

# Mediated Meditations

Curated by  
Niama Safia Sandy

June 24  
—  
September 7, 2019

Pratt  
Manhattan  
Gallery

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# Foreword

*Mediated Meditations* focuses on the work of eight Fine Arts MFA alumni. Collectively, their work navigates a complex terrain in which lived and mediated experiences are radically interwoven. Each artist explores their relationship to these fluid territories using diverse media, materials, and processes.

The alumni artists in this exhibition reflect a small portion of the richness of talent that Fine Arts graduates possess. Our MFA program enables each artist to develop their talent within an intellectually and creatively challenging community, helping them to grow as practitioners and become active contributors to the global cultural conversation. Fine Arts alumni go on to make significant contributions as artists, critics, curators, gallerists, and educators. Many also forge their own paths by creating new models for cultural engagement, and initiating new platforms and innovating relationships that reimagine the cultural landscape of the future.

We are proud of all that our alumni accomplish and are delighted to share some of their work with you.

Many thanks to all the artists for participating in this exhibition, and special thanks to Niama Safia Sandy for her thoughtful and thought-provoking curation.

Sincerely,  
Jane South, Chair  
Fine Arts

# Introduction

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*Mediated Meditations* is a multimedia group exhibition featuring eight Pratt Institute Fine Arts MFA alumni—Lana Abu-Shamat, Evan Paul English, Tal Gilboa and Elizabeth Stehl Kleberg, Alana MacDougall, Lara Nasser, Hyunjung Rhee, and Luisa Valderrama—working through sculpture to ask questions about our experience as humans.

Virtually all of our experiences are mediated—there is our individual subjective experience wherein the prisms of class, ethnicity, religion, race, and gender act together to shape our realities—these categories themselves each a technology. It is true that in this contemporary moment, our lives are increasingly augmented by a bevy of mobile computational applications and devices; however, technology can also be more generally defined as the processes through which human beings have created means to order the world and solve problems. In *Mediated Meditations*, the artists are each devising their own technological interventions to navigate the world through their artistic practices. Simultaneously, the artists challenge and reshape the genre of sculpture with their own unique material approaches. Taken together, the works interrogate thematic relationships with power, nature, geography and architecture, language, internet culture, gender, sexuality, the body—and ultimately—our humanity and collective ability to recognize the humanity of another.

Each artist brings a story to bear through their formal engagements with materials as technologies. Lana Abu-Shamat engages with olive pits—reminiscent of the renowned olive trees that dotted her family’s ancestral lands in Nablus, Palestine. Economic and political difficulties in the 20th century caused members of the Abu-Shamat family to leave their home, but their traditions persist. For the work in her installation *99* (2019), the artist carefully scrapes the flesh from the pit of olives to create a *misbaha*, a tool used to perform traditional Islamic devotion. *99* is less about religion than it is about devices for memory. With *Menudo* (2019), Luisa Valderrama’s dexterous manipulation of porcine intestines explores the juxtaposition of rural organic materiality in urban environments. The work is an interrogation of what Valderrama refers to as an “intuitive, instinctual” flow in contrast to that which is “artificially imposed,” a necessary constraint reflecting

the two almost diametrically opposed realities.

While Valderrama deals with the imposition of the natural into constructed urban environments, Alana MacDougall’s ceramic and rope installation, *Tense X* (2019), is imbued with a corporeal resonance reckoning with the fragility of the body—the ceramic portions of the work resembling human bone fragments taut in a fraught labyrinthian rope form. At a glance, it appears that one segment is connected and supporting the next. Any shift in tension of any of the tendons results in collapse of the entire structure. These entanglements are not unlike the vulnerabilities daily stresses produce on the body, and perhaps the social stability of the world at large if we extrapolate and map that information on a macro scale. Our connections to each other endure and entwine us—whether or not we perceive them as such. Evan Paul English’s *Consensual Immobility #2* (2019) is a site-specific mixed media sculptural installation echoing these connections and the beauty the entanglements can create, as the rope intersects with found vintage crystal bead chandelier chains. In the same instance, English is bringing these entanglements to bear using the decorative arts to subvert gender narratives and stereotypes. Lara Nasser’s *EDBTZ, or Uncausing the Cause* (2018), subverts ethnic, gender, and religious dogma. Nasser transforms herself into an omniscient and purposefully ethnically ambiguous deity-like figure projected before the viewer in a scene replete with custom mood lighting and faux foliage meant to evoke what the artist has called “an aggressive exoticized aesthetic.” Viewers may ask the deity questions; the answers are populated from BuzzFeed listicles, pornographic advertisements, and other web content. It is a cheeky *de-mediation*—or a dissociation from the information we believe we have in order to begin a transformation toward something new and more capacious than where we began.

