

2024 BA WITH  
DISTINCTION  
EXHIBITION

the DAVIS  
gallery

MAY 23-JUNE 16 2024

 School of Art & Art History  
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

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## Participating Artists

**Emily Domagala**

**Theo Hansen**

**Haven Hinds**

**Vy Nghe**

**Luke Penton**

**Marley Robinson**

**Brianna Tolkacz**

# Emily Domagala

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My artwork is a direct exploration of vulnerability, healing, the intricacies of mental illness, and how I understand societal disillusionment in relation to my own self-perception. Considering that there may be only one element away from abstraction, my work allows for creative interpretation in both architectural and figurative forms. I represent my complex relationship to vulnerability through self-portraiture, performance, and emotional representation while compelling the viewer to consider their own relationship to these topics. Most recently, I've taken bold approaches to exploring and responding more authentically to my emotions through my artistic practice and performance work. I find it quite difficult to convey the ways in which I understand the world except through my artwork.

# Instagram: @emollientmollus

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Within my artistic practice, I want to destigmatize conversations about mental illness, offering an honest portrayal of struggles we often keep silent. Figurative and human representations serve as a mirror for viewers to reflect on their own struggles and healing processes. I am drawn to the idea of inviting viewers to intimately visually engage with my art; to confront the raw emotions experienced with my art. By sharing my vulnerabilities, I invite viewers to confront their own inner turmoil and understand how my self-portraiture is more symbolic than simply a representation of myself. Through my performance *Agnes Vaile*, I took a leap of faith that has fueled the direction of where I aspire to lead my artistic practice post-graduation.

# Theo Hansen

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Throughout my adolescence, access to infinite information was always within reach. The lack of transparency in news media, coupled with my underlying pessimism, eventually led me to be mistrustful of society. Consequently, my multidisciplinary artwork highlights the gilded nature of Western culture – broken social, political, and economic systems that appear to work at the surface level, the physical damage to the world that humans are responsible for yet failing to adequately address, and the façade of technological escapism. In my photographs, prints, and drawings, I isolate and amplify social issues to force the viewer to engage with something that may be discomfoting, encouraging them to confront the issues they would otherwise avoid. My work critiques the power dynamics that control our individual perceptions, and I am fascinated by the concept of authority, whether it be over oneself or a state forced by an external power. Within my art pieces, I investigate dichotomous relationships like those between the conscious and subconscious, citizens and government, and peace and violence.

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Escapism – the deliberate actions taken to avoid a thought, task, or other stressor – has become an integral part of everyday life for the average person, especially as access to technology and media continues to increase in many parts of the world. While imagination and distraction have always been an escape, the presence of technology brings these concepts closer to the user, allowing endless access to fictionalized, unattainable worlds. Some things warrant avoidance; constantly reading news about war, death, and the state of both the economy and environment is taxing. But what happens when the thing we use to escape becomes a burden itself? This project reflects on the causes and impacts of avoidance practices that plagued me in the recent past. This year, I have been struggling in the tug-of-war between personal productivity and peace of mind. I dove head-first into the black hole of technology in many ways, avoiding the dread of the world while trying to make my experience more positive. Escaping became an addiction. My avoidance became my burden. Through this body of art, I explore the physical and mental toll of my own escapist practices and the volatile relationships they have created within my own head.

# Haven Hinds

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Haven Hinds is multimedia digital artists who focuses on the subjects of human issues and nature's impact. Through her work she provides an accessible approach to art through virtual means. Haven has worked with mediums such as graphic design, video production, generative art, 3D modeling, animation, and augmented reality. By utilizing multiple mediums in the digital field, Haven is able to create innovative pieces that spark interest and engage those interacting. She is earning her undergraduate degree in Emergent Digital Practices and International Studies. Tying the two together it is important to her to focus on a digital format that is engaging while exploring subject matter from around the world. Through this she is able to explore new mediums and cultures that bring about learning.

