

**2021**

**MAY  
7-26**



**SENIOR THESIS EXHIBITION**

**Christopher Barker**

**Carlo Cremonini**

**Eli Eshaghpour**

**Blaise Marceau**

**Alex Paton**

**Mari Sato**

**Laila Stevens**

**Wenjing Zheng**

**Bates | Museum of Art**

Olin Arts Center, [bates.edu/museum](https://www.bates.edu/museum)  
Mon, Wed 10am-7:30pm Tues, Thurs, Fri, Sat, 10am-5pm, and by appointment  
Follow us on Instagram and Facebook, [bates.edu/museum/join-our-mailing-list/](https://www.bates.edu/museum/join-our-mailing-list/)

Visit the [website](#)/request Museum News email for information about additional programming.

## Christopher Barker

My interest in the earth sciences, physics and biology has led me to spending time looking at photos of deep space or microscopy shots of suspended biological specimens such as viruses, insect wings and neuron networks. When we focus our lens way in or way out, there is an illusion that objects could be near and miniscule or far and massive, and can escape the apparent forces of gravity. When capturing a view of elements suspended in transparent fluid or star dust scattered in the vacuum of space, the emptiness hides all frames of reference and evokes a powerful sense of disconnect and freedom.

While studying the artwork of Terry Winters, Jasper Johns and Brice Marden, I found myself falling into the vacuums present in their abstracted drawings and paintings. I have worked to integrate these influences onto a ceramic surface, to pull the view beyond the solid, hard exterior and into the realm and space created by my marks.

I make wheel thrown stoneware vessels ranging from small cups to large vases. They have a soft white or glassy gray finish with detail drawn in black and white. While surfacing my pieces, I work with one or multiple layers of fine-line stain drawings, wax resist and slip inlay designs. I explore a sense of depth and spatiality. An atmosphere may be created by subtle changes in line weight or size, making a two-dimensional line have life and the illusion of occupying three-dimensional space. I want my surface designs to exhibit a celestial, weightless presence of floating and suspension.

To pull attention to the surface designs I throw simple sharp vessels. I start with a plain cylinder and then manipulate the form. When I trim away clay to uncover the final form, I explore the way my pieces interact with gravity. I remove clay so my forms are more noticeably lightweight. I also change the foot of some pieces to levitate them, so they hover, while I give others an unstable bottom that allows them to move and rotate freely.



Christopher Barker, *3 Stoneware Cups*, 2021, stoneware, 3 x 3 x 3 inches

## Carlo Cremonini

The camera inherently leaves a mark on everything it captures. Therefore, the extent to which an artist can leave their mark is limited. In short, the tool takes up interpretive space.

The world has never been black and white, pixelated or between dark bars, but our visual technology has been all of those things. Advancements in video and photography processes have left us with media that manipulate their proximity to us. Without context, clues from style, or setting, we can intuitively recognize a camera phone image as the present or near present. Conversely, we feel black and white images put subjects in the past, independent of clues that say otherwise.

The work I have done with pinhole photography allows me to capture a subject that is recognizable with a presentation that may not be. As the viewer uses their smartphone to uncover the images, they will be comparing two viewing tools, eyes and screen. They will be comparing two photographs, positive and negative.

When conservators colorize old film, we feel our proximity to those people and places increase. In part, my work is about doing just the opposite. My subjects are contemporary but the medium we meet them in is not. The distance between the viewer and subject is emphasized. The perceived or actual veneers of time that accumulate on these visual technologies are important to recognize, but they steer us away from the realization that fundamentally they are not as significant as we perceive them to be. This realization allows us to engage with rather than being distracted by our distance to them.

Asking the viewer to look deeper than the visual technology does not mean that they should ignore it. In fact, by asking them to uncover the image themselves I have asked them to engage with it far more. This work asks the viewer to meet the subject and medium with minimal preconceptions, to share in the magic that is created when light meets silver, when paper meets chemistry, and to remember that photography is not reliant on complex technologies.

The rest is up to you.



