

Art by Shachi Kale



A Guide for Understanding the Exhibition

Tempe Center for the Arts | 700 W. Rio Salado Parkway, Tempe, AZ 85281 | 480.350.2867

TCA
GALLERY

DEGREES
of Being

tempecenterforthearts.com/Gallery

DEGREES OF BEING

Jan 21 – May 1, 2022

Degrees of Being celebrates different voices, perspectives and life experiences. Whether making art about themselves or others, the featured local artists reveal intimate stories about identity and self-expression, while also bravely diving into personal topics like labor, culture, social justice, immigration, body image and mental health.

Dear New Reader:

We hope this guide will provide you with some easy-to-use tools to enhance your experiences with visual art. Over the years, we've noticed that people can be both attracted to and intimidated by art at the same time. We've found that asking questions that start "informal conversations" is one of the best ways to put people at ease.

Sure, some art is beautiful and easy to approach, while other art can be challenging and not so easy to digest. Just like a book, visual art can be appealing, serious and yes, even ugly. Some art confirms, celebrates and expands how we understand ourselves. Other art opens pathways through which we can explore other viewpoints. You as a viewer (reader) also bring a variety of thoughts and personal preferences into the experience. With practice and some new tools on your belt, you'll find that those seemingly complicated layers of meaning and context can be peeled back and explored. It's just knowing where to look and why.

We also thank the exhibiting artists for the use of their artworks for this guide.

Sincerely,

Mary Erickson, Ph.D. (TCA Docent) & Michelle Nichols Dock (Senior Visual Arts Curator)

Inquiry Strategy with Tactical Questions

The following 4-question strategy is an easy to use tool for investigating the layers of context and meaning in visual art.

What Can I See? Facts about the artwork.

- Subject Matter
- Design Elements & Principles
- Technical Features
- Function
- Reproduction versus Original
- Care/Condition



What Else Can I Learn?

Contextual facts.

- Artists' Lives
- Physical Environments
- Cultural Context
- Artworlds (Art Experience)



What Does It Mean?

Conclusions about meanings.

- Personal & Cultural Viewpoints
- Artists' Intentions
- Art Specialists' Understandings



How Does It Compare?

Conclusions about connections among artworks.

- Style
- Art Influence (From Other Art)
- Themes



Hints for Asking Good Questions

Hints for a well-rounded conversation: You'll often learn more from open-ended questions than close-ended questions.

A **closed-ended question** is answered with a one-word response such as yes or no or another single word. *Example:* Is this an oil or acrylic painting?

Closed-ended questions start with verbs like “Is? Do? and Can?”

An **open-ended question** requires more explanation.

Example: How is painting in oil different from painting with acrylics?

Open-ended questions start with “Why? and How?”

Some words can be used for **both types of questions** such as:

What?

Who?

Where?

When?

Both open and close-ended questions are valuable. The construction and phrasing of a question shapes the kind of information you can expect to receive.

For Practice: Write down 3 open-ended questions. Pretend you are meeting someone for the first time. You need to ask questions to get to know that person better.

a _____

b _____

c _____

What Can I See?

Tips for looking carefully at an Artwork



Subject Matter: Some artworks have subject matter and others do not. Subject matter refers to anything real or imaginary that is shown in an artwork (such as people, places and things).

Elements of Design: Traditional elements in Western art include: (“D” represents “dimensional.”)

2D Elements

line
shape
value (light and dark)
color

3D Elements

form or mass
space
texture

4D Elements/Time

sequence
duration

Design Principles: Ways artists organize elements of design to create interesting and unified compositions. Some Traditional Principles include:

Balance	Variation	Focal Point	Pattern
Harmony	Repetition	Movement	Transition
Emphasis/Focal Point	Rhythm	Direction	Proportion
Contrast			

Technical Features: Careful viewing of an artwork usually reveals evidence of how it was made. (Indicators might include art making tools, materials and processes.)

Function: Artists make artworks that serve a great many functions such as:

Capturing the beauty of nature	Memorializing an important event
Celebrating or criticizing a person, event or group	Exploring visual possibilities
Sharing a vision	Promoting a belief or cause
Celebrating the artist's heritage	Making the ordinary extraordinary
Stimulating action	Many more

What Can I See? continued



Reproduction Vs Original: Some reproductions can look pretty different from the originals. Common differences between originals and reproductions are:

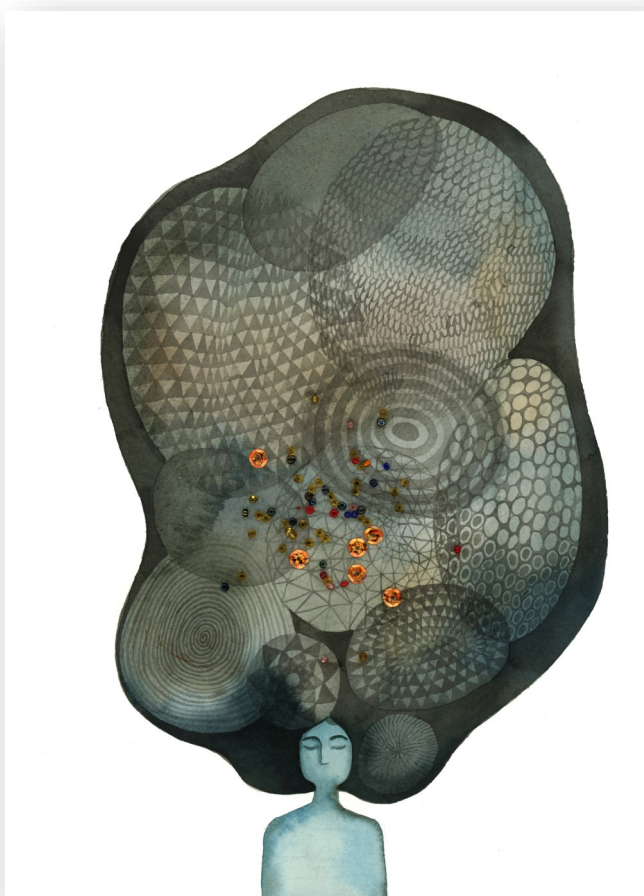
Size	Colors	Surface Texture	Luminosity
Angle of View	Lighting	Other	

