98th ANNUAL

GARY BURNLEY
RANRAN FAN
NATALIA MEJÍA
MURILLO

Solo Exhibitions
98th ANNUAL International
Competition Solo Exhibitions

Gary Burnley
Caste

Ranran Fan
Pressing Matters 按压即可

Natalia Mejía Murillo
Between Emergency and Imminence

January 19 – March 30, 2024
The Print Center, Philadelphia
Gary Burnley: Caste

“The world of most Western museums was created for and is meant to be consumed by white audiences. The history of art has largely reduced ‘Others’ to an uncomplicated characterization of a stranger in the world of the white man’s imagination, a shadowy figure without a gaze, a presence or a voice. Whiteness is, and has been, the exemplar of beauty, curated, maintained and preserved in museums, excluding non-whites except in reference to a vanishing past or less than desirable future.

I think of being an artist as a way of trespassing where historically ‘Others’ have not been welcomed nor seen as belonging. If one of the primary functions of any image is to validate and give permanence to the world it describes and to the persons that inhabit that world, the physicality of collage allows me to, materially and psychologically, construct a world of my specification. A world of previously uninhabited territory

98th ANNUAL Solo Exhibitions

The Print Center is pleased to present three new solo exhibitions of recent work by Gary Burnley, Ranran Fan and Natalia Mejía Murillo. The artists were awarded these exhibitions from the nearly 500 applicants to the 98th ANNUAL International Competition, juried by Dr. Kimberli Gant and Diana Gaston. The exhibitions were organized by guest curator Liz K. Sheehan.

“I am so pleased to have been invited to organize the ANNUAL solo exhibitions for a second year. Chosen from the ten Finalists, these three artists present works created using a wide range of techniques, from relief printing with eggshells, to furniture as printing press, to collage. Although visually quite different, the works of Gary Burnley, Ranran Fan and Natalia Mejía Murillo comprise personal quests for meaning within media, history and family, while leveraging the potential of print to reference communication across space and time.”

– Liz K. Sheehan, Guest Curator

Gary Burnley, Watson and the Shark, 2020, collage, 23” x 20”
mimicking the way the human eye processes information. Burnley's stereoscopes feature a pair of images so dissonant as to defy blending by the eyes, pointing to the ways in which the two figures could never occupy the same space, whether social or temporal. The artist has noted that the effect of his devices is largely individualized, because the two images unify only in the mind in ways that speak to our own assumptions and perspectives.

As an outgrowth of these optical experiments, Burnley began making collages to build stronger visual connections in what he calls "forced marriages." His primary source materials are images that have a history, a language and a purpose, that "have influenced our reading, understanding and expectations of each other as humans: reproductions of 18th and 19th century paintings – most often portraits, but also classical landscapes – and black and white vernacular photographs from his youth. His selection process

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2 Email exchange with author, November 28, 2023.
is organic and instinctual: flipping through art books and family archives, he selects paintings and photographs that speak to one another through a glance, a shared pose, and occasionally, common stories. Many of the reproductions Burnley chooses will be familiar to students of art history, but their identification is not central to the work’s meaning; the conversations and relationships generated through the collages are what interest him. His pairings prompt us to question our assumptions about what we see: “How someone is pictured, where they are placed, who is represented and who is not, the materials used and many other pictorial choices, have over time imparted social and cultural messages, signals and signs.”

The simpler the composition, the more focused the viewer’s attention is on the information coded in the portraits. Queens of Yesteryear #1, 2016, is comprised of the top half of a yearbook picture of a young Black girl with a crown of curls held by a tiny barrette, overlaid by the bottom half of a 19th century preparatory drawing of a young French woman, seen from the bridge of her nose to her neckline.

Both sitters face the viewer directly, and their profiles have been scaled to an exact match. The cut edge of the top layer acts as both a metaphorical and physical divide. The eyes meet the viewer directly but give little else away, while the dainty nose and mouth, ringlet curls and the suggestion of a frilly dress in the drawing, point to an upper-class existence, already established by the fact that only the wealthy could afford to have their likeness preserved by such a practiced hand. Far from a simple visual swap, Burnley creates a deceptively complex conversation about history, beauty and privilege, while prompting us to question our how our perspectives as viewers are shaped by both experience and bias.

