

SF CAMERAWORK

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Dismantling Monoliths

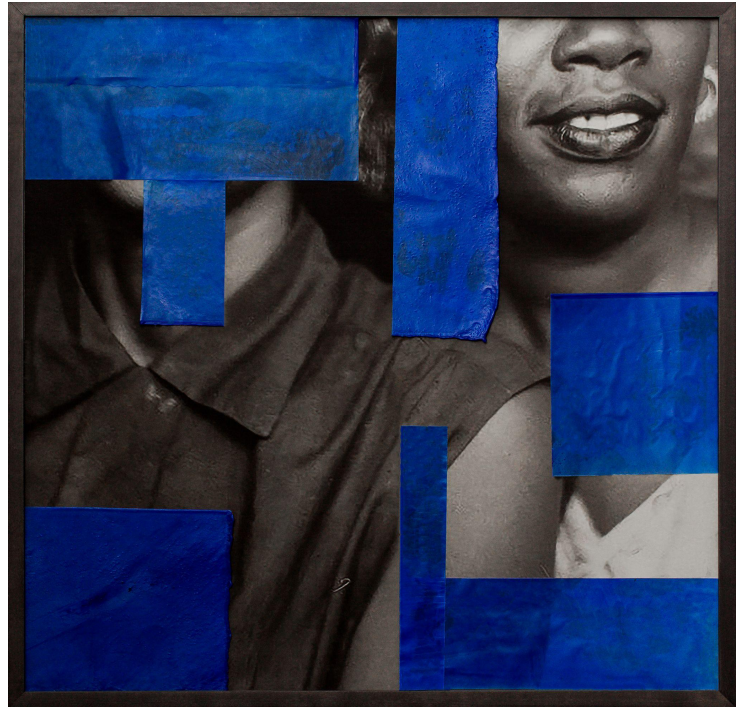
Curated by Jamil Hellu

January 17 — March 25, 2023

Opening reception

Saturday, January 21, 3-6pm

Dismantling Monoliths is generously supported by Michelle Branch



Alanna Fields, *Untitled (Blue)*, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

December 6, 2022, San Francisco, CA – SF Camerawork is proud to present *Dismantling Monoliths*, a group exhibition of artists who catalyze their medium to challenge conventions. Through critical engagement and intimate gestures, *Dismantling Monoliths* calls attention to the multidirectional ways in which contemporary artists are recontextualizing the canon of Western history while envisioning fresh perspectives for identity representation, visibility, and inclusion. The exhibition presents works, from photography to video, by Alanna Fields, Xandra Ibarra, Tarrah Krajnak, Forrest McGarvey, Marcel Pardo Ariza, and Aaron Turner. Together, they shatter stereotypes and shift the monolithic historical frame of reference to new dimensions.

“Dismantling Monoliths originated with the intent to spotlight contemporary artists who are reframing long-established art historical legacies into something new,” says Guest Curator Jamil Hellu. “The exhibition provides a catalyst to promote a valuable dialogue between local artists and image-makers who live outside of the Bay Area. Alanna Fields, Tarrah Krajnak, and Aaron Turner, whose practices intersect in manipulating photographic archives with triumphant agency, remind us that the past is not over and can definitely still be reworked. They create experimental reinterpretations for empowering possible futures. In addition, the works by Xandra Ibarra, Forrest McGarvey, and Marcel Pardo Ariza challenge the colonizing gaze, expanding the horizons for identity representation and inclusion. The plurality of their work investigates the cultural state we are in, shifting old territories to new grounds.”

Alanna Fields is a New York-based, mixed-media artist and archivist whose work unpacks Black queer history through a multidisciplinary engagement with photographic archives. Fields contributes mixed-media collages that pull from photographic archives depicting Black queer people from the 1920s and on, repositioning the imagery and her subjects into the present, while honoring the lively gestures, expressions, and records she uncovers.

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Xandra Ibarra, who sometimes works under the alias of La Chica Boom, is an Oakland-based interdisciplinary artist from the US and Mexico border of El Paso and Juarez. Through commanding gestures and positionality, her video work *Turn Around Sidepiece* references those canonized as side pieces throughout the history of art: the subjects of nude art paintings of the twentieth century by Gauguin, Manet, and Bouguereau.

Tarrah Krajnak is an Oregon-based artist represented by Galerie Thomas Zander in Cologne, Germany, working across photography, performance, and poetry. In her eighteen, archival print series, *Master Rituals II: Weston's Nudes*, Krajnak makes clear reference to the history of photography, on the one hand, and to the artist's identity as a Latin-American woman, on the other. She re-enacts Edward Weston's famous *Nudes* (shot starting in 1927, and published as a unified work in 1977) and replays a significant chapter in the history of photography while re-focusing on the role of the female model.