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“Flower Study” is a study of extinct flowers, their histories, environments, biology, colors, and assigned personalities, transformed into 3D models and a digital book. The book features six flowers with interesting histories and cultural connections. Since the flowers no longer exist in physical form, I recreated them in a 3D modeling software as accurately as possible. To give people a means of connection with the flowers, I assigned each a personality based on different factors. These factors include their colors, geography, history, and biology. To allow these personalities to further flourish, color spaces were created to be applied as the background of the models as well as the background of some of the book’s pages. The digital book features rendered images of the 3D modeled flowers, information on each plant, and a page with the flowers’ name in chrome lettering, and the aura color spaces. Each person who interacts with the book is encouraged to pick out flowers they connect to and create their own garden of these now-gone flowers. The installation includes two iPads. And the viewer is able to flip the pages of the book by swiping their finger to the left or right.

# Vy Nghe

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Vy Nghe is an interdisciplinary artist and designer who seeks to investigate the intersection between personal identity, culture and technology. Combining mediums such as graphic design, UI/UX design, game development, creative coding, video art, miniature clay sculpture, plush-making and more, Vy's work speaks upon themes of mental health, spirituality and self-expression as a first-generation Vietnamese-American woman. By exploring realms of memory, femininity, softness and comfort in an increasingly uncomfortable world, Vy aims to cultivate thought-provoking spaces, pushing viewers to daydream as she does.



# Instagram: @ivie\_music

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““Kẹo: Saccharine Affliction” is a video art installation that features a trailer/preview for a live performance taking place in the Fall of 2024. The piece combines projection artwork, including typography in several languages, 3D-modeled and generative art, with contemporary choreography, incorporating elements of Latin and Vietnamese dance to create a performance of “CANDY” by musical artist Rosalía. As the song details the experience the singer has with letting go of a past lover, the performance will tell my story of a deepening yet distant and nostalgic relationship with my culture, expressing vulnerability and grief across experiences living in the US and abroad.

“Kẹo” translates to “candy,” and the liquified texture of visuals used throughout alludes to melting “Kẹo Mạch Nha” or malt candy. I perform a fusion of dance styles with “vũ phiến,” a traditional fan dance. My movements interact with the TV/karaoke set and bring digital projections of lyrical type to life. These components are combined with fleeting, distorted visuals, including the yellow star from the Vietnamese flag, the national lotus flower, and a butterfly signifying the spirit of a loved one who has passed on. Incorporating artifacts from my college dorm room, the piece details a loss of childhood innocence and the experience of living with half of oneself, becoming whole, then letting go once again.

More details of the upcoming live performance will be shared on my social media page (@ivie\_music on Instagram).

Music: ROSALÍA

Digital Design: Vy Nghe

Choreography and Performance: Vy Nghe

Videography, Production and Set Design: Vy Nghe, Lara Holland, Zel Kerr-Atkinson

# Luke Penton

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A portal is more than just a door. A portal is a container that holds an aspect of time and space or a separate realm. Beyond the common aesthetic of grand archways, gateways, and swirling ovals, portals can be found in much broader contexts. Depending on your experience, portals often come in the forms of distractions, investments, obsessions, admirations, or passions. The experience of a portal can be overwhelming, all-consuming, blissful, and numbing. Because portals release an alluring, sometimes enchanted energy, it can be hard to resist falling into these portals repeatedly for comfort. One portal I find myself constantly returning to is doodling and mark-making. Doodling has always been a way for me to take a step back and enter a peaceful state. Although doodling represents a distraction, it is a beneficial one that helps relieve stress.

Beyond doodling, a portal can be anything that represents the passage of time. The only common ground between all portals is that they consist of three stages: the entrance, the absorption, and the exit. For some, the initial connection and engagement with the entrance stage will be the most impactful; however, each stage in a portal is equally important. Through some portals, the exit may leave you in a state of confusion, frustration, or pain. Escaping the appeal of some of these damaging portals can be difficult, but it is possible to avoid them by reflecting on your experience after your exit. I hope my work prompts viewers to reimagine the idea of portals and to discover portals within their own lives.