Burnley describes his process in terms of coverage, building, exposure and fragmentation, emphasized by the deliberately raw edges of the cut material. Many collages feature circular cutouts or “peepholes” that reveal various layers, a device that both suggests a temporal window and, as Burnley notes, “places the viewer outside, into a world I have created.” Twilight #2, 2022, features

3 Ibid.

a black and white studio portrait of a young Black man in military dress, superimposed over *Twilight in the Wilderness*, a landscape by Frederic Church from 1860 that depicts a distant view of Mount Katahdin below an expansive sunset. Painted at the cusp of the Civil War, this landscape is widely considered one of Church’s masterpieces of the sublime and symbolizes the national storm threatening the union. Here, Burnley has enlarged the photographic portrait so that the figure of the soldier is nearly the same height as Church’s composition, which gives the landscape the appearance and scale of a studio backdrop. A pattern of cutouts focuses our attention on the centered torso of the soldier and emphasizes a series of bold diagonal rays that extend out from behind the man’s body, shifting from black and white to the pale pinks and oranges of Church’s palette. This design element – part of the photo studio’s actual backdrop – adds a feeling of celebration that amplifies the expression of pride on the young man’s upturned face. Burnley’s choice of Church’s landscape can be read as a commentary on the ways in which Black men historically would have been excluded from the idealized wilderness Church recorded, yet conscripted into the forces to defend it.

Portrait paintings are carefully constructed performances in which the sitter typically communicated to the artist those traits and features they wanted highlighted in order to showcase wealth, beauty and social stature. The “value” of the sitter was reflected not just in their dress and affects, but in the size of the portrait itself and in the circumstances of its making. Where would the portrait be hung? Who would see it? What was its effect on the home’s occupants, visitors and servants? Burnley’s work prompts us to consider how the original physical context of both the portraits and the photographs adds another layer of meaning to their reception. The original conditions and impact of the display of these portraits is underscored by the choice of wall color on which the works are displayed: Benjamin Moore Williamsburg Wythe Blue, part of that company’s collection of historic colors inspired by the grand homes of the colonial American South. Images of African American subjects would likely not have been at home on those walls. Despite the many differences in the media Burnley employs, he sees similar aspirations in how their subjects endeavor to present the best version of themselves. His “forced marriages” advocate for employing an equal standard of beauty and humanity that lies beyond and beneath the visual.

About the Artist

Gary Burnley (born St. Louis, MO; lives Ridgefield, CT) received a BFA from Washington University, St. Louis and an MFA from Yale University, New Haven, CT. Selected solo and group exhibitions include Amarillo Art Museum, TX; Museum of Fine Arts Houston, TX; Ogden Museum, New Orleans, LA; Aperture Gallery, Artists Space, Leo Castelli Gallery, Elizabeth Houston Gallery and Holly Solomon Gallery, all New York, NY; Blue Sky Gallery, Portland, OR; Queens Museum, NY Candela Gallery, Richmond, VA; Alice Austen House Museum, Staten Island, NY; Hansen-Fuller Gallery, San Francisco, CA; and Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY; as well as SALON, Florence, Italy; and Tbilisi University, Georgia. Burnley received a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in 2022 and his work is included in collections such as: Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA; Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Charlotte; Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, TN; Museum of Fine Arts Houston; Candela and Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, both Richmond; and Light Work, Syracuse, NY.
in case the need to leave the country quickly arises, including fabric sleeves that roll up and tie for easy portability.

Many of Fan’s devices are designed to self-soothe. In this vein, they intend the gallery to feel like a comfortable living space that puts visitors at ease, populated with objects that appear domestic: a chair; a fabric wall piece that could be a decorative textile, blanket or carpet; and a workstation. In the center of the space hangs their most recent work, *FontMaker*, 2023, a 3D-printed device that Fan activates in performance to stamp an inked message on their hand in English and in Chinese, which reads “I stand by my response.” They then shake hands with audience members to share the inked message, which smears on contact. Although interrupted, the connection is made. “In many situations,” the artist has said, “communicating without verbal language can be effective as a way of taking a stand.”

