

2025

# **MFA Thesis Catalog**

James Madison University  
School of Art, Design and Art History

Michelle A. Smith | Kareena Solanki



# MFA THESIS CATALOG

James Madison University  
School of Art, Design and Art History

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### **College of Visual and Performing Arts**

Rubén Graciani, Dean

### **The Graduate School**

Dr. Linda Thomas, Dean

### **School of Art, Design and Art History**

MiKyung Lee, Director

### **Graduate Program in Studio Art**

Corinne Diop, Director

### **Duke Hall Gallery of Fine Art**

Dr. Beth Hinderliter, Director

Thank you to the many faculty, staff and students who selflessly contributed their time, mentorship and support over the past three years.

## **2025 MFA THESIS CATALOG**

James Madison University  
School of Art, Design and Art History

## **THESIS COMMITTEES**

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Greg Stewart

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### **Kareena Solanki**

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            works & statement

**MiKyoung Lee****Director of the School of Art, Design and Art History**

Michelle, your profound, process-based art-making approach reflects the sense of time and the history of existence. The containment of the anthropomorphic form in clay emerges as a substance of humanity—vulnerable yet fluid and concrete within our eternity.

Kareena, your invitation to the creative space allows me to experience spirituality and encourages me to explore unknown passages within myself. Your movements in performance have always intrigued me, offering a unique perspective that evokes a different emotion in drawing.

**Corinne Diop****Director of the Graduate Program in Studio Art**

Michelle, your thesis work is rooted in an expression of personal grief, yet also of resilience and transformation. Using clay and its processes as a metaphor, you have developed a visual language of healing and emotion that speaks not only for yourself, but for the many who seek hope beyond pain and loss.

Kareena, you skillfully integrated AI-generated images derived from world spiritual traditions into wood, fabric, glass and other materials through mechanical processes such as machine embroidery and CNC routing, merging technology, craft, ritual, and theory in innovative ways. The result is an immersive installation that invites contemplation of the divine, whether as sacred space or simulacrum.

# Michelle A. Smith

## *Grief as Slip: (how little I show)* –an exploration in clay, when words are not enough

My thesis work implies that even as we acknowledge our mortality and the fleeting nature of life, we still only reveal a fraction of our true selves or our deeper realities. The ceramic artwork in my exhibition carries and conveys a journey through the present and remembered emotions of my personal narrative. By juxtaposing the tactile nature of clay with the ethereal quality of human experience, I contemplate the profound interplay between material transformation and emotional resilience.

The intent of my exhibition is to translate the essence of complex emotional states into abstracted forms so they can be experienced and understood in new ways. These artworks serve as a foundation for fostering deeper human connections, as well as bridge the divide between what is visible and what is not (specifically internal emotional states). This exploration in clay is a glimmer of hope for those who struggle to articulate their everyday feelings or traumatic life events, emphasizing that we are not alone.

Michelle A. Smith

# Grief as Slip:

*(how little I show)*

This exploration in clay implies that even as we acknowledge our mortality and the fleeting nature of life, we still only reveal a fraction of our truest states of being – our deeper realities.

Translating the essence of complex emotional states into abstracted ceramic forms bridges the divide between what is visible and invisible, it awakens empathy for ourselves and others. This recognition is a foundation for fostering deeper human connections.

We are not alone.

**potential**, 44" h x 14" w x 13" d

failed half-reduction fired ceramic offering vessel treated with ashes and charcoal, with concrete and steel base, holding unfired, slip-cast porcelain ceramic seeds with personal directives inside

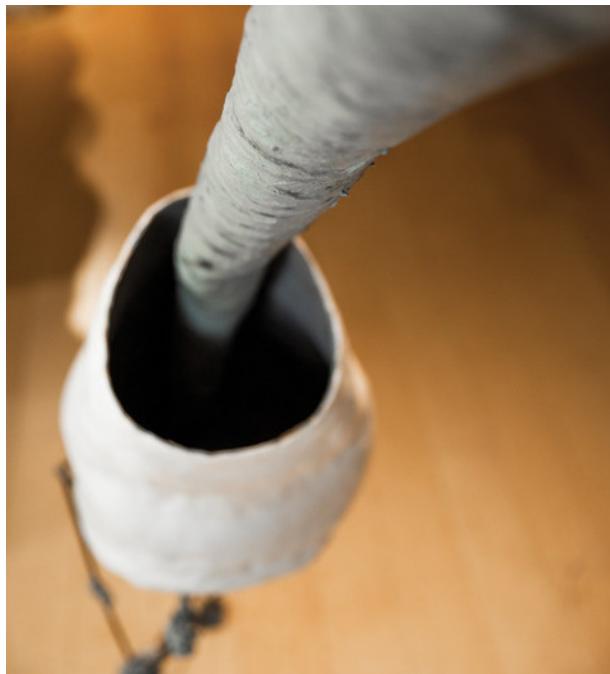


To further emphasize the underlying theme of self-care and connection I placed raw, unfired porcelain seeds in an offering vessel, available for exhibition visitors to disseminate into the wider world. By taking them from the gallery and incorporating them into their own unique lives, the audience become a living extension of my exhibition as active participants in my mission for connection and understanding.