Forrest McGarvey is an artist and writer based in the Bay Area. His digital collage series *New Works* reflects on the performance of identity, presenting questions about ownership and legibility within the omnipresence of technology. He uses screenshots and found online images depicting the history of the Pacific, cultural iconography, product and stock imagery to create still lifes and portraits influenced by his experiences as a mixed-race queer person.

Marcel Pardo Ariza is an Oakland-based, trans visual artist, educator, and curator, represented by OCHI Gallery in Los Angeles. Ariza explores the relationship between queer and trans kinship through constructed photographs, site-specific installations, and public programming. Their practice celebrates collective care and intergenerational connection and is invested in creating long term interdisciplinary collaborations and opportunities that are non-hierarchical and equitable.

Aaron Turner is an Arkansas-based artist. He uses photography as a transformative process to understand the ideas of home and resilience in two main areas of the U.S., the Arkansas and Mississippi Deltas. Throughout his series *Black Alchemy*, Turner responds to internal questions about identity, representation, and the artists' role in the studio space.

Dismantling Monoliths is Hellu's curatorial debut with SF Camerawork. Hellu is an artist and educator at the center of the Bay Area's community of photographic artists and a longtime collaborator with SF Camerawork. A 2020 survey of his work entitled *Together* was the last exhibition at SF Camerawork featured prior to the onset of the pandemic.

"We are thrilled to have Jamil Hellu preside over the first group exhibition in our new space at Fort Mason, bringing together an array of outstanding artists, whose work questions, reimagines, and expands upon canonical notions of Western cultural history in visionary and thought-provoking ways," says SF Camerawork Board Chair, Jonathan Calm. "Hellu is an exceptional artist as well as a seasoned art educator, who has contributed tremendously to teaching and inspiring the next generation of image-makers. His curation of *Dismantling Monoliths* embodies SF Camerawork's purpose of extending challenging conversation forward and sharing new ideas with our community."

Dismantling Monoliths, A group exhibition curated by Jamil Hellu presents Alanna Fields, Xandra Ibarra, Tarrah Krajnak, Forrest McGarvey, Marcel Pardo Ariza, and Aaron Turner, January 17 — March 25, 2023. On view at SF Camerawork, 2 Marina Blvd, Building A, San Francisco, CA 94123. For all inquiries, please contact the gallery by phone at (415) 487-1011 or email Joanna Knutsen, Gallery Manager, at joanna@sfcamerawork.org.

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About the Curator

Through a multidisciplinary art practice that spans photography, video, and site installations, Jamil Hellu's work focuses on themes of identity, visibility, and cultural heritage, while expressing a shift towards a world beyond binaries. Navigating from a personal lens, his projects weave together strategies of performance and photographic representation to point to the tensions found in the evolving discourse about sexuality. Born in Brazil, Hellu holds a Masters in Fine Arts in Art Practice from Stanford University and a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Photography from the San Francisco Art Institute. His projects have been discussed in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Artforum*, and *VICE*. He is the recipient of the San Francisco Art Commission Artist Grant, Zellerbach Family Foundation Community Grant, Fleishhacker Foundation Eureka Fellowship, and the Kala Art Institute Fellowship Award. He is a Photography Lecturer in the Department of Art & Art History at Stanford University. An active member in the San Francisco Bay Area arts community, Hellu serves as an advisory board member for Recology's Artist-in-Residence Program. His work is represented by Rebecca Camacho Presents in San Francisco.

About SF Camerawork

SF Camerawork is a long-standing leader in the San Francisco arts milieu, committed to provoking discovery, experimentation, and exchange through exhibitions and experiences for all who value new ideas in photography. The organization was founded in 1974 by a collective of artists who welcomed experimental photography, unconventional techniques, and sociopolitical themes and who fostered a range of alternative styles and approaches. The essence of the founders' vision remains at the core of SF Camerawork even as the organization has adapted to the changing scope of photography and surrounding cultural landscape.

For more than 45 years, SF Camerawork has provided a launching pad for many artists' careers, supplying invaluable financial support, exhibition space, curation, and patronage. In its early years, SF Camerawork was the first organization in the Bay Area to host exhibitions and lectures by controversial but ultimately highly influential artists such as Sally Mann, Robert Mapplethorpe, Susan Meiselas, and Joel-Peter Witkin. More recently, the organization has presented the first West Coast exhibitions for artists including John Chiara, Binh Danh, Erica Deeman, Jennifer Karady, Jason Lazurus, Chris McCaw, Wang Ning De, and Meghann Riepenhoff—artists who have emerged as leaders of a new generation gaining international prominence.