

Fellowship 25
Sobia Ahmad
Brett Davis
Paolo Morales
Alana Perino
Clare Sheedy
Ramona Jingru Wang

I. Introduction

For twenty-five years, Silver Eye has supported emerging voices in contemporary photography through *Fellowship*, our annual international juried photography competition. We are grateful to jurors Dionne Lee and Nelson Chan for selecting this year's artists.

Building upon the *Fellowship 25* competition, this year's exhibition explores diverse themes including the bonds of family and home, cycles of loss and renewal, and the transformative power of collaboration. Some artists create installations or portraits that empower loved ones and communities, while others use handmade processes to evoke emotional and sensory engagement. Each artist reflects on their unique lived experiences while deeply engaging with photography as a powerful medium of inquiry.

Silver Eye is proud to support the *Fellowship 25* artists at a pivotal stage in their practices and to bring their work into conversation together.

Fellowship 25 is supported directly by Arts, Equity, & Education Fund™ and The Leonian Foundation.

Fellowship Award

Ramona Jingru Wang

Keystone Award

Sobia Ahmad

Fellowship Award Honorable Mention

Brett Davis, Alana Perino

Keystone Award Honorable Mention

Paolo Morales, Clare Sheedy

About the Artists

Sobia Ahmad explores the transcendental power of everyday experiences, objects, and rituals through film, photography, and social practice. She draws from non-western lexicons, specifically traditions of devotional poetry and oral storytelling associated with Sufism. Ahmad was born and raised in Pakistan and moved to the United States at the age of fourteen. She holds an MFA from Carnegie Mellon University (2024), a BS in Community Health (2015), and a BA in Studio Art (2016), both from the University of Maryland College Park, and lives in Pittsburgh.

Brett Davis is a father, partner, and artist based in Columbus, Ohio. He holds a BA in American Studies from Georgetown University and an MFA in Visual Art from The Ohio State University. Davis is the recipient of the 2023 Greater Columbus Arts Council and Columbus Museum of Art Visual Artist Fellowship. His books are held extensively in US collections as well as the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum Library (Tokyo, Japan).

Paolo Morales' work investigates the documentary tradition. His photographs have featured in eight solo exhibitions and numerous group exhibitions. Morales received an MFA from Rhode Island School of Design and is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Photography at Bucknell University. He was born and raised in New York City and lives with his wife and corgi in Philadelphia.

Alana Perino's artistic practice engages with the entanglements of home, family, and heritage. Simultaneously an only child and the youngest of seven children, Alana grew up in New York City, the North Fork of Long Island, and the stretch of highway between the two. They studied European Intellectual History and Photography at Wesleyan University before completing the MFA Photography program at RISD. Alana resides on the unceded land of the Pokanoket, Wampanoag, and Narragansett in Providence, Rhode Island, where they currently serve as an Assistant Professor at Johnson & Wales University.

Clare Sheedy lives and works in Pittsburgh, PA, where she teaches art to children and works at a Downtown box office. She seeks to create shared methods of inquiry in which the artist and the viewer must journey together, each contributing equal effort. Consequently, Sheedy's practice fosters a sense of intimacy in works that bridge language, touch, and perception.

Ramona Jingru Wang transcends documentary traditions to craft narratives that shed light on the compassionate bonds that photographs can nurture. Her work delves into themes of identity, community, and the deep connections fostered between humans and their surrounding spaces. She studied at the International Center of Photography-Bard College and graduated with an MFA in photography from Pratt Institute, New York.



II. Collaboration and Photography

Photography often relies on the contributions of multiple individuals. However, the notion of the singular artist has been reinforced throughout histories of photography. As a result, the complex relationships and negotiations involved in creating and sharing a photograph are often overlooked. Several *Fellowship 25* artists explore these dynamics by challenging preconceived power structures between the artist and the sitter or subject. For example, Brett Davis collaborated with his five-year-old daughter, Toko, to create installations that question traditional family hierarchies and empower her agency and authorship. Similarly, Ramona Jingru Wang collaborates with her friends to produce portraits grounded in mutual trust and kinship. Her photographs are both playful and political, celebrating her friend's lives and environments while refuting stereotypical representations of Asian bodies in media, film, and literature.