Hyunjung Rhee’s *Buffering* (2017–ongoing) similarly explores dissociation—specifically the discourse markers that act as interstitial spaces between words in speech. The *Buffering* consists of twelve panels of video interviews edited to include only filler and planner sounds, there are no formal words spoken in any language. We recognize these sounds as a signifier

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of cognition; they are familiar regardless of language, ethnicity, or any other social strata. The installation is a study of the possibilities of creating meaning in the absence of language. Tal Gilboa and Elizabeth Stehl Kleberg's *Icarus' Sisters* (2019) sculptural video installation makes its impact without the use of spoken language but instead through the multivalent strategy including the visual languages of sculpture, choreography, and video. Pairing the duo's mark-making interventions in segments of archival footage of a performance of Martha Graham's 1936 iconic choreographic work *Chronicle* with a printed image of Auguste Rodin's *Fall of Illusion - Sister of Icarus* (1894–96) the work is self-mediating in a number of ways. The works were chosen for their monumental weight in Western culture, and as an opportunity to explore alternative histories and offer a new formalist interpretation. *Chronicle* was created in direct response to mounting tensions stirred by the rise of fascism across Europe on the eve of World War II. It is a prescient work rooted in unflinching protest and solidarity in the face of what would be a watershed moment in contemporary world history, and what Tal Gilboa named as the "grand notion of what art can accomplish." Multiple versions of Rodin's *Icarus* sculpture exist; the version Gilboa and Kleberg use depicts a winged figure they have chosen to read as a woman deftly swooping through the air. The Greek myth of Icarus is almost exclusively used as a cautionary tale with the male child and his mistake as the center. The collective's radical reading of Rodin's sculpture is a gesture toward an alternative ending that makes room for restorative spaces. Together the norm-breaking components of *Icarus' Sisters* challenge mechanisms of knowledge and heritage through movement and light.

Niama Safia Sandy

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Niama Safia Sandy is a New York-based cultural anthropologist, curator, and essayist. She believes that we personify the wildest dreams and joys of our ancestors. Simply put, this is the core mandate of her work. Sandy's curatorial practice delves into the human story—through the application and critical lenses of culture, healing, history, migration, music, race, and ritual. She sees her role as that of an agitator—one who endeavors to simultaneously call into question and make sense of the seemingly arbitrary nature of modern life and to celebrate our shared humanity in the process. Sandy is fascinated by the ways in which history, economics, migration, and other social forces and

constructs have shaped culture and identity. Her aim is to utilize the visual, written, and performative arts to tell stories we know in ways we have not yet thought to tell them and to lift us all to a higher state of historical, ontological, and spiritual wholeness in the process.



Lana Abu-Shamat, *99*, 2019, video installation, olive pits, off-white silk thread, acrylic cube, 02:36 minutes

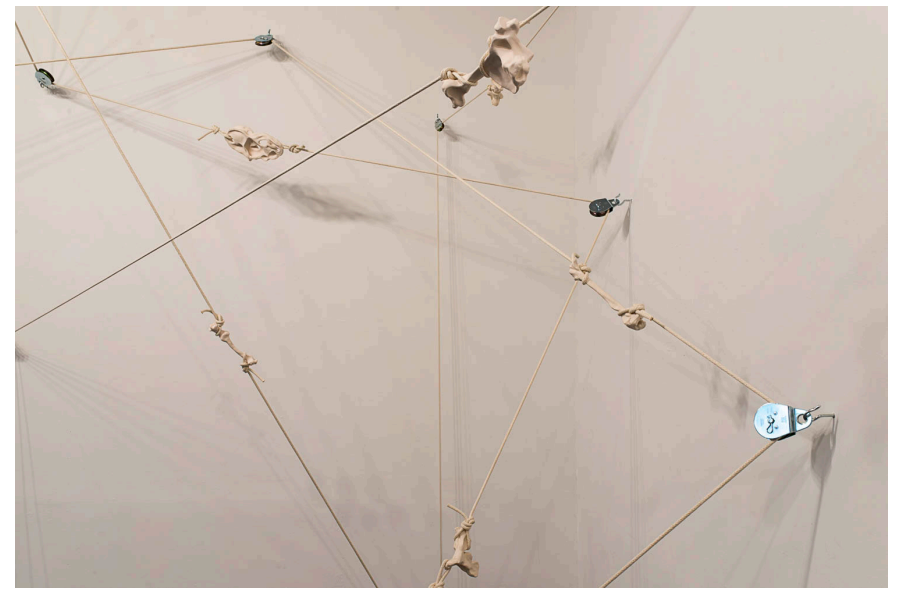
Evan Paul English, *Hung or Hanged*, 2017, cotton, wool, and acrylic fibers with acrylic paint, 96 x 60 inches with variable depth





