

generations

University of Maine Artists Choose Artists

Hannah Barnes

Ali Dion

Jesse Potts

Abigail Cloutier

Peter Precourt

Ted Closson

Susan Smith

Anna Martin

Charles Danforth Gallery
at the University of Maine at Augusta
Aug 30 - Oct 18, 2023

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Foreword

Amy Rahn

Generations, the title of this exhibition, has two meanings. First, it indicates the ways Art faculty in the University of Maine system share their gathered knowledge in direct and indirect ways with those who come to learn from them, creating waves of artists that radiate around them and through time. **Generations** also refers to the creative energy that the studio environment creates; the studio is a place where ideas and artworks are created - it is a possibility-generator. The studio is also a site that generates possibilities for artists themselves; faculty, and especially Art faculty, not only point to what's possible for artists they teach and mentor, but to the potential, even the worthiness, of an artist to elect a creative future.

As an Art History professor at the University of Maine at Augusta, I teach classes, direct the Charles Danforth Gallery, and carry out a lively research agenda. It was in the latter capacity, when researching the American artist Joan Mitchell (1925 - 1992), that my attention turned to her mentorship of younger artists. In looking for ways to link my research with my teaching and curatorial work, I soon realized the artistic mentorship that fascinated me in Mitchell's life was all around me, day in and day out, in the generous, ongoing mentorships that support the growth of artist-learners while they are enrolled in studio classes at the University and long after.

I also realized, in an era when higher education is frequently discussed in terms of job readiness, that this continuing, life-changing mentorship aspect of studio art teaching and learning might easily escape wider appreciation. For, while those who have pursued a studio art education vividly remember the ways art professors have demonstrated a technique, suggested an avenue for investigation, challenged an idea, or suggested ways to continue on an artistic path, the hands-on mentorship of art faculty is less known outside the turpentine-scented quarters that artist-learners and faculty haunt.

This exhibition is meant to draw the generative artist-mentor relationships native to the studio into the lights of the gallery. seeing the works of art faculty beside their former students highlights and celebrates the ways

art faculty in the University of Maine system mentor and support artistic growth in the studio and beyond, and offers our community access to the insights artist-alums have achieved in their studios.

Each of the four corners of this exhibition holds the work of a mentor-artist teaching in an Art department in the University of Maine aystem, and an alum artist the Art faculty member chose for reasons delivered in the pages of this catalogue and the walls of the Danforth Gallery. Hannah Barnes is Associate Professor of Art and Art Department Chair at the University of Southern Maine. She chose Ali Dion, an artist who completed her BFA at USM in 2023. Jesse Potts is Chair of the Division of the Arts and Associate Professor of Art at the University of Maine Farmington. He chose Abigail Cloutier, who completed her BA in Art at UMF in 2022. Peter Precourt is Professor of Art and Art Department Coordinator at the University of Maine at Augusta. He chose Ted Closson, who graduated with his BA in Art from UMA in 2009. Susan Smith, PhD is director of the Intermedia Program at the University of Maine at Orono, and chose Anna Martin, who completed an interdisciplinary PhD with research in Intermedia and collaborative practice in 2023.

Arranged to create a visual dialogue between the works of artist-faculty and artist-alums, **Generations** addresses not only the person-to-person ways Art faculty teach art techniques and practices, but also the ways a studio education supports artists in stepping fully into their own distinct practices, materials, and concepts. Mentorship among artists generates growth, momentum, and creativity. The studio is a generator, and the artists that feed its engine as teachers and the artists that draw on its energy and forge new visions as learners know it as a warm place where art and artists grow.

Hannah Barnes

I create paintings, drawings, and installations that explore color, material, structure, and the nature of meaning in abstraction. My work is permeated by an interest in pattern and geometry. I also explore painting as a unique form of ritual labor. I approach abstraction through a lens of non-hierarchical and process-based image making. My practice stems from a wish to reimagine abstract painting's history and its capacity to express marginalized experiences. While my work is guided by a love of painting, I also draw influence from textiles, decorative arts, and ritual-based art forms. Feminist theory and contemplative practice traditions are significant frameworks for my practice, as both give space to that which exceeds language and resists codification.

Drawing forms the core of my work. I approach it as a mode of visual thinking and a way to experiment with shape, color, and material. I draw without a plan. Like calisthenics or meditation, I approach drawing as a practice – a place to hone my capacity for observation, awareness, attention, and perception. I value watercolor's fluidity and unpredictability; it is a responsive material that easily registers touch and the hand, as well as ambient conditions such as moisture and gravity.

My recent paintings employ geometric pattern as a vehicle for connecting points in time and space. I employ layers and accumulation to foreground the importance of time, concentration, and labor in the painting process. In my paintings, thin, fluid washes form underpaintings upon which geometric structures are built. The process is emergent; I allow each layer to determine the next. As layers accumulate, the surface remains thin so that space is simultaneously implied and negated.

My installations and wall drawings are extensions of my interest in labor, process, and temporality. I work with impermanent materials such as watercolor, ink, rice flour, and powdered pigment. My installations are developed on site and in relation to the unique architectural planes and dimensions of a given space. In these works, I attempt to engage aspects of my ideas not easily explored on a two-dimensional surface, such as the presence of the body and the changing conditions of light and shadow. I also attempt to explore artmaking as ritual labor and a means of activating shared and inhabited spaces.



Hannah Barnes
"Hum" 2023
Oil and graphite on hand-dyed linen
26" x 34"

Hannah Barnes

Why did you select Ali Dion for this exhibition?

I chose Ali for this exhibition because she models the qualities of an individual determined to make her way as an artist: commitment, curiosity, determination, earnestness, humility, a love of painting, and an eagerness to see and picture the world through her own unique lens.

I first met Ali Dion as her professor in Introduction to Painting class, it was clear from day one that Ali was the type of artist who saw the world differently - and was eager to share that vision with others. Even in our early still life exercises, Ali found ways to share her fascination with color, pattern, and biomorphic abstraction. She approached each subject, no matter how mundane, as opportunity to find joy and beauty through painting. Over the years, it's been an honor to watch Ali's style evolve and develop into her own unique voice.

What about Ali's work, or her ways of working, most inspires you?

