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5-22-2024

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### Recommended Citation

Creson, Fern, "2024-05-22 Seniors Say a Farewell at the Fine Arts Photography Show" (2024). *The Spectator Online*. 1298.

<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online/1298>

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# Seniors Say a Farewell at the Fine Arts Photography Show

Fern Creson, Staff Photographer

The Photography Senior Bachelor in Fine Arts (BFA) Show is an annual celebration of the graduating seniors' past years of hard work. The opening ceremony took place May 16 at the art gallery in the Fine Arts building. Photographers of Seattle University,



A woman, Peiran's neighbor, observing Gracie O'Dwyer's series Haunted.

from fresh-faced first-years to alumni, gather together to admire museum-worthy collections produced by the senior cohort.

I look forward to this event every year, anticipating the opportunity to come into a community with so many admirable artists, family, friends and teachers. There is something deeply personal about each and every work of art; an intimate expression of self.

During his speech, Professor Trung Pham described the show as "a journey of true identity."

"We need them. They go into the depth of their being and get us to see what those moments look like. So we're here to celebrate them, their contribution to what we are facing right now; With immigration, politics, racial injustice," Pham said.

The photography program at Seattle U prides itself on producing genuine artists, focusing on self expression through fine art photography. I talked to some of those artists about their journey through the program: who they entered as, how they are leaving, and the impactful moments throughout.

Hannah Sutherland, whose work beautifully captures the dichotomy of being adopted into a white family, recalls her experience



Fern Creson

The graduating BFA in Photography students of 2024, with Professor Claire Garoutte in the center.

making her series “Li Qian” over this past year.

“This was a fundamental journey for me as a person and as an artist. Coming to terms with my adoption and meditating through my process was something I felt I needed to do. It was a painful and emotional process, but it was also rewarding and healing for me,” Sutherland said.

Similarly, all the other featured artists I spoke to defined their work as a meditation on a darker and deeper aspect of themselves. For Emily Harper-Johnson, her work sifted through old memories, trying to distinguish truth and reality from childhood. Peiran Liu and his huge prints of abstracts linked vibrant color to emotional terrain. And as for Ashley Miya, she practiced reconnecting to one’s heritage. All these artists, and everyone in the show, produced impactful and truthful series that embodied their individual experiences.

Although photography is an individual sport, it takes a village to produce a good artist. When working alongside others, having a sense of community, closeness and safety is crucial. Many of this year’s seniors expressed their appreciation for their cohort, including Sutherland.

“The strength of your cohort and your connections will benefit your work greatly. I’m so happy to have had such a tight knit community with my group, and they’ve pushed me so much as an artist,” Sutherland said.



Professor Trung Pham giving an opening speech. (Fern Creson)

Emma Swanson, whose work acts as a diary of small moments, stressed the importance of having people who give constructive criticism, colleagues who want to see each other get better.

It is also such a sentimental night, where teachers who have guided these young adults over four years, send them off. One particularly notable character in the Seattle U Photography scene is Claire Garoutte; teacher, advisor and beloved colleague. Within the program are endless stories about Garoutte’s influence on students’ decision to switch to a photography major, and how she has truly touched each of their lives.

“I’m just really proud of them... A B.F.A. is a professional arts degree, it’s serious, and I feel like every year [is wonderful] and this year is absolutely no exception. This year is spectacular. I feel like they rose to the occasion,” Garoutte said.

This year’s cohort came into the program at very different points in their life, but now unite on this one night to celebrate how far they have come, as people and in art. When asked what their futures look like, many expressed uncertainty and excitement. The natural path of an artist is to aim to get into a museum or gallery, so having created a full, professional series of work sets students up to begin such endeavors.

Miya’s multimedia series reckons with Asian-American trauma, and she knows there is still so much left to be expressed. She looks to continue her series after graduation. Sutherland will be moving to New York and on her way to getting a Master’s Degree in Film, whereas Liu looks forward to jumping right back into commercial photography.

No matter where these artists end up in the next few years, one thing is certain, the graduating photographers of 2024 will continue to make great art. You can see the exhibition on your own time, on the first floor of the Fine Arts building before June 7th.