Tal Gilboa and Elizabeth Stehl Kleberg, *Icarus' Sisters* (detail), 2019, 7:21 minute video loop projected on Inkjet print

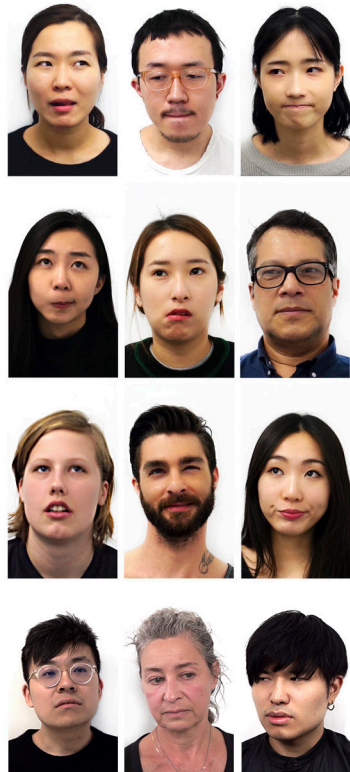
Alana MacDougall, *Tense X*, 2019, ceramic, rope, hardware, dimensions variable





Lara Nasser, *EDBTZ, or Uncausing the Cause*, 2018, interactive video installation (single channel video, palm trees, neon, pedestals, WHO / WHAT buttons), dimensions variable. In collaboration with Ramsey Nasser

Luisa Valderrama, *Menudo*, 2019, dried pig intestines, thread, dimensions variable



Hyunjung Rhee, *Buffering*, 2017-ongoing, video installation on tablets, dimensions variable



# Artist Bios

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Lana Abu-Shamat, MFA Fine Arts '15, is a Palestinian-American artist who revisits historical narratives by reclaiming and recreating objects from her heritage. In her work, Abu-Shamat seeks to bring forth products or items that relate to her ingrained identity, as she believes they can be harmonized into new meanings. Her work has been exhibited at The Boiler Room, Pierogi Gallery (New York), Abrazo Interno Gallery (New York), and Alexander Hall Gallery (Savannah). She currently lives and works in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and is an instructor at OCAD University. Website: [www.lanaabushamat.com](http://www.lanaabushamat.com)

Evan Paul English, MFA Fine Arts '16, uses a wide range of media to explore facets of 21st-century queer identity using the vocabulary of Americana nostalgia and craft. His work is rooted in his suburban Idaho childhood. English is interested in the ways in which culture shapes our self-understanding through materials and objects, often utilizing decorative arts to subvert stereotypes and ask deeper questions about our own gender narratives. Recent solo exhibitions include Shortcut Gallery (Phoenix), and NAPOLEON Gallery (Philadelphia); and he has been an artist-in-residence at Surel's Place (Boise, Idaho), Vermont Studio Center, and the Wassaic Project (New York). English is currently practicing in Brooklyn, New York. Website: [www.evanpaulenglish.com](http://www.evanpaulenglish.com)

Tal Gilboa and Elizabeth Stehl Kleberg, MFA Fine Arts '16, have worked exclusively as a collaborative team since 2015, making video installations. Gilboa (from Jerusalem, Israel) and Kleberg (from Virginia, USA) are interested in the moments of connection when two things combine to create a third held together with magnetic potential. In their work, they bridge manipulated iPhone videos and simple materials, like plastic, metal, or paper, into spatial collages. This process mirrors their collaborative work—two seemingly distinct personalities generating a third creative force. Their work has been shown in New York at SOHO20 Gallery, The Boiler Room, Pierogi Gallery, Mulherin New York, BAXTER ST CCNY, and in Israel at Barbur Gallery. In 2016, they were Rema Hort Mann Foundation emerging artist nominees and were recipients of The Stutzman Family Foundation Graduate Fellowships in Sculpture at the Vermont Studio Center, which they

attended in 2017. They have a forthcoming solo exhibition at CIRCLE1 Gallery (Berlin) in September 2019. They work together in Brooklyn, New York. Website: [www.talandliz.com](http://www.talandliz.com)

