

For Immediate Release

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Moody Center for the Arts Commissions Five Artists to Create Public Art for Rice University

Starting this month, a series of large-scale, temporary installations showcase the work of Houstonians Preetika Rajgariah, Kenneth Tam, and Sarah Welch and MFA Houston Core Residency program alumni William Cordova and Devin Kenny



Sarah Welch, Skeeter Control, photo by Gustavo Raskosky.

August 21, 2023 [Houston, Texas]—Alison Weaver, the Suzanne Deal Booth Executive Director of the Moody Center for the Arts, has announced that five large-scale works will be installed throughout Rice University's campus, showcasing a vibrant group of artists based in or connected to Houston.

"In keeping with the university's commitment to public art, we're excited to share works by living artists who reflect the city's diversity and dynamic engagement with the arts," said Weaver. "This fall both the campus and the greater community can experience the creative potency of local and visiting artists who shape contemporary art in Houston."

Commissioned works debuting this fall include installations by Houston-based artists Preetika Rajgariah, Kenneth Tam, and Sarah Welch that activate the "tents" or Provisional Campus Facilities (PCFs)—structures that provide additional classroom and meeting space at the center of campus. Additionally, two MFA Houston Core Residency alumni William Cordova and Devin Kenny will be the featured artists in the Moody's Off the Wall at Brochstein Pavilion and Platform series, opening on September 29 and October 12, respectively. All five projects are new works curated by the Moody Center for the Arts. Each work is designed specifically for Rice's campus, reflecting the university's ongoing commitment to public art and showcasing the work of living artists through temporary, site-specific commissions.

Read on to learn more about each series—Tent Series, Off the Wall, and Platform—as well as the artworks included, and the commissioned artists.

About the Installations



Kenneth Tam, *We played*, photo courtesy of the Moody Center for the Arts.

Tent Series: Rajgariah, Tam, and Welch

On view August 21, 2023 – May 15, 2024

As in the past three rounds of commissions for the Tent Series, artists were invited to respond to the current moment and the campus environment with interventions intended to foster conversation in the academic year ahead. Works by Preetika Rajgariah, Kenneth Tam, and Sarah Welch will be featured on the south side of campus, across Loop Road from Herring Hall, from August 21, 2023, through May 15, 2024. These works follow Tent Series commissions from Karin Broker, GONZO247, Robert Hodge, Allison Hunter, Hedwige Jacobs, Delita Martin, Royal Sumikat, Charisse Pearlina Weston, and Jasmine Zelaya.

According to Weaver, “Since their debut in 2020, the tents have become a creative destination on campus, hosting both formal and informal gatherings and inspiring innovative thinking across departments. We’re proud to have commissioned twelve Houston-based artists to present their work through this public format which is notable for its visibility and accessibility.”

A description of each of the three works in the Tent Series is explained below.

Preetika Rajgariah, *your potential self is infinite*, 2023

Vinyl. Original work, acrylic and latex paint, saris on yoga mats.

Incorporating a range of materials from yoga mats to family-owned saris, Preetika Rajgariah’s practice examines the intersections of identity, race, pop culture, and sexuality. In her vibrant paintings, dynamic installations, and engaging performances, the artist explores contemporary selfhood through material histories of the body and various cultural narratives.

In *your potential self is infinite*, Rajgariah used five vertical yoga mats as canvases. Upon this textured surface, she painted and collaged three self-portraits in poses based on Bharatanatyam, a traditional Indian dance. To make the monumental figures and create depth, the artist layered strips of patterned fabric, specifically fragments of saris sourced from her mother and the local thrift store. In the background, lights sparkle amongst dark green foliage, while neon blue lines shaped like portals reference the British reality dating television show, *Love Island*. A large neon heart near the center of the scene invokes sentimental and saccharine notions of love as depicted in the media while gesturing to the artist’s personal desire to reclaim a space for self-love.

