

DAVID  
KORDANSKY  
GALLERY

KIYAN WILLIAMS

**KIYAN WILLIAMS**

Kiyan Williams is a multidisciplinary artist who works fluidly across sculpture, performance, and video. They often work with soil as material and metaphor to unearth diasporic experiences, obscured histories, and the shifting relationship between people and the land. Recent exhibitions include [In the Beginning: Media Art and History from the Hirshhorn's Collection](#), Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. (2020); [Call and Response: Making Monuments Now](#), Socrates Sculpture Park, New York (2020); [Up Close](#), The Shed, New York (2020); [something else \(Variations on Americana\)](#), Recess Art, New York (2020); [In Practice: Other Object](#), SculptureCenter, New York (2019); [Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall](#), Brooklyn Museum, New York (2019); [The Least Orthodox Goddess](#), Jenkins Johnson Gallery, New York (2018); and [Queer Exceptionality](#), SOMArts, San Francisco (2017).

Williams (b. 1991, Newark, New Jersey) earned a BA with honors from Stanford University and an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University. They have given artist talks and lectures at The Guggenheim, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Princeton University, Stanford University, Portland State University, and Pratt Institute. Williams' work is in private and public collections including the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Williams' honors and awards include the Astraea Foundation Global Arts Fund and Stanford Arts Award. They were previously an artist fellow at Leslie-Lohman Museum and is an alum of the EMERGENYC fellowship at the Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics at NYU, and are the recipient of the 2019/2020 Fountainhead Fellowship at Virginia Commonwealth University, where they are on faculty in the Sculpture and Extended Media Department.

**KIYAN WILLIAMS**

born 1991, Newark, NJ  
lives and works in New York, NY

EDUCATION

2019 MFA, Visual Arts, Columbia University, New York, NY  
2013 BA with Honors, Interdisciplinary Art Practice and Comparative Studies  
in Race and Ethnicity Studies, Stanford University, Stanford, CA

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

(\* Indicates a publication)

- 2020 *In the Beginning: Media Art and History from the Hirshhorn's Collection*,  
Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.
- Indisposable*, Ford Foundation Gallery, New York, NY
- \**Call and Response: Making Monuments Now*, Socrates Sculpture Park, New  
York, NY
- Up Close*, The Shed, New York, NY
- something else (Variations on Americana)*, Recess Art, New York, NY
- 2019 *Open Call: Group 2*, The Shed, New York, NY
- Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall*, organized by  
Margo Cohen Ristorucci, Lindsay C. Harris, Carmen Hermo, Allie Rickard, and  
Lauren Argentina Zelaya, The Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY
- Columbia MFA Thesis Exhibition*, organized by Regine Basha, Wallach Art  
Gallery, New York, NY
- \**In Practice: Other Object*, curated by Gee Wesley, SculptureCenter, New York,  
NY

# DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

- 2018     *The Least Orthodox Goddess*, curated by Jasmine Wahj, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, New York, NY
- feel that other day running underneath this one*, curated by Sarah O'Keefe, Times Square Space, New York, NY
- Pride & Loss*, curated by Zanele Muholi, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, New York, NY
- Columbia MFA First Year Exhibition*, curated by Natalie Ball, Wallach Art Gallery, New York, NY
- 2017     *New Half Full: Qulture Collective*, Oakland, CA
- Queer Exceptionality*, SOMArts, San Francisco, CA
- 2015     *Squirts: New Voices in Queer Performance*, curated by Dan Fishback, La Mama Experimental Theater Club, New York, New York
- 2014     *Raw Honey*, La Mama Experimental Theater Club, New York, NY

## WORK EXPERIENCE

- 2019     Visiting Professor, Department of Sculpture and Extended Media, School of the Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2018     Faculty, Sadie Nash Leadership Project, Rutgers University-Newark, Newark, NJ
- Teaching Assistant for Concepts in Visual Art: Performance Course taught by Kembra Pfahler, Columbia University, New York, NY

