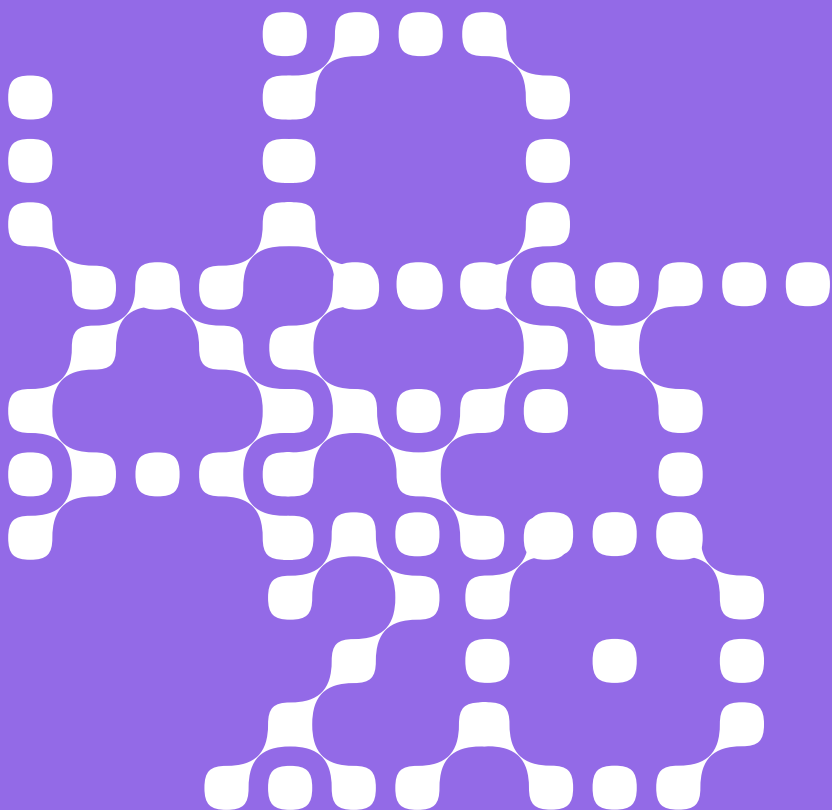


University of Oregon
Department of Art

MFA

THESIS



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INTRODUCTION

Although the University of Oregon has one of the oldest MFA programs in the country, this is the first time in its almost 100-year history that graduating students have not been able to present their work in a public exhibition. Certainly, this is not the way any of us imagined the year would go. Following executive orders in March to shelter in place due to COVID-19, our students were abruptly displaced from their studios, as well as their close-knit community of fellow artists. With the thesis show just weeks away, completing the work required multiple kinds of collaboration, solving unexpected logistical challenges, and working in the absence of their peers during the crucial final weeks. While navigating the dizzying pace of events that followed, this group of artists not only persevered, but they also triumphed.

We are proud to present the thesis work of the 2020 MFA class in the pages that follow. Through deep introspection, hours of independent research and faculty critique, and an inspiring commitment to their studio work, each of these artists has developed a rich and complex project. While we cannot all be together in person to celebrate these accomplishments, we are proud to share and honor their projects here, from a distance.

Amanda Wojick

Interim Department Head, Ann Swindells Chair, Professor





Doran Walot
Untitled Shelf Arrangement, 2020, Concrete & Oxide Colorant, 4¼×7¾×1"



Objects that at first scan as rusty bricks of consistent size and inconsistent materiality reveal themselves to be concrete castings from VHS “Squeeze & Shake” rental sleeves, effigies not of the technology of the video cassette but of the vessels that protected them. These unfussy artifacts recall the chronologically recent but reasonably inaccessible space of the video rental store, a browsable archive curated not by algorithm but still shaped by the invisible hands of capital and regional demand.

A novelty freezer seems plucked from an understocked bodega in winter and placed in the gallery: one Popsicle remains in stock, cradled in a grid-
ded basket. An elaborate armature designed to keep one small, sugary



Doran Walot
Good Humor (detail), 2020, Commercial Novelty Freezer with Wire Basket, Popsicle, 4 x 3 x 2'

treat in edible cryo-stasis, lest someone has an off-season craving. A low sound reverberates from the aging freezer, this coffin of Good Humor—simultaneously peaceful and effortful.

Elsewhere in the gallery, an outmoded headband-style hearing aid emits a less pleasant feedback noise, straining to amplify the tone of the room for an invisible audience of one: the artist's brother, ephemerally referenced in recreations of text exchanges and a snapshot torn from a scrapbook. Images on the walls document the Southern California suburb where the artist and his brother were raised, traces of a neighborhood forever simultaneously degenerating and regenerating. Evidence of activity stands in place of any identifiable human subject: paint samples, in community board-approved shades of white and tan, dry on a worn condominium, while tire marks streak grass from lawn onto sidewalk.