In Rajgariah’s words, “It’s a message of self-love to all the women on campus, especially those who look like me.” As with many of her works, the title comes from the label on a Yogi teabag, an American brand of tea that features inspirational affirmations on every tag. Such a reference simultaneously offers an uplifting message of self-empowerment while considering the multi-faceted aspects of identity and the commercialization of culture.

This installation is organized by Molly Everett, Assistant Curator, and is made possible by Rice University’s Arts Initiative Fund and the Moody Center for the Arts.

Kenneth Tam, *We played*, 2023

HD video and vinyl, on view from sunset to sunrise.

Dance, Jeevika Bhat; choreography, Juri Onuki; videography, Christian Carroll; and poem *We Played* (2023) by Rohan Chhetri.

Kenneth Tam is a visual artist whose practice investigates codified behaviors within groups, often in the context of universities, schools, or sports. He captures gender-specific rituals that are adopted to forge or affirm identity but also reveal unlikely moments of intimacy or even vulnerability. As Tam observes bodily expressions and collective activities in staged situations, he highlights the potential of the human body to function as a catalyst for social change by engaging in communication and relationships with others.

In *We played*, Tam examines the game of cricket as a carrier of cultural memory and a participative practice that can generate a feeling of belonging. He was inspired by growing South Asian cricket communities in Houston and nearby Fort Bend County, which is one of the most diverse counties in the United States. Tam worked with a professional dancer of South Asian descent to film a sequence of movements inspired by the actions of cricket players, particularly by the batter and the bowler (the person who throws the ball). This physical engagement is translated into a poetic, dance-like suite of abstracted gestures.

Tam collaborated with the Houston-based poet Rohan Chhetri who created a new text, reproduced on the tent's surface. The shape of the poem is meant to suggest the curve of the ball, or its arc when thrown by the bowler. In the poem, Chhetri reflects on how cricket speaks to questions of immigration and diasporic identity, as mirrored by the movement of the body. At night, the moving images and the printed words blend into each other, emphasizing the inspirational power of the visual arts, sports, and poetry.

This installation is organized by Frauke V. Josenhans, Curator, and is made possible by the Moody Center for the Arts.

Sarah Welch, *Skeeter Control*, 2023

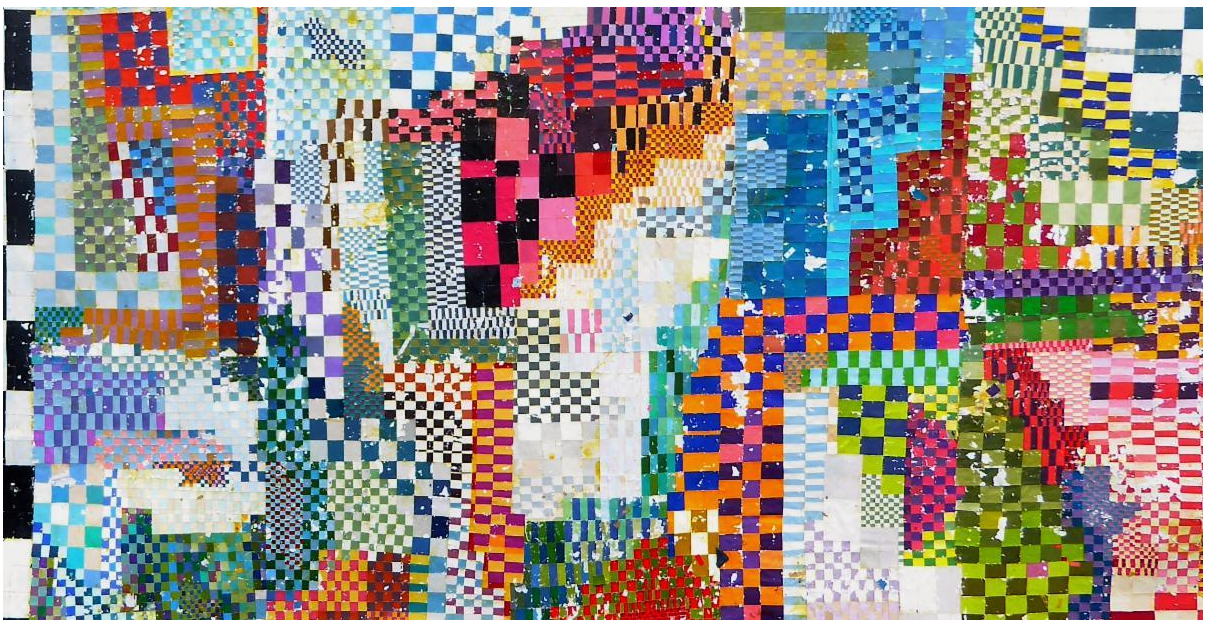
Vinyl. Original work, ink on paper.

