



**University Art Gallery**  
712 Arts Plaza  
Claire Trevor School of the Arts  
University of California, Irvine  
Irvine, CA 92697-2775  
(949) 824-9854  
gallery@uci.edu  
uag.arts.uci.edu

Tues.–Sat., 12–6 p.m.

## PRESS PREVIEW KIT



Photo Credit:

rafa esparza. *Bust: A meditation on freedom*, 2015. Single-channel video, color, sound, 9 min 10 sec. Edition of 3, 2 AP. Image courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth & Council

## Affective Resistance

Curated by Liz Glynn & Alberto Lule  
University Art Gallery & Room Gallery

On View: October 7– December 16, 2023

Opening Reception: October 7, 2–5 p.m

**IRVINE, Calif.** – The University of California, Irvine’s University Art Galleries (UAG) is pleased to host *Affective Resistance* Curated by Liz Glynn and Alberto Lule

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Featured artists include rafa esparza, Tarik Garrett, Pélagie Gbaguidi, donna Kukama, Rodney McMillian, Alicia Piller, Nyugen Smith and Chanell Stone.



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*Affective Resistance* brings together works by eight artists using performance art and materialist abstraction as modes of resistance to systemic racism and state power. At a moment when society seeks to reckon with what true representation looks like, these artists deploy physical and material affect to make visible complex histories of oppression through the poetics of the performative. Juxtaposing site-specific interventions created in South Africa, Greece and the Caribbean with work by Los Angeles-based artists, the show approaches questions of freedom and liberation through a transhistorical, global framework beyond the American context. Several works in the exhibition draw out the conflict between democratic ideals and the subjugation of the body under slavery, Colonialism, and the carceral system. These videos are juxtaposed with several experimental approaches to abstraction as a political gesture.

The Room Gallery features *The Missing Link: The Decolonisation Education of Ms. Smiling Stone* (2017) by Pélagie Gbaguidi, a Dakar-born artist of Benin descent currently based in Brussels whose work has rarely been shown in the US. Originally commissioned for the prestigious international exhibition *documenta 17*, which centered artists from the global south as part of a broader conversation about democracy, the video was shot in South Africa and at the Temple of Delphi in Athens. This video will be installed on a loop alternating alongside Los Angeles-based artist rafa esparza's *bust: a meditation on freedom* (2015), which documents the artist chiseling himself out of a concrete tube outside of the Twin Towers Correctional Facility to protest the mass incarceration of black and brown people.

The University Art Gallery will include two major video works alongside photography, mixed media and sculptural installations. donna Kukama, a South African artist currently based in Cologne, will include a video of a performance shot during a protest staged by Kenyan veterans seeking recognition from their government for their role in liberating the country from colonization. Nyugen Smith's video *Like Dead Weight* depicts the artist activating a former plantation site with his recumbent body. The work will be juxtaposed with his *Flag for a New Caribbean*, a decolonizing proposal speculating on a liberated future for the Caribbean islands. Chanell Stone will present photographs exploring erased histories and the black body's relationship to the American landscape.

A group of mixed media works explore the landscape and its relation to histories of racialized violence and environmental degradation. The University Art Gallery opens with two abstractions by Rodney McMillian: *Sky/Soil* (2020) and *Untitled* (2017), a viscous composition that extends from the ground of a thrift-store purple bed sheet onto the floor below while calling into question issues of class and race, particularly in relation to American landscape painting. Alicia Piller will present three large-scale mixed media sculptural works which mix references to the colonization of Africa and old family photographs with forms evocative of climate change and ideological crisis. Tarik Garrett, UCI MFA '22, will include an abstracted "tapestry" made from deconstructed red, white and blue beer cans etched with a partially destroyed image of a burning police car.

Organized by Professor Liz Glynn and MFA candidate Alberto Lule, the exhibition draws upon a rich history of student and faculty activism in the UC system, as well as UCI's Art Department's historic emphasis on performance art and radical politics. Alberto Lule is an interdisciplinary artist, an alumnus of UCLA's BFA program, and member of the Underground Scholars Initiative. The [UCI Underground Scholars Program](#) creates a pathway for incarcerated, formerly incarcerated and system impacted individuals into higher education. Underground Scholars Initiative (USI) is the student-run organization that works in partnership with the UCI Underground Scholars Program which is led and run by UCI staff. The exhibition is part of the

Poetic Justice Initiative, a programming initiative and cluster hiring program established as part of the University of California, Irvine's [Black Thriving Initiative](#). More information about UCI's University Art Galleries is [here](#), including a list of [thematic exhibitions](#).