In *Imaginary Archives*, Julia Bryan-Wilson writes, “As there are many kinds of queer histories, so too are there many types of queer archives: banal ones, tender ones, bureaucratic ones. But perhaps the queerest things about archives are their silences—their telling blanks and perversely willful holes.” Doran Walot's thesis exhibition brings together objects and images that reference bygone common commercial spaces and pieces that specifically recall his lived experience. The act of browsing shelves of VHS tapes, the passing of Walot's brother, a solitary Popsicle, documents of years of a suburb's evolution—these are incongruous losses bound by a darkly comic shared sensibility.

Walot's work appears to direct attention to the lack of information through objects identifiable with a feeling, memory, or history—information that can't be transmitted fully. Rather than attempting to make the viewer feel his feelings or know his thoughts, these objects and photographs bridge the gap of a common bond of disconnectedness. We can come close to knowing each other but there are limitations to empathy.





Doran Walot
Untitled, 2020, Hearing Aid, Wood, C-Print, Dimensions Variable

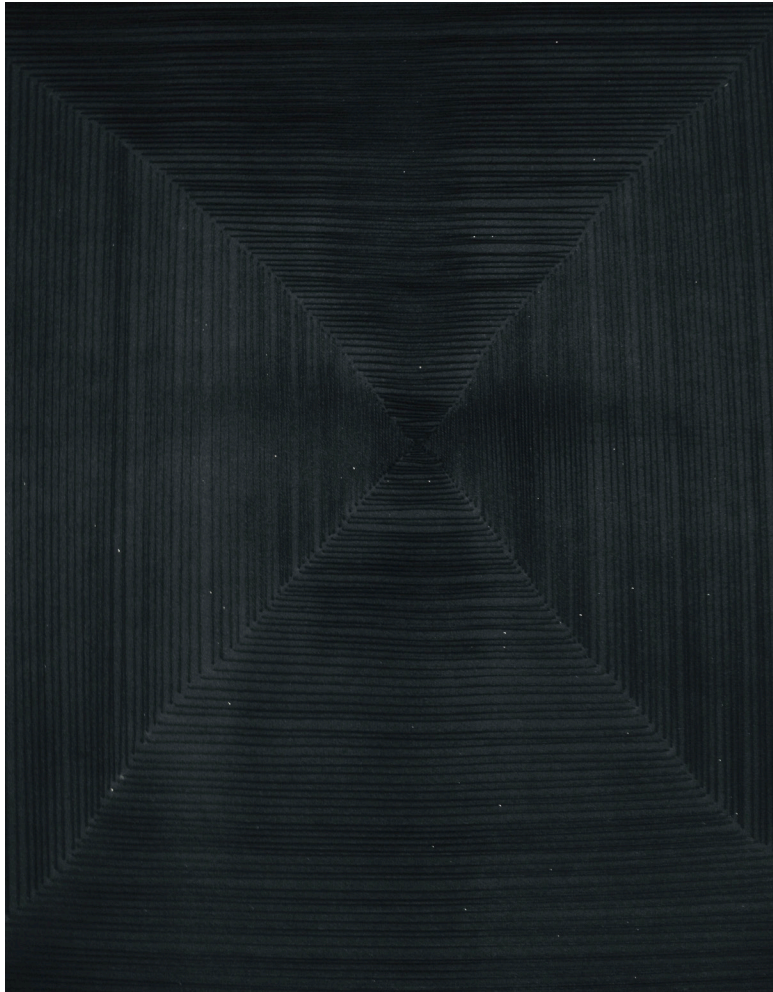




Elnaz Talaei
Inside Out, 2018, Ink, Paper, 20x30"



Elnaz Talaei intertwines the politics of relationships and communication in her fiber-based, monochromatic installations. Growing up in Iran, Elnaz watched her mother work with thread and fabric as a dressmaker. After seven consecutive years in the United States, Elnaz uses these materials to investigate the threads that still lead to her family in Tehran. Fibers entangle en route from one anchor to the next, but they always reach the other side. The installations comment on the complicated nature of long-distance: the space and time that stretches between two entities.



