

# Fellowship 26

Robert Contreras II

Conner Gordon

Javier Griffey

Jamie Ho

Jacquelyn Johnson

Helen Jones

## I. Introduction

This year's *Fellowship 26* artists invite us into worlds shaped by memory, ritual, and attentive observation. Helen Jones and Robert Contreras II develop approaches to explore the power of intergenerational connection, while Jacquelyn Johnson and Javier Griffey navigate familial memory through dynamic exchanges of text and image. Across the exhibition, artists reconsider how culture and perception shift meanings. Jamie Ho and Conner Gordon each challenge the ways imaging practices have historically visualized ideologies. Working across GIFs, photography, and installation, Ho interrogates Eurocentric perceptions of Asian American women and femmes, while Gordon disrupts familiar ideas of the American landscape. Together, these six artists' distinct visual languages sustain personal processes of discovery while opening up new ways of seeing.

*Fellowship 26* is generously supported by Arts, Equity, & Education Fund™.

### **International Fellowship Award**

Jamie Ho

### **Keystone Award**

Javier Griffey

### **International Fellowship Award Honorable Mention**

Conner Gordon, Jacquelyn Johnson

### **Keystone Award Honorable Mention**

Robert Contreras II, Helen Jones

## About the Artists

**Robert Contreras II** is a no sabo kid uncovering what lies beneath while planting a future rooted in the love and labor of his Ecuadorian and Mexican American family. Once taught to blend in, he now reclaims his identity through performances and photographs that examine memory, belonging, and legacy. His work turns cultural gaps into spaces of connection; an ongoing journey to honor the past, grow through the present, and tend to what's yet to come.

**Conner Gordon** is an artist and educator exploring photography as unreliable narration. Through installations and self-published photobooks, he explores how photography's documentary fallibility opens up new expressive potential. He holds an MFA in Art from the University of Oregon and is currently a Lecturer in Photography at Washburn University in Topeka, KS.

**Javier Griffey** is a photographic essayist whose practice interrogates photography as a meditation on fragmented truths, shared memory, and the ethics of seeing. Drawing from personal archives, documentary methodologies, and his own emotional cadence, Griffey approaches the medium as both document and metaphor. His images, texts, and material interventions dance in tandem, seeking validation in the use of a camera. He holds an MFA from the School of the Arts at Columbia University and a BA from Moravian University.

**Jamie Ho** is an interdisciplinary artist and educator from Fort Myers, Florida. Her art practice engages with photography, GIFs, new media, and installation to investigate the long-term impact of assimilation and cultural bereavement through references to ancestral Chinese traditions and artifacts. Her work troubles the history of public spectacle and display of Asian American women, using performance and lighting studio to challenge societal expectations of gender roles and performance. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Art in the Photography and Moving Image area at Florida State University.

**Jacquelyn Johnson** is a project-based artist working interdisciplinarily between photography, time-based media, textiles, and prose. She currently lives in Ithaca, New York where she works as a program coordinator and is an MFA candidate in Image Text at Cornell University. She is bound to art and writing through vernacular language, failures in storytelling and representation, and daily practices. Johnson is from Western Pennsylvania, and is a co-director of the Pittsburgh Art Book Fair, and self-publishes under the moniker Cool Dry Place. She received her B.F.A. from Carnegie Mellon University School of Art.

**Helen Jones** is an image maker whose work explores interactions between people and places, and the imprints they leave behind. She holds an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin and a BFA from the Massachusetts College of Art. Since 2011, she has run Pine Island Press, a small press specializing in publishing photography and art zines.



## II. Memory and Intergenerational Connection

Rather than treating memory as stable or fixed, several artists in *Fellowship 26* approach it as something to be reshaped through photography. Robert Contreras II describes his project as a collaboration with his family across time, where the act of photography contributes to an ever-unfolding **narrative**. Javier Griffey places his mother's archival photographs in direct dialogue with his own contemporary images and writing to open up new understandings of their relationship. Helen Jones juxtaposes her own contemporary photographs with ephemera, snapshots, poems, and notes to reflect on loss and connections still to be discovered.

