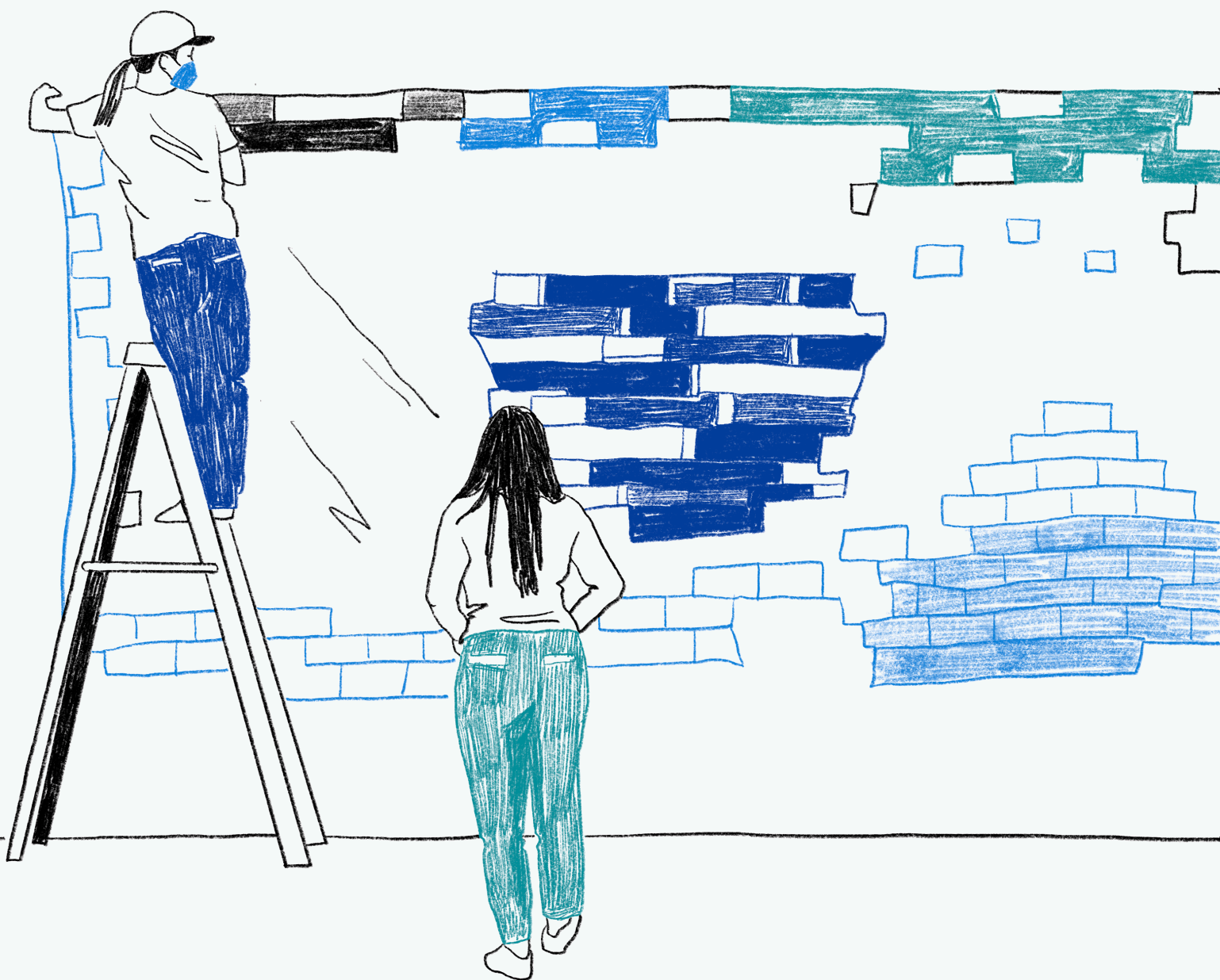


# Transcending Symbiosis through Arts: An Exhibition at the *Fluid Mutualism Symposium*

By Gordon Fung



The individual practices of art and institutional teaching often emphasize individuality. The sole expression of self, which often becomes egocentric, drives artists away from communal responsibility. To draw awareness of equal give and take, CCA@CCA Faculty Coordinator Vreni Michelini-Castillo (aka Prof. V), adjunct professor in Critical Ethnic Studies, organized the CCA@CCA Fluid Mutualism Symposium, which took place March 1-4, 2022. This symposium cultivated the concept of symbiosis through a week of seminars, workshops, performances, and an exhibition in CCA's Nave space. To enhance the understanding of fluid mutualism through visual experience, the symposium exhibited five works by CCA artists.