Questions for Looking:

→ Consider Ramona Jingru Wang's photograph *Sukeban Girls*. The term 'Sukeban' historically refers to all-female street gangs in 1960s-70s Japan who protested against mainstream gender norms in a male-dominated society. They were distinctive for their dress incorporating modified school uniforms. Why might the artist choose to reenact this subculture today? In the image, neither of the young women face the viewer. Instead, they turn inwards, as one lights the other's cigarette. What might this gesture and their posture suggest to you?

→ Brett Davis uses video stills in his installations rather than traditional photographs. How does knowing the image originates from a moving sequence affect your perception of it? In what ways might this creative choice invite reflection on time?

→ The layout of Brett and Toko Davis' installation reflects five-year-old Toko's height and way of experiencing the world. How does this perspective influence your relationship to the work? Whose viewpoint is centered and why?



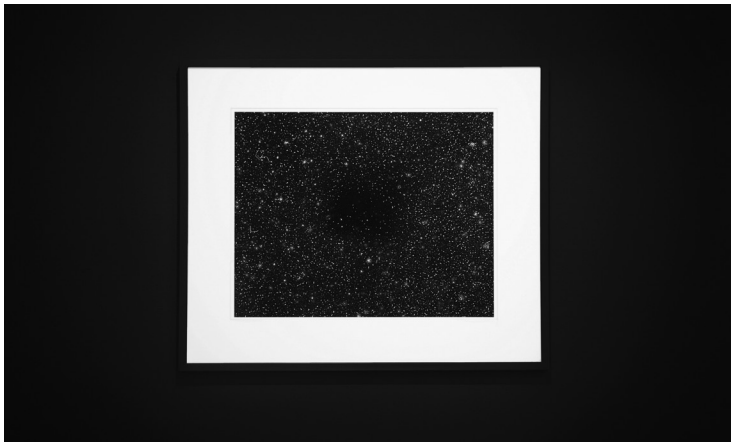
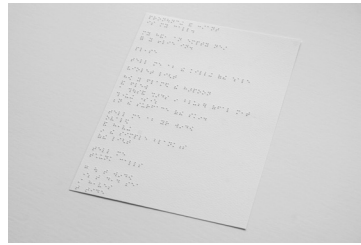
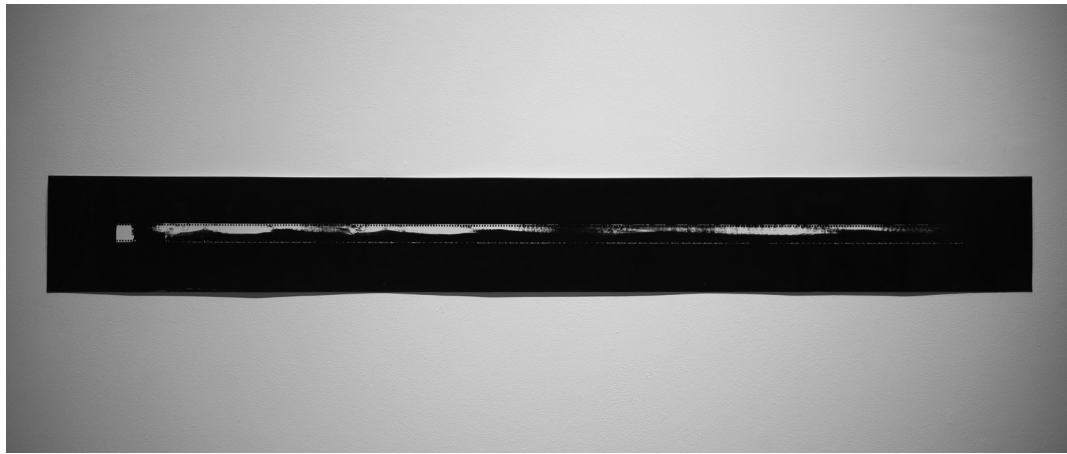


III. Visualizing Family and Home

Family, home, and belonging are central themes in *Fellowship 25*. Artists in this exhibition invite us into their lived experiences and encourage us to reflect on our own evolving relationships with the people and places that shape our lives. For instance, in *Pictures of Birds*, Alana Perino responds to their stepmother's fading memory and the inevitability of their father's death. What began as a personal, instinctive act of preservation invites broader reflection on cycles of mortality and transformation. Paolo Morales' *Balibbayan* series examines transnational family bonds and concepts of home. At the same time, his work challenges the racial assumptions embedded in photography and invites reflection on how care is expressed through the photographic image itself.

