

# BAI BAUTISTA-BUCKINGHAM

WANDERINGS: 2024 UNDERGRADUATE FINE ARTS THESIS EXHIBITION

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DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

# WANDERINGS:

## 2024 UNDERGRADUATE FINE ARTS THESIS EXHIBITION

Glass Curtain Gallery May 10–June 7, 2024

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*Wanderings: 2024 Undergraduate Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition* features the works of eight BFA candidates in Columbia's Fine Arts program. The exhibition, which includes paintings, drawings, sculpture, prints, video, mixed media, and installation works, represents the culmination of four years of development of a cohesive body of work for each artist while earning their degrees.

**Participating artists:** Paul Bonokollie, Bai Bautista-Buckingham, Karington Cox, Marjorie Hellyer, Robyn Leah, Finch Naradowski, Kai Offett, and Bibiana Saucedo

*Wanderings: 2024 Undergraduate Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition* is presented in conjunction with the Department of Exhibitions, Performance, and Student Spaces (DEPS) and the Art | Design Department, and Joan Giroux, Professor at Columbia College Chicago.

# BAI BAUTISTA-BUCKINGHAM

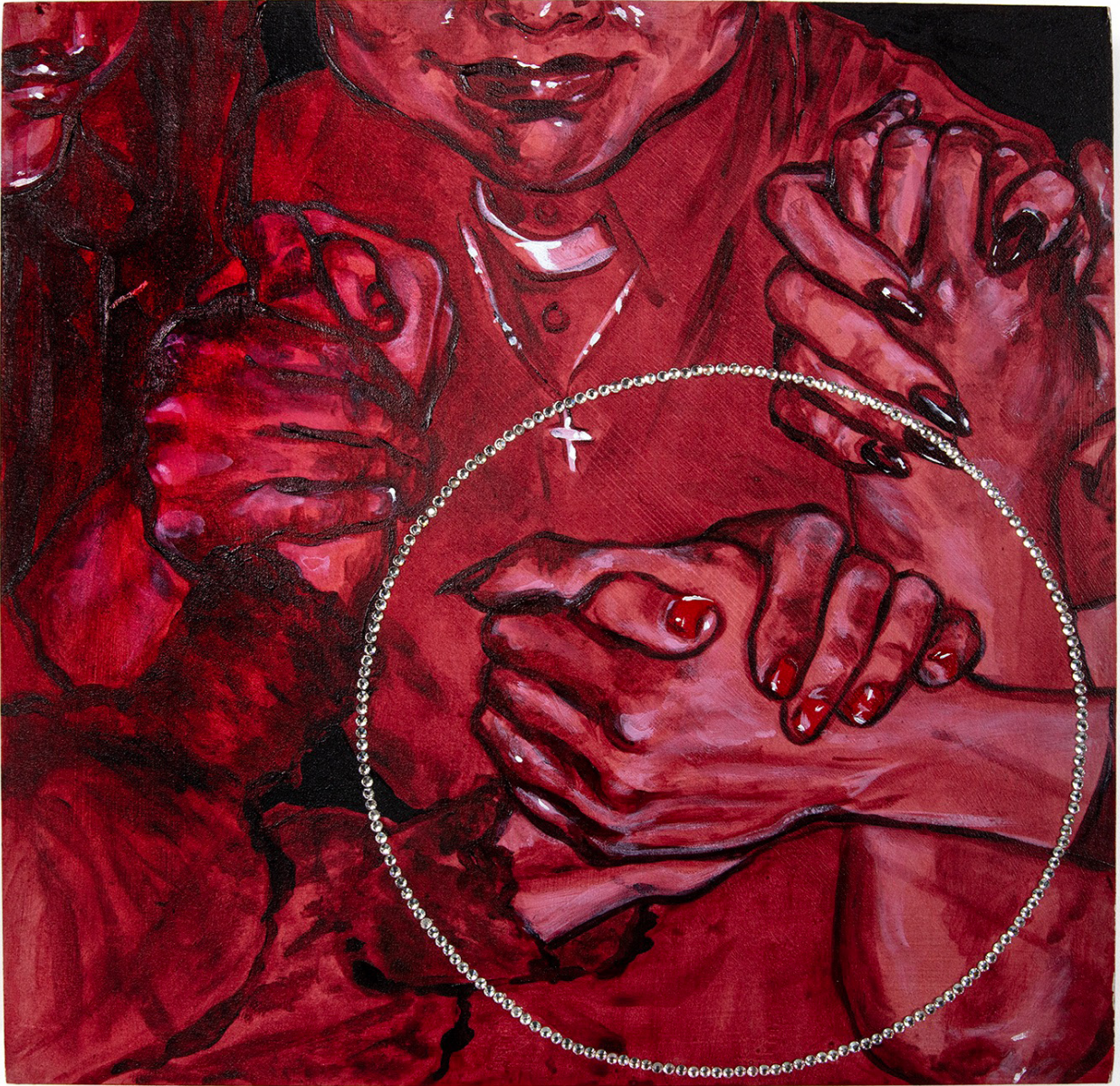
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**Bai Bautista-Buckingham** navigates using humor as a crutch while attempting to remain earnest through sculptures, installations, and paintings. Throughout her practice Bautista-Buckingham utilizes religious iconography and Y2K aesthetics to question our societal hyper-independent, hyper-consumerist values and how they often come at the cost of sincerity, intimacy, and empathy. To a similar effect, her paintings and sculptures often reference pop culture or familiar and nostalgic items. The paintings range from colorful, crowded group portraits to studies of fabric that border on abstraction. Bautista-Buckingham's text-based works, as well as found object sculptures, are inspired by the visual language of Jenny Holzer and Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

**Bai Bautista-Buckingham** is a Chicago-based, Arizona-born, interdisciplinary artist working primarily in sculpture, mixed-media installation, and painting. Her practice varies in theme, but currently explores interactivity and levels of engagement across media. Bautista-Buckingham was a recipient of the Pougialis Fine Art Award in 2022 and had a two-person show, *Trust Visions*, with James Ross in the Arcade Gallery in 2023. In 2024 she also exhibited work in the group exhibition *After Everything* in Columbia College Chicago's Hokin Gallery.