Ali's way of working is deceptive! Her abstract paintings appear playful, intuitive, and improvisational, and have a sense of ease. From working with Ali, however, I know that she actually brings a tremendous amount of planning and rigor to each of her paintings. From her choices of color and form to her approach to careful layering, each step is considered and intentional. I love that Ali is able to create paintings that have a sense of joy and levity but are grounded in such a rigorous work ethic. I also find Ali's ability to bring personal feelings and experiences to abstract paintings really inspiring. Her work is a reminder to me that painting is a space where meaning does not have to be literal to be impactful.

Has working with Ali affected the ways you think and work as a professor? If so, how?

It's a cliché, but it's true!: I learn more from my students than they will ever learn from me. Ali's work and process has always kept me on my toes. She's been ready to meet and exceed every challenge - and working with her has reminded me that students are often capable and ready for more than we think! Sometimes as an educator my job is to create the space and opportunities for students to move forward - and then just get out of their way.

What aspect of your work with Ali do you think they would find most resonant in their continuing life and work?

I hope our shared love of abstraction in all its various forms will continue to inspire Ali and propel her work forward!

How do you think of mentorship in relation to your career as an artist and art professor? How has your work with students over your years of teaching shaped those views?

Since beginning my teaching career in 2007 I've come to think of art education as a form of stewardship. As artists studying the history and practice of making, we inherit the various histories, traditions, legacies, and stories that make up the field of visual art. The studio classroom is a place where the practice of art is kept alive through dissemination and innovation. As practitioners, we each do our part to sustain our discipline over time, each adding our unique voices and visions to the field.

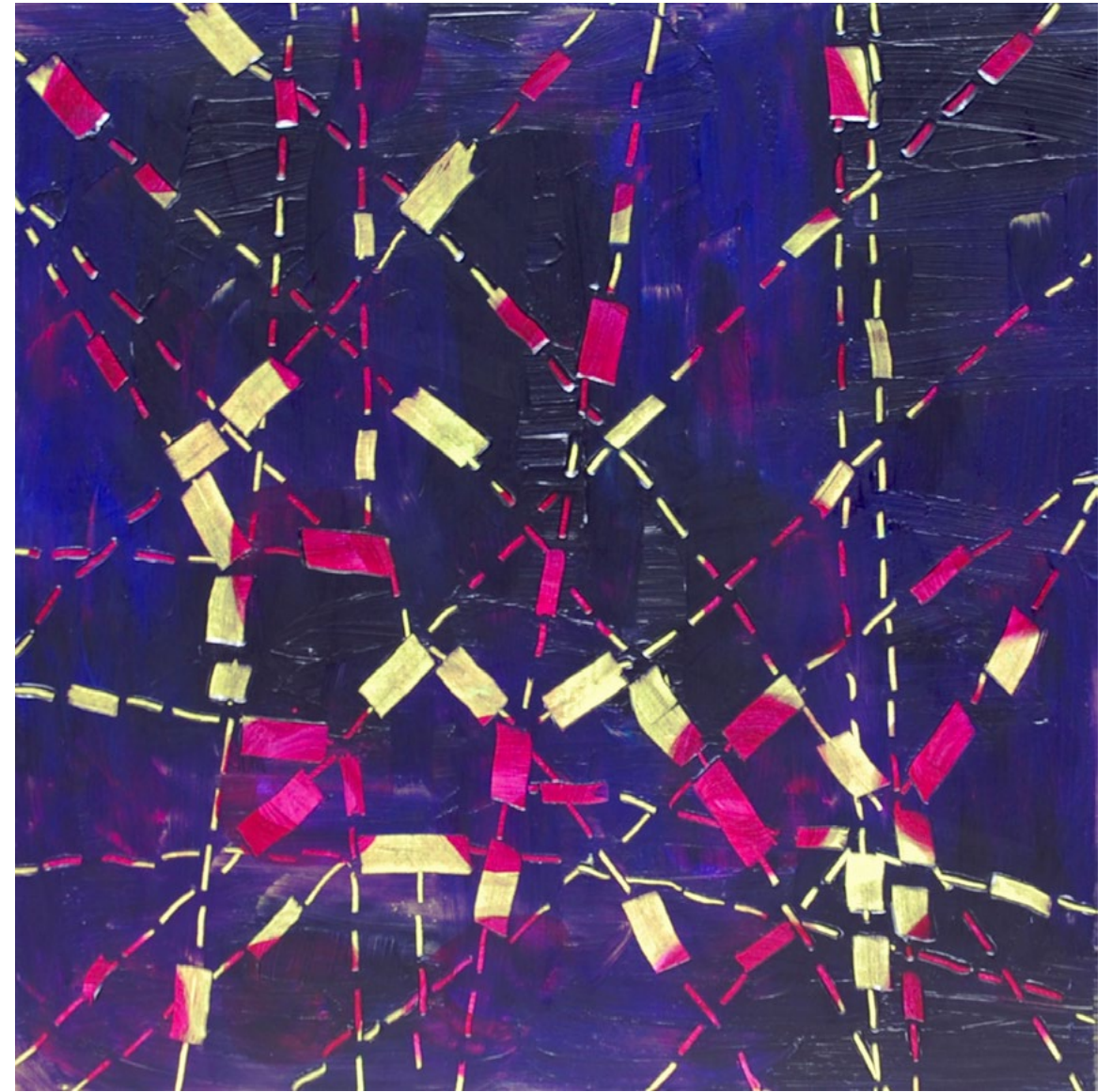
My job as a mentor is not only to train students but also to help them find how and where their unique voice fits into this ongoing conversation of contemporary art. In my work with students, I've learned to set aside my own expectations and assumptions about what those voices might look and sound like. Working with students in Maine, I've had the privilege to get to know students with diverse backgrounds, experiences, circumstances, and reasons for choosing to be artists. I'm continually surprised and inspired to learn about their individual stories. Often, the hardest work in teaching is helping students to recognize their own value and really understand and believe in what it is they bring to the table as individuals. Cultivating this confidence and self-awareness is key to creative mentorship - and is what I hope to offer my students.

Ali Dion

Throughout my years in the University of Southern Maine Art Department, I always struggled with the idea of making my artwork personal to myself and my story, or impersonal with no meaning in it at all and focusing on the color and composition of the artwork itself. I didn't want it to seem like I was flaunting my mental health for empathy or wanting to be pitied because of it. So I stuck with my comfort of color, form, and pattern for most of my USM career because of that lingering fear.