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### **Artist Bios:**

**rafa esparza** (b. 1981, Los Angeles; lives and works in Los Angeles) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work explores history, kinship, and genealogies disrupted by colonialism through his personal experience. Rafa has created numerous site-specific and collaborative performances, including many involving the labor of adobe brick-making learned from his father, Ramón Esparza. Leveraging the collective and the communal, esparza's work challenges binaries and deconstructs hierarchies. Solo exhibitions of esparza's work have been presented at Artists Space, New York (2023); Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles (2021); MASS MoCA, North Adams (2019); and Ballroom Marfa (2017), among others. <https://commonwealthandcouncil.com/us/rafa-esparza/biography>

**Tarik Garrett** (b. 1990, lives and works in Los Angeles, CA and Cambridge, MA) is a Los Angeles based artist with a multimedia practice working in sculpture, installation, painting, sound and video. Garrett studied at the Cooper Union, and received a MFA from UC Irvine in 2022. He is currently a PhD candidate at Harvard University.

**Pélagie Gbaguidi** (from Benin; b. in Dakar in 1965; lives and works in Brussels) calls herself a contemporary "Griot" who absorbs the words of the ancients and models them like a ball of fat that he places in the stomach of each passerby with the ingredients of the day. Her focus of interest is centered on the colonial and postcolonial archives and on the unmasking of the process of forgetting in history. Gbaguidi has participated in the Berlin Biennale (2020), documenta 14 (2017), the Lubumbashi Biennale (2019) and the Dakar Biennale (2004, 2006, 2008, 2014 and 2018).

**donna Kukama** (b. 1981 Mafikeng, South Africa; lives and works in Cologne, Germany) is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice engages performance art as a tool for inserting foreign 'undocumented' voices and presences into history by occupying sites and territories that remember less-told stories. Kukama questions how histories are narrated and subverts how value systems are constructed, instead centering methods and perspectives that originate from the Global South. Kukama has exhibited and performed at international institutions and museums including the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery in Toronto (2022); Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town (2021); Musée - Frac Occitanie Toulouse in Toulouse (2021); Tate Modern in London (2015); and MhKA in Antwerp (2015), among many.

**Rodney McMillian** (b. 1969, Charleston, South Carolina; lives and works in Los Angeles, CA) creates sculptures, paintings, videos, and installations that consider the complex relationship between history and contemporary culture in both American politics and American modernist art traditions. Solo exhibitions include those at the Blaffer Museum in Houston, TX (2020), the Underground Museum in Los Angeles (2019), the ICA Philadelphia (2016); the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2016), and MoMA P.S.1., New York, NY (2016) among many. McMillian is a professor in the Department of Art at UCLA. <https://vielmetter.com/artists/rodney-mcmillian/>

**Alicia Piller** (b. Chicago, IL; lives and works in Los Angeles) reconstructs historical traumas, both political and environmental, through macroscopic and microscopic perspectives. Her sculptural work is characterized by rich material experimentation, informed in part by her years spent working in fashion and jewelry design in New York prior to completing her MFA. Solo exhibitions of Piller's work have been presented at the Craft Contemporary, Los Angeles (2023); the Craft Alliance, St. Louis, MO (2021), and L.R. Projects, Los Angeles, CA (2019), among others. Her work was included in the Orange County Biennial in 2022. <https://www.aliciapiller.com/>

**Nyugen E. Smith** is a Caribbean-American interdisciplinary artist based in Jersey City, NJ, primarily working in the areas of mixed media drawing, found object assemblage, and performance. His practice explores world-building, informed by the intersection of ritual, memory, language, history, the body, and play through the lens of Blackness. His work has been presented at the Pérez Art Museum, Miami FL (2019); Museum of Cultural History, Oslo, Norway (2019); the Nordic Black Theater, Oslo, Norway (2019); Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, CA (2017); and in the Congo Biennial, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (2022) among others. <https://www.nyugensmith.com/>



