

stories of us at CCA's Campus Gallery

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by Renata Blanco Gorbea



Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

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Left: Installation view of *Carry-On* by Pallavi Sharma (2010) and *Witness* by Tereneh Hemami (2019)
 Right: Janette Kim, *Barbertown* (2017)
 Photos courtesy of Megan Kelly

Opening at the CCA Campus Gallery in San Francisco, *stories of us* showcases the work of multiple artists all working in different mediums, ranging from industrial design to textile art. As part of the CCA@CCA initiative, which works towards promoting creative activism and democratic engagement at California College of the Arts, *stories of us* presents work exclusively submitted by members of the college's faculty. The main focus of the exhibition is to meditate on how artists embody personal narratives of belonging in their practices. The works featured in *stories of us* serve as a reminder of the fact that we are not alone and that we do, in fact, belong, whether that be as students, artists, professors, staff, or simply as individuals.

The exhibition space was predominantly open with few divisions, allowing all of the works presented to come into dialogue with one another. The layout made it easy to interact with the works and appreciate them not only by themselves, but as part of a



stories of us Reading Room
 Photo courtesy of Megan Kelly

larger organism. One of the things that caught my eye the most was the reading room, where the viewer could find books relating to the main topic of the exhibition recommended by the show's participating artists. The reading space gave the gallery and the works a deeper dimension. It felt as if the viewer could really connect and build a relationship, not only with the subject of the exhibition or the artworks, but with the artists themselves; some of whom had written the content found in the library.

Moving further into the exhibition I was met with works in many different mediums, such as the piece *Manufactured [Poetic] Phenomena: The Cover Project (2018–2019)* by Mara Holt Skov. This piece addresses the topic of belonging through a series of books gathering some of the lessons of educator Steven Skov Holt about design and creative processes,

in which blank spaces have been left for future students to fill in. The books create a space for students to build a community of their own and to share their own knowledge, highlighting how artists and designers can always learn from each other.

Throughout the exhibition audiences get to appreciate the way in which artists interpret the meaning of belonging, what it means to belong, and how we can make everyone belong. Artists like Deborah Stein and Curtis Hidemasa Arima explore topics of belonging by giving a voice to those who have been historically excluded. Stein's ceramic plate piece *Les Oubliés (The Forgotten Ones)* (2018–2022) serves as a memorial for all of those who have been victims of anti-semitic violence in recent years. Arima's piece *Stories from Camp: A stone's throw* (2016) recounts one of the stories that the artist's father used to tell them about

living in a Japanese Relocation Camp during WWII. Both of these works make space for the artists to reflect on the importance of creating safe spaces and to highlight the stories of those who for so long have not been able to raise their voice. They remind us that we still need to work hard in order to create communities where everyone is heard and can feel safe.



Ranu Mukherjee, *Ensemble for Non-Linear Time/Campus 23* (2022)
Photo courtesy of Megan Kelly

In *Ensemble for Non-Linear Time/Campus 23* (2022), artist Ranu Mukherjee affirms that we are part of nature and that nature is a part of us. This film installation uses imagery of the forest, along with a dancing sequence connecting the human body with the natural environment, reminding us that nature welcomes all of us. This work made me reflect on the importance of protecting these crucial spaces of belonging that we have taken for granted for a very long time.

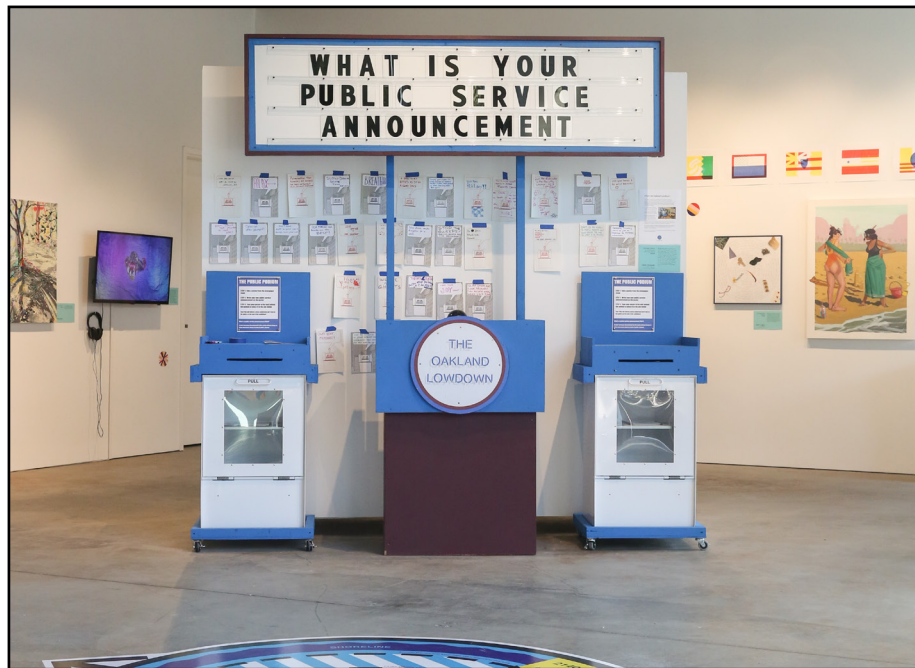
Overall the exhibition collects multiple interpretations of what it means to belong. Artists explore the meaning of belonging by telling stories, incentivizing the creation of a unified community,

and making it clear that we are not too different from one another. Seeing all the different works come together in conversation throughout the space gestures toward the importance and influence that art and media have on changing narratives and creating spaces of tolerance. While some works resonated with me more than others, I think that it is crucial as students to be able to learn from our faculty even outside of the classroom. All of the artists' pieces remind us that we all have a voice, and we can use it to highlight the things we value and create a better world with our craft. Appreciating so many different stories from our own professors and other staff members opens a door for communication, engagement, and solidarity. Seeing so many different perspectives and hearing so many stories, all of which have big and small similarities with one another, really makes the viewer realize that we are not in fact as different as we have been led to believe. An exhibition like *stories of us* is extremely relevant in the contemporary context where more and more people across institutions are working towards embracing inclusivity and belonging.

Curtis Hidemasa Arima, *Stories from Camp: A stone's throw* (2023)
Photo courtesy of Megan Kelly



Deborah Stein, *Les Oubliés (The Forgotten Ones)* (2018–2022)
Photos courtesy of Megan Kelly



Chris Treggiari, *The Public Podium (A Collaboration with Cole Goins)* (2023)
Photo courtesy of Megan Kelly

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Creative Citizens in Action (CCA@CCA) is a college-wide initiative that promotes creative activism and democratic engagement through public programs, exhibitions, and curriculum connections. The *stories of us* exhibition concept is inspired by an audio project of the same name by CCA@CCA Student Fellow, Layla Namak (MARCH 2025).



Visitors gathered at CCA's Campus Gallery for the opening reception of *stories of us* on September 6th, as Director of Exhibitions Jaime Austin speaks.

Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno