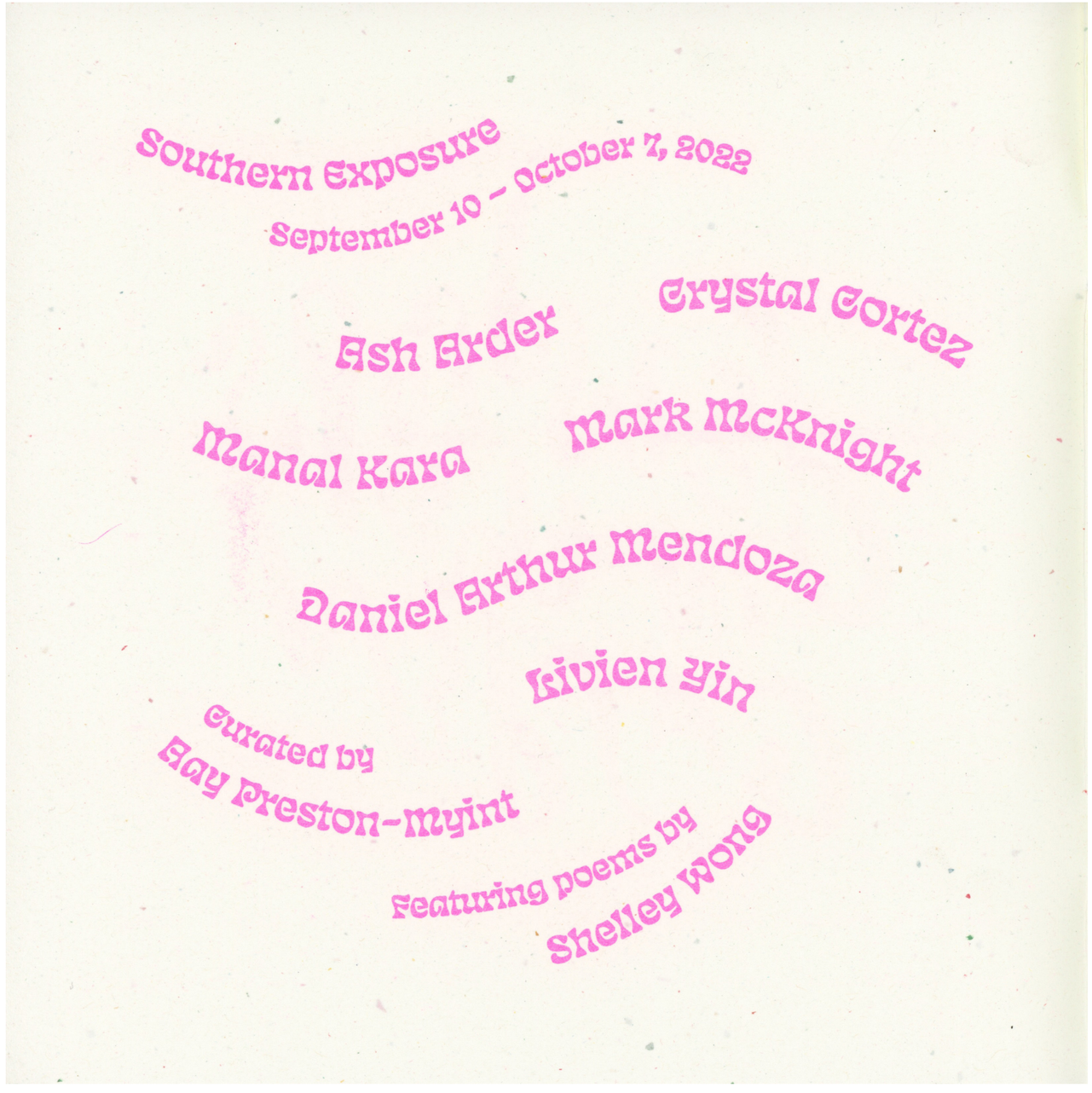

dewdrops
in the
garden



Preface

Dewdrops in the Garden is a group exhibition curated by Aay Preston-Myint, exploring ways in which marginalized people perform and embody joy, kinship, and eroticism in a space called “nature.” Through imagery and subject matter ranging from foraging to fetish culture, the artists in *Dewdrops* offer playful ecological perspectives that defy narratives of victimization and despair in the wake of colonialism and environmental apartheid. *Dewdrops in the Garden* captures an optimistic, yet fraught pastoral consciousness, in which black, brown, and queer bodies claim access to the outdoors and the pleasures unlocked there.

This catalog, along with work by poet Shelley Wong, frames and documents the show as it was displayed at Southern Exposure gallery, San Francisco, in September and October of 2022.

Dewdrops in the Garden features work by Ash Arder, Crystal Cortez, Manal Kara, Mark McKnight, Daniel Arthur Mendoza, and Livien Yin.

Curator's Notes

One could say that this exhibition is a certain kind of "homecoming" in a lot of ways, if you could define homecoming as realizing you are home for the first time.

I arrived in the Bay Area a few years ago, disoriented and uncertain. To my east coast eyes, the seasons appeared short, numerous, and out of order. A coat check at the drag bar in July, outings to nude beaches in October, yellow daffodils crowning in January. Eventually, I learned to tell time not by changing weather or passing seasons, but by ripening fruit and blooming flowers, the density and persistence of the fog and rain, the dryness of the earth.

Nightlife and club culture have always been a home for me, and that was different too. My studio practice often depicts the vernacular architecture of queer spaces where I work and live my life: dancefloors, mirrors, dark corners, spotlights, shadowy, disco-ball dappled surfaces, curls of artificial fog. But here in the Bay, we dance under lemon trees on Sunday afternoons. Leathermen cruise outside on bright, cigar-smoky patios, and saloon doors part to reveal sapphic gardens cascading down hillsides. While the transition over distance was rough, it was softened by beauty and novelty. There was deep history and new magic to learn here.

On a return visit home, while walking to the Guggenheim Museum, my mother made me question my decision with the most casual of observations, as only family can – *"you walk slow now."* Inside, someone had made the interesting choice to run shows by Hilma af Klint, Simone Leigh, and Robert Mapplethorpe concurrently. In the Mapplethorpe retrospective, I reluctantly parsed through the daddy issues inherited from my chosen family, looking over the canonical, classically beautiful black male nudes. They remain erotic as they are tainted by his objectifying gaze and the overt racism in his politics and romantic relationships. But in a corner of the room dedicated to lesser known work – self-

portraits, formal experiments, and images of friends in the fetish scene – I recognized something I knew. Even at a distance, I quickly recognized the familiar textures of the abandoned military structures in the Marin Headlands, just north of the Golden Gate Bridge – the scratched concrete, rusted metal, and high contrast sun beaming through cracks in the walls. In front of this backdrop, a leather-hooded man urinates into a kneeling, bearded biker's mouth. The wall label reads *Jim and Tom, Sausalito*. In this image, I also saw something that Mapplethorpe would later refuse for his black subjects – agency, relationships, and sense of place. It made me want to think more about *this* California, and where someone like myself – mixed-race, overthinking, and queer-as-in-fuck-you – had a niche. I wanted to make and show work like this, but very much not like this – in a way that made me/us feel good, made us feel at home.

Just a few months later, in early 2020, I had the opportunity to curate a show about environmentalism in art at the Headlands Center for the Arts. Steps from the scene of *Jim and Tom*, I brought together work from artists that attended a series of summits on climate justice and equity among the lighthouses, cypresses, and fog. The show was titled *Tomorrow is Already Here*, after a Stereolab song (stolen song titles always hit better than the ones I think of on my own). It focused on aesthetic, scientific, and community responses to climate catastrophe, including adaptation, resilience and anxiety. The works ranged wildly in style and approach, and incorporated as much rigor as they did fantasy – but if I could name a common thread, it might be *urgency*. I thought about some of this vital work, by friends and colleagues like Sofia Cordova, Adrian Colburn, and Mika Tosca, and where this urgency surfaced in my daily life. I wondered how I show up for the world at large. I suppose, I show up to make space for marginalized people – sometimes in brightly lit classrooms and art galleries, sometimes in loud warehouse basements, but mostly in sweaty, darkened rooms where people are free to be what the outside often does not want them to be. But what did that have to do with this *other* outside, made of sand and pelicans and crashing waves, that was mighty and precarious and interconnected?