Questions for Looking

- Many of Paolo Morales' photographs show moments of familial tenderness through gestures of touch and gathering around the sharing of food. By viewing shared insights into Morales' own family life, what associations or memories arise for you? How do these intimate depictions of care invite reflection on photography not only as documentation, but as an act of care in itself?
- In Alana Perino's photograph *Lori's Shells*, a seashell is shown removed from its natural beach habitat and suspended in a bucket during a cleaning process. The photograph refers to Perino's stepmother and sister's practice of collecting shells. Beyond this personal connection for the artist, how might the photograph explore more abstract themes of loss and the human impulse to preserve what was once beautiful?
- Alana Perino's practice explores the psychological and spiritual connections between human experience and the natural world. Consider, for example, *Shark*. While sharks are typically portrayed as fearsome, often by emphasizing their teeth, Perino focuses on the shark's gills, organs which take in oxygen and eliminate carbon dioxide. How does this photograph make you feel? The artist displays it next to an image of their father's shower. What meaning does this juxtaposition invite?



IV. Knowing Through Feeling

Several artists in *Fellowship 25* explore how perception and understanding are shaped by emotional and sensory experiences. Clare Sheedy, for instance, integrates photographs and poems in both standard text and braille, offering a multi-layered experience that reflects her ongoing process of inquiry. This approach invites us to think and *feel* through different states of knowing and unknowing.

While Sheedy's work encourages us to explore perception through photography's relationship to text and sensory engagement, Sobia Ahmad's process-driven work challenges conventional ways of seeing. Photographs taken on reversal film stock and printed, inverted, as negatives, emphasize textures, movement, and the interplay between light and darkness. Ahmad's meditative exploration of **ecological** concerns invites viewers to connect emotionally with her work, the interconnectedness of all things and offering diverse ways of knowing.

Questions for Looking

→ Sobia Ahmad's photograph, *The Breath within the Breath*, is a continuous image created on a single roll of 35mm film. It was made at **Pando**, a forest in Utah considered to be the largest living organism in the world. The artist kept the camera shutter open while advancing the film through the camera and slowly turning her body in a full circle timed with her breath. What new meanings arise when an image is captured through movement? How might the viewer's understanding of the Pando shift when the forest is not described conventionally?

→ In Clare Sheedy's installation, certain motifs echo and repeat, such as shadows. Looking at the two photographs shown here, what does their juxtaposition suggest to you? How do the shadows contribute to the artist's exploration of space and perception?

→ Sheedy incorporates poems in braille, while Ahmad presents works that reenact movement or require us to use our bodies to shift how we typically experience art, such as looking down at *To Become Dust that Sings it's Melody to the Night*. How can engaging senses beyond sight open up new ways of experiencing art?

V. Community Perspectives

Community Perspectives is an ongoing series where people from diverse disciplines and backgrounds respond freely to images in our exhibitions.



Brent Nakamoto reflects on Sobia Ahmad's *As One They Quake II*, 2024

In the light there is darkness,
but don't take it as darkness;
In the dark there is light,
but don't see it as light.
Light and dark oppose one another
like the front and back foot in walking [...]
If you don't understand the way right before you,
how will you know the path as you walk?*

In Sobia's photograph of Pando—a forest of trees that is also only one sprawling tree—she takes us on a walk through light and darkness. Processed using coffee instead of traditional photo-chemicals, the image crackles with energy, as if made up of thousands of chattering particles. The air rustles along with the leaves. Footsteps rustle along with the sky. As we step amongst the trees that are all one tree, light and darkness flicker together—a universe emerges.

In traditional Zen Buddhist thought, “light” and “dark” have conventionally opposite connotations to Western thought. Light: the realm of samsara, where discrimination creates difference, opposition, suffering. Dark: the realm of nirvana, the unity of emptiness, non-discrimination. In his poem, the “Harmony of Difference and Equality”, Zen ancestor Shitou reminds us that to see light and darkness as separate is delusion—yet seeing them as the same is also not true. To hold one above the other is like trying to walk while standing on one foot. How do you hold both together? Keep moving forward.

