



CCA MFA WRITING
CLASS OF '25
THESIS READINGS
MAY 15, 2025



MFA Thesis Readings 2025

WELCOME

Jasmin Darznik, Program Chair

READINGS - PART I

Jeremy Stone
Introduced by Faith Adiele

Emma Vetter
Introduced by Eric Olson

MV Candelaria
Introduced by Trisha Ya-wen Low

Stephanie Peters
Introduced by Jasmin Darznik

JOYFUL INTERLUDE

READINGS - PART II

Armando Padron-Cruz
Introduced by Yalitza Ferreras

Alex Fischer
Introduced by Aimee Phan

Mady Jones
Introduced by Leslie Carol Roberts

FINAL THANKS

California College of the Arts
THURSDAY, MAY 15 | 6:00-9:00 PM | H&S HOMEROOM

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From the Chair

What a joy it was to gather in our beautiful new MFA space to celebrate this extraordinary group of graduating writers. Over the past two years, they have brought curiosity, courage, and deep commitment to their craft—and to one another. They’ve shown up for the work and for their peers, building a culture of generosity that’s been a gift to witness and a privilege to support.

In a time marked by tension, upheaval, and uncertainty, these students have found—and created—a refuge in each other. This program, and this community, has been a place where the imaginative and the humane still matter. They have shown us what the humanities are for: not just for beauty, not just for truth, but for survival.

I also want to recognize the incredible faculty and mentors who have guided them on this journey—Aimee Phan, Joseph Lease, Leslie Carol Roberts, Tom Barbash, Denise Newman, Trisha Low, Faith Adiele, Yalitza Ferreras, Eric Olson, and Zeina Hashem Beck. Thank you for your vision, your care, and your fierce belief in what’s possible.

The thesis readings marked the culmination of the Class of ‘25’s time in the program—but also the continuation of their lives as artists. Congratulations Alex, Armando, Emma, Jeremy, Mady, and MV on completing this remarkable milestone. You are forever part of the CCA MFA family.

Jasmin Darznik



Jeremy Stone

The Missing De Kooning: Growing up in the Art World



Dad is dead. He's been gone almost 19 years. Yet many questions remain unanswered in my mind. Was he the maverick dealer of the postwar art world, as his obituary by Roberta Smith, his least favorite New York Times art critic said? A risk-driven man with all the advantages and privileges of race, class, and an Ivy League education trying to escape a cookie-cutter, predestined life?

"I can tell the CIA has been in here," Dad said, smiling.

"Every paper on my desk has been carefully read and placed back where it was."

He watched my face for my reaction. I kept a poker face and stared right back at him.

Dad called me the CIA. He had many nicknames for me, including Gertrude when I gained weight, and he decided that I was going to be a lesbian. He wasn't right about that or anything. His eyes and his hunches were most successful when they involved art. Just art.

My father was built like a Russian peasant, with broad shoulders, a barrel chest, and arms as long as a gorilla's. Thick-waisted, despite his brutal slice-and-dice tennis game and daily gardening, he had extraordinarily muscular calves, slender legs, and virtually no backside. He had to wear a belt to keep his baggy chinos up. Although he was reportedly only 5'8," Dad loomed large, his gaze clocked you at any speed.

Jeremy Stone is an inhabitant of the art world. She's worked for over 35 years on both coasts as a gallerist, independent curator, writer, expert witness, and accredited senior art appraiser, fine art. She founded Business Matters in the Visual Arts in 1998.



Emma Vetter



The Night Shift

Her pulse ran faster. *Inhale.* . .

The air slipped through her nostrils into her ribcage. Everything was fine.

Exhale. . .

She felt the wheezing of her diaphragm, the constricting in her torso. This was it, wasn't it? She just needed to. . .

. . . *inhale.* . .

. . . taste metal. . .

. . . *let it out.*

And then the air left her lungs. Her skin prickled. Her muscles throbbed. Teeth. Knuckles. Knees. Her body moved violently. Yanking. Twisting. A series of audible *pops* exploding in her ears like gunshots. She bit down and let her own laughter settle in her throat, beneath her tongue. She was changing, but it didn't hurt, did it?

No. Not exactly—it was like stretching your legs before a run, like teething only fiercer. Like a thought more than a feeling. A thought that expanded and took up space and flesh until she had no other thought but that one. And then.

(Continued)

Her own hot breath fell against her teeth. Her spine hunched over. Everything was out of shape and yet perfectly in shape.

Buzzing. Her skin. . .fur? Tingling...moving against the breeze. Taller, but not by much. Wider. Her shirt had torn off. Her pants still. . . partially on her legs, though they were ripped from the knees down and what remained squeezed at her thighs. Her bike was small now. No, the world was the wrong size.

She grinned.

Emma Vetter is a writer and educator from Fresno, California. She writes sweeping adventure fantasy stories inspired by folklore and grounded explorations of gender, mental health, and trauma—often including werewolves.





MV Candelaria

IF NOT THAT, THEN

1.

the

errraowwwwww of an electric guitar

or the

boomboombap of a 808

the dichotomy of

man/woman

boundaries and the in-between

2.

the moon
drinks me up and
i look to her when i need a hug
she says
look there at the image of a man sticking into me and declaring me his
she says
there is a flow of water
it drips, it drowns, it dries, but it does not disappear
for it is the gift of god to receive me
she says receive

this

4.

of whose
of what's
unspoken between a family
beneath the self
toward the outside
in fluent speak
of rosetta stone in a language not your own
close enough save for a p in place of the f
alam mo ba
impulses influence influent impotent illusions
existence
resistance

3.

By kindergarten, Tagalog fell away and nestled into an English hearth where *f*'s placed
as harder *p*'s, the *ah* of an A comforted by the soft palate of my mouth. Because I
retained an accent as I spoke, I sat confused and bound to a desk until the third grade,
matching images to words like tomatoes or strawberries

MV Candelaria immigrated with their family from Manila, Philippines to California at age two. As a child, MV spent nearly every hour of the day and night pouring over fantasy novels and fabricating new tales within their realms. They subsequently grew up to weave the magical and the real in poetry and prose.

Stephanie Peters



Clothed In Strength and Dignity

Amidst the first real crisis of faith of Norah Grier's 18-year-old life, she received a sign from God—an Angel of the Lord, walking toward her down the empty gravel road.

This road, lined by a flimsy barrier of anemic pine trees, marked the edge of the Mount of Olives Bible College campus and the border of Dustburn, Saskatchewan—a village indistinguishable from the college. Norah turned her back to all of that and stared out at the prairie landscape, her arms crossed tight around her torso, her breaths jagged and strained. Wheat fields extended all the way to the horizon, the jaundiced flesh of them pimpled every so often by an angry red silo.

Only moments earlier, Norah had made a last-minute decision to skip out on morning chapel. On her way to her regular pew: stage left, close enough to the rear that were she to throw her head back she would see the overhanging lip of the balcony instead of the high vaulted ceiling; Norah caught sight of her roommate Olivia—the very last person she wanted to deal with—walking toward her own regular spot in the front row.

The possibility that their paths might cross had been enough for Norah to veer off course, pivot toward the back of the sanctuary, out the wooden doors into the lobby. By that point some animalistic instinct had taken over. Instead of making the rational choice to collect herself and return to the sanctuary—Morning Chapel was mandatory, after all, and Caitlin the RA would no doubt be performing her headcount at any minute—Norah bolted. She flung her jacket, dusty green with a fur-lined hood, around her shoulders as she descended the concrete steps two at a time, then cut diagonally across the limp brown grass in the courtyard.

Now, at the edge of town, Norah tried to calm herself. She held her next breath tight in her chest for a second longer than was comfortable, released it gently through pursed lips. But her heart was still racing, hot tears still burning in the corners of her eyes before being wicked away by the arid prairie wind. She clenched her jaw—these petty jealousies and juvenile resentments were pathetic. She had no reason to be so upset. She paused a moment, waited for that logical truth to misplace the wretchedness coursing through her body, but it didn't work.

From the depths of her misery and shame, Norah cried out to God in a different way than she ever had before. She didn't begin by thanking Him for the day, by praising His name, or even by begging Him to answer her prayer. She confronted Him in anger.

Why are you doing this to me? she shouted, in her head. Why did you bring me here? I hate it here. It was her first time admitting this, even to herself. I came here because I love you! I thought this was what you wanted for me. She threw her head back, now and directed her prayers up to the sky. I thought I'd feel your presence here, and we'd grow closer, and... she was at a loss for words, even the inaudible. She waited, then. Shut her eyes, let her mind go blank, and listened for the voice of the God she loved.



Stephanie Peters grew up on a hobby farm just outside of Vancouver, BC, among peacocks and Guinea fowl. Following an adolescence immersed in mid-aughts Evangelical fervour, she spent a year at a conservative bible college in the Canadian prairies, an experience that provides her with writing material to this day. After returning to the secular world, she got a BA in Creative Writing from Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Her writing often explores the evangelical culture of her youth, both satirizing and humanizing its participants, without slipping into either apology or caricature.





Armando Padron-Cruz



I never felt so low as I had in that sea plane when it touched water twenty miles outside of Santiago de Cuba.

As the minutes passed, I grew more stunned over my violent outburst. As a child, Abuelo's and my father's use of corporal punishment evidenced to me that they were small people, unable to communicate without losing their temper. And as horrible a statement as Abuelo's was, I knew my striking him had solved nothing. If anything, the act proved I was no different than him.

Since grade school, when I became aware of machismo's effect on the women in my family, I had consciously sought to eradicate any semblance of my father's influence on me with regards to his objectification of women that I'd completely overlooked my temper, the impulse to exact violence in times of frustration.

(continued)

I was more like my father than I thought.

Whatever behaviors and insecurities Abuelo had inherited from his father had passed down to mine and again down to me. The headstrong pursuit of women, the quick temper, the violence; these were menaces that spread like viruses from one man to the next, specters which persisted over generations, borne from the ghosts of the men we believed our fathers were before they hit us and cheated on our mothers, before they taught us that nothing was sacred save for whatever they wanted.

Armando is a husband, father, writer, and lawyer who lives with his family in Seattle, Washington. His work explores the powerful influence of inherited generational traumas, the convergence of the real and the psycho-spiritual, and the socio-historical implications of modern masculinity.



Alex Fischer



Planet of Teeth

Cold and numb, processing cryogenic dreams in her first hour of consciousness, Raya's mind had offered a sweet-eerie image of Raya and her mother standing on gray sand, ocean waves crashing at their feet. Her mother pointed at an otter adrift on the waves, floating on its back, cradling a pup. The water salty, green, otters auburn and black, lost in a reverie of mother and child. Her mother tousled Raya's hair, mimicking the mother otter on her pup's coat to create buoyancy, making Raya giggle. Her mind jumped to a foggy place where ocean waves planted a dead otter against a rough fiberglass composite seawall covered in barnacles and red algae. She wasn't clear how the otter died.

When Raya turned to look for her mother, she was in a white hospital, her mother asleep on a bed. Thin, pale arms folded on her hollowed stomach, flat line on her heart monitor. Raya's cry reverberated across the hard

(Continued)

Her own hot breath fell against her teeth. Her spine hunched over. Everything was out of shape and yet perfectly in shape.

Buzzing. Her skin. . .fur? Tingling...moving against the breeze. Taller, but not by much. Wider. Her shirt had torn off. Her pants still. . . partially on her legs, though they were ripped from the knees down and what remained squeezed at her thighs. Her bike was small now. No, the world was the wrong size.

She grinned.

A native of the San Fernando Valley, Alex Fischer's writes speculative short stories and novels concerned with themes of climate change, memory, and grief.

Mady Jones



Gumption: A Memoir

When Pop died, my brothers and I, all in our thirties, married, living in California, returned to New York for his funeral. We stayed in our old bedrooms in the house we grew up in. Mummy informed us that her brother, our Uncle Bill, would be spending the night and enlisted my help in making up the bed in what had been Grandma's room when she was alive.

Gone were any traces of Grandma: no more crucifix wrapped Ikebana-style with blessed palm leaves hanging over her bed; no more rosary beads dangling on her mahogany bed post; no more votive candles burning 24/7 on her dresser-top shrine; no more statues of Jesus and His Mother, the Blessed Virgin; no more Extreme Unction kit in her night side table with everything at the ready for the Last Rites.

Mummy carried an armful of all white bedding which she placed on the armchair next to the bed for easy access. We wrestled the snug-fitted bottom sheet over the twin-sized mattress as I managed to avoid breaking a freshly manicured nail as we lifted the mattress to accommodate the sheet.

“I expect you to muzzle yourself for the duration of your visit,” said Mummy as she handed me the ironed flat sheet.

“What?”

