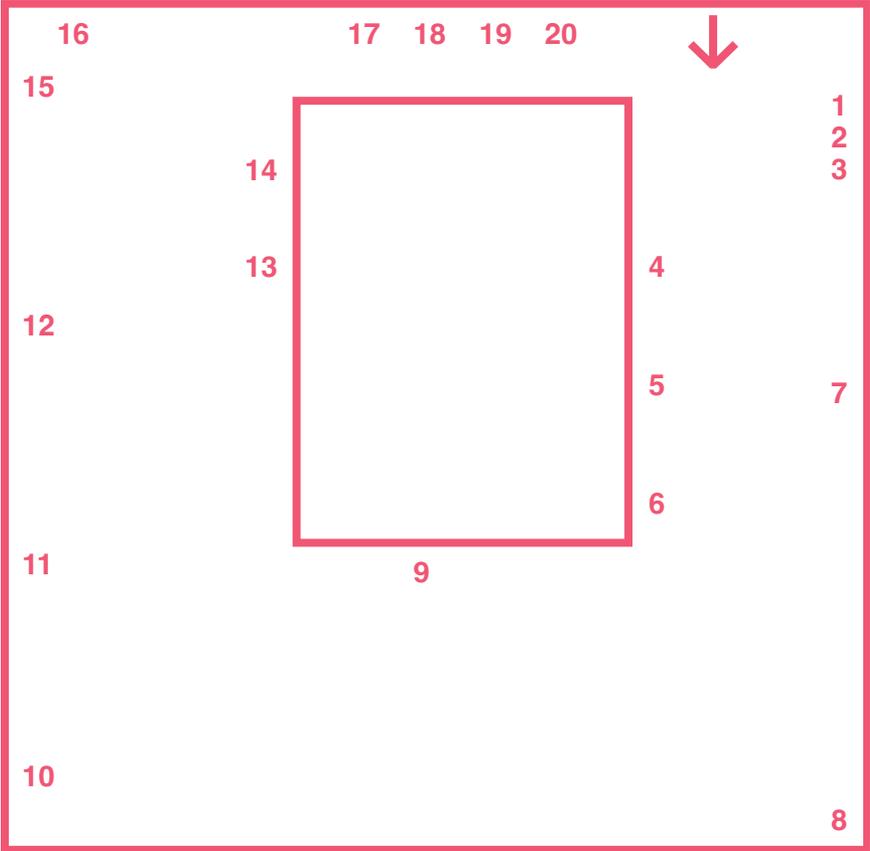


# Open MFA

March 20  
Raven Tower



Curated by Megan Olivia Ebel

**Mayra Huerta**  
**Hillaree Hamblin**  
**Lorena Mitchell**  
**KNOWME**  
**Jean Sebastien Boncy**  
**Ryan Hollaway**  
**Amanda Powers**  
**Únies & Leche**  
**Aliah Montazeri**  
**Matt Manalo**  
**Erica Reed Lee**  
**Cynthia Giron**  
**Hugo Pérez**  
**Alexandra Constantinou**

When Open MFA—a collective of emerging Houston artists established as a resource for continuing art education and expanding individual art practices—approached me to collaborate with their community via curation of their Raven Tower Pop Up Exhibition, the opportunity to activate an environment that has held great personal significance during my tenure in Houston played a big role in the selection of works for the program. With one of the most iconic views of our incredible city: what does one celebrate, and what does one mourn when looking through the nearly 180' vantage point of the tower?

When one enters the tower, the Houston skyline—sometimes gleaming gold from the evening sun, sometimes I-10 pathways highlighted with red and white brake light streamers, commuters leaving their work-week posts to their homes outside of the city—is no doubt the most prominent icon, and rightfully so. It is, in my opinion, uninspired to curate a show around the theme of Houston, but using the skyline as an object posits that Houston is a creation of the humans who work this city.

Non-Houstonian's oft remark on the uselessness of our downtown, the stress of the inbound traffic, the disorganization of no zoning and lack of continuous public transportation, how our tunnel system connecting businesses are commercialized mole-ways and ridiculous in a city that is ruled by the ancient floodplains we inhabit, and how giant concrete, glass, and steel obelisks of Houston's maternal Oil and Gas industry overpower any small green space. Until I lived Downtown, the heart of Houston, and at the intersection of Texas and Main no less, I may have agreed. Three years ago, before pandemic times, I stood looking out on the city having activated the Raven Tower for the celebration of another ending—a sale of a company—feeling some sort of ownership or pride over “my city”. I was not born here, but what does it take to feel belonging, to claim a place for yourself?

Reflecting on the artists and works selected for the Raven Tower pop up, the viewer is pushed through a lifecycle of accepting Houston—reflecting on the culture of the city, our bodies that work hard to create and manipulate our landscape and the recategorization of what our skyline stands for, the pains of

expansion and gentrification, yet the celebrations of new frontiers and access that cities of similar size and capacity cannot harness.

