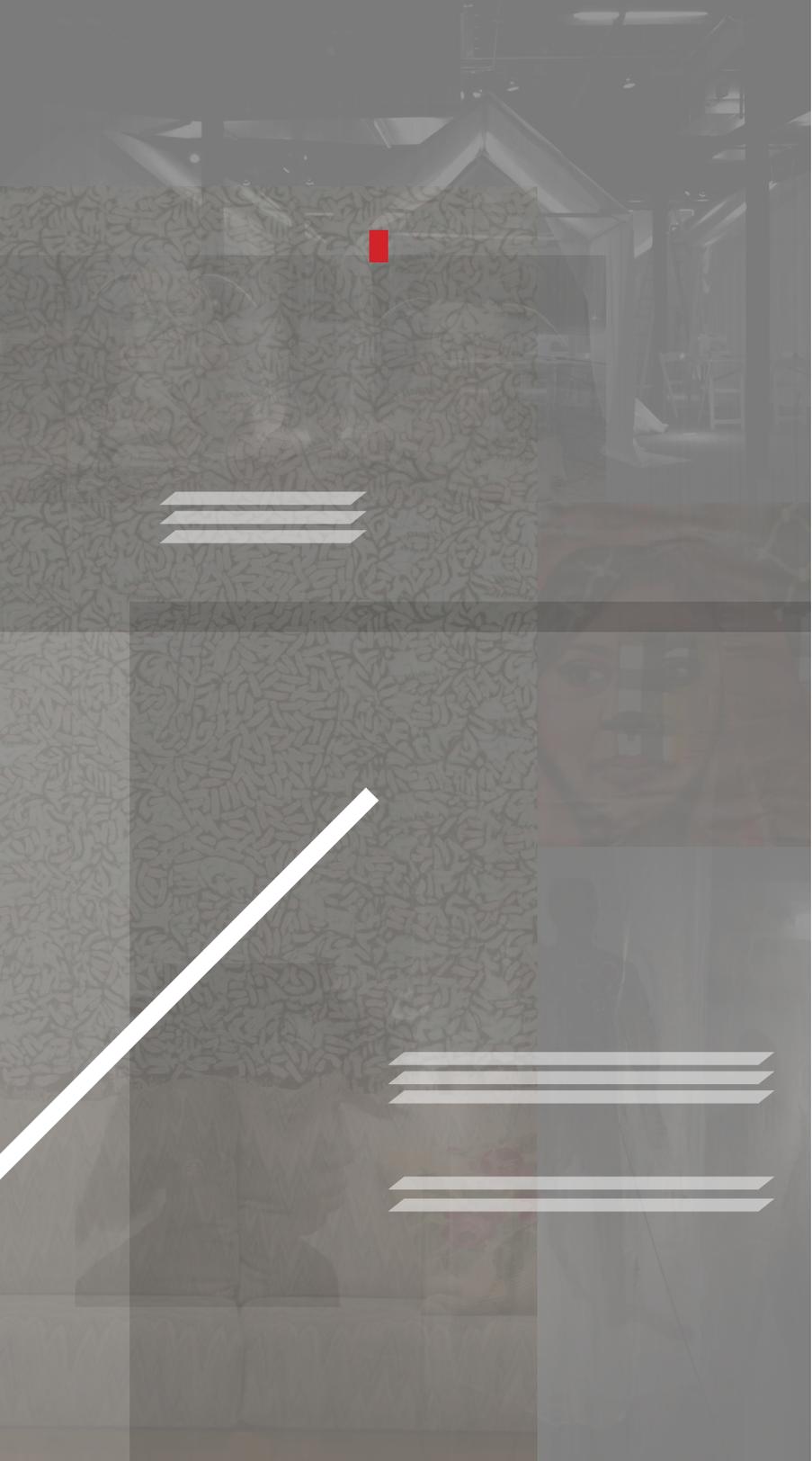


3x5

July



Three by Five is a new opportunity consisting of five one month-long residencies that take place from May until September 2016.

