

SEVENTH FLOOR

BEMIS × CENTER

**Close to the Clouds:
Encountering
Digital Diasporas**

+

**Ezra Masch:
VOLUMES**

**WINTER + SPRING
EXHIBITIONS**

January 16–May 3, 2026

About

Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts facilitates the creation, presentation, and understanding of contemporary art through an international residency program, exhibitions, and educational programs.

Residency Program

For more than four decades, Bemis has provided artists from around the world dedicated time, space, and resources to conduct research and create new work. Bemis offers artists private live/work studios, financial support, technical/administrative assistance, and opportunities for intellectual discourse about contemporary art. More than 1,000 artists have participated in the residency program.

Bemis's Curator-in-Residence Program provides a curator the opportunity to participate in the Bemis Residency Program, serve as a professional resource to Bemis artists-in-residence and the Greater Omaha arts community, and organize exhibitions and public programs at Bemis Center.

Bemis's Sound Art + Experimental Music Program, launched in 2019, is a special track within the Residency Program for artists working in sound, composition, voice, and music of all genres. Participating artists receive financial, technical, and administrative support, along with dedicated facilities for rehearsing, recording, and performing.

The program includes LOW END, a performance venue offering free live

shows for the public to experience the latest innovations by local, national, and international sound artists and experimental musicians.

Exhibition Program

Bemis Center's exhibition program features solo and group exhibitions of artwork in all media by local, national, and international artists. Exhibitions are always free, open to the public, and frequently introduce the community of Omaha to the most experimental and provocative art forms today.

Public Programs

Throughout the organization's history, Bemis Center has offered artist-driven, community-responsive programs that bolster civic engagement in the creation and understanding of art. Public programs provide regular opportunities for the public to learn about and be inspired by the visual arts. Through artist-led classes and workshops, ARTalks, open studio events, panel discussions, film screenings, and performances, the community has direct access to artists and to their diverse approaches to artmaking and interpreting the world around us.