2014 New Media and Online Communications Coordinator, Hetrick-Martin Institute,  
New York, NY, 2014-2016

RESIDENCIES AND AWARDS

2020 Socrates Annual Fellowship, Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens, NY

2019 The Fountainhead Fellowship, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond,  
VA

2018 Queer Artist Fellowship, Leslie Lohman Gallery, New York, NY

2017 Visual Arts Scholarship, Columbia University School of The Arts, New York, NY  
New Jersey Council on The Arts Award, Trenton, NJ  
Davis-Putter Scholarship, New York, NY  
Astraea Foundation Global Arts Award, New York, NY

2016 Stanford Arts Institute Award, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA  
Trans Justice Funding Project Award, New York, NY,

2014 EMERGENYC, Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics, New York  
University, NY, NY

ARTIST TALKS AND LECTURES

2020 *Art and Soil: Artist Talk with Kiyon Williams*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture  
Garden, Washington D.C.

*Art In Our Moment: Kiyon Williams and Gioncarlo Valentine in Conversation,*  
Columbia University, New York, NY

- 2019 Artist Lecture, Virginia Commonwealth University, New York, NY
- Summer of Know: Kiyon Williams and Ericka Hart in Conversation, Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
- In Conversation: Kiyon Williams with Darnell Moore, Presented by The Studio Museum in Harlem and New York Public Library Trans Oral History Project, Gavin Brown's Enterprises, New York, NY
- Artist Talk, Bedford Library - Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, New York
- Panelist, Creative Black Futures, Interplanetary Festival, Santa Fe Institute, Santa Fe, NM
- Visiting Artist Lecture, Portland State University, Portland, OR
- Artist Talk, Pratt Institute, New York, NY
- Queer Art/Queer Theory: In Conversation with Dr. Tavia Nyong'o, Queer Disruptions 3, Conference, Columbia University, New York, New York
- Race, Sex & Cinema: The World of Marlon Riggs, Brooklyn, New York
- 2018 Artist Talk and Workshop, Grounding, Stanford University, Stanford, CA
- Artist Lecture, Reflections: Performing Black and Queer Archives, Allied Media Conference, Detroit, MI
- 2017 Marlon Riggs & "No Regret": Disclosure, Performativity, & Legacy: Kiyon Williams, Ni'Ja Whitson and Tavia Nyong'o In Conversation, The 8th Floor, New York, NY
- Guest Lecturer, Black Studies and the Black Radical Tradition Reading Group, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ
- Guest Lecturer, Intersectional Feminism and Performance Course, School of Visual Arts, New York, NY

CURATORIAL AND PUBLIC PROGRAMMING WORK

- 2019 Curator, *Trans/gression: An Evening of Performance Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of GLQ, Queer Disruptions, Conference (QD3)*, Columbia University, New York, NY
- 2017 Organizer and moderator, *Revolution '67 Film Screening and Discussion*, Gallery Aferro, Newark, NJ

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

(\* Indicates non-periodical book, catalog, or other publication)

- 2019 Williams, Kiyon, "In Films That Bring Underacknowledged Histories to the Fore, Tourmaline Fills in Gaps in the Historical Archive," *Artnews.com*, January 14, 2019
- Williams, Kiyon, "Intersectionality in the Studio: Kiyon Williams," *The Archive: Intersectionality*, Issue Number 68, Leslie Lohman Museum, October 2019, p 26-27
- Shapiro, Rebecca, "Shaping the Shed," *Columbia Magazine*, Summer 2019
- Lescage, Zoe, "13 Artists Reflect on the Stonewall Riots," *NYTimes.com*, June 27, 2019
- Carroll, Rebecca, "Commemorating Stonewall Through the Art of Queer Millennials," *WYNC.org*, June 5, 2019
- Small, Zachary, "Queer Artists in Their Own Words: Kiyon Williams Uses Dirt to Unearth the Exploitation of Black People in America," *Hyperallergic.com*, June 19, 2019
- Small, Zachary, "Columbia University MFA Thesis Students Gamble on Uncertainty in Thesis Exhibition," *Hyperallergic.com*, May 21, 2019
- \**In Practice: Other Objects*, SculptureCenter, March 2019

# DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

- 2017      Meghan Allen, "Artist Profile," *BuzzFeed.com*, June 2017
- Maya Harder Montaya, "Posture X Paper Celebrates the Gender-Fluid Future,"  
*Paper Magazine and Posture Magazine*, June 2017
- Burke, Sarah, "Kiyon Williams Bridges Queer Dance Culture and Ivy League  
Academia," *KQCED.com*, February 23, 2017
- 2016      Rosengarten, Magnus, "It Is Necessary to Be Able to Dream..."  
*ContemporaryAnd.com*, October 6, 2016

## COLLECTIONS

The Hirschhorn Museum



Small, Zachary, "Queer Artists in Their Own Words: Kiyani Williams Uses Dirt to Unearth the Exploitation of Black People in America," *Hyperallergic.com*, May 21, 2020

## HYPERALLERGIC

### Queer Artists in Their Own Words: Kiyani Williams Uses Dirt to Unearth the Exploitation of Black People in America

LGBTQ Pride Month is now. Every day in June, we are celebrating the community by featuring one queer artist and letting them speak for themselves.



Kiyani Williams in their studio (photo by William Jess Laird, courtesy the artist)

#### **Kiyani Williams**

**Age:** 28

**Location:** New York City

**Artistic Medium:** Sculpture, Performance, Video

#### **Who are you and what do you do?**

I'm a Pisces and artist born in Newark, New Jersey. My work thinks through the relationship between Blackness, trans/gressive subjectivities, and ecology. In my recent work, I excavate residue from sites of loss within the African Diaspora: slave castles and sugar plantations in the Caribbean and American South; the archives of Black gay artists who died of HIV/AIDS; and a low-income residential building in West Harlem demolished by commercial developers. To borrow the words of Saidiya Hartman, "I am intent on tracing an itinerary of destruction." Working primarily in sculpture, video, and performance, I am attracted to materials that are silent witnesses to the historical and ongoing dispossession of Black people in America.

#### **What are the top three greatest influences on your work?**

Black feminist and queer texts (Thomas Glave's *Among the Bloodpeople: Politics and Flesh*), rhythm and blues from the 1990s, and mycelium.

*Describe your coffee order.*

Two creams and two sugars.

Small, Zachary, "Queer Artists in Their Own Words: Kiyann Williams Uses Dirt to Unearth the Exploitation of Black People in America," *Hyperallergic.com*, May 21, 2020

**What is your greatest accomplishment?**

Giving myself permission to exist on my terms. Period.

**What constitutes a perfect day?**

Arriving from my dreams into a still and quiet morning; laying silently in bed for an hour after; having coffee plus an aimless walk down 125th Street and saying good morning to the people I pass; a few uninterrupted hours in the studio; a few hours in the library; a voguing session with some friends; dinner and drinks with a good sis; and ending the night shaking my kitty kat to some Jersey club music. All done without answering a single email and little interaction with a phone or computer!

**What was your favorite exhibition from last year?**

*God Made My Face: A Collective Portrait of James Baldwin* curated by Hilton Als at David Zwirner.

**What would your superpower be if you had one?**

Being able to articulate and express my feelings to others without speaking them.

**What is one question you wish somebody would ask about your work?**

The real story about why I use dirt and soil as my primary materials.

**What is the greatest threat to humanity?**

The systems of extraction and exploitation that undergird violences enacted on people and the land.

**What did you make when you first started making art?**

T-shirt and bandanas for friends who passed away.

**What is your all-time favorite work of art?**

*Sula* by Toni Morrison

**What are your plans for pride month?**

Avoiding and evading corporate-cis-gay pride.

**What is the future of queerness?**

Reparations for all Black people.

**Greatest queer icon of the internet: Babadook, Momo, or a pervading sense of existential angst?**

A pervading sense of existential angst.