***impact***, 64" h x 59" w x 24" d

oxidation bisque fired ceramic vessel with grief as slip, wax, adobe, concrete and steel





***solace***, 43" h x 48" w x 48" d

oxidation fired ceramic vessel with  
cold surface finishing on steel base

***unspoken***, 65" h x 19" w x 17" d

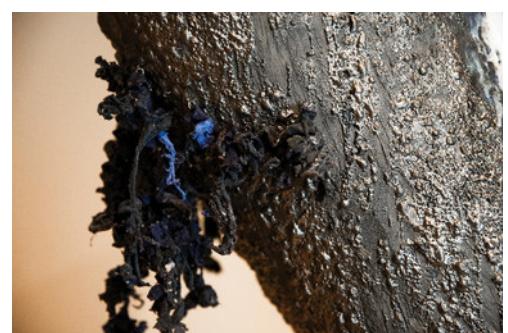
reduction fired ceramic vessel with porcelain, grief as slip, steel, reclaimed solid wood stump with adobe patch, and concrete base





***proximity***, 76" h x 41" w x 18" d

oxidation fired ceramic vessel with self-reducing  
grief as slip, glaze, black ink, kanthal wire, concrete and  
wooden base with fibers from my late husband's t-shirts  
and red common bricks from my childhood home





***Threshold of His Soul***, 59" h x 48" w x 20" d

reduction and oxidation fired ceramic vessel with self-reducing grief as slip, cold surface finishing on a cast concrete memory of a credenza with steel base





***repressed joy***, 71" h x 25" w x 24" d

oxidation fired ceramic vessel with  
self-reducing grief as slip, black ink, steel  
and black plastic bags with yellow ribbons





***subversion***, 39" h x 60" w x 45" d

oxidation fired ceramic vessel,  
adobe, steel and concrete



***mask management***, 17" h x 36" w x 18" d

oxidation fired ceramic vessel with  
self-reducing grief as slip, crystalline  
glaze, unfired porcelain casting slip





**votive terminal for reconciliation**, 114" h x 130" w x 94" d

various ceramic vessels- unfired, reduction, oxidation and wood fired, may include self-reducing grief as slip, porcelain, stoneware, black ink, glass, bronze, plaster, wood, resin, steel, fibers from my late husband's t-shirts, absence, tears and red common brick from my childhood home

*The moment I pick up a piece of clay, I begin a relationship with it.*

*Infusing the fine particles with a story of patience, silence and unseen emotions.*

*Clay does not lie, it is unwaveringly honest in its portrayal of the action upon it.*

*It is a record keeper of time and the great reveler of imperfection.*

*The language of clay is most clearly understood by those who engage with it.*

-Michelle A. Smith



# KAREENA SOLANKI

My work navigates the material tensions between artificial and authentic; immutable and hybrid; myth and fallacy; individual and collective identity; and interconnected histories through performance rituals and relics. I investigate the role of AI in creating myths and the embodied manifestations of sacredness.

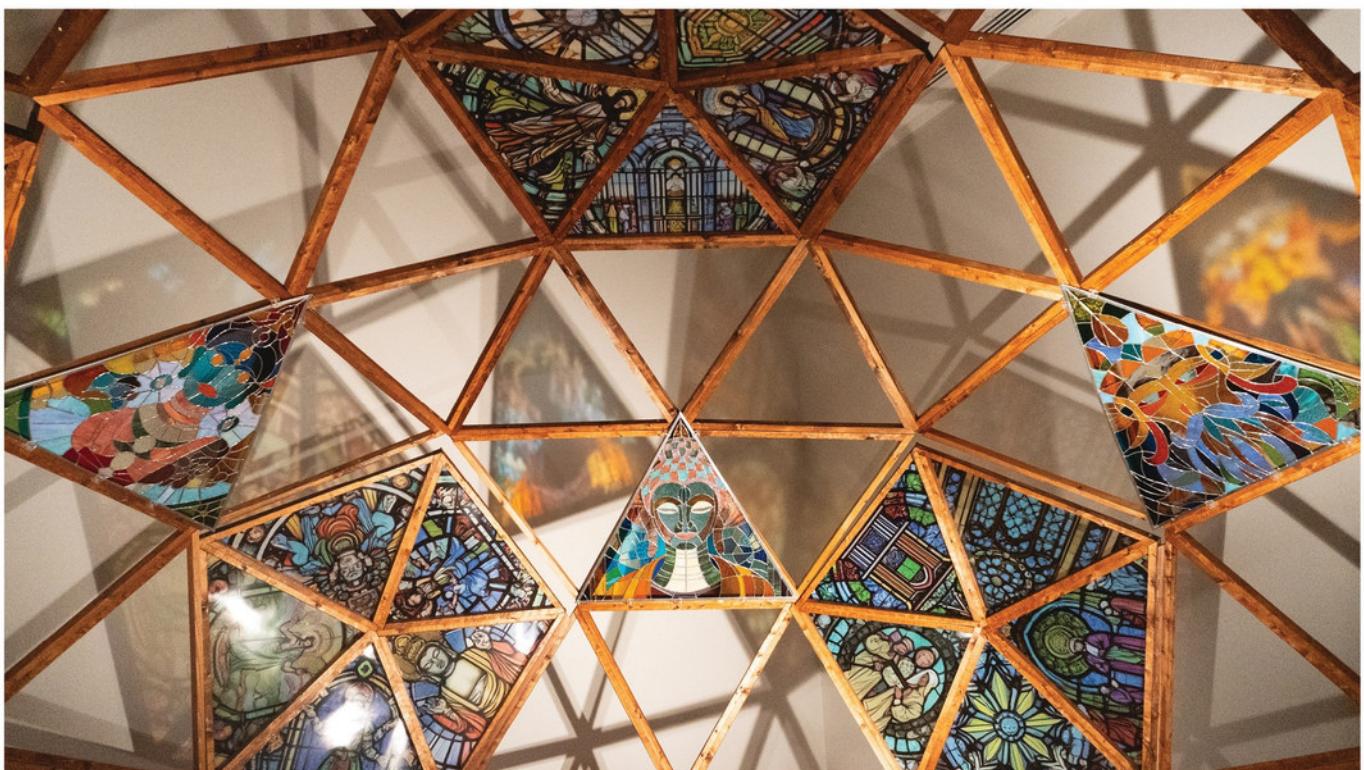


**Deity I**

Stained glass, AI

42" x 36"

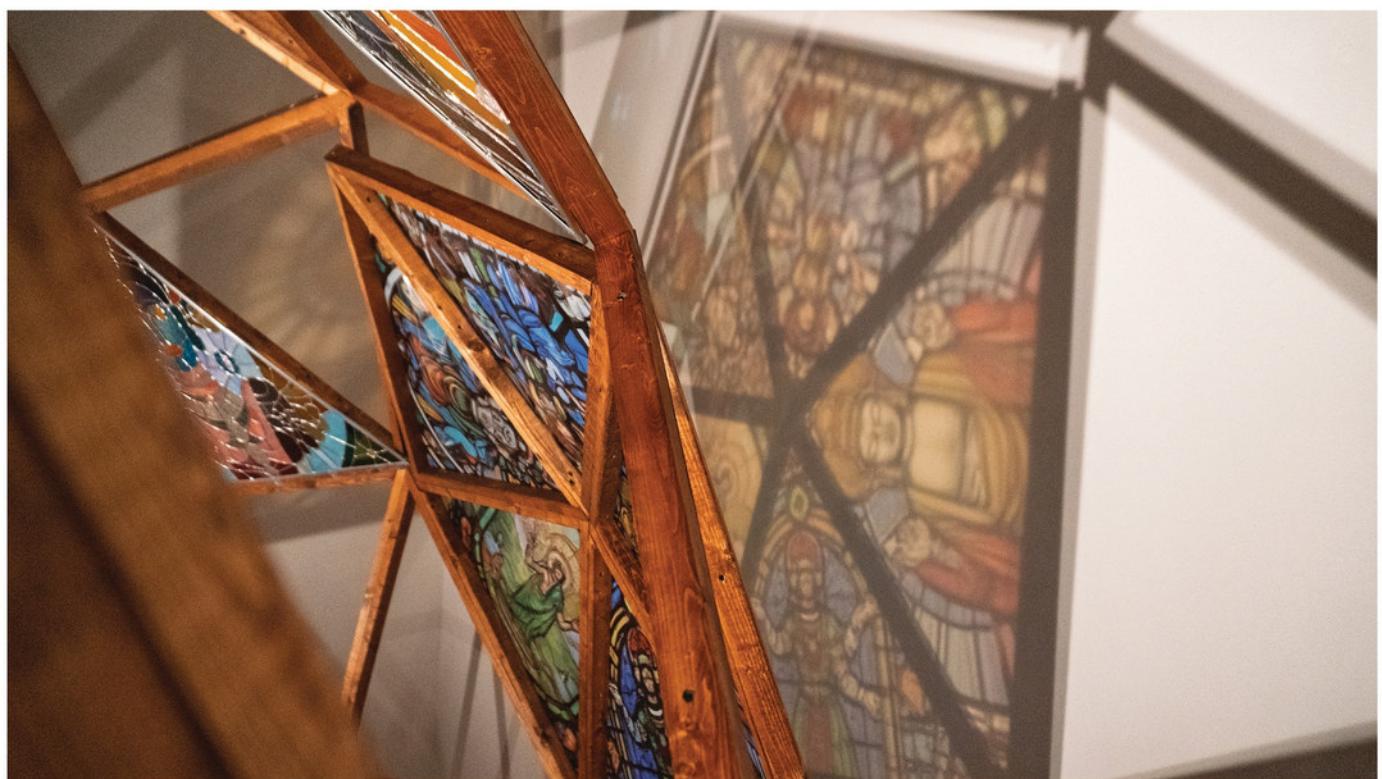
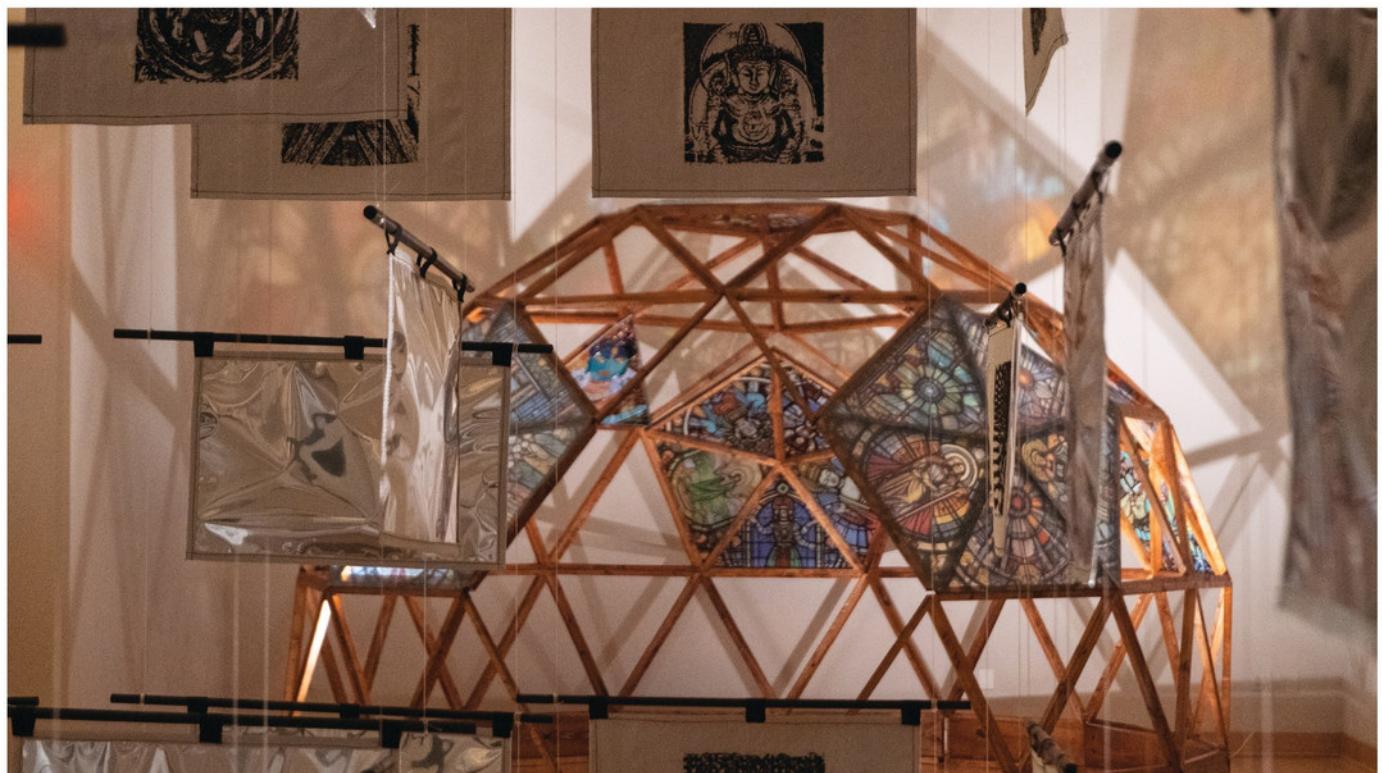