Within the last few semesters before I graduated, I started to slowly open up in my work about my personal experiences little by little. I like to say I leave little "easter eggs" to myself within my pieces that I may only know about like adding a shape or color that reminds me of a certain feeling or experience in my life. Some people may feel similarly to me, and some may think of something else while looking at it and that's fine by me. My artwork likes to make people think, myself included.

This series explores the struggles of living with insomnia and how hard it is to simply fall asleep at night. To create this work, I investigated the different textures of acrylic paint using patterns, layering, and scraping. Through this series, I wanted to share my history with insomnia through the creation of abstract patterns. I want the work to show off my experiences that speak only to me, but also connect to a larger audience.



Ali Dion
"Melatonin" 2023
Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36 in

Ali Dion

How would you describe your experiences working in the studio with Hannah Barnes?

I have been connected with Hannah since my second year of my college career at USM. From introductory painting to figure painting, and even advanced she's been with me through it all. She's always been good at pushing me to give it my all and challenge myself when my drive wasn't at its peak.

What about this Hannah's work, or her ways of working with artists, most inspires you?

Hannah's work inspires me because of what she focuses on, form and color. Upon entering the art department, my peers around me had lots of personal connections to their art and to me my art was about the color and shapes I created first. I felt discouraged at points because of my opposition to making my art more personal, but Hannah supported me and said that all art doesn't have to be personal. Her art that focuses on color and form on the forefront inspired me to gain more confidence in what I like to create and not feel like I have to make my art more personal than I want.

Has working with Hannah affected the ways you think and work as an artist beyond your time in the classroom/studio? What has most resonated with you from your work with Hannah?

One lesson I've kept in the back of my mind at all times thanks to Hannah is to always keep creating art to keep the creative process flowing. I'm a quick painter so during classes I always tended to finish the current assignment earlier than my peers. Whenever I finished, boredom started to set in, and whenever Hannah saw this happen she would tell me to get another canvas or piece of paper out and start another work. I always sighed and took out a piece of paper, but thinking back this was the best advice anyone could give me.

What aspect of your working with you do you think your mentor found most resonant? What do you make of the difference or similarity?

I think my time management skills were more resonant to my mentor. This is similar to what I identified in the last question because it goes along

with how I'm a quick painter. Since I always had 4-5 classes going on at the same time I had to learn to juggle them quickly or else I would get too stressed and my artwork would turn sloppy. In turn this turned me into a quick painter so I could get my assignments done a little ahead of time just in case. Being a quick painter doesn't mean that it doesn't look finished or that I rushed it, it simply means I planned ahead and spent the time needed to create my vision.

Are there broader ideas, in terms of teaching or art or community, that have surfaced for you in preparing for this exhibition?

In preparation for this exhibition, I have had to learn to make time for art and create artwork while working a full-time job throughout the summer. Working 35-40 hours a week with weird days off has given me a bit of a challenge while preparing for this, but luckily my time management skills are awesome. But it's still hard sometimes after a long week and wanting to spend a day relaxing, but in the end I still push myself to make art. Because if I don't I can fall behind my personal schedule and even lose some of my passion.

How do you think of mentorship and/or community in relation to your broader career as an artist? How have your experiences with art and mentorship (in and possibly outside the academy) shaped those views?

I think community is essential in relation to my broader career as an artist. For example my friends and peers I met throughout my college career, local artists, and the artists-in-residence I met while attending USM.

Community is what brings art to life and how we share our artwork and stories to the people around us.

Jesse Potts

In recent sculptural works and installations I use altered objects and construction materials to create narratives about the human condition. I am interested in creating assemblages and installations that utilize the meaning of objects and materials while subverting or recontextualizing perceptions of their use-value. Wonderment, introspection, playfulness and content embedded in the work often depend on the acknowledgement of something's designed purpose and the slippage of meaning caused by an alteration, condition or an object's relationship to the whole.

I am interested in ways simple alterations and combinations of these objects and materials call into question their use value and affect or redirect the underlying narrative or content of a work. I am curious about how actions and relationships of common items like ladders, doors and other home goods can be utilized to tell stories and explore symbolism and challenge perceptions of transience and permanence. I like to play with ways that meaning can develop by viewing a work from various angles and how aspects of a piece may be hidden and revealed and how a story in a work might unfold over time.

In **A Little More Than Enough** the unexpected combination of an extension ladder and pogo stick are meant to provide a strange set of comparisons and a mashup of uses and value structures. At first glance, the two are instinctually oppositional and little is done to alter either object. Content in the work is reliant on the narratives derived from the interplay of the objects. The pogo stick is a toy meant to elevate and to be playfully off-balance. Conversely, the ladder is a tool to elevate and to provide balance and support to its user. On one hand the unconventional relationship of the objects cause a sort of visual friction, obstruct the use of each other and render one another moot unless perhaps part of some new circus act. On the other hand the combination of objects sets up comparisons between the two as a means of aspiration for elevation or the symbolic desire for another rung. This work explores themes of work and play, figurative and literal connection to the ground, feelings of stability, disconnection, ascent and related notions of human nature and mortality.



Jesse Potts
"Arc" 2018, 16' x 14' x 2'
Aluminum extension ladder, hardware

Jesse Potts

Why did you select Abby Cloutier for this exhibition?

When presented with this great opportunity by Amy Rahn at UMA, I felt this would be a great moment and opportunity for Abby to create some new work and utilize this as a nudge in her path as a working artist especially in the event that she pursues graduate school. Admittedly, that may be a bit of a faculty ulterior motive on my part. Most importantly, I chose Abby to participate because I felt that she was an ideal representative of the mission and values of the UMF art program. She is a multidisciplinary artist who thinks deeply about the content and concepts she explores and isn't afraid to tackle a new medium or process that fits her underlying idea and motivation behind a work. She likes to experiment with the way her processes can reinforce her ideas, the give and take of that in the studio and the way a body of work can reinforce and strengthen an underlying motive or manner of being. She was always so great at articulating her ideas in her writing but not beholden to those words in the studio as new ideas and processes evolved. She was also always such a great steward of the classroom & studio, supportive of her peers, thoughtful, and engaged as a student and artist. Her work across mediums was always playful, strong and explores a complex range of topics and emotions.

