

**SCHOOL OF  
THE ART INSTITUTE  
OF CHICAGO GALLERIES** 

33 E. Washington Street, Chicago, IL 60602

[www.saic.edu/exhibitions](http://www.saic.edu/exhibitions)

**Low-Residency MFA Exhibition  
July 6–26, 2026**

***Resisting Resolution: The 2026 Low-Res MFA Cohort*  
By: Emily Edwards, Guest Critic**

The 2026 Low-Res MFA cohort at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago approaches artistic practice as a relational act: one rooted not in singular objects or fixed meanings, but in systems of exchange between bodies, materials, histories, and environments. Across installation, performance, painting, sculpture, sound, scent, and social practice, these artists construct spaces that ask viewers to move through uncertainty rather than resolve it.

Many of the artists in this exhibition and concurrent public presentations are concerned with thresholds: the unstable spaces between presence and absence, body and environment, memory and perception. In **Heidi Carlsen**'s installation and performance, hanging paper figures, drenched peacoats, and shifting fields of projected color become meditations on disappearance, touch, and liminality. Her works compel viewers to move through barriers of suspended forms that simultaneously obstruct and invite passage, evoking both bodily vulnerability and loss. Similarly, **Stephanie LenWar**'s multimedia practice moves through dream states, mourning rituals, and mythological cycles. Her music video *As The Dust* transforms personal grief into a broader meditation on death, transformation, and the fragile space between worlds, where her ghosts vanish one by one and memory lingers in their absence.

Questions of transition and unstable perception also shape the work of **k guyot** and **Lucinda Esh**. Guyot's layered photographic works and translucent vellum drawings explore the impossibility of fixed understanding; how memory fractures, language collapses, and meaning remains perpetually incomplete. Drawing from Buddhist philosophy and her experiences navigating communication with her autistic son, Guyot embraces "the gap" as a generative space rather than a failure of comprehension. Esh likewise examines how humans process and interpret information through her immersive sculptural installation incorporating folded paper, aluminum, plexiglass, sound, and LIDAR technology. Her practice asks viewers to consider the instability of

sensory data itself: how perception is filtered, translated, and continually reshaped by both machine and body.

Throughout the exhibition, sensory experience functions as both medium and methodology. **Kathleen Korotzer's** multisensory installation combines scent, glass, sound, and sculptural forms to investigate migration, bodily memory, feminism, and inherited histories. Drawing from field recordings made in Georgia and California, family archives tracing her ancestry, and experiments with handcrafted fragrances, Korotzer creates environments that resist purely visual interpretation. Her glass forms, described as "liberated bodies," suggest the emotional residue carried through generations, while scent becomes a vehicle for memory that exceeds language.

**Ginger Brooks Takahashi** similarly uses smell, as well as sound and participatory experiences, to explore migration, colonial history, and diasporic identity. Through gardens of cultivated shiso and perilla plants, scent vessels, herbarium-inspired works on paper, and oral storytelling, Takahashi examines the tensions embedded within colonial histories between Japan and Korea. Her work resists singular narratives, instead creating spaces where taste, fragrance, language, and memory overlap. By foregrounding plants as ancestral tethers and carriers of migration, Takahashi reframes the garden as both archive and community space.

Sound itself becomes a material language throughout many of these practices. **Carl Joe Williams** creates immersive installations where painting, moving image, and music converge into rhythmic meditations on spirituality, memory, and Black life. Influenced by his experience with synesthesia, Williams approaches color and sound as interconnected systems, layering imagery from mass media and his personal history with meditative soundtracks. He creates spaces that pulse with both grief and possibility. **Miguel Chavez** similarly incorporates sound into a sculptural installation that repurposes toys, propellers, and found objects to investigate childhood, play, and political violence. His kinetic sculptures and his drawn images evoke both wonder and unease, linking the imaginative freedom of childhood to systems of militarization, surveillance, and technological power.

The relationship between bodies and systems, whether technological, political, ecological, or historical, appears repeatedly throughout the cohort. **Lisa J. Croner's** practice examines the limits of human perception through experimental processes involving charcoal, fluid dynamics, photography, and interconnected sculptural forms. Drawing from her background in biology and scientific research, Croner creates works that hover between abstraction and recognition, revealing the hidden complexity of systems in nature. Her "box colonies," composed of hinged plastic forms that twist into unpredictable configurations, become metaphors for interdependence and emergent

behavior. Rather than asserting control over material, Croner allows agency to remain distributed between artist, process, and environment.

Material transformation plays a central role in **Brian Guerin's** sculptural practice. Working with clay, stone, and textiles, Guerin creates fragmented animal and organ-like forms that oscillate between tenderness and violence. His practice explores vulnerability, melancholia, queer embodiment, and the porous boundaries between interior and exterior states. Pillows sewn from the artist's own clothing support intertwined limbs and visceral fragments, creating scenes that feel simultaneously intimate and uncanny. Influenced by psychoanalytic and queer theory and the emotional residue of illness and loss, Guerin's works reject stable narratives in favor of systems of relation that remain unresolved and emotionally charged.

