

# NORA BENJAMIN

2024 MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

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DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

# 2024 MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

5th Floor Student Center May 6–28, 2024

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*The 2024 MFA Thesis Exhibition* features the thesis works of the MFA candidates in Columbia College Chicago's Art I Design and Photography Departments. The exhibition, which includes paintings, prints, drawings, photography, sound, and installation, captures the extensive research, exploration, critical analysis, creative inquiry, productivity, practice, and achievement these emerging artists have maintained throughout their time in the programs. With varied approaches to subject matter, distinct methods of creation, and a unique blending of personal, political, and historical narratives, the artists in this show weave together the nuanced strands of the contemporary moment.

**Participating Artists:** Andre Barker Jr, Nora Benjamin, Callie Clark Wiren, Noah Fodor, Eli Giclas, Ash Huse, Hillary Irene Johnson, Adam MacArthur, Giselle Mira-Diaz, Grace Papineau-Couture, Arrietta van der Voort, and andrew vogelpohl

*The 2024 MFA Thesis Exhibition* is presented in conjunction with the Department of Exhibitions, Performance, and Student Spaces (DEPS), the Art I Design Department, and the Photography Department.

# NORA BENJAMIN

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**Nora Benjamin's** body of work *Terms & Conditions* is a series of photographs and collages that interpret the relationship between social media use, the negative implications of excessive e-consumerism in beauty markets, and the Internet's obsession with the pursuit of beauty. Through this series, she is reflecting on the continuous trend cycle that colored her early online experiences and its looming presence in the contemporary social media landscape. By photographing and collaging her own beauty products, Benjamin identifies herself as an active participant in the mania of trend-following. Thus, *Terms & Conditions* functions as the self-reflective examination of an insider and not a detached critical response. Benjamin experiments with the rules of advertising photography as a way to situate this work as an analog to the e-beauty market. In order to subvert these conventions, she digitally colorizes and distorts her black-and-white photographs and collages. These interventions mimic the highly constructed nature of online identity and reinterpret the beauty product as an idol to be worshipped or feared.

**Nora Benjamin** (b. 1999) is an experimental photographer and collagist based in Chicago. Nora explores themes associated with identity, hyperconsumerism, and delirium in her practice. Her work is noted for her use of color, which she experiments with through various digital and analogous methods of colorization. The collages and photographs she creates combine both surrealistic and realistic motifs. In 2021, she graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design in Atlanta with a B.F.A. in Commercial Photography along with a minor in Advertising and Branding: Art Direction. Nora is enrolled in Columbia College Chicago's Master of Fine Arts Photography program and will graduate in Spring 2024.