**Website:** [bautistabuckingham.com](http://bautistabuckingham.com)

**Instagram:** [@baibeeteef](https://www.instagram.com/baibeeteef)



*Boy Harsher*, 2022, acrylic and rhinestones on wood panel, 12" x 12"



*Do U Wanna?*, 2022, oil on canvas, 24" x 20"



*Baby You'll Be Famous (Follow You Until You Love Me)*, 2023, oil on wood panel, 30" x 30"



*In Passing*, 2022, oil on unstretched canvas, 62" x 16"



Ibuprophet, 2022, mixed media collage, 10" x 10"





*Wrong Your For Authenticity, 2022, rearview mirror, vinyl text, rhinestones, disco balls*



*The Smell of Chlorine, The Passing of Time, 2022, oil on canvas, 20" x 24"*



*Ghost Tricking*, 2023, acrylic and oil on unstretched canvas, 36" x 72"

# INTERVIEW WITH BAI BAUTISTA-BUCKINGHAM

Conducted by Rachel Manlubatan

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**Rachel Manlubatan:** Your artwork is created with several types of processes and materials, through the creation of your artwork, how do you find a balance between being humorous and earnest?

**Bai Bautista-Buckingham:** I'm honestly not sure that I have found a balance between being humorous and earnest yet. I think through my practice I'm swinging back and forth between the two from piece to piece. I'm still figuring out how to land somewhere in the middle where honesty isn't hiding behind the humor quite so much. My newer work is some of the most direct and vulnerable I've made, and I'm definitely fighting the urge to slap some satirical text or a meme onto it.

**RM:** Which elements of your work are the humorous elements, and which are the earnest? How do you determine which of your ideas function better as a sculpture and which ideas function better as a painting?

**BB:** The text I include in the sculptural work is often a joke or a reference to something funny online. The more earnest elements usually shine through in the title or the overall tone of a piece. In a similar way the ideas that end up as paintings and two-dimensional works are usually more narrative. They have subjects (or a lack of subjects with the bed paintings) and a specific story that's being told. The three-dimensional works often cover more abstract ideas and concepts; If there is a narrative, it's harder as a viewer to pin it down with the sculpture. These pieces rely a lot on symbolism and emotional attachment to objects. It's much more open to interpretation. Even when I'm working through the same subject matter, the sculptures and paintings function as two different sides of the same coin.

**RM:** How does the use of religious iconography and Y2K aesthetics, challenge your viewers to question our societal hyper-independent,

hyper-consumerist values?

**BB:** I think mashing really obvious marketing ploys and trends with the visual language of Catholicism, for instance, points out some of the ways that we misplace our values. For me it comes from a place of genuine interest. I grew up in a deeply Christian, specifically Mormon, area where I was very aware of religion but had no real entry point as my family was strictly atheist. There were all these mega-churches, lines of pews, stacks of bound bibles, the crosses, the glorified bathtub for adult baptisms, crowds dressed in Sunday best in 110 degree heat, and as an outsider it was such a production. I was brought to a Catholic church once as a child and despite being given a Caprisun and some Saltines to occupy myself, I was so swept up in the spectacle of it all. What makes something holy? Why not an exit sign? Why not a clock? Why not any of the thousands of objects that have garnered some version of hate-worship and risen to iconography? What's the difference between a hymn and *Baby One More Time* by Britney Spears? What's the difference between a saint and K-pop Idol? So, to my child mind all of this religious paraphernalia accumulated to build this aesthetic that doesn't feel so different from cottage-core or Y2K or any number of aesthetics we see now.

**RM:** Why do you choose to make some pieces interactive? What is your creative process like when planning to have others touch and/or use it, and how do you think these varying levels of engagement influence your style and mission?

**BB:** I have no interest in providing clear directions with my interactive works and I'm interested in leaving the work open to multiple levels of engagement. Viewers have to overcome a level of uncertainty in order to engage with the work. I'm not a fan of art that champions making viewers wildly

## INTERVIEW CONTINUED

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uncomfortable, but I think brief discomfort can be a tool for questioning unspoken rules of society. My interactive works revolve around a lot of the doubts and questions I have when interacting with the world in my day to day. I think we're forced to dull our instincts and question ourselves all the time. Especially in a city. Especially if you have anxiety. There aren't any simple interactions anymore. If I see an old lady struggling to carry bags up the stairs leaving a train station my first instinct is to offer to help. But then I'm immediately second guessing. What if she gets mad and yells at me? What if I don't help and she hurts herself? What if I do help and unknowingly become an accomplice in a crime? Placing these types of worries on something low stakes like interacting with a VHS player in a controlled environment like a gallery adds a level of humor. When I plan these pieces, I try to anticipate the doubts and line of thinking that a vague invitation to interact might inspire. Hopefully it makes viewers go "why is this stressing me out?" which can then be applied to just about everything.



## THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series and graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Rachel Manlubatan. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

**Learn more at:** [colum.edu/deps](http://colum.edu/deps)

**Contact information:** Mark Porter, [mporter@colum.edu](mailto:mporter@colum.edu) / 312.369.6643

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**Glass Curtain Gallery:** 1104 S Wabash Ave, First Floor, Chicago, IL 60605

**Gallery Hours:** Monday–Friday 9 a.m.–5 p.m.