Care/Condition: The condition of artworks can deteriorate over time for many reasons, among them:

Perishable or fragile materials	Damage in storage
Matting, mounting, or framing	Temperature and humidity
Accidents	Vandalism

Now, practice looking carefully at an artwork.

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “what you see.”



1. What does this artwork depict? Please describe. [SUBJECT MATTER]

2. Much of this artwork includes muted colors created with watercolor. How is the cluster of tiny, bright colors different from the rest of the artwork? [TECHNIQUE]

3. What different types of shapes and lines did Kale use to fill in the overlapping circular forms in the “hairdo?” [ELEMENTS OF DESIGN]

Shachi Kale, *breaking the pattern*, watercolor and mixed media, 36" x 24"

Now You Try! *What Can I See?*



Shachi Kale, Frozen Tears, watercolor, clay and fiber on paper, 20" x 15"



Shachi Kale, watercolor and fiber on paper, 36" x 24"

Look at these additional artworks by Shachi Kale. List 3 quick descriptions about what you see: (Example: "large sculpture, depicts a woman and is made of bronze.")

a _____

b _____

c _____

Now, based on your observations, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about this artwork.

a _____

b _____

c _____

What Can I Learn?

Tips for investigating an Artist's Background



Artist's Life: The personal lives of artists can affect their work, including such factors as:

Family

Work

Education

Travel

Personal life experiences

Other

Physical Environment: The physical world, both natural and human made) can inspire their work:

Natural environment (plants, animals, climate, landforms, etc.)

Constructed environment (buildings, roads, bridges, vehicles, furniture, consumer goods, etc.)

Culture: Artists can draw ideas for their work from their cultures:

Values and beliefs

Hobbies and entertainment

Politics

Economic situation

Language

Heritage and/or ethnicity

Other

Art Experience (Artworld): Artists get ideas and support from other people involved in art, through:

Art education/Apprenticeships

Insights from specialists in the art form (ceramics , painting, etc.)

Representation by art galleries

Contact with art patrons and collectors

Acknowledgement through art awards, prizes, grants, commissions.

Art included in museum collections

What Can I Learn?

Practice investigating an Artist's Background



Solomon is a Liberian-American artist who lives between two worlds: his adopted home in America and that of his African heritage in Liberia. His mother, while pregnant with him, was forced to leave by foot during the country's first civil war. In 1993, she gave birth to Solomon in Guinea where they stayed for five years until growing political unrest again forced the family to move. They would spend the next 9 years in refugee camps. At 14 years of age, Solomon and his family immigrated to the United States and the Phoenix area.

While growing up in refugee camps, Solomon found art was a way to express himself. As early as five years old, he would scavenge together scraps of paper and used pencils for drawing. After graduating high school in the Valley, he went on to pursue art at Arizona State University. He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and was named Outstanding Undergraduate by the

Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts in 2018.

During his art studies, Solomon noticed that he didn't often see people of color represented in art history books or in the models selected to pose for painting classes. During a studio assignment to "modernize a famous artwork" he responded by adapting a well-known 1433 painting, "Portrait of a Man," by Jan van Eyck. It features a white man (possibly a self-portrait of the artist) dressed in a red turban. Solomon's version featured himself in a similar pose and dressed in a turban made from an African textile.

Solomon's ongoing series of hyper realistic portraits continues to feature young immigrants like himself who have stories to tell about the contemporary African diaspora. He describes his sitters as "collaborators." Like him, they share common experiences of separation and displacement. By painting their portraits, he is also able to better see and know himself. In a 2020 video interview with Eric Minh Swenson of EMS Art Scene, Solomon said that telling the stories of fellow refugees whom he admires is also to show the "pride and greatness of being African."

Since graduating, his portrait work has been featured in exhibitions locally at the Phoenix Art Museum and Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art and nationally at Steven Zevitas Gallery in Boston. He's also shown internationally at the prestigious National Portrait Gallery in London, home of that same van Eyck painting that started it all.

papaysolomon.com #papaysolomon

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about "what I can learn."

1. As a child, Solomon lived in West Africa refugee camps and later resettled in Phoenix. How might his experiences influence how he sees and paints people who are immigrants? [ARTIST LIFE]
2. Consider how the crowded living conditions of a temporary refugee camp in West Africa might contrast with life and the environment in a U.S. metropolitan city like Phoenix. How might such a contrast have impacted Solomon when he was a young teenager moving to Arizona? [PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT]
3. How is the "modernizing a famous artwork" assignment in school continuing to influence Solomon's paintings? Can you see evidence of it in the artwork above? [ART EXPERIENCE]

Now You Try! **What Else I Can Learn?**



Brainstorm and list 5 interesting facts about Papay Solomon’s background.

