

There's not much for me to explain about anger and quite frankly, I barely understand how knots work — sometimes something fixates on itself and produces incredible strength. What can I say? Certain knowledges are best acquired through somatic experience. There is a dark gulf between what we are and what we don't know. But courageously wading through it are artists who make work about the self.

*Anger Knot* is an exhibition featuring visual artists Takia Michael, Fina Grimes, Laila Islam and Carolina Marin Hernandez, all of whom are navigating what it means to produce art about self-identity. These artists do not make work as a plea for understanding, nor do they themselves have all of the answers. At the time of this exhibition, all four creators are current students at Moore College of Art & Design.

Institutional critique is built into the work, along with questions about the various socio-political contexts that contributed to the painful confusion of not-knowing oneself.

Carolina Marin Hernandez, who goes by Carolina Marin, challenges the sweeping identity of Latinidad, which has been used to broadly represent hundreds of cultures, ethnicities, and histories. As a Paez-Colombian who moved to the United States at the age of five, Marin was taught to assimilate both as an American and as a Latina. For her sculptures, Marin uses earthly materials, such as corn, coffee, clay and natural dyes, replicating domestic traditions found in Colombian and indigenous culture. Additionally, Marin creates performances around the production and use of her objects,

accentuating her intentionality within the context of craft and tradition.

Marin's piece, "no quiero que me salves" consists of a series of vessels constructed from hand-dyed corn husks and a video in which Marin is seen weaving the vessels, while an autobiographical voiceover plays in Spanish. There is a direct English translation of the narration available and it notably features a few moments of grammatical and conceptual confusion. This is due to both the impossibility for one language to exactly be translated into another, and Marin's waning fluency in Spanish; a disappointment that is mentioned in her narration.

The major topic discussed in "no quiero que me slaves" is Marin's tumultuous relationship with her mother, who Marin identifies as the one who perpetuated the

generational erasure of indigenous culture within her family. In the video, the screen is split into four quadrants and each shows the various steps of weaving a round mat composed of yellow, purple, and orange corn husks and hemp string. The benign aggression of domestic creation is present here; there is twisting, poking, pulling, biting, tearing and squeezing. Through a gentle show of force, Marin insists on embodying her heritage.

This embodiment is shown more literally in “abrazame soledad.” This work consists of three humanoid, raw clay sculptures and a video in which Marin consumes one. Placed into a pour over filter, the small clay piece is dissolved into a cup of freshly made coffee. Only one sculpture is shown dissolving into the drink but there is photo documentation of all three sculptures in

various stages of erosion. As for the performance, Marin stares determinedly into the camera as she gulps down the concoction. Whatever unease the viewer may feel in watching this consumption is met with equal conviction from Marin's gaze. All one can do is confront the fact that Marin knows what she's doing.

Painter Takia Michael also utilizes presentness in her self-portraits, all of which feature a stoic Michael who gazes at the viewer. In "Me and my studio," Michael's full form is portrayed starkly against a hot pink background. Her hands rest casually in her pockets. Michael's kicks edge the bottom of the picture plane, ready to step out. Behind the figure, Michael uses loose black strokes and white highlights to sketch out a desk, chair, and studio wall. Michael paints herself in full detail and color, though

she limits her palette to browns, blues, and blacks.

“Me and my studio” is the first painting in a trio of works that also feature Michael’s figure situated over a high chroma background and brief outlines of furniture. The other two, “Me and my studio pt2” and “Me and my dorm” feature yellow and blue backgrounds respectively. In both, Michael’s form dissolves back into the skeletal environment. Her head however, always remains. This series explores the discordant relationship Michael has with institutions, a dynamic that is familiar to many Black students in particular. By merging her form with the desks and tabletops, Michael considers her own assimilation and success at college; are belonging and being inherently incongruent within institutional contexts?