Together, these artists show that family memory is not a fixed past to recover, but instead something actively reshaped by love, care, attention, distance and time.



### Questions for Looking:

- Consider Robert Contreras II's photograph *Saying cheese with Dad*, 2021. How might Robert Contreras II's use of effigies and fabric overall suggest memory as something carried or embodied?
- In works such as *I Often Forget You Were a Child Once*, 2026, Javier Griffey combines archival and contemporary images. What effect does this create? Do these moments feel preserved, transformed, or both?
- Helen Jones juxtaposes her own images with fragments from the past, suggesting that absence and presence coexist. How does Jones suggest that **intergenerational** connection is non-linear and reshaped over time?



Images (top to bottom, left to right): Robert Contreras II, *Saying cheese with Dad*, 2021. Javier Griffey, *I Often Forget You Were a Child Once*, 2026. Helen Jones, *Bread and roses on a smokey day, Oregon*, 2019 (2026); *Smoking, thinking*, 2021 (2026).



### III. Shifting Discourses

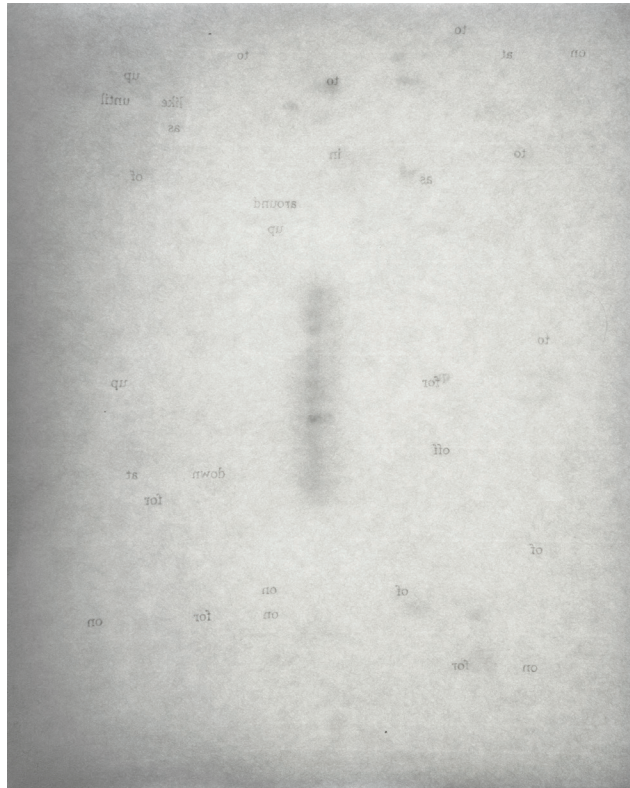
Several artists in *Fellowship 26* challenge how photography constructs meaning, authority, and representation. Conner Gordon photographed the Oregon coast using a phone camera and binoculars as a makeshift lens, disrupting familiar ways of perceiving and representing landscape. Jamie Ho works across GIFs, staged altars, and repetitive visual systems, drawing on personal and cultural histories to rethink **cross-cultural exchange** and question Western conventions. Together, their work expands photographic discourse by revealing how meaning is constructed through process, context, and systems of display, inviting viewers to question how images are made, encountered, and understood.

#### Questions for Looking

- Compare and contrast Conner Gordon's photographs. How does he destabilize vision? What does his use of distortion or abstraction suggest about photographic authority or creative possibility?
- Jamie Ho's interdisciplinary practice combines multiple forms of making and incorporates cultural references drawing from childhood memories and contemporary experience. How does this layering reclaim symbols to shift authority?
- Both artists challenge the idea of photography as a stable record. When photographic authority is unsettled, what kinds of emotion, sensation, or meaning take its place?



Images (top to bottom): Conner Gordon, *Retina*, 2026. Jamie Ho, *Altar for Filial Piety (small) I, II, III*.



