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Drawing 1 Course Syllabus, Fall 2025

Jennifer Sullivan
CUNY Queens College, JENNIFER.SULLIVAN@qc.cuny.edu

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QUEENS COLLEGE COURSE SYLLABUS
Drawing I - ARTS 151

Day & Time: Thursday 2:00 PM to 5:50 PM
Semester: Fall 2025
Location: Klapper Hall, Room 483
Professor: Jennifer Sullivan
Email: JENNIFER.SULLIVAN@qc.cuny.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class offers an immersive introduction to drawing from life—a practice that, at its heart, is about learning to see with greater clarity and sensitivity. We will explore the foundational elements of observational drawing: the perception of edges, shapes, space, proportion, and perspective, as well as the relationships between parts and the whole. Students will work with a variety of materials—graphite, charcoal, and ink—on projects that emphasize drawing from still life and the human figure, with a particular focus on portraiture. Each assignment will begin with thumbnail sketches to explore composition and evolve into sustained drawings that demonstrate both a command of formal principles and a distinct point of view.

Throughout the course, we will consider how drawing functions not only as a technical skill but as a means of expression—a way of conveying presence, mood, and memory through mark and form. Our inquiry will be guided by the interplay of *form and feeling*, asking how line, value, and composition can carry emotional weight. A vital part of our process will involve looking closely—at our own work, at the work of our peers, and at the drawings of historical and contemporary artists whose approaches offer models, questions, and possibilities.

Drawing is a physical activity and a process-based studio experience. Each class introduces new techniques and visual concepts, building cumulatively over time. Regular attendance and engaged participation are essential. Weekly homework assignments will extend the practices introduced in class and will typically be presented for discussion and critique at the start of the following session.

Like dance or music or athletics, drawing is a practice—it requires repetition, focus, and care. Growth emerges through consistent engagement. Homework and sketchbook work are not peripheral but central to developing fluency with materials, cultivating one's unique artistic voice, and staying limber.

Learning to draw is really a matter of learning to see - to see correctly - and that means a good deal more than merely looking with the eye. – Kimon Nicolaides

...Between sensibility and plasticity, we form and we make something out of who we are. – Jack Whitten

Drawing is thinking. – Milton Glaser

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course introduces students to foundational and expressive approaches to drawing. Our goals are to:

- Develop technical drawing skills through sustained practice and observation
- Explore expressive and conceptual possibilities in drawing
- Experiment with formal elements (line, shape, value, volume, edge) and diverse materials and methods
- Build awareness of historical and contemporary drawing practices
- Foster a reflective studio practice through critique, discussion, and research
- Throughout the semester, students will work from direct observation and structured prompts to build a vocabulary of techniques and compositional strategies. The course is structured in two major units: the first half focuses on still life; the second on the human form and portraiture. Alongside technical practice, students will be encouraged to explore emotionally resonant and personal modes of expression.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Develop the ability to see and translate visual information with accuracy and precision through sustained observation
- Use line, contour, shape, value, and volume intentionally to describe form and space
- Apply foundational drawing techniques using a range of materials
- Demonstrate proficiency in drawing from both still life and the human figure
- Make informed formal and expressive choices in their drawings
- Employ visually effective and creative compositional strategies in their artwork
- Maintain a sketchbook for practice, experimentation, and research
- Use historical and contemporary artist examples as inspiration for exploring different approaches to drawing
- Reflect on and critique artworks—including their own—through verbal discussion and close visual analysis

COURSE POLICIES

ATTENDANCE
Your presence—both physically and mentally—is essential for success in this course. Active participation in classroom activities and discussions is critical for your learning and growth as an artist.
Since this is a studio course, attendance is especially important. Missing class means missing valuable instruction and opportunities to engage with the material.

Unexcused Absences:
Two unexcused absences will result in a one-letter grade deduction (e.g., from an A to a B, or a B to a C).
Four unexcused absences will result in an automatic F for the course.

Late Arrivals/Early Departures:
Arriving late or leaving early by 15 minutes or more will count as half an absence.
Leaving the classroom for an extended period of time without prior permission is not permitted, as it interrupts studio work and reduces the amount of time devoted to completing assignments, which may affect your grade.