**Is there enough support for queer artists where you live?**

No.

**How do you stay cool during the summer?**

Rosé and a cute rooftop situation.

**What is your favorite type of milk?**

Yikes! We don't do milk.

*"Queer Artists in Their Own Words" is an ongoing feature happening every day in the month of June.*

# In Practice: Other Objects

Natalie Ball

Takming Chuang

Niloufar Emamifar

LaMont Hamilton

Ariel René Jackson

Katherine Simóne Reynolds

Aliza Shvarts

Rosa Sijben & David Bernstein

Sara Stern

Kenneth Tam

Kiyan Williams

SculptureCenter

# In Practice: Other Objects

*In Practice: Other Objects* presents new work by eleven artists and artist teams who probe the slippages and interplay between objecthood and personhood. From personal belongings to material evidence, sites of memory, and revisionist fantasies, these artists isolate curious and ecstatic moments in which a body becomes a thing or a thing stands in for a body.

The works in the exhibition address the capacity of objects—whether personal, collective, ambiguous, or arbitrary—to assume the body’s agency and testify about experience, recollect the past, mediate intimacy, and move politically. Rather than seeing the body as a stable form or coherent whole, *Other Objects* posits the body, and therefore the person it corresponds to, as a fluid and fragmentary medium—one materially contingent on the objects with which it shares space.

The subtitle *Other Objects* is taken from a phrase of Martiniquais philosopher Frantz Fanon, whose 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks* offers a trenchant exploration of the psychic toll levied by colonial domination, dehumanization, and anti-Black racism. Fanon writes: “I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others.” For Fanon, “being through others,” or becoming an “object among other objects,” shatters the psyche and devastates the sense of selfhood.

The works selected for the exhibition argue that the oscillation between body and thing demands a revised understanding of each. The works attend to categories of objects, including objects of the Other, that trouble the limits of personhood and reveal our dependence on material things to enact collectivity, forge intimacy, challenge the visual, and spur new political imaginaries. While seemingly inanimate and silent, objects stir with the ability to agitate, speak, remember, and rebel. They serve as surrogates for bodies denied social agency and as talismans for playful and radical reimaginings of the present.

### **Natalie Ball**

With a foundation in visual archives, materiality, gesture, and historical research, I make art as proposals of refusal to complicate an easily affirmed and consumed narrative and identity without absolutes. I am interested in examining internal and external discourses that shape American history and Indigenous identity to challenge historical discourses that have constructed a limited and inconsistent visual archive.

*Playing Dolls* is a series of assemblage sculptures as Power Objects that are influenced by the paraphernalia and aesthetics of a common childhood activity. Using sculptures and textile to create a space of reenactment, I explore modes of refusal and unwillingness to line up with the many constructed mainstream existences that currently misrepresent our past experiences and misinform current expectations.

### **Takming Chuang**

*Shelf Life* is an installation of twenty-one sculptures shelved along the recesses of a narrow corridor in the basement of SculptureCenter. Fluorescent lights illuminate forms that resemble vessels, body parts, and artifacts. Made of unfired clay contained within a plastic skin, their supple forms will wrinkle, blister, discolor, and harden during the course of the exhibition.

*Shelf Life* is modeled after two disparate spaces that regulate value. Supermarket aisles display consumables with limited immediate value whereas museum display cases present value as permanent. *Shelf Life* stages a hybrid of both to critically consider the correlation between change and value, of bodies as well as art objects.

### **Niloufar Emamifar**

#### **LaMont Hamilton**

In *J.W, R.H, H.D, E.R, NHP (whispering of the self to the self)*, the soft touch of 100 ostrich feathers, the chiming of 1,200 bells, and the ethereal sound of vocal artists Yaw Agyeman, Wesley Chavis, and Anaïs Maviel create an immersive, meditative space.

