

Barclay MFA Award Winners Explore Themes of Remembrance

Each year for over three decades, the Barclay Simpson Award has been granted to a selection of graduating CCA MFA students, and includes a long list of illustrious awardees ... This year proves no exception to the historically high quality of work.

by Sam Hiura



Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

VOL.8



Entering the CCA Campus Gallery, I was overjoyed to be met with familiar presences. On view was the 2024 Barclay Simpson Master of Fine Arts Award Exhibition, which featured this year's four honorees – MFA Fine Arts students Lynse Cooper, Kelley Finley, Dottie Lo Bue, and Yue Xiang. I have had the privilege of working closely with each of them as part of *Between Friends* – a series of exhibitions I curated for CCA's Fall 2023 PLAYSPACE program – which featured early iterations of some of the works ultimately selected for this year's Barclay Awards Exhibition.



Installation view
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

Each year for over three decades, the Barclay Simpson Award has been granted to a selection of graduating CCA MFA students, and includes a long list of illustrious awardees – Trina Michelle Robinson, Consuelo Tupper Hernández, and Ebti Shedid are a few that come to mind. This year proves no exception to the historically high quality of work. The 2024 award was juried by two incredible local curators: Maria Castro, Assistant Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA, and Anthony Graham, Senior Curator at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. This year is the first time the award exhibition has been held in the new CCA Campus Gallery space, which opened last spring with Christine Wong Yap's solo exhibition, *RECOGNITIONS* / 认 · 知.

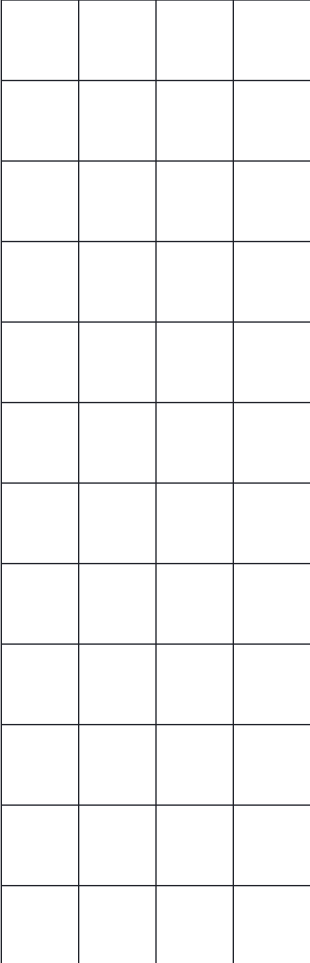


Kelley Finley, *liminal spaces, the memoirs I tell myself* (2023)
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno



Kelley Finley, *Lotus House Wishes* (2023)
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

A vision of bright pink translucent vinyl and electric thread meets my eyes first. I know Kelley Finley best for that distinct pink color which not only lives within the pieces, but also acts as a living shadow cast on the surfaces behind them. Nestled gently within a lotus made from hand-sewn pink vinyl, suspended inside a steel armature, is an archival childhood photograph. Pictured is a young girl sitting just below her mother at a table filled with food for a birthday celebration. Finley's interest in exploring familial practices and cultural histories of labor announces itself through her meticulous work across mediums – metalworking, hand-sculpting clay, and sewing into an unforgiving material. In *liminal spaces, the memoirs I tell myself* (2023), Finley references both the gate outside her family's first apartment in Brooklyn, where they settled after immigrating, and those found at Ellis Island, the port they immigrated through. By making the mundane image of a



(Left to right) Dottie Lo Bue, *Nightstand* (2023), *Circle* (2023), and *Ghost* (2023)
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno



Lynse Cooper, *Untitled (Pink Lily #6, #2, #1)* (2023)
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

gate strange through the use of hair instead of metal, she transmutes it into a soft symbol of amalgamated struggle, serenity, and guardedness.

The pink led me to Dottie Lo Bue's triptych of paintings, all touched with a haze of pink, whether through a base layer of paint poking out from under, or in Bue's gentle brush strokes. Through uncanny decontextualizations of familiar everyday objects, like flowers and bedroom furniture, her work visualizes the experience of recalling a dream. Across the gallery from these paintings is *Constellation* (2023), a work on paper with a pointed frame that recalls the shape of a house and slatted white wood pieces that recall a picket fence. These references, pulled from the familiarity of a suburban life, combined with her gentle, hazy charcoal drawing, incite a feeling of discombobulation in the viewer through jarring juxtaposition.



Communal altar for Peter Simensky (2024)

Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

Finally, I found myself awash in a complicated swell of transfused feelings, memories – both my own and those belonging to others – upon being greeted by a waterfall of gold mylar centered on the gallery's back wall. The four award recipients worked collaboratively to construct a soft monument to Graduate Fine Arts Chair Peter Simensky, who passed away at the end of last year. Each artist contributed their own distinct element in his honor. Situated gently towards the top is one of Simensky's signature duck umbrellas – itself so full of whimsy and levity. The altar-like installa-

tion also held offerings – yellow flowers, illustrations, a framed photograph of Peter – and a radio playing recorded memories of him, which evoked his own well-known series of sculptural radios, Pyrite Radios. Surrounding the monument, affixed to the gallery’s concrete columns, were handwritten notes.

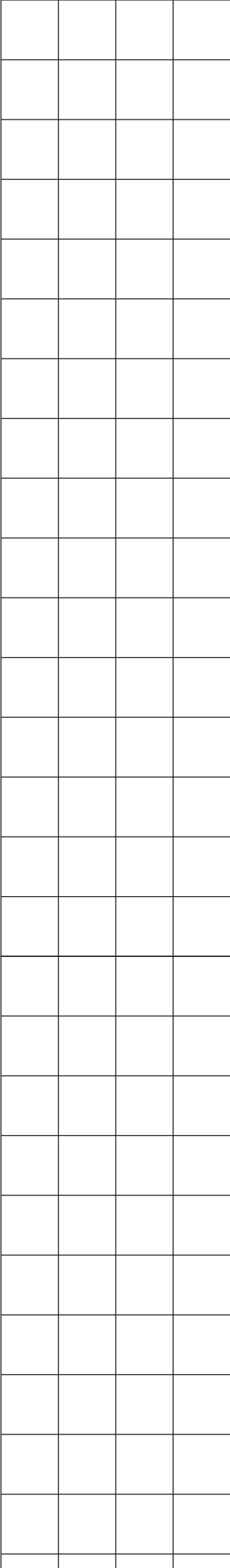


Barclay Simpson Award Winners Dottie Lo Bue, Kelley Finley, Lynse Cooper, and Yue Xien

In the spirit of the artists’ collective memorial to Peter, I offer my own remembrance:

A memory of Peter that persists is from the opening reception of my pop-up exhibition at the ICA San Francisco, which he attended to support the MFA Fine Arts students selected to show their work in the museum’s bathrooms. That day was difficult for personal reasons, and I found myself having to work hard to convince myself to even go to my own opening. That mood lingered until Peter came up to me and said “Congratulations, this show looks great.”

His demeanor from that moment is hard to capture in writing. He was casual, yet sincere, both polite and deeply, tangibly genuine. I must have really needed to hear it too, because afterwards I felt tears well up. I will always be honored for my work to have captured his attention, even if only for a moment.



Sam Hiura (she/her) is a second-year graduate student in CCA's dual degree program for Visual and Critical Studies and Curatorial Practice. Her academic and professional focuses are centered on contemporary art as resistance, with a particular interest in the intersections of queer and BIPOC experiences.