

PERSONAL BELONGING

March 4th - April 11th
Alumni Gallery, Historic Landmark Building

Tabitha Arnold

Doah Lee

Julia McGehean



Personal Belonging is an exhibition that explores what “belonging” means. Curated by PAFA alum Kate McCammon (MFA '16), the exhibition features work of Tabitha Arnold (BFA '17), Doah Lee (PAFA Artist-in-Residence and Visiting Critic '20), and Julia McGehean (BFA '18).



(Left) Tabitha Arnold, *This Woman's Work*, 21" x 27", tufted wool rug, 2021; (Middle) Doah Lee, *We Alter and Repair*, 11" x 15.5", gum bichromate over cyanotype, 2019; (Right) Julia McGehean, *Generation Gap*, 16"x20", Solvent transfer and colored pencil on Bristol, 2021

“Belonging” can mean “an affinity for a place or situation”, and it can indicate ownership of an object. That is, the word could describe a feeling of being welcomed and meshing with one’s community or it may refer to one’s possessions. In this interdisciplinary exhibition, material objects evoke thoughts and emotions connected to place, identity, and otherness. Arnold’s rugs utilize tactile, symbolic imagery, to tell the interwoven, tangled struggles associated with social reform. With complex layers and dynamic compositions, Lee’s artworks play the game of hide and seek and double entendre through a childlike lens to speak to the influence that cultural images can have on one’s self-identity. Cycling among human impulses—such as accumulation, abundance, and absence—McGehean’s constructed worlds culminate in vibrating and poetic clusters of familiar objects from an unfamiliar time that is just out of reach.

Using simplified forms, familiar symbols, and nostalgic references based on their critique of contemporary culture, the artists invite the viewers to explore their own sense of belonging and pose questions about their process of self-discovery.

The roots of the exhibition grew a year ago when McCammon admired McGehean’s playful collages and Arnold’s striking rugs that she had watched develop through studying and working at PAFA. She eventually came across the multi-media works of PAFA artist-in-residence, Lee, and the dots connected.

McCammon began to organize an exhibition, which was to open in Spring 2020. The pandemic squashed the opportunity. With the new year of 2021, the project was resurrected, discovering new works creating by the artists within the past year and finding new common threads among them. For McCammon, the sharing of the work of three female artists exploring their personal histories through an interdisciplinary lens felt even more fitting as we celebrate Women’s History Month through March.



Julia McGehean, *Shelf Life of A Memory* (Detail), mixed media (solvent transfer, colored pencil, acrylic, sand, Plexiglas on Bristol mounted to canvas, 14' x 10', 2020

Tabitha Arnold

Tabitha Arnold is an artist and political organizer in Philadelphia. Since receiving her BFA from Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art in 2017, she has explored the places where fiber art intersects with contemporary storytelling. In 2020, her touch-sensitive interactive tapestry, "Our Sutured City," was highlighted in the international ALT.CTRL showcase at Game Developers Conference.

Arnold has exhibited work in group shows around the US, including the Woodmere Museum in Philadelphia, the Baltimore Theatre Project, and Bunker Projects in Pittsburgh. She is the 2021 Artist-in-Residence at the Glen Foerd estate.