What about Abby's work, or her ways of working, most inspires you?

When working with Abby, I admired the openness of her approach in the studio and her playfulness with media in which three dimensions and two dimensions can work together in different pieces. I admired the ways she worked with moving images in animation and static objects and the approachability of her use of symbolism and metaphors and action in her work. I liked the way she works across mediums, but also thinks about the way that an audience may interact with different pieces and the interplay or call and response of pieces in her portfolio. Abby is really great at beginning work and assessing the direction of an idea and of the advantage or limitation of a process and responding. Sometimes I feel like the outcome of my work is too predetermined and that my own ideas are sometimes too prescriptive or not that well mediated by the studio. Her willingness to be flexible and learn new ways of working continue to inspire. In our classes, she was always determined, but flexible and her skills of observation and response were always remarkable.

Has working with Abby affected the ways you think and work as a professor? If so, how?

And I think in some ways every student that I've had in a class has impacted my approach as a professor in the studio/classroom. Each course and class has its own dynamic too with slightly different demographics and goals. Having Abby in multiple courses, one thing that sticks out to me is in better recognizing the role of the faculty in offering feedback, especially to works in progress. One of Abby's strengths was in her ability to receive feedback and finish works in her own voice by using her own observations and her many skill sets. Abby taught me to be especially mindful and keen to perceive the ability and willingness of a student to receive feedback and tack their own course of action. The balance of offering feedback and open-ended solutions versus the way a doctor is expected to offer a prescription to a problem is important to constantly work through. The way I might solve a problem in the studio is sometimes irrelevant to a student's process or idea. Sometimes a student just wants a quick resolution or to know the right answer. In that situation giving them too many options or scenarios can be frustrating. A student like Abby is great to have in class because she is willing to put in the effort to take what I hoped was open-ended feedback and respond, but also didn't need a specific resolution. She was willing to process feedback and work through the issues and resolutions in her own way.

The shorter answer to this question is to better trust the student's ability to find their own motivations and resolutions given active feedback.

What aspect of your work with Abby do you think they would find most resonant in her continuing life and work?

I don't know how well I can answer this question. This certainly seems more aspirational from my point of view. I hope that after working with Abby in our senior seminar she would take away an appreciation for the underlying importance and value of the artist's search for meaning and the two-fold nature of that search; in the studio both from the point of view of that artist in that moment and space, and for the role of that artist to bring their goals and ideas to fruition by bringing their voice & work to a larger audience. I would hope that my values and earnest method of observation and search for meaning and storytelling resonated.

Are there broader ideas, in terms of teaching or art or community,

that have surfaced for you in preparing for this exhibition?

I am very grateful to have been invited to this exhibition because it has offered a moment for me to reflect on the great gift of the reciprocation in these relationships.

How do you think of mentorship in relation to your career as an artist and art professor? How has your work with students over your years of teaching shaped those views?

I think I approached the whole enterprise with a great deal of gratitude.

First, gratitude for having had so many great mentors in my life and for their guidance and insight and also gratitude for finding myself in the position to be a mentor for other young artists and students. Every educational, and professional aspiration and opportunity that I've been so fortunate to have is because of someone else who provided or recommended that opportunity and/or in some way had a hand in shaping those experiences and by extension, my entire existence and way of life. My relationship to and understanding of my responsibilities as a mentor are largely shaped from my vast experience as a mentee. I often reflect on my good fortune and on how my entire way of life, not just in the studio, but as a person, parent, academic, artist and community member are entirely shaped by my mentors.

In my early years as a teacher, I think I approached mentorship all wrong; more as a older sibling might encourage a younger sibling. I am afraid that I didn't think all that deeply about my responsibility, for better or for worse, I kind of feel like maybe I was more in the moment. I was also much closer in age at that time so maybe that was a more honest and natural approach. As I age into the role, I feel like I am more mindful of those interactions. I think about how my observations or suggestions may carry more weight than I'd like them to or wish they had, again, for better or worse. I also think about helping students identify a trajectory after graduation and the larger picture. Sometimes I feel a little more measured now. I'm still forthcoming, honest, as helpful and promoting as I can possibly be but I also better understand the gravity of the role of mentorship. I also value humility. I think I've always wanted to be real, acknowledge my own flaws and foibles and be human first.

Earlier in my career I was always much more adverse to asking for help. Asking for letters of recommendation just felt to me like such a burdensome chore on the person I needed to ask. I just hated to do it. I

hated to bug them. Now, after having written lots of letters for colleagues and students in particular, to send to future employers or grad school committees, it's actually such a great pleasure to reciprocate in that way. As a mentee, I had it all wrong. It's actually a joy of the job to reflect on the strengths and attributes of friends, colleagues and students. I just see that whole endeavor - to continue on in school and succeed in careers and the reliance on those relationships - as a real joy of being an art professor.

Abigail Cloutier

Our world is in constant states of change, and in my work I try to create moments where the viewer can take pause and reflect. My work in the past has been an exploration of connection; to others, the world, nature, ourselves. I use my work to create a moment where the viewer can reflect on different types of connection. We live in a time where we have become unconnected to those around us, from community, family, and peers, yet we can connect with so many people through technology. I explore my ideas through depicting hands or birds, as through my time in undergrad I have found that using them allows me to express how I feel. Birds have always interested me; they show freedom, community, and are supernatural. Each bird symbolizes different meanings, and that language is intriguing to me. Hands are a uniquely human trait, they bring what we observe into an active experience. We define ourselves in the work that is made by our hands. We reach out to others with our hands - we seek physical connection.

Experimenting with materials influences my work. Using unusual and found materials transforms the way I create and the work from its original concept. My most recent project titled "Intent" is a series of Cyanotype prints - an early form of photography that uses UV reactive chemicals to create uniquely dark blue exposures. I took scans of sketches, text, and feathers and used those alongside photos I took to create unique cyanotype collages. It's a unique mix of a digital and traditional process that I try to explore. To me, the most interesting works are the ones that don't work out the way you planned, the ones that challenge you and surprise you along the way. What I love about the cyanotype process is that you can't fully predict how an exposure is going to turn out. The type of paper, the brand of chemicals, and even the weather are all factors that can drastically change the results of any prints. It creates a challenge to me as an artist and problems I can try to solve with each exposure. A lot of my work comes from a place of trial and error, as I often self teach myself new mediums, processes and unique ways of utilizing any medium.