The initials in the title stand for Jay Wright, Robert Hayden, Henry Dumas, Ed Roberson, and Norman H. Pritchard, some of the many poets who have informed my practice. This work is a portrait of their influence on me and an example of my commitment to the working principle of Transrealistic Poetics. In this flux world, meditation is a radical act.

The vocal element is the result of another type of collective meditation. Each of the vocal artists responded to a score composed of lines from the

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aforementioned poets and an Anthony Braxton-style notation. The results were composed by me as a 25-minute track. The bells, of varying tones, further the meditation.

**Ariel René Jackson**

*Its Extended Remnant* is a video installation of my grandmother's rusted swingblade made into a palimpsest. The swingblade has been given a chalk appendage that conjures and celebrates the relic's departed life as it transitions to its next. My grandparents were successful farmers until racist loans and illiteracy caused them to lose much of their land, only to be confronted every day on their porch by their lost legacy. Their memory poetically lives on through oral interpretations of defunct tools, furniture, and clothing.

This work of remembering, working, and dressing the dispossessed's possessions carries a complicated understanding of joy. Joy in this practice comes from fully recognizing the body beyond its limits of existence. There is a cry in the installation to watch over the dead by hiding the body in the land, refusing a demand for transparency entrenched in a colonial mindset that seeks to construct an idea of what the Other is.

**Katherine Simóne Reynolds**

On my mind as of late has been labor. Physical labor. In the sense of household labor. The monotonous action of vacuuming, ironing, "straightening" up.

Witnessing and acknowledging service.

I investigate the items and movements of this labor, with the quote from my grandmother "Don't ever be someone's maid" clanging in the background as I straighten up my and my partner's bedroom.

There is something to being a Black woman seen cleaning a house she doesn't own.

*You Smell Like Iron* utilizes sourced and taken photographs of Black women with long nails with quotes I heard growing up from my Aunties, Ma, and Grandma: "Actin' fast" or "You smell like iron."

There are also hairbrushes and satin pillowcases on the floor that are sprayed, with "faux stone" spray paint, with the messages "Who did it? What for? And please don't do it again." The hairbrushes appear on ironing boards with the message "I told you, I'm fine," which can also be heard in the three-channel video piece from each woman in different beauty-shop landscapes.

I am wanting to use cast-iron irons and wrinkled shirts on spray-painted ironing boards. Cast iron plays a key role in displaying weight and strength.

There seems to be a need to be presentable not only in the house but outside as well.

Using the medium of readymade sculpture, I accentuate the domesticity of needing to appear like everything is all there and together, while also revisiting past feelings of “being seen cleaning.” It begs the question, who is actually in control here? And who are we trying to be “presentable” to?

Presentability Politics

Authority

### **Aliza Shvarts**

*Anthem* is part of my ongoing research into testimony and its gendered and racial exclusions. The work is a comparison of the different sexual assault evidence collection kits or “rape kits” used in each US state. For this installation at SculptureCenter, the exterior containers are hung on the wall at eye level, and refabrications of the interior contents are piled on a low plinth for visitors to handle.

Produced by commercial companies and state agencies, the kits vary in language, content, and form. A kit might contain seven or twenty-one steps; it might use legal or medical language (“victim” vs. “patient”) and gendered or gender-neutral terms (“panties” vs. “underwear”). As an object, a rape kit is a crucial site where physical experience is transformed into testimony—one that has the power to support or supersede the survivor’s own voice. Yet in whose voice, and on whose behalf, does the object speak?

### **Rosa Sijben and David Bernstein**

*Something To Hold On To* is both a series of objects and a condition for their display. The objects—haptic, pleasurable, curious, and abstract forms—are offered to visitors to hold while they explore the exhibition. These objects can give visitors a feeling of groundedness. If there is a moment of doubt, or confusion, at least they have something to hold on to.

The forms for these objects originate as abstractions of familiar things in everyday life. They could be thought of as tools for projection—things that produce association and memories. Perhaps they can be an escape, a way for someone to pretend to be busy, to take away the awkwardness of a situation, like a cigarette or a pen might do. They can give a sense of security and comfort, and perhaps they will spark a story that one visitor can share with another.