As one enters the Raven Tower, the proverbial nest of the exhibit, we recall the rawness and rebirth of our new view—the skyline from a rarely accessed vantage point—via Mayra Huerta's intricately veined triptych of veined manus and fleshy globules. The softness of this rebirth, through watercolor, through the delicacy of works on paper, structures the journey we are lead through as we follow the room, and traverse along the framed highway-scape. Hillaree Hamblin's *Grape Frost*—a frothy lilac enzymatic composition—pushes us towards similarly alchemical works by Lorena Mitchell (*Fancy*) and KNOWME (*Tiamat*), representing a goddess familiar of a metropolitan Hathor—of fertility and love—and Tiamat—the Meso goddess of the sea, chaos, floods. When one looks out the windows of Raven Tower, a tributary of the bayou, veiled with litter, debris from some recent rainstorm, separates the building from the roadway. Similarly, Amanda Powers' metamorphosed installation of *\$2/hour*, separate us from the field beyond our nest, transmuting a perhaps innocent outlook on our rebirth journey, through discussion of labor and wage disparity, its connection to a city center where financial, political and social decisions are made, often without an earnest outlook of equitability for the majority of waged-workers in our affluent city. Ryan Holloway (*Porto*) and Jean Sebastian (*October 18*), lend petite portals that disrupt our view and draw attention from the living city in front to documentation of other windows not so inherent. Aliah Montazeri and Matt Manalo's commentary on the adornment and shaming of the tegument we choose and the husk—our skin color—we are born of. The segmentation of these categories and judgements reflect in works *There, Not There* (Erica Reed Lee) and *The Green Room* (Cynthia Giron) before entering the heel of the space, a hallway connection between end and rebirth, where lies Hugo Pérez's *Terlingua 1 & 2* series and Alexandra Constantinou's *Moon Tree* series, delectate embroidery on silk which reference change, connection to nature, moonscape and resonation between something we may all experience—light pollution aside.

—Megan Olivia Ebel

1



## Mayra Huerta

*Soma VII*  
2022  
Watercolor on paper  
10 x 14 inches

*Soma III*  
2022  
Watercolor on paper  
11 x 14 inches

*Flesh Undone*  
2022  
Watercolor on paper  
16 x 20 inches

**Contact /** @mayra.m.huerta

2



3



4



## Hillaree Hamblin

*Grape Frost*  
2013  
Acrylic, salt & plaster on canvas  
6 x 6 inches

**Contact /** @hamblinhillaree

5



## Lorena Mitchell

*Fancy*  
2020  
Digital  
15 x 10 inches

**Contact /** @renadoesart

8



## Amanda Powers

*\$2 / hour*  
2021-ongoing  
Installation, hand crocheted with  
found and donated plastic bags  
2.5 x 5 inches each

**Contact /** @amandaaapowers

6



## KNOWME

*(DM) Tiamat*  
2018/19  
Acrylic gouache on paper  
9 x 12 inches

**Contact /** @dmtiamat

9



## Jean Sebastien Boncy

*October 18*  
2018  
Inkjet mounted on board  
9 x 12 inches

**Contact /** @tiboncy

7



## Ryan Hollaway

*Porto*  
2019  
Inkjet print  
11 x 14 inches

**Contact /** @rchollaway

10



## Únies & Leche

*prototype 1*  
2022  
Silver gelatin print, film  
photography x acrylic/oil paint  
16 x 20 inches

**Contact /** @venusinfurr

11

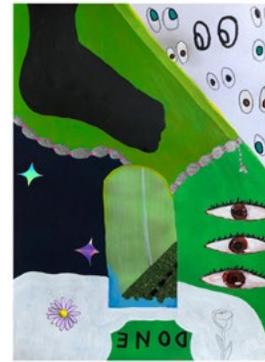


## Aliah Montazeri

*Off-White Garden*  
2020  
Acrylic on canvas  
18 x 24 inches

**Contact /** @aliahmontazeri

14



## Cynthia Giron

*The Green Room*  
2021  
Acrylic, airbrush, color pencil,  
glitter, puffy paint, and marker  
on paper mounted on wood  
panel  
9 x 12 inches

**Contact /** @cynthiajamilhart

12



## Matt Manalo

*I Forget Forgetting My Skin  
Is A Ruin*  
2019  
Spray Paint, Acrylic Paint,  
Duct Tape on Rice Bags  
60 x 54 inches

**Contact /** @mattmanalo

15



## Hugo Pérez

*Terlingua 1*  
2021  
Acrylic on Panel  
12 x 16 inches

*Terlingua 2*  
2021  
Acrylic on Panel  
16 x 20 inches

**Contact /** @hugoperezart

13



## Erica Reed Lee

*There, Not There*  
2021  
Acrylic on canvas  
24 x 18 inches

**Contact /** @ericareedlee

16



17



**Alexandra Constantinou**

*Moon Tree: Coast Redwood*  
2021  
Silk, Coast Redwood seeds, thread, wood  
18 x 18 x 2 inches

18



*Moon Tree: Sycamore*  
2021  
Silk, Sycamore seeds, thread, wood  
18 x 18 x 2 inches

19



*Moon Tree: Sweetgum*  
2021  
Silk, Sweetgum seeds, thread, wood  
18 x 18 x 2 inches

20



*Moon Tree: Douglas Fir*  
2021  
Silk, Douglas Fir seeds, thread, wood  
18 x 18 x 2 inches

**Contact /** @maniacalstar

**Open MFA Pop-Up Exhibition**

Raven Tower / Houston, TX

March 20, 2022

Curated by Megan Olivia Ebel

@meganoliviaebel

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**Open MFA / Artist Collective**

Established in 2016

**Free and open to artists  
of any discipline**

openmfahouston.com

@openmfa

**Current organizers**

Ryan Hollaway

Hillaree Hamblin

Erica Reed Lee

Amanda Powers

**Mayra Huerta**

**Hillaree Hamblin**

**Lorena Mitchell**

**KNOWME**

**Jean Sebastien Boncy**

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