

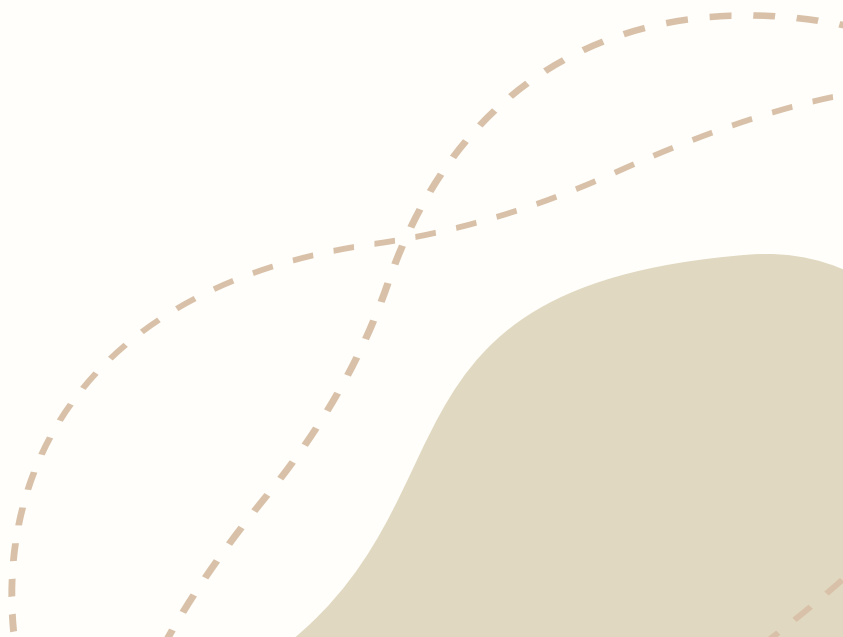


AUTONOMOUS **ZONES**

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All text by Trisha Lagaso Goldberg



Introduction

In an era marked by seismic social and political upheaval, creativity and artmaking emerge as radical forms of critique and defiance.


Five years after a global pandemic rewrote our understanding of proximity and connection, these four artists: Lucia González Ippolito, Daniela Tinoco, Joey Toro, and Eleanor Scholz, have navigated a landscape defined by fracture, polarization, and uncertainty. As civil liberties are rolled back, McCarthy-era rhetoric resurges, and protests against genocide, racism, homophobia, and transphobia fill the streets—against the undeniable backdrop of climate disaster—they have persevered. Across these contested realities they have cultivated spaces that embody the spirit of their exhibition title: *Autonomous Zones*.

The concept of an autonomous zone: a self-governing space created by those dissatisfied with existing power structures, reflects this cohort's commitment to creative independence. These artists have developed their practices while working under tremendous societal pressures, and rather than surrendering to prescribed limitations have asserted their right to self-determination, and found ways to establish distinct personal, conceptual, and artistic territories.

For Lucia González Ippolito, art is both a record of lived experiences and a call to action. Ippolito extends her artistic lineage of Mission District mural traditions and activism, and forges contemporary expressions of community and resistance that interrogate themes of gentrification, displacement, and cultural erasure. Her images are grounded in the struggles of her community, and refuse to simplify complexity or offer one-size-fits-all resolutions. Instead, with urgency and clarity, they insist on the power of collective defiance and the importance of remembering.

Daniela Tinoco's practice examines the intersections of land, language, and sovereignty through found objects, performance, and media. Her installations expose fictions of state power and transform archival and material fragments into disruptive critiques of colonialism's enduring impact. By reclaiming languages and symbols targeted for erasure, Tinoco's work suggests that enduring cultural practices are sites of power and insurgence that can open pathways to autonomy.

Joey Toro's digital landscapes invite viewers into liminal spaces where time slows and memory lingers. Toro constructs virtual worlds that resist the frenetic demands of the



attention economy. These works of machinima depicted spaces of contemplation use deliberate pacing to demonstrate an alternative way of being present in digital environments. Toro's practice explores the space between the familiar and the surreal, inviting viewers to explore worlds that resist urgency and prioritize observation and atmosphere over action.

Eleanor Scholz's practice reimagines waste as sacred, and transforms discarded objects into meditative compositions that honor what is overlooked. By presenting refuse as a bearer of history and potential, Scholz challenges the logic of disposability that defines so much of contemporary life. Her intricate, ritualistic compositions demonstrate the profundity in the act of slowing down, of paying attention, and insisting on the value of that which is often dismissed or rejected.