Elnaz Talaei
Threads of Body, 2019, Felt, Yarn, Thread, 5'

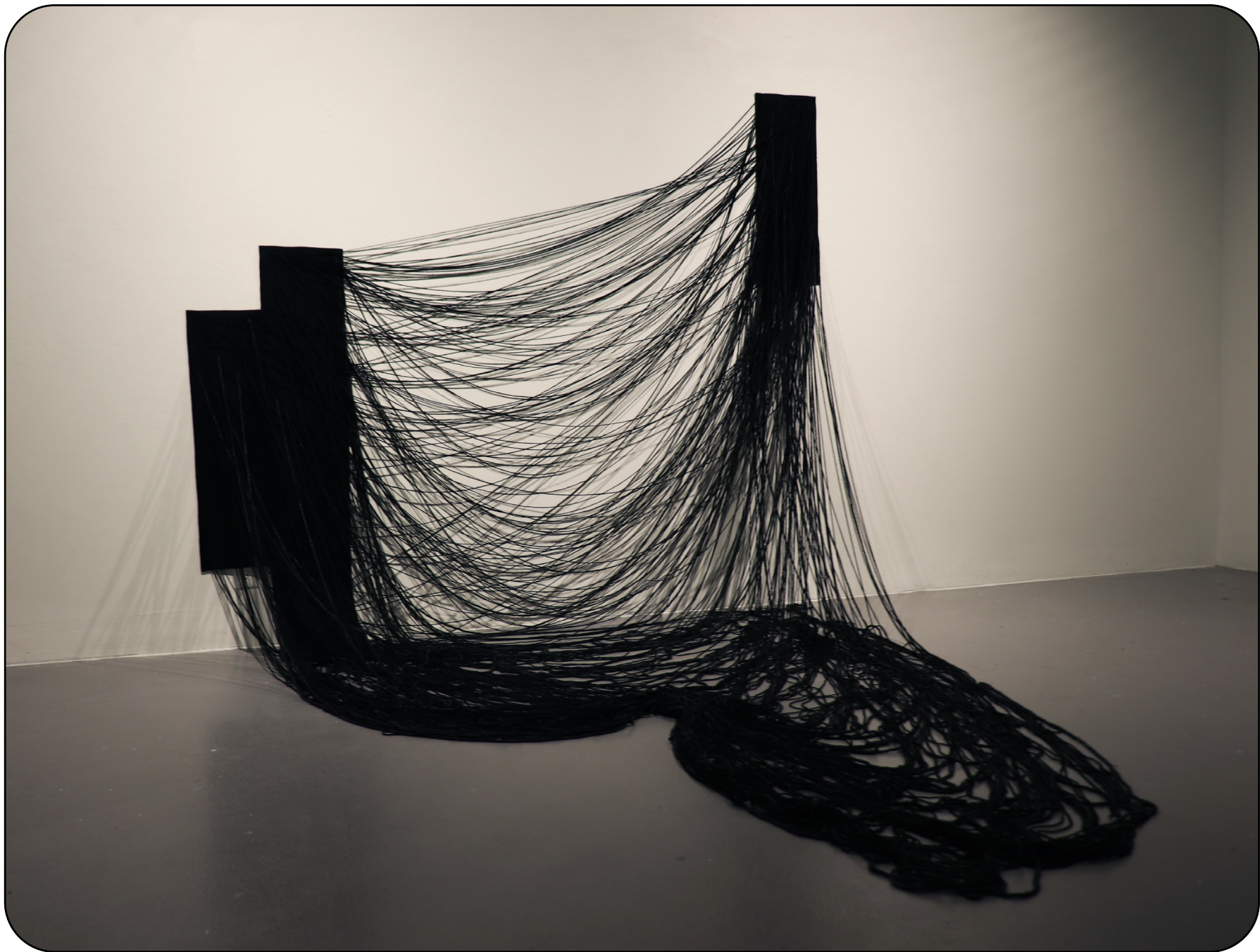
The repetitive motion of creation—stitching, mark-making, and interweaving with ink and thread—is meditative. Viewing Elnaz’s work is equally so. Her black panels are deep voids, inviting viewers to sink in. Threading is subtly and profoundly intriguing from across the room, and from a distance, darkness swallows all detail. By closing that distance, geometric patterns emerge and reveal depth previously obscured by the solid black field. The works defy white space waiting to be filled. This dark void is already dense. But the material is porous; there is always room for the viewer to add memories and personal experiences to its depths. Elnaz sees these objects as communicative and open for individual interpretation. Like the Persian poetry that inspires her work, Elnaz ensures these works do not dictate a singular narrative.