You may want to consult pg. 9 and/or a media article and/or Internet references about the artist.

- a _____
- b _____
- c _____
- d _____
- e _____

Now, based on your research, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about these artworks/artist.

- a _____
- b _____
- c _____

What Does It Mean?

Tips for interpreting an Artwork



Artist's Intention: Artists decide how they want their artworks to look. Their intentions may be:

Personal or private	Traditional	Practical	Boundary breaking
Unconventional	Evolving	Emotional	Spontaneous
Experimental	Deliberate		
Focused on collector, patron, funder or other viewer			Other

Art Specialists' Understandings: The considered opinions of art specialists (experts) direct viewers' attention to aspects of artworks that they judge to be worthy of that attention. Art specialists may include:

Artists	Art Teachers	Museum Curators	Art Critics
Art Historians	Master Craftspeople	Ceremonial Leaders	Guild Members
Tribal elders	Others		

Cultural Understandings: A viewer's cultural understanding draws upon a set of ideas, beliefs and standards shared broadly within a culture. These are learned, not by special effort and instruction, but simply through growing up as a member of a culture. Unexamined expectations might include:

High price	Obvious meaning	Difficult to make	Easily recognizable
Familiar	Other		

Your Own Viewpoint: Your responses to artworks are affected by:

conscious thoughts	unconscious reactions	personal preferences
careful viewing	thoughtful reflection	relevant information
free association	previous art experience	and more

What Does It Mean?

Practice interpreting an Artwork



Megan Koth, *Molt*, oil on canvas, 80" x 80"

Koth grew up in Cave Creek, Arizona. She attended Arizona State University where she graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 2014. She later moved to California to pursue a Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She completed her Master's in June of 2020, in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic. Koth's work resides in private collections throughout the United States and has appeared in publications like *Voyage-Phoenix*, *LA Weekly*, *Hyperallergic* and *Phoenix New Times*.

Koth says, "My pieces in 'Degrees of Being' are all self-portraits exploring the nuances surrounding beauty and grooming rituals. I personally resent the notion that such topics are vapid and not worthy of exploration. Quite the contrary, I believe that engaging in beauty and grooming rituals affords us a daily confrontation with our own bodies that can be (and often is) entangled with social pressures, insecurities, wellness, concepts surrounding gender and self-presentation, and even bodily discomfort and horror. As a woman, I am also sympathetic to the way that dominant beauty standards often encourage us to see our bodies, especially our faces, as sites that must always be maintained and 'under construction' in many ways. As human beings, though, we are always changing. Every time we look in the mirror, we are confronted with a face and a version of ourselves that, however small, is a little different than before."

More about this artwork from Koth: "Through self-portraiture, I document the active ritual of peeling off a skincare mask. The ritual is both uncomfortable and satisfying, absurd and sometimes grotesque, but also seductive. A ritual of self-care can look and sometimes feel violent and the entanglement of concepts of wellness, beauty standards and pressures can create even make us question our own choices: such as 'am I freely engaging in this ritual out of genuine desire to do so, or am I simply succumbing to social pressures?' Specifically, in 'Molt,' the ambiguity of a 3rd hand in the composition suggests this internal struggle."

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about "what it means."

1. Koth says her work is "entangled with social pressures, insecurities, wellness, concepts surrounding gender and self-presentation." What can you see in this painting that supports these ideas? [ARTIST'S INTENTION]

2. What feelings or ideas does the artwork, *Molt*, stimulate for you? [PERSONAL VIEWPOINT]

3. How do you think someone immersed in the fashion world or movie industry might respond to Koth's work? [CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING]

megankoth.com

#megakoth

Now You Try! What Does It Mean?



Megan Koth
Ablution
oil on canvas
80" x 60"

Look at this work by Megan Koth Brainstorm and list 5 ideas about what the artwork is about. *You may want to consult pg. 12 and/or a media article and/or Internet references about the artist & themes.)

- a _____
- b _____
- c _____
- d _____
- e _____

Now, based on your interpretation, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about this artwork.

a _____

b _____

c _____



How Do They Compare?

Tips for gathering insights by comparing Artworks



Style: Style is a set of distinctive qualities ("family resemblance") that are shared by more than one artwork. Artists develop their own style and incorporate aspects of the styles of artists from their own or other times and cultures.

Artist's style

Style of art movement or period

Cultural style

Art Influence: Most artists are influenced by artists who worked before them, though some self-taught artists, called "outsider artists," work in isolation, largely unaware of the work of other artists. Art influences can include:

Technical and aesthetic achievements by other artists

Other artists' ideas, innovations, commitments

Traditional or historical art ideas to follow, extend or break away from

Theme: Some broad, cross-cultural themes have been the focus of many artists throughout history and across the globe:

People and nature

Cultural pride

Conquest

Overcoming obstacles

Strength of family

Love

Fantasy

Social order

Harmony

Chaos

Revisiting history

Heroic adventure

Religious devotion

Status

Many more

How Do They Compare?

