USC ROSKIE SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN 2018 ARTS MASTER OF FINE
This *2018 MFA Thesis Exhibition* catalogue celebrates the culmination of two years of extensive work by seven emerging artists, who have gained insight and explored process and making during their time as USC Roski MFA candidates.

As the curriculum at Roski has expanded to encourage cross-disciplinary practices such as performance and social practice, made possible by the breadth of knowledge at this world-class research university, we see before us a robust cohort of exceptionally talented students: **Julia Orquera Bianco**, **Robert Farid Karimi**, **Chris Michael**, **Joshua Rains**, **Marton Robinson**, **Assaf Shaham**, and **Chad Sines**. I could not be prouder to introduce them to you, our Roski community of artists, thinkers, and supporters.

These individuals have brought to the school a diversity of backgrounds and viewpoints that have informed students and faculty alike. Given the uniqueness of the graduating class, we have chosen to steer away from a curated exhibition, and instead present the multiplicity of their individual practices. The individual installations have been designed by the MFA students themselves with considered oversight by Associate Professor Edgar Arceneaux.

The MFA curriculum has evolved to support a closer relationship with Roski’s Critical Studies program, allowing MFA and MA candidates to take classes side by side. To reflect this, we begin a new tradition of inviting an alumnus of the Curatorial Studies program to contribute to the exhibition catalogue. We are pleased this year to be working with Paulina Samborska, a graduate of our MA program in Curatorial Studies and the Public Sphere. Samborska, a Los Angeles-based curator, conducted interviews with several of the MFA graduates and wrote essays for this catalogue.

A number of Roski Art and Critical Studies faculty have served as faculty in the MFA program. In addition to Edgar Arceneaux and me, Suzanne Lacy, Keith Mayerson, Mary Kelly, Andy Campbell, Amelia Jones, Karen Moss, and Noura Wedell have taught and closely mentored our students. Many more Roski faculty have spent significant time in the MFA studios as well, offering guidance and input. The MFA students have further benefited from generous time and extensive dialogue with the visiting artists, critics, and scholars who have joined us in the past two years (see sidebar).
VISITING ARTISTS, CRITICS AND SCHOLARS

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MARK ALLEN
NAYLAND BLAKE
TANIA BRUGUERA
DAN CAMERON
PATTY CHANG
BEATRIZ CORTEZ
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PEPÓN OSORIO
SHANTI PILLAI
MIRA SCHOR
JENNIFER WEST
HAMZA WALKER

This exhibition could not have been possible without the assistance of Roski’s administration and extraordinary staff, and in particular the offices of Events, Facilities, Communications, Business, and Student Affairs. A special thanks goes to our dean, Erica Muhl, whose backing has been crucial to the growth of the program as a whole, and to the successful outcome of this exhibition.

The list of financial donors and supporters of USC Roski is a long one, but we must call distinct attention to the following for their continued support, or support that was specific to the MFA program and/or this exhibition: Gayle Garner Roski and Ed Roski, Jr., The USC Roski Board of Councilors (see full list on page 64), Christine Ofiesh, Lura Gard Newhouse, and Vivian Zhu and Jian Li.

On behalf of the USC Roski administration, faculty, and staff, I wish to express our enormous pride in our graduating MFA/Art cohort. We are pleased to see this exhibition realized in the historic Cooper Building in the Los Angeles Garment District. As the Roski curriculum has expanded to include the vibrant and ever-changing city of Los Angeles as a classroom, Downtown LA is a fitting location to celebrate the MFA Class of 2018.