The duality in this statement runs through this exhibition, as they move between intimacy and politics, confidence and uncertainty, humor and sadness.

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Win?, 2023, is a computer game that Fan made as a platform for communicating with their father, who could not understand their interest in making art instead of “having a regular life.” The game explains: “As linguistic language fails, one party tries to talk using another party’s preferred channels.” Modeled after a game they played when Fan was a child, Win? has two roles with different rules based on their individual perspectives and personalities. Player Me, the artist’s side, is designed to be easier to win – yet if Fan is successful, Player Dad replies “Are you sure you win? It is full of randomness.” If Player Dad wins, Player Me replies “I cannot believe you actually win.” While the game is an attempt to connect, Fan also acknowledges that we may never fully understand another person.

Walking on Transience 往无咎, 2022, is a large, multi-media piece that represents perseverance in the face of challenge and uncertainty. The Chinese characters of the title read: “going forward with simple, humble steps, there will be no error,” a phrase from the I Ching that has become a mantra for Fan in dealing with “years of struggling on finding and walking the path as a free individual under an oppressive political and patriarchal environment,” and has provided “the strength to fight against racial discrimination and deal with personal traumas.” Comprised of fabric tiles on which small cyanotypes in the form of Chinese characters are sewn, like much of Fan’s work, the piece contains personal, inspirational messages. As the accompanying video shows, this work was originally made of tracing paper and was placed on the floor. In performance, Fan walks across the piece to activate several silent communications: LED bulbs light up; English phrases underneath the paper come into clearer view; and small stamps print inked characters.

The third element of Walking on Transience is an artist book made in collaboration with interdisciplinary artist Su Yu that is read back-to-front or top-to-bottom, depending on the language. The English text is addressed to several individuals, including a friend and Fan’s grandfather, and reveals their difficulty in speaking and being understood. It also uses the distinctive font Fan designed that repeats throughout the exhibition, and which serves as a multi-layered metaphor for the body of work. Called “Wrong R” or 口 in Chinese, the character is “a shape of mouth, outlet, entry…it is pixel…it emphasizes the gap instead of connection.”

About the Artist

Ranran Fan (born China; lives Denton, TX) works across print, new media, installation and performance. They earned a BS in biology in Hong Kong, a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; and an MFA in Studio Art from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. Their work has been exhibited at Tamarind Institute, Albuquerque; Academy Art Museum, Easton, MD; Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Salem, OR; Santa Fe Art Institute and SITE Santa Fe, both NM; as well as OCT Contemporary Art Terminal, China; and Incheon Marine Asia Photography and Video Festival, South Korea. Fan is an Assistant Professor of New Media Art, University of North Texas, Denton.
from Colombia to the United States. These circumstances led Mejía to realize that scientific systems are invented to establish control and order and are therefore – like Pluto’s status – arbitrary, temporary and inherently unstable. She represents this state in her work by using aged or fragile materials, like eggshell and glass, which she often transforms or alters by applying pressure from other materials. For the series of “Pillars,” 2022, blown glass orbs were pressed between segments of table legs when hot, and they conformed to the shape of the wooden posts as they cooled. Etched on the glass are lines from Borges’ poem, *The Moon*, in which he recounts the struggle to describe its beauty: “I see it indecipherable and daily/And out of reach of my literature.” Like artifacts of an abandoned library, the use of rolled-up woodcuts and sagging stacks of paper reinforce the theme of searching for knowledge just out of reach.

Much of Mejía’s recent work was inspired by the 2017 exhibition *Cartographies of the Unknown* at the National Library of Spain, Madrid, which presented an expansive range of maps from real to imagined. A silk “escape and evasion” map, developed as part of an emergency kit for WWII bomber pilots, inspired Mejía’s work *White Lies*, 2021. Fascinated by the idea of having an entire territory in one’s pocket, she sketched a handkerchief hanging in her studio while considering how to collapse the distance between a map’s terrain and its aerial viewpoint.

