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Take a friend to an artist’s studio

After reconnecting with a friend from elementary school, artist Lyra Purugganan (they/she) asked her to pose for a portrait with anything she could find in her room, as long as she was really into it. She put two tiny rubber hand puppets on her fingertips, holding them deadpan against her cheeks. The resulting painting, “Michelle in Yellow,” is part of Purugganan’s exploration of friendship and family ties.

Purugganan and her graduate student cohort — Panteha Abareshi, Lucy Bell, Negar Farajiani, Dannah Mari Hidalgo, Austin McCormick, Diego Melgoza Oceguera, Hope Okere, Mariana Rodela, Rose S., Lela Sharzhad and Autumn Smith — invited the public to their art studios in November to learn more about how they create from spending time in their working studios. UC Santa Barbara's MFA students work in a wide range of artistic studio practice from sculpture to performance.

In Purugganan’s studio, she has large pieces and other works in progress and “a lot of cute things,” she said, noting her interest in cuteness as an aesthetic. The studio is full of trinkets she has collected and the color pink, “tapping into the kitschy, cute and girly.”

Influenced by craft and materials, queer culture and the midwest DIY music scene, Purugganan explores selfhood and her intersecting identities, disrupting systems through the misuse and misplacement of materials. Through performance, ceramics, installation, ornament and sculpture, she explores the complexities of girlhood and femininity, celebrating queerness and its intersectionalities.

Originally from Manila, she grew up in a Filipino home in Ohio, where she attended Ohio State University's art program before beginning her graduate studies at UC Santa Barbara. When Purugannan depicts themes of friendship and family in her interdisciplinary work — which includes new media and ceramics — she considers it through the lens of her own biculturality. Her studio is full of reminders of the artist's home and family, including keepsakes that remind her of her "maternal grandparents or my aunts who basically raised me."

As an emerging artist, Purugganan has exhibited in group, solo and duo shows in Columbus, Ohio and Los Angeles and featured in publications like Folklore As Resistance, The Lantern and Cleveland Magazine.

In her thesis, Purugannan looks further into how close relationships unfold in a specific way depending on where they happen. Her research will examine "how the individual and the community come together and what kind of spaces they come together in." She also interweaves elements of programming and other new media. "I like thinking about new media as material," she added. "I'm interested in weird materials like sugar and misusing these materials."

Each quarter, UCSB's Art Department holds Graduate Open Studios, featuring finished and in-process artworks across media (such as painting, sculpture, photography, installation, performance and video) by MFA students, in their own studios located at Harder Stadium. Look for the next open studios on the Department of Art's website.

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About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.