

Battle of the Bay: CCA at the 2024 Murphy & Cadogan Awards



Gabrielle Anderman, *Everything Forever About to be Revealed* (2024)

By
Sam Hiura

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Each year, CCA's Graduate Fine Arts students gear up to apply to the prestigious Murphy and Cadogan Awards, which offer a cash prize, and culminates in a group exhibition held at SOMArts featuring all of the awardees. This year's exhibition was curated by local artist and curator, Kevin B. Chen. It's one of the most prestigious awards available for students in the Bay Area, dually serving as a monumental platform of visibility and reach for emerging artists.

This year, CCA's 2025 Graduate Fine Arts cohort represented almost half of the awardees, with six second-year MFA students being named for the Cadogan award: Gabrielle Anderman, Zedekiah Gonsalves-Schild, Chloe King, Molly Rapp, Jonah Reenders, and Ashley Spencer.

Just behind the exhibition's title wall, Gabrielle Anderman, Molly Rapp, and Zedekiah Gonsalves-Schild's respective works welcome the large crowd trickling in for the exhibition's opening. Anderman's triptych of warmly-colored paintings, titled *Everything Forever About to Be Revealed*, is monumental as it stretches and enlivens the height and length of SOMArts' grand walls. Warm vertical color fields are punctuated by explosive, loose figures, saturated with blacks and vibrant reds. These paintings draw me in closer towards the back of the space, simultaneously pulling me further into the carefully punctuated details in Molly Rapp's installation, *Dedicating Myself Before God To My Chosen Profession...Law Enforcement*. What appears initially as small



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Photography courtesy of Claire S. Burke



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holes perforating the surface of the adjoining sheets of a bronze-y metal, two-paneled room divider become small silhouettes of the infamous star-shaped sheriff's badges up-close, and the sound of police radio chatter emerges from a collection of walkie-talkies mounted on a Catholic kneeler. In mass, their overlapping noise is almost invisible, but as I listen closer to each individual radio, pangs of anxiety, anger, and grief emerge as the violent police monologues from body cam footage and the like come into audible focus. Rapp articulates the ways in which the process of creating this work not only allows her a platform to explore topics of violent national-institutional entanglements, but to also "examine the contradictions within [her] own family, as [she comes] from a lineage of police officers."

Adjacent to Anderman and Rapp is the glimmering gold and saturated pockets of color from Zedekiah Gonsalves-Schild's collection of sculpture and wall works, *Dollar Store Ecology*. Anthropomorphic stilted sculptures with aggregations of multicolored egg-shaped bulbs stand among the other elements of the installation, appearing as if walking alongside me through the exhibition. One is held within a cage-like structure, made of thin metal wire. Tiles of paper appear almost woven within the structures' framework, and upon closer look, seem to be the square-cut pages of John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, a firsthand account of the 1917 October Revolution, spliced alongside snippets of abstracted strokes of paint, textured prints, and cut paper.



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Around the bend from Gonsalves-Schild, an antique wood-framed vitrine sits at the base of a constellation of photographs by Jonah Reenders. The series and accompanying found sculptural elements represent Reenders' scientific search for a near-extinct species of fish in the remote Northern California town of Clear Lake, and his subsequent discovery of a persistent and texturally rich community living alongside, and among the lake's natural and manmade ecosystemic influence. The textured lives of Reenders' human and nonhuman subjects is paralleled in his heterogeneous display techniques, pairing framed prints with mounted prints, and the use of an old lab vitrine to hold and expand upon his findings. The scattered groupings of images juxtapose people, places, and close-up shots of Clear Lake's natural features, gesturing towards Reenders' dual qualitative and quantitative experience there, accumulating stories and specimen samples alike.

Calling out from behind a heavy curtain are slowly shifting club lights that fill a secluded room, like an underground dive, filled with Chloe King's precisely-rendered colossal paintings, sculptures, and video work. Mirrored stalactites and stalagmites emerge from the floor and ceiling in this constructed rave cave, and semi-abstracted scenes of fantastical life act like vignettted flashes of memory from a late night out. The paintings are rendered using a UV-reactive paint, allowing the image shift and change in reaction to the varying colored lights. A video on the wall of a figure in a green morphsuit with red stiletto acrylic nails smokes a joint, an abstracted figure that reminds me of standing outside a bar, smoking to catch a fleeting break from nightlife overstimulation.

Across the room, suspended in mid-air like falling water is Ashley Spencer's *heavy as a black feather, light as a white stone* – a distinct sculptural blend of found furniture, home appliances, ceramics, and synthetic hair. Various textured and colored beaded hair dangles from and grows out of every surface like dripping liquid, and carefully crafted anthropomorphic ceramic figures precariously stand against ready-made surfaces. The ancient enchantments and magic listed in Spencer's materials list bestows transcendent animacy upon these objects, making them dance, twist, and soar far above the viewer as an evocation of the folktale *The People Could Fly*, a tale of "African magic, the diaspora, the human spirit, and transcendence."

As I navigate the space, memories of these objects being made throughout the semester emerge. I recall poking my head into their studios as the artists worked late into the night. The intensive push to make these new works come together led to aesthetically striking breakthroughs, features well-achieved by each artist. The quality and obvious rigor of the work on display proves that CCA's students have earned their unusually large representation of artist awardees in this year's award selections. In a moment where fine arts programs exist within an onslaught of institutional budget cuts, staff layoffs, a growing lack of resources and program cuts, this collection of graduate student work proves that the potency of true creative dedication and passion will always persevere. Regardless of how many times I have seen their work and in spite of how familiar I've grown with these artists' work over our shared time at CCA, I'm constantly inspired and humbled by the creative and intellectual labor of my peers. To each of them, I offer the utmost congratulations.



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Sam Hiura (she/her) is a third year graduate student in CCA's dual degree program for Visual and Critical Studies (MA) and Curatorial Practice (MA). Her academic and curatorial interests lie in contemporary art's power to undo and unsettle, with particular interest in the intersections of queer and BIPOC representation and criticism. She also holds a BA in Humanities and Art History with departmental honors from Seattle University. She has worked at Micki Meng Gallery (San Francisco, CA) and currently acts as the Curatorial Fellow at the Institute for Contemporary Art San Francisco, and has published art criticism through Variable West and Rewind, Review, Respond.