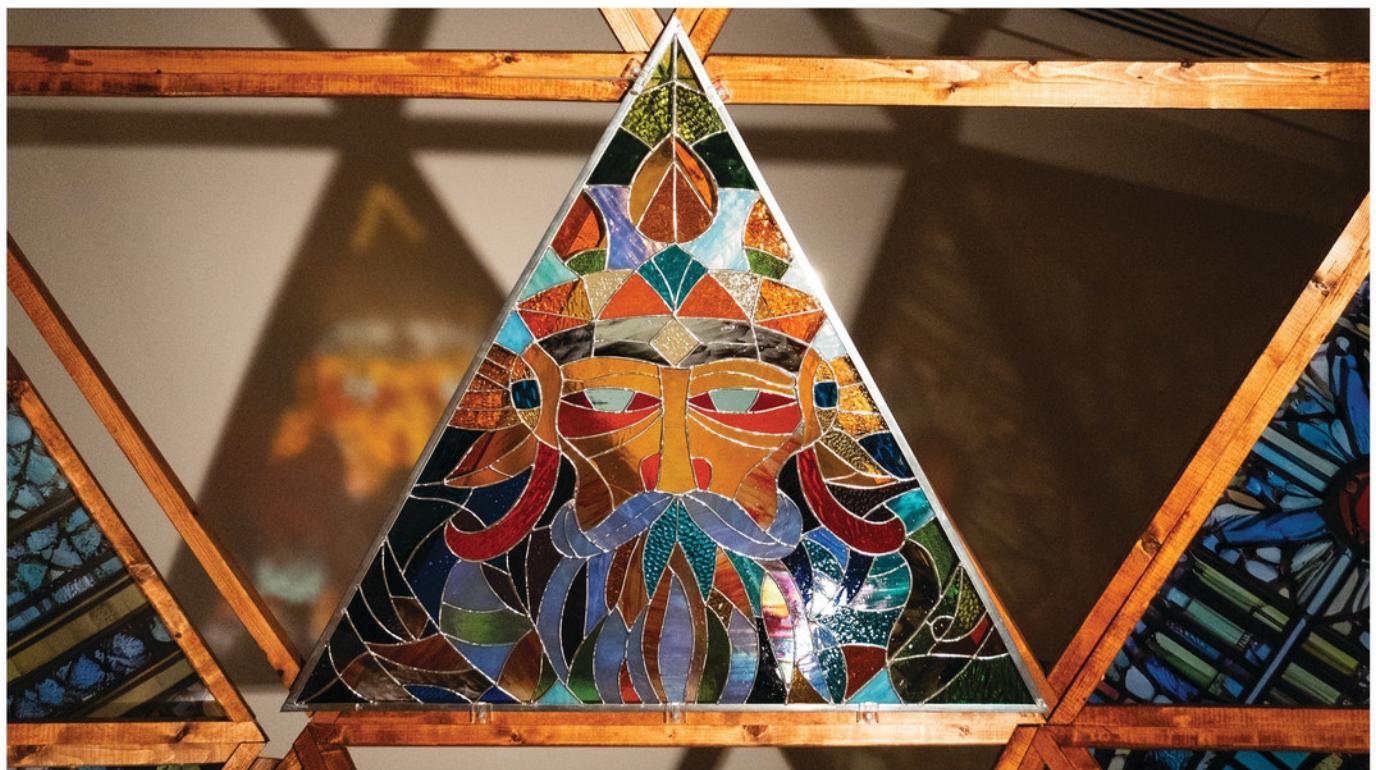


Pantheon

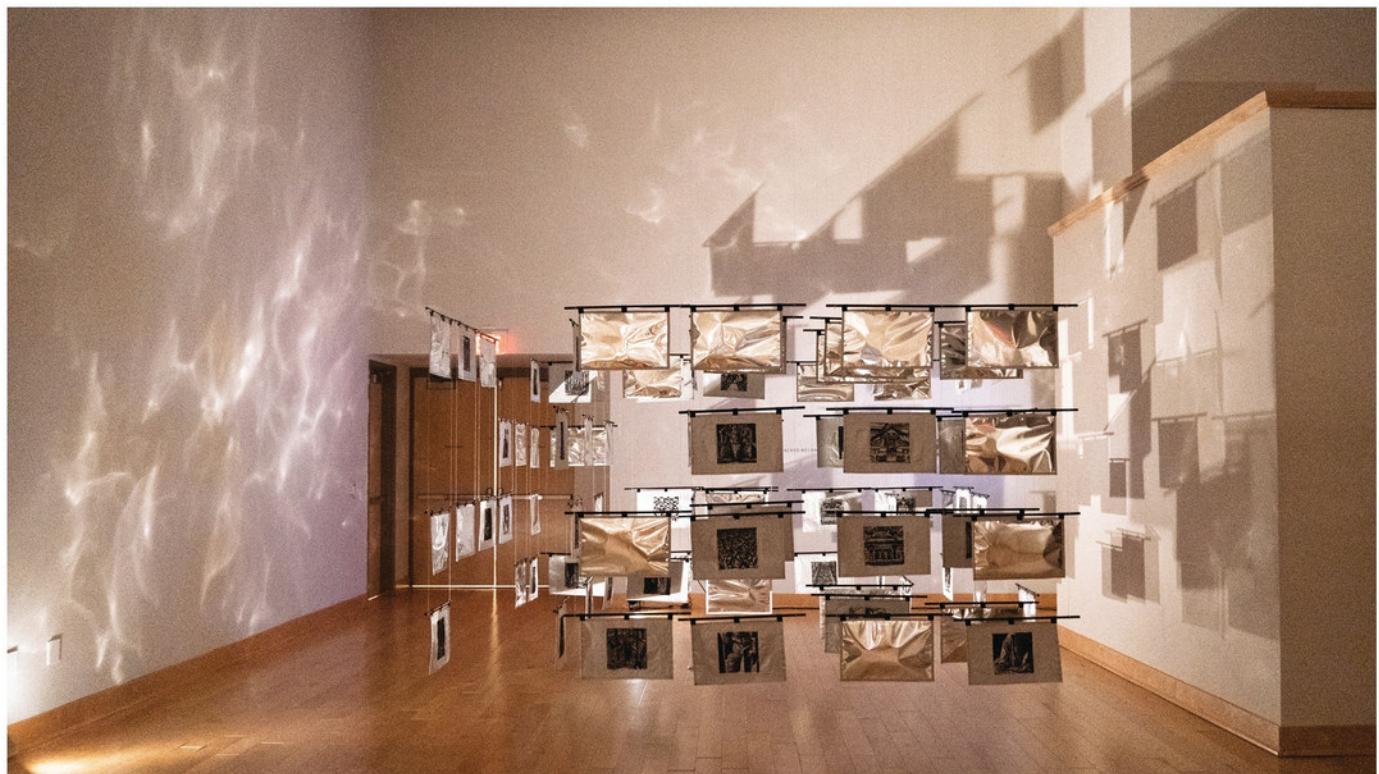