**Website:** [www.nxravisuals.com](http://www.nxravisuals.com)

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



Salvator, 2023, Inkjet print



*With Time*, 2022, Inkjet print



*Thirteen*, 2022, Inkjet print



*Onlookers*, 2023, Inkjet print

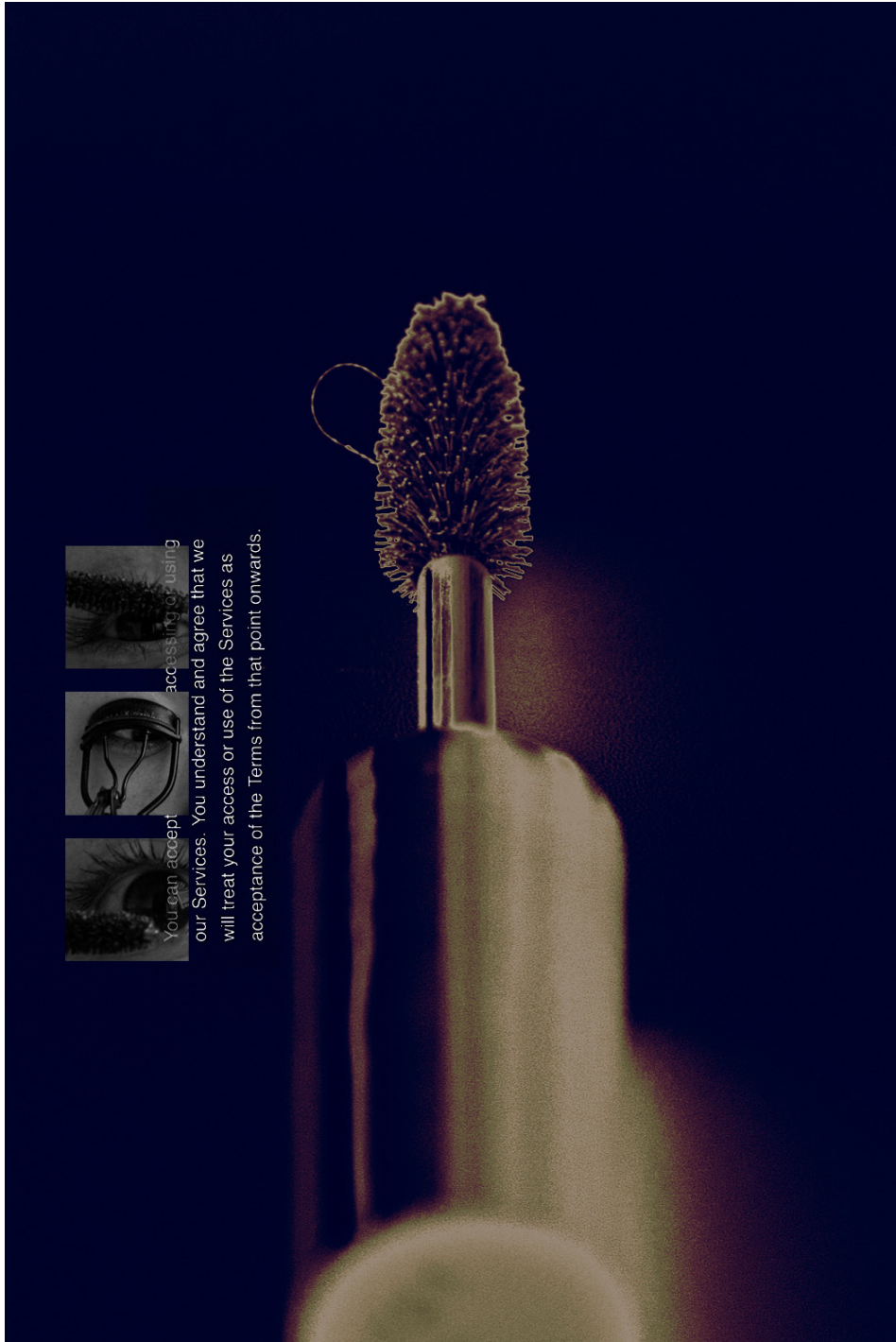


Sever, 2023, Inkjet print





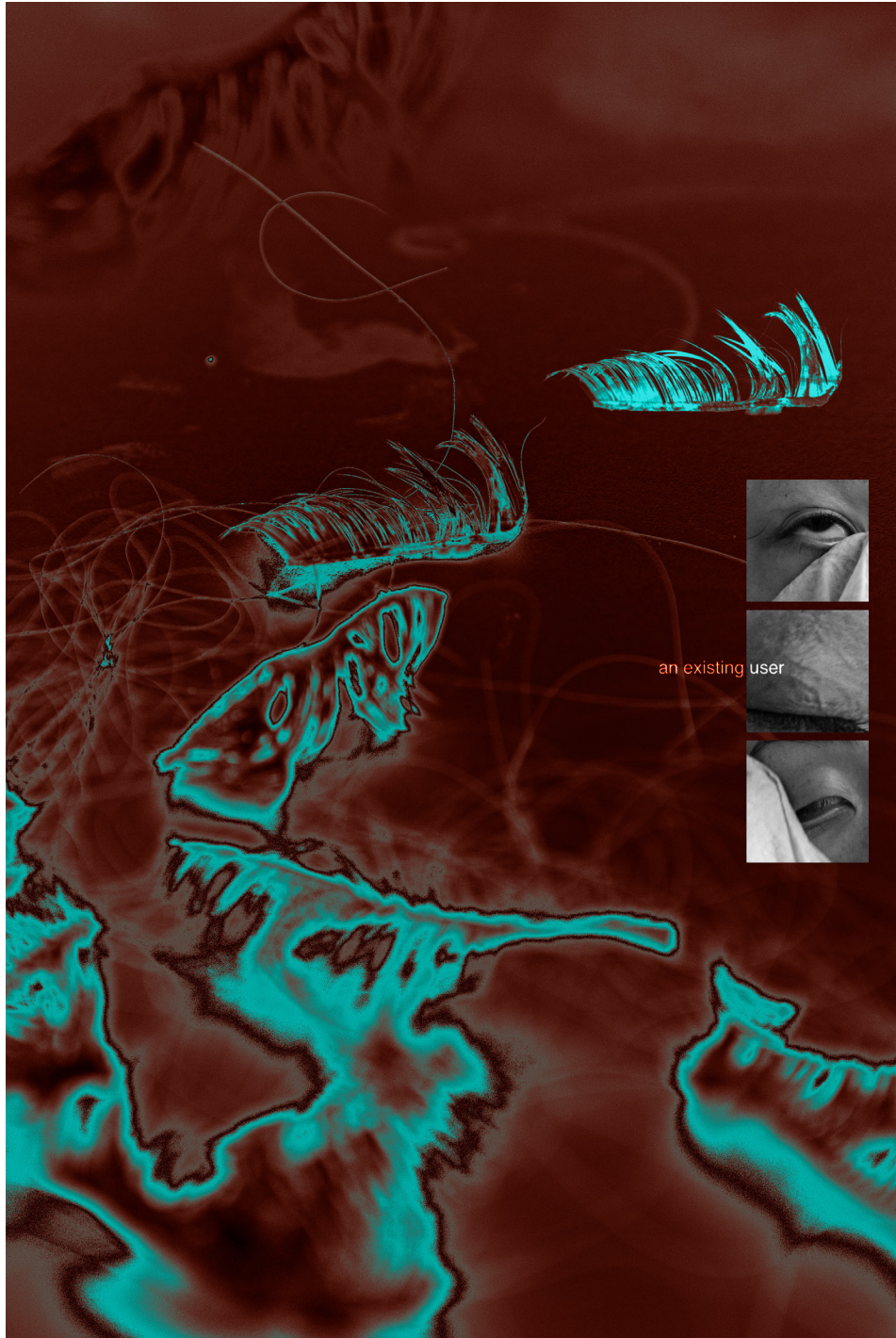
*Worship*, 2022, Inkjet print



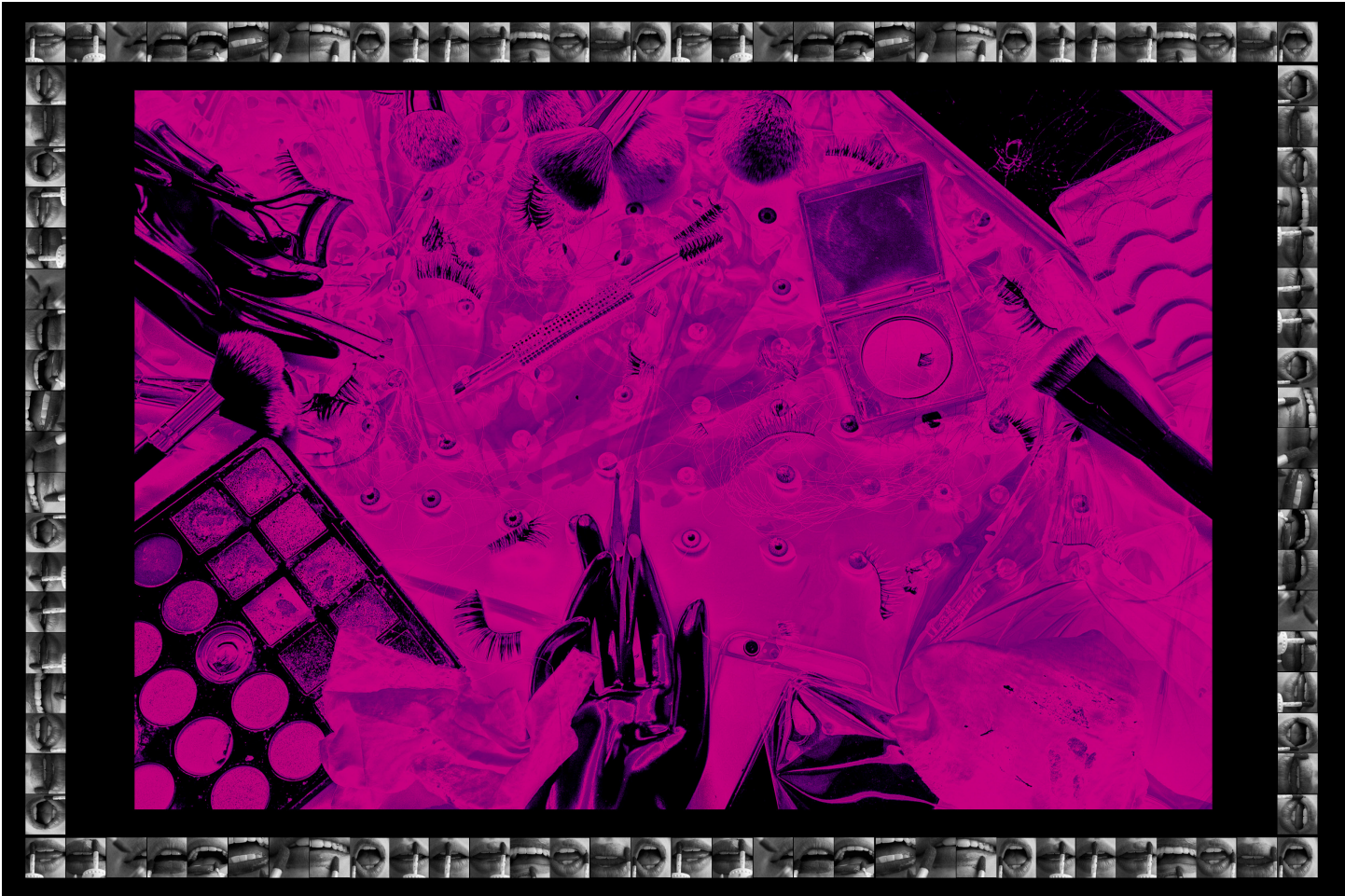
*Disciple*, 2023, Inkjet print



Reverance, 2023, Inkjet print



*An Existing User*, 2023, Inkjet print



*Communion*, 2023, Inkjet print

# INTERVIEW WITH NORA BENJAMIN

Conducted by Rachel Manlubatan

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**Rachel Manlubatan:** When reflecting on your early online experiences, what feelings typically emerge? How do you think your perception of those memories has changed as you have gotten older, and how has that correlated with stylistic growth within your art?

**Nora Benjamin:** My reflections of my early online experiences are mediated through my conscious awareness as an adult today, so I often think of my younger self in the way you would a younger sibling. In some regards, I wish I could prevent such heavy online influence at an impressionable age, but in other instances I celebrate the access I had to certain communities, friends, and positive discourses online. This is the tension I allude to in my stylistic approach to my work, there are moments of darkness depicted outlined with vibrancy and mania, often in the same frame.