Carlo Cremonini, *504*, 2021, gelatin silver print, 2.5 x 4.75 inches

## **Eli Eshaghpour**

As religious minorities in Iran, many Persian Jews immigrated to the U.S. around the time of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iran's last fifty years or so are a testament to the randomness of history and its subsequent effects on individuals' experiences, memories, and self-perceptions. We tend to focus on the interrelated events and unique circumstances that coalesce into the famous moments we remember. We point out critical crises in time that stand as turning points for our futures, but maybe these futures are inevitable regardless of how they play out. In 1970 - almost ten years before the Revolution - my grandmother and her immediate family left Tehran for Jersey City. At that point the Shah seemed invincible - his oil-rich regime was backed by the American and Israeli militaries, his economy attracted capital from the world's leading corporations, and Iranians lived with relative freedom and prosperity under his globalist monarchy. Things changed very quickly though, for the Shah, Iran, and my family.

Last summer I interviewed my grandmother, my uncle, and a distant cousin whom I had never met. Each relative was born in a distinct political climate in Tehran. The interviews were conversational with my own planned questions interspersed throughout. I set aside excerpts that felt most reflective of each's upbringings, attitudes, and views. I sorted through footage of Iran from the Shah's reign, the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini's rise to power, and the Hostage Crisis. After building a library of video clips and threading together the interviews, I started to see a storyline develop.

There is an element of chance in how I create the video, because it is difficult to predict what clips and audio might work together until I start testing the possibilities. Each action in the editing process informs the next, until all the interviews and footage fall into place. Like a collage, they interact to create new associative meanings. Through this process of analyzing, synthesizing, and editing my family's intergenerational memories, I have threaded my own contemporary perspectives into my family's oral history. With that in mind, it is important to remember that I could have made several different videos with the same stories and history.



Eli Eshaghpour, *But at Least We Remember*, 2020-21, video still

## **Blaise Marceau**

Capturing the natural beauty of the wilderness through photography goes hand in hand with my passion for the outdoors. I constantly want to go mountain biking, hiking, fishing, backpacking, camping, and driving through Maine. This presents countless opportunities for a photographer.

In my work I merge environmental portraiture and landscape photography. Combining genres and blurring the lines between them can result in more complex photographs than if I followed predefined conventions. Traditionally in environmental portraiture, you can identify the subject in the landscape. My spin on this form of portraiture is that you cannot distinguish the people in these pictures. This puts more focus on the figure as a whole and less on their identity.

In terms of landscape, I am always looking at spatial information. For example, in the last photo I took what made me excited about the site was a broken fence in the foreground. This contributes to depth of field, which is achieved when there is a foreground, background, and substantial space between them. This makes the photograph feel very open.

For each photoshoot, I stage an event where someone is involved in an unclear narrative within the landscape. This changes the attitude of the photograph and pushes the viewer to consider the scene on a deeper emotional level. With this approach, I am layering information and joining artifice and realism. More specifically, I satisfy artifice by directing my subject to hold specific poses. At the same time, I keep a sense of realism by staying faithful to the natural features of the landscape.

I am staging unresolved moments that exist between a 'before' and 'after' in order to offer a deeper psychological experience. It is the emotional and mysterious sublayer in these images that may keep the observer thinking about them.





Blaise J. Marceau, *Untitled*, 2020-21, digital photograph, 42 x 64 inches

## Alex Paton

My utilitarian ceramic vessels represent a moment in time; a memory of materiality, morphology and place. These memories drive connection to our everyday lives and give meaning to our rituals of sustenance. The works contain within them a synthesis of my evolving relationship with clay; of constant scientific inquiry and material exploration. They display the forces I have put into the clay, but they also possess an inherent material life beyond the control of my touch. They are never truly finished, but simply undergo rapid periods of observable metamorphosis. Today, the pots may be a product of my hands and mind, but soon, they too will be weathered, broken and quietly cast away. Even when the evidence of human touch may be completely erased, the materiality of the clay will still live on.