Wood, Inkjet prints on transparency film, stained glass, AI

180" x 120"



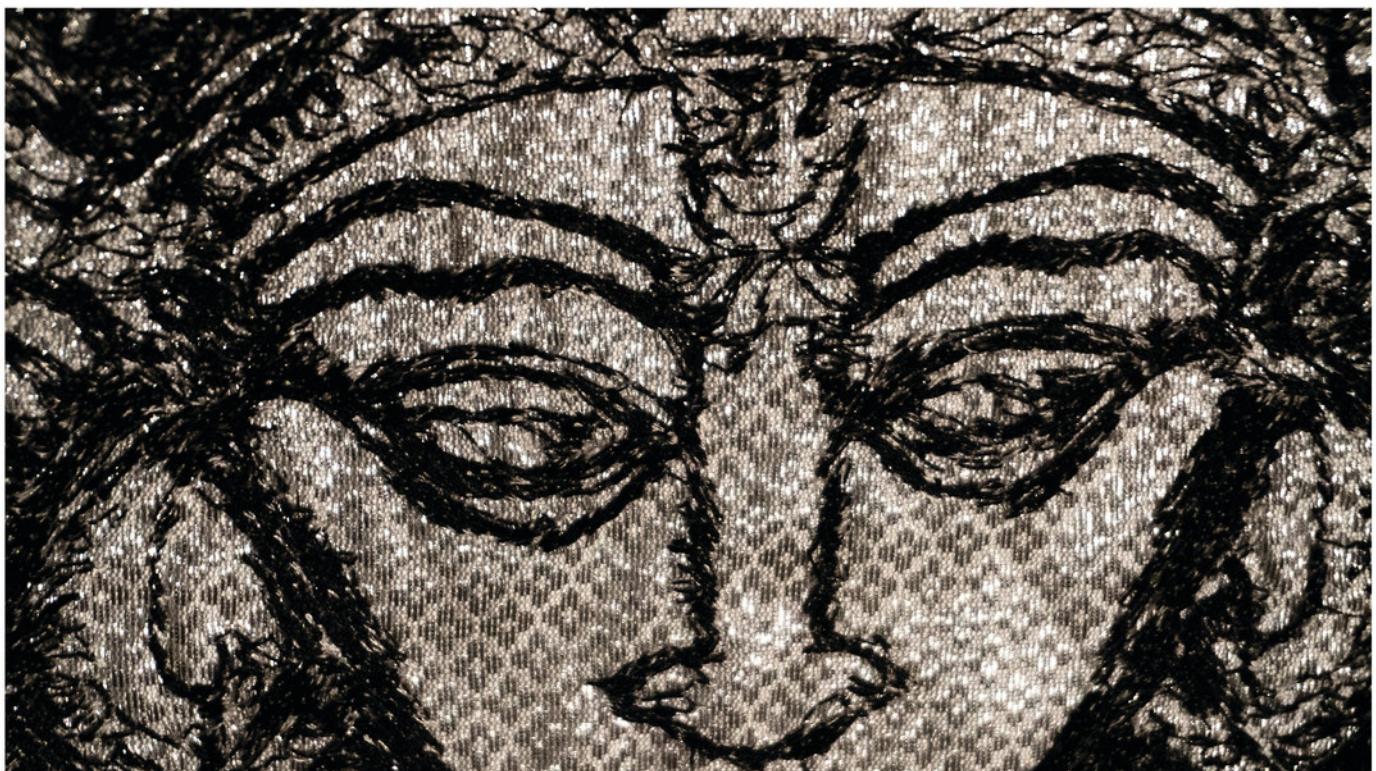
