



List Projects 27:
fields harrington and
Nancy Valladares

July 20–October 29, 2023, Bakalar Gallery



MIT List Visual
Arts Center

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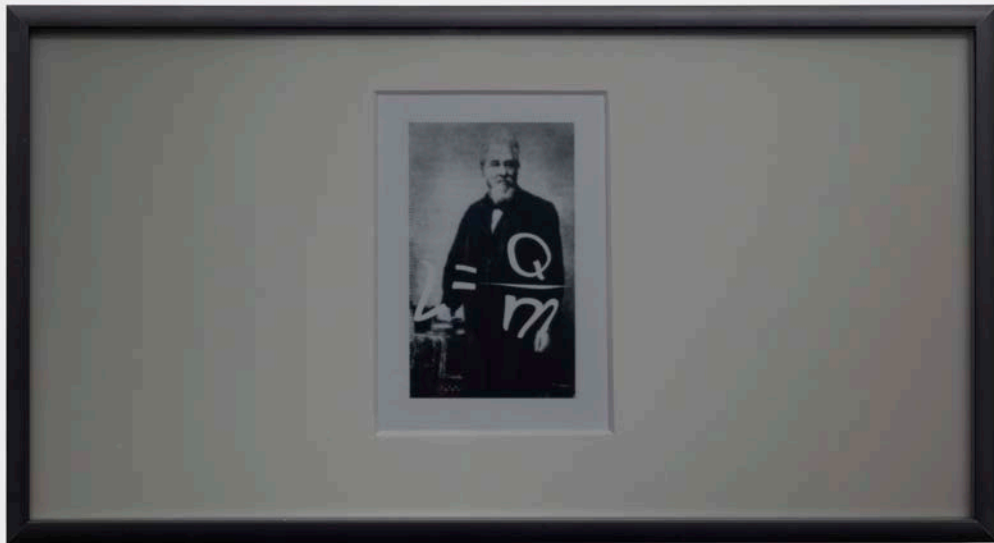
In their respective practices, fields harrington and Nancy Valladares work across sculpture and installation, text, photography, and the moving image.

Both artists center research, and their works and related inquiries take a critical eye to overlooked technological and industrial histories. Each has also employed citizen science to shed light on the enduring toxicity of various colonial projects and the extractive processes that underpin both racial and fossil capitalism—systems of racialized exploitation and carbon-intensive activities that directly enable capital accumulation.

Their joint presentation at the List Center inaugurates a season of experimental List Projects exhibitions that will foreground and support artistic collaborations. On view are a trio of works by harrington that take on the complicated legacy of Norbert Rillieux (1806–1894), a Black American chemical engineer and the inventor of the multiple-effect evaporator under vacuum,

and selections from Valladares's *PHOTO/SYNTHETIC* (2021–ongoing), a project that unpacks the environmental and economic impacts of the use of silver in analog photography.

Accompanying these past works are two collaboratively authored new commissions that reflect their shared interests in pedagogy and the act of reading. Based on their collective research into how exhaustion functions within extractivist economies, *On Exhaustive Rifts* (2023) is a co-authored text that introduces the artists' concept of "molecular exhaustion." Visitors can access these words in a takeaway pamphlet, a digital download, and the *Molecular Library* (2023), a study area within the gallery space featuring a selection of titles from a syllabus compiled by harrington and Valladares.



fields harrington, *Steam Economies*, 2021.
Photo: Kristine Eudey

ABOUT THE SEASON

This special season of experimental List Projects programming is composed of three exhibitions in the Bakalar Gallery. Each presentation will pair two artists who share a history of conversation and foster their continued collaboration through a joint commission. A closing program featuring all six artists will round out the series, offering an opportunity for the artists to reflect on what it means for institutions to prioritize conversation and collaboration in their exhibition spaces.

A CONVERSATION ON EXHAUSTION

Selby Nimrod: As someone who has followed your respective practices for a few years, I am struck by the complementary approaches to artmaking I've observed in your work as well as in your related scholarship and pedagogy. How did you learn about each other's work?

fields harrington: I was introduced to Nancy's film *The Density of Breath* (2020) by my friend, the artist Rami George. At the time, I was workshoping a video titled *Economies of Breath* (2021) with a small crit group. Rami noticed that there were some overlaps between our work and suggested we do a studio visit.