We hope that this small act of care gives a sense of connection and joy.

### **Sara Stern**

Filmed in a former stove factory turned loft apartment complex in Richmond, Virginia, *COMPANY* addresses trends in adaptive reuse architecture through a moving-image work that weaves together magical realism, dark humor, and

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references to 1920s films including *Modern Times* and *Metropolis*. Such films mark a moment when innovation and growth provoked new understandings of personhood and allowed society to imagine machines and automated systems as animated beings whose complexity exceeded the capacity of ordinary people to account for it.

The video enacts a choreography of reuse across a series of vignettes. A stove produced on the premises returns nearly a century later to roam its birthplace, admiring all the new amenities. A line of loft inhabitants with vintage stove legs for hands and feet moves slowly along the hallway of the former foundry, tapping walls and floor in sync. A Bauhaus-inspired dancer performs a property dance.

A site-responsive architectural intervention of weathered steel walls leads into the installation, an allusion to SculptureCenter's Corten steel entrance added in 2014, pointing to the museum's own history of adaptive reuse.

### **Kenneth Tam**

In *All of M*, the high school prom serves as a vehicle for examining the role of social ritual in forming male identity and the physical trappings that enable sites of male homosocial belonging. The prom is generally understood as a coming-of-age event where adolescents dress up and perform as adults for one night, ritualistically marking the movement from one stage of life to another. In *All of M*, however, a diverse group of high school seniors are brought together with adult men to enact a different version of the prom.

The subjects' participation in this reperformance speaks to the anxieties tied to normative gender expression while also suggesting possibilities for reimagining both this ritual and themselves. Inner tubes filled with sand function as bodily surrogates in the video, and larger versions appear as sculptures in the installation. Their origins in the world of DIY gym equipment videos circulated on YouTube contrast with their languid yet eroticized presentation. In *All of M*, the performance of male subjectivity is seen as contingent and open to change.

### **Kiyan Williams**

*Dirt Eater* resurfaces the practice of geophagy—consuming dirt—among enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and American South. In the project, I reference nineteenth-century drawings of enslaved Black people wearing punishment masks for eating dirt. I visited plantation ruins in my ancestral homelands in St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands, to source soil and debris for the work. The earth sculpture memorializes the Indigenous practice and transgressive act of consuming dirt, which was prohibited under the



slavery regime. In the accompanying video performance, I engage in geophagy while wearing a punishment mask that I made from steel and patina.

*Dirt Eater* highlights my process of using archival sources and site-specific soil to unearth Diasporic history. The work is a part of my ongoing use of dirt and soil as material and metaphor for imagining alternative ecologies and counterhegemonic relationships and encounters with land that subvert the civilization/nature binary within the Euro-Western social order.





Kiyon Williams, *Dirt Eater*, 2019,  
installation views.

# 13 Artists Reflect on the Stonewall Riots

50 years ago, the Stonewall Inn became the center of the gay rights movement after a series of riots broke out. Its influence on these artists still reverberates.

The Stonewall Inn, a mob-owned gay bar in New York's West Village, was an easy target for surprise raids in the late 1960s. Busts were common, riots were not, so when the police began making arrests in the early hours of June 28, 1969, no one expected resistance. But that night, the crowd erupted. People hurled insults, then coins, beer cans and bricks. Reinforcements rushed to the scene as Stonewall supporters poured out of neighboring dives to join the melee. Half destroyed, Stonewall reopened the following night. The rioters returned, singing protest songs, and so did the police, armed with tear gas. The clashes, which continued on Christopher Street for days, were barely covered in the news, but they altered the course of history.