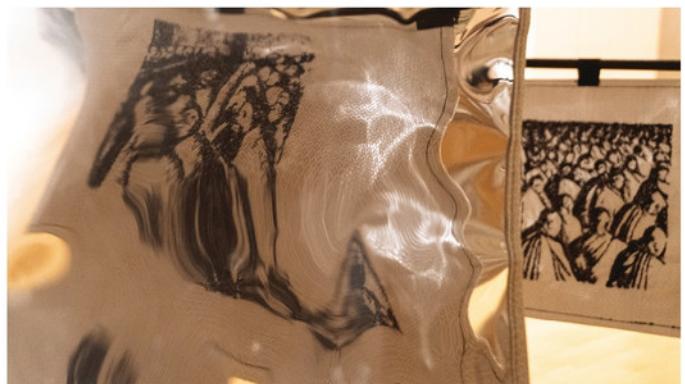
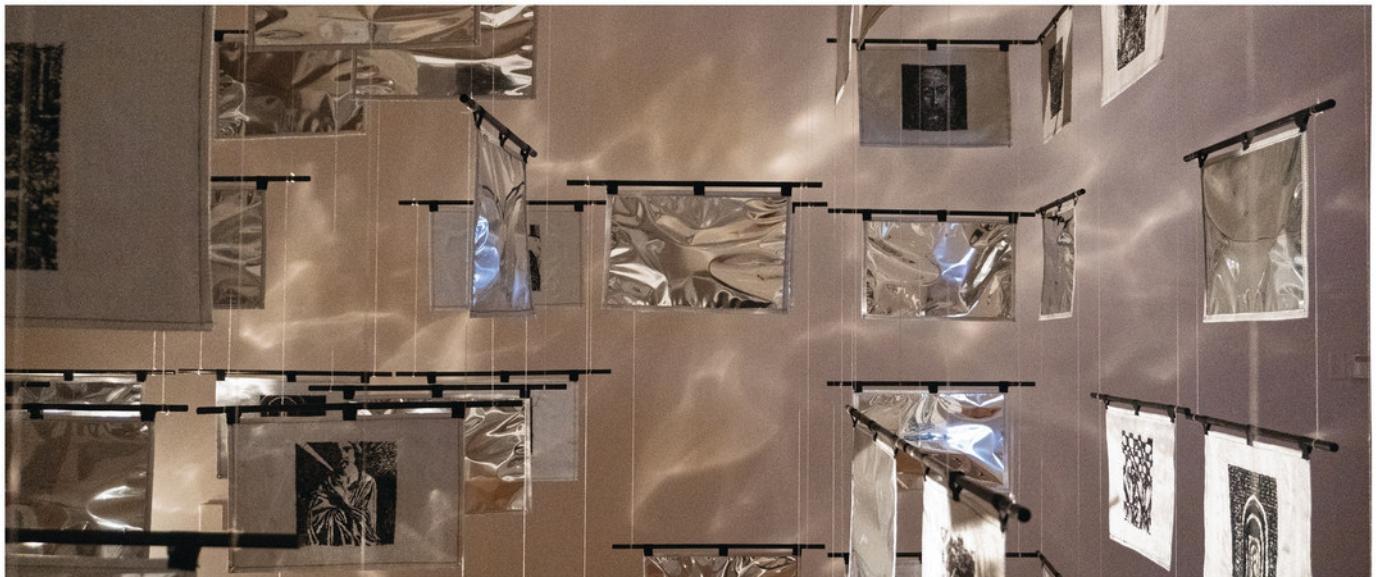