Nancy Valladares: Later, fields invited me to give a talk about my work at the New School. The conversation we had following my presentation was great and felt very natural. I believe this event was the catalyst for this ongoing dialogue!

SN: That's correct!

fh: I do remember thinking to myself that I wanted to co-teach a course with Nancy because I thought we had points of contact in our research.

NV: Same here! The invitation to work together on this exhibition is a great framework to think with fields.

SN: Can you each speak to the concept of "molecular exhaustion" and share a bit about how we might see it in this exhibition?

NV: I started thinking about exhaustion through the lens of vision, extraction, and the chemical processes of photography. One of the first things you learn in the darkroom is to check for exhausted

chemistry, which would produce inconsistent results. Exhausted silver mines, exhausted soil, tired and strained eyes after too much screen time and too many images and words—these are the conditions of violent "molecular colonialisms," which Margarida Mendes coined a few years ago.¹ For this commission with fields, I'm interested in the processes of extraction and exhaustion that are necessary to produce and sustain vast networks of visuality.

fh: My work in the show is a proposition that emerges from a set of open questions, including "How may we (en)counter exhaustion?" I'm assisted in my inquiry and intervention by the history of sugar refinement, especially its relationship with Black enslaved labor on the plantation. The expended black carbon lumps in *Energy in Hidden Form* are the result of sugar oxidizing and the decomposition of baking soda after being exposed to an open flame. Exhaustion here stands in as the means through which the Black enslaved body (and labor) is exhausted (and extracted), as well as defined by its limits for maximum production. *Energy in Hidden Form* indexes not only thermodynamic processes but also the labor performed by the enslaved Black people that allowed these processes to happen.

SN: I am curious to know more about the basic laboratory experiments and chemical processes we see in the works on view.

fh: Rather than thinking about the work with scientific protocols in mind, such as testing scientific theories or generating hypotheses, I'm thinking about a poetics of science through the assemblage of slavery, the latent heat of vaporization, and the story of the inventor and sugar



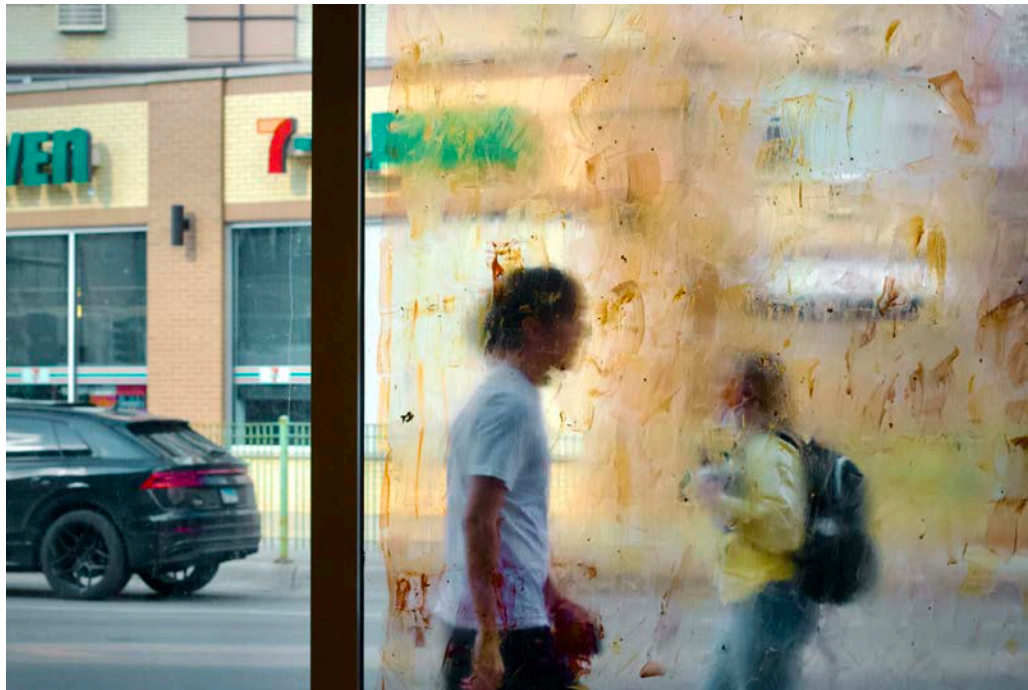
fields harrington, *Energy in Hidden Form*, 2021.
Photo: Kristine Eudey