Completing an MFA in this unsettled historical moment is itself a declaration of independence, and commitment to creative practice when the world offers endless reasons to surrender to despair. These four artists have not merely endured; they have thrived, channeling their energy into work that resonates with urgency and purpose. Their *Autonomous Zones* stand as beacons of possibility—evidence that even as institutions falter, the human capacity to imagine and create alternative futures remains undiminished.

LUCIA GONZÁLEZ IPPOLITO

Two terms come to mind when considering the work of Lucia González Ippolito: *revolutionary* and *curandera* (healer). With a practice that spans muralism, screen-printing, and mixed-media installations, Ippolito demonstrates how community-based art can ignite social transformation and collective healing. As a descendant of Mission District activists, muralists, screen-printers, and community organizers, she continues a storied legacy while forging a distinct voice that is all her own.

Central to Ippolito's practice is her insistence that art serve both as a mirror of her community's struggles and as an impetus for action. Raised by an activist and an artist, she learned the value of social justice work and the necessity of cultural preservation from an early age. Her practice directly confronts issues like displacement and cultural effacement with unapologetic clarity, refusing to flatten the complexities of Latinx identity.

Ippolito's murals reclaim both physical and symbolic space for histories threatened by marginalization. Her first mural, *Mission Makeover*, critiques the gentrification reshaping the Mission District. This work embodies what Tomás Ybarra-Frausto calls *rasquachismo*: an aesthetic of resilience that finds beauty in the everyday and power in community resistance. Through vibrant, figurative works, Ippolito preserves memories at risk of erasure and reasserts cultural agency in a neighborhood battling the forces of capitalism.

Her *Heart Portals* series, featured in her MFA thesis exhibition, expands on these themes through heart-shaped wood-cut portraits of Mission District archetypes: a pachuco couple styled as a contemporary Adam and Eve, a queer Latino couple sharing a single pupusa, a Guatemalan street vendor engaging with Black barbers, and a mother breastfeeding in a car set before a world on fire. Though these subjects may be familiar to Mission residents, they remain largely unseen in the fine art world and even in public spaces within the neighborhood. Ippolito deliberately chooses to spotlight individuals who are underrepresented or absent in popular media and contemporary art.

An example is *Pupusa Party of 2*, which depicts a gay couple—one in a red “FRISCO” cap and 49ers varsity jacket, the other in a red and black plaid shirt and silver chain necklace—sharing a tender moment over a stretchy pupusa in the backseat of a low-rider. When Ippolito shared this painting on social media, it received over 650 likes and 122 comments. The comment thread quickly exposed the persistence of homophobia within the Latinx community. The polarized responses underscore Ippolito's courage and commitment to making art that asserts visibility and belonging for groups sidelined by conservative values and traditionalist narratives, challenging norms that have long dictated who gets to be seen and celebrated.



Cage Free, 2025

Acrylic on heart shaped wood
30 x 36 in

Ippolito extends this ethos of care and inclusion into her social practice through *Lovers Lane*—an annual cultural event she founded in Balmy Alley. This day-long celebration continues the tradition of grassroots arts organizing established by the PLACA collective in the 1980s. Designed as a counterpoint to the exclusionary practices of institutional art spaces, *Lovers Lane* explicitly serves everyone—queer folk, artists, street vendors, eccentrics and their allies—expanding the space for Latinx identity beyond the macho stereotypes prevalent in homeboy culture. By rejecting corporate sponsorship and police presence, the event centers local artists, vendors, and performers, transforming Balmy Alley into a living extension of Ippolito’s murals—an active site of resistance and remembrance.

In an era when solidarity often feels elusive, Ippolito’s work insists on the power of communities coming together across differences. By presenting art as a strategy for survival and world-building, she challenges us to reclaim histories that institutions fail to preserve and to imagine new possibilities for collective liberation.