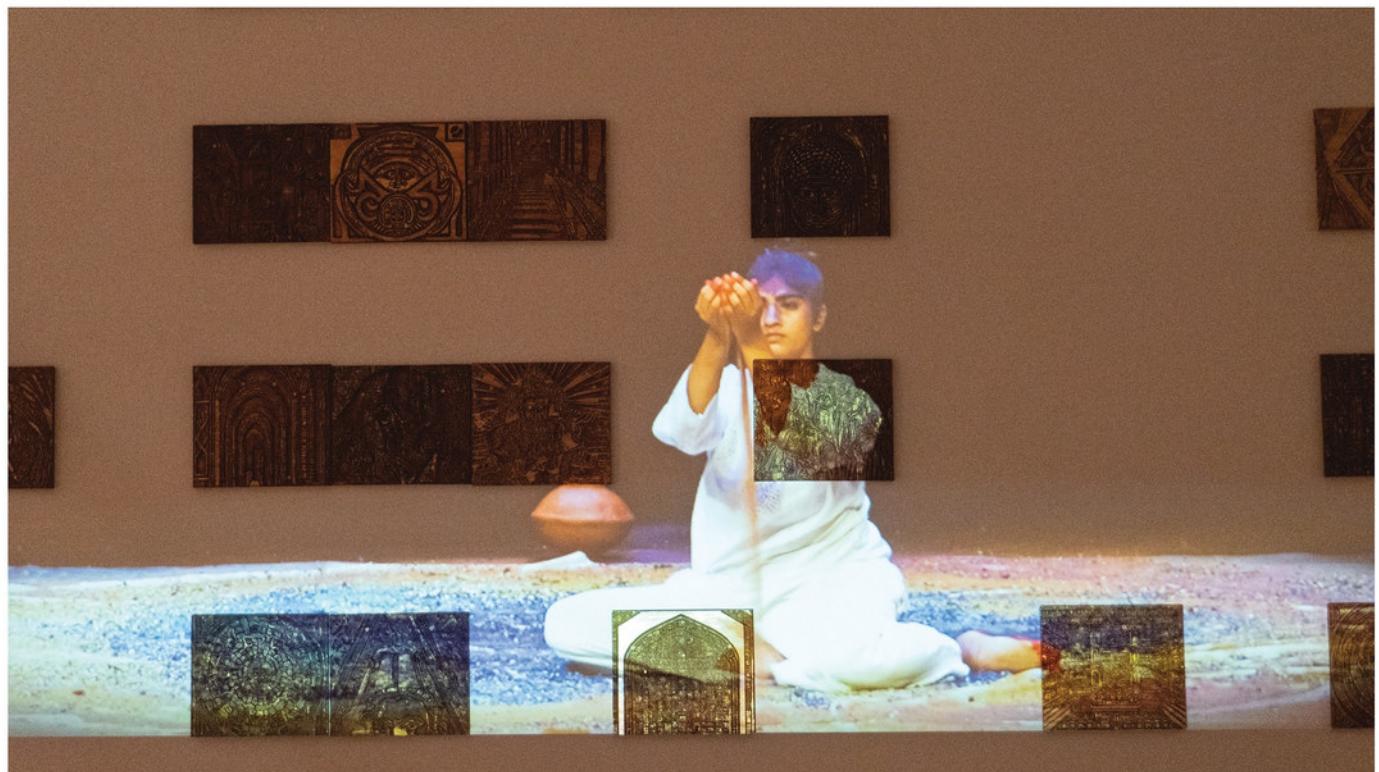
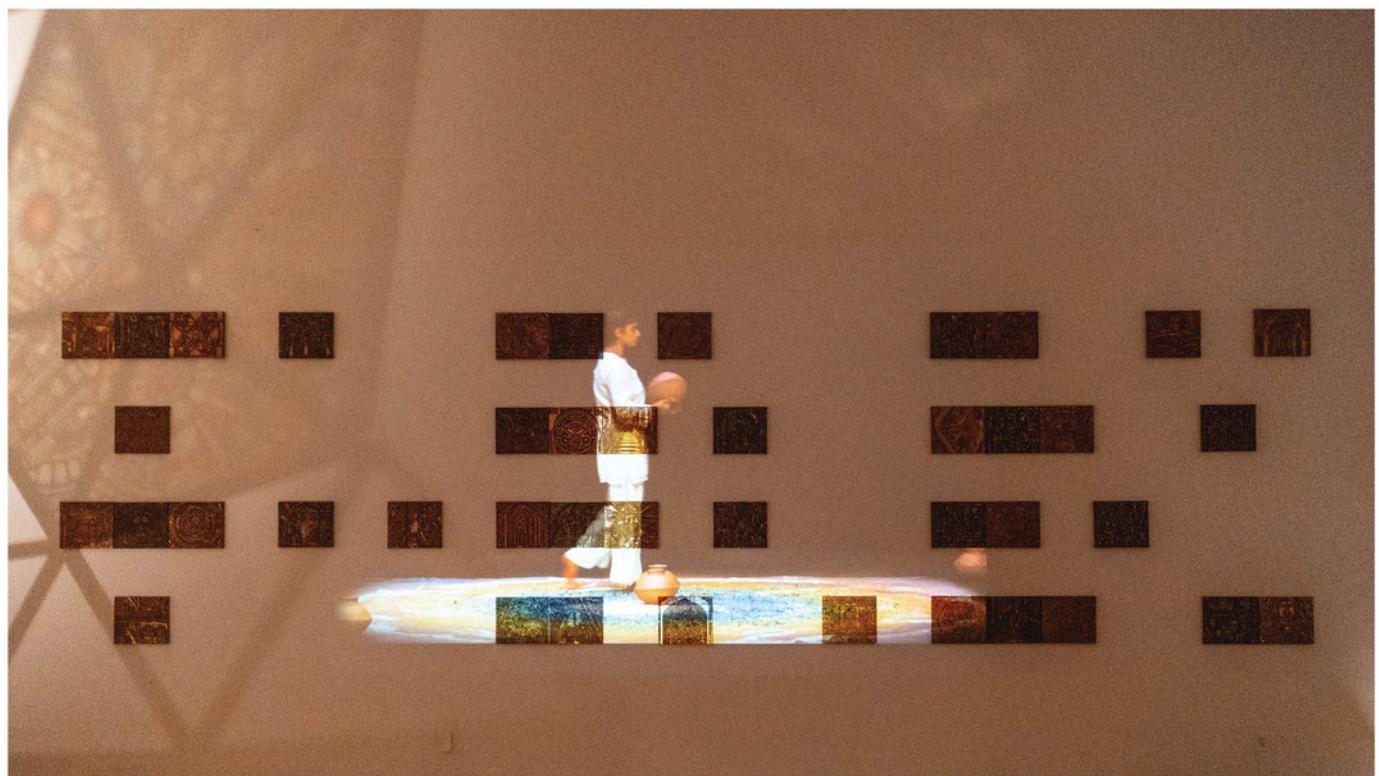
**Deity II, Deity III**  
Stained glass, AI  
42" x 36"