technologist Norbert Rillieux. For me, the process of oxidation to decompose sugar in an exothermic reaction resonates with Norbert Rillieux's invention of the multiple-effect evaporator, which implements the latent heat of steam to refine sugar by evaporating the water from sugar cane juice, transforming it into a crystalline solid. Both methods apply converted, concealed, obscure, and hidden energy. I feel ambivalent about Rillieux's invention as the outcome of capitalism's desire for efficiency. However, what led me to the multiple-effect evaporator was its capacity to harness the concealed power of latent heat to produce an economy of steam. More specifically, the economy of steam demarcates not only a ratio of evaporated cane juice to steam, but in my own view, it simultaneously gestures towards an

economy of exhaustion that is dependent on and produced by enslaved labor.

NV: I would say I'm more interested in the chemical instruments as language that appears in photographic production. This seems a bit obvious, but before embarking on the research for *PHOTO/ SYNTHETIC*, it had never occurred to me that the technologies that allowed early photography to proliferate weren't only optical. They were also chemical in nature. This is something that isn't emphasized in the way that photography is taught, and so its relationship to the chemical processes of image production beyond the darkroom is very nearly invisible. The works you're seeing in this show are an allusion to that, and hopefully a reminder that image production has an environmental cost.

¹ Margarida Mendes, "Molecular Colonialism," in *Matter Fictions*, ed. Margarida Mendes (London: Sternberg Press, 2017), 125–140.



Nancy Valladares, *PHOTO/SYNTHETIC: SENSITIZED*, 2022.
Photo: Gwen Madden

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

fields harrington

Energy in Hidden Form, 2021

Sugar, baking soda, 90% alcohol, aluminum foil pie pan, Plexiglas

9 × 13 × 13 in. (22.9 × 33 × 33 cm)

fields harrington

Steam Economics, 2021

Privacy filter, inkjet print

7 × 13 in. (17.8 × 33 cm)

fields harrington

Multiple-Effect Evaporator Norbert Rillieux, 2019

Ink on newsprint

19¼ × 25¼ in. (48.90 × 64.14 cm)

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On Exhaustive Rifts, 2023

Co-authored text, takeaway pamphlet

Commissioned by MIT List Visual Arts Center

fields harrington and Nancy Valladares

Molecular Library, 2023

Reading area with table, chairs, and bookcase in Enzo Mari *Autoprogettazione* designs; titles from the molecular exhaustion syllabus

Dimensions variable

Commissioned by MIT List Visual Arts Center

Nancy Valladares

PHOTO/SYNTHETIC: EXTRACTION, 2022

Reclaimed silver from expired photographic film and paper, sodium hypochlorite, borosilicate glass

Dimensions variable

Nancy Valladares

PHOTO/SYNTHETIC: INDEX, 2023

Reclaimed silver from expired photographic film, sodium hypochlorite, glass jars

Dimensions variable

All works courtesy the artists

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

fields harrington (b. 1986, Sacramento, CA) lives and works in New York. He has previously exhibited at KAJE, New York; Y2K Group, New York; Parsons School of Design, New York; Automat, Philadelphia; and the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. In 2020, harrington was a participant in the Studio Program of the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art. harrington received his MFA from the University of Pennsylvania and BFA from the University of North Texas.

Nancy Dayanne Valladares (b. 1991, Tegucigalpa, Honduras) lives and works in New York. Her work has been exhibited and screened at Ralph Arnold Gallery at Loyola University, Chicago; Stiftung Bauhaus, Dessau, Germany; Sakiya, Palestine; Chuquimarca Projects, Chicago; and Goethe-Institut, Chicago; among others. Recent fellowships and residencies include Triangle Arts Association, the Film Study Center at Harvard University, and Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau. Valladares holds a master of science in Art, Culture, and Technology from MIT and a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

List Projects 27: fields harrington and Nancy Valladares is curated by Selby Nimrod, Assistant Curator.

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UP NEXT



List Projects 28: Sophie Friedman-Pappas and TJ Shin

On view:

November 16, 2023 – February 18, 2024

PUBLIC PROGRAMS



Curator Tour

September 14, 2023, 5:30–6:30 PM

In-person

All List Visual Arts Center programs are free and open to the public. Registration is required. For more information about events and programs related to this exhibition, please visit: listart.mit.edu/events-programs

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MIT List Visual Arts Center
20 Ames Street, Bldg. E15
Cambridge, MA 02139
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