

On Reworlding and Mediated Rupture, an essay for FeE, WG, MJ, GOM, DM, and CSW by Re'al Christian

“The world is before you and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in.”¹ Here, James Baldwin evokes a particular dualism—an overlap between past and future, where a general *you* shifts into a collective *our*. Intertwining time and place, the personal and the collective, Baldwin subtly implores us to reimagine the world as we presently know it and to situate, by extension, our place within it. Taking up this invitation, one might consider what forms of relationality emerge amid entangled connections between self and place, how our identities are formed in response to environmental circumstances both within and beyond our control. Touching on themes of materiality, rebirth, and rematriation, *The World Is Before You* reveals such conscious praxes, featuring six artists who delve into aspects of identity formation embedded within material histories.

1 James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), “In Search of a Majority: An Address”, 221.

For each artist in this exhibition—Francisco echo Eraso, Willa Goettling, Maya Jefferies, Gabrielle Ondine Mertz, Dario Mohr, and Carrie Sijia Wang—labor, migration, and memory act as familiar points of departure. Eraso’s *Flor de cuatro pétalos* (2023) alludes to overlapping forms of labor—the medical, the artistic, and the administrative—through the lens of care practices. His installation hinges on durationality: an eight-harness floor loom, warped with over 4,000 linen threads, is accompanied by an audio description of the loom. Our slow, somatic response to the textile in its not-yet-complete form speaks to access-driven epistemologies pitted against the trappings of progress. Dario Mohr’s installation *Trophies of War: Kingdom of Light* (2023) concerns another form of visual vernacular through an exploration of the sacred. Mohr constructs everyday altars using the trophy as a central form, evoking the culture of fetish objects on the African continent and histories of head hunting, collecting and displaying human remains as a symbol of victory. Glass, wood, gold-painted leather braids yield individual talismans that, together, form a “kingdom,” in the artist’s words, a space in which collective histories are self-contained and protected.

In Maya Jefferies’s two-part video installation *Fields Fallen from Distant Songs* (2023) and *Passages I* (2023), reclaims histories of Japanese labor on Hawai’ian sugarcane plantations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A cross-temporal narrative unfolds as ghostly images flicker across the screen: found footage of workers on the



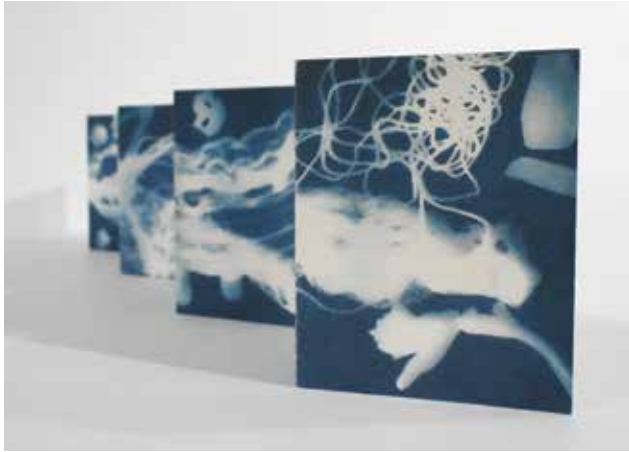
Maya Jefferies

Fields Fallen from Distant Songs, 2023
Single-channel 4K video,
16mm film (color, sound)
11:30 minutes, looped

Willa Goettling

a geology breaks in half to grow, 2023

Risograph printed
accordion fold book,
French's true-white
speckletone paper
6 x 40 inches
(6 x 5 inches folded)
Edition of 50



plantations inter-
perse with popular
folk songs, poetry,

16mm home movies shot by her grandfather in the 1960s, and the artist's own footage of the eruption of Kilauea in January 2023. The material, economic, and cultural connotations of sugar are inextricable from histories of migration and displacement, but Jefferies attempts to reframe this narrative by exploring notions of rematriation, of returning ancestral land. Disrupted soil becomes a space of continuous rebirth. Willa Goettling's installation similarly deals with generational ecologies. Inspired by her father's occupation as a stonemason, Goettling reveals hidden dualities embedded within materials—poetic phrases engraved into hard surfaces and a risograph that builds an intimate dialogue between human and nonhuman beings become allegory for examining one's roots. Working with the same material as her father, the artist makes herself a proxy to better understand his work while reflecting on larger issues of labor, capitalism, and their effects on the body, particularly in relation to her own work. In this process of reduction, of taking away to see what remains, Goettling explores stone as material, memorial, and metaphor.

Other artists in the exhibition explore the materiality of mediated experiences, both analog and digital. Gabrielle Ondine Mertz's series of saturated pigment paintings grapple with the

realities of visual overload permeating modern media culture. In Mertz's work, the image frame becomes a reliquary for meta-data and obsolescence. In isolating and blowing up fragments of media, from viral videos and sensationalized news narratives to age-defining moments witnessed in real time, Mertz brings our attention to processes of information capture that underlie the media landscape as we currently know it. Carrie Sijia Wang's interactive *Hey Alien: Integration Assessment Examination Practice Test* similarly enacts the digital, combining elements of real and fictional worlds. Misrecognition, mishearing, and misunderstanding are inherent in the AI's interface, but, as Wang observes, these interfaces are experienced both on and offline, digitally and physically. Rather than focusing on the potentiality of AI, Wang asks us to consider how the technology influences human to human interaction, how the technology mediates communications, generates prompts, predetermines how we perceive acceptability, normalcy, value, and agency adjacent to machines. In doing so, Wang evaluates our individual abilities to exist within this system, to code switch, to slip between.

With distinct methodologies and materials, Eraso, Goettling, Jefferies, Mertz, Mohr, and Wang each reveal the symbiotic relationship between the self and a specific time and place, encountering new modes of identity formation that tend to exist when this connection is ruptured, an overflow of information searching for a material container. Returning to Baldwin's invitation, *The World is Before You* asks us to consider our own histories, our bodies, our output, to re-situate ourselves within the world as we know it. Thinking across labor, access, movement, and memory, the artists gathered here conjure their own means of worldbuilding, re-envisioning the present by speculating on what we leave behind.