Practice gathering insights by comparing portrait works of
Cydnei Mallory and Rachel Bess



Cydnei Mallory, *i woke up*, detail from photograph installation

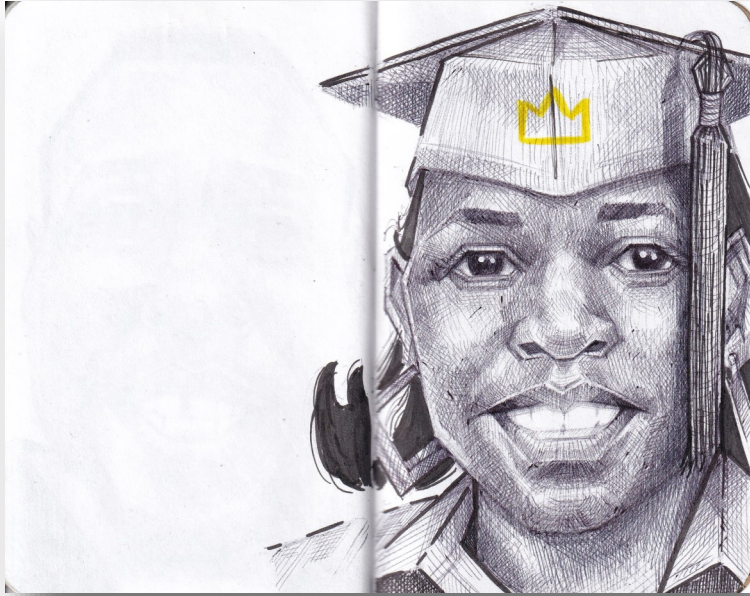


Rachel Bess, *Right Path*, oil on dibond, 40" x 20.5"

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “how they compare.”

1. Both of these artworks were created by women and depict women. Each work was created by different art making processes (media). One is a series of photographs and one is an oil painting. Besides media, how are these works different in appearance? [STYLE]
2. Both of these artists attended art school at Arizona State University. Based on the artwork examples above, what areas of arts study do you think they each focused on? Which one do you think studied more traditional and historical techniques for making art? Explain why. [ART INFLUENCE]
3. Both of these artists’ works explore ideas about gender and sexuality. What other themes might these works have in common? [THEME]

Now You Try! How Do They Compare?



Jerome Fleming
Portrait of Tanisha Anderson (1977-2014)
from the #saytheirnames series
Sketchbook page and ball point pen, 5.5" x 3.5"



Janet Diaz
Maria, from the series *Sangre Sudor y Amor: Hunger for the American Dream*
digital print, 96" x 48"

1. What similarities can you find between these two artworks?
2. What differences do you see among these two artworks?

Now, based on your comparisons, write three questions you could ask a friend about these artworks.

a _____

b _____

c _____

Token Response 2.0 | SEEKING the Artist's Voice

with Degrees of Being exhibiting artist, Saskia Jorda



Questions can help you figure out how an artist thinks and works.

Choose three tokens to guide your inquiry about this artist. If you are able to talk to the artist, what would you most like to know? Circle your chosen tokens.

Hint: Knowing something about the artist and their work can help you ask better questions, for example, an artist's statement, key life experiences of the artist, and quotes about specific works.

Saskia Jorda, Raíces
felt, thread, cotton yarn,
plaster feet and wooden
spools, 78" x 64" x 16"



Token Response 2.0 | SEEKING the Artist's Voice

with *Degrees of Being* exhibiting artist, Edgar 8ahau Fernandez



Edgar 8ahua Fernandez
Be Authentic
 mixed media
 24" x 24"



Questions can help you figure out how an artist thinks and works.

Choose three tokens to guide your inquiry about this artist. If you are able to talk to the artist, what would you most like to know? Circle your chosen tokens.

Hint: Knowing something about the artist and their work can help you ask better questions, for example, an artist's statement, key life experiences of the artist, and quotes about specific works.



FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY: THE PATTERNS OF MY LIFE

- 1) Students will be able to use pattern to organize elements in their artworks.
VA.CR.2.7c: Apply visual organizational strategies to design and produce artwork of art, design, or media that clearly communicates information or ideas.
- 2) Students will be able to write short artist statements about their artworks.
VA.CR.3.7: Reflect on and explain important information about personal artwork in an artist statement or another format.
- 3) Students will be able to make art inspired by art made by local artists.
VA.CN.10.7: Make art inspired by community art and/or by art made by local artists

INTRODUCTION

Your life is full of patterns. Some regular patterns might include getting up and getting dressed, brushing your teeth eating breakfast, going to school, etc. Your life also has less predictable patterns, like visiting cousins, going to the movies, going to the dentist or ordering pizza. What patterns in your life have been disturbed or broken by the pandemic? What new patterns have you learned?

Many of the artists in *Degrees of Being* exhibition use patterns in their art to share their experience and their identities. Look through the artworks in this guide. Which artworks have some regular, predictable patterns of shapes or lines, like petals on a daisy or squares on a checkerboard? Which artworks have irregular, unpredictable patterns, like leaves scattered by the wind or a broken dish smashed on the floor?

ASSIGNMENT

Use available materials (such as markers, construction paper, colored pencils, etc.) to make various types of shapes and lines. Make a list of patterns of your life before and during the pandemic. What remains regular and what has changed? Sketch ideas for how you can share the patterns in your life visually. You may want to show recognizable subject matter or just use shapes or lines. When your work is finished write a short statement about it.



Feathers in the Wind, mixed media: Each set of words placed on the feathers represent thoughts and feeling during the pandemic shut-downs.



Disturbing the Peace, mixed media: Inspired by the word art by Shachi Kale... the orange zig zag lines represent the pandemic creeping into one's life.