Each month, three different Artist Coordinators, selected from Soap Factory alumni or other highly-regarded artist leads, host one or more emerging artists of their own choosing in one of our first floor galleries. These emerging artists are allowed to make new work directly in the space, responding to the gallery environment and to one another. Towards the end of their residency, artists present their work to the public with an open house event. Showcasing new work by some of the most innovative, up and coming MN artists.

Every residency is followed by a publication, cataloging each gallery along with written responses to the work that occupies them. Each publication is unique, inviting new writers and designers to create the content revolving around the residency. The Three by Five program is completely artist driven; all artists, designers, and performers involved were given the freedom and space to experiment.

Each month, three writers were asked to respond to the new work by our artists-in-residence. One writer per gallery, respectively allowed to respond to all or some of the work, in any form. These are their responses.

Gallery 1

Artist Coordinator: Piotr Szyhalski

Labor Camp

The People's Library

Written by:

Forest Lewis

The immediate association upon viewing the rows of square white tents that made up the Peoples Library's 3x5 Soap Factory exhibit in July was that of the tents of a main-street art fair. You would expect, seeing such "stalls", that one might contain ceramics and in another plein-air watercolors. But such is not the case. What the tents contain, rather, are the attempts at certain varieties of dissent.



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The manifesto included with the show explains a position of "revolutionary solidarity with all people fighting against injustice and discrimination." This is a "radical posture" and one that "until everyone knows what intersectional group freedom is... refuses to be satisfied with narcissistic individual freedom." This is enacted by the traditionally Marxian concept of praxis; the combination of theory and practice. Some of this praxis is what is ostensibly on display at the Soap Factory.

Aside from a flimsy grasp of the history of revolution, as well as a vanilla interpretation of the word "radical," all of this looks pretty good on paper, as manifestos like to do. What is on view at the Soap Factory, however, is a different thing altogether.

Art as political means tends to disfigure both art and politics. The obvious question viewing much art with an overt political message is: why dilute the content with this half-baked form? In other words: why not just write an essay?

Those works in the People's Library that succeed do so formally, before they work politically. One such gloomy installation by Zoja Chmielarczyk is a tent containing a white mattress surrounded by domestic objects painted all white—cups, plates, used toilet paper. The virtue here is the feeling the piece gives off: a true feeling the uncanny. These white objects, white because of no obvious

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cause, manifest multiform associations which project a deeper and weirder idea of whiteness, in which "Whiteness" as in "privilege by default" is made haunted by whiteness. The virtue here is that the piece seems more interested in the uncanny, than in any indictment of "whiteness" while subtly performing said indictment all the while. Tell it slant indeed.



Likewise, Christopher Scholdt's tent, nearly succeeds on the same grounds. With its faucet of running water and its walls wrapped in tar paper, the installation provided a very particular kind of menace, but one that was only stifled by lame print outs of paper money. Here the smell of the petrochemicals off gassing from the tar paper together with the sound of running water is enough for the work to function. Like Richard Wilson's pool of oil in London's Saatchi Gallery, the smell alone says it all: something is rotten in the state of Denmark. But aside from any indictment the menace itself is what comes off: you are literally smelling the world-consuming stink of modernity.

A performance piece that was perhaps the most political worked on account of its boldness. Candice Davis enacted a performance in which she invited members of the audience to straiten her knotted, African American hair with a curling iron. This invitation to straighten what is naturally kinky, is to engage physically with standards of beauty, and received representations of blackness. The physicality here is the thing. For it is not just black hair, but Ms. Davis's hair in which she has invited you to interfere. The implication is that for Ms. Davis the performance does not start and stop at the soap factory. The political content works here because of it's urgency; it works because the politics are real, local and, like that curling iron, hot.

Despite these successes, however, the overall mood of the group show is undercut by the back corner of the grid of tents where a literal People's Library resides. Books along the lines of



Howard Zinn, bell hooks, Noam Chomsky, and Karl Marx. These classic texts that can be found in any activists book shelf quickly dispel any shreds of mystery the tents may have had left and locate the show in the very staid and regular position of fashionable liberal protest. In other words not very radical.

