

A  
a  
D  
d a r k  
W  
w o o d  
g R e w  
i n s i d e  
M  
m e

HOLLIS HAMMONDS • SASHA WEST

**oct 26 - dec 03**

**W R I G H T G A L L E R Y**

# table of contents



## STATEMENTS

Rebecca Pugh, Curator ..... 03

Stephen Caffey, Curatorial Committee Member ..... 04

Exhibition Statement ..... 05

Hollis Hammonds & Sasha West Biographies ..... 06

## WORKS

Exhibition Shots ..... 08

Ode to Fossil Fuel, Sasha West ..... 15

Fossil Fuels, Sasha West ..... 16

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special Thanks ..... 17



# STATEMENT

## rebecca pugh



CURATOR, WRIGHT GALLERY | LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF VISUALIZATION, COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

This exhibition brings collaborative works by artist, Hollis Hammonds and poet, Sasha West from St. Edward's University in Austin, TX to the Wright Gallery at Texas A&M University. This cross institutional effort results in a powerful exhibition in the College of Architecture featuring mixed media drawing and painting, sound, video, sculpture and poetry. The exhibition encourages important dialogues among visitors, students, staff and faculty surrounding the carbon footprint of modern conveniences, consumerism and our collective dependency on fossil fuels.

Meaning is built throughout the show in many layers of texture, color, materials, found objects, text and sound. Bringing attention to the fossil fuel industry in the work titled, *A Dark Wood Grew Inside Me*, Hammond's manipulation of black ink on Yupo, which is a slick polypropylene substrate, results in a texture that resembles oil. Black is dominant throughout the exhibition and color emphasizes imagery of fire, both still and in a film projection. The imagery of houses on fire and scenes of massive blazes may remind viewers of the fragility of our lives and daily routines – concerns that are all amplified during the third wave of the global pandemic during which this exhibition takes place.

West's poetry is printed on translucent sheets of Yupo and layered throughout the exhibition. Her poem, *Doubt*, which was featured in the Laurel Review, is rearranged and visible in overlapping sheets of Yupo. Upon entering the gallery, visitors are welcomed with audio of West reciting her poem, *Ode to Fossil Fuel*. West's tone of voice is calm yet alarming, stirring a sense of warning about our shared reliance on modern conveniences that

are made possible by fossil fuels. The audio spills out of several large black assemblage sculptures along with found objects scattered on black tar paper over the floor. Found objects are painted black and assembled in tall linear sculptures. The scale of most of the individual objects relate to the human body, such as chairs, crutches and handheld vessels and woven baskets, yet form large masses stacked up to the gallery ceiling. Collectively titled, *A Dark Wood*, these multimedia sculptures may be interpreted as trees in a forest, black oil exploding vertically from the landscape or phallic abstractions of an individual's carbon footprint.

One of the many successes of this exhibition is that it welcomes multiple interpretations among visitors. Bringing attention to the excess of cast-off objects which are made possible by the fossil fuel industry has potential to spark productive conversations among visitors and awareness of the environmental impact of consumerism. During a pandemic when shortages of goods and supplies seem to be possible at any time, the use of common objects in assemblage sculpture takes on new meaning. In Hammond's mixed media work on Yupo titled, *Smoke-House: Night-Time*, a fire burns from within a house and the smoke is filled with imagery of common objects billowing from the rooftop. The timing of the exhibition during a pandemic furthers possible interpretations of this thought-provoking show.

On behalf of the Curatorial Committee, I would like to thank Hollis Hammonds and Sasha West for sharing their work with the Texas A&M community. I would also like to thank the College of Architecture and Mary G. and James S. Wright for the generous Wright Gallery endowment.

# STATEMENT

## stephen caffey



CURATORIAL COMMITTEE MEMBER, WRIGHT GALLERY | ASSOCIATE DEPARTMENT HEAD,  
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE, COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

In the Wright Gallery's collaborative exhibition titled *A Dark Wood Grew Inside Me*, visual artist Hollis Hammonds and poet Sasha West generate a space of richly destabilizing indeterminacy. The images, objects, texts, and sounds that populate the gallery withdraw from the simplistic, refuse the reductive, and invite the viewer to luxuriate in a peculiar vulnerability articulated through an estranged monumentality. Towering forms comprising black and blackened household items rise like stalagmites before a theatrical backdrop of blanked trees intermingled with human detritus. Words, black and gray, handwritten and machine printed, intermingle with mountains, brush against white walls, and emanate in soft recitation from each tower. Soot and ash and oil

haunt the porous interstices between surface and depth, between the cerebral and the mundane, between Self and Other, between interior and exterior, between attraction and repulsion, and between organization and disarray (a much more subtle and intimate alternative to order and chaos). These inventories, lists, accretions, and cumulations simultaneously extol and indict artist and poet, challenging the viewer to pause in a state of self-reflection without self-recrimination and to interrogate that which seems self-evident: that things—present and absent—and the substances from which they arise—psychic and physical—both wield and lack the power to make us.

# A DARK WOOD GREW INSIDE ME

## exhibition statement

### INTRODUCTION

A Dark Wood Grew Inside Me is a multimedia exhibition resulting from a collaboration between visual artist Hollis Hammonds and poet Sasha West. The title, taken from West's poem "How to Abandon Ship," riffs off of the opening lines of Dante's *Inferno*. The metaphor begins what Timothy Morton calls "grief work," articulating the experience of living in the midst of a fragile, changing ecosystem. Through self-interrogations, the artists question both individual and societal contributions to environmental crisis. Viewers dwell in wreckage, suspended between flood and fire, and stasis and loss. Objects lose their meaning as markers for a normal existence. In these works, the distinction between natural and human-made disasters starts to collapse. Hammonds' drawings reflect the melancholy and darkness manifest in West's poems, asking us to reexamine the impact of elements when those elements are fed by human actions.

### BACKGROUND

Hammonds often draws inspiration from a fire that consumed her childhood home in Independence, Kentucky, when she was 15 years old. In the context of climate change, that displacement takes on new meaning. Rather than being an aberration of the past, the incident foretells a potentially apocalyptic future. West's poems connect to the landscapes of ruin in Hammonds' drawing, questioning our culture's belief in limitless growth. Collapsing time, her speakers range across eras and historical events to try and articulate their role as witnesses in the first generation to feel palpably the effects of climate change (mere decades after global warming was first named). Her speakers work to name the complex spaces of responsibility, despair, and hope. By combining sound with sculptural installation and words with images, both artists offer their personal vantage points on the precipice of a forbidding future. The show opens liminal spaces where hard boundaries dissolve: past disasters forecast future ones, the crackle of fire becomes the cracking of ice, what is civilization becomes wilderness. Hammonds and West invite viewers to see anew their own part in making the physical world and, thus, the future.

## HOLLIS HAMMONDS

### **multimedia artist**

•

#### BIOGRAPHY



Built on threads of her own personal memory, Hollis Hammonds' drawings and found-object installations investigate a variety of social issues, from economic disparity to environmental degradation. Hammonds' work is derived from what she terms the "collective consciousness." Gleaning images from the Internet and objects from street corners, she reconstructs personal stories, conjured memories, and projected social fantasies. Her work has been widely exhibited throughout the US, including venues such as Women; Their Work, Redux Contemporary Art Center, The Grace Museum, and the Dishman Art Museum. She is a Professor of Art and Chair of the Department of Visual Studies at St. Edward's University in Austin, TX.

## SASHA WEST

### **poet**

•

#### BIOGRAPHY



Sasha West's work examines the underpinning narratives of Western civilization and their impact on landscape, environment, species, and human psychology. West combines mythology with research into late-stage capitalism to examine the world in which we find ourselves—and to imagine the world we will choose to hand down. Her book, *Failure and I Bury the Body*, was a winner of the National Poetry Series and the Texas Institute of Letters First Book of Poetry Award. She has received numerous awards, including a Bread Loaf Writer's Conference Fellowship, Rice University's Parks Fellowship, Inprint's Verlaine Prize, and a Houston Arts Alliance Grant. She is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at St. Edward's University in Austin, TX.