The novel coronavirus pandemic began shortly after. It elasticated time and distance on a personal level, and exposed structural negligence for queer, black and brown communities on a structural level. Our mirrored, foggy safe spaces were no longer safe, and clubs and parties continued to fall through the United States' eroded safety net. I often found myself at a loss as to how to access pleasure and connection again. But in the midst of isolation and anxiety, a friend and I started going on day trips to trails and beaches together, an activity that quickly became a lifeline. Some places, like the gay beach at San Gregorio, were filled with queerness, kinship, and exhibitionism. Others, like Purisima Creek, were filled with beautiful wet rocks and banana slugs. This may sound strange, but I truly think my first "curation" around this theme of reclaiming the outdoors was a mixtape I made for this friend's fortieth birthday, which I offer to readers in this catalog. Importantly, I also started drawing more. I started drawing poppies and trumpet flowers, and queers cavorting among prickly pears and broken down buildings. I started looking at the Bay again with maybe even wider eyes than before.

Months later, deep into the ongoing isolation, my partner and I roamed the Headlands just across the lagoon from the art center, taking advantage of the relative isolation of the bunkers on Hill 88 on a hot, dazzling and sweaty January day. From inside the bunker, backed against cool concrete, I saw the hazy, far-off hills of San Francisco across the strait, framed perfectly in a square severely cut from a densely graffitied wall. I was a little stoned and strains of Patrick Cowley and Sylvester began to play through the fog in the back of my mind. "I think I get it," I said to myself.

Often in moments of very nerdy free association, the sensory experience of that day blends in with pieces of the material culture of queer life, such as old zines by rural dykes, secret photos of gay biker campouts, and artsy attempts at scene-setting in the beginning of a vintage pornographic film. In a way, it might have been the spark of realization of the ways that pleasure, nature, and art come together to make a candid record of the moments we live in.

In 2021, as the world tried to open up in mismanaged fits and starts, I had a chance encounter with **Mark McKnight**'s striking, deeply contrasted photographs depicting sexuality and landscape one afternoon in a Los Angeles bookstore, and some of these threads of thought started to intertwine. Flipping through an issue of *Gayletter*, I was drawn to his images of thick, brawny men grappling in the grasses and hot sun of the American Southwest. In scenes like *Beggar II* and *Worship*, men embrace, lounge, and consensually degrade each other on top of dry rolling hills and sharp rocks, under hot open sky. They become creatures of spit, foreskin, waves, reeds, hair, piss, dirt, and clouds. It called to mind Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens's ecosexuality movement, in which you commune with natural forces like the wind, a tree, or the earth below. But here, one does not make love with or to the earth. When you fuck, you *are* the earth.

In the exhibition, McKnight's stark black-and-white compositions alternate with the verdant green washes and citrus yellow impasto of **Livien Yin**'s recent oil portraits of herself and other Asian American artists, completed in the idyllic setting of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. I was first introduced to Yin at Headlands, where, among other parts of her multifaceted practice, she began making technicolor gouaches of historical fiction, imagining the immigrant laborers of capital's westward expansion in intimate and sensuous scenes of rest, waiting, whispering, and bathing. In the Skowhegan paintings, Yin turns her revisionist lens toward her artist comrades and immediate surroundings, rewriting for the now. A stunning example is titled *Paul, Caru, Mei.* The subject, Paul, bathed in viridian summer light, captures the viewer's gaze intensely while dragging on two long cigarettes, one dangling seductively from each hand. In a pose synthesized from family photographs of his indigenous Argentinian and Chinese grandmothers, Paul bridges time, simultaneously breathing the brisk Maine air along with the breath of his ancestors.

Also focusing on rewriting lineage is **Daniel Arthur Mendoza**, whose dusky blue and lilac piecework hangs at the entrance of the gallery, welcoming viewers into a world of shadows, daisies, and sequins, where kinship, cruising, and mediated fantasy intertwine. Much of Mendoza's current work stems from earlier imagery that extracts homoerotic coding from cartoon relationships such as Popeye and Bluto, as suggested in the sparkling silhouettes of the wall hanging *Envy and Desire.* In other works like *Tenderness So Painful I Thought My Heart Would Burst,* the cartoon style remains as a foil, but the subjects are now sampled from more explicit media such as the models on internet porn sites, cruising scenes, or real-life inspiration such as Mendoza's queer friend group and social circle. While the combination might seem chaotic at first, this upending of traditional intimacy and relationships is an essential tool in queer world- and identity-building, whether looking for representation in media, finding connection in the shadows, or choosing a family. Standing amid Mendoza's immersive fabric work *An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros*, we experience many points in the spectrum of queer intimacy at once, where the shade of flowers provide our lovers safety, and our friends are blessed by their colors.