## Labyrinth

Machine embroidered synthetic fabric, black thread, mylar film, wooden dowels, mercerised cotton thread, Al  
120" x 144" x 84"

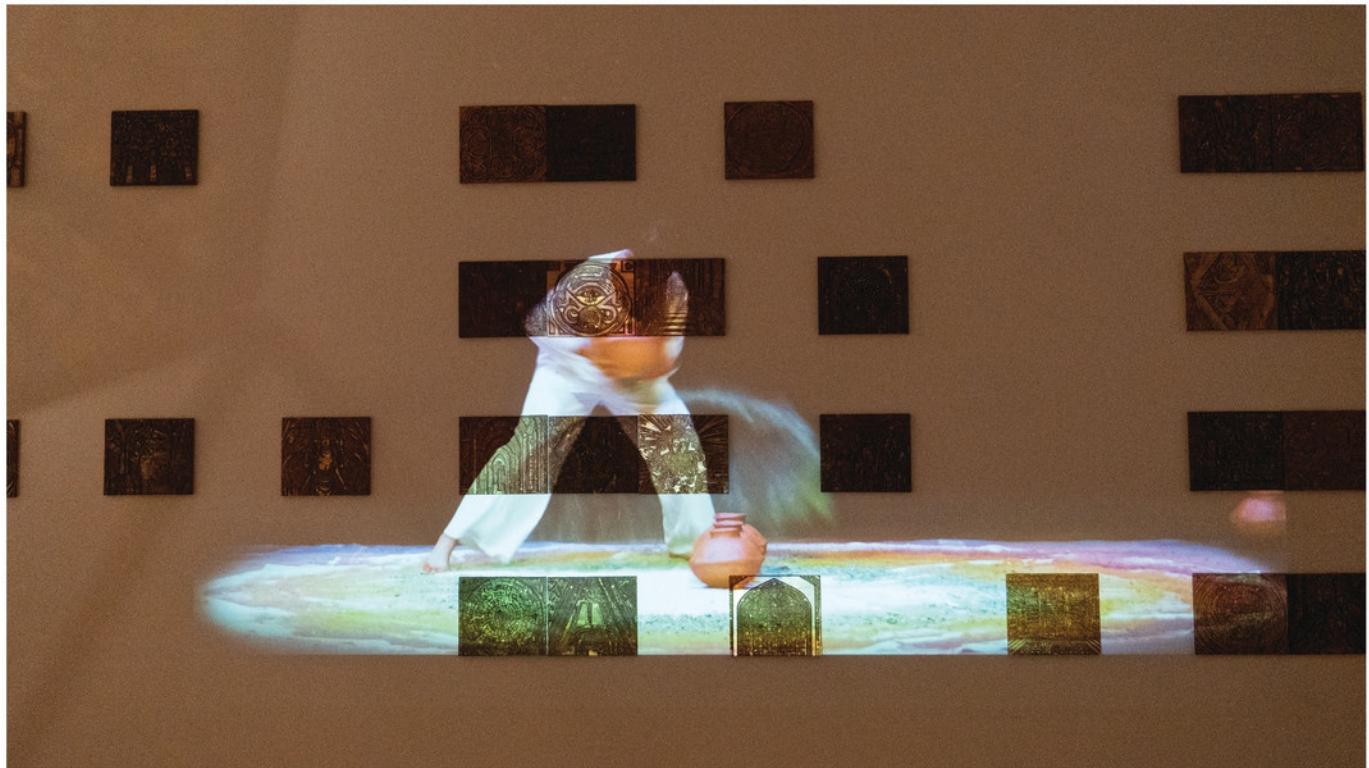




### The truth is / Binary Text

CNC engraved plywood, gold acrylic paint, AI images

324" x 120"

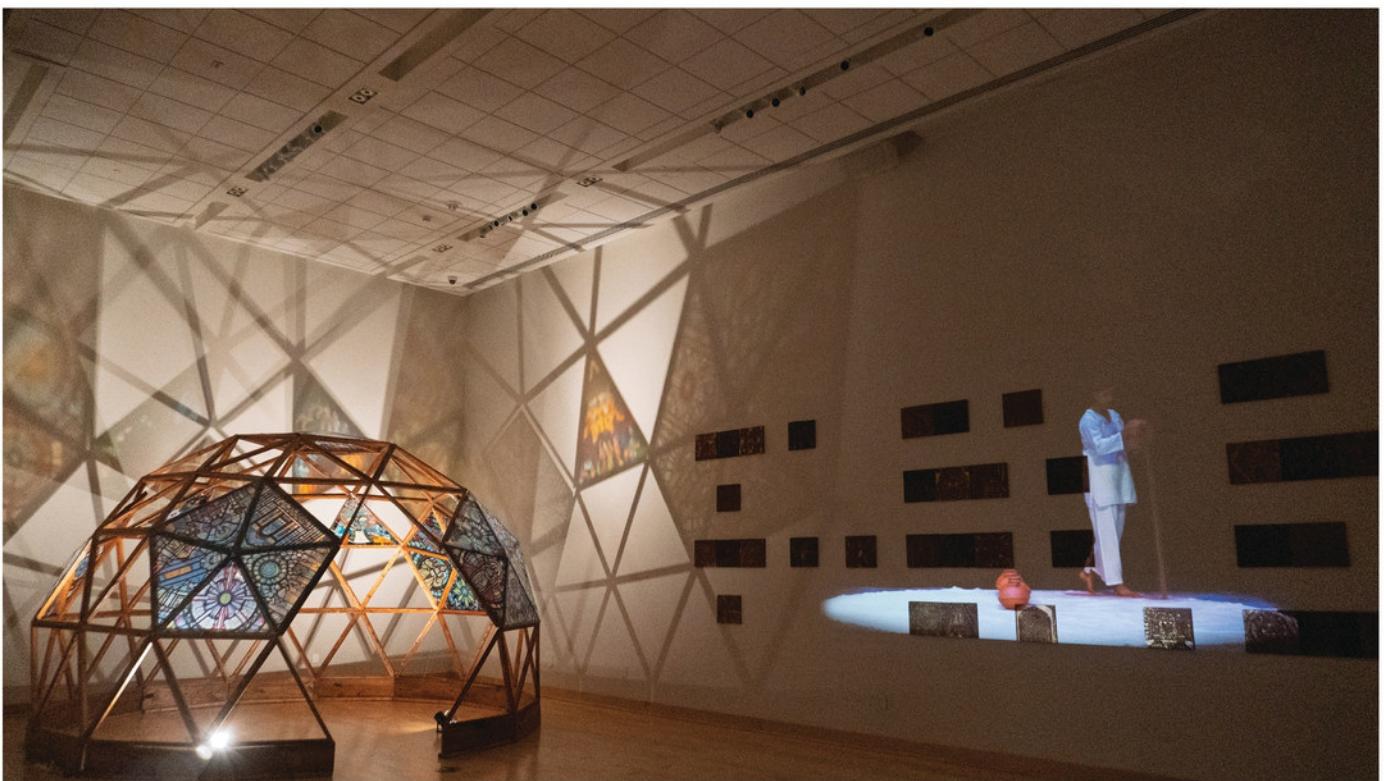




### Samsara

Copper vessel, sappanwood dye, wool, dyed water, plexiglass, wood, clay, expanded sheet metal, metal rods, upholstery fibre, CNC engraved wood panels, AI

00:04:30









DUKE HALL  
GALLERY OF  
FINE ART