## IV. Transformative Text–Image Relationships

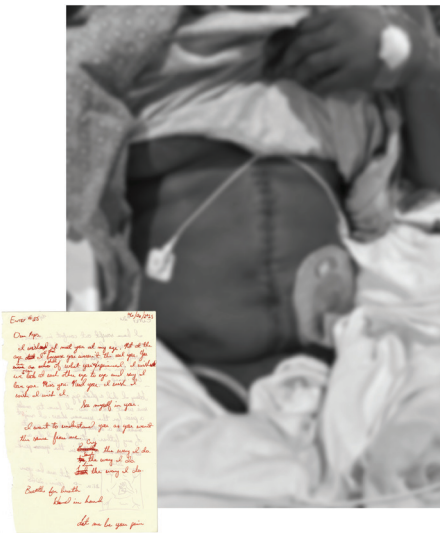
Jacquelyn Johnson and Javier Griffey both treat text as a medium that can be disrupted or reimagined in relation to art-making, using language not as a fixed system but as a means to explore lived experience in conversation with photography.

Jacquelyn Johnson works within strict rules that govern how text can be used to prompt image-making. She draws from a transcript of a loved one’s religious testimony and defines parameters within which the relationship between text and image itself becomes her medium. Javier Griffey writes individually to each of his parents, clarifying his own voice in the space in-between communication or absence.

Across these interventions, language is proven to be something that can be reshaped through attention, care, and ongoing self-discovery.

### Questions for Looking

- In Jacquelyn Johnson’s work, she takes **prepositions** from the original transcript as a guide for making or selecting photographs. How do such limits or constraints shape the relationships between text and image?
- In Javier Griffey’s work such as *Entry #25*, how does writing “to” someone shape the self as much as the person being addressed?



Images (top to bottom, left to right): Jacquelyn Johnson, *toward*, 2026; *The Beginning of Prayer*, 2026. Javier Griffey, *Entry #25*, 2025.

## V. Community Perspectives

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



### Karen Lue reflects on Jamie Ho's *To Touch (Peonies)*, 2025

I have been familiar with Jamie Ho's work for a number of years, the unmistakable altars she builds, these glimmering worlds. They are portraits without a sitter, symbols of our shared culture standing in for a body.

In *To Touch (Peonies)*, the scene evokes a gentleness when a crooked nail caresses a bloom not fully open. But there's still a crudeness to the hand that touches, garish adornments on top of a skin that isn't quite right. I think about my body and who has and has not been gentle to it. I think of those who have only been gentle because of how they see the body of an Asian woman and not because they want to be gentle. I also think of my mother and her vanity; her lack of gentleness when she pruned and preened me as a young girl, pulling my hair tight against my skull as she tied it into a ponytail, so tight that I would tear up.

To be touched a certain way, to be perceived a certain way, to be trimmed to fit inside a vessel—a body is not unlike a bloom.

*Karen Lue is a self-taught, image-based artist whose work explores aspects of identity and the physical body in relation to grief, ritual, and performance. She is the recipient of the Keystone Award Honorable Mention (2023) through Silver Eye Center for Photography and has exhibited at Associated Artist of Pittsburgh, SPACE Gallery, and Tomayko Foundation, among others. She has received residencies from Cornell's Image Text MFA program and Brew House Arts, and her work has been featured online and in print in SLANT'D Media, DER GREIF, Float Magazine, and Fraction Magazine.*



**Dani Lamorte reflects on Javier Griffey's *Staring Down a Barrel Waiting to be Shot*, 2026**

It's, of course, you know, empty inside. A camera is a room, a box, containing something like nothing. Emptiness is a horizon. Meaning is the sun.

I only know Javier through three photographs and a voice note. I am writing to you—*hello, reader*—about just one of those photographs. You may never hear the voice note, may never see the two remaining images. We have an emptiness, too.

Artists often include cameras in their self-portraits. Vivian Maier's was at her waist. Robert Mapplethorpe's was right above his...are we allowed to say? But Javier, the photographer, is nowhere to be seen.