# HOLLIS HAMMONDS + SASHA WEST a dark wood grew inside me

INK ON YUPO, 58 X 78 INCHES, 2020

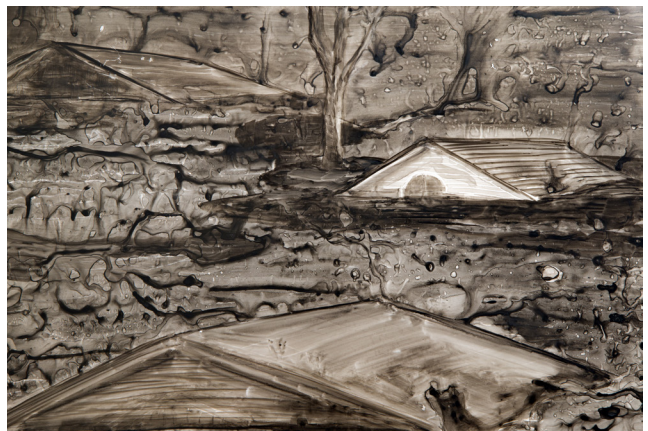


**FOSSIL FUEL**

*I make CO<sub>2</sub> by breathing. I burn the charcoal  
become all the smoke above your city. I am  
what the cars and jets make of the air. I am  
the methane from the tundra and the wetlands.  
I blow my hot breath to melt the ice to raise  
the water. I knock my head against the trees.  
I shrink the animal's range. I am aggressive hold  
back rain too long in one farm. find elsewhere  
the crops and bridges my breath causes concern.  
I sit in fire. I welcome the invasive species. I dig  
and figure in the ocean dissolve the shells. I  
collect the bodies of freshwater tanks of farmed  
and crops. ultraviolet-glacial lakes. If you let me  
grow. I'll take in all your ice and not down  
because you've shaded the weather you know  
how I work. I take what you want and hold  
it in my belly. I give you back the world dis-  
figured. I am that I am. I make CO<sub>2</sub> by breathing.*

DETAIL: FOSSIL FUEL BY SASHA WEST, 2019

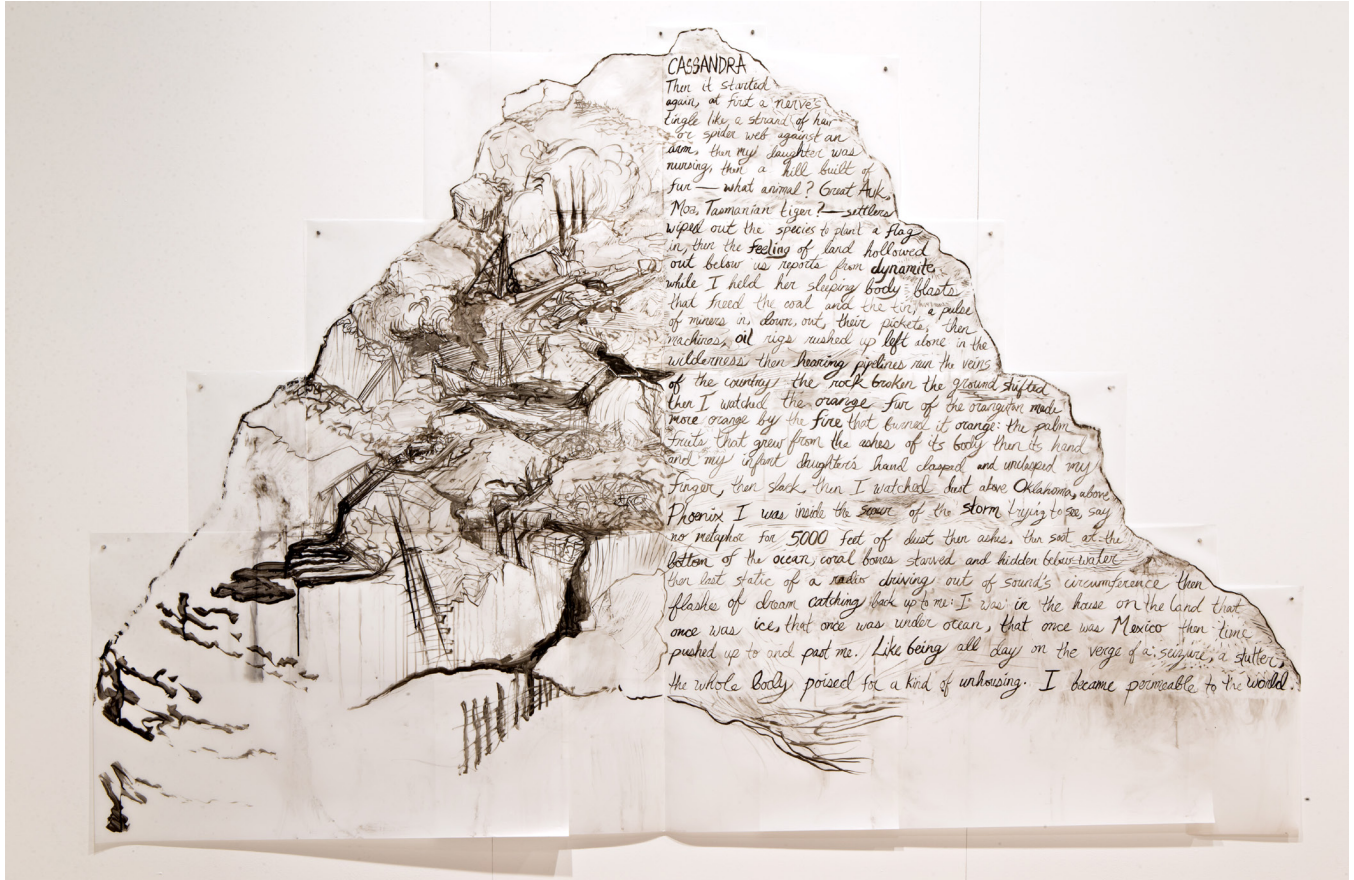
DETAIL: A DARK WOOD GREW INSIDE ME, 2020