This becomes problematic because the library, sitting in a gallery space, takes on an elevated status. And not of the Duchampian ironic variety but rather one of bathos. The library placed on such a pedestal deflates the "radical posture" of the protest group by indicating not that there is injustice against which we are opposed but rather simply "we are opposed," or "we are protesting." And protesting, mind out of a need to be seen protesting. It reduces a just cause to fashion and gloss.

This seems to be the primary flaw in much of Piotr Szchalski's work. Mr Szchalski is the lead curator for the People's Library show and has his own tent in the back. His is work that is on the whole arresting and has a brilliant cohesion but often times threatens to turn the critique of global Capital into a kind of pastiche, a mere shtick of hip protest. This most often exhibits itself as a packagedness, a neatness of form and content that seems to forget its argument in favor of the more attractive attributes. At its best the content can be so oblique as to not register as political dissent at all, at its worse it reduces all dissent to a surface, a weightless and ghostly Marxism: Marxism as aesthetic surplus: Marxism as sign.

But it is just that packagedness that seems to have inflicted the People's Library show with a malaise. Aside from a few exemplary artists, much of the overtly political didactics here seem too neat and as if they are preaching to the choir. That is, the content is, for the most part obvious and at the worst redundant. This finally makes problematic any of the manifesto's claims of radicalism.

Gallery 2

Artist Coordinator Jehra Patrick
Garrett Perry
Kim Benson
Jonathan DeDecker
Leslie Barlow
Clea Felien David Bartley
Syed Hosain
Elizabeth Dorsey
Oakley Tapola
Jesse Dale Peterson
Bianca Pettis

Written by:
Kelsey King

Jehra Patrick's exhibition for the July edition of the 3x5 series is a room packed with paintings and a few painterly sculptures. As the executive director and curator of The Waiting Room, a gallery located in the Loring Park neighborhood of Minneapolis, Jehra Patrick has a good deal of experience coordinating exhibitions with multiple artists and organizing their work in a shared space. For her group show in gallery two of The Soap Factory, Patrick invited nine individual artists and one collaborative team to exhibit together - Leslie Barlow, Syed Hosain and David Bartley, Jonathan DeDecker, Garrett Perry, Jesse Dale Peterson, Bianca Pettis,

Liza Dorsey, Clea Felien, Kimberly Benson, and Oakley Tapola. The result is an inclusive exhibition that feels cluttered and a bit overwhelming in the amount of work that was stuffed into one gallery.

While overwhelming at first, Patrick's show is packed with fresh new artists exhibiting strong work. One of the standout pieces in the show is the collaborative installation titled *Thin Ice* (2016) by Syed Hosain and David Bartley. Their work is composed in a space surrounded by three walls. The floor is layered in white plaster or ceramic material, which cracks and breaks as viewers walk through the installation. There is a floral couch in the middle of the space, facing a wall of paintings and drawings hung at varying heights and in different groupings, while other works hang on the walls adjacent to the couch. Hosain and Bartley's space is open to the rest of the gallery, and looks like a stage in the way that it's lit so intensely from above. The plaster floor not only delineates itself from the rest of the viewing space, but also adds an auditory aspect to the piece as it cracks beneath the viewer's feet and echoes about the room. I found myself spending most of my time that night

standing in Hosain and Bartley's installation, walking across their crumbling floor. The chance for an interactive piece is especially welcome in this show, which is almost entirely made up of unchanging paintings. As the floor breaks into smaller pieces, it gains a sculptural quality, while the pieces hanging on the wall above the floor act as a two-dimensional breather from the ever-changing nature of the artists' space. It feels in some ways like a studio, with debris and dust littering the floor and an old couch inviting you to sit and look at the works haphazardly hung on the walls. Hosain and Bartley's *Thin Ice* is immersive and inviting, acting as a gathering space for viewers to congregate in as the floor falls apart around them.