Maybe he's selling us this camera. It is, after all, posed like a kid on picture day. Or maybe he's reminding us that we need him behind the camera. If you—*yes, you*—go behind the camera, who will be in front? Who will have their picture taken? Not me, not Javier. We're not here.

There are things behind the curtain, but the camera is a curious fish, a territorial bird. Dare you walk past it? Will it not take a bite of your flesh, digest it into something you've not yet been?

Javier, what do you think?

*Dani Lamorte is a Pittsburgh-based artist who writes, performs, and makes photographic images. His first book, *Nobody's Psychic*, was published by the University Press of Kentucky in 2025.*

## David Bernabo reflects on Jacquelyn Johnson's *after*, 2026

How I love a conundrum. A photograph that says, THIS IS NOT REAL, while also presenting two identifiable things, a wall and its copy. Or maybe it's a phased image—an object in two places at once, breaking time.

My immediate thought: a visible measurement of the latency between making a decision and hearing your brain-voice hand you that decision.

Whatever the dissonance, whatever the gap, there is a desire for it to mean something.

Practicing a religion can be a lifelong exercise in meaning making. Faith in unseen figures and places + texts to interpret + leaders to interpret + politics + intuition. Constantly reconciling exploded physics with the will to do good. By some accounts, a spiteful Jesus cursed his boyhood friend to an early deathbed. What to do with this?

As with much of Jac's work, there is a conveyance of information paired with an elevation of a mystery. A process that begets another process and the documentation to prove that it all took place.

An interview transcript distilled into 1,039 unique words. A new text written from *only* those words. A guide for image-making using only prepositions from those 1,039 words.

It's exciting to see this photograph in person, as I mostly know Jac's work through documentation on her website. I've always been late to the party or out of town. Finally, I get to see the real thing.

*David Bernabo is a musician, artist, and filmmaker. He performs in the bands Watererer, House Music, How Things Are Made, and How Things Are. His films document Western Pennsylvania food systems, the studio practices of composers and artists, and the histories of iconic arts institutions like the Mattress Factory. He is most noted for Moundsville, a documentary co-directed with writer John W. Miller, which screened on PBS for three years, and the biographical documentary Just For The Record about avant-garde composer "Blue" Gene Tyranny. He is a co-founder of Bright Archives, an independent archival production house.*



## Glossary

<b>Cross-cultural exchange</b>	Refers to the interaction and sharing of ideas, beliefs, traditions, and perspectives from different cultures. This often leads to new meanings or hybrid forms. This process emphasizes the importance of interconnectedness.
<b>Intergenerational</b>	Involving or bringing together people from different generations or age groups. In families and communities, intergenerational exchange can be mutually beneficial, fostering understanding, respect, and shared learning across age groups.
<b>Narrative</b>	The presentation or understanding of a series of experiences or events as a story, often representing a particular point of view or set of values.
<b>Preposition</b>	A small, common word (such as “in,” “on,” “at,” or “with”) that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and another part of a sentence. Prepositions often indicate direction, location, or time, or introduce an object.

## Reading List

*Selected readings shared by Fellowship 26 artists below offer insights into their practices.*

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010)

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 2006)

Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 2019)

Inger Christensen (translated by Susanna Nied with an introduction by Anne Carson), *it* (New Directions, 2006)

Édouard Glissant, “For Opacity” in *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997)

Mao, Sally Wen Mao, “Occidentalism” in *Oculus* (Graywolf Press, 2019) 9-10.

José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999)

Pablo Neruda (translated by William O’Daly), *The Book of Questions* (Copper Canyon Press, 2001)

Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (Verso Books: London, 2020)

Ellen Samuels, “Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time”, *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37(3), 2017

David Levi Strauss, *Photography and Belief* (David Zwirner Books, 2020)

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton University Press, 2021)

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (Bison Books, 1997)

**Silver Eye Center for Photography  
Aaronel deRoy Gruber & Irving Gruber Gallery  
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