# HOLLIS HAMMONDS + SASHA WEST

## cassandra

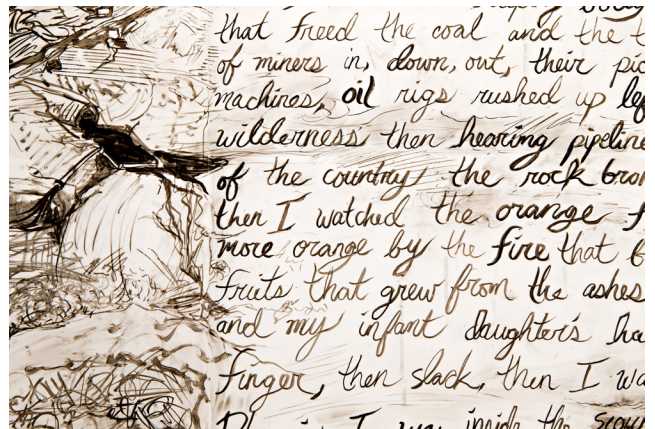
INK ON YUPO, 69 X 102 INCHES, 2020



INSTALL SHOT: CASSANDRA, 2020



DETAIL: CASSANDRA, 2020

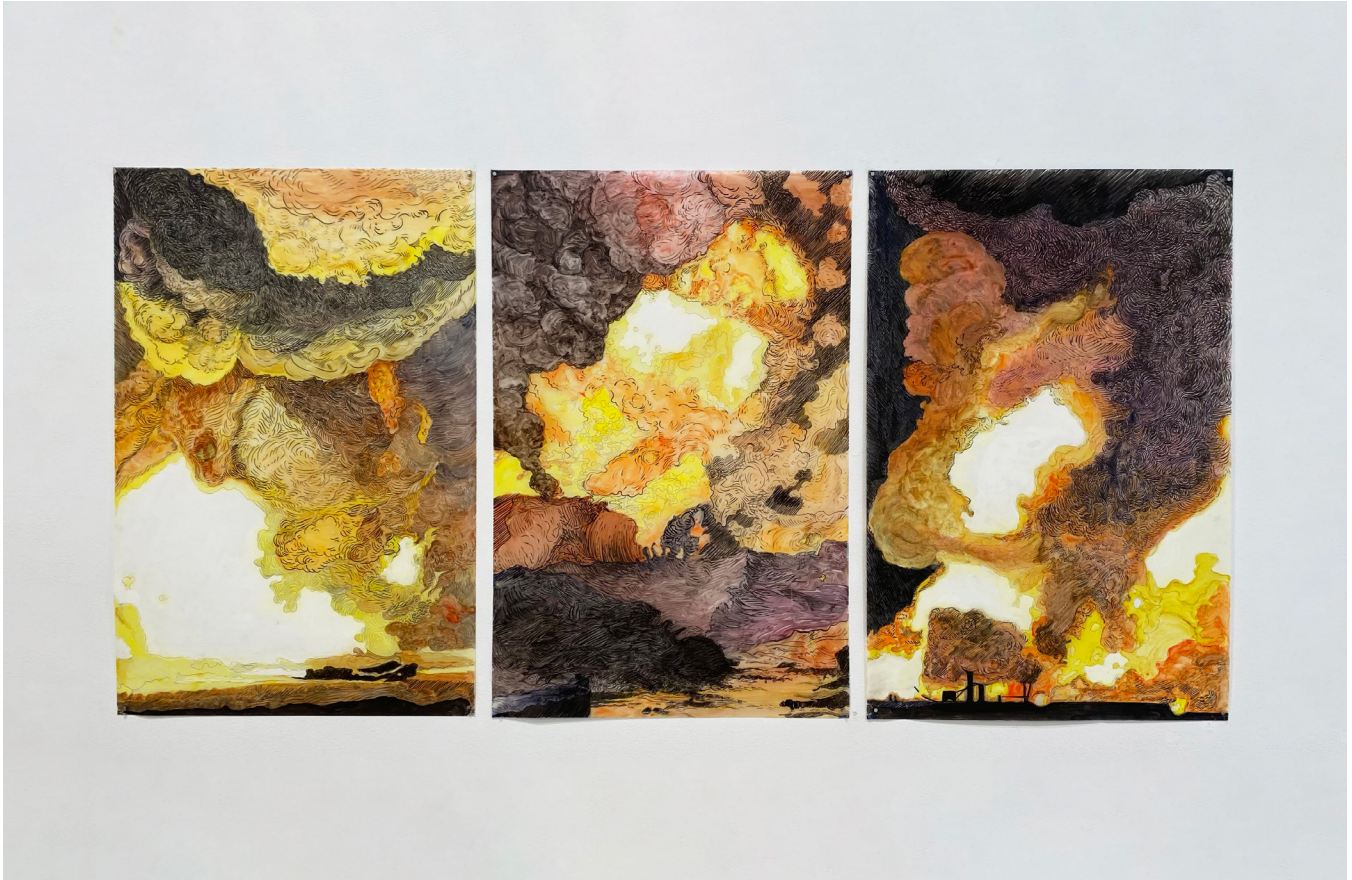


# HOLLIS HAMMONDS

## fire studies 1-3



INK ON YUPO, 38 X 78 INCHES, 2019



INSTALL SHOT: FIRE STUDIES 1-3, 2019



DETAIL: FIRE STUDIES 2, 2019