Artist Text Panels



Loren Aragon of ACONAV, Phoenix

Aragon is a Native American fashion designer and multimedia artist from the Acoma Pueblo of New Mexico. He lived the first 18 years of his life on the reservation where he was surrounded by family art traditions like pottery made by his grandmothers, garment work by his aunt and jewelry making by his uncle. His mother, also a seamstress, was especially influential on his early creative journey. As an adult, Aragon didn't initially start out in the arts. He studied mechanical engineering and

earned a Bachelor's degree from Arizona State University in 2004. While working as an engineer in Phoenix, he observed an increasing necessity to preserve his Acoma culture and tradition. In 2008 he began to re-explore his artistic roots and created the ACONAV brand with co-founder Valentina Aragon who is Navajo. Over the years, Aragon and the brand evolved and explored areas of artistic expression including illustration, sculpture, jewelry and eventually - fashion design. His experiences and skills as a mechanical engineer also had a positive influence on his current endeavors which also require discipline and the use of new technologies. Today, ACONAV fashion collections are culturally fueled by the traditional pottery art and sharable beliefs of the Acoma Pueblo culture.

Aragon says, "I am motivated by the art, stories and life lessons of my culture. My response has become an exploration of ancient ideas applied to modern fashion styles. I love my freedom in fashion. I am able to collect my ideas, then orchestrate and visually vocalize them on a canvas of my choosing."

"It may seem that my work is severed from the conventional practices of my Acoma people. Truthfully, I value and sincerely appreciate the ancestral arts of my people. However, I feel it necessary to demonstrate an investigation into other art forms, in parallel with observing historic and cultural preservation. I challenge myself to find new and undiscovered ways to represent Indigenous art with the hopes of igniting the interests of future generations."

"My inclusion into the exhibition allows me to tell my story while continuing to create an awareness to my identity as a thriving Native American fashion designer.... My hope is that anyone wearing my designs will embrace their strengths, discover self-evolution and evoke empowerment."

aconav.com

#aconav



About ACONAV

The name ACONAV represents the cohesion of cultures between its founders Loren (Acoma Pueblo) and Valentina (Navajo) Aragon. ACONAV is a couture fashion brand that celebrates the strength and empowerment of women worldwide. The brand strives to evoke the empowerment of women with positive ideas that are embodied in designs that tie culture to modern style. ACONAV is a respectful representation of the Acoma Pueblo whose traditions and world renown pottery art culture are reflected in unique luxury designs. The brand seeks to identify the distinct culture of the Acoma Pueblo through designs that resonate the beliefs and artistry of the Acoma people. The purpose of the brand is to share, educate, and connect its audience to the artistry and the Acoma ways of life.

Loren Aragon says, "There are strengths we may not yet realize... they compel us to rise. ACONAV is a story of self-discovery and evolution. It is a brand that is about positive change and breaking beyond self-imposed limitations. ACONAV is a part of an enduring story, a people, and its culture. It is a journey told through fashion and is meant to inspire those to wish to create their own story."

aconav.com



Christopher Jagmin, Phoenix

Jagmin is a graduate of the School of Fine Arts at Indiana University at Bloomington with a Bachelor of Arts degree in printmaking and graphic design. Over the years, his fine art practice has included a variety of media including encaustics, painting, installations, sculptures, public art and limited-edition tableware. Jagmin's current body of work is a cohesion of visual art, spoken word, poetry and train of thought conversations with himself and others. Even before his work started delving into the traditions of word-based

art, he considered himself a "documentarian."

Jagmin is an active participant of and advocate for the local art scene. He has shown his work at Phoenix locations such as Lisa Sette Gallery, Practical Art Gallery and Phoenix Art Museum. During the pandemic shutdowns of 2020 he helped lead community projects as an ArtFarm curator of Roadside Attractions. The project featured drive-by art displays in artists' yards and outdoor spaces around the Valley. Jagmin is the recipient of public art projects from Tempe, Chandler and Scottsdale; artist grants from the Arizona Commission on the Arts and Contemporary Forum at Phoenix Art Museum and artist residencies at Chautauqua School of Art, NY and the Studios at MASS MOCA, MA. He was also recently named a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant recipient.

Jagmin says, "My life is not extraordinary. I am a white man, and a man of a certain age. My voice and perspective have been heard way too many times. It's not all about me."

"Plenty of mistakes have been made, and there's a need to make amends. I want to apologize to you."

"I tell stories of fear, complicity, childhood memories, anxiety, vulnerabilities, marginalization, sexuality, religion, love, humor and hopeful expressions of humanity. Words matter, and I hope to make some changes."

Image Credit: Java Magazine and Susan Allred Prosser.

christopherjagmin.com

#jaggyman

Jagmin's Notes About the Artworks

(Art descriptions from left to right.)

THAT TIME

Micron pen on paper

Jagmin says this work tells overlapping stories of two people in his life. His father, and a love interest that became an obsession. Longing to be loved, he was ultimately disappointed by both. Jagmin goes on to say, *"This piece is a sort of personal internal dialog that I constantly have. Maybe we all consider the same questions. Love haunts and causes me pain. At the same time, patterns are hard to break, and maybe we are all incapable of change."*

i will sleep tonight

label-making tape and push pins

In this work, Jagmin recalls that his beloved grandmother often found comfort in repeating the Rosary Prayer. As an adult he understands better the soothing effects of repeating phrases and ingrained mantras of his religious upbringing. He says, *"The hope is that we find peace and comfort, and the opportunity to feel comfortable in our skin, and in the world we inhabit."*

Awake

Jacquard woven tapestry

Jagmin says he's always been a writer and storyteller, and now he writes poetry. He writes down events in his life in the hope of seeing how he fits in this world. As an insomniac he worries about this world and is on a search to find calm and comfort to get through the night. Written with anxieties and questions that keep him up, he hopes this blanket will now carry the weight of his thinking and offer comfort and peace.