This investigation is carried through in Michael's most recent work in *Anger Knot*, "Navigation." In this large scale triptych, floating faces appear amongst abstracted architectural structures and washes of color. The painting has the same multi-spatiality that can be found in a mural, where multiple narratives can occur in flattened time. Unlike public art, Michael's painting is not didactic; street lights, eyeballs, arrows, and streams of red tears appear in surreal succession. Michael instead provides an unsolvable maze of potential meaning.

As a printmaker and photographer, Laila Islam gathers empathy through diaristic expressions. "Desiring Desiree," "Profuse Anger," and "Homecoming" all feature personal text that examines Islam's sense of dignity, attraction, and self-worth. In a

scarlet and yellow woodblock print titled “Profuse Anger” an aghast figure clutches their head. Black text frames the wide-eyed face and reads, “WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU ALLOWED YOURSELF TO BE PROFUSELY ANGRY AT HOW CAPITALISM USES YOU?” This emotive print possesses the same fast-and-deep ethos that can be found in much of the viral content on social media.

The speed with which a piece can be understood is unrelated to its depth, and Islam’s body of work makes a terrific argument for the close evaluation of communicative content. Take their photographic series, “Margins.” In each photograph, a person of color is positioned alone in an urban setting. Their faces are covered with some form of adornment: balloons, face paint, streamers. The idea

behind “Margins” is to make the subjects appear clownish in order to reflect the real way poc and queer people in hegemonic spaces experience hypervisibility. “Margins” is about violent surveillance but it also replicates the desire many qtpoc have to exist in public space, privately. Although each photograph takes place in the busy city, every single person is photographed joyfully, mundanely, alone and unbothered.

“Homecoming” is a silkscreen zine that uses a graphic novel format to recount the memories that shaped Islam’s understanding of consent, sexuality, and the male gaze. The zine is printed with primary colors and features Islam’s handwritten recollections and analysis of their life. At times, Islam is vindicated, honoring their younger self’s ability to maintain their own autonomy. In other instances, Islam

recongizes the pleasure they had once felt was in fact compromised by patriachal expectations. "Homecoming" ends with an optimistic acknowledgement that there will always be more time to heal. The last page depicts Islam resting in bed, draped under warm light.

There is a piece by Fina Grimes that perfectly objectifies the feeling of recalling past memories that no longer feel emotionally present. "Throw Pillow," as the name suggests, is a small pillow that has words sewn into the fabric. They read, "this summer we joked about you getting my name tattooed/now we don't talk." Also on the pillow is a depiction of someone with the word "Fina" tattooed on the neck and abdomen. For Grimes, this memory is significant in their mind, but not for the pain it perpetuates. The thought lingers but is of

little current consequence, much in the way a decorative throw pillow is seen more than it is noticed.

Grimes has an affinity for translating emotional states into soft sculptures and apparel. Their practice is centered around experimenting with modes of textile production. As a disabled, trans, queer, and mentally ill artist, Grimes chooses to let these experiences influence material choices rather than to create work that explicitly details trauma. A piece like “Torso” will be created by scanning images, manipulating the files, printing the photos onto fabric, collaging layers of fabric, stuffing the form and distressing the material into a state of vitality. This labor of love is self-evident in the final product. What is present in Grimes’s work is not pain, but care.

“Zipper Mask,” “Cape,” “Glove 1” and “Gloves 2” are all documented through sharp photographs taken by Michael Durkin. Grimes models each garment with an aloof playfulness. “Zipper Mask” is a complete head covering that is made entirely out of sewn together black zippers. One stunning image of this piece features a close-up of Grimes, who stares up at the viewer with one gray eye through a thin, unzipped slit. For “Cape,” Grimes is bare chested and wears only the small cape that covers their shoulders and upper back. In one shot, they gently pull on the drawstrings around the neck of the cape and relax their head to the side, eyes closed and restful. These photographs are generous displays of self and even more generous examples of pleasure on one’s own terms.