# HOLLIS HAMMONDS

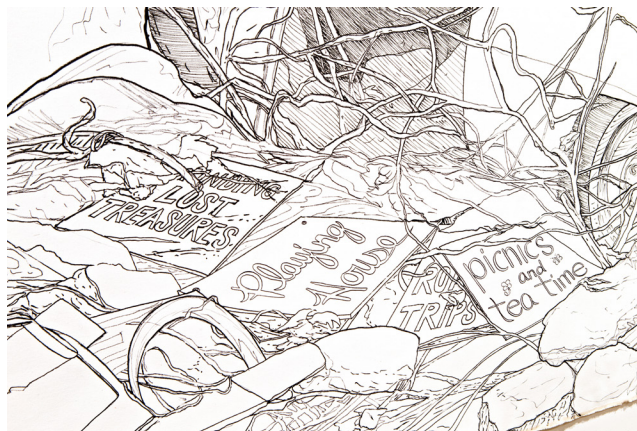
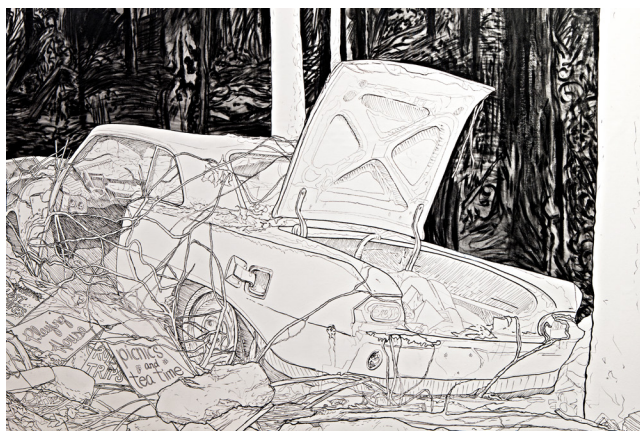
## the dark forest

CHARCOAL AND GEL MEDIUM ON CANVAS, 8 X 32 FEET, 2015



INSTALL SHOT: THE DARK FOREST, 2015

DETAIL: THE DARK FOREST, 2015



# HOLLIS HAMMONDS + SASHA WEST

## **a dark wood**



MIXED MEDIA WITH SOUND (POEMS WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY SASHA WEST). 11 X 30 X 8 FEET, 2020.