Artist and illustrator Sarah Welch creates images, installations, and zines exploring the real and speculative effects of climate change on the Gulf Coast. Working at the intersection of nature and the built environment, Welch draws attention to the impact of human activity on the changing planet and our everyday lives.

Drawn in the artist's signature style of black outlines filled with hues of green, *Skeeter Control* depicts a cross-section of a frog pond with tadpoles in various stages of development. At the center of the composition, an aerosol spray can of bug repellent has fallen into the pond. The can's label references a product developed by Gulf Oil in the late 1950s, made with the toxic chemical DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane), the first synthetic insecticide. The label's design acknowledges both the product's success as a means of pest control and its adverse environmental impact on wildlife and human health. Although DDT was banned by the Environmental Protection Agency in 1972, its impact continues to be felt in natural habitats along the Gulf Coast and around the world.

Reflecting on the work the artist stated, "I like the contrast between a frog pond, which you could say is its own form of mosquito control, and the chemical bug spray as a human-engineered tool of control."

This installation is organized by Alison Weaver, Suzanne Deal Booth Executive Director, and is made possible by the Moody Center for the Arts.



william cordova, 2800 dowling-wasi-sangarara, detail, courtesy of the artist.

Off the Wall: william cordova, 2800 dowling-wasi-sangarara

Off the Wall, launched in 2019 and is a partnership between the Moody Center for the Arts and the Core Residency Program at the Glassell School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The series commissions Core alumni to create a site-specific installation for the Brochstein Pavilion, that remains on view for one year. The goal of the series is to meet students, faculty, staff, and visitors with innovative works of art in one of the most utilized spaces on campus, the café at the Brochstein Pavilion. To date, the artists commissioned for Off the Wall include Danielle Dean, Harold Mendez, Sondra Perry, and Clarissa Tossin. The latest installation by cordova will open with a public reception on September 29, from 5 – 7 pm. The work will remain on view through August 23, 2024.

Off the Wall: william cordova, *2800 dowling-wasi-sangarara*, 2023

Paint chips, acrylic, oil, graphite, and collage on cardboard.

william cordova is an interdisciplinary cultural practitioner interested in the roots of abstraction, the history of textile encoding, and non-linear narratives. He illuminates the synthesis of memory, ritual, and mythology to further disrupt, challenge and reassess definitions of our collective landscape. His site-specific installation work is both expansive and intimate. Intersecting the economy of materials with ephemeral and spatial rhythms, he juxtaposes social-political theories and strategies taken from Third Cinema, a Latin American film movement that used fragmentation, close-up shots, and open-endedness, thus highlighting alternate visual aesthetics.

The project *2800 dowling-wasi-sangarara* is rooted in cosmogony, the scientific study of the origin of the universe and fractal structures that convey repeating geometric shapes at various scales. These repeating patterns echo structures in nature, the human body, or rituals. cordova used photographic documents of historical landmark locations, one in Houston and the other one in Cuzco, Peru, as a starting point to encode and highlight how architecture, geography, and social systems are constructed and preserved through abstraction while producing visual scenarios. The photographs were altered through material intervention to challenge and provoke the viewer to form an independent conclusion. The overall composition relates to “the reunion of broken parts” (al-jabr), a mathematical concept that also laid the ground for algebra, and is used by cordova as a tool for algorithmic storytelling. Despite the visual cacophony of forms and color, the piece invites the viewer to meditate and reflect.