My work revolves around the medium of clay and its transformation. I make functional, atmospherically fired ceramic wares which are often angular, geometric and clearly constructed. My recent formal exploration is largely focused on pouring pots as a means of expressing physical tensions between strength and fragility; between the built and natural world. I use native clays with coarse aggregates to evoke a geologic history of the material. Unfiltered inclusions of feldspar and silica break up flat, architectural planes to emphasize the crude physicality of the clay.

I have found the clearest expression firing my work in long format wood firings, where pots are subjected to extended periods of heat and a volatile reduction atmosphere. The path of the flame and conditions of alteration are captured on the pots in icy flows of natural ash glaze and richly flashed orange, brown and red clay facies to create a dynamic relationship between surface and structure. These pots then serve as a collaboration between maker, natural materials and process, each equally implicit in the final works. In providing agency to the clay and to the firing, I seek to reflect on the ephemeral qualities of humanity, and its cultivation of the natural world.

My forms speak of modernity and of the built environment. They reference artists like Constantine Brâncuși, Giorgio Morandi, and Duilio Barnabe in their assemblages of spatial relationships. My pots present sharp, oversized spouts alongside soft swooping handles, ever delicate appendages affixed to hefty structural bodies. My pots borrow formal elements from discarded industrial goods and domestic “junk”, which clutters roadside shops throughout North America. This societal refuse speaks to ritual and sustenance, but also to the temporal fragility of domesticity and of our objects. My forms too seek to elicit this utilitarian fragility; to maintain a commentary on domestic consumption by referencing, in a contrived and delicate manor, the abandoned and decayed products of our past.



Alex Paton, *Hooch Bottle*, 2020, wood and soda fired stoneware, 11 x 3 x 3 inches

## Mari Sato

If you were to give my heart a papercut, and then collect the blood from the cut and turn it into a dragon from a storybook, and the dragon could breathe fire, the fire from the dragon is the energy I hope to embody through my artwork. In this world that feels so enclosed in its opportunities for spontaneity, animation has become my escape to a place where possibilities are infinite. This pandemic-induced confinement has led me to revisit mythical worlds from my childhood and video footage from my past, which help to revive my imagination through their seeds of sentimentality.

My process is one of navigating uncertainty. I read, watch, and listen, as I go about my life with my art in mind. In the mornings, after drinking coffee and considering the day ahead, I go to the studio or to my desk, and I pick up a pen. The time of creating is the time in which I let my mind drift into its subconscious. Usually, I like to listen to something in the background. This animation has been made through a podcast series about Princess Diana, Trevor Noah's autobiography, Harry Potter Books seven, three, five, and six, Princess Nokia's full discography, a podcast series about O.J. Simpson, *The Secret Garden*, and more. Through the months, as I have grown tired of drawing with pen, I have shifted to working with the vibrant colors of Photoshop, acrylic paints, and water-based markers. Sometimes the ideas stay as they are, drawings that have found a life of their own, but other times I tuck them away into my orange accordion folder kept in waiting for the addition of a companion or home.

I contemplated the combination of animation with live-action video for a long time. But as I arranged the pieces of animation, I became convinced that there was something distinctly grounding for my animation to be contextualized through the recognizable world captured by digital video. I selected these sounds and videos from my archives of footage taken at and away from home. All are sentimental. This project contains the meows of feral cats in Indonesia, words exchanged with loved ones, bison as they roam the Badlands, and other snippets of documentation that recall feelings of life.

In connecting my pieces of animation, sound, and video, I focus on the feelings they emit. The colors, textures, and presence of these pieces inform their respective tones. From there, I weave all of the strands together in the video editing and animation finalizing process to give you what you see today.



Mari Sato, *Sakura*, 2021, animation still

## Laila Stevens

I work with clay to make sculpture. I have always found beauty in scientific images, whether it be the structure of an organelle or the lattice of complex molecules, and this outlook informs my creative direction. Through this body of work, I have merged my interests and studies in biology, chemistry, and ceramics.