NAO BUSTAMANTE
VICE DEAN OF ART | USC ROSKI SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN
INTRODUCTIONS TO THE ARTISTS
JULIA ORQUERA BIANCO’S evocative work extends her lived experiences as a migrant and explores her family’s heritage and customs. While the concept of migration is vast, Bianco’s strategy is to approach the subject from a personal place, which offers her audience an intimate entryway into her work. Born and raised in Argentina, the artist moved to Mexico later in life and then relocated to the United States to begin the graduate program at USC. Through her work in performance, sculpture, video, and installation, she strives to establish a dialogue with her past, examining how her background shapes her present and how it can serve her future. In one recent project, Bianco set out to learn the *zamba*, an Argentinian folk dance that is an important family tradition she never learned. She asked family members to send videos of themselves dancing the *zamba* and taught herself the choreography through their instructions. Later documenting her own performance of the dance in a video called *Lecciones de Baile* [Dance Lessons] (2017), where she appears on the roof of her Mid-City apartment, the Los Angeles skyline as a backdrop, Bianco inserts herself into this cultural lineage.
Recently the artist constructed a tiled floor piece composed of grout and broken shards from a found mirror titled *Atmosphere*—referring both a Joy Division song and a spatial and ambient politics. Bianco’s father works in construction, but never passed along knowledge regarding his labor—skills such as grouting—claiming it was not women’s work. In this installation, as in *Lecciones de Baile*, she is reclaiming and re-engaging a memory on her own terms. Making visible the craft and labor inherent in her work is important to Bianco, as is the specificity of her materials. In her sculptures, she often uses discarded furniture she collects from the street, which show signs of past wear. As a migrant, Bianco has often had to rely on found or gifted materials for her work. Using these experiences as a starting point, her work transcends the personal with poetic resonance.
ROBERT FARID KARIMI’S interdisciplinary projects tackle critical, real-world issues through playful strategies that challenge us to confront cultural, social, and political subjects. With an unconventional background rooted in the fields of theater and comedy, he has worked as a performer, community engagement specialist, and experience designer for the past twenty-five years. Among Karimi’s many projects are interactive game performances, immersive theater experiences, and themed events that engage participants to examine current societal issues and share their own individual experiences. Prior to starting the graduate program at USC, Karimi directed a multifaceted project called ThePeoplesCook Project that sparked intergenerational cross-cultural dialogue about community nourishment through interactive storytelling and food experiences. Programming included pop-up restaurants, a live cooking show event, and workshops that taught basic cooking skills while participants exchanged ancestral recipes, food stories and food wisdom with one another. This led Karimi to work with nutritionists, doctors, health professionals, and others in the food industry on ways to make healthy messaging delicious.
Recently Karimi has focused on making object-based work that can be employed as a performative tool to instigate exchange among users. At USC, Karimi produced two interactive card games that provoke players to talk about two pressing topics in the US—widespread police brutality and the Trump administration’s Muslim ban. In *Police the Police* (2017), players take on the role of either a police officer, a community member stopped by the police, or an observer, and work to earn one another’s trust throughout the game. *Cards Against Iranians, Syrians, Iraqis, Somalis, Yemenis, Libyans, Afghans, Sudanese, Chadians, North Koreans, & Venezuelans* (2018) functions as an expansion pack for the popular game Cards Against Humanity to spark conversation about the travel ban and the cultures of the countries affected by the order. Although dissonance may result, Karimi believes that discomfort can be a productive territory in which to have real debate. By combining satire and play, Karimi’s games and events make difficult subject matters more approachable and give participants the agency to unpack serious issues.
CHRIS MICHAEL’S approach to art-making is rooted in his interest in bringing people together and making them more aware of their presence in a space, both physically and psychologically. As platforms for discussion, social interchange, and multisensory experiences, his interactive, magnetic installations entice viewers to become participants. Influenced by artists such as Allan Kaprow, Roman Signer, and John Cage, Michael creates structures that people can freely engage with. The artist never wants a viewer to feel obligated to interact with his work—his projects invite us to activate them at our discretion. During his first semester at USC, the artist built *Table* (2016), a large outdoor table to activate and create a communal place for the graduate school. Through this simple and earnest gesture, he produced not just a functional object, but an opportunity for gathering and exchange.
For one of his sound installations, *Decibels of Chris* (2017), Michael designed a sound sculpture with amplified strings. Audience members could play the sculpture, along with a number of other musical instruments the artist supplied: a microphone, drum pad, synthesizer, keyboard, and a *djembe* (a hand percussion drum). Other key pieces of the installation included a bridge connected to contact microphones and an LED lighting system that cast alternating shades of the color spectrum onto a large reflective Mylar-covered wall, projecting colors throughout the entire space.

For part of his thesis exhibition, Michael will install his sound sculpture *Pagoda* (2018). This large-scale sculpture is based on a five-level temple structure. The sculpture is constructed of piano wire of multiple gauges, so the entire structure becomes a percussive instrument.