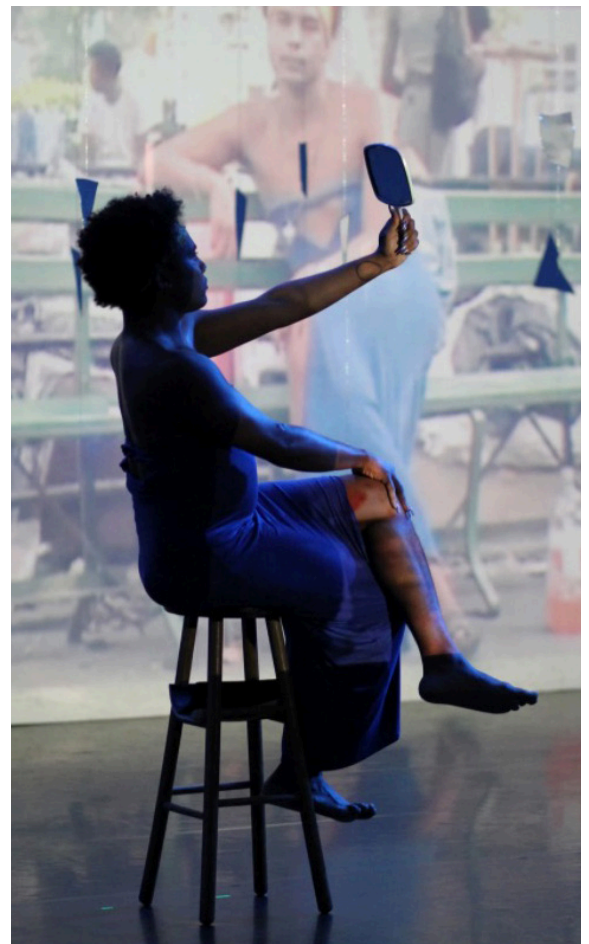
The Stonewall riots electrified the nascent gay-liberation movement with urgent, ferocious energy during a time when homosexuality was illegal in 49 states and widely considered to be a mental disorder. Suddenly, what had been a nonviolent push for civil liberties became an uncompromising crusade. The protests catalyzed the formation of radical civil rights groups, in New York and across the United States. A year later, the first pride march set out from Stonewall, growing from several hundred people to several thousand as it moved up Sixth Avenue. This year, more than four million people are expected to attend the city's annual celebration.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, T Magazine invited a multigenerational group of artists to reflect on the demonstrations and their legacy. "Today, there's a lot of infighting about who threw the first brick," observes Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, an artist who was at the bar that summer night, in his response below. (Lanigan-Schmidt's work is currently on view in "Art After Stonewall, 1969–1989," a joint exhibition at New York University's Grey Art Gallery and the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art — one of several shows throughout the country devoted to the protests and their aftermath. Others can be found at the Brooklyn Museum and Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.) But the riots, he reminds us, were only possible because of the solidarity of the many different groups who joined forces 50 years ago. "Stonewall was very diverse, and it was unified in its diversity."



## Kiyan Williams, b. 1991

As a black nonbinary transfemme teenager growing up in Newark, N.J., I didn't know of any other people like me, in real life or history. During my freshman year at Stanford, I took a queer studies course, where I first learned about the Stonewall riots. I was empowered through learning about people like Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera and other black and Puerto Rican activists and artists who transgressed normative gender and resisted the forms of oppression that confined their lives. I was especially empowered by learning about their struggles against the carceral system, the police state, economic injustice and trans misogyny. The Stonewall riots and the gay liberation movement were catalyzed by poor black and Puerto Rican folks, people who were referred to as street queens, people who went to bars to get drunk and dance, to find community and joy. These were racial, sexual and gender deviants who were politically and economically disenfranchised, who created networks of care for each other and who took to the street to resist various forms of state violence. Contemporary L.G.B.T. politics often forgets and neglects queer, trans and gender nonconforming folks from the hood, the banji girls, those of us who come from under-resourced communities, who are denied access to health care and affordable housing, and who lack viable means of making income. I am inspired by the vision of those street queens from Stonewall and the gay liberation front who envisioned a world for those of us who are trans/gressive in myriad ways to live multifaceted lives of deep satisfaction, interdependence, self-actualization and profound joy.



Kiyan Williams's "Reflections" (2017). Portrait by Elijah Ndoumbé. Artwork © Kiyan Williams, courtesy of the artist

## HYPERALLERGIC

### Columbia University MFA Students Gamble on Uncertainty in Thesis Exhibition

The class of 2019 is presenting works that inspire curiosity and fear — palimpsests for a generation still trying to understand itself.



Installation view of Kiyon Williams's work

The concept of the starving artist is as old as art history itself. It was Giorgio Vasari who, during the Renaissance, described Michelangelo as exceedingly frugal, subsisting only on wine and bread when on an art-fueled bender. Centuries later, precarity is a condition built into becoming an artist — especially in a city like New York where rent is unaffordable (and so is the milk).

The promise of a better future is on the minds of Columbia University's 2019 class of visual arts MFAs. Last year's group of graduates told Hyperallergic that their program was in shambles with faculty unexpectedly departing, studios flooding, and heat inside Prentis Hall reaching scalding temperatures. Students from this year's cohort say that conditions have much improved. There were fewer facilities issues and the administration added more classes and adjunct faculty — though full-time positions at the school have yet to be filled and some internal problems have persisted. "I wonder if it shows in our thesis show this year," one artist mused in an email about the show.

Well, did it? I think so.



Kiyani Williams, "Untitled (An Accumulation of Things That Refuse to Be Discarded)" (2019)

the dead resurrected as sculptures to tell their story. It's an approach not unlike what artists, including Wangechi Mutu, are serving at this year's Whitney Biennial.

There are others who follow this path. The daughter of immigrant parents from India and Pakistan, Ruhee Maknoji's work searches for symbols of paradise and peace through Persian philosophy and other sources. "The Garden" (2019) is an installation made for relaxation and yet it's constantly being invaded by trouble. Mischievous characters and chaotic patterns cover the work, weaving a pathway for the viewer into the installation's darker inner sanctum of meditation.

Another personal highlight was Rafael Domenech's "Notations from an American landscape" (2017–19), which presents itself as a reading room of massive cutouts. What the artist has accomplished here is an ode to geographical dislocation, a massive photomontage of how urban landscapes are as much generators for creativity as they are stifling places to live. Aesthetically, the images within Domenech's makeshift art books bear resemblance to John Baldessari's *Overlap* and *Junction* series, which also combined photographs in ways that connect compositional elements and disparate realities.

The future is, by definition, uncertain. But Columbia's 2019 thesis show attests to the power of visual arts to divine paths into the future by addressing our pasts.

Fear flashes from the dense woods seen in Taejoong Kim's *Foresta* series (2019). Like a scene from a horror film, images of the forest burst onto the projection screen with alarming pace. Many of these images are granular in detail and flat, almost like a woodblock print. Anxiety fills the room. Is that the sound of crunching leaves and branches? Plot twist. On the other side of the screen, viewers will notice that the artist has poked several pinholes into the fabric, which creates a serene vision of twinkling stars on the opposite wall.

Vivian Chiu's work confronts the mechanics of identity formation in a meticulous deconstruction of materials like wood, acrylic, and photography. As a queer Asian woman, the artist investigates what the weight of tension is on the body, and how disorientation manifests in the body politic. Repetition and labor-intensive practices that all circulate modernist theories of the grid coalesce into works that simultaneously pay homage to her family's history of toiling in factories and Chiu's path toward self-discovery. Accordingly, works like "Looking" (2019) and "Self IV" (2019) are symbols of complexity and hardship, the deconstruction and reconstruction of one's sense of self-worth.

History haunts the halls of the Wallach Art Gallery and artists like Chiu dive into their ancestral pasts. Kiyani Williams presents a hauntingly poetic tribute, called "Untitled (For My Great Great Great Great Grandmother Salmoy Miller who was Emancipated from slavery in 1834)" (2019). The work is accompanied by three other related pieces, all of which use dried soil as a foundational material. The result looks dredged from the ground —