*Shades of the Garden Campus* (2022) by Joel Lithgow (BFA Individualized Studies) and Joseph Blake (BFA Printmedia) stood powerfully as a centerpiece in the Nave. A sea of 10-foot long strips of printed receipts formed a 10-foot wide circular shed that could house a group of two people. From a







**Joel Lithgow and Joseph Blake, *Shades of the Garden Campus*, 2022. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno**



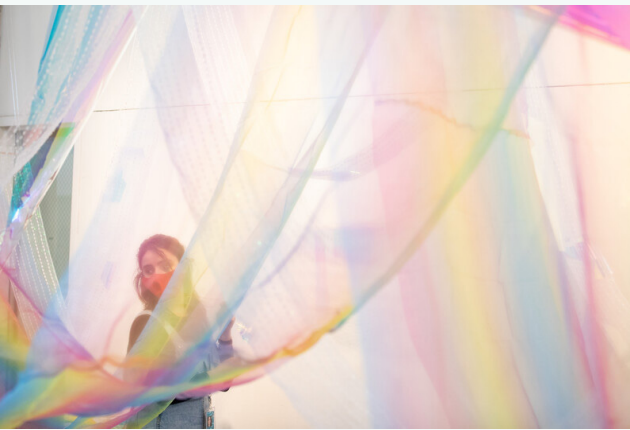
**Anbin Liu, Elif Aydinli, Saint Gorgani, Shreya Shankar, Weisheng Zhong, *FLOW STATE PAVILION*, 2022. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno**

distance, viewers could only see images of creeper plants, inviting visitors to take a closer look inside. The receipt shed left an opening that allowed in. The interior of the shed displayed black and white printed images from shot photos and the CCA Library Archive. The images span from 1910–2022, faintly depicting sceneries of the Oakland campus. This intimate space allowed visitors to slow down and pay homage to the history of the campus.

This prompt was especially timely as it created a contemplative pavilion for CCA associates to rethink the legacy of the school’s Oakland campus. The school administration’s one-sided decision to sell the campus devastates the CCA community in several-fold. Not only does it demolish the bohemian campus, but it also destroys the continuation of collective experience once enjoyed and shared by many generations of CCA family. The physical lightness of the receipt-curtain enables interactions with the flow of air, reminding visitors of the plentiful standing trees on the campus. The intimacy created by the small space allows viewers to reflect on the Oakland campus’s history, the fragility and impermanence of receipts echoing how the CCA students reminisce on the school’s history.

The exploration of spatial interaction through the pavilion continued in *FLOW STATE PAVILION* by the MArch team: Anbin Liu, Elif Aydinli, Saint Gorgani, Shreya Shankar, and Weisheng Zhong.

The team of students created a suspended prototype that invited viewers to freely navigate around and between the work. By assimilating natural forms, the team levitated flexible fabrics to outline the shape of mountains. Connecting with the theme of land appreciation, the team drew inspiration from the undulating mountains in Southern



**Anbin Liu, Elif Aydinli, Saint Gorgani, Shreya Shankar, Weisheng Zhong, FLOW STATE PAVILION, 2022. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno**



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Mexico. The sunlight in the Southern Mexican landscape also inspired them to use iridescent colors.

The sheen invited visitors to examine the relationship between space and objects. The intermix of mesh cloths (in white and rainbow) resembled the clouds and fog we know so well. The prominent rainbow color on iridescent foil mimicked water reflections, adding light and joy to the surrounding. The architecture aimed to explore the relationship between the visible realm of mountains and water and the invisible aspect of air and wind.

A fondness for water also informed Eric Lum's (MFA Fine Art) digital-print photography series, *Wake* (2022). The digital photo prints showed images of water rippling, as a set of three vertical flags hung in an inverted V-shape pillar in the Nave.

The emphasis on primary colors—red, yellow, and blue—evoked the fundamental function of water as a nutrient that sustains lives. This work is an analogy to how water provides a meditative reflection to viewers. *Wake* resembles his earlier iteration of meditative photo works, *Natural Abstraction* (2019), which investigates abstract patterns found in nature.

Continuing the narratives in the Nave, the Alcove housed two works, including Namita Paul's (MFA Fine Arts) *The House in My Bones* (2022). This work explored the idea of home, domesticity, and forced immigration. The 15-foot wide mixed media work was composed of canvas, thread, oil paint, plastic, and indigo dyed bedsheets. The mural-like composition utilized repetitive units of fabrics resembling brick constructions of a house. Though the reference to sturdy material is clear, the softness of canvas and bedsheets suggests a sense of comfort. In





**Installation view of Eric Lum's photography series, *Wake*, 2022. Photograph by Nicholas Lea Bruno.**



**Namita Paul, *The House in My Bones*, 2022. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno.**

the center of the work, deep blue photographic images appeared ghostly. They depicted the indoors of Paul's childhood house, where her grandparents found refuge due to the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.