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**Natalia Mejía Murillo:**

**Between Emergency and Imminence**

Natalia Mejía Murillo (she/her) imagines her practice as a cartographic exercise, combining printed maps with glass, branches and other fragile organic materials in installations that both symbolize and perpetuate the ancient human drive to chart the unknown. Poetry and materiality hold equal importance for Mejía. Trained as a printmaker and influenced by the work of Jorge Luis Borges as well as Italo Calvino’s musings on language and the universe, she investigates “the essential act of touch, the trace that a body leaves on another body,” endemic to both print and sculpture. In her hands, systems of measurement and navigation, from the earliest human tools to the most sophisticated digital processes, become metaphors that can transport us to imagined realities.

Two experiences shaped Mejía’s interest in maps and measurement: the 2006 demotion of Pluto from planet to dwarf, and her difficulty in shifting from the metric system to the imperial when she moved

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Over a series of etchings, Mejía added details from a street map of her native Bogotá and a constellation chart to connect the city and the sky in one image. Each state of the etching contains more information, until the last print is rendered unreadably dense.

Mejía’s practice rests on the freedom offered by the observation that even a practical map is a fiction. The title White Lies comes from Mark Monmonier’s book How to Lie with Maps, 1991, in which he observes: “To avoid hiding critical information in a fog of detail, the map must offer a selective, incomplete view of reality. There’s no escape from the cartographic paradox: to present a useful and truthful picture, an accurate map must tell white lies.” Monmonier’s work is in turn rooted in the famed short story “On Exactitude in Science” by Borges, in which the poet points out the absurdity of the perfect map: one so precise in its detail that it becomes the exact same physical size as its territorial subject. Like antique maps that depict the foreboding promise of terra incognita, Mejía restores the sense of wonder and beauty to the object of the map itself.

A small paper globe from the collection of the Naval Museum in Madrid led Mejía to use eggshell powder as a print medium, after she discovered an eggshell of similar size as the globe on the pavement outside her studio. The spherical map presented a contradiction – a diminutive, handheld object that contained the world – and led her to contemplate the symmetry between the globe and the egg. “The eggshell is an essential space for genesis and transformation, the primary space of life contained and shaped in an ovoid sphere, a mother that shelters. A small planet and a powerful container that is portable, disposable and breakable. So everyday and essential that it goes unnoticed.” To incorporate this material into her work, Mejía added ground eggshell to a binding medium and used this mixture in place of traditional ink to pull prints from laser-etched woodblocks, resulting in a three-dimensional image. Between Emergency and Imminence, 2023, features a series made with this technique of “redundant and ambiguous images about the moon” that create a pictorial dialogue between data, information and poetry. Inspired by another Borges work that challenges the human capability to comprehend the universe, these relief prints rest on a wall built from rough timber that suggests an architectural fragment. In Mejía’s work, the sense of age and ruin implies an in-between state, inherent in the work’s title, that offers opportunities for new discoveries.

About the Artist

Natalia Mejía Murillo (born Colombia; lives Doha, Qatar) has a BFA and an MA in the History and Theory of Art from the National University of Colombia, Bogotá; and an MFA in painting and printmaking from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond. She has had artist-residencies including: Hello New York! through the Curatorial Program for Research, New York; MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA; Tajo Taller and Saenger Galería, Mexico City; Ellis-Beauregard Foundation, ME; and Fundación Miró Mallorca and Casa de Velázquez, Spain. Mejía has received awards from the Kunstmuseum Reutlingen, Germany and the Ministry of Culture of Colombia – México (FONCA), among others. She has been on the faculty of the National University of Colombia and Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, both Bogotá, and is an Assistant Professor at VCUArts, Qatar.

