

# K.R. FOWLER

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CRACKS IN THE GLASS:  
2022 UNDERGRADUATE FINE ARTS  
THESIS EXHIBITION



**DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES**

MAY 12-JUNE 16, 2022

# CRACKS IN THE GLASS: 2022 UNDERGRADUATE FINE ARTS THESIS EXHIBITION

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*cracks in the glass: 2022 Undergraduate Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition* features the works of eleven BFA candidates in Columbia's Fine Arts program. The exhibition, which includes paintings, drawings, prints, books, video, performance and installation works, represents the culmination of four years worth of development of a cohesive body of work for each artist while earning their degrees.

Participating artists:

Lisette Chevalier  
Micaela Felix  
K.R. Fowler  
Nadia Khan  
Viy Lahowetz  
Nicole Leung  
Alexis Malone-Alvarado  
Caroline Robinson  
SEAH  
CJ Shaw  
Aleida Zapata

*cracks in the glass: 2022 Undergraduate Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition* is presented in conjunction with the Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), the Art and Art History department, and Adam Brooks, Professor at Columbia College Chicago.

# K.R. FOWLER

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The work of K.R. Fowler functions as an exploration of identity and the concept of self within the broader context of culture and lived experiences. Endlessly enamored with learning, Fowler's practice is informed by the ongoing research and study of religion, feminism, philosophy, history, and beyond. This research often manifests by relating the figure, the most frequent subject in their work, to symbolic or mythological iconography and narratives that are then recontextualized through a contemporary intersectional lens. Otherness, empowerment, and the dichotomy of feelings of uncanniness and familiarity caused by portraying the figure in unexpected ways, is what drives Fowler's interest in using the human body as subject matter, whether self-portrait or of others. Using paint as their medium of choice, scale, color, line, and composition are all intricately considered when creating a piece. The challenge of communicating complex ideas and experiences through subtle visual cues forms the foundation of their practice.

**K.R. Fowler** is an interdisciplinary artist with a focus on painting and they are originally from Oklahoma and Texas, and now their practice is based out of Chicago. They have exhibited their work in Houston and Chicago. Notably, they are a recipient of the 2021 Aiko Nakane Fellowship and the 2022 Albert P. Weisman Award. Fowler is due to graduate with honors from the BFA Art and Art History program at Columbia College Chicago in May 2022.

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



*Wrestle with god (Take Your Fucking Blessing), 2020, oil on canvas*



*Self Portrait as Lilith (The Demon in the Attic), 2020, oil on canvas*



*Vulgar Artimisia*, 2022, oil on canvas



*Ascension of Saints and Demons, 2020, handmade cotton rag paper, dye, collage elements*



Left to right:

*The Prodigal Son and our Daughters in Drag*, 2021, oil on canvas

*Let's Try this on Again, Once More with Spirit!* 2021, oil on canvas

*The Seer Performing for the Unseen*, 2021, oil on canvas



# INTERVIEW WITH K.R. FOWLER

Conducted by Sierra Delamarter

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**Sierra Delamarter:** What first drove you to explore ideas of identity in correlation with religion, feminism, philosophy, and history?

**K.R. Fowler:** I grew up in a very religious culture that placed a lot of emphasis on faith as the most important aspect of an individual's life, and that there was only one way of life that was truly faithful. I, by nature, never really believed that; I've always been very curious and fascinated with learning, and having a resolute answer was never satisfying to me when there were always more questions to be asked, or the asking itself was more interesting. Being one of very few people in my community growing up who did not profess any kind of faith, I was often challenged on why, or what I believed instead. As such I became really invested in studying religion and philosophy to understand why I didn't believe, and to come to a better understanding of where belief stems from and why it is so powerful in people's lives. In these years of unravelling and questioning and researching I became more aware of how much belief is tied to identity, and how much history and the philosophies that have shaped our various cultures affect not only our perception of ourselves and others, but the way we construct systems of identity and ideas of the self. All these things are interwoven and inseparable to me, all of our experiences and histories thrown together into one big gumbo pot that makes us who we are. These are the thoughts and concepts I am working from, and art is just one way to externalize them and make these things that matter to me tangible outside of my own body.

**SD:** When it comes to your more large-scale paintings, what does your approach look like when you start a new piece? What is the process you go through to complete a piece?

**KF:** I am a very conceptually driven artist, so most of my work starts there; usually there is something I have been thinking about or wanting to explore more in-depth in my work, and I will start sketching out thumbnails to figure out what this might look like as a painting or object. To address my large-scale work specifically, most work I make large-scale is tied to ideas of presence or monumentality; they are large because the figure or scene is meant to take up space and make confronting it unavoidable. On a technical level I will roll out a loose piece of canvas to the size that feels right, and stretch it out flat on a wall like a tapestry or hide to prime the surface. I am most often working from sketches and reference photos I have taken so the process of getting an image on the surface is fairly methodical and intentional. The physicality of working so large is an important aspect too; I don't think many people have the perception of painting as a strenuous activity but working on pieces larger than my own body becomes a very physical process, and there is a relationship of labor built between me and the canvas that becomes like a body in its own right, something I must carry and move and mark with scars before it can come to life. Once a painting is completely done it becomes almost like a stranger to me too, in that the relationship of creation feels severed in the moment I know there's nothing left to change.

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**SD:** You state that “otherness, empowerment, and the dichotomy of feelings of uncanniness and familiarity caused by portraying the figure in unexpected ways” is what drives your art practice. Could you go more in-depth about what this means in your art practice? Why choose the human figure? Why choose to skew the human figure to communicate your ideas?

**KF:** I think the human figure of such great interest to me because of our inherent familiarity with it. We see the world from our bodies, and we have the cultures and perspectives we do because of how our bodies exist in relation to each other; it is the framework that we base everything on, so much so that we often anthropomorphize non-human things to be like our bodies, such as when we see a face in the clouds or a body in the shape of a tree. We’re trained from birth to see ourselves in everything, to base our perception of ‘other’ on our own existence. This is also where my interest in pushing the uncanny or the unexpected in the figure comes from; to take something we are so familiar with and make it in a way that upsets our assumptions is what I seek to do. This also ties back into my interest in identity and history—we assume we know what a figure looks like, or who someone may be like based on how we perceive them, but ultimately we are limited by what we are used to seeing, which can never encompass the whole scope of existence. I honestly want to push this idea even further in my practice going forward; I’ve kept these distortions and plays on perception and assumption very subtle in my recent work, but in order to make these concepts clearer I hope to skew the figure even more into the realm of the unexpected.



## 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 is managed by Fine Arts major and DEPS Exhibitions Assistants Kaylee Fowler and Sierra Delamarter. Graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Gray Beyer. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

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

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