

For Immediate Release
October 10, 2025



orion, *ahhhhhh*, 2024, Dimensions variable.
Courtesy of the artist.

**South-West Brooklyn Exhibition
*Beauty & Splendor***

October 10 – November 5, 2025

Curated by Joyous R. Pierce

With works by Aheneah, orion, Elodie Blanchard, Hammad Abid, Jessica Elena Aquino, Melika Abikenari, Nature Shankar, Rigo Flores, Sally Kong, Vanessa Nieto Romero, Wendy Cohen

Opening Reception: Friday, Oct 17, 6–9 pm

NARS Main Gallery

The New York Art Residency & Studios (NARS) Foundation is pleased to present ***Beauty & Splendor***, a group exhibition featuring textile work from artists based in Southwest Brooklyn, curated by Joyous R. Pierce.

There are some songs you only understand by living. A note tugs a heartstring tied to memory; a lyric drifts in, a phantom of the past taking its place beside you. The air fills.. slowly...with a lingering beauty and splendor, the kind that can only be conjured when many strings play in accord.

Textiles are symphonies of the greatest detail. Singular threads, fibers, panels, and pulp are drawn together by patient hands, becoming a multitude, adorning the gravity of meaning in our lives. They feel universally resonant in their embodiment of: utility and adornment, record and message, pleasure and ceremony.

Loops, buttons, sequins, and knots slip on and off and their intimacy lingers. Mastery is skill, yes—but also the courage to turn matter into narrative.

South Brooklyn has long spoken in this language of making. The harbor breathes through economy; from the 1880s through the late 20th century, South Brooklyn warehouses have cleared their throats with labor; with stoops keeping time. Here, labor and creation are braided together, a place where the hand's memory becomes the city's memory.

Beauty & Splendor gathers South Brooklyn virtuosos of this moment—each raising harmonies of their own through fiber and firmament. Across the exhibition, fiber is less a category than a method for thinking: a way to translate feeling into form and to bind dispersed histories, ruminations, and memories into present touch. For many artists here, textile is lineage, sensation, and a vessel of memory. These works connect the weight of a message with the matter that carries it.

Across these practices run shared urgencies—the afterlives of state violence and migration; the pressures of gentrification and displacement; the colonial cut answered by the work of mending. We encounter queer and feminist lineages, Indigenous and diasporic knowledge, bio-based experiment, and code-as-loom: labor as witness, repair as form.

These artists embody the artistic excellence of South Brooklyn, a nexus for creatives who have boldly sat in the discomfort of gentrification, displacement, and the layers of complex history that animate a changing community within a restless international landscape.

“You think you just fell out of a coconut tree?”

— A reminder, in the age of the chronically online, that none of us arrive without history, kin, or context.

In truth, ***“We are all tied together in a garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality”***

As part of the invitation to exhibit, artists were asked to reflect on two curatorial framings:

- 1) how textile might disrupt inherited (gendered, colonial, institutional, industrial) structures; and
- 2) how textiles can open new modes of making and meaning.

Excerpts from their reflections are interwoven with the works below.

Gathered together, these works conjure the beauty and splendor of an existence where materials remember, where materials are the messenger, where communities persist, and where new harmonies are composed from what we carry and what we repair.

We begin with **Rigo Flores**. His work *anonymous* (2024) offers a portrait of an elder whose visage floats nearly off the hoop. Emerging from dense embroidery, sequins catch light; demarcations of time gathered on her skin glint like small constellations. In *Soñando* (2025), Flores traces a different line of demarcation—an in-between, a dream that drifts across postcolonial spaces and timelines.

For **Sally Kong**, in her work *Mitos*, the loom is a proto-computer; code and craft share a matrix. Her woven systems translate astronomical and biological logics into patterns you can touch. **orion**'s installation *ahhhhhhhh* (2024)—plaster casts of teeth; rice straw and handmade rice-straw paper; eggshells; lace; fabric curtains; thread, wire, wood, and hardware—queers desire and power, mourning lost intimacies and balancing tensions like humors, treating material as both precious and imperfect, splitting hairs between meaning and the precarity of weight.

Nature Shankar's touch-heavy abstractions in *It's Just Us Now* (2025)—pulped, ripped, embroidered—treat the body as an instrument for remembering, where stains and seams become sites of mending. **Elodie Blanchard**, in *Urn I Love You* (2025), & *Ninja Turtles Bouquet* reclaims worn clothing and packaging waste, letting repetition, repair, and play turn the discarded into tender architectures and fantastical layerings of florals & mixed pattern.

In their own words:

“Textile is the first thing to envelop our form when the walls of the womb stop swaddling us. It is inherently bodily... Textile and craft were only ever ‘lowly’