Excused Absences:
An excused absence does not exempt you from completing missed work. All missed assignments must be made up promptly to stay on track. Participation is critical in studio classes, accounting for **15% of your final grade**. To excel, you are expected to:

- Be fully engaged, focused, and working sincerely on assigned projects during class time.
- Actively contribute to studio discussions and critiques in a professional and respectful manner.

Remember, the more you are absent, the more instruction and classwork/studio time you will miss, making it harder to understand the material and succeed in the course. Please make every effort to attend each class and participate fully!

Classroom Expectations and Phone Usage Policy
Respectful and professional behavior is expected at all times, both in class and in email correspondence. Disruptive, disrespectful, or discourteous behavior—including but not limited to arguing about attendance, homework, feedback, grades, disregarding classroom rules, or using inappropriate language or tone—will not be tolerated.

Discussions about grades, attendance, and other private matters should be addressed confidentially through email or in a private meeting, rather than during class.

Phone Usage Policy
Phone use during class is strictly prohibited unless specifically permitted by the instructor for academic

purposes. Repeated phone use during studio time will significantly affect your *In-Class Assignment* and *Participation* grades. Stay engaged and focused to make the most of your studio experience—deep attention to our work is an essential component of all artmaking, especially observational drawing.

GRADE POLICY / CRITERIA

1. **In-Class Assignments: 40%:** Grading will be based on creativity, neatness, attention to detail and how closely you followed the guidelines of each assignment. You may only redo late/missing assignments up until the midterm and then only the second half semester assignments by the last class. Even one missing assignment significantly drops your grade.

2. **Participation: 15%:** Participation in class critiques, discussions, and attendance to all classes.

3. **Homework: 15%:** For every assignment you turn in late your overall homework grade will be lowered one point (from an A to an A- for example). Everyone will start with an A+. Assignments are due at the beginning of class in time for critique/class discussion unless otherwise noted.

4. **Mid-Term Assignment: 10%:** The Mid-term project will be an assignment due in the middle of the semester worth 10% of your final grade.

5. **Final Project: 20%:** The final project is due at the end of the semester and will count for 20% of your final grade. It is designed to demonstrate the skills and concepts you've developed throughout the course.

MIDTERM / FINAL REQUIREMENTS
Your midterm grade will be an average grade of your assignments up to the midterm point. The first half of the semester assignments will not be accepted for credit after the midterm. The final project will be an assignment due at the end of the semester, worth 25% of your final grade and will not be accepted late. If you do not turn in your work, you may receive a grade of zero.

HOMEWORK OUTSIDE CLASS
You are expected to spend at least three hours per week working outside of class. This time should be used to practice the skills introduced in class and to complete self-guided homework assignments. Staying current with this work is essential to your success in the course.

LATE WORK
Prompt completion of projects is essential for academic and professional success. It is essential that all assignments be turned in on the due date. Late work will be accepted **at my discretion, if at all**. The minimum deduction for late work will be one full letter grade per week.

DISCUSSION / CRITIQUE

Discussion/Critique/Analysis is an important part of creativity. We need to verbalize our thoughts to refine, clarify and influence progress. You will only get from this class what you put into it. It is common to refrain from asking questions for fear of appearing ignorant or naive. This is a misunderstanding. The question is an important part of the answer, and we learn best by asking questions, and through the discoveries we make in the process of questioning. Creativity itself could be thought of as a process of asking a question we do not already know the answer to and sharing our results with others.

Although art can be created in solitude, maintaining a dialog with your peers / classmates in an encouraging atmosphere, can lead to improved results. Your contribution to our class environment by way of thoughtful questions, observations, or viewpoints is a meaningful part of your development and will be a factor in determining your grade. Please be respectful when commenting on another student's work. The goal is to see what is happening and what are the most successful or resonant parts, and to also identify where there is room for improvement or refinement. We must go beyond just saying "I like it" and try to analyze the work more deeply, or identify what we like about a particular work, what draws our attention, what an image reminds us of or the feelings it conjures, and why. We will discuss strategies and terminology for this process in class to help achieve this goal.