Acting as something of a bridge between the flat works and Mendoza's immersive fabric environments, lies the work of **Manal Kara**, who I got to know equally from the punk houses of Chicago as from the wilds of western Wisconsin's driftless region, where we both worked at the ACRE Residency as studio technicians – I in printmaking, and they in ceramics. In Kara's ceramic-based sculptures, things lurking in the underbrush are both subject and material, and make a welcome pairing with their experimental approach to form and glazing. Here, in *Comparative Vasculature*, a bulky, wormy ceramic frame embellished with meandering metallic text and an inlaid snake carcass, surrounds a photographic skin stretched by spidery orange cords, with images of various vein structures from humans skin, leaves, and insects burrowing through bark. In mixed-up fonts that would look at home on an underground rave flyer, we can read: "Society is a thin distribution chain / I recommend more porous architecture." The abstract poetic, hazy interspecial revelations one might find alone on the forest floor are not unlike those we might feel in a sweaty knot of people cuddled together in the club.

Floating down over these 2- and 3-D works from above are sound pieces by Ash Arder and **Crystal Cortez**, who offer two very different sonic approaches to tuning into the world of plants. Crystal Cortez's album *Sonic Blooming* washes over viewers as they walk into the gallery, filled with lush, glittery, ambient textures. The five-track album was produced on commission from Portland's International Rose Test Garden, and in it Cortez uses field recordings combined with a process they dub "plant biodata sonification" to translate electronic impulses from plants into pitch and/or sound. The compositions are beautiful on their own, but also serve as a meditation tool originally designed for walking through the gardens, bringing together embodiment, site, and sound. In an accompanying video, jewel-toned images of Cortez's research and performances, interspersed with dream-like stagings of flowers, lights, cords and limbs, provide a visual interpretation of the process.

As we approach the back of the room, two works of "flash narrative" by **Ash Arder** play on a screen, including *agco 8t,* an animation lying on the darker end of the exhibition's spectrum. *agco* follows a spotlit threshing machine in the rain and darkness with eerily voyeuristic angles, conjuring notions of machine-fetish and consumption. *Module* is a playful stop-motion tracing a journey in which the artist forages for nettles near the blighted Rouge River in Michigan, seeking a glowing green prize in sketchy waters. Up above on boxy black speakers, *Nettle Process Techno* thuds and chirps, in which Detroit-based Arder pays homage to local black music legacies by processing field recordings made during the aforementioned foraging trip. In the way a forager-chef uses as many parts of the plant as possible, so does Arder extract multiple works from this excursion. They weave together clips of hissing insects, crackling leaves, and vocal interjections of a friend, using the patterns and rhythms of Detroit Techno. The piece draws a line between the sense of embodiment and communion among (queer, black, brown) bodies in a darkened room with the sense of embodiment and communion in nature. It feels restorative and reparative – at least while we wait for reparations, we can still repair.

MOSSY CLOAK

Listen here: *tinyurl.com/mossycloak*

rainy rock & ravine music for ferns and inner space

for LS from APM

1. Yo La Tengo - "Green Arrow"
2. Charlotte Day Wilson - "Stone Woman"
3. Sudan Archives - "Water"
4. Chancha Via Circuito ft. Lido Pimienta - "Jardines"
5. Björk - "Isobel"
6. Mort Garson - "Rhapsody in Green"
7. Brian Eno - "Another Green World"
8. NEU! - "Seeland"
9. The Breeders - "Oh!"
10. The Microphones - "My Roots Are Strong and Deep"
11. Tones on Tail - "Rain"
12. Patrick Cowley - "Out of Body"
13. Dr. Octagon - "Blue Flowers"
14. Combo Chimbita - "Santo Fuerte"
15. Polo & Pan - "Attrape-rêve"
16. Lafawndah - "I'm an Island"
17. Cocteau Twins - "Blue Bell Knoll"
18. Aldous Harding - "What If Birds Aren't Singing They're Screaming"
19. Minnie Riperton - "Les Fleurs"
20. Don Raye - "Standing in the Rain"
21. Stereolab - "Fluorescences"
22. Helado Negro - "Fantasma Vaga"

The Ocean Will Take Us One Day

Shelley Wong

A supermoon opened
its brightness. My first memory

is when the tide pulled me

into its room. The last time
the moon aligned so close to earth

was the year my mother

came into being. On land I can still lose
my boundary, identifying

with the ocean & not the lake.