By hand-building earthenware sculptures I am able to model amorphous forms inspired by organic structures. My most successful pieces are made when I embrace the spontaneity of both the building and firing processes and allow the work to change and develop. When I construct the forms of my sculptures, I build them one half at a time, with the only requirement being that the two halves must line up when they are fitted together. Through this method, the forms I make are both soft and heavy, broad and specific, and strange yet beautiful. I work to embrace these dichotomies, with all of the paradoxical elements coexisting. Next, I use terra sigillata, slip, stain, and metallic lusters to create surface designs that encompass the body like a skin.

Since I rely heavily on biological imagery for inspiration, the current pandemic-filled world, saturated with photos of the COVID-19 virus, made me want to explore those viruses further as three-dimensional entities, rather than flat and unapproachable on a page.

However, after months of exploration and experimentation, my sculptures have moved beyond a direct connection to those former references and have instead become abstract objects. At times they remind me of a rock or an animal, and at other times, I clearly see the outline of a scapula or pelvis. This kind of individualized and conditional implication is very alluring to me.

I do not think that something has to be completely recognizable or understood to possess beauty. In fact, sometimes the things that are novel or strange are the most captivating. And while captivation does not always equate to beauty or wonder, I think there is something fascinating to be discovered about anything. And in this way, I believe there is great beauty in all existence.





Laila Stevens, *No. 7 (large blue with black lines)*, 2021, earthenware, 9 x 14 x 14 inches

## Wenjing Zheng

Qiankeng Village is my Laojia, the “old home.” In China, the old home is the place where your family and previous generations originated. I lived in my old home when I was two years old and only return during traditional Chinese festivals. Sometimes I feel close to Qiankeng Village since my grandparents have lived there for more than 40 years, but other times, I feel alien to the place due to the limited time I have spent there.

My work is an experimental video of my grandparents’ lives in my old home, a rural area where all the residents wake at 6 am and begin raising their gardens and animals. In my mind, I had romanticized the abundance of their lives- cooking delicious food, basking in the sunshine, growing plants, raising ducks, and relaxing. I thought people in the bustling city would never imagine the tranquility of their lives. But it turned out things were not as I assumed. It is a plain life, a cycle of waking up, working, and going to bed. Many scenes of my video show the repetitions of cooking and gardening. I shoot when my grandparents are busy dealing with their mundane duties because I want them to be natural in front of the camera. We do not talk a lot while I am filming, instead, I record our conversations using my phone and add a voiceover to the video later.

This work is also an exploration of my personal journey back to my old home. I split my time in half: Each week I traveled from my current home to my old home and spent three days there. Using different modes of transportation, such as cars, buses, and motorcycles, I noticed the trivial beauties that I never noticed before. For example, when I was riding a motorcycle, I smelled the fragrance of various plants and heard the sounds of wind. When I was on a bus, I saw farmers leading their cattle, watering their crops, and chatting with each other. I went to the market, documenting my grandmother’s bargaining with the merchant. I went to the downtown area, experiencing the lively sincerity which I seldom noticed in the city. I saw the old merchant of a soy store happily giving more soy to customers who compliment his soy, with no additional charge. The children playing in the public park are delightedly sharing their stories with strangers. I also spent days walking on my grandparents’ farmland in order to identify each plant, see how they grow, and understand how much effort my grandparents exert on them.

The process of making this work has given me different versions of my hometown, and a look into the reality of my grandparents’ lives. We often focus on the differences in our lives, and even exaggerate these differences, but in making this work I have found that all lives share some similarities.





Wenjing Zheng, *Old Home*, 2021, video still

Since its dedication in 1986, The Bates College Museum of Art has maintained a special relationship with the college's Department of Art & Visual Culture. Part of this is a commitment to supporting the work of Bates students through our Annual Senior Thesis Exhibition. The exhibition highlights work selected from the thesis projects of graduating seniors majoring in Studio Art.

Thesis projects vary from student to student, each pursuing an individual interest. The emphasis of the program is on creating a cohesive body of related works through sustained studio practice and critical inquiry. The year-long process is overseen by Art and Visual Culture faculty, and culminates in this exhibition.

**Bates** | Art+Visual Culture

**2021**