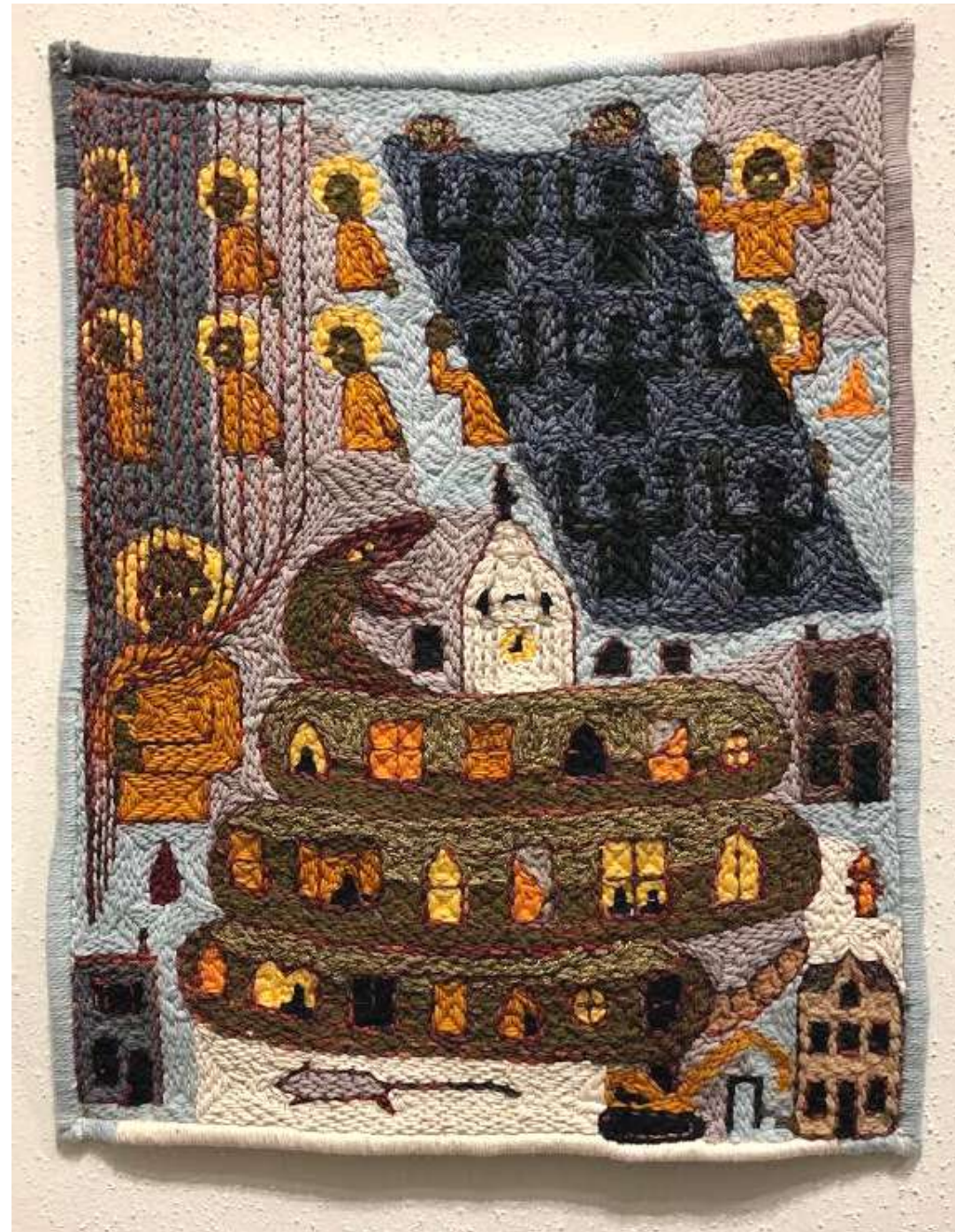


Tabitha Arnold, *This Woman's Work*, 21" x 27", tufted wool rug, 2021

"I started making textiles around the time I decided I wanted a piece of history. Living in a frustrating media landscape that distorts reality before our eyes, I feel I can stay sane by working on my own counter-narrative. The resulting images affirm the world I know: one filled with political struggle and protest in Philadelphia and beyond.

Drawing on my perspective as a labor organizer, my artwork often uplifts grand narratives about justice and worker power. These exalted images are interwoven with simpler passages of everyday life in Philadelphia. "Boner 4ever" graffiti, as recognizable to some as the looming face of City Hall, beckons to fellow residents like a secret handshake. Byzantine ikons, relics from my childhood that clutter my adult apartment, make their way into the artwork and become reflections on contemporary sainthood and martyrdom.

Like Afghan rugs embedded with woven planes and burning towers, my work connects to a rich tradition of fiber art behaving as a vessel for alternative histories."



Tabitha Arnold, *Curtain*, 21" x 27", tufted wool rug, 2020



(Left) Tabitha Arnold, *October*,
34"x 56", tufted wool rug, 2018

(Right) Installation view

Doah Lee

Doah Lee is an interdisciplinary visual artist based in Philadelphia. She was born and raised in Seoul, South Korea. She earned her MFA from the University of Pennsylvania and her BFA with a concentration in Painting and Printmaking at the School of Art Institute of Chicago. In her artwork, she explores and utilizes cultural symbols through repetition in a practice that mediates on cultural translation, immigration, otherness, and femininity in focusing more specifically on the issues of self-identification. She is interested in how the ways children speak, listen, see, and draw reveal their developing identities. She investigates how their relationships, as well as socio-political and cultural pressures, become influencing points in the development of those identities. Her artwork has been featured in exhibitions in Virginia, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Los Angeles, and Seoul, South Korea. She has been a resident-artist at the Vermont Studio Center and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. She is a curator and co-director of the artist-run exhibition space, FJORD Gallery and currently teaches at Haverford School and Fleisher Art Memorial.