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**Chanell Stone** (b. Los Angeles, lives and works in Southern California) investigates the Black body's intersectional states of being and connection to the natural world through collage, self-portraiture, and poetry. Her practice negotiates potentialities for reconciliation and reprieve by upending historical and ancestral memories within the American landscape. Her solo exhibition *Natura Negra* appeared at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco in 2019-20. More recently, Stone's work has been displayed at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Pier 24 Photography, Museo Cabanas in Guadalajara and Fotografiska New York. <https://www.chanellstone.com/>

### **Curator Bios:**

**Liz Glynn** is a professor of sculpture, installation, and graduate studies in the Department of Art at UC Irvine and the co-lead of the Poetic Justice Initiative at UCI. Glynn creates sculptures, installations and performances which mine the past to imagine other possible futures and seek to locate individual agency in the face of empire. Glynn's solo exhibitions include those at Vielmetter Los Angeles (2023), Mass MOCA, North Adams, MA (2017); The Public Art Fund, New York, NY (2017); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles (2015); and SculptureCenter, Long Island City, NY (2014); among others.

**Alberto Lule** uses readymades, mixed media installations, video, performance, and tools used by agencies of authority to examine and critique the prison industrial complex in the United States, particularly the California carceral state. Lule is currently the Vice-President of The Underground Scholars Initiative, a student-led organization which supports incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students seeking higher education. He is the recipient of the Public Impact Fellowship, UC Irvine, 2022-2023. The Leo Freedman Fellowship, Claire Trevor School of the Arts, UC Irvine, 2021-2022. The 2020 Kay Nielsen Memorial Drawing Award, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Alberto received a BA in Art from The University of California Los Angeles, and is currently pursuing his MFA from the Claire Trevor School of the Arts at UC Irvine, 2024.

**UCI** Claire Trevor

School of the Arts

Please follow our Instagram [@uag\\_ucirvine](#) for updates

For questions: [gallery@uci.edu](mailto:gallery@uci.edu)



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### ***Affective Resistance***

#### Fact Sheet

##### **Exhibition**

On View: October 7 – December 16, 2023  
Curated by Liz Glynn & Alberto Lule

##### **Events:**

Public Opening Reception: October 7, 2–5 p.m.  
Parallel Public Program will be announced on our website: [uag.arts.uci.edu](http://uag.arts.uci.edu)

##### **Location:**

University Art Gallery  
Room Gallery, Art Culture and Technology, Bldg. 727

##### **Description:**

*Affective Resistance* brings together works by eight artists using performance art and materialist abstraction as modes of resistance to systemic racism and state power. Juxtaposing site-specific interventions created in South Africa, Greece and the Caribbean with work by Los Angeles-based artists, the show approaches questions of freedom and liberation through a transhistorical, global framework beyond the American context. Several works in the exhibition draw out the conflict between democratic ideals and the subjugation of the body under slavery, Colonialism, and the carceral system. These videos are juxtaposed with several experimental approaches to abstraction as a political gesture. Featured artists include rafa esparza, Tarik Garrett, Pélagie Gbaguidi, donna kukama, Rodney McMillian, Alicia Piller, Nyugen Smith and Chanell Stone.

##### **Gallery Hours:**

Tues. – Sat. 12–6 p.m.  
Free admission

##### **Parking:**

UC Irvine [Mesa Parking Structure](#), 4000 Mesa Rd., Irvine, CA 92617  
(Complimentary parking provided for the press preview with RSVP)

##### **More Info:**

<https://uag.arts.uci.edu/exhibit/affective-resistance>

##### **Note to editors:**

Selected high-resolution images for publicity only may be downloaded from [Google Drive](#)  
(Key to images attached)



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## PRESS PREVIEW KIT IMAGE KEY

University Art Gallery, UCI Claire Trevor School of the Arts

### ***Affective Resistance***

rafa esparza, Tarik Garrett, Pélagie Gbaguidi, donna Kukama, Rodney McMillian, Alicia Pillar, Nyugen Smith and Chanell Stone.

