

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The World Is Before You

July 6 – August 12, 2023

SHIFT 2023 Residency Exhibition

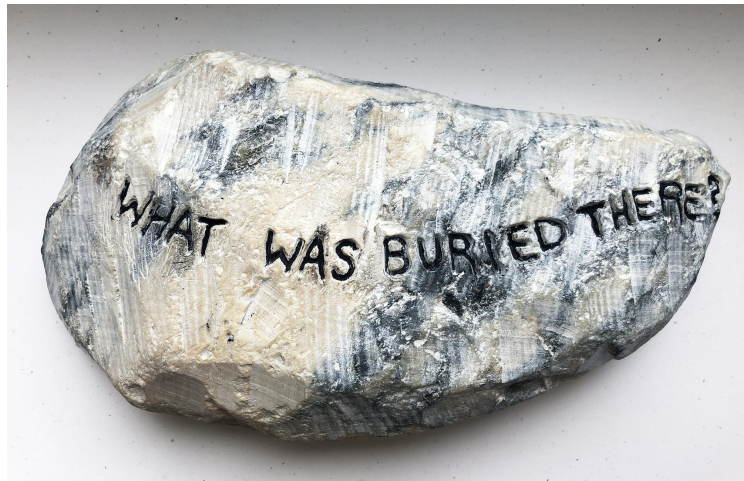
Opening Reception: July 6, 6:30 - 8:30 PM

Artists:

Francisco echo Eraso
Willa Goettling
Maya Jeffereis
Gabrielle Ondine Mertz
Dario Mohr
Carrie Sijia Wang

Curator: Naomi Lev

Assistant Curator: Minji Lee



Willa Goettling, *untitled (stone IV)*, 2023. Hand-carved soapstone, black acrylic ink, 8 x 4 x 2.5 inches

For the past six months the SHIFT residency artists have been activating their shared studio at The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, meeting with professionals, and working on their projects towards a final exhibition. Throughout this time they were committed to diving into their individual processes, exploring their lineages, roots, and upbringings, and sharing distinct voices that encapsulate their rich and complex backgrounds. The results are artworks that capture personal stories of exploration, dedication, and labor that reflect on the history of our nation and reveal a magnitude of cultures and circumstances.

With two new films, **Maya Jeffereis** explores her ancestral history as Japanese laborers on Hawai'iian sugarcane plantations. In *Fields Fallen from Distant Songs* (2023) Jeffereis interweaves folk songs and ghostly images, poetically and enigmatically exploring the past through a present day gaze. Here, Jeffereis blends 16mm home-videos shot by her grandfather (whose parents worked at the plantations), with footage from the 1906 Thomas Edison film "Hawaiian Islands," as well as with colonialist archival materials, and digital videos of the artist's recent research-based trip to Hawai'i with her mother, where she captured volcano eruptions, thus creating a fusion of past and present. The artist's great-grandparents moved to Hawai'i in 1904 with the aspiration of establishing a better future, and were disillusioned by the reality of plantation life. Through Japanese folk songs and contemporary Hawai'iian poems that speak about the challenges of this reality, Jeffereis sets a soft yet penetrating tone. Nearby, *Passages I* (2023), is a single channel video installation created with archival documents and direct animation on film and projected onto a sugar glass screen. This experimental video, created through the artist's intervention with a chemigram process, sets the tone by providing an unusual metaphoric space. The notion of labor comes to life as it bears the physical memory of migration, adaptation, and struggle.

Ideas of labor and working-class identity are investigated and become themes in **Willa Goettling's** work. Here, Goettling presents four hand-engraved stones on shelves, an accordion-fold handmade book that

contains the artist's poetry, alongside a black and white photographic image of a cave printed onto plexi-glass. Goettling's fascination with limestone derives from her father's background as a stone mason. In a captivating manner the artist is able to create poetry by simply stating facts about the geological and industrial processes the stone undergoes, embodying its nature with affection and care. In return, the limestone reveals itself to be multifaceted, abundant, responsive, and adaptable. In her poem the artist describes a process of dissociation of the limestone when the stone is "forcefully teased apart" – a process of separation and transformation. Goettling's exploration of the self and family lineage reveals softness and resilience, and her creative process is filled with rich manual labor; from sanding and engraving the stones to hand-binding an edition of artists' books.