Moving counterclockwise through the gallery, Jesse Dale Peterson occupies the back right corner of the room. Peterson goes an informal route with his display, laying out his paintings on a long card table. His setup feels similar to the way an artist would display their work for sale at a market, or how one might lay out items at a garage sale - carefully arranged but, at any time, open to reorganization. Peterson's paintings are mostly cheeky portraits, often of men with mullets. Their faces and lush heads of hair are rendered with detail, but oftentimes the subject's proportions seem to be a bit off. Is his face too scrunched? His neck too thick? Where is his chin? Needless to say, the subjects of Peterson's portraits operate well with his casual display method. I found myself lingering over the card table and examining each painting much longer than I would have if they were hanging traditionally on the wall, because of their unimposing, unassuming nature. The paintings were there for the taking, and this made Peterson's arrangement offbeat and memorable.

Oakley Tapola is absolutely the strongest artist that Jehra Patrick chose to exhibit in gallery two. Similar to Hosain and Bartley's collaborative installation, Tapola's work creates its own environment for the viewer to enter. Tucked away to the left when facing the door to gallery three, Tapola's setup consists of a grouping of sculptures that all seem to face each other in their placement. The sculptures have a linear structure that is built up with red clay or putty, which looks malleable to the touch and contains traces and indents that indicate the way the artist's hands shaped it. Red clay



chains hang from the brick walls, which, at first, make the installation feel intimidating and dark. But there's a whisper of lightheartedness as the chains are made of a soft and breakable material. The two sculptures in the middle of Tapola's setup function like three-legged end tables with collages as their tabletops. A martini glass and a lumpy figurine sit atop each table, both made of the same red clay. The tables are positioned over two works on paper that lay on the ground like small rugs. These works on paper feature silhouettes of a curvy female figure and a bust of a man. Instead of representing actual human forms, it seems as if these silhouettes are referencing historical methods of representing human forms (i.e. busts, figurative sculptures). Tapola's works feel like artifacts in the materials she uses and the way that she loosely emulates figures and patterns that may be found on ancient pottery or other historical objects hiding in storage rooms of old museums. They read as art historical in a playful sense, instead using contemporary methods of making which could be read as unmonumental, casual or erratic. It's as if Tapola is nodding to a world of old high culture consisting of martinis and priceless, timeless art objects, while simultaneously laughing