Map

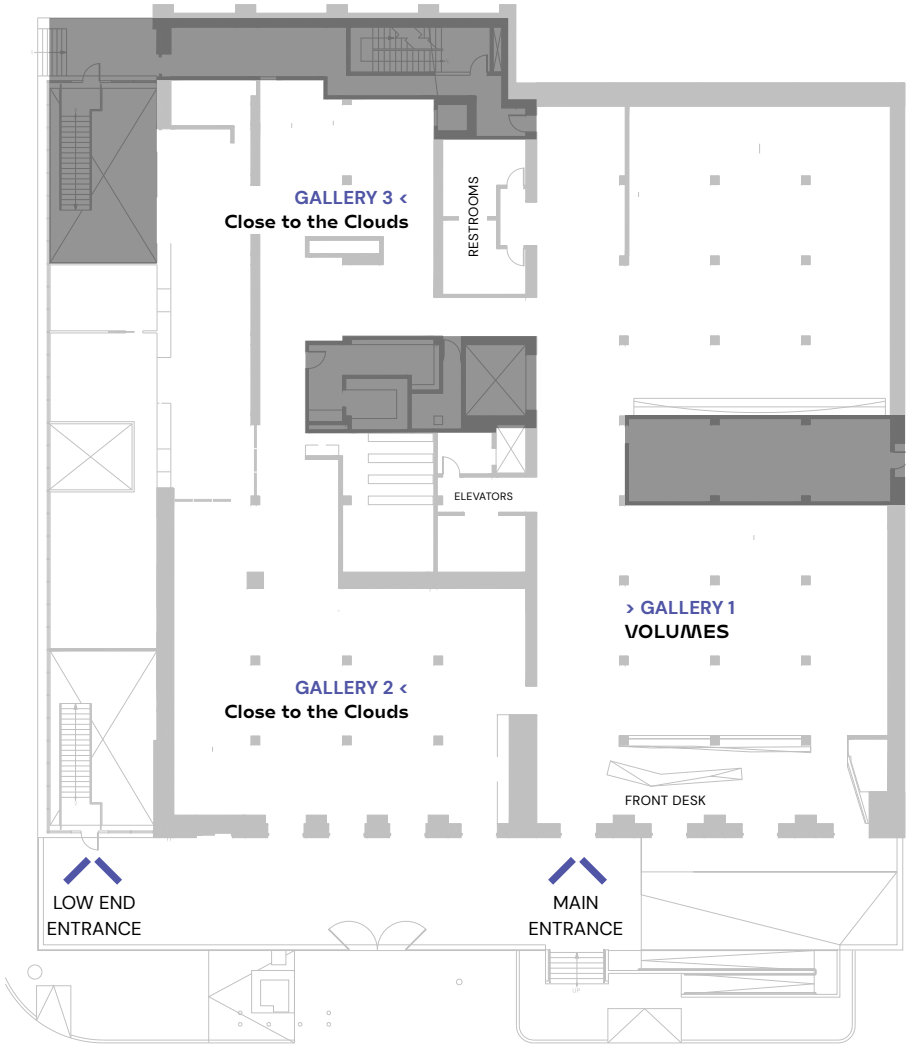
GALLERY 1

Ezra Masch: VOLUMES

GALLERY 2 + 3

Close to the Clouds:
Encountering Digital Diasporas

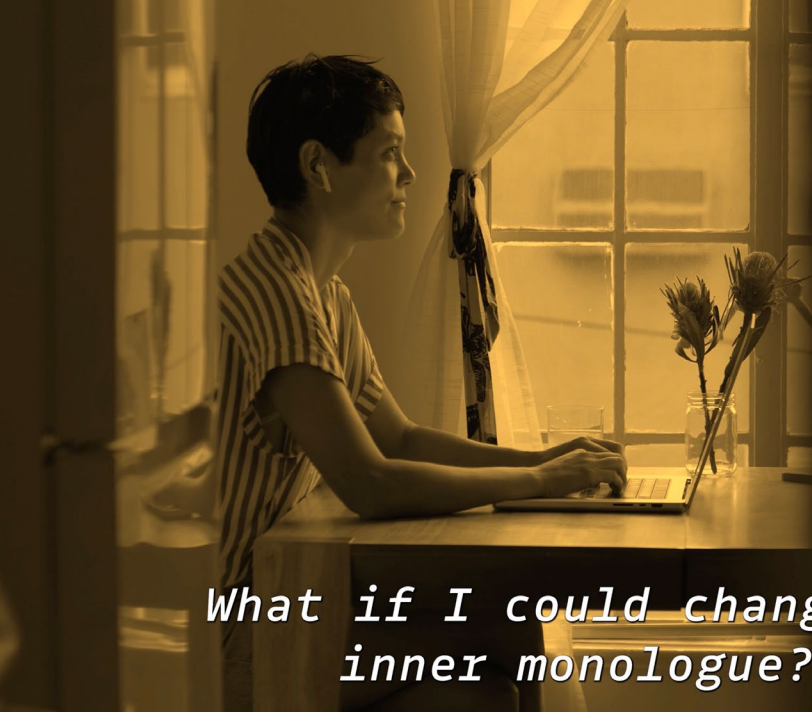
LEAVENWORTH STREET



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*What if I could change my
inner monologue?*



Close to the Clouds: Encountering Digital Diasporas

CURATED BY KATHY CHO, 2024–2025 CURATOR-IN-RESIDENCE

Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme

Zainab Aliyu

Rindon Johnson

Lauren Lee McCarthy and Kyle McDonald

Rebeca Romero

Tiangi Sun and Fiel Guhit

In 2023 when I applied to be Bemis Center's Curator-in-Residence, I had been thinking for a few years about how the group exhibition format and a polyvocality of voices could contribute to the meaning of an existing terminology, "digital diaspora." Before this current era of AI summarized search results, I looked for uses of "digital diaspora" generally online, browsing through library catalogs, and also

on academic research websites, such as JSTOR—access I gained by a favor from Jacinda Tran, who has since contributed further to this exhibition. At the time, search results included a handful of essays and book chapter excerpts under the umbrella of media theory—a majority of results not directly related to art. It felt kismet when I came across the term in print, briefly mentioned in the final paragraph

Previous page: Lauren Lee McCarthy and Kyle McDonald. Courtesy of the artists. Photo by David Leonard.

Installation view of *And yet my mask is powerful Part 1*, 2016–18, Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme. *The song is the call and the land is calling* © Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 2024. Photo by David Stjernholm. Courtesy of the artists.

of the afterword written by Legacy Russell for Mindy Seu's *Cyberfeminist Index*. The amalgamation of these two words was being considered by others I deeply admire in the field, while also leaving enough room to add to the conversation. However, I spent a majority of my time during the residency trying to avoid using "digital" and "diaspora." These are frequently used in art world conversations around identity politics, and "the intersection of art and technology." But ultimately I came back around to it, as these terms were the most straightforward way to refer to and honor the multiplicity of themes and ideas that the artists are exploring within the exhibition.