Alana MacDougall, MFA Fine Arts '16, is a sculpture and installation artist who works primarily with ceramics and industrial materials. She creates large-scale artworks that aim to increase the viewers' awareness of their bodies. MacDougall's work explores the intersection of organic and industrial intervention, what she describes as an invading and manipulation of the body by something foreign. Her work has been included in group exhibitions including at Fairleigh Dickinson University (Teaneck, New Jersey), Carrie Able Gallery (Brooklyn), The Robert McLaughlin Gallery (Oshawa, Ontario, Canada), and The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada). MacDougall currently teaches in the School of Art at the University of Manitoba, in Winnipeg, Canada. Website: [www.alanamacdougall.com](http://www.alanamacdougall.com)

Lara Nasser, MFA Fine Arts '15, employs sculpture, video, and painting to understand the controlled production of identity and behavior. She is interested in failure within the frameworks meant to guide interpersonal relationships. From the macro level of political conflict to her own personal insecurities, she recreates crisis scenarios in which established social scripts no longer apply. She has exhibited nationally and internationally at Non-Fiction Gallery (Savannah); H Gallery (Los Angeles); The Boiler Room, Pierogi Gallery (Brooklyn); Bullet Space (New York); Alfa Gallery (Miami); Beirut Contemporary Art Fair (Lebanon); Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt (Paris); Takt Kunstprojecteraum (Berlin); KUP Gallery (Athens); among several others. Her work is included in the Imago Mundi collection of Luciano Benetton. In 2018, she had her first solo show at Meredith Rosen Gallery (New York). Nasser lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Website: [www.laranasser.com](http://www.laranasser.com)

Hyunjung Rhee, MFA Fine Arts '17, explores the problems and fallacies that are constant among communication. Through manipulation of machines built on binaries, she showcases an infinite process of meaningless transmission, symbolizing the failure of human speech as a whole. Rhee's work has been

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featured both internationally and nationally, including at Yangpyeong Art Museum (Kyoungki-do, Korea), Gallery Palais de Seoul (Seoul, Korea), and Governor's Island Art Fair (New York). She has participated in the Vermont Studio Center residency, SHIM Studio Residency (Brooklyn), The Studios at MASS MoCA, and in 2018 was awarded the Silver AHL-T&W Foundation Contemporary Visual Art Award. She currently lives and works in New York. Website: [www.hyunjungrhee.com](http://www.hyunjungrhee.com)

Luisa Valderrama, MFA Fine Arts '18, draws on her experience of living between rural and urban environments in Colombia, where she grew up. She explores organic materiality, formalist composition, self-reflection, and how things relate to the land through a combination of mixed media sculpture, installation, painting, and video. She is a recipient of a NYFA 2019 Mentoring Program (NY), a 2019 thematic residency at RU-Residency Unlimited (NY), 2019 MASS MoCA Residency (MA), and a 2019 Marble House Residency, among others. Valderrama's work has been included in group exhibitions at The Boiler Room, Pierogi Gallery (Brooklyn), Agora Gallery (New York), and El Sótano Art Space (Brooklyn), as well as numerous exhibitions in Colombia. Valderrama currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Website: [www.luisa-valderrama.com](http://www.luisa-valderrama.com)

The exhibition comprises all the works illustrated in this brochure, as well as the following:

Evan Paul English, *Consensual Immobility #2*, 2019, vintage chandeliers, minita rope, dimensions variable

Lara Nasser, *House Ruin*, 2018, 3-D printed bust, Aristotle's 'The Book of Problems,' pedestal, 62 x 14 x 14 inches

## Acknowledgments

This exhibition and its programming would not have been possible without the dedication of the Department of Exhibitions staff: Kirsten Nelson, Assistant Director; Kate Ryan, Gallery Coordinator, Travis Molkenbur, Installation Manager; Paul Matvienko-Sikar, Installation Technician; and our Student Assistants.

Many thanks to the artists for making their work available; and we are grateful to Niama Safia Sandy, New York-based cultural anthropologist, curator, and essayist, who was generous with her time and expertise in selecting the work for this exhibition.

The direction of Jane South, Chair, and Dina Weiss, Assistant Chair, from Fine Arts is greatly appreciated.

Nick Battis  
Director of Exhibitions

Lana Abu-Shamat  
Evan Paul English  
Tal Gilboa and Elizabeth Stehl Kleberg  
Alana MacDougall  
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