Elnaz’s work is intensely affected by the place in which it is situated. The artist uses the exhibition space to explore, and the works are largely created on-site. The place itself has an effect, a mood to contribute. The resulting installations are unique and individually designed for their place. To Elnaz, the materials play their own roles. The works pierce the viewer’s personal space with their sheer size, engulfing bodies in the installation environment. Active engagement is required—moving in this space reveals the subtle but complex network Elnaz has exposed. Untangling individual threads with the eye is impossible; instead, the works reveal and accept the nature of convolution. The line of communication is opened: between Elnaz, the artwork, the viewer, and the complicated relationships that exist amongst all.

Emily Lawhead

Ph.D. Graduate Student, History of Art & Architecture





Elnaz Talaei
Threads of Body, 2019, Felt, Yarn, Thread, 5'

University of Oregon
Department of Art





Junwei Zhang
Pseudo-Well (front view), Various Materials, Dimensions Variable



Junwei Zhang's artworks often culminate in a series of created binaries: distinctions between the self and the other, reflections of materiality and immaterial ideas, and the physical versus the abstract. Using a variety of found and created materials, the physical manifestations of Zhang's artworks serve to bridge the gap between these created binaries. Zhang's work is often accompanied by poetic prose to further the reflective nature and mythical connotations evident in his sculptural designs. Zhang's contemplative and interactive practice represents collective individuality through viewer participation.



Junwei Zhang
Pseudo-Well (back view), Various Materials, Dimensions Variable

Zhang's project is one of monumental proportions. *A Well* takes form as a grand sculptural structure composed primarily of tires. The sculpture is meant to look like an oversized well, with 120 tires stacked in a circle on top of each other to reach a height that dwarfs human scale. An attached wheelchair-accessible ramp (in his exhibition, the ramp was replaced by a playground slide) and staircase share a platform that sits off the sculpture's edge. Viewers are encouraged to traverse the ramp and/or staircase and peer off the edge of the sculpture into the void below. Once at the edge, the viewers, overwhelmed with the smell of tires, gaze towards a screen projecting images of water, the sky, and clouds found at the bottom of the piece. An interactive camera furthers the viewer's interventions, projecting their reflection onto the screen below. However, Zhang distorts the viewer's reflection to appear grainy and unrecognizable, further conflating distinctions between the natural and unnatural as they gaze deep into the well.

In concert with his use of tires, Zhang's *oeuvre* is connected through repeated motifs of transportation and mobility. For one such example, titled *From West to East*, Zhang used collected tires shreds to create an abstracted profile of the United States. Twisted topographical forms represent the mountain ranges and river valleys that mark the American landscape. *A Well* similarly incorporates tires but they are left intact. Zhang intentionally chose tires from the popular Toyota Camry and Corolla cars. The use of this particular brand emphasizes underlying themes of accessibility and availability to physical space. However, the performative aspects of *A Well* simultaneously suggest a limitation in reach to each individual's internal space. Thus, *A Well* serves as a compelling thesis for Zhang's practice through its representative relationship between the physical artwork and the body created through movement.

Jayne Cole
Ph.D. Student, History of Art and Architecture





Junwei Zhang
Pseudo-Well (side view), Various Materials, Dimensions Variable



University of Oregon Department of Art MFA Thesis Exhibition 2020
Originally scheduled for May 16-May 31, 2020 at Disjecta, Portland, OR

Department of Art Faculty + Staff

Jonathan Bagby, Marissa Benedict, Carla Bengtson, Alida Bevirt, Mika Boyd, Michael Bray, Rebecca Childers, Isami Ching, Colleen Choquette, Joe Coleman, Sonja Dahl, Jovencio de la Paz, Tannaz Farsi, Derek Franklin, Brian Gillis, Eric Ramos Guerrero, Damon Harris, Wendy Heldmann, Heidi Howes, Maia Howes, Colin Ives, Steven Joshlin, Ron Jude, Anya Kivarkis, Sylvan Lionni, Charlene Liu, Christopher Michlig, Donald Morgan, John Park, Dan Powell, Jacob Riddle, David Rueter, Jack Ryan, Risa Saavedra, Michael Salter, James Schauer, Jeremy Schropp, Reanna Schultz, Stacy Jo Scott, Rick Silva, Jeremy Smith, Jessica Swanson, Ying Tan, Jessie Rose Vala, Laura Vandenburg, Kate Wagle, Terri Warpinski, Ty Warren, Amanda Wojick

2019-20 Visiting Artist Lecture Series

Julia Haft-Candell, Nicholas Muellner, Danny Orendorff, Hank Willis Thomas, Theo Triantafyllidis, Angela Washko, Julie Rodrigues Widholm, Namita Gupta Wiggers

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Doran Walot: Ron Jude, Chair, Sylvan Lionni, Anya Kivarkis
Junwei Zhang: Colin Ives, Chair, Ying Tan, Jack Ryan

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