Pupusa Party of 2, 2024

Acrylic on heart-shaped wood
48 x 60 in



Trust No Man, 2024
Acrylic on heart-shaped wood
48 x 38 in

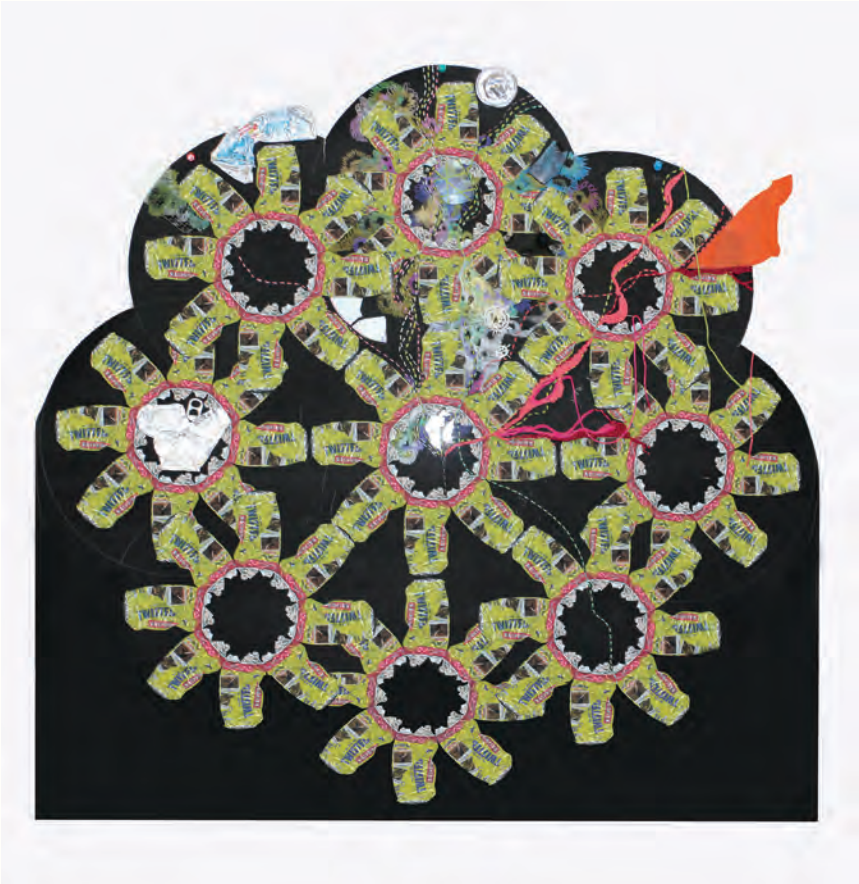
ELEANOR SCHOLZ

Eleanor Scholz's art practice is an act of reverence—for the organic world, humanity, and all living and nonliving entities. Using found objects and a range of materials, she creates devotional works that honor overlooked spaces and discarded things. Her practice explores the interplay between the natural and the human-made, challenging romanticized notions of untouched wilderness by engaging with what is left behind—trash, debris, and remnants of human activity. Through this, she asks: What do our discarded materials reveal about us? How might we reimagine our relationship with the environment if we regarded all matter, even waste, as sacred?

At the heart of Scholz's practice is a slow, meditative engagement with material. Her process involves wandering, gathering, and observing, allowing found objects to dictate form and meaning. Rubbings, scans, and digital pattern-making reveal the hidden beauty within urban flotsam—car-flattened cans become intricate mandalas, pine cones leave ghostly floral impressions, and fragments of roadside debris pressed into paper transform into honeycomb patterns. By considering what has been cast aside, Scholz invites viewers to rethink value, care, and our responsibility to the material world.

Scholz's thesis work builds on these inquiries, incorporating ritual and sacred geometry. Inspired by traditions that imbue objects with spiritual significance, she arranges her compositions with intention, using repetition, symmetry, and layering to suggest transformation. Each work becomes an offering—an altar to a more conscious way of being, where waste is part of an ongoing cycle of renewal.

A recent project, *Secret Garden*, emerged from a summer spent gathering debris from untended urban spaces—bike paths, roadsides, vacant lots. Expanding on this work, Scholz now hand-stitches found detritus onto digital photographs, creating “cosmic debris quilts” that weave discarded matter back into natural cycles. The work included in this exhibition also features cut-up rubbings from *Secret Garden*, merged with wood grain patterns drawn from memory, exploring how the world is reshaped through the act of mental recall. This layering emphasizes the relationship between memory and material, suggesting a form of reclamation—of both objects and the landscapes they come from. Scholz's practice of walking and gathering becomes a meditative act of truly seeing the environment, paying close attention to what is overlooked or left to waste. This devotion to observing and internalizing material offers viewers a way to reimagine their relationship with the world. Through these acts of care and transformation, she invites us to see waste as part of a cycle of renewal and potential.