Required Texts and Materials

All course materials are designated as Open Educational Resources (OER) or open access, meaning they are freely available to view, download, and use in accordance with copyright laws. Whenever possible, links to readings, images, and videos are embedded directly in the syllabus and are also available through the course Brightspace page.

Additional Drawing Technique Resources

The following optional resources offer valuable insights into drawing technique and are available for free online:

The Natural Way to Draw, Kimon Nicolaides, Read Books Press:
https://archive.org/details/naturalwaytodraw0000nico_c9d5/

Drawing on The Right Side of the Brain, Betty Edwards, TarcherPerigee:
https://archive.org/details/drawing-on-the-right-side-of-the-brain/

SEEING BEYOND THE STUDIO

Throughout the semester, I will share a range of exhibitions, lectures, and events that may deepen or inspire your work. These will include both on-campus and off-campus opportunities, spanning a wide array of topics within—and sometimes beyond—the studio arts.

New York City is an extraordinary resource for visual art of all kinds. I encourage you to see work in person whenever possible at institutions such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA, The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Brooklyn Museum of Art, and The Drawing Center. These museums not only house world-renowned collections but also offer continually evolving encounters with art from around the world and across time. Their websites are also rich sources of inspiration and learning, providing access to thousands of works—from antiquity to the present day.

Unit 1: Seeing Through Line

Week 1: Learning to See

We'll begin with an introduction to the course, a review of the syllabus, and the distribution of materials. In our first drawing session, we'll explore what it truly means to *draw what you see*—and how drawing can become a deeper encounter with the objects before us. Through a series of foundational exercises, we'll begin tuning our eyes and hands to the quiet, attentive practice of observation.

In class:
– Pre-instruction drawing
– Upside-down contour drawing
– Blind contour drawing
– Gesture drawing

We'll also introduce the idea of composition—how placement on the page can support expression and guide the viewer's attention. Composition will be a major theme throughout the course.

Homework:
– Make 5 blind contour drawings and 5 gesture drawings from life.
– Choose one of these drawings and develop it into a more sustained piece. In this finished drawing, aim to bring together clear contour observation with the expressive energy of gesture.

Read: Chapter 4: Creativity as Encounter, from *The Courage to Create* by Rollo May (PDF excerpt provided)

Additional video resources (optional):
Blind Contour: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZK_AEKpIS7I
Gesture Drawing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lya0fduPGO8

Week 2: Observing Lines and Edges

This week we'll deepen our practice of careful observation through the study of line—both as a descriptive tool and as an expressive force. We'll continue working with contour drawing, expanding

into line quality, weight, cross-contour, and textural line. We'll also begin to explore how emotional states and focused attention shape the marks we make.

In class, we'll begin with an emotional line warm-up, using music to guide the search for form. This will be followed by extended contour drawings of leaves, inspired by the spirit of Zen drawing—a meditative practice of slowing down, looking closely, and truly *encountering* the subject.

Homework:
– Choose an object that holds personal meaning and create two meditative contour drawings inspired by the reading. Select an object with a strong, complex form—something with variation, depth, and interesting edges. Avoid objects defined primarily by surface graphics (e.g., phones, laptops, video game controllers, figurines, or other painted items). Instead, look for unique, varied shapes that invite close observation.
– On one large sheet of paper, draw the same object twice—each time with a different emotional emphasis. Consider how expressive line and compositional choices can shift the tone or feeling of the drawing.

Read: *Zen Seeing* by Frederick Franck (PDF excerpt provided)

Week 3: Observing Shapes and Spaces

This week we'll shift our attention to something often overlooked: the space around and between things. Like the silence between musical notes, negative space plays a vital—though often invisible—role in visual composition. We'll learn to recognize these spaces not as emptiness, but as shapes in their own right—pieces of a visual puzzle that help define the forms around them. Through drawing shaped objects, chairs, and interior spaces, students will practice using negative space as a tool for accuracy, clarity, and compositional strength. A presentation of artworks will support this shift in perception, highlighting how artists across time have used negative space to powerful and surprising effect.

Reference Image: Marcel Duchamp, *Self-Portrait in Profile*, 1957
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/492560

Homework: Choose an object with complex interior spaces and make a large negative space drawing, you may fill in the negative space with charcoal or a darker tone to create a more dramatic image / sense of contrast.