At the core of *Close to the Clouds: Encountering Digital Diasporas*, I am interested in the feelings and immaterial experiences that come with the ubiquity and everyday use of digital technology in order to forge interpersonal connections and relational identities. I think back to

the early aughts, when as a teenager I met email pen pals turned IRL friends through stints on blogging platforms such as LiveJournal, Xanga, then Tumblr. And somehow stumbling across invitation-only private Facebook Groups such as "Radical Black and Brown Hotties," "☆≡" (Starwave), and "Sad Asian Girls," that were most active (to my memory) during 2013–2016. Heated yet titillating arguments in these groups ran parallel to the rise of general conversations around identity politics as we know them today. Often, I would see nuanced conversations around the role of art and identity politics take place live in the comments section. These talking points would often spill offline and were discussed in art school critiques, exhibition reviews, and explored within artworks themselves. An ever-evolving negotiation of where I stood or fit in eventually became core memories and took root: the witnessing of a feedback loop between digital spaces and IRL.





Rebeca Romero. Courtesy of the artist and Copperfield Gallery.

Previous page: Zainab Aliyu. Courtesy of the artist.

As online technologies rapidly change so does our understanding of ourselves and others, as well as the boundaries. On one end, it helps us connect with kin, and at the other end, keeps us reinforced and often stuck within familiar echochambers, or even going to an extreme—down the rabbit hole. Looking through someone else's Explore page (Instagram) or FYP (TikTok), which seamlessly combines algorithmically suggested content with content from accounts one follows, can give intimate insight into what type of content they encounter and engage with. And one is reminded that there are endless niches tucked away in the corners of the internet. You might reference a meme that has been all over your feed for the past few months that another person has no idea exists.

These tools can also help us stay in touch and in constant conversation as we grapple with physical distance. While in residence at Bemis Center for the past eighteen months, I've balanced reading printed and online materials, alongside conversations with fellow artists in residence, and new friends in Omaha. Supplementing these main forms of research, were also trips to New York, Los Angeles, Berlin, and London to conduct studio visits with most of the artists in the exhibition, speak with colleagues and old friends in the field, experience relevant exhibitions—all to feel the pulse on framing an exhibition through the lenses of the digital and diaspora communities.

Integral to expanding the ideas around *Close to the Clouds*, are written contributions by Eileen Isagon Skyers, Frederike Sperling, and Jacinda Tran. Skyers's essay brings generous insights and depth to select artist's work, through her decade of experience specializing in media art. Sperling's writing focuses on "distance" from a geographical and social perspective, bringing her curatorial knowledge and personal musings from afar. Tran's ongoing academic research and coining of the term "banalization of diaspora" is expanded through the cloud as metaphor, physical object, and its relationship to security. And with that, I leave you with links to access their prescient and thoughtful words, back in the digital realm.

—Kathy Cho
2024–2025 Curator-in-Residence

Essays

“The Network Is a Clearing” by Eileen Isagon Skyers

Eileen Isagon Skyers is a writer, curator, and artist with a decade of experience specializing in media art. Skyers has been at the forefront of groundbreaking online exhibitions and digital programming at prestigious venues like David Zwirner, Rhizome, and the Whitney Museum. Her writing has appeared in publications like *Hyperallergic*, *Outland*, *Frieze*, the *Net Art Anthology*, and the Whitney’s forthcoming Artport exhibition catalog. She is also the author of *Vanishing Acts*, a book that delves into network-based art practices as a critique of seamless and undetectable interface technologies.



Read the essay:

bemiscenter.org/essay-eileen-isagon-skyers-the-network-is-a-clearing

“Notes on Distance and Depth” by Frederike Sperling

Frederike Sperling is a curator and writer living in Vienna, Austria. Since 2023, she has been the artistic director of Kunstraum Niederoesterreich, a contemporary art institution dedicated to time-based media. In this capacity she has worked on new commissions, (performative) exhibitions, as well as live and discursive events. Alongside jury activities and teaching assignments at institutions such as Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University of Applied Arts Vienna and Kunstuniversität Linz, she has published essays with Sternberg Press and Mousse Publishing, among others, and regularly writes for international art magazines.



Read the essay:

bemiscenter.org/essay-frederike-sperling-notes-on-distance-and-depth

“Securing the Cloud” by Jacinda Tran

Jacinda S. Tran is an interdisciplinary scholar of visibility, race, space, and empire. Her research and writing examine the affective and cultural legacies of US militarism across transnational landscapes. Tran is currently a Visiting Lecturer in the Program of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Dartmouth College, teaching in Asian American History and Queer Studies. She holds a PhD in American Studies from Yale University with a graduate certificate in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and was most recently a Global American Studies Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard University’s Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History.