In the continuation of my practice I want to continue to learn, grow, and experience new mediums for art and my own relation to the world around me. I want my work to play with the ideas of traditional and digital as we live in a time of advanced technology. I want to create and express



Abigail Cloutier
"Intent 1" 2023
Cyanotype print on paper, 8"x 10"

my ideas and view of the world, to share the things and processes I find interesting, and to create work that explores different connections that are formed throughout our lives.

Abigail Cloutier

How would you describe your experiences working in the studio with Jesse Potts?

Jesse has always been supportive of my ideas and goals. He always encourages us to create art that we are interested in, but also explore the deeper concepts connected to the work, like what the materials used say about the work. Jesse has always been a bit playful in the classroom, one of my favorite projects was when he gave us a snuggie to transform into a different wearable object, which was challenging and fun to design and create.

What about this Jesse's work, or his ways of working with artists, most inspires you?

I love the way Jesse's work often has an element of movement to it, a piece that is not static, that forces you to pause for a moment to experience the full range of a piece. I want to create those kinds of moments in my own work, where people need to stop and take in the piece as a whole and as the individual components.

Has working with Jesse affected the ways you think and work as an artist beyond your time in the classroom/studio? What has most resonated with you from your work with him?

Working with Jesse has encouraged me to explore more with different mediums and has challenged me to see more of the world through the lens of art. I find myself wanting to collect different scraps of material for a possible future use, even if I don't have the space for it. He has also taught me to learn how to interpret and question other artists' work, to better understand the meaning and intent behind a work.

What aspect of working with you do you think your mentor found most resonant?

I think the thing I found most resonating while working with Jesse was his encouragement to experiment and explore with our art, to let the process of creating art be as important as the end result. The journey that we as artists go on when creating a work is a work of art in itself. I think this idea ties in to the use of found objects and unusual materials in a work, as materials can often pose challenges or have unexpected results.

Are there broader ideas, in terms of teaching or art or community,

that have surfaced for you in preparing for this exhibition?

At first this project started out an exploration of the cyanotype printing process, from what it can be printed on, how well the different values develop, to even simply learning how to coat the paper correctly. But as the collages came together the project became more of an exploration of how different images and materials are brought into relation with each other through the cyanotype process that leaves everything in shades of blue.

How do you think of mentorship and/or community in relation to your broader career as an artist? How have your experiences with art and mentorship (in and possibly outside the academy) shaped those views?

I don't think I would have become an artist if not for the mentorship and community I have experienced throughout my journey as an artist. I still remember the moment back in high school where I decided I would pursue an art career was during a workshop at Haystack, where I was able to be fully immersed in a community of other artists. Being in a community is important for my own personal growth as an artist, as it pushes me to create more work and learn from other peers.

Peter Precourt

On July 30, 2005 my wife Jane and I sold our home in Houston and moved to Gulfport, Mississippi; I had been hired to chair the painting area at a small college that overlooked the Gulf of Mexico. Less than one month later, Jane, our 18 month old daughter Charlotte, and I lost most of our possessions, including my art, my art supplies and my slides in Hurricane Katrina. The most depressing visual feature of the Mississippi coast, after the immense destruction, was the endless amount of debris. Everything was leveled and spread across the coastal landscape: nails, drywall, toilets, tires, forks, needles... every item that was once in a house or a garage was now scattered all over the ground. Over nearly two decades, I have struggled to come to terms with a way to tell my experience, which is a single story amongst thousands of stories in the aftermath of violent climate change.

Originally, it made sense to me to tell the **Katrina Chronicles** in a form that embraced the leveling power of Katrina. The first chapters of the Chronicles were told in a visual form that hovers somewhere between a graphic novel, a journal entry, a painting, a memoir and a flippant conversation. It was pieced together on the most delicate and fragile of surfaces, paper. Unfortunately, I have greatly struggled to make this work since the COVID pandemic.

Throughout the early chapters of the **Katrina Chronicles**, it was relatively easy for me to depict my own flaws and missteps in this journey. As the story progressed, I could not find a satisfactory way to unravel and unpack the enormous impact of Jane's mother, Jane Camp Shaver's suffering with dementia. At that moment, we did not know what was causing her completely out of character destructive behavior. It felt, and still feels in the present moment, unfair and unjust to depict Jane Camp Shaver, a woman of great intellect, grace, decorum, style, and integrity, in a snapshot of her worst moments. It is a representation of an incomplete truth that I could not reconcile; thus the **Katrina Chronicles** were pushed aside.

When I was invited to participate in the Generations mentorship exhibition, I was spurred by Ted Closson's incredibly brave graphic story, **As Before, So Behind** to revisit the work. I needed to lay this work on

a stronger foundation than paper; I decided to make the format bigger and shift the making to encaustic on wood panels. I needed to literally excavate my thoughts through many layers buried deep below the surface. It wasn't exactly a fresh start, but a more physically grounded reset.

These two panels, representing both Jane and Charlotte, are far from perfect. The event is one of the most painful of Jane's life. Fortunately, I can sing of their brightness, their sparkle and their goodness in this statement. Jane Camp Shaver was truly remarkable, and for much of her life was my wife Jane's best friend. My hope in this new work is to make images that openly engage the importance of addressing uncomfortable truths and the restorative power of storytelling.

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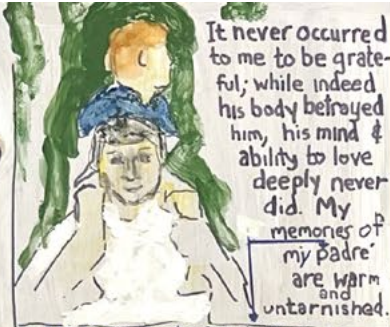
Peter Precourt, "Katrina Chronicles: Excavation Panel 2", Acrylic, Encaustic, Oil, Oil bar, pastel, sumi-e ink and marker on panel, 40" x 30", 2023

tangent 2

My Dad died when he was sixty one

Even in the years before his death watching his broken body fall him piece by piece, organ by organ, I often felt as if he had drawn the short straw.

And as I tried to navigate marriage and fatherhood without him, I felt as if I had drawn the same damn straw.