Divining Debris, Twisted Tea, 2025

Digital print on paper, embroidery thread, colored pencil, oil pastel, aluminum, plastic, glass, debris
34 x 34 in

Though rooted in material exploration, Scholz's work is also an exercise in self-soothing and hope. She describes her process as both a personal coping mechanism and an invitation for others to confront difficult realities through acts of restoration that care for an overwhelmed world. Beyond despair, her work is about staying present with environmental crises while imagining alternative futures.

Scholz's practice ultimately asks us to reconsider what we discard—not just physically, but conceptually. In an era of mass consumption and environmental degradation, her work offers a counterpoint: a world where detritus is sacred, where care extends to the most overlooked materials, and where we might learn to see the divinity, history, and possibility in what we leave behind.



Divining Debris, Silver, 2025

Digital print on paper, thread, colored pencil, oil pastel,
aluminum, plastic, glass, debris
34 x 34 in



Divining Debris, To Go, 2025
Plastic lid, embroidery thread
34 x 34 in

DANIELA TINOCO

Daniela Tinoco's practice unfolds at the intersection of land, language, and resistance.

Through a transdisciplinary approach that bridges found objects, media, and performance, her work critiques the imposed narratives of nation-states while reclaiming the cultural and linguistic fragments that persist despite attempted colonial erasure. Deeply invested in the autonomy of Mexican Indigenous communities, Tinoco's work does not simply mourn loss but actively constructs spaces of autonomy, solidarity, and agency. Her MFA thesis exhibition presents a body of work that operates as both critique and proposition—engaging with the material and ideological residues of history while envisioning radical possibilities for the future.

One of the central themes of Tinoco's work is the entanglement of land and language, particularly as sites of contested meaning and power. *Tepalcate*, a video performance, draws from the Nahuatl term "tepalcatl," meaning "fragment of clay." Nahuatl, an indigenous language historically spoken in central Mexico, particularly in regions like Cholula, Puebla, continues to be spoken by communities resisting linguistic erasure. This work illuminates the endurance of Indigenous knowledge systems and their ability to resist homogenization. In *Tepalcate*, Tinoco enacts a process of breaking and reforming, a gesture that embodies the resilience of cultural memory in the face of systemic suppression. The work challenges the linguistic and colonial structures that have severed Indigenous communities from their lands, urging viewers to reconsider the ways language itself becomes a battleground for self-determination.

In *State Tools*, a series of collages constructed from mid-century Golden Book Encyclopedias and blank obsolete U.S. corporate stock certificates, Tinoco dismantles the ideological underpinnings of postwar American historical narratives. These artifacts—designed to instill national identity and economic order—are reconfigured to expose the latent structures of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalist expansion. Inspired by Enrique Chagoya's concept of "reverse anthropology," Tinoco uses these found materials to critique the imposed narratives that continue to shape contemporary geopolitics. Through this process, *State Tools* reveals how the myths of progress and development are inseparable from histories of violence and dispossession.

Tinoco's *Zonas Autónomas* extends this interrogation into the material realm, using found objects, including a dining room table, a dollhouse (complete with fully furnished rooms), and books, all coated in red clay slip to symbolize the fraught legacies of *mestizaje*, the ideological construct that sought to erase Indigenous and



Tepalcate, 2024

Risograph print (Still from video performance)
5 x 12.5 in

Afro-Mexican identities in favor of a homogenized national subject. The work exposes the contradictions within Mexican state-sponsored narratives of multiculturalism, highlighting the ongoing struggles for land and autonomy that Indigenous communities face. By embedding sprouting corn within these pieces, Tinoco signals the possibility of renewal and perseverance, aligning her work with a broader politics of resistance and self-governance.

Her collaborative musical composition, *Ya Banat Poblanas*, created with the femme-led collective *Corazón de Cedro*, demonstrates how sound and oral traditions function as enduring records of cultural resilience. Merging Mexican Son Jarocho and Arabic folk influences, the piece underscores the interconnected struggles of diasporic and Native communities. Here, music becomes both a method of historical preservation and a means of fostering cultural continuity and cross-border solidarities.

Tinoco's work does not seek easy resolutions. Instead, it insists on the necessity of vigilance, disruption, and collective reclamation. Whether through the material poetics of clay, the critical excavation of historical media, or the communal resonance of music, her practice invites us to listen closely—to the land, to language, and to the voices that refuse to be silenced.



