

Pulp Memories

Melissa Joseph and Julia Norton

January 11 - February 15, 2024



Conversation with the Artists: Saturday, January 11 from 4-5 pm
Opening Reception: Saturday, January 11 from 5-7 pm

(Brookline, MA – December 10, 2024) Praise Shadows is thrilled to announce the 2025 opening exhibition, *Pulp Memories*, featuring works on handmade paper by Melissa Joseph and Julia Norton, marking the first-ever presentation of the two New York City-based artists. Inspired by their idiosyncratic takes on papermaking, pulp, and painting, the selected works demonstrate explorations of material, techniques, and modes of storytelling.

Joseph paints in fluid figurative gestures to represent moments referencing images from old family photos. Known for her paintings made from wool felt, this exhibition features works on handmade paper created during her residency at the renowned New York City organization DieuDonne. Norton's painted assemblages navigate abstraction using natural materials that employ a deep consideration of colors and connect her studies of landscape, nature, and the body. The act of care is a throughline in both artists' practices, not solely in the labor required in the artmaking, but also in the consideration of subject matter and memory. Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that Joseph and Norton each have had significant careers as art educators.

Melissa Joseph believes one of the most meaningful roles she has taken on in her life and her career is a 'keeper of stories.' The seven paintings in this exhibition were completed during a one-year Workspace Residency at DieuDonne, where she iterated on her personal visual language of wool felt and ceramics to a new medium for her practice: paper. The physical exertion of working eight hours days with these materials often exhausted her, but it also pushed her – and the medium – to their physical limits. She considers the paintings active sites of dialogue between herself and the plant fibers, with both parties contributing equally.

Over the course of her residency at DieuDonne, Joseph created these paintings using liquified linen paper pulp, a technique that is dynamic, interactive, and unpredictable. The process must happen in a wet studio, where fresh sheets of paper are pulled and prepared for the drawing, a complex process that requires intense focus and stamina. The drawings are raw, fluid, and uninhibited, executed without premeditation. By depicting members of her family vis-a-vis old found photographs, she engages directly with her past and her present as a first-generation bi-racial American and the unique juxtapositions of diasporic life.

The imagery in Julia Norton's paintings honors the natural world and its living occupants by connecting to various stories of life cycles, both real and imagined. The assemblage-style works are inspired by creation narratives, landscape iconography, and mammalian reproductive anatomy. Forms, shapes, and found objects are carefully positioned within the composition: circular and tunnel-like shapes suggest landscapes of the earth as well as reproductive organs, and represent the life-giving potential of both the exterior world and interior self.

Norton employs an assortment of handmade paper that contain natural substances in the pulp, including knotweed, alpaca wool, agave fiber, chilis, and rice. Yarn colored with natural dyes and three-dimensional pieces wrapped in paper are arranged on wooden panels. She applies natural pigments to certain areas and incorporates found objects within the compositions, such as stones, seed pods, seashells, and animal bones. The work evokes feelings of tenderness — the act of wrapping an object in paper is reminiscent of wrapping a gift, or putting a child to bed. The curve, a recurring shape in the imagery, is organic and ergonomic in its form — it's always cradling something, whether that might be a living being, a space, a river bend, or an object.

A conversation between the two artists, moderated by Yng-Ru Chen, Owner and CEO of Praise Shadows, will take place at 4 pm on January 11. Tickets are \$5, [available here](#). Doors open at 5 pm for the public reception.

About the artists

Melissa Joseph is a New York based artist. Her work considers themes of memory, family history, and the politics of how we occupy spaces. By using needle felting and found objects, she intentionally alludes to the labors of women as well as experiences as a second generation American and the unique juxtapositions of diasporic life. Her work has been shown at the Brooklyn Museum, Delaware Contemporary, Woodmere Art Museum, Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, Brattleboro Museum and Art Center, Jeffrey Deitch Projects, ICA San Francisco, and List Gallery at Swarthmore College. She has been featured in Hyperallergic, Art Forum, Artnet, Artnews, New American Paintings, Le Monde, CNN, and Architectural Digest, Whitewall, Family Style, and participated in residencies including Artpace, Dieu Donn e Workspace Residency, The Textile Arts Center, BRIC, Fountainhead, the Archie Bray

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Foundation for Ceramic Arts, the Museum of Arts and Design and upcoming at Greenwich House Pottery. She is a regular contributor to BOMB Magazine.

Julia Norton is a multimedia artist, educator, and researcher, with a primary focus on natural materials. She holds a BA from Sarah Lawrence College, an MFA from SUNY Purchase, and an Ed.M from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her work has been exhibited at Lyles & King, the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, and The Wassaic Project, and she has participated in residencies at The Wassaic Project (Wassaic, NY), Cooper Union (New York, NY), Mass MoCA (North Adams, MA), Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (BC, Canada), and Pocoapoco (Oaxaca, Mexico). In 2023 she was the recipient of the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Artist Community Engagement Grant. She has previously worked as an educator at institutions such as New Museum, Pioneer Works, and Harvard Art Museums, and currently at Swiss Institute, Dia Art Foundation, and The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

About Praise Shadows Art Gallery

Praise Shadows Art Gallery is a contemporary art program based in the Boston area with a focus on exceptional artists working in all artistic disciplines. Our worldview is informed by the notion that the artworld's untapped and unrecognized potential is worth cultivating, supporting, and championing. Since our founding in December 2020, the gallery has placed artworks by our artists in esteemed public collections, and our exhibitions have been covered widely in major international media outlets. Our work is grounded by partnering closely with artists to develop opportunities in traditional and emerging models of creativity and entrepreneurship—exhibitions, commissions, brand partnerships, new technologies, and original concepts that no one has ever tried before. www.praiseshadows.com

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Artwork captions

• Melissa Joseph, *Mom and Ollie doing yoga | Down Dogs*, 2021, Abaca base sheet with linen pulp paint, 30 x 40 inches. Courtesy the artist and REGULARNORMAL.

• Julia Norton, *Excavation*, 2023, Assemblage with various papers, black walnut ink, ochre pigment, soil, lapis lazuli, bone black (from cow bones), rocks, devil's seed pods, sheep wool, naturally dyed yarn, and opossum vertebrae, 68 x 80 inches. Courtesy the artist.