Read: *Let's Focus On The Negative!*
https://club.drawtogether.studio/p/focus-on-the-negative

Watch: *Japanese Concept of "Ma" (間) and Negative Space in Japanese Culture*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Q7hxgDlkGA

Week 4: Perspective, Proportion, and Sighting

This week, we'll focus on developing your ability to see and draw accurate perspective and proportion. You'll learn various sighting and measuring techniques to compare parts of an object to the whole. In class, we'll draw cylindrical objects (such as a cup) and rectilinear forms (like cardboard boxes), using observation and incremental adjustments to refine proportion and perspective. We'll also practice scaling objects effectively to fit the page.

Watch: *Sighting, Measuring, Mapping*
https://youtu.be/pTVuDcwIF3M?si=ecGmnyDNSMdW2YaA

Watch: *Proportion - Sighting Angles*
https://youtu.be/77IiwPEGl04?si=errkWnTs0unA7AaQ

Homework: Create a drawing on your largest paper (18 x 24 inches) that demonstrates accurate use of perspective and includes overlapping objects. Pay close attention to proportion and aim for a thoughtful, well-balanced composition.

Unit 2: Light, Shadow, and the Shape of Things

Week 5: Value, Light, and Shadow

This week introduces shading techniques through the study of value, light, and shadow. You'll learn how to create a sense of form and depth using a full range of tones instead of outlines. We'll work with value scales and begin to apply these principles to drawing simple still life objects.

Classwork: In class, you'll begin by creating a 5-step value scale in charcoal to practice identifying and applying distinct tonal values. You'll then use charcoal and kneaded erasers on mid-toned paper to draw simple still life objects. The focus will be on building volume and form through the use of light and shadow, rather than relying on outlines. Special attention will be given to observing tonal shifts and creating subtle gradations to model the illusion of depth and dimensionality.

Homework:
Using your large paper (18 x 24 inches), create a charcoal drawing of two overlapping white objects observed from life—such as a hard-boiled egg, toilet paper roll, or white mug. Choose objects with contrasting textures and forms to create compositional interest and visual tension. Place your objects under a strong, directional light source to reveal a clear range of light and shadow, helping you capture a full tonal range (at least five distinct values). Build form through light and shadow rather than outlines, using your value scale as a guide. To create smooth gradations where needed, you may use a blending stump, paper towel, or cotton swab.

October 2 - No Classes Scheduled

Week 6: Value Continued - Sculpting with Light

This week, students will continue exploring value and charcoal to capture the forms of a more complex still life. We'll deepen our observational skills by focusing on overlapping objects and emphasizing texture, shape, and volume. Using both shading and erasure techniques, you'll learn to "carve out" objects through light and shadow, creating depth and detail. Throughout, you will apply all the foundational techniques covered so far, including close observation, dynamic composition, positive and negative space, perspective, and proportion.

Read: Chiaroscuro - definition and examples
https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/chiaroscuro

Watch: Reductive Charcoal Drawing Technique
https://youtu.be/EI1P2qtrcd8?si=qB-A2ax0O0OQO6EW

Homework:
Create a still life drawing at home using charcoal and the erasure technique under dramatic lighting. Your composition should include 3–5 overlapping objects and demonstrate a full tonal range with at least 10 distinct values from white to black.

Week 7: Midterm Assignment

Students will complete a still life drawing in class using the material of their choice—pencil or charcoal. Drawings must be completed without instructor assistance and will be collected at the end of the class session. This assignment serves as an independent assessment of key concepts covered so far, including contour, negative space, value, perspective, and composition. Drawings will be reviewed and discussed during the following week's class.

Week 8: Midterm Drawing Review, Exquisite Corpse, and Experiments with Ink

After reviewing and critiquing your midterm drawing assignments, we'll begin with a warm-up collaborative drawing exercise using the Exquisite Corpse technique to loosen up and spark unexpected creative connections. Next, we'll transition to still life drawing with ink by creating a value scale and practice page focused on developing a varied lexicon of lines. For the remainder of class, we'll compose drawings that combine line and value using natural objects such as flowers and vegetables alongside character-driven items like stuffed animals and figurines. Our goal will be to capture the unique character of each object, explore meaningful relationships between them, and create a cohesive sense of wholeness through line and tone.