Doah Lee, *Say You Are Worthy*, 65" x 114", mixed media on canvas, 2017-2020

"Sailor-Moon is a fictional superhero schoolgirl who was popularized in Japanese animation and culture in the early 90's. She had her prime time in Asia, her birthplace, while finding a new home in American society through her expedition overseas. Sailor-Moon also had her prime time in America, but the American Sailor-Moon does not remember her time in Asia, and vice versa. Now, the Sailor-Moons are meeting in Chinatown, in the U.S., connecting their hands, touching their palms. Fingers are weaving together their lives, and they are turning around, facing people through self-conscious eyes, showing how the outer world has been consuming and perceiving them in the reality.

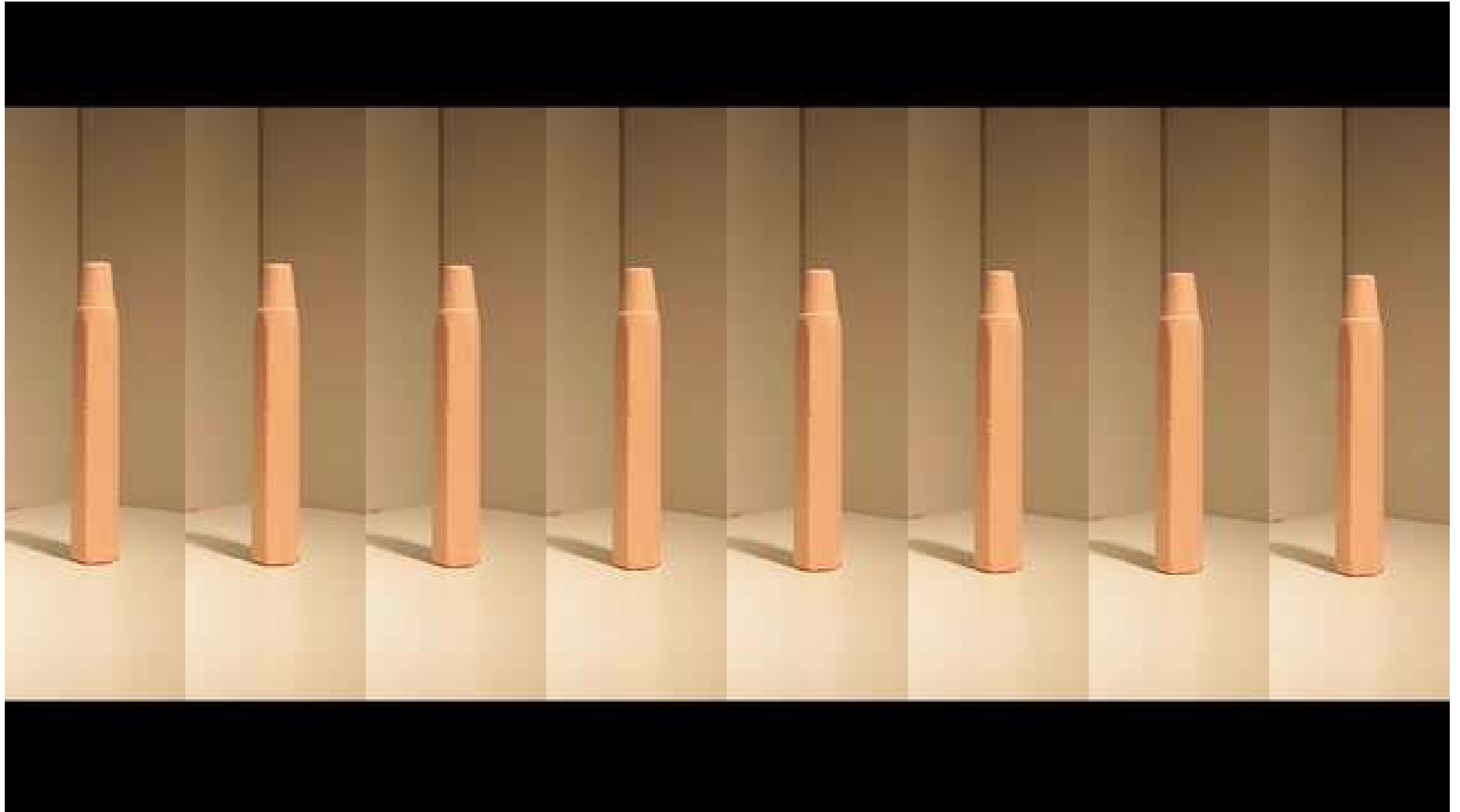
This action is a coalition of missing moments in different spaces and time in the different universes and is a reflection of my life's journey. Dislocating myself from Korea to the U.S. constructs my experiential process as a reality of what it means to live as a foreigner and Asian woman in America today. I explore and utilize cultural symbols repeatedly in my practice that reflects on conflicted cultural translation, immigration, otherness, and femininity while interrogating issues of self-identification under the generalization of race, culture and gender.