Zonas Autónomas, 2024

Sculpture made of clay washed found objects

JOEY TORO

Joey Toro is a world-builder. Using computer graphics produced by game engines, he creates virtual spheres that emerge from memory, biography, and fantasy. Some environments are stark and unyielding—devoid of light or warmth, with surfaces clad solely in grey and black. Others offer respite: a wintery landscape with a cabin beside a gravity-defying river or a medieval village nestled among grassy hillsides. Throughout Toro's work, the physical constraints of the brick-and-mortar world dissolve.

Transcending boundaries between painting, computational media, and game design, Toro creates immersive virtual realms that reward patience and curiosity. His work counters the hyperactive nature of contemporary media, crafting explorable spaces where movement isn't about visual fidelity or combat mechanics, but about lingering in environments that privilege abstraction, atmosphere, and emotional resonance.

Toro's artistic trajectory through the program has been characterized by a willingness to take risks. Earlier works saw him tearing canvases into strips and reconstructing them as sculptural forms. This impulse to dismantle and rebuild evolved into his current approach: photographing painted textures and mapping them onto virtual environments, transforming each surface into an extension of his hand-painted marks. His work maintains the tactility of painting while embracing the emotional resonance—or void—of the digital realm.

Toro's thesis exhibition features three "machinima" works: *Walkthrough* (2024), *Dreamhouse* (2025), and *Media Landscape* (2025). Machinima, or "machine cinema," is a form of animated filmmaking that leverages and makes use of video game engines. *Walkthrough* presents a guided exploration of an enclosed two-room space, evoking childhood bedrooms and sites charged with solitude. The deliberate pacing subverts expectations of first-person gaming, where movement typically serves efficiency and control. Instead, Toro slows time, guiding viewers through a setting both familiar and unplaceable.

Dreamhouse presents a view onto an open-beam ranch-style home existing in suspension—simultaneously a sanctuary and a vessel for...nostalgia? Comfort? A future residence? The structure's atemporality expresses early game aesthetics, every facet tiled with sections of Toro's paintings that scroll in an acid-trip-cum-ticker-tape fashion. It stands as an uncanny threshold between memory and simulation, permanence and ephemera.



Dreamhouse, 2025
UnrealEngine, machinima
1440 x 1080px

In *Media Landscape*, presented on adjacent monitors, Toro cycles through virtual environments ranging from comfort scenes to ambiguous emotional terrains. You choose: a forest sanctuary or an enigmatic domestic interior. Each world is built entirely from photographed paintings, with every tree, object, and surface bearing traces of his hand. These settings unfold as immersive, animated realms that invite viewers to inhabit them without the need for action or decision-making—offering a contemplative pause between the hyper-charged intensity of typical media experiences. By suspending the urgency of player-driven choices, Toro’s spaces draw the viewer’s attention slowly and deliberately, transforming passive observation into an act of lingering engagement. This work most clearly reflects Toro’s broader interest in virtual sites where the acts of leisure and intentional observation and connection have become increasingly rare.

Rather than merely critiquing the attention economy, Toro creates alternative virtual worlds inviting a different quality of presence. His works offer the opportunity to navigate constructed spaces without the constant demand for reaction. In doing so, Toro reclaims the digital realm as a sanctuary for memory and the slow unfolding of contemplation.



Fountain, 2025

UnrealEngine, machinima

1080 x 1920px



Walkthrough, 2025

Source Engine, canvas, acrylic, machinima
1920 x 1080px

Artists

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

San Francisco State University's Master of Fine Arts program in Art provides a dynamic interdisciplinary environment within which students are encouraged to develop their creative practice as professional artists. The School of Art has facilities for printmaking, painting and drawing, sculpture, photography, textiles, digital media and emerging technology, and ceramics. MFA students have access to all of the School of Art facilities as well as individual and communal MFA studio workspaces. Our faculty are distinguished and professionally active artists and art historians. Students work closely with a graduate advisor/mentor to chart their individual path through the program, including studio seminars, critiques, and individually supervised tutorials. Coursework and seminars in art history and other academic fields complement studio courses, and students are encouraged to develop rigorous research and writing skills to enrich their art practice. All students are provided with individual studio spaces, and there are opportunities for teaching, either as a teaching assistant or instructor of record. Our vibrant visiting artist and exhibition programs introduce students to artists in the Bay Area and beyond, connecting students to the local art community. The MFA degree culminates with a written thesis report and a thesis exhibition in which student exhibit an original body of work.



April 25 to May 15, 2025

Opening Reception

Friday April 25, 5pm - 8pm

Saturday Reception

May 10, 1pm - 3pm

Gallery Hours

Tuesday - Friday, from 12pm - 4pm



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