Across some of this cohort's practices, inherited histories and diasporic memory emerge not as static subjects but as living conditions embedded within materials, gestures, and bodies. **Nell Pimental** examines Afro-Caribbean identity, colonial histories, and beauty rituals through her practice. Her large-scale unstretched canvases and translucent fabric installations explore how histories of migration and racialization reverberate through intimate acts of self-presentation and care. By foregrounding quotidian gestures such as hair maintenance, Pimental reveals how identity is continually negotiated within systems shaped by colonialism and displacement.

**simone körner** navigates the intersections of personal history, labor, and political ideology in their sculptural installation made from denim, bakery textiles, bells, and found objects. Drawing from their upbringing in rural Germany and their experiences moving between vastly different social worlds, Körner investigates fascism, technocratic optimism, spirituality, and trauma through materially dense environments. Their braided textile forms, vibrating with embedded motors and bells, reference DNA helices, peasant rebellions, and inherited memory all at once. For Körner, material itself becomes a site where histories accumulate and continue to resonate across generations.

Questions of ritual, transformation, and collective care circulate throughout the exhibition as well. **Elise Gagliardi's** floral installations, performances, and photography draw from art history, mythology, motherhood, and religious ritual to construct environments suspended between decay and renewal. Using flowers, Gagliardi creates sculptural forms that evolve over time, emphasizing cycles of transformation rather than permanence. Her performances reclaim bodily autonomy through ceremonial gestures that intertwine vulnerability, humor, and resistance, reframing historically gendered rituals as acts of self-authorship.

**Carol Schrader** similarly approaches artistic practice as a communal and ritualistic process. Through cyanotypes created collaboratively with participants across different geographies, Schrader constructs “bodies of water” that merge personal memory with environmental consciousness. Their installations incorporate sails, projected waterways, artist books, and hand-sewn cyanotypes, positioning water as both environment and metaphor for connection, migration, and mutual dependence. Rather than treating authorship as singular, Schrader’s work foregrounds exchange and participation as essential components of meaning-making itself.

Some cohort artists examine how images and narratives shape collective consciousness. **Christine Vermeer**’s aluminum-based paintings meditate on nostalgia, memory, and empathy through fragmented scenes that unfold nonlinearly, like recollections surfacing unevenly over time. Her reflective surfaces and repeated imagery create subtle disruptions between past and present, viewer and subject. **J Maskrey**’s large-scale portrait paintings similarly engage with historical representation, though through the lens of contemporary capitalistic power. By appropriating the visual language of Old Master portraiture to depict figures such as tech executives and industry leaders, Maskrey interrogates the relationship between mythology and image-making in the present moment.

**Aimée Suárez Netzahualcóyotl**’s installations and sculptural narratives resist fixed interpretation altogether, unfolding through anthropomorphic forms, folded structures, and spatial interventions that privilege ambiguity and intuition. Her works invite viewers into systems of association rather than singular readings, allowing narrative to emerge through encounter and perception. Likewise, **Karl Albert Lairtus**’s abstract paintings and sculptural arrangements investigate systems of thought, language, and cognition through grids, gestures, and modular structures that visualize the architecture of consciousness itself.

Poetry and philosophical inquiry function as intertwined forms of research in **Yoanna Ball**’s practice. Drawing from sustained research into figures such as César Vallejo, Ball investigates how poetry and visual art respond to moments of historical and cultural rupture. Her work foregrounds reflection and encounter, creating intimate spaces where language, image, and material presence operate as interconnected modes of thought.

Taken together, the works in the 2026 Low-Res MFA Thesis Exhibition resist easy categorization. Rather than arriving at singular conclusions, these artists create conditions for encounter: spaces where viewers must navigate sensation, contradiction, memory, and uncertainty alongside them. Across disciplines and materials, the cohort demonstrates a profound investment in relational thinking. Meaning is produced not in

isolation, but through entanglement with others, with history, with material, and with the environments we inhabit.

What unites these practices is not a shared aesthetic, but a shared commitment to making as a form of inquiry. Whether through scent, sound, folded paper, projected light, clay, flowers, textiles, moving image, or communal ritual, the artists in this exhibition approach poetics as an embodied process of world-building. In doing so, they offer not stable answers, but propositions: invitations to inhabit complexity more fully, to remain open to transformation, and to recognize ourselves as participants within systems far larger than any single body alone.

---

**Emily Edwards** is the head of Curatorial Affairs at MassArt Museum in Boston, Massachusetts. She has curated solo exhibitions of artists EJ Hill, Martin Gonzales, Bianca Bondi, Chloe Chiasson, Gabrielle Goliath, Natalie Wadlington, Shilpa Gupta, Ariel Rene Jackson, and Margarita Cabrera and assisted with over thirty of Dallas Contemporary's exhibitions. She independently curated the acclaimed exhibition *Is It Real? Artists Address Reproductive Freedom* in 2024 with Sara Hignite and was the curator of the 2023 Texas Vignette Art Fair. In 2023, Edwards was the recipient of an ICI Étant Donnés Curatorial Fellowship in Paris, France. Her curatorial practice is dedicated to working with historically underrepresented artists with a specialization in sociopolitical commentary. Before moving to Dallas, she worked on the curatorial team at the 9/11 Memorial Museum. She holds an MA in Art History and Museum Studies from Georgetown University and a BFA with honors in Art History from the University of Texas at Austin.