One of the artist’s critical objectives is to disrupt the hierarchical treatment of art objects and space and to allow for open exploration and creative engagement. Breaking the division of performer/audience, Michael’s work allows us all to become the makers and composers.
JOSHUA RAINS examines notions of queerness and sexuality through a multidisciplinary practice that includes drawing, performance, video, sculpture, and installation. Growing up in a small, conservative town in Oklahoma, the artist took to illustration as an outlet and developed a strong visual language of figures, objects, and textures. Referring to this internal catalogue, his drawings depict imagined landscapes that lie at the intersection of the amorphous and the representational. Executed with intricate detail, they demand a close reading to appreciate the fragmented body parts, hair, and cavities that form their compositions. Replete with craters and crevices, these drawings, along with other recent projects, explore ideas surrounding anality—a subject that Rains has studied through the writing of contemporary cultural and gender theorists including Jennifer Nash and Paul B. Preciado. While anal sex has historically had negative connotations, associated with death and obliteration, Rains’s work emphasizes the rich, generative powers of anality by reclaiming the hole as a space for the emergence of new possibilities outside of binary constructions.
*Plushanus* (2017–18)—a hand-sewn, corporeal soft sculpture—is covered with holes that reference this concept. Made from second-hand fabrics and nylon, and ornately embellished with costume beading, this work uses materials to play with queer aesthetics. Rains often uses thrift store finds in his work, specifically ceramic trinkets that people collect as interior decor, including the artist’s own family. In the video for *Blue Boy* (2018), Rains attempts to fit a whole Victorian-style figurine into his mouth—a physical test of his body and an obscene act on an object that elicits specific memories for the artist. The filmed documentation is projected onto a mirror that reflects the video onto the surrounding walls and produces a slight sense of disorientation. Rains’s intention is to invoke the feeling that queer people experience being in the world, having to create their own identities and space outside of patriarchal and heteronormative roles.
Born and raised in San José, Costa Rica, artist **MARTON ROBINSON** has an interdisciplinary background informed by his studies in both physical education and in art and visual communication. His current studies investigate modes of communication and translation—of history, culture, and identity—that challenge popular culture’s representations and assumptions, particularly nuances present in the Afro-Latino experience that deepen the critical discourse of works in the contemporary African diaspora.
Robinson has participated in solo and group exhibitions nationally and internationally, including at The Getty Center, Los Angeles; Museo de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo (MADC), San José, Costa Rica; Vincent Price Art Museum, Monterey Park, California; Fundación Ars TEOR/éTica, San José, Costa Rica; Museo de Arte Costarricense, San José, Costa Rica; Monte Vista Projects, Los Angeles; New Wight Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles; Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California; Eastside International, Los Angeles; X Bienal Centroamericana, Costa Rica; Despacia, San José, Costa Rica; The Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California; Aidekman Arts Center, Tufts University, Boston; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France; and Bergen Kjøtt, Bergen, Norway. He has delivered talks at the British Museum, London; California African American Museum, Los Angeles; and the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, San José, Costa Rica, among other institutions.
Originally from Jerusalem, **ASSAF SHAHAM** disrupts the intended functions of images and objects in order to rediscover their poetic and politic potential. Shaham considers himself a “photographist” and although he often uses film, sculpture, or painting in his work, the medium of photography and its expended field is always at the core of his practice.
Shaham’s latest body of work revolves around the consumption of food and the consumption of images and how the two collapse into each other in a way Shaham describes as “obesity of images.” The dentist as a cultural agent, the physical standardization of the perfect smile, and supermarket misting systems are all subjects of Shaham’s recent installations.