I am interested in researching the impact of media and image culture on an individual's identity formation under socio-political and cultural pressures during one's childhood. I search through the ways of how children speak, listen, see and draw, and their relationships with the influencing points that evince these pressures.

My studio process integrates diverse aspects of printmaking, textiles and installation elements into the format of painting. I dye my own fabric, iron and hand sew the digitally printed textile images, screen print along with drawing, painting, and finish with layering various images on top of the other. This creative process is a response to my experience of the complex nature of the two different environments, such as the politics of education systems and cities both foreign and familiar. My work is about reconciling all the fragmented and conflicted identities into a hybrid format by manipulating the full range of languages from sophisticated pictorial tools to the use of all the ingredients of childhood materials and cute, naïve and uninhibited ways."



Doah Lee, *We Alter and Repair*, 11" x 15.5",
gum bichromate over cyanotype, 2019



Doah Lee, *In and Out Colors*, Video, 2015

Julia McGehean

Julia McGehean is a multi-disciplinary artist based in Philadelphia, PA. She earned her BFA in sculpture and painting from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in May of 2018, and works full time in a university library. McGehean combines processes of photo-based printmaking, objects, and painting into mixed media assemblages. Since graduation, she has shown around the city of Philadelphia, VAE Gallery in North Carolina, Volkswagen Headquarters in Virginia, Lancaster Museum of Art in Pennsylvania, and received the VSA Emerging Young Artist Award.



Julia McGehean, *Generation Gap*, 16"x20", Solvent transfer and colored pencil on Bristol, 2021

"As the only child of an older single mother, and a very dead, even older father, the studio has become a place to process the blunt realization that I will outlive my aging family sooner than I would like. My object based practice reflects a mix of grieving strategies that my relatives swear by, such as combing through local thrift shops, as if to uncover a sense of closure at the bottom of a novelty mug. Through this therapeutic family routine, I have amassed hundreds of color coded items that I pull from to make assemblages on the floor of my studio.

While I will eventually inherit all of my loved one's clutter, they have already passed down the most important component to my creative practice; a twice exceptional brain that allows me to process information differently than others. My work illustrates the chaotic dynamics of expressing myself as a promising lateral thinker, while working hard to compensate for an array of learning disabilities. For example, when my eyes scan a string of letters on a white page, they are constantly jolted up, down, backwards, and forwards; all while skipping over or introducing new words that do not belong. These jumbled sentences often have a humorous quality that embodies a similar absurdity to a discordant cluster of bric-à-brac on the kitchen table. My compositional tendencies mimic this turbulent ocular pattern by scattering sentimental souvenirs in a similar circular motion.

These physical collages seamlessly shift into works on paper that become abstracted interpretation of daily life, while playfully condensing time and space. These liminal environments often invite an unsteady slippage by collapsing multiple perspectives into one picture plane while juxtaposing color, size, scale, and function. I am drawn to the gauzy precision of solvent transfer as a rogue reproductive technique to carefully render and rapidly layer pictorial conversations. As a full-time library technician, I am ironically surrounded by this collision of visual and text based learning on a daily basis. Through this constant exposure, I have interpreted a rocky relationship with reading into an object based language that translates my strengths in creative problem solving and emotional sensitivity."



Julia McGehean, *Snowmen Sleep in the Sea*, 15"x12.75", Solvent transfer and colored pencil on Bristol, 2020



Julia McGehean, *Shelf Life of A Memory*, mixed media (solvent transfer, colored pencil, acrylic, sand, Plexiglas on Bristol mounted to canvas, 14' x 10', 2020