Reference Images: Ulala Imai's Paintings
https://karmakarma.org/artists/ulala-imai/

Read/Watch: Learn About Chan (Zen) Buddhism with Muqi's Six Persimmons
https://www.artsq.org/blog/learn-about-chan-zen-buddhism-with-muqis-six-persimmons

Homework:
Create a portrait of a friend or an animal that captures their essence using line, tone, and composition. To deepen your understanding of artistic presence, listen to Alan Watts' *Painting and the Zen Mind*.

Unit 3: Living Forms: Portraiture and Study of the Human Body

Week 9: Introduction to Portraiture – The Profile

We'll begin by reviewing the basic proportions of the head, identifying common pitfalls to avoid, and discussing practical strategies for placing volumetric facial features. We'll also explore techniques for drawing hair, using line to suggest texture, direction, and form. Next, we'll create warm-up drawings based on public domain profile portraits from the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection, using pencil and contour techniques. For the remainder of the studio session, students will pair up and take turns drawing profile portraits of each other from life.

Reference Image: George Richmond, *Portrait of George Eliot* (Profile to the left), 1881
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/420456

Homework:
Create a large profile portrait of someone you know, paying close attention to composition, line quality, and proportion.

Read: *Eye to I: Self Portraits from 1900 to Today*
https://artsandculture.google.com/story/eye-to-i-self-portraits-from-1900-today-national-portrait-gallery/AQXxgJNprGf3JA?hl=en

Week 10: Portraiture Continued — Self-Portrait with Value, Frontal and ¾ Views

This week features a lecture and discussion on the tradition of self-portraiture across art history and its evolution in contemporary practice. In class, we'll focus on capturing a **frontal self-portrait**, using value and composition to express a specific **emotional or psychological aspect of the self**.

For homework, you'll create a large **¾ view self-portrait** (or portrait of another person), drawing inspiration from the self-portraits we explore in class—ranging across drawing, painting, and

photography. Pay close attention to **lighting, mood, expression, pose, materials, and composition**, and how these elements work together to convey emotion and narrative.

In class, each student will create a self-portrait in one mode and pose; for homework, you'll develop a second portrait that presents a different perspective—both **literally** (¾ view) and **emotionally** (a contrasting aspect of self).

Reading:
The Serious and The Smirk: The Smile in Portraiture
https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/the-serious-and-the-smirk-the-smile-in-portraiture

Homework:
Create a large ¾ view self-portrait, paying close attention to **composition, value, and proportion**. This drawing should express a **different emotional side** than the portrait created in class. You may work from a photograph if you wish.

Week 11: Drawing Hands & Feet

This week, we will explore art historical representations of hands and feet, examining works by Paula Modersohn-Becker, Andy Warhol, José Clemente Orozco, and others. We'll begin with warm-up drawings by copying foot studies from Van Gogh and Michelangelo to build familiarity with form and gesture. Following this, we will create a series of charcoal gesture drawings focused on hands. The remainder of class will be dedicated to developing and extending these hand drawings to capture more detail and expression.

Reference Images:
John Wonnacott, Study of the Artist's Right Hand, 1990
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/486342

John August Dominque Ingres, Study of Hands for "Christ Among the Doctors", 1852-62
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/854147

Charles White, Preacher, 1952
https://whitney.org/collection/works/3310

Look At: Andy Warhol, *Still Lifes and Feet, 1956-1961*, Kasmin Gallery
https://www.kasmingallery.com/exhibitions/341-andy-warhol-still-lifes-and-feet-1956-1961/

Read: Handy Mnemonica - The Five Fingered Memory Machince
https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/handy-mnemonics/

Watch: *The Hands of Bresson*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk_yKYhBjKA

Homework:
Using Andy Warhol's *Still Lifes and Feet* series as a reference, create a drawing of your hands or feet (or those of a friend), composed alongside another visually interesting object on large paper. Use gesture, context, and composition to tell a story or evoke a specific mood or contrast. For further inspiration, watch *The Hands of Bresson*, which explores the expressive power of hand gestures and actions in conveying narrative and emotion in the films of Robert Bresson.