**Harmony of Difference and Equality (Sandokai), Shitou Xiqian*

Brent Nakamoto is a Queer, Japanese-American, and Buddhist artist with a background in painting and drawing, printmaking, photography, and book arts. He is the Program and Marketing Coordinator for Brew House Arts, a non-profit arts organization where he manages the Distillery Emerging Artist Residency. He is the owner and operator of Almost Perfect Press, a curatorial and publishing project specializing in hand-bound, small-batch publications featuring emerging writers and artists.

Elina Zhang reflects on Ramona Jingru Wang's *Kazz and Jazzy*, 2024

The morning that Bonny was supposed to move out of our shared apartment to a new city, she crawled into my bed and said she wasn't ready yet. She was still in her sleepwear, cottony, wrinkled. The moving truck was outside, her boyfriend had traveled to help with the move, her things were in boxes. She cried in my pillow, and I told her she didn't have to go.

Getting to live with a childhood friend as an adult girl is an enviable position, it means sleepovers every day. Our families were friends, Bonny and I, we went to Chinese parties together, slinking out of the adults' line of vision. Find us, two girls supine on an unfamiliar bed or floor, staring up at the ceiling fan. *Kazz and Jazzy*, Bonny and Elina. We would find our girl selves ragdolling in many bedrooms, girl limbs sprawling on bed covers, girl fingers grazing what didn't belong to us. Girls enter unknown rooms because rooms need girls as much as girls need them. The ceiling won't stare at itself. The closest thing a girl has to possessing a self is possessing a secret, and anything could be a secret if a girl whispers it to a girl in a room a girl isn't supposed to be in.

Qinmi, it's how my mom has described me and Bonny's friendship. It's also what she said I could have with my partner, who is not a man. "Why can't you just be very *qinmi* friends?"

It's been over four years since Bonny moved. I look everywhere for childhood friends, escaping the party just to lie on a bed that isn't mine.

Elina Zhang is a queer writer, educator, organizer and girl. She is a member of the JADED arts collective, and she curates a gossip sheet in Pittsburgh.



Glossary

Balikbayan

Translates in Tagalog to a Filipino person visiting or returning to the Philippines after a period of living in another country.

Collaboration

Refers to two or more people working together to create or achieve a shared goal or outcome.

Ecological

Relates to the interrelationship of organisms and their environments.

Pando

Refers to an ancient aspen tree grove in south-central Utah, believed to be over 10,000 years old. Unified by a single immense root system, Pando stands as the earth's oldest and heaviest living organism, embodying interconnectedness and oneness.

Transnational

Refers to going beyond or extending national boundaries.

Reading List

Selected readings shared by *Fellowship 25* artists below offer insights into their practices.

Jeffrey de Blois, and Ruth Erickson eds., *To begin again: Artists and Childhood* (DelMonico Books/Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (January 3, 2023)

Park Chan-wook (Director), *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* (2006)

Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991, pp 149-181)

Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (One World, 2020)

Bell Hooks, 'Women Artists: The Creative Process' in *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (W.W.Norton and Company, 1995, pp 125-132)

Karl Ove Knausgård, *A Time for Everything* (Archipelago Books, 2009)

Kim Knowles, *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)

Anthony Christian Ocampo, *The Latinos of Asia: How Filipino Americans Break the Rules of Race* (Stanford University Press, 2016)

Sadaf Padder, 'Artists Look to Sufism for Echoes of the Divine', *Hyperallergic* (March 26, 2025)

Adrienne Rich, *Poetry & Commitment* (W.W.Norton and Company, 2007)

Dr. Paul Rogers, *Prostrate in Pando* (pandopopulus.com, March 25, 2022)

Leo Rubinien, *A Map of the East* (David R Godine, 1994)

Sirkhane Darkroom, *I Saw The Air Fly* (MACK, 2021)

Playlist

Alana Perino generously shared the playlist below, which inspired them during the making of *Pictures of Birds*. The playlist should be listened to in sequence.

Svefn-g-englar - Sigur Rós
Bird of Cuzco - Nina Nastasia
God is Alive Magic is Afoot - Buffy Saint Marie
Orange - Big Thief
Into Dust - Mazzy Star
Sawdust and Diamonds - Joanna Newsom
Holy Ghost - Laura Stevenson
Picture Me Better - Weyes Blood
Con Te Partirò - Andrea Bocelli
Another World - Anohni
On the Nature of Daylight - Max Richter
My Love Mine All Mine - Mitski

**Silver Eye Center for Photography
Aaronel deRoy Gruber & Irving Gruber Gallery
4808 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15224**

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