Curated by Liz Glynn & Alberto Lule

### **Press Images:**



(1)



(2)



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(5)

### Photo credits:

1. donna Kukama, Still from *Not Yet (And Nobody Knows Why Not)*, 2008. Video, 15 min 10 sec duration. Courtesy of the artist and blank projects, Cape Town © donna Kukama
2. Alicia Pillar, (L) 'Acid Rain, Dissolving Emissions & Old Ideologies, 2021. Vinyl, resin, latex balloons, gel medium, laser prints, plastic, foam. 100" X 96" x 132". (R) *Diversity of Voices, Re-hydrating. Resisting Contamination*, 2021. Vinyl, resin, latex balloons, gel medium, laser prints, plastic, foam. 54 x 113" x 70"
3. Nyugen Smith, *A New Flag for the Caribbean / A Flag for the New Caribbean*, 2017. Installation, textile, video, flagpoles. Courtesy of the artist.
4. Chanell Stone, *Untitled (river wading)*, 2022. Archival pigment print. 96 x 80". Courtesy of the artist.
5. Rodney McMillian, *Untitled*, 2017. Latex and acrylic on bedsheet. 148" x 63". Courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles.

The images are approved only for publication in conjunction with promotion of the exhibition. Reproductions must include the full caption information, and images may not be cropped or altered in any way or superimposed with any printing.

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### **About the Poetic Justice Initiative**

At every crucial juncture in our nation's history, Black authors, artists and other creative workers, especially from Los Angeles and the greater Southern California region, have produced new narratives, images and social practices that challenge systemic anti-black racism and affirm Black life and humanity. Their works, broadly conceptualized by the term poetic justice, elevate the level of public conversation on how the history of slavery, segregation, and mass incarceration directly affect virtually every civic and social institution, including higher education. Hiring under the theme of poetic justice, UCI will hire four tenured or tenure-track professors in the Departments of African American Studies, Art, Criminology Law & Society, and the Paul Merage School of Business. The cluster will build stronger connections between UCI and community-based institutions that focus on the production and preservation of Black history, culture and art. Focusing on this nexus between UCI and California's cultural economy, Poetic Justice will support the creative talents of Black Southern Californians, students, faculty, staff and other system-impacted people on our campus and beyond, build sustainable arts and culture industry careers, and promote campus- and societal-level visions of reparative justice.

### **About the UAG**

The University Art Galleries are committed to promoting an inter-generational dialogue between 60s/70s neo-avant-garde art and contemporary visual culture. Accordingly, the curatorial mission is to keep an eye on the modernist past while promoting the most innovative aesthetic and political debates of the post-modern present. From this vantage, the projects commissioned provoke intelligent debate on the subject of art in its most expansive poetic definition. What distinguishes the program is its unwavering commitment to publishing scholarly texts in catalogue/book form in order to disseminate research-based information into the community, providing a venue for the promotion of innovative discourse surrounding mixed media production today. The UAG program provides several exhibition platforms for inter-generational and interdisciplinary dialogue. The Major Works of Art Series commissions original projects by canonical artists working today. The Emerging Artist Series features solo projects by a set of younger artists informed by the legacies showcased in the Major Works series. The Critical Aesthetics Program commissions new work by internationally renowned mid-career artists. Augmenting this inter-generational dialogue, UAG also produces larger thematic group exhibitions alternately showcasing historical and contemporary art and film projects. UAG further promotes an active dialogue between UCI residents and the local and international art communities through colloquia, conferences, visiting artist lectures and theme-based films series, all of which are open to the public. As the galleries continue to mature, they stand committed to being an experimental exhibition space different from the current - but largely traditional - art biennial and film festival platforms.

### **About UCI Claire Trevor School of the Arts**

As UCI's creative engine, the Claire Trevor School of the Arts has proven itself to be a national leader in training future generations of artists and scholars who go on to inspire audiences in theaters, galleries and concert halls – as well as in entertainment and technology-related venues throughout the world. CTSA combines artistic training with a top-ranked liberal arts education. It is home to the departments of art, dance, drama and music, offering 15 undergraduate and graduate degree programs and two minors. CTSA is currently ranked No. 1 in affordable fine arts, drama/theater and music degrees by the College Affordability Guide. Courses include extensive studio, workshop and performance experiences; theoretical and historical studies; and arts and technology practices. CTSA's nationally ranked programs begin with training but culminate in original invention. The distinguished, international faculty work across a wide variety of art forms and forge interdisciplinary partnerships with others across the campus. For more information, visit [www.arts.uci.edu](http://www.arts.uci.edu).