Shaham has had solo exhibitions at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Yossi Milo Gallery in New York, and Braverman Gallery in Tel Aviv. His work has been included in group exhibitions at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Shpilman Institute of Photography, Tel Aviv; Petach Tikva Museum of Art, Israel; Centro Cultural Clavijero, Morelia, Mexico; Jewish Museum Vienna; and New Wight Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles. Shaham’s practice has been featured in the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, BlouinArtInfo.com, and Artdaily.com. He is the recipient of the Israeli Minister of Culture and Sport Award, a Mifal HaPais Council for the Culture and Arts grant, the Shpilman International Prize for Excellence in Photography, and the Contantiner Photography Award, among others.
In **CHAD SINES’**S large-scale sculptures and installations, the artist uses materials scavenged from the urban landscape to create works that are at once abstract yet referential of their source. While studying sculpture at the University of Kentucky, Sines began to work with material he gathered from job sites and streets around his community, and he has continued this strategy ever since. While Sines began this process out of a need to source affordable materials, he has integrated it into his larger practice and approach to art-making. An important aspect of Sines’s work is the act of retrieving the objects to bring back to his studio. The materials the artist finds in construction zones include plywood sheets, framing lumber, bricks, and boards with wheat-pasted advertisements. He reconfigures and combines these raw, disparate elements to construct a formal narrative or composition.
Sometimes Sines titles his pieces after the areas where their components come from, such as *South Central* (2018) or *Boyle Heights* (2017), and he hopes that viewers can develop their own interpretations of the works by confronting the materials in a new context. In the sculpture *We Didn’t Land on Plymouth Rock* (2017), Sines connects billboard fragments to a concrete chunk with a colorful banner that one might see at a car lot or celebratory event. The billboard, with its bold blue and red shapes, resembles a modernist, geometric painting, but the innate roughness of the materials complicates this read. Bits of torn posters and graffiti remain on the white plywood backing, pointing to and underscoring the sculpture’s original function. In Sines’s work, we find these moments to investigate, drawing our own associations with the materials and experiencing them through a new formal lens.
JULIA ORQUERA BIANCO
Sin fin
ya habría caminado contigo.
ROBERT FARID KARIMI
Every Muslim woman has a under her hijab.

What every Iranian father tells his daughter not to do?

What a Yemeni grandmother would find disturbing yet oddly charming?

What they serve at Syrian McDonalds?
DECULO-NIZANDO
LOS ANGELES

BLACK AS ETHNIC DEKU MOTHER
SO LARGE BLACK JCOMM TAB
NOTE
INNOCENT
DERULO-
ELEVACIÓN

TAN
GRANDE
NEGRA
COMO MI
PACHA
JULIA QRQUERA BIANCO

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ROBERT FARID KARIMI

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PAGE 30:
Robert Farid Karimi in year-long residence at the Physical Education Department, Department of Physical Education, USC, (2017–18).

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CHRIS MICHAEL

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ASSAF SHAHAM

PAGE 16: Assaf Shiham, stills from The Missing Hand (Job), 2018. 16mm film converted to digital, 1:32 mins, looped.

PAGE 17: Assaf Shiham, Untitled (Flute), 2017. Inkjet print on archival paper, light box, 43 x 32 in.

PAGE 51: Assaf Shiham, Watch the Clock, 2017. Inkjet print on archival paper, 48 x 37 in.

PAGE 52: Assaf Shiham, stills from All Smiles, 2018. Slide projection; two Kodak carousel slide projectors, 162 slides.

PAGE 53: Assaf Shiham, Misting Piece (#4), 2018. Photo print on glossy paper, scrap wood, cardboard, stainless steel misting pipes, water, 18 x 11 x 2 in.

PAGE 54: Assaf Shiham, Six Easy Pieces (#1), 2018. Animal hide, glazed porcelain, silver, Turkish marble, plaster, approx. 50 x 30 x 10 in.

PAGE 55: Six Easy Pieces (#2), 2018. Glazed porcelain, stainless steel, mirror, Carrera marble, approx. 50 x 30 x 8 in.

CHAD SINES

PAGE 18: Chad Sines, Sign of Permanence, 2016. Plywood, rebar, twine, spray paint, 8 x 4 ft.


PAGE 57: Chad Sines, South Central, 2018. Billboards, plywood, two-by-fours, 8 x 8 ft.

PAGE 58: Chad Sines, We Didn’t Land on Plymouth Rock, 2017. Billboards, plywood, concrete, streamers, two-by-fours, 8 x 8 ft.


PAGE 60/61: Chad Sines, David and Goliath, 2016. Wood, steel, plywood, 60 x 40 x 20 ft.

All images courtesy of the artist.
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