Week 12: Introduction to the Body / Final Project Begins – *Portrait, Gesture, Symbol*

Lecture / Discussion
We will explore portraiture across art history and contemporary practice, with special attention to works in which the subject is holding or interacting with an object that carries symbolic, emotional, or conceptual weight. How does the body—especially the hands—act as an extension of identity, narrative, or inner life?
We'll look at artists including **Paula Modersohn-Becker**, along with selected works by **Frida Kahlo**, **Danielle McKinney**, **Martin Wong, Jordan Casteel**, and other historical and contemporary artists who use gesture and object to deepen the psychological or symbolic resonance of the portrait.

Classwork
We'll return to gesture drawing, this time through the lens of full-body structure and the relationships of individual parts to the whole. We'll review the use of plumb lines and anatomical axes to support proportional accuracy and perspectival clarity. Students will work from magazine photographs to create extended figure studies, with particular attention to how posture, hand placement, and bodily orientation can convey narrative or emotional tone. This session will also serve as a springboard for brainstorming approaches to the final project, encouraging students to consider how gesture and symbolic objects might function within their compositions.

Homework
Begin concept development for your **final project: *Portrait, Gesture, Symbol***. Reflect on who you want to portray and what object (if any) they will hold or interact with. Consider the meaning of this object, and how gesture might reinforce or complicate the narrative.
Bring in **reference images, sketches, and/or compositional studies** to prepare for our final in-class studio session after Thanksgiving break.

November 27 - No Class - Thanksgiving Break

Week 13: Begin Final Project

In-Class Studio Work
Students will begin working on their **final drawings for *Portrait, Gesture, Symbol***. This session is dedicated studio time to develop initial compositions, refine figure placement and proportions, and begin integrating symbolic objects or gestures into the portrait.

Individual Feedback Sessions
You'll meet one-on-one for brief check-ins to discuss your concept, references, and drawing progress. Come prepared with your sketches, reference images, and any questions or challenges you'd like to discuss. The goal is to support the development of a cohesive and intentional final piece.

Week 14: FINAL ASSIGNMENTS DUE for in-person review and critique

Final Project – Portrait, Gesture, Symbol

In this final project, you will create a portrait that includes not only the subject's face, but also their hands—shown holding or interacting with an object of personal or symbolic significance. The hand is often called an extension of the mind and the self. What we carry, hold, offer, touch, or protect can reveal more than words alone.

Your task is to explore the relationship between physical gesture, symbolic object, and internal world. What is revealed when the hand becomes an active part of the portrait? What story is told through what the subject holds, how they are posed, and the subtle cues of body language and facial expression?

The subject must be someone **other than yourself** and should be drawn **from life**, most likely using your own **photographic reference**. You may work in **graphite, charcoal, or a combination of the two**, and your final drawing should be completed on **18 x 24 inch paper**.

*Assignments and order are subject to change based on the needs of the class

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ABOUT THE PROFESSOR

Jennifer Sullivan (b. 1978, New York) creates expressionistic, character-driven paintings that explore personal narratives with a diaristic sensibility, mapping an ever-evolving inner life. Drawing on borrowed plotlines and protagonists from film, music, and other forms, as well as her own life experiences, her work weaves intimate feelings with shared cultural references. Over the years, her storytelling has taken various forms, from autobiographical performance and video art to her current focus on painting, drawing, monotype printmaking, and hand-painted t-shirts. Based in Ridgewood, Queens, Sullivan holds an MFA in Fine Art from Parsons School of Design and a BFA from Pratt Institute. Recent solo and two-

person exhibitions include The Tenderness (Emma Gray HQ, 2024) and Sleeper (Turn Gallery, 2021). She has participated in group exhibitions at NADA Miami, Peter Blum Gallery, Marinaro, Klaus Von Nichtsaggend, and the deCordova Museum. Awards include fellowships with Paint School at Shandaken Projects (2020) and the Fine Arts Work Center (2012–13), as well as residencies at The Lighthouse Works, the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, the Ox-Bow School of Art, and Yaddo. Her work has been featured in The New York Times and The Brooklyn Rail.

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