Carrie Sijia Wang has spent the duration of the residency exploring her own identity and comfort level in this country. Her incentive through *Hey Alien* (2023) is to reflect on the various bureaucratic processes as well as mundane encounters she has experienced as an immigrant. The installation consists of a welcoming video and flyers, and a screen-based interactive experience in which the audience is confronted with the inquisitive questions and bureaucratic processes of entering "The Beautiful Planet," drawn from the Mandarin translation of the United States as "The Beautiful Nation." With a computer respondent software the artist has programmed, the acceptance interview into this beautiful land is filled with doubts, miscommunication, and offensive commentary. Questions like "Why should I let you stay?" and comments such as "Our portal isn't open to everyone" reveal the prejudice and ignorant nature of these processes. Wang created an atmosphere of a fantastic world that seems celestial and profound, yet once facing the camera one encounters abuse and frustration. By utilizing her wit and sense of humor, Wang recreates personal experiences into sarcastic occurrences.

At the far end of the gallery, **Dario Mohr's** installation *Trophies of War: Kingdom of Light* (2023) consists of eight sculptural objects situated on large pedestals, alongside a human-size pillar accompanied by an audio conversation with citizens who guided Mohr, driving across borders from Ghana to Togo, Benin and Nigeria, where he was able to connect with his ancestral land and history. The objects in this installation are created using found materials, and are each unique in their energy and essence. Mohr refers to the objects as *Trophies*, and examines the origins of the word, its initial purpose, its convoluted history, and its present meaning. In Latin and ancient Greek the term "*trophée*" refers to human captives, and human remains taken from a defeated army and set up as a memorial of victory. In the current installation the trophies are individually lit, creating a collective ceremonial atmosphere which resonates and articulates the audio conversation shared through the pillar. In this conversation Mohr and his guides discuss Vodun, spirituality, and christianity. The conversation concludes with the understanding of the colonization processes in Africa, which divided countries and tribes, creating forced alienation. As we gain an understanding of *Trophies* and the way this notion is celebrated in modern culture, we can potentially reflect on the complexities, misguidance, and ignorance that we so willingly take part in. As the trophies light up the room, Mohr pays homage to his ancestors, celebrating and mourning the vestiges of tribal societies of West Africa.

Situated in the center of the space, **Francisco echo Eraso** presents a large loom designed and programmed to create a large double woven textile with red and yellow linen, layered to create a large square cross with pockets for ceremonial use. *Flor de cuatro pétalos* (2023), serves as a means to

express the artist's experience of dealing with grief as an ongoing process. Eraso shares a story of his abuelito who was the president of the Red Cross in southern Colombia, and has passed during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Combining his accessibility work through an intervention of Audio Description in the space alongside durational performances throughout the show, as he continues to weave the fabric, Eraso's various practices exemplify the complexity and layers of meanings in his work; referring to the colors, Eraso shares the use of yellow as a signifier of the histories of colonialism within a Colombian-American context, when the search for gold was a driving factor in the exploration and colonization of indigenous lands. Combined with the color red, which symbolizes the red cross, these two create an intricate relationship, one that is tied to the politics of national aid and to ongoing colonial realities.

For this exhibition **Gabrielle Ondine Mertz** created six vibrant layered pigment paintings on paper that synthesize culturally-defining moments of the Media Age. The process of creating these analog gifs, as she refers to them, is by combining both digital and analog components; Mertz digitally paints a sequence of stills from the moving image source, then physically creates a layered image through pigment printing, and then hand finishes the work – a labor intensive process that involves the artist's ongoing interventions. In this series Mertz addresses cultural signifiers that point at the evolution of broadcast and social media technology (i.e., the first 24-hour news broadcast, a C-SPAN camera capturing a moment just before the January 6th Capitol attack, a viral dance from Tiktok), reflecting the impact of and changes to mediated experiences over the past forty years. Each of these moments reveals a fleeting drama which ultimately changed the way we see, understand, and communicate contemporary reality. These moments signify all that strongly affects us right now: politically, socially, intellectually, economically, and ecologically, and sum up our most radical concerns into works of art that play with the poignant divide between our nature as analog beings and our digital manifestations.

In *Nobody Knows My Name*, James Baldwin writes: "The world is before you and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in."¹ The artists in this exhibition present their consistent strive to understand and present a unique view of their heritage, roots, and influences. It is an accumulation of their whole being; their being as artists, as arts workers, and as humans in this world. The voices in this exhibition are poetic and clear, voices that are heard so vividly and strongly, and that echo their passion as well as their pain. Their consideration, delicacy, and empathy while dealing with what their bodies remember is prominent, filling the space with an abundance of intricate stories, realizations, beauty, and hope.