“You heard me. You are not to bait my brother.” We evenly draped the top sheet over the bottom sheet and tucked in the bottom edge. “I don’t want to hear a peep out of you about the Equal Rights Amendment or Betty Friedan or Gloria Steinem. Any of that.”

“He has five daughters. He should—”

“We are celebrating your father’s life. Period.” We draped the blanket next, followed by the blanket cover. We lifted the sides of the draped sheet, blanket, and blanket cover and folded them into tight envelope corners. She handed me a pillowcase. “Bill is here overnight. Please, for my sake. With everything I’ve been through with your father—”

“Fine. I’ll ignore him,” I said, stuffing the pillow into the case with more force than was physically necessary.

“I don’t want you to ignore him. I want you to be nice. If it kills you.”

I let out a long breath. “Fine.”

“I don’t know what gets into you,” said Mummy as she shook her head.

“What gets into *me*?”

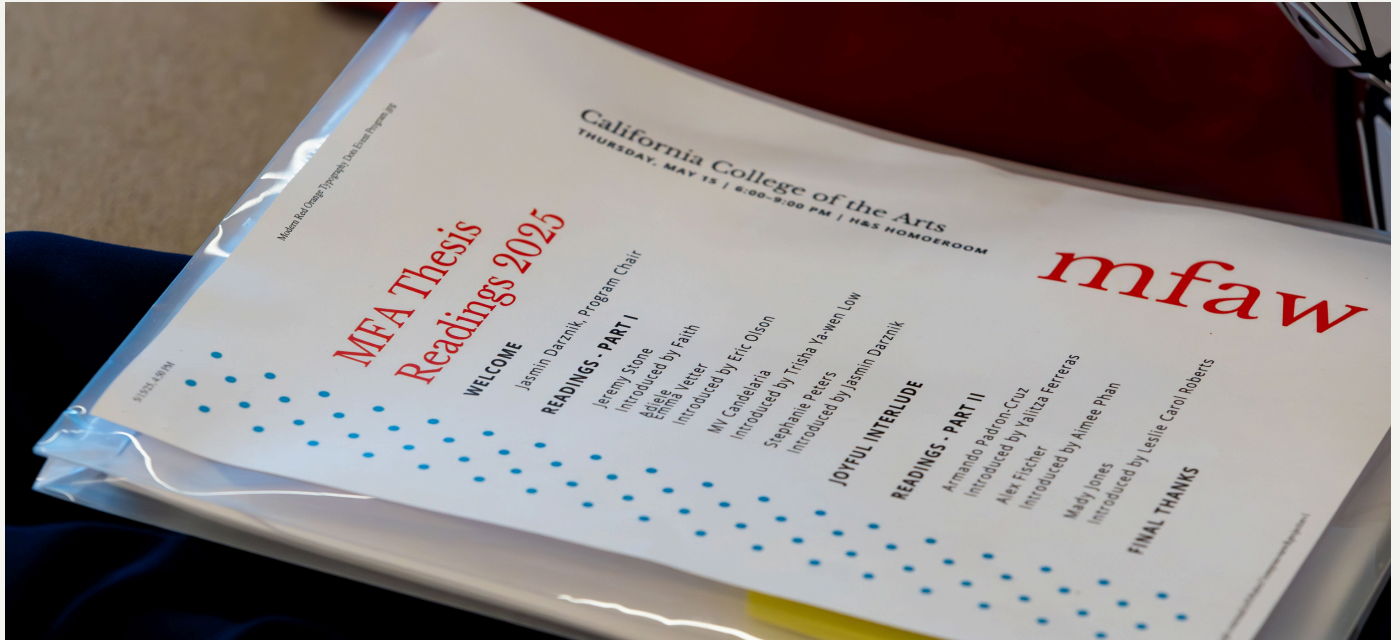
“Muzzle it,” said Mummy.



Mady Jones, born on the East Coast, re-born after she got to California, lays claim to the mastery of self-reinvention. A former fashion and beauty editor, former public relations director, former founder and owner of a retail store, former fundraiser and event producer, former art and lifestyle journalist, former bank vice-president, she has been honing her writing skills for decades.











Congratulations Class of '25

**Thank you,
MFAW Faculty!**

**Faith Adiele
Tom Barbash
Jasmin Darznik
Yalitza Ferreras
Joseph Lease
Trisha Low
Denise Newman
Eric Olson
Leslie Carol Roberts**

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Let's Stay In Touch

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