Read the essay:

bemiscenter.org/essay-jacinda-tran-securing-the-cloud

Next page: Rindon Johnson. Courtesy of the artist.

Tianyi Sun and Fiel Guhit. Courtesy of the artists.





Ezra Masch: *VOLUMES*

CURATED BY RACHEL ADAMS, CHIEF CURATOR + DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

Ezra Masch's *VOLUMES* transcends traditional distinctions between sculpture, performance, and installation and each new iteration transforms the gallery into a space of sonic and visual dialogue. Masch collaborates with musicians, who activate the space with their instruments, altering our perception through an immersive sound and light experience. Over the four-month exhibition at Bemis Center, performances by local and national musicians will be recorded and integrated into the installation, allowing the piece to evolve, and layering past and present moments into an ever-shifting ecosystem of experience. This extended duration not only highlights the uniqueness of each performance, but underscores Masch's deep interest in synesthesia: making sound visible, space audible, and inviting us to inhabit new relationships between perception, environment, and collective presence.

Ezra Masch in Conversation with Rachel Adams

RA: *VOLUMES* has taken on several forms over the years, adapting to different spaces and performers. Looking back, how do you feel the project has evolved conceptually and technically since its earliest iteration?

EM: The earliest versions of *VOLUMES* used fluorescent lights, and the system that triggered them was completely analog. I started designing and building my own light fixtures with LEDs in 2018, and experimenting with new software. There have been four or five different design iterations since then, each with its own wiring system and software configuration. So on a technical level, the project has been rebuilt from the ground up numerous times. Conceptually, it has always been about the connection between sound, light, and space as a framework for musical exploration/discovery. But as the tech has evolved, so has our ability to develop new interactions between sound and light. And this has allowed musicians to experiment with it in new ways. Every iteration has been an opportunity to try something new (this one especially).

RA: Your practice sits at the intersection of sculpture, sound, and performance. How do you think about the balance between structure and improvisation when creating an installation that is so responsive to live performers?

EM: Structure is so important for both musicians and visual artists, although it can mean slightly different things within each creative discipline. In music, a scale, a chord progression, or a series of movements can provide a structural framework for improvisation or thematic variation. In visual art (especially in sculpture) a three-dimensional structure is defined by a series of physical components that come together to form a unified whole. With *VOLUMES*, sound is visualized in real time within a three-dimensional grid based on the proportions of the surrounding architecture. So it enables performers and audiences to experience an intersection of physical structures and temporal structures, all at the same time. The installation itself is an open framework in which variation, experimentation, and improvisation can take place.

RA: Each presentation of *VOLUMES* becomes inseparable from its architecture. As you prepare for your exhibition at Bemis, what aspects of the building or gallery have influenced how you're reimagining the work?

EM: The massive structural elements—the timber columns and overhead beams—are the aspects that stand out the most. There's a perfect symmetry to the four vertical columns that anchors the center of the grid. And the beams above have an inherent rhythm that defines the spacing of the light fixtures as well. I'll be using the open spaces in between the beams to locate the center of each light. The white



Ezra Masch. *VOLUMES*. Courtesy of the artist.

painted surfaces of the columns are going to reflect light and color, so I'm excited to create some interactions that make intentional use of these architectural elements.

RA: Collaboration is central to *VOLUMES*, especially as different musicians activate the piece in unique ways. What have you learned from these collaborations, and how have they shaped your understanding of the work over time?

EM: Collaboration doesn't always come easy for me. I'm very particular, and I like things to be done a certain way. But when I open myself up to other people's ideas, sometimes the results are better than what I would have come up with when left to my own devices. So I have learned to silence the voice in my head that always says "no" to everything. Now I say, "let's try it and see what happens." And it's not just with musicians. Through working on this project, I find myself collaborating with creative technologists, curators,

audio engineers, and videographers. I've learned to seek a balance between staying true to my creative vision, while also allowing space for new possibilities to take shape.

RA: For audiences encountering *VOLUMES* at Bemis—many for the first time—what new elements or shifts in approach should they expect in this iteration of the project?

EM: With this new iteration at Bemis Center, the performances are going to be recorded (sonically and visually), and reproduced, playing on a loop during regular gallery hours. All of my previous *VOLUMES* installations have been strictly event-based thus far, so this represents an exciting point of departure. The performance series at Bemis will also include some new instrumentation, with the addition of piano/keyboards, a development that has been in the works for a while, but has yet to be presented publicly.