**RM:** Can you describe your process for colorizing black and white images? What is the significance of this process to the themes addressed in your work? What are the similarities and difference between these works and the imagery used in online beauty markets?

**NB:** Everything I shoot, whether on 35mm film or digitally captured, is black and white. I colorize my images digitally through multiple processes, but the two I tend to shift between are hand-coloring and layering color-filled layers. I draw a lot of inspiration from historical, analogous methods of colorization and I enjoy reclaiming these practices in digital processes. Working “backward” from black-and-white — adding color back to the photograph — gives me a large amount of control within my images and allows me to create visual hierarchies I wouldn’t be able to achieve by shooting straight color. Controlling the color in this way is a comparison to the carefully manipulated visual language

incorporated in advertising photography while additionally alluding to the online identities we carefully curate through what we choose to share and engage with on social media platforms. Throughout this work, I subvert advertising and commercial photography conventions as a way to situate this work as an analog to these markets.

**RM:** How do you utilize collage to reenact themes commonly seen online? How do your artistic methods highlight other areas of digital media that audiences may not always seem to notice?

**NB:** Collage in my work characterizes the tension of the viewer being viewed. In documenting this relationship I collage video stills of myself ritualistically applying my products atop and around still life imagery. I am recontextualizing the relationship and interaction with these products both in their on screen viewing and off screen use. Since I am focusing on the content and trends in the online beauty cycle as both reiterations and reappropriations, I purposefully use repeated motifs and imagery in both my photographs and collages.

**RM:** How does using your own beauty products in your pieces acknowledge that you are a part of the cycle, and how does calling attention to your participation make your artwork even more significant?

**NB:** The collected products I photograph are from my own current following of these trends or products I have used previously. I work in this way to identify myself as a participant to form a basis of relatability with a viewer that shares both my past and present online experiences. There is currently a lot of rhetoric offline about the toxicity of the Internet as this negatively charged space, which I think does hold truth, but is also a very secular way of categorizing the Internet. The Internet, as it

## INTERVIEW CONTINUED

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lives presently, functions as a third space for many people where they can find community, engage with like-minded people and media, but also have negative interactions and experiences as well. My identification as a participant embodies this experience; I find joy in consuming online media focused on beauty and trend following in this e-space, but I also experience the negative implications of consuming this type of content as well.



## 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)

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754 S. Wabash Ave., Fifth Floor, Chicago, IL 60605  
Gallery hours: Monday–Saturday 9 a.m.–5 p.m.