I'm Afraid of You

Micron pen on paper

While in a residency studio several years ago, Jagmin had to step into an awkward position of calming a woman that overreacted and wrongly misinterpreted another person as a gunman. Jagmin says, *"Fear can define us. And this fear brings anxiety and uncertainty to our lives.... In the piece there are questions of what we should fear and what is imagined enhanced by rumor and political propaganda."*

When This is Over

Micron pen on paper

This work reflects on the sentiment "when this is over" as a way to reimagine life after a trauma (like a death in the family or global crisis like the AIDS epidemic). Jagmin wonders aloud about whether we've become numb to such sentiments. "We cycle through these major events so often now, that we promise a change is coming, but nothing really changes in the end."



Cydnei Mallory, Phoenix

Mallory is originally from Pittsburgh and earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Pennsylvania State University. She later moved to the Valley where she received a Master of Fine Arts degree from Arizona State University. Today, Mallory is an interdisciplinary artist and educator whose work deals with issues surrounding stereotypes, gender, sexuality, class and the human body.

Mallory uses a wide variety of ordinary and recognizable materials and processes to create work. Some of that media includes cast metals, rope, fabric and hair to make two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks. She utilizes familiarity as a tool to engage viewers who may enter an unfamiliar setting like a gallery. In a recent exhibition at Scottsdale Museum of Art, Mallory constructed a large sculpture with recycled wood blanks and rope made from t-shirts.

For this exhibition, Mallory transformed a compilation of selfies she took and posted daily on Instagram between March 16, 2020 to June 22, 2021 into a photographic installation called *"I woke up."* She says, *"I used the act of taking a photo daily as a daily promise to myself, something to look forward to everyday. March 16, 2020 was the start of a time of uncertainty, the beginning of quarantine for the Coronavirus, also known as the Covid-19, pandemic. During this time, I found myself asking a lot of questions and feeling a lot of new emotions. The seemingly small act of taking and posting a photo became a daily meditative routine which allowed me to be present in that moment. The raw intimate photos acted as a daily checking with friends and family across the world and created a safe space of vulnerability, leading to conversations around race, privilege, fear, intimacy, the unknown."*

cydneimallory.com

[#iwokeuplikethis](https://www.instagram.com/iwokeuplikethis)



Edgar 8ahau Fernandez, Phoenix

Fernandez is originally from Los Angeles but moved to Arizona with his family in 2000. Since relocating to the Valley, he embraced his Xicano/x identity and his passion for creating modern ancestral art. As a young artist, he found collaborations and community projects especially sparked his motivation to become a full-time artist. Fernandez went on to study art at Phoenix College and earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Arizona State University in 2019. He is already making a name for himself through participation in numerous

exhibitions and community mural projects across the Valley. Fernandez continues to explore and embrace his ancestral roots through his own unique style that cross references graffiti graphics, ancient Mayan imagery and western painting traditions.

Fernandez says, "In this life, there is a journey within my art that radiates a universal message. This message embodies my passion of discovering new forms of expression that derive from my heart, mind, and ancestors. My dream is to achieve a legacy as an artist who remained connected to his heart and inspired others to do the same.

"I am currently working on art that comes from a place of authenticity that shines the light of my southwest and ancestral influences. Sharing my story in new works relates to my previous work by continuing the path of a Maíz-based philosophy with the essence of Toltecayotl (The art of Living)."

8ahau.com

#8ahau



Janet Diaz Muro, Vera Cruz, Mexico

Diaz is a first generation Mexican-American Chicana artist. She grew up in Salinas, CA where many of her family members were immigrant farm laborers. These early experiences continue to influence her dedication to issues of migration, immigration, labor rights, identity, social injustice and arts education. While working on her Master of Arts degree in printmaking at Arizona State University Diaz purposely sought to make art that

related to her own life. The series of prints on display were part of her thesis exhibition "Sangre Sudor y Amor: Hunger for the American Dream." Currently, Diaz resides in Veracruz, Mexico and is now the lead master lithographer at La Ceiba Grafica.

Diaz says, "My hometown, Salinas, CA, is considered a 'breadbasket,' as it has a long history of rich agriculture and produce that makes its way to kitchen tables around the world. Along with these goods you have an immigrant workforce that labors in extremely difficult conditions to achieve the 'America Dream.' I have witnessed these struggles firsthand. My parents, family members, and friends, have all [been a part] of this way of life ever since I can remember. Seeing people hunched over in the blistering hot sun with sweaty faces as I walked to school was a normal part of my day to day.

"In hindsight, I now realize that the efforts made by this community came at a cost of sacrificing their former lives, leaving family, friends, and country behind, that in turn has benefited millions here at home and abroad. The journey these people have endured is at its purest form- part of the moral fabric of the United States. Often unnoticed and considered expendable, my work aims to bring light to this community and showcase the important role that they play in our daily lives.

"I felt it was important to show some of these individuals, thus I created large portraits of them hanging high above so that for once they are on top and not down on their knees serving us. Interviews that I conducted both here and in Mexico of agriculture workers help to add context and continue the human connection with the viewer.

"Sangre Sudor y Amor: Hunger for the American Dream, is a tribute to people like my parents who work day-in and day-out in the shadows, not looking for recognition, simply seeking to live a humble and peaceful life."

#janet.diaz.studio

Janet Diaz

Sangre Sudor y Amor: Hunger for the American Dream
digital prints

Isauro, Oaxaca, Mexico

“Nos vamos a ir al norte me decían mis primos. Mencionaban que había mucho dólar para ganar. Yo no sabía que era dólar, siempre eran pesos, y el me pinto una imagen de cómo iba hacer el norte y que había mucho trabajo para ganar mucho dólar.”

“We are going north my cousins would say. They mentioned dollars were to be made. I had never heard of ‘dollars,’ it was always pesos, and well, he painted a pretty picture and said there were so many dollars on the other side to be made.”

6.17.17

David, Zacatecas, Mexico

“La pizca de la fresca es difícil. A veces se tiene uno que hincar de rodillas porque la espalda ya no aguanta el dolor, pero tus manos siguen trabajando. Aquí, tu miras el amanecer y el escurecer.”

“Strawberry picking is exhausting. Sometimes you have to go on your knees because your back can't bare the pain, but your hands keep working. Here, you see the sunrise and you see the sunset.”

8.18.18

Maria, Guanajuato, Mexico

“Sólo caminamos por el cerro en la noche porque en el día corríamos el riesgo de ser capturados por la ‘migra,’ nos podían ver mejor en el día. Todos del grupo me decían que por mi culpa nos iban a encontrar, porque mi hija no dejaba de llorar.”

“We only journeyed through the hills at night because in the daytime we were more visible and ran a higher risk of being caught by the border patrol. Everyone in the group would yell at me saying, ‘if they catch us it's going to be your fault because your daughter will not stop crying.’”

6.10.18

Lupe, Zacatecas, Mexico

“Me da mucha tristeza de pensar en las personas que batallan para llegar a este país y por las que han fallecido al intentar. Nosotros venimos a este país con las ilusión de tener una vida mejor y poder darles a nuestros hijos mejores oportunidades.”

“It makes me really sad to think of all the people who struggle to get to this country and those who have died trying. We come to this country with the illusion of having a better life and being able to give our children better opportunities.”

3.11.17



Jerome Fleming, Phoenix

Fleming grew up in San Francisco. He describes the Bay area as a place rich in history, architecture, sights, sounds and especially people. The geometric-like styles of some of his artworks are influenced by the graffiti he saw growing up, which was considered an “illegal” artform. Fleming’s recent paintings, drawings and digital work largely focus on themes of social justice, black history, popular culture and current events. One of his recent projects includes a collaboration with Chandler Museum on a series of portraits of African American civil rights leaders. Fleming’s work, #SAYTHEIRNAMES, in this exhibition explores current social justice movements surrounding policing and serves as a memorial installation to lives lost.

Fleming says, “Due to the recent events of the past few years, I decided to pick up my favorite tool, the everyday ballpoint pen, and center the majority of my work around portraiture of the BIPOC [Black and Indigenous People of Color] community and activism. Each portrait in this #SAYTHEIRNAMES series depicts a person of color who’s lost their lives to police brutality, violence or unjust system. No preliminary pencil sketch was used, forcing me solely to rely on every stroke of the pen to create the details and narrative for each face you see here. Simply viewed... in Black and White.”

Image credit: VoyagePhoenix.com

#kulorbandit

#SAYTHEIRNAMES



Megan Koth, Ventura, CA

Koth grew up in Cave Creek, Arizona. She attended Arizona State University where she graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 2014. She later moved to California to pursue a Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She completed her Master's in June of 2020, in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Koth's work resides in private collections throughout the United States and has appeared in publications like *Voyage-Phoenix*, *LA Weekly*, *Hyperallergic* and *Phoenix New Times*.

Koth says, "My pieces in Degrees of Being are all self-portraits exploring the nuances surrounding beauty and grooming rituals. I personally resent the notion that such topics are vapid and not worthy of exploration. Quite the contrary, I believe that engaging in beauty and grooming rituals affords us a daily confrontation with our own bodies that can be (and often is) entangled with social pressures, insecurities, wellness, concepts surrounding gender and self-presentation, and even bodily discomfort and horror. As a woman, I am also sympathetic to the way that dominant beauty standards often encourage us to see our bodies, especially our faces, as sites that must always be maintained and 'under construction' in many ways. As human beings, though, we are always changing. Every time we look in the mirror, we are confronted with a face and a version of ourselves that, however small, is a little different than before."

megankoth.com

[#megakoth](https://twitter.com/megakoth)



Papay Solomon, Phoenix

Solomon is a Liberian-American artist who lives between two worlds: his adopted home in America and that of his African heritage in Liberia. His mother, while pregnant with him, was forced to leave by foot during the country's first civil war. In 1993, she gave birth to Solomon in Guinea where they stayed for five years until growing political unrest again forced the family to move. They would spend the next 9 years in refugee camps. At 14 years of age, Solomon and his family immigrated to the United States and the Phoenix area. While growing up in refugee camps, Solomon found art was a way to express himself. As early as five years old, he would scavenge together scraps of paper and used pencils for drawing. After graduating high school in the Valley, he went on to pursue art at Arizona State University. He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and was named Outstanding Undergraduate by the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts in 2018.

During his art studies, Solomon noticed that he didn't often see people of color represented in art history books or in the models selected to pose for painting classes. During a studio assignment to "modernize a famous artwork" he responded by adapting a well-known 1433 painting, "Portrait of a Man," by Jan van Eyck. It features a white man (possibly a self-portrait of the artist) dressed in a red turban. Solomon's version featured himself in a similar pose and dressed in a turban made from an African textile.