DETAIL: A DARK WOOD, 2020



DETAIL: A DARK WOOD, 2020



# HOLLIS HAMMONDS

## house on fire 2



INK ON YUPO WITH VIDEO PROJECTION, 60 X 113 INCHES, 2016



INSTALL SHOT: HOUSE ON FIRE 2, 2016



DETAIL: HOUSE ON FIRE 2, 2016





# SASHA WEST

## ode to fossil fuel

●

2013

Without you, no paper in reams, no books with spines to break with use, no shirt whose blue I love against my husband's skin, eyes, no button from another country, no stitches programmed down his sides, no machine measuring my mother's heart while they cut the cancer out, no tomatoes in winter, no cheap wine, no wandering another country's streets for a few days, no drug mules, char in a child's lungs, no miles of highway, no fast enough to break a tumbleweed, no Christmas trees in desert, no rolling blackouts, no moving away from but still keeping family, no clean and running water, no toothbrushes, no antibiotics, no grandmother's face on the phone teasing my daughter, no ballet shoes, no hothouse flowers at our wedding, no train on my dress, no desire for a train on my dress, you have made us wealthy in goods and time, without you no cookbooks, no inflatable pool, no water guns, no smashing the bass at the end of a concert, no MTV, no Hollywood, no Hadron Collider, you have migrated the bees on the backs of trucks, you have made cement swimming pools, a million rubber ducks and most of the toys my daughter loves, without you no lifejackets, no mammograms, no gas masks, no napalm, no grandmother's farm in summer, no machines to replace bodies in the fields, no wind turbines on semis across the highways, we could have known who made every object in our house, no neatly cremated bodies behind the barbed wire, the buildings, no mercury rising through the city from their burned teeth, without you fewer mosquitoes, no almost instantaneous history of the world in light, no expansion to the coast, without you no mass-market guns, no 3D printers, no ultrasound of the baby's body, no landscape as a staging area for designer clothes & purses, no taking someone's acres to tunnel or poison, no carnival rides, no ice in drinks, no selling the oil & mineral rights to leave something to the next generation, without you no wonder, no photos of the war, the wedding, no piñata favors, no artificial heart, no snooze button, without you no body doused in flames for protest, no flying back to say goodbye to my grandparents, no flying for the funerals, no casinos, no poems scattered in dead hard drives, no soldiers on the ships and submarines sent to the sea, to war, no flag in the ice, no recording under the ocean of song, no birth control pill in its oyster pink box, no women on the factory floor, no flammable nightgowns, flammable water, oil slick, yellow bright wellies, train explosion, paintings that smell like horses, fish from the ocean's middle, no quick shower before work, no Madam Curie's laboratory, no man on the moon, astronauts exploding in air, no World Trade Center, no World Trade Center falling, no fires in the oil fields, no oil spill in the water, no time down to the second, no glut of information, no newspaper on my phone, no cold waiting rooms, no pieces showing what it all adds up to, here we are: an increased standard of living, fewer deaths in the factories, the mines, the fields, and now, bear down: the sixth extinction's crowning



# SASHA WEST

## fossil fuels



### AFTER NAOMI KLEIN

I had been so long away from you, in a vein  
 of the rock, waiting for you to find me  
 in peat. As you burn through  
 the leaves, the trees, I make you a cape  
 of smog. I keen in flares.  
 When you extract me, I am covered  
 in wet, like your daughter just birthed  
 and slick, like the bird you saw slouch  
 towards you from the Gulf. What is longing  
 but a thing that knows no  
 intermission. Even when you  
 can walk across the Gulf on rigs  
 you will hold and keep me. Tell me,  
 say: Oil is our everything. I, who have brought you  
 these clothes on ships,  
 and the light at night you kiss  
 his eyelids by, and the barrette that holds  
 her hair back. Whenever you gather,  
 I am among you. What shape  
 could we say craving has? My bones  
 in the ground become liquid  
 possibility. Of course, you can stop  
 any time you want. When we met  
 I said I'd steal you the sky  
 and there, proof of the theft,  
 the theft of the sky,  
 is the dark scrim  
 your lights make  
 of the stars. In exchange, I have  
 given you the Bakken flares  
 a bouquet of tiny orange  
 buds that flicker  
 into a quick  
 petal, and  
 burn  
 out.

# SPECIAL THANKS

## **acknowledgements**



### **CURATORIAL COMMITTEE**

Cecilia Giusti, Chair  
Rebecca Pugh, Curator  
Felice House  
Stephen Caffey  
Krista Steinke-Finch  
Karen Hillier

Additional thanks to committee member Felice House who was instrumental in bringing the exhibition to campus.

### **GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Leila El Dana



FOLLOW US!

**@tamuwrightgallery**