It never occurred to me to be grateful; while indeed his body betrayed him, his mind & ability to love deeply never did. My memories of my padre are warm and untarnished.

My Dad taught French + Spanish. Naturally, I thought Pedro was cooler than Pierre. He called me Pedro & he was Pierre.

Many adults fear suffering from dementia as they age. For Big Jane this possibility filled her with dread. The mere mention of the short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" would make her shudder and mutter about "the unspeakable horror* of madness."

Most people expect dementia to be a sad mix of confusion and memory loss. No one warns you about the rage, the literal violence, the button pushing, and the destruction of the living relationship of parent and adult child. You are completely unprepared for a hostile, non-empathetic, unrestrained and unleashed new pilot now driving the busk of your parent's body.



As a confirmed poker player, I can say few things with great certainty. I have often seen the highly improbable happen with very high stakes at risk. But, as an altar boy who served in the Fall River diocese in the 1970's (who moved rather than removed predatory priests) I can say with great confidence that the truth, withheld to protect a person or an ideal, can be every bit as devastating as overt lies told to maintain power.



This Karrina chronicle stalled due to my inability to speak hard truths about Big Jane's dementia and her destructive interaction with Jane. In that moment, we couldn't understand the cruelty. Now, I do not want to represent this amazing woman as a Disney villain, or traumatize my Jane any further. Yet, silence no longer seems viable. Just know that inside Big Jane is so much beauty and magic that you will not find here, in the worst and most tragic part of her story.

GET OUT OF MY HOUSE YOU FUCKING BITCH!!



Those hateful eight spittle shrieked words transmuted the strongest woman into a wide-eyed slack jawed slump shouldered Jane simulacrum

I had often heard the expression "the worst part of her story" but I never heard it used in such an explicit way.

Peter Precourt

Why did you select Ted Closson for this exhibition?

Ted was the first student that I worked with at UMA. He actually scheduled a meeting with me before I even started, in August, before I was on contract. Right away, I could tell that he had an intensity, a passion about his work, and an empathy about the people and places he wanted to represent.

I encouraged Ted to go to graduate school; ultimately, he attended my alma mater, The University of Houston. He tapped into both the visual arts program there and the creative writing program. I have very much enjoyed watching his transition from a narrative painter to a storyteller. He teaches from time to time at UMA and has been a guest curator.

Ultimately, while I have had many amazing students that I could have selected; Ted is the one who I have known the longest, and our relationship has moved from professor/student to mentor/alumnus to being peer artists and colleagues.

What about Ted's work, or his ways of working, most inspires you?

Ted has such an amazing combination of persistent work ethic, storytelling power, rendering skill, research chops and an unflinching honesty. He raises the bar for all who know him.

His work "As Before, So Behind: A memoir on Losing a Child" is one of the most powerful pieces of art I have ever encountered. It is stunning in every way.

Has working with Ted affected the ways you think and work as a professor? If so, how?

Working with Ted as one of my first students at UMA, shaped my path as a professor. Many students are going to stay in Maine after graduation, and only a small percentage choose graduate school. Working with Ted taught me to use a sliding scale; I often tell upper level students, "If you are considering graduate school, please let me know. I will give you a different level of criticism (not a different level of grading) to better prepare you for what will come next.

Ted's interest in pushing things further and deeper made the entire faculty

rethink the curriculum and add more 300 and 400 level classes.

What aspect of your work with Ted do you think he would find most resonant in their continuing life and work?

I really am not sure about the answer to this one. I have two guesses: The first is that I think perhaps Ted saw me and realized, "If Pete can craft a life as an artist, I can as well." The second is that I often encouraged Ted to push beyond displaying his amazing technical abilities and to consider more how the viewer was going to interact with the work.

Are there broader ideas, in terms of teaching or art or community, that have surfaced for you in preparing for this exhibition?

A lot of things have come up for me, both in things I have wanted to do, and things I have not wanted to do. I have been at an impasse in my own storytelling for several years as I have searched for how to address the interaction between Jane, my wife, and Jane, her mother as she battled dementia. I could not find a way to address it, and it truly was a fundamental part of the story. During the COVID outbreak, I realized there was a lot of trauma under the surface that both Jane and I had simply pushed down over the years.

After I selected Ted to be in the exhibition with me, I knew I wanted to make new storytelling work. I re-read "As Before, So Behind" to inspire me and push me forward. I wanted to take the honesty and poetics, but embed it with a tactile painterliness which has been hibernating from my work for some time.

Already, the work in progress has sparked a number of long discussions about dementia, abuse, representation and storytelling. I have long been of the opinion that I am more interested in the conversations and connections that happen in relation to my work than the work itself, so that is pretty exciting.

How do you think of mentorship in relation to your career as an artist and art professor? How has your work with students over your years of teaching shaped those views?

I became an art professor because I could think of no better career than to talk to people on a regular basis who are excited about making art. I don't really think of my students as "students" - I think of them as fellow travelers. Often, but not always, I am the most experienced traveler on this stretch of land, but not always. It is a gift and a privilege, both to travel

this journey and to have a fellowship along the way.