This shelter fostered new lives for their family. Besides celebrating the continuum of family heritage, Paul also investigated the vulnerability and susceptibility of civilians. Some "bricks" on the canvas house are missing and some are deliberately not sewn together, creating holes and gaps in the piece. Paul explores the theme of communal responsibility, stating, "While deeply personal, the house I am depicting has a history of turmoil and displacement brought about by religious difference." The artist believes that such a phenomenon happens worldwide, which sparks endless forced migrations. She adds, "With this work I hope to share a sense of belonging and faith, that as humans we are more alike than different."

Ernest Strauhal and my (both BFA Individualized Studies) installation *re-genesis* (2022) celebrated the greatness of nature in relation to Bay Miwok mythology. To honor native land and traditional knowledge in California, we collected footage and field recordings on Mount Diablo—the birthplace of the world according to Miwok beliefs. This multimedia work presented a two-channel video, stereo sound, and a screened printed canvas. The 18-minute video loop juxtaposed heavily edited footage of Mt. Diablo, which included: ants crawling on patterned rocks, close-ups of plants, cracked earth, Wave Caves, panoramic views from the mountain, and eagles soaring.

With the glitch visual effects, the sceneries are constantly merging and dissolving into one an-

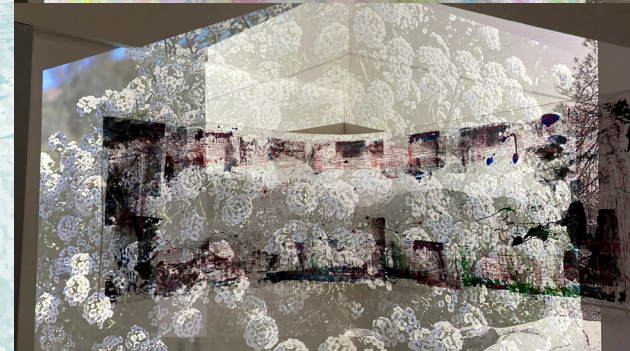
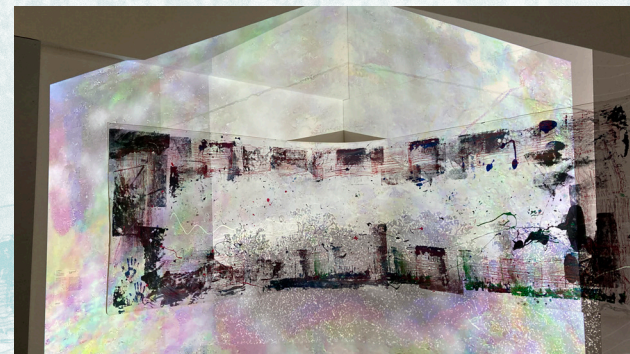


other. The 6-minute loop displayed still images of black and white analog photos of Mt. Diablo and visualizations of the field recordings. The two videos projected onto the printed canvas, where all visuals interlocked and blended into each other. Besides celebrating the biodiversity and landscape, we also drew awareness of communal responsibility by confronting human activities that intervene with and disrupt the balance and order of nature. The moving image showed the vandalized Wind Caves where visitors carved into rocks. This work encouraged interconnectivity and reciprocity through the constant merging and dissolution of visual motifs; it also invited the necessity for re-connection to nature and living beings, as Strauhal echoes, "Fluid Mutualism invites participants to appreciate our collaborative works, inspiring the community to recognize the power of connecting with one another."

Participating artists captured the spirit of fluid mutualism well. Most exhibited works are collaborative, demonstrating artists' understandings of symbiosis. The symposium demonstrated how arts education can put social responsibility into a creative practice. As Anbin Liu recalls, "We are all very happy to have this opportunity. Through the school's exhibition activities, we not only use what we have learned in real practice but also deepen our friendship."



**Namita Paul installing her work, *The House in My Bones*. Photo by Nicholas Lea Bruno.**



**Gordon Fung and Ernest Strauhal, *re-gensis*, 2022. Photos by Gordon Fung.**

**Gordon Fung** is a transdisciplinary artist who works across various fields, including installation, music composition, sound art, video art, multi-/new media, experimental and conceptual arts, etc. With the use of unconventional materials like noises, lo-fi presentations, and glitches, his immersive and synaesthetic works challenge the viewers to expand their experiential horizons.