Off the Wall: william cordova is organized by Frauke V. Josenhans, Curator, Moody Center for the Arts. It is made possible by Leslie & Brad Bucher and by Susan Brochstein in memory of Raymond Brochstein.

Platform: Devin Kenny, *Ash and Spirits*

October 12, 2023 - May 1, 2024

The Moody’s Platform series brings temporary, site-specific projects to campus by inviting artists to respond to artworks, architectural structures, and research at Rice University. Since launching in 2017, the artists commissioned for the Platform series are Jarrod Beck, Rana Begum, Nina Katchadourian, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, Edra Soto, and We Make Carpets. Kenny’s installation will be sited at the center of campus, opening on October 12 and closing after May 1, 2024.

Devin Kenny, *Ash and Spirits*, 2023

Scaffolding, iridescent paint, plywood, commercially manufactured signs, near-field communication (NFC) tags, and audio.

Devin Kenny’s *Ash and Spirits* invites viewers to engage with historic concepts of monumentality during this time of social and political change. A scaffold coated with iridescent paint is mounted with commercial signs, featuring both standard worksite warnings and the artist’s reflections on the life of William Marsh Rice (1816–1900), the slave-owning merchant who bequeathed his fortune to found Rice University.

The physical experience of walking under the scaffold is activated by a collaborative sound work, available to visitors through suspended near-field communication (NFC) tags. Kenny commissioned eight composers with strong connections to Houston to create original works for the project: Anthony Almendarez, Marica Chavez, Megan Easely, Lisa E. Harris, Michael LaCour a.k.a. B L A C K I E, Anthony Obi a.k.a. Fat Tony, S Rodriguez, and Ricky Zoker a.k.a. YATTA. Visitors can access these scores by holding their smartphones near the NFC tags and following the playlist.

While the scaffolding visually echoes current construction projects on campus, the sound elements explore emotional registers connected to themes of change. Experienced together, the physical sculpture and the audible album invite visitors to consider our collective history of inequity and the ongoing struggle for social justice, together with possibilities for new modes of engagement.

Platform: Devin Kenny is organized by Alison Weaver, Suzanne Deal Booth Executive Director, and is made possible by the Moody Center for the Arts.

About the Artists

william cordova (b. 1969, Lima, Peru) graduated with a BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and received an MFA from Yale University. He has participated in numerous artist residencies including Artpace, San Antonio, TX; The Core program, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, CA; The Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, ME; and American Academy in Berlin, Germany. cordova has shown in various solo and group exhibitions, notably at the Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Stenersen Museum, Oslo, Norway; and others. His work is included in the collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Yale University, New Haven, CT; Museo de Arte de Lima, Peru; Goetz Collection, Munich, Germany; and La Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba, among others. He lives and works in Upstate New York, and Miami, FL.

Devin Kenny (b. 1987, Chicago, IL) is an artist, writer, musician, and independent curator. They received a BFA from Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art (2009) and an MFA from the New Genres Department at UCLA (2013). Kenny is currently a DPhil candidate at the University of Oxford, Oxfordshire, UK. Kenny's cooperative practice has led to collaborations with the Bruce High Quality Foundation University, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, SOMA Mexico, as well as projects created together with DADDY, poool, Studio Workout, and Temporary Agency. Kenny has performed at various art and music venues in the U.S. and abroad, including Recess, Brooklyn, NY; Julia Stoschek Foundation, Berlin, Germany; Artspace Aotearoa, New Zealand; REDCAT, Los Angeles, CA; MoMA PS1, New York, NY; Performance Space New York, NY; The Kitchen, New York, NY; and the Queens Museum, New York, NY. Kenny is an alumnus of the Whitney Independent Study Program and the Core Residency Program at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Kenny currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

Preetika Rajgariah (b. 1985, New Delhi, India) received her MFA from the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign (2018) and a BFA from Trinity University (2008). She has held several residencies, including at Asia Society Texas, Houston, TX; Galveston Artist Residency, Galveston, TX; and most recently at the Momentary, Bentonville, AR. Her work has been exhibited at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE; SOMArts Gallery, San Francisco, CA; Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX; and the Blaffer Art Museum, University of Houston, TX, among other venues. Rajgariah lives and works in Houston.