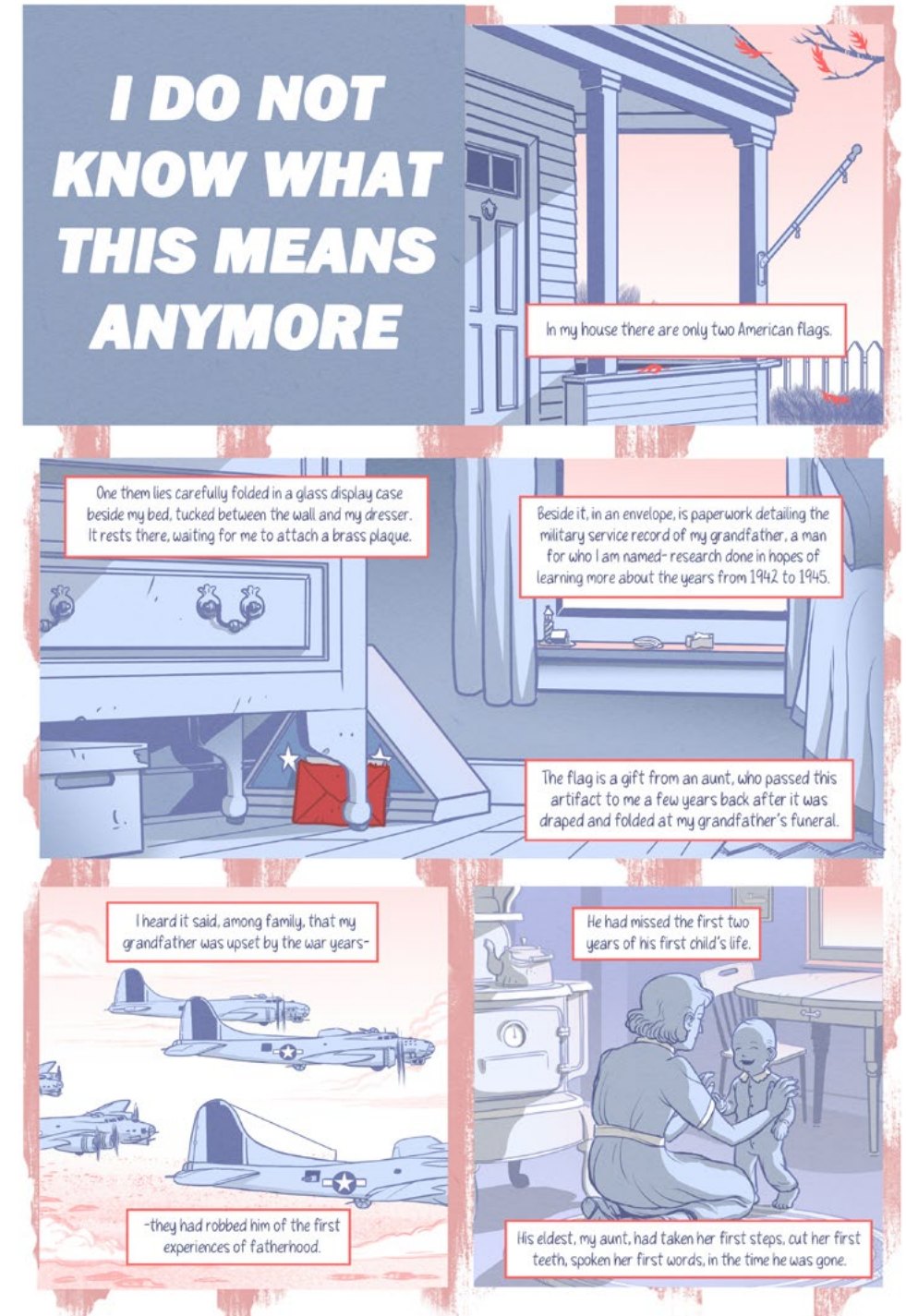
When I began at UMA, I worked with a woman who was in her eighties and had worked as an artist in the 1950s in New York City. Some travelers are deeply invested in the journey, others are here for a shorter visit. Along the way, we keep our eyes open, ask each other questions, we inspire each other and we engage in the gift, this process of thinking, making and sharing.

Ted Closson

I don't know whether this work is dangerous, or incompetent, or dangerously incompetent.

I only know for certain that some of this is what I felt when I saw how we behaved as a nation after the towers fell. And the rhetoric began. And the wars started afresh. And the intelligence infrastructure was built and expanded and expanded. And we elected a rapist, and then a fool, and then a competent black man, and then (almost) a woman, and then a monster. And people were afraid and angry, and some people thought that was funny. And my friend died because he couldn't afford his medication. And I buried my son in a world that was rapidly warming while people continued to debate why it was, or whether it was, happening. And I began to raise my daughter in a world that hates women, and LGBTQ folk, and people of color, and stripped their rights away. And we failed to hold the powerful and the greedy and the cruel accountable. And we jailed people for defending their right to drink clean water. And maimed and killed protestors. And defended racists. And denied the unhoused the right to sleep or seek shelter. And prosecuted those who would feed the hungry. And murdered innocent civilians in the name of justice, and then repeatedly defended in the court of public opinion those who did it. And tried to overthrow an election. And refused to mask or vaccinate or limit contact to protect our fellow citizens. And pretended it was over while 3000+ people a day died. And I tried to believe the best of us. And it was hard to do it.

Facing page:
Ted Closson, "I Do Not Know What This Means Anymore"
Page 1, 2023
Color LaserJet Print, 8"x10"



Ted Closson

How would you describe your experiences working in the studio with Peter Precourt?

Peter always challenged us to think about the choices we were making in our work and our work practices, but he equally allowed us to make those choices so we could see for ourselves where they lead.

What about Peter's work, or his ways of working with artists, most inspires you?

Peter's creative process had openness in its approach as well as a sincerity and strength in interrogations of often-delicate subjects that he encouraged others to adopt without at the same time discouraging their personal methodologies. He gave his students the space and time they needed to begin to make the kind of work that would transition them into meaningful and self-sustaining professional practice. In my own teaching and personal work I try to emulate this same openness, in hopes of furthering the efforts of students, professional peers, and the voice/language of my own processes.

Has working with Peter affected the ways you think and work as an artist beyond your time in the classroom/studio? What has most resonated with you from your work with Peter?

Peter's willingness to reveal and to further understanding of, when possible, the inner workings of professional practice and his own approaches to problem-solving within the arts helped to ease my own confusions and anxieties about the scope and integration of my own practice. This notion of utilizing the tools available, making choices best-suited to the needs of the work, and then finding ways to articulate and uphold those decisions helped alleviate prior misconceptions about the genesis of ideas and investigative methods.

What aspect of working with you do you think your mentor found most resonant?

I think perhaps my need to push the boundaries of conventional practice, not in terms of media, but in what was permissible and necessary in order to further self-expression, may have echoed challenges Peter had overcome throughout portions of his own professional development. In this way, the mechanisms for exploration and resolution he presented me with as a mentor proved equally useful for my own growth.

Are there broader ideas, in terms of teaching or art or community, that have surfaced for you in preparing for this exhibition?

My own experiences over the last several years have led me to conclude teaching is a form of leadership within a community that expressly sustains and fosters the health of that community. But unique to the practice of teaching art, conventionally a solitary or deeply individual practice rather than communal, the act of teaching creates paths by which the artist returns to that community - to share, to build, to reflect.

