

Angela Dufresne + Mala Iqbal  
***Where I End, We Begin***  
Curated by Wells Chandler  
Opening Reception 4-7pm Thursday Oct 21

Oct 19 - Nov 17, 2021

Richard and Dolly Maas Gallery  
SUNY Purchase

### **Catalogue Essay by Gaby Collins-Fernandez**

One of the deep satisfactions of collaborations is relinquishing authorship, losing track of what and who is what, in favor of the collective, the moment of visual connection. Sometimes, as in the collaborative drawings included in this exhibition, the rectangle is enough to contain cacophony and curiosity, to encourage tangents and weird asides; a unity forged by formal accommodation and the attitude of “let’s see what happens”; collaboration as groupthink as community.

Iqbal and Dufresne’s paintings, while perhaps borrowing the permissiveness of this space, have a different affect. They build to a common pictorial end of seeing and being seen. While a viewer can identify differences between each artist’s work in general, these paintings leave the distinct impression of a joint effort toward a goal, two artists making one painting.

On the one hand, the play of likeness and the representation of subjectivity, is *the* drama of portraiture (which Dufresne and Iqbal both, independently, engage), and arguably, of figurative painting at large. But by literally including the other hand, the two painters change the terms of the game. Most paintings pictorially represent a tight loop between artist, surface, and viewer where the art constitutes an artist’s perspective. As radical as any perspective might be, it is still a singular view, contained within and executed by one body. In the simple shift of including another body to construct this view, Dufresne and Iqbal expand this loop, and allow us to see the image as serious mutual play.

These tender paintings often include one of the artists, or both. The touch does not hide its gestures, brush marks become tactile little stares. Figures show up, sit down, lounge, comfortable in dress and undress. At a certain point, you realize that the figures are comfortable with our looking at them because they are comfortable with each other and themselves; that they saw first and consented, and participated. The gaze is liberated from having an object, because two people are working on these surfaces. These two people are also the subject of the paintings, working on each other, working on themselves. The generosity of looking is matched by the generosity of allowing oneself to be seen, and participating in the view. You get the sense that the mutuality is, itself, the pleasure.

In painting, the idea that where I end, we begin is a gesture of faith in a community around art: the we is implied in the desirous sociality of making imagery and showing it to others.

Many artists hope to change or affect something: a circumstance, an opinion, a person's heart or mind. We release our work out into the world without knowing whether this is possible. Dufresne and Iqbal show us another way: sometimes art changes its makers; sometimes the love we give and receive is traceable to how we smile naked beside a tree and let it be known; sometimes intimacy happens before the art and infuses it; we change each other, and art is the witness to this change, and that is enough. We keep each other afloat, and art lets us know that this is what is happening.

**Gaby Collins-Fernandez** is an artist living and working in New York City. She holds degrees from Dartmouth College (B.A.) and the Yale School of Art (M.F.A., Painting/Printmaking). Her work has been shown in the US and internationally, including institutionally at the Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama and el Museo del Barrio, NY. Her work has been discussed in publications such as The Brooklyn Rail and arcritical, and on the video interview series, Gorky's Granddaughter. She is a recipient of residencies at Yaddo (Saratoga Springs, NY), The Marble House Project (Dorset, VT), and a 2013 Rema Hort Mann Foundation Emerging Art Award. Collins-Fernandez is also a writer whose texts have appeared in Cultured Magazine, The Miami Rail, and The Brooklyn Rail. She is a founder and publisher of the annual magazine Precog, and a co-director of the artist-run art and music initiative BombPop!Up.