¹ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), "In Search of a Majority: An Address", 221.



Public Programming

Thursday, July 6, 6:30 - 8:30 PM

Opening Reception: Poetry Reading and Musical Performance

Poetry reading by Willa Goettling and Musical Performance by Nava Dunkelman
Organized by Maya Jeffereis and Willa Goettling

Thursday, July 20, 6:30 - 8:30 PM

Mediated Technology Experiences in the Age of Information Overload

A discussion among artists Gabrielle Ondine Mertz and Carrie Sijia Wang with a special guest, along with the release of a new collaborative digital work created by Mertz and Wang.
Organized by Gabrielle Ondine Mertz and Carrie Sijia Wang

Thursday, August 10, 6:30 - 8:30 PM

Catalog Launch and Performances

Performance by Dario Mohr and Percussionist Kraig Blue, alongside culminating performance by Francisco echo Eraso.
Organized by Francisco echo Eraso and Dario Mohr

About: SHIFT Residency for Arts Workers

Since its inception in 2010 *SHIFT* residency has been providing peer support, mentoring, and studio space for artists who work in arts organizations to boost their personal creative practices. The *SHIFT* residency honors these artists' commitment to the arts community with a supportive environment.

About: SHIFT Curatorial Mentorship

The *SHIFT* Curatorial Mentorship is a new program established by EFA Project Space and launched in January 2023, with Minji Lee as inaugural mentee. The main purpose of the Mentorship is to prepare an emerging curator to the practicalities of working alongside professional artists and supporting them through research, administration, and production towards the final product and exhibition space.

FOR PRESS INQUIRIES

Naomi Lev, Director and Chief Curator, EFA Project Space

212-563-5855 x244 / naomi@efanyc.org

EFA Project Space, launched in September 2008 as a program of The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, is a collaborative, cross-disciplinary arts venue founded on the belief that art is directly connected to the individuals who produce it and the communities that arise because of it. By providing an arena for exploring these connections, we empower artists, curators, and other participants to forge new partnerships and encourage the expansion of ideas. The program is based on Open Calls as well as invitational exhibitions and projects. It is a home for emerging, mid-career, as well as established curators and artists. We focus our attention on community engagement and public programming. www.projectspace-efanyc.org **The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA)** is a 501(c)(3) public charity. Through its three core programs, EFA Studios, EFA Project Space, and EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, EFA is dedicated to providing artists across all disciplines with space, tools and a cooperative forum for the development of individual practice. EFA is a catalyst for cultural growth, stimulating new interactions between artists, creative communities, and the public. www.efanyc.org EFA Project Space is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and additional funding from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Artist's Bios

Dario Mohr is a first generation Grenadian, U.S. citizen born in 1988. Based in New York City, Mohr is an interdisciplinary artist, educator and non profit leader. He received a BFA in Painting from Buffalo State College, an MFA in Studio Art from The City College of New York and an Advanced Certificate in Art Education from Queens College. His work involves the creation of "sacred spaces" referencing his heritage, and expressing commentary on the cultural zeitgeist through immersive sanctuary experiences. His practice is interdisciplinary, converging painting, sculpture, installation, digital art and film. In addition to his individual art practice, he is also the Founder and Director of AnkhLave Arts Alliance, Inc. which is a non-profit arts organization for the recognition and representation of BIPOC artists in contemporary art.

Willa Goettling is an artist and educator interested in art as a tool for information sharing and community building. Her own art practice is largely based around the production and distribution of printed matter. Willa received her MFA in Interdisciplinary Book & Paper from Columbia College Chicago (2019) and BA in Medical Anthropology & Global Health from the University of Washington (2016). While at Columbia, she was a Print Production Fellow and contributing writer for the *Journal of Artists' Books*; taught undergraduate and graduate printmaking workshops; and received an Albert P Weisman Award for her MFA thesis. In 2020 she was an Artist in Residence at Eureka! House via the Center for Artistic Activism (Kingston, NY). She has taught workshops at Parsons, Ugly Duckling Presse, and Interference Archive among organizations around the country. She currently serves as the Programs Manager at Smack Mellon Gallery (Brooklyn, NY).

Maya Jeffereis is an artist working video, performance, and installation whose work seeks to expand upon overlooked histories and archival gaps through counter and personal narratives, offering both critical perspectives and speculative possibilities. Jeffereis' work has been shown in the United States and internationally, including the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Queens Museum, New Britain Museum of American Art, among others. Jeffereis is a recipient of the A.I.R. Gallery Fellowship and Cisneros Initiative for Latin American Art. She has been a participant in Asia Art Archive in America and an artist-in-residence at Lower Manhattan Cultural Center (LMCC), Banff Centre for Arts & Creativity, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, and SOMA Mexico.

Carrie Sijia Wang is an artist and educator based in New York. Combining art, technology, and research, she makes performances, videos, and participatory experiences to explore the humanization of machines and the mechanization of humans. Wang is a Year 8 member of NEW INC, 2021 Pioneer Works resident, and 2020 Mozilla Creative Media Award recipient. She has shown and presented work with venues including Rhizome, New Museum, Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Onassis Foundation, ACM SIGGRAPH, and A.I.R. Gallery. Her work has been featured in publications including the Business Insider, Slate, and Computerworld. She teaches Interactive Media Arts at NYU.

Gabrielle Ondine Mertz is a multidisciplinary artist with a practice that explores contemporary information structures and issues through the use of altered technology, printmaking, photography, and other forms. Mertz creates images, installations, and other works that expose and reimagine digital, architectural, social, and environmental spaces and systems. Previously the Founder/Artistic Director of Ondine and Company, she has created exhibitions, performances, and site-specific projects on stages, on tour, and on screen. Her work has been exhibited in the United States and Europe at the Cultural Center of Krakow, New Museum, High Museum, International Dance Festival, Rialto Center for the Performing Arts, Susquehanna Museum of Art, and King Plow Arts Center, among others. She is the recipient of commissions/awards from the Cultural Olympiad, Rauschenberg Foundation, Open Society Foundation, City of Atlanta, Georgia Council for the Arts, Center for Artistic Activism, and Netherland-America Foundation, among others. Her work on cultural policy with nonprofit organizations, governmental entities, and international institutions includes The United Nations Economic & Social Council, Obama For America, The John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Arts for AIDS, The Carter Center, Institute for Global Policy, Coalition for the International Criminal Court, and International Rescue Committee, among others. She has served as a board member/on the advisory panel of the Emory Women's Center, Bronx Council on the Arts, Atlanta Coalition for the Performing Arts, NYC Cultural Development Fund, and Fulton County Arts Council, among others. She has taught/lectured at New York University, Bruce High Quality Foundation University, Emory University, and Image Film & Video Center, among others. She is the Director of Drawing Out The Vote, a voter education program mobilizing turnout and access to information through collaboration with the creative community.

Francisco echo Eraso (he/él) is a disabled, trans, Colombian-American interdisciplinary craft artist, educator, arts administrator and access consultant. Eraso works in sculpture, woven textiles, ceramics, text, performance and sound, and draws from disability justice, trans liberation, and cooperative textile movements. His practice deals with the social construction of value by referencing the colonial, indigenous and queer histories of gold. He holds a dual degree in Visual Studies and Fine Arts from Parsons, the New School. He is currently an artist in residence at FABSCRAP and The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts' SHIFT residency for arts workers. He has presented his work at a variety of venues including Ford Foundation Gallery, Sheila C. Johnson Gallery, Chashama Gallery, Westbeth Gallery, Columbia Law School, Virginia Commonwealth University, Museum of Art and Design, University of Illinois, Chicago, among others. Eraso currently works as the associate manager of access and inclusion at the Whitney Museum and access coordinator of Proclaiming Disability Art through NYU's Center for Disability studies.



Assistant Curator's Bio

Minji Lee is an independent curator and writer based in New York City. She received a B.F.A in Curatorial Studies from Dongduk Women's University in Seoul, South Korea. Before moving to the U.S. she worked at various contemporary art institutions in South Korea including the Busan Biennale Organizing Committee, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), and the Coreana Museum of Art. In 2019, she curated the group exhibition Dear America at CP Projects Space in New York City, where she invited four Asian American artists to address the issues of race, multiple identities, and the Asian diaspora experience in the U.S. Currently, she is pursuing a Master's degree in Art History at Hunter College (CUNY) where she focuses on post/de-colonial theory, critical race theory, and social/political artistic practices by BIPOC artists.