How do you think of mentorship and/or community in relation to your broader career as an artist? How have your experiences with art and mentorship (in and possibly outside the academy) shaped those views?

Community has been an enormous influence in my own artistic practice and career as an artist. Indeed higher education and the community I discovered as I entered college helped expand the scope of my thinking, and, by proxy, my processes. Broadening the diversity of ideas, approaches, and interactions in a manner that increased the capacity of its members to adapt to changes and maintain relevance. Mentorship, as I both experienced it and practice it in personal and professional settings, forms the bedrock of that growth - allowing for an earnest protraction of formal pedagogy.

Susan Smith

Whether visual, spatial, graphical or interactive, the arts help foster modes of problem solving and communication. Artists are daily conducting research in method and material that produce new processes and ways of considering precious resources in a time of environmental challenge.

In my role as artist, researcher and educator, I see a responsibility for critical reflection; questioning my material choices, my pedagogical approach, and providing a call to action, as well as a celebration of resilience in the face of our struggles. I refer to my work, as a practicing artist, as coordinator for a graduate art program, and as a researcher, as “Radical Gardening” - acts of stewardship, caretaking and social responsibility.

These works were created from materials at the site of Sears island, Maine (Wassumkeag) during the course of one month, June 2023. Local soils and shells became pigments for paint, plant material and sea water became ink and dye. Grasses and fiber were transformed into paper and cordage. Each work was considered an experiment in materials, and a response to a site which has a history of colonization and land use debate. Slow meditative processes connect us to the land and at the same time reveal the need for solutions and urgency coupled with a careful working with nature as our collaborator, not as mere resource.



Susan Smith's worktable,
Sears island, Maine
(Wassumkeag), June 2023

Susan Smith

Why did you select Anna Martin for this exhibition?

I have worked with Anna in multiple roles: MFA faculty, MFA committee chair, IPhD committee chair, and she has worked as my assistant for four years. We have rebranded our program, moved through the pandemic lockdown and transition back to in person together, and created a path together for interdisciplinary collaboration linking art and science. As she completed her doctorate this May, and I had the honor of hooding her as her degree was conferred, it was not lost on either of us how much we had been through together, and how each of us had grown as artists and researchers. I chose Anna because of our history of collaboration- of learning how to collaborate, and what can happen when we combine our skills.

What about Anna's work, or her ways of working, most inspires you?

Anna listens. That is extraordinary, important. She is incredibly creative, but it is the listening that always impresses and inspires. So much of what she does is in community, and she is able to navigate between facilitator and co-creator, which is vital to the outcome of socially engaged work.

Has working with Anna affected the ways you think and work as a professor? If so, how?

We have supported each other. We have allowed ourselves to be vulnerable and honest, and the work reflects that.

What aspect of your work with Anna do you think she would find most resonant in her continuing life and work?

Our research into developing modes of interdisciplinary collaboration.

Are there broader ideas, in terms of teaching or art or community, that have surfaced for you in preparing for this exhibition?

I am reminded of the impact that support - via mentorship, family or community, can have on all of us. This also reconnects me with the role we play - in modeling ethical, thoughtful practice. It is immensely gratifying to see that what we do makes a difference, gets reflected back to us.

How do you think of mentorship in relation to your career as an artist and art professor? How has your work with students over your years of teaching shaped those views?

I was fortunate to have several significant mentor relationships that helped me see the connections/threads in my artistic practice that were there, but I was too stuck in my head to see. These mentors each gave something valuable to both my practice as an artist, a researcher and educator. They helped open doors for me, and I am committed to paying that forward in any way I can. Over the course of the last few years I feel the urgency of our times, and this translates into my teaching - being acutely aware of the fact that our work has power - our artwork, our influence as instructors, and that we do not teach nor do we create in a vacuum, we are the cultural producers and documentarians of our current state of affairs, and also some of the sculptors of the future.

Anna Martin

Anna Martin is an intermedial artist living and working in the great state of Maine. Anna's practice explores the spaces formed between environment, story, time, people and connection. She holds a BFA in Illustration from the Rhode Island School of Design, an MFA in Intermedia and a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Maine.

With a balance between community-engaged work and studio exploration, Anna's work can take many forms including illustration, gardens, photography, eco sculpture, graphic design or even a pop-up studio - laboratory. Creating experiences that are informed by the collaborative process and engaging with the environment render her evolving practice that is in constant dialogue with place and time.

When outside the studio Anna can be found at the beaches, mountains, lakes and trails of Maine with her family and friends.

Facing page:
Anna Martin, Illustration from
"At the Water's Edge"



Anna Martin

How would you describe your experiences working in the studio with Susan Smith?

My work with Susan takes place among people, places and connection. The experiences that come together to create this type of work involves time in studio working with materials, fabrication labs, and in large part, conversations.

What about Susan's work, or her ways of working with artists, most inspires you?

Susan's incorporation of place and time in the work that she creates, whether through material or conversations, is a point of practice that is incredible to witness as it evolves throughout her work

Has working with Susan affected the ways you think and work as an artist beyond your time in the classroom/studio? What has most resonated with you from your work with Susan?

Absolutely. My own practice of making connections and sharing experience has grown over the past several years as a result of working with Susan. It has helped to transform my ideas about the of the core elements of my practice and the opportunities for how to apply them.

What aspect of your working with you do you think your mentor found most resonant? What do you make of the difference or similarity?

Likely, our shared interest in building opportunities for meaningful experiences and conversation through art.

Are there broader ideas, in terms of teaching or art or community, that have surfaced for you in preparing for this exhibition?

The ways of working that come together in order to build a practice have been something that I have reflected upon a lot lately. Developing a social practice that is based in conversation and making with many different people in many different contexts requires a tremendous amount of planning and time invested in building those experiences.

It has been exciting to work in proximity to my mentor in preparation for this exhibit in different ways. Shifting my way of working to a practice of illustration which explores site, time, and connection to the environment

has been a completely different conversation with my mentor than our shared community-based practice.

How do you think of mentorship and/or community in relation to your broader career as an artist? How have your experiences with art and mentorship (in and possibly outside the academy) shaped those views?

Community and connection are essential components of my own practice as an artist. The opportunities that have evolved from working alongside my mentor in the arts have meaningfully impacted my ideas about what my art can be, how it evolves and why I engage in creative practice.