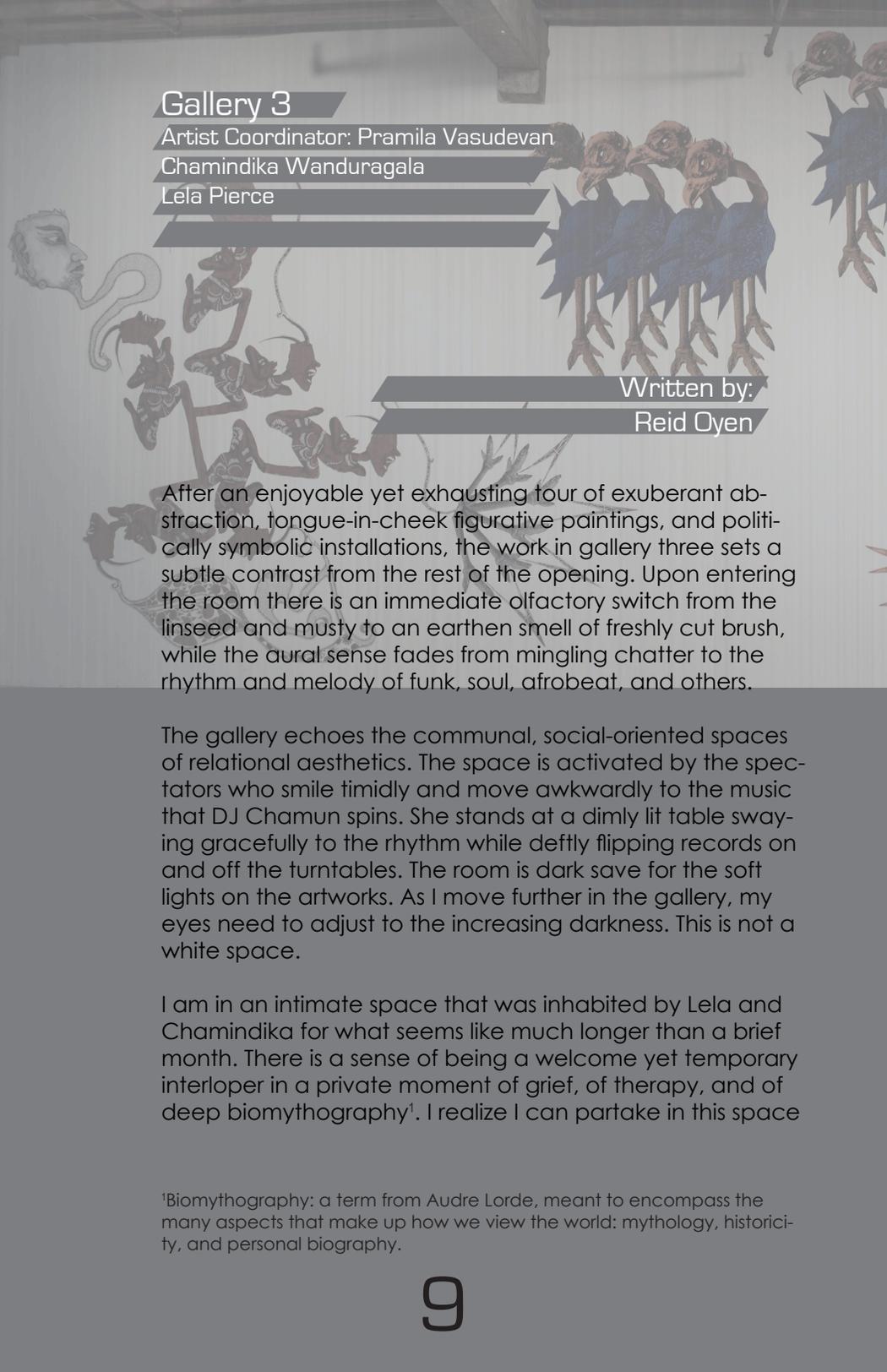
with us at the cliché garishness of the setup. The materials partly clue us in on the joke - rugs made of paper, and tables and chains made of clay. Tapola's work is clever and self-aware, playing with many themes throughout her installation while still remaining cohesive and her own.

Jehra Patrick's lineup of artists is an impressive survey of emerging painters and sculptors working in the Twin Cities community. And for being a show that is exactly about exhibiting emerging artists, Patrick did a great job with giving a handful of people the chance to show their work in a large, well-known space. However, Patrick's exhibition for the 3x5 series is too full. And with a majority of the artists working in the medium of painting, every so often there is a bleed over of imagery from one artist to the next. Most of the work feels as if it doesn't have room to exist on its own. Subsequently, some of the most standout artists were those who chose to create their own space within the gallery - an environment that the viewer could escape into apart from the jumble of the rest of the exhibition. The best work in Jehra Patrick's show was on the periphery, hiding in the corners.

Gallery 3

Artist Coordinator: Pramila Vasudevan
Chamindika Wanduragala
Lela Pierce

Written by:
Reid Oyen



After an enjoyable yet exhausting tour of exuberant abstraction, tongue-in-cheek figurative paintings, and politically symbolic installations, the work in gallery three sets a subtle contrast from the rest of the opening. Upon entering the room there is an immediate olfactory switch from the linseed and musty to an earthen smell of freshly cut brush, while the aural sense fades from mingling chatter to the rhythm and melody of funk, soul, afrobeat, and others.

The gallery echoes the communal, social-oriented spaces of relational aesthetics. The space is activated by the spectators who smile timidly and move awkwardly to the music that DJ Chamun spins. She stands at a dimly lit table swaying gracefully to the rhythm while deftly flipping records on and off the turntables. The room is dark save for the soft lights on the artworks. As I move further in the gallery, my eyes need to adjust to the increasing darkness. This is not a white space.