13 Faltriquera Terrestrial Globe, 1791, paper and leather, 7.6 cm diameter. MNM 1712.
15 Ibid., 17.
Photographic and printmaking practices, are encouraged to enter. The ANNUAL’s focus reflects The Print Center’s interest in the use of photography and printmaking in intriguing and expansive ways, both in content and in process. Awards from the ANNUAL include three museum purchase awards: the Art Museum of West Virginia University Purchase Award, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Purchase Award and Stinnett Philadelphia Museum of Art Collection Award as well as numerous additional awards and prizes.

Support for the ANNUAL is offered by the Art Museum of West Virginia University, Awagami Paper, BOMB Magazine, Tom Callan + Martin McNamara, Fireball Printing, Alida Fish, Fitler Club, Hahnemühle, the Olcott Family, Jeannie Pearce, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, The Photo Review, Renaissance Graphic Arts, Society for Photographic Education, the Stinnett Family, Stockbridge Fine Art Print and the Zemel Family.

Programs

**Gallery Talk & Opening Reception**
Thursday, January 18, 2024
5:30pm    Gallery Talk with Liz K. Sheehan and Artists
6 – 7:30pm    Reception

**Artist Talks (all 6pm)**
The artists will discuss the works in the exhibition and their artistic practices.

- **Gary Burnley**
  Wednesday, February 21, in-person and on Zoom

- **Ranran Fan**
  Performance and conversation with the artist
  Thursday, March 14, in-person and on Zoom

- **Natalia Mejia Murillo**
  Thursday, March 21, on Zoom

All of The Print Center’s exhibitions and programs are free and open to the public. To register for a Zoom event or for more information visit printcenter.org.

All images are courtesy of the Artists.

**About the 98th ANNUAL International Competition**
Solo exhibition winners were among the 10 Finalists selected from the 485 international artists who submitted, juried by Dr. Kimberli Gant, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY and Diana Gaston, Director, Tamarind Institute, Albuquerque, NM. Online portfolios of the Finalists’ and Semifinalists’ work will be launched online in February 2024.

The ANNUAL is one of the oldest and most prestigious competitions in the United States, juried each year by distinguished colleagues in the fields of photography, printmaking, book arts and contemporary art. Artists who use printmaking and/or photography as critical components of their work, or whose work pushes the boundaries of traditional

**Finalists**
Ron Abram
Allison Bianco
Agathe Bouton
Bill Brody
Gary Burnley
Stella Ebner
Ranran Fan
Emily Gui
Natalia Mejia Murillo
Vanessa Nieto

**Semifinalists**
Mark Armbruster
Lorenzo Baker
Vic Barquin
Shir Bassa
Ava Blitz
Erika Blumenfeld
Katharina Bossmann
Samantha Buchanan
Justin Carney
Patty Carroll
Julia Curran
Olivia Fredricks
Michelle Kuen Suet Fung
Lea Genis
Jon Greene
Annamarie Knox & Erin Miller
Drew Leventhal
Genevieve L'Heureux
Emmitt Merrill
Christine Osinski
Anna Rotty
Zorawar Sidhu & Rob Swainston
Yan Wang
Terri Warpinski
Peggy Washburn
About The Print Center

Mission
For more than a century, The Print Center has encouraged the growth and understanding of photography and printmaking as vital contemporary arts through exhibitions, publications and educational programs. The Print Center has an international voice and a strong sense of local purpose. Free and open to the public, it presents changing exhibitions, which highlight established and emerging, local, national and international contemporary artists. It mounts one of the oldest annual art competitions in the country, now in its 98th year, provides the Artists-in-Schools Program to Philadelphia public high school students and its Gallery Store offers a carefully selected array of contemporary prints and photographs onsite and online.

Funders
Support for The Print Center is offered by: Drexel University Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design; Forman Family Fund; Sheila Fortune Foundation; Fund for Children; FS Investments; Harpo Foundation; Allen Hilles Fund; William King Foundation; Phillip and Edith Leonian Foundation; Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Foundation; Christopher Ludwick Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts; William Penn Foundation; Pennsylvania Council on the Arts; The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage; Philadelphia Cultural Fund; The Philadelphia Foundation; Rosenlund Family Foundation; University of the Arts; Henrietta Tower Wurts Memorial; and our Board of Governors, Luminaries, members and friends.
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