Kenneth Tam (b. 1982, Queens, NY) holds a BFA from The Cooper Union (2004) and an MFA from the University of Southern California (2010). He has had solo exhibitions at Ballroom Marfa, TX; MoCA Tucson, AZ; Queens Museum, NY; Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN; MIT List Center for Visual Arts, MA; the Visual Arts Center at UT Austin, TX; and ICA LA, CA. He is a recipient of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grant to Artists (2023); The Core Residency Program, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX (2015–17); California Community Foundation Fellowship (2015); and Art Matters Foundation Grant (2013). Tam is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Arts at Rice University. He lives and works in Houston and Queens, NY.

Sarah Welch (b. 1988, Austin, TX) is an artist and illustrator based in Houston, Texas. She is part of the printmaking duo Mystic Multiples and a co-organizer of Zine Fest Houston. Welch has participated in several artist residency programs, including at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts; Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture; MacDowell; Wesleyan University; Lawndale Art Center; and CentralTrak at the University of Texas Dallas. Welch has exhibited throughout Texas and the Gulf Coast, notably at Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX; Austin Public Library, Austin, TX; Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX; Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, TX; Galveston Art Center, Galveston, TX; Antenna New Orleans, LA; and the Museum of Fine Arts at Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL. She is a recipient of grants from The Arch and Anne Giles Kimbrough Fund Award (Dallas Museum of Art); The Houston Arts Alliance; and The Idea Fund. Welch's work is included in the City of Houston art collection and is currently on display at George Bush Intercontinental Airport, Houston.

About the Moody Center for the Arts

Since its opening in 2017, the Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University has dedicated its resources to encouraging creative thinking and original expression, enriching curricular innovation, and promoting cross-campus and community collaboration through transformative encounters with the arts. A public-facing institution, the Moody serves as a connection between the arts at Rice and the greater Houston community.

The Moody mounts three exhibitions a year in its award-winning building, curates numerous temporary and permanent public art installations throughout Rice's campus, and hosts performances, conversations, classes, and hands-on workshops. By centering these public and open initiatives on generative partnerships with artists, scholars, and

students from various disciplines, the Moody presents unexpected and everchanging entry points into the arts which bridge communities and areas of interest.

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(University Entrance 8, at University Boulevard and Stockton Street)

General Hours & Admission:

Exhibition spaces are open to the public and free of charge Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and are closed Sundays, Mondays, and holidays. Events and programs are open to the public. For schedule, tickets, and prices as applicable, visit moody.rice.edu.

Directions & Parking:

The Moody Center for the Arts is located on the campus of Rice University and is best reached by using Campus Entrance 8 at the intersection of University Boulevard and Stockton Street. As you enter campus, the building is on the right, just past the Media Center. There is a dedicated parking lot adjacent to the building. Payment for the Moody Lot is by credit card only.

For campus maps, visit www.rice.edu/maps.

About Rice University

Located on a 300-acre forested campus in Houston, Rice University is consistently ranked among the nation’s top 20 universities by U.S. News & World Report. Rice has highly respected schools of Architecture, Business, Continuing Studies, Engineering, Humanities, Music, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences and is home to the Baker Institute for Public Policy. With 3,879 undergraduates and 2,861 graduate students, Rice’s undergraduate student-to-faculty ratio is 6-to-1. Its residential college system builds close-knit communities and lifelong friendships, just one reason why Rice is ranked No. 1 for quality of life and for lots of race/class interaction and No. 2 for happiest students by the Princeton Review. Rice is also rated as the best value among private universities by Kiplinger’s Personal Finance.

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