I am in an intimate space that was inhabited by Lela and Chamindika for what seems like much longer than a brief month. There is a sense of being a welcome yet temporary interloper in a private moment of grief, of therapy, and of deep biomythography¹. I realize I can partake in this space

¹Biomythography: a term from Audre Lorde, meant to encompass the many aspects that make up how we view the world: mythology, historicity, and personal biography.

in the same way as they are able to. This space feels somewhat like a home, not mine or any visitor's, in the sense of its intimacy and comfort—a lively, comfortable party in a welcoming stranger's space.

Chamindika's drawings span the wall across the room from the table where she spins her records. Brightly colored and patterned, there are multiple characters engaged across the wall alternately dancing, writhing, screaming or simply sitting and watching. The characters, however, appear not as single elements in one composition, but are seen in multiples like copy-and-paste yet often subtly changing. The effect is like that of animation, except for the staccato repeated vulture figure that looks down with the same expression in each repetition. Squat sculptures stand aside the drawings swaddled in burlap with curling horns made of corrugated metal. There is a sense of story, mythic figures, and of symbolism—perhaps personal, perhaps cultural.

Movement is the underpinning of much work in the space, not limited to that of the live DJ. The work of Lela Pierce at first appears

as static installation, yet she possesses an awareness of the body that lifts the work into a vibrating, felt experience. Transparent, natural fabrics hang from the ceilings depicting life-size silhouettes, and I have difficulty making out how many there actually are. As I move in between them they seem to flow in and out of my field of vision, startling me as I nearly run into ones I did not see. These pieces feel holographic and ghostly at the same time, and seem to exist as an infinite record system of the moments of death they are seemingly meant to indicate. Red twine spreads from a single point across the room, connecting with each figure on a presumed wound. Not even a month after Philando Castile was killed only a few miles from the Soap Factory, the weight and urgency of the figures is unmistakable.

Lela's work materially and conceptually brings to mind the natural, figurative, and grief-laden protest work of artist such as Ana Mendieta. In her *Siluetas* series, Mendieta worked directly with materials from nature to create silhouettes of her body on, in, and of the earth, tying both the human body generally and her female body specifically

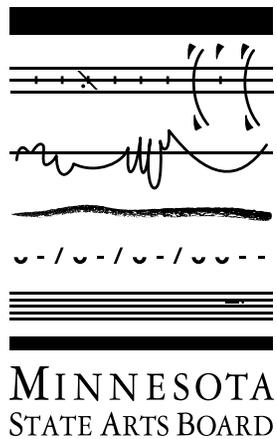
with the earth. Here, however, Lela's use of natural elements point to the separation between human and nature, and to human imbalances within nature being brought violently back into perceived balance. A cave of buckthorn sits across from the figures and an opening reveals the dyed red fabrics of its interior. Her use of buckthorn, an invasive species, points to this human created and named imbalance, and the subsequent violent attempts to rectify this imbalance. The cave fashioned of this violently storied plant is at once indicative of violence and restoration. She invites the viewer into the cave, to sit across from the room of figures and find some kind of transformation. In using elements like the buckthorn, Lela brings identity and direct experience of violence together with an exploration of human as both part of and separate from nature. Her work indicates a grappling to understand and cope with instantaneous and violent loss, though not without the therapeutic and transformative.

In combination with the movement and mythos in Chamindika's work, there is a sense of comfort and the therapeutic nature of identity in tandem with something beyond purely personal identity. For Chamindika, this seems to take effect within a mythos born from identity, while also engaging the viewer as part of a community through music. For Lela, personal identity and its relation to tragedy is explored in tandem with the idea of human as both for and against nature. I feel shy and awkward in my investigations into these partly private, partly public spaces, yet I am thankful of that fact. These works challenge my experience and perception, while still leaving me with further questions about the nature of human myth, identity, and place within/without nature.

Thank you,

The Soap Factory would like to thank all of the Artists, Coordinators, Interns, and Volunteers who participated in the Three by Five residency. This project was a success only because of your hard work and talent. And of course, thank you to the Twin Cities arts community, audiences, funders and individual donors!

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Szyhalski

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Oakley Tapola

Jesse Dale Peterson

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Gallery 3:

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