi, India). In 2021 she earned her MPhil from the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, India. Since then she has worked at Critical Collective and Delhi Art Gallery.
Endria Isa Richardson is a Black, Malaysian, and gay American writer from Worcester, Massachusetts. Her essays have appeared in *Black Warrior Review*, *Alpinist*, and *Bay Nature* magazines. Her speculative fiction is in *Lightspeed*, *Clarke's World*, *FIYAH*, *Nightmare*, and other fantastic/al magazines. Her work has received notable mentions in *Best American Essays* and *Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy*, as well as the runner-up award from the *Black Warrior Review* nonfiction contest. Richardson was a Tin House Scholar and is a graduate of the Viable Paradise and VONA workshops. She was a Spring 2023 writer-in-residence at the Headlands Center for the Arts in Marin, California, where she was a McLaughlin Children’s Trust awardee. She holds a JD from Stanford Law School and is currently a PhD student in the Department of African American Studies at UC Berkeley.

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