# Instagram: @kookscollection\_

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*The Portal Shrine* encapsulates the viewer for a moment as they are surrounded by mirrored ceramic sculptures. The ceramic vessels are duplicated to the left and right of the mirror to symbolize the puzzling and enchanting aura that commonly surrounds portals. The duplicated forms help guide the viewer to walk between them as if they were in a portal themselves. As the sculptures lead back to the wall, a classic oval-shaped reflection portal creates a new perspective and a chance for the sculptures to be viewed in a completely different way.

Although the ceramic sculptures explore three separate portals, creatures, ecologies, and technologies, they are all intertwined within my life. The first set of sculptures are 3D-printed ceramic figures meant to represent the brightly colored and messy creatures that I started creating in kindergarten. These figures represent a transformation of my doodles from paper to the physical world. The Multiple sections of drooping coils and negative space translate to the sketchy, outlined style of my drawings. These creatures are the guardians of the Portal Altar.

The middle set of ceramic sculptures represents the importance of making connections in nature with plant life and other ecologies. These sculptures mimic the forms, textures, and colors of various types of plants and succulents that I grow and care for. To achieve the reality of this living portal, I planted succulents and plants on the tops of the sculptures.

The final set of sculptures portrays technology as a portal. Often, smartphones act as a portal for distraction. On the contrary, other technologies and platforms allow users to experience additional portals, exploring new ideas and developing new forms of art and media. These rigid, geometric forms of the ceramics allude to the various LCD device screens and other flat surfaces of computerized equipment.

# Marley Robinson

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Marley Robinson uses a variety of mediums including printmaking, painting, and sculpture to explore themes of mythmaking and the collision of fantasy and reality. She is currently working on her Bachelor of the Arts at the University of Denver, studying studio art and art history. In the past year, Marley has been included in multiple exhibitions at the University of Denver—Slumber Party, Collective Effervescence, and Outdated FashArt Show—and was selected for a group exhibition at Memento Mori Gallery in Denver, Tarot. She has also exhibited work at the Lorenzo de Medici Gallery for the show Mimesis and Construction (2022) in Florence, Italy. Marley has been awarded the DU Art Research Grant as well as other art-related scholarships.

# Instagram: @art\_is\_my\_desire

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Life and myth are intricately intertwined, resembling two mirrors reflecting each other, where human experiences shape myth and myth offers guidance for living. Fantasy, legend, and folklore construct narratives about birth, growth, and death, all anchored in the timeless framework of the Hero's Journey. Through this body of work, I merge fantasy and reality, exploring themes of transformation, mortality, love, power, delicate gore (the subtle and symbolic portrayal of gruesome elements), and femininity, drawing inspiration from this narrative archetype. Within the Hero's Journey lies a reflection of life's ebbs and flows, mirroring our own mortal journey, from innocence to the complexities of existence. By creating elements of mythology and folklore, I aim to depict the delicate balance between life and death, purity and corruption, creating a reflection of life's intricacies shaped by my own experiences. This body of work explores growth and the constant rebirth of oneself in life—the never ending cycle of life and death experienced in one lifetime.

# Brianna Tolkacz

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Brianna Tolkacz is a passionate storyteller and artist working across multiple disciplines and media to create meaningful artworks. The age-old tradition of storytelling is seen throughout her artworks, and she draws from personal emotions and experiences. Tolkacz strikes a balance between humanity and natural beauty, exploring both the far ends and intersections of the two worlds.

# Instagram: @ brie\_t\_arts

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*The Hero's Journey* reflects on the continued fascination with fairytales, myths, and legends through time. This project follows the exploration of these stories, themes, and the lessons they can teach one about themselves and the wider world. Such fictional narratives allow one to process and share their lived experiences: the victories and tragedies, losses and growth. This project follows a winged figure as she fights for her freedom and gains her wings. the journey is messy and raw but still beautiful. The project blends classical oil painting and contemporary sculptural elements to compose an evolving narrative culminating in a dynamic, wearable set of wings. The pieces in this project push the bounds of interweaving techniques and narrative to understand the importance of storytelling and an exploration of why fairytales, myths, and legends still captivate humanity.



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*Thank you to all of the DU Faculty and Staff  
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