Public Programs

Friday CELEBRATION

16 Exhibitions Opening Reception

January 7–9 PM
A festive evening with complimentary drinks, light bites, and music performances

activating *VOLUMES*, from percussionists Dana Murray, Executive Director of North Omaha Music and Arts (7 PM), and Kendall Wooden, professor and director of the Commercial Music Hip-Hop Ensemble at the University of Nebraska Omaha (8 PM).

Saturday PERFORMANCE

17 Live Site-Responsive Performance with Artists Tianyi Sun and Fiel Guhit

January 3 PM
A durational performance providing an environment utilizing custom-built computers, mechanical fans, and synthetic grass.

Thursday TOUR

22 Curator-Led

January 7 PM
Chief Curator + Director of Programs Rachel Adams leads an in-depth look at the themes, artists, and ideas that shape the current exhibitions.

Saturday TOUR

7 Exhibitions Highlights

February 3 PM
A focused thirty-minute tour through key works, inviting you to explore the evolving intersections of identity, technology, sound, and space.

Thursday RESIDENCY

12 Meet + Eat

February 6–8 PM
Meet our current artists-in-residence, learn about their practices and aspirations, and enjoy pizza and drinks on us!

Friday VOLUMES PERFORMANCE

20 George Burton

February 7 PM
Pianist George Burton activates the installation *VOLUMES* through a distinct audio-visual approach.

Saturday TALKS

7 OMA ARTalks

March 3 PM
Explore the exhibitions from the perspective of guest speakers Gretchen Larsen, PhD, Instructor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Johnny Carson Center for Emerging Media; Alex Myers, MFA, Program Director and Associate Professor of Graphic Design & Film at Creighton University's Department of Computer Science, Design & Journalism; and Dr. Stacey Barelos, sound artist, composer, and director of Soundry.

Thursday LECTURE

19 Dr. Jacinda Tran, Dartmouth College

March 7 PM
Moderated by *Close to the Clouds* curator Kathy Cho, this lecture from Dr. Jacinda Tran,

Visiting Lecturer in the Program of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Dartmouth College, examines the affect of varied psychogeographies of global colonization and dispersal—and how some of the artists in the exhibition take up the tasks and technologies of representationability amid an increasingly fractured world. *Lecture funding provided by:*



Saturday TOUR

21 Exhibitions Highlights

March 3 PM
A focused thirty-minute tour through key works, inviting you to explore the evolving intersections of identity, technology, sound, and space.

Acknowledgements

Saturday RESIDENCY + MORE

28

March
1–5 PM

Open House / Open Studios

The ultimate behind-the-scenes Bemis experience!

Explore your own creativity

through a hands-on, artist-led activity, and go beyond the galleries to discover Bemis's upper floors—where you can visit with artists-in-residence to see their studios and view their works in progress.

Saturday *VOLUMES* PERFORMANCE

28

March
3 PM

Phill Smith

Omaha-based multi-instrumentalist Phill Smith activates the installation *VOLUMES* through a distinct audio-visual approach on the drums.

Thursday TOUR

16

April
7 PM

Curator-Led

Chief Curator + Director of Programs Rachel Adams leads an in-depth look at the themes, artists, and ideas that shape the current exhibitions.

Saturday TOUR

25

April
3 PM

Exhibitions Highlights

A focused thirty-minute tour through key works, inviting you to explore the evolving intersections of identity, technology, sound, and space.

Saturday *VOLUMES* PERFORMANCE

2

May
4 PM

Mark Guilliana

Grammy-nominated drummer and composer Mark Guilliana activates the installation *VOLUMES* through a distinct audio-visual approach.

Close to the Clouds: Encountering Digital Diasporas

CURATOR

Kathy Cho, 2024–2025
Curator-in-Residence

ARTISTS

Basel Abbas and
Ruanne Abou-Rahme
Zainab Aliyu
Rindon Johnson
Lauren Lee McCarthy and
Kyle McDonald
Rebeca Romero
Tianyi Sun and Fiel Guhit

Ezra Masch: *VOLUMES*

CURATOR

Rachel Adams, Chief Curator +
Director of Programs

Exhibitions Acknowledgements

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VOLUMES SOFTWARE ENGINEER

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Hana Brock and Parker Herout

TRANSLATION

Roxana Corral

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NEBRASKA ARTS COUNCIL

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Gallery Hours

Wednesday	11 AM–5 PM
Thursday	11 AM–9 PM
Friday	11 AM–5 PM
Saturday	11 AM–5 PM
Sunday	11 AM–5 PM

Admission

Thanks to the generous support of individual donors and foundation, government, and corporate partners, Bemis Center offers free admission to all of its exhibitions and public programs.

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