Solomon's ongoing series of hyper realistic portraits continues to feature young immigrants like himself who have stories to tell about the contemporary African diaspora. He describes his sitters as "collaborators." Like him, they share common experiences of separation and displacement. By painting their portraits, he is also able to better see and know himself. In a 2020 video interview with Eric Minh Swenson of EMS Art Scene, Solomon said that telling the stories of fellow refugees whom he admires is also to show the *"pride and greatness of being African."*

Since graduating, his portrait work has been featured in exhibitions locally at the Phoenix Art Museum and Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art and nationally at Steven Zevitas Gallery in Boston. He's also shown internationally at the prestigious National Portrait Gallery in London, home of that same van Eyck painting that started it all.

papaysolomon.com

#papaysolomon



Rachel Bess, Phoenix

If not for the contemporary clothing, make-up and hairstyles of the people in these portraits, one might think these paintings by Bess were made in another distant time. She purposely utilizes a combination of historical oil painting techniques, and composition set ups to create hyper-realistic portraits with a twist. Bess combines recognizable classical practices with theatrical lighting, unique props and compelling models with attitudes to reveal glimpses into an alternate reality. Her creative choices are deeply informed by art history, but, her interests in the underground comics scene and punk music also play a key role.

Bess says big questions and human drama are important. *“The starting point for the ideas behind many of my paintings is the turmoil that is so often a part of the mortal experience. Whether this occurs between people, between people and their surroundings, or is strictly internal, the adventure of living is wrought with these conflicting moments of pride, fear, sadness, and hostility.”*

Bess received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Arizona State University. Since graduating she was awarded the Arlene and Morton Scult Contemporary Forum Artist Award and had a solo exhibition at the Phoenix Art Museum. Bess was also the recipient of an Artist Research and Development Grant from the Arizona Commission on the Arts and awards from the Art Renewal Center in Port Reading, NJ and Arcadia Contemporary Gallery in Pasadena, CA. She is represented by Lisa Sette Gallery in Phoenix. In addition to her work in the studio, she owns and operates the Electric Bat Arcade in Tempe and Flagstaff, helped organize the Phoenix branch of Dr. Sketchy's Anti-Art School and writes and illustrates a comic book entitled *Fighting Death Through Reanimation*.

lisasettegallery.com

#rachelbessart



Saskia Jordá, Phoenix

Jordá is an interdisciplinary artist who works in a variety of media including site-specific installations, soft sculptures, performance art and drawing. Her undergraduate studies were at Arizona State University and her graduate studies at the School of Visual Arts in New York City, where she earned a Master of Fine Arts degree. She has received various awards, including a Research and Development Grant from the Arizona

Commission on the Arts and awards from the Arizona Community Foundation and the Arlene and Morton Scult Contemporary Forum Award of the Phoenix Art Museum. In addition to her studio work, she co-founded the Taliesin Artist Residency Program, which she directed from 2005-2017 and teaches drawing and textiles at Phoenix College.

Jordá says of her work, "In a world where a six-hour airplane flight can transplant a person into a completely alien world, cultural identity is retained through rituals surrounding clothing, play, language, and food. Having relocated from my native Venezuela to the United States as a teenager, I became aware of the layers of 'skin' that define and separate cultures - one's own skin, the second skin of clothing, the shell of one's dwelling place - all these protecting the vital space of one's hidden identity."

"[My work] maps the tension between retaining one's identity and assimilating a foreign persona. This immigration and assimilation experience continues to fuel my work as I explore the relationships among body, space, cultural identity, and mapping a sense of place. The works included in this exhibition offer additional layers of meaning such as: intertwined connotations of ancestry, bloodlines and lines that connect and disconnect body, place, and the passage of time in 'Raíces,' and the processing of anxiety, loss, and grief in 'I wish I could give you more.'"

Image Credit: Arizona Commission on the Arts

saskiajorda.com
#saskiajorda



Shachi Kale, Chandler

Kale is a visual storyteller, graphic designer and children's book illustrator. She works with a variety of art media including watercolors, acrylics, embroidery and digital arts. She was born and raised in Mumbai, India. Early in her career she started as a graphic designer in advertising and then ran her own successful design studio. In 2001, she moved with her husband to Arizona where she continued to work as a designer with the Maricopa Community Colleges. Kale is also a passionate children's book illustrator and has illustrated over twenty children's books. In recent years, Kale has also found success in the local art scene and shown her work at places like the Tempe Center for the Arts, Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum and Vision Arts Gallery of Chandler.

Kale looks to folk arts from around the globe and her own Indian heritage as references for the vibrant colors, patterns and perspectives she uses to tell a story. She especially likes the colorful narrative traditions of Indian miniature paintings which date back to at least the 9th Century. Kale sees her work as a reflection of her own journeys through life, including, moving from India to Arizona, marriage and motherhood and the emotions and events that shape her every day. This recent series includes female forms which represent her own feelings about change, loss and regrowth as well as connecting with *“other women who grapple with their place in the world.”*

Kale says, *“my new collection, titled ‘Conversations with Myself II,’ attempts to capture my constant inner monologue. In a year that forced the world to retreat indoors, I retreated even further into my inner world and in this collection, I examine the complex and evanescent thought patterns and emotions that make their way through my subconscious. The inner dialogue moves and shifts as it grapples with anxiety, grief, despair, hope, optimism and healing. To convey the complex and layered nature of these emotions, I employ the tactile dimensionality offered by fiber, fabric, beads, pressed flowers, clay and burnt paper.”*

shachikale.com
#shachidreams