When you enter a city, check the elevation
on the welcome sign.

We saw over 300 Native tribes

gather in North Dakota
to protect a river. Saw the river

transgressed: the police shooting water cannons

in freezing weather.
Was it worth it, what you did

to live by the sea? Stay with me

in bare light, undone.
In recovery, two states

drift toward one another

& repel, like soldiers. Rapture, yes
I've felt that too. Who will stop a man

from having his way? Breathless, a woman

rests her head on her longtime companion
as they listen to the waves.

Ash Arder

agco 8t

Module

Crystal Cortez

Sonic Blooming

Mandi Kara

Comparative Vasculature

Worship

Beggar II

Clouds (Opening)

Mark McKnight

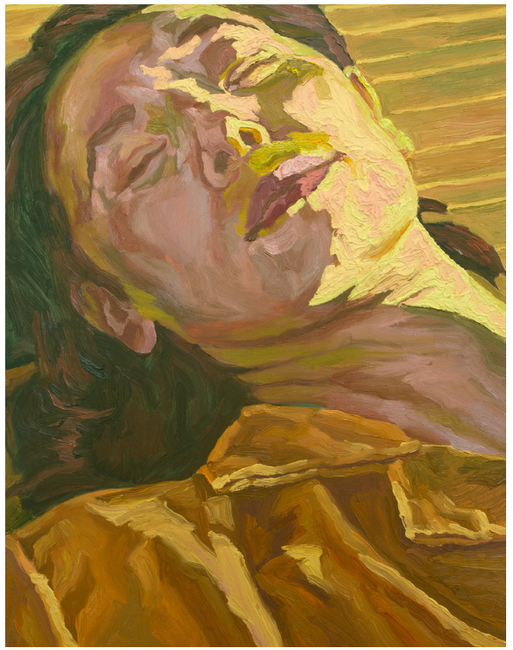
An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros

Daniel Arthur Mendoza

Envy and Desire

Tenderness So Painful I Thought My Heart Would Burst

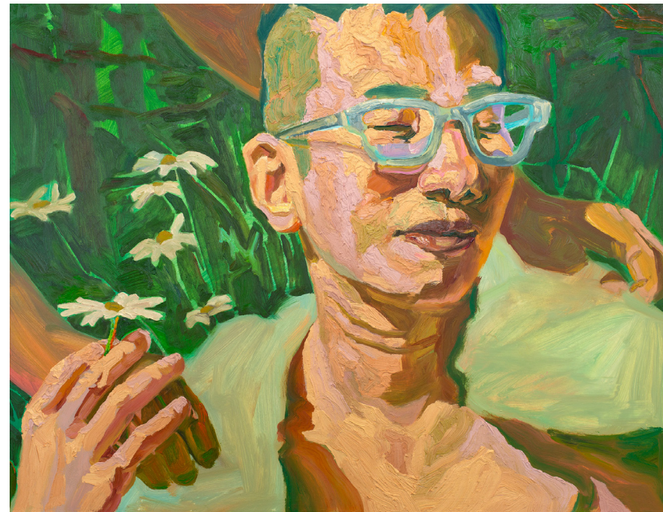
June on the Dock



Paul, Caru, Mei

Kivien Yin

Zhidong's Pick



Ash Arder

agco 8t, 2021
Single channel video
1 minute 35 seconds
Courtesy of the artist

Module, 2016
Single channel video
1 minute 11 seconds
Courtesy of the artist

Nettle Process Techno, 2016
Single channel audio, 2 minutes 18 seconds
Courtesy of the artist

Crystal Cortez

Sonic Blooming, 2021
Audio album, 42 minutes total
Courtesy of the artist

Sonic Blooming, 2021-22
Single channel video with audio
6 minutes
Courtesy of the artist

Manal Kara

Comparative Vasculature, 2022
Ceramic, photographic prints on fabric, snake roadkill, resin
41 x 27 x 4 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian Gallery

Mark McKnight

Worship, 2021
Gelatin silver print
24 x 30 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Park View / Paul Soto, Los Angeles

Beggar II, 2021
Gelatin silver print, edition 1/3 + II AP
24 × 30 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery

Clouds (Opening), 2021
Gelatin silver print, edition 1/3 + II AP
20 × 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery

Daniel Arthur Mendoza

Tenderness So Painful I Thought My Heart Would Burst, 2021
Second hand bed sheets, tulle, sequin backdrop curtain, colored pencil, thread, metal hardware.
89 x 62 x 6 inches
Courtesy of the artist

An Open and Fearless Capacity for Joy and a Fuller Eros, 2022
Second hand bed sheets, Second hand window sheers, tulle, sequin backdrop curtain, sequins, colored pencil, thread, metal hardware
108 x 132 x 132 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Envy and Desire, 2021
Second hand bed sheets, second hand sheer curtain, sequins, sequin backdrop curtain, thread, wood, metal hardware, spray paint.
32 x 28 x 12 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Livien Yin

Paul, Caru, Mei, 2022
Oil on wood panel
24 x 30 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Friends Indeed Gallery

June on the Dock, 2022
Oil on wood panel
11 x 14 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Friends Indeed Gallery

Zhidong's Pick, 2022
Oil on wood panel
18 x 14 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Friends Indeed Gallery

List of Artworks

Weather Advisory

Shelley Wong

it is foggy and the ferry will not travel east—the captain lost
without his radar sonar—*excuse me sirs this is a gay*

dancing emergency—is heterosexuality the fog—I am slow
with too much time, dressed in four shades of grey

& a streak of pink—oh it's an older crowd—
oh that's me—we all had the same Madonna-Whitney childhood

set to synthesizer beats—today I tried to pluck a pinecone
but the stem said no—*I am sorry, tree, I meant*

to ask consent—between the Pines & Cherry Grove,
there is one path for tourists, another for cruising—

among the rangers, I feel famous *(are you*
the writer)—hello bird—I have no sweetness

to offer the bees—where did Frank O'Hara wander
& fall asleep on the beach—the first inhabitant of Fire Island

was a shipwrecker—he lured ships to shore
& killed the crews—it is not certain

whether the island is named for these warning flames
or its sunsets—*I am a fire sign—who should I touch*

with this burning—I loop along the bay—
the marina—the beach—emptied of families—

in the straight neighborhood, I watch men on break
pause one by one to take in my neon floral shorts

they reveal my kiss of a birthmark—the walk
of a messy-haired woman—some faraway flower

About the Artists

Ash Arder is a transdisciplinary artist whose research-based approach works to expose, deconstruct, or reconfigure physical and conceptual systems—especially those related to ecology and/or industry. Arder manipulates physical and virtual environments to explore mark making, mechanical portraiture, and sound design as tools for complicating dynamics of power between humans, machines, and the lands they occupy. They were the recipient of a 2021 Knight Foundation Challenge Award and have exhibited work at the Kitchen (New York City), the Museum of Contemporary Art (Detroit), Cranbrook Museum of Art (Bloomfield Hills, MI), and Pelican Bomb (New Orleans).

Crystal Cortez is a sound and installation artist and programmer based in Portland, Oregon. Their work focuses on the empowerment of underserved populations to gain access and knowledge around technology. In 2019 they co-founded whateverSpace, a maker space offering free and sliding-scale workshops and technology rentals with priority given to the BIPOC community. Under their performance moniker Crystal Quartez, they transform field recordings and use synthesis, audio programming, data sonification, and 3D sound spatialization to produce complex sonic realms. Their art has been shown at New Interfaces for Musical Expression (NIME), La MaMa (New York), Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), Disjecta, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), NAVEL (Los Angeles), and On the Boards (Seattle).

Manal Kara is a Moroccan-American self-taught artist working across sculpture, installation, video, and text. Recent solo exhibitions include Conjectures, Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles; Xylem & Phlöem, No Place, Columbus; The Viewing-Room vs. The Adoring-Gaze, Interstate Projects, Brooklyn; and Song of the Other Worm, Prairie, Chicago. They have attended residencies at ACRE, Ox-Bow, September Spring at the Kesey Farm, Project Freewill, and Shandaken: Storm King. Upcoming projects include solo exhibitions at Hair + Nails (Minneapolis) and Projet Pangée (Montréal).

Mark McKnight's work has been exhibited at Kendall Koppe (Glasgow), Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery (New York), Paul Soto (Los Angeles), Museum of Contemporary Art (Tucson), The Mistake Room (Los Angeles), Aperture Foundation (New York City), and the California Museum of Photography (Riverside). His works are in the public collections of Los Angeles County Museum of Art, J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles), and The Henry Art Gallery (Seattle). McKnight's first monograph, Heaven Is a Prison, was published by Loose Joints in September 2020, with support from the Light Work Photobook Award. He currently lives and works in New York City.

Daniel Arthur Mendoza's work is made from cut and sewn secondhand fabrics and drawings that celebrate queer history, joy, and friendship and its historical veiled-ness within the confines of daily life. Exploring themes of intimacy, repression, and refusal, Mendoza's work reveals a longing to rediscover the past, confront the weight of patriarchal visual propaganda, and open oneself to potential, soft, hopeful futures. Mendoza's work has been exhibited at Human Resources Los Angeles, Rivalry Projects (Buffalo), New Wight Gallery (Los Angeles), Swim Gallery (San Francisco), Guerrero Gallery (San Francisco), and Incline Gallery San Francisco). He received an MFA at UC Riverside in 2022, received a BA in Studio Art at UC Davis in 2013, and attended the Chautauqua Institution Schools of the Fine and Performing Arts in Chautauqua, New York. He is based in the Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay areas.

Livien Yin is an artist currently living and working in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Recent exhibitions include solo shows at Friends Indeed Gallery (San Francisco) and The New Gallery (Calgary) and group exhibitions at Jeffrey Deitch Gallery (New York City), Ben Brown Fine Arts (Hong Kong), and Berkeley Art Center. She is a recipient of the Murphy & Cadogan Contemporary Art Award and a residency at Headlands Center for the Arts. She received her MFA in Art Practice at Stanford University and her BA in Studio Art at Reed College.

Curator **Aay Preston-Myint** is an artist and art worker making home on unceded Ohlone territory [the San Francisco Bay Area], after establishing a practice for 15 years in the ancestral lands of the Council of the Three Fires [Chicago, IL]. Their practice employs both visual and collaborative strategies to investigate memory and kinship, often within the specific context of queer community and history. In addition to their studio work, Aay is a founder of No Coast, an artist partnership that prints and distributes affordable contemporary artwork, is a co-director of the Chicago Art Book Fair, and has served as a DJ and organizer for Chances Dances, a party supporting and showcasing the work of queer artists in Chicago. They are currently the Program Manager at Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito, California, and support Bay Area artist communities through membership in the collective studio Real Time and Space in Oakland, Southern Exposure's Curatorial Council, and the Board of Directors at Small Press Traffic, a literary organization in San Francisco. The name "Aay" is pronounced like the letter "A."

Shelley Wong is the author of *As She Appears* (YesYes Books), winner of the 2019 Pamet River Prize and longlisted for the 2022 National Book Award. She has received a Pushcart Prize and fellowships from MacDowell and Kundiman. She is an affiliate artist at Headlands Center for the Arts and lives in San Francisco.

About Southern Exposure

Southern Exposure (SoEx) is an artist-centered non-profit organization committed to supporting visual artists. Through our extensive and innovative programming, SoEx strives to experiment, collaborate, and further educate while providing an extraordinary resource center and forum for Bay Area and national artists and youth in our Mission District space and off site, in the public realm.

Southern Exposure respectfully acknowledges that we reside upon the ancestral, unceded, occupied lands of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples. As an organization that has been based in the Mission district of San Francisco since 1974, we honor and recognize the Native people who have stewarded this land for thousands upon thousands of years and who continue to do so. We further acknowledge that we, as an organization, have benefited from the use and occupation of this stolen land. Given the ongoing, damaging injustices of colonization, Southern Exposure is committed to supporting our Bay Area community of diverse artists and Indigenous-led partnerships that extend Indigenous self-determination in San Francisco. We aspire to be good stewards of arts, culture, and generative conversations while always mindful of greater equity and justice.

This living statement represents an ongoing dialogue with the Association of Ramaytush Ohlone.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Southern Exposure
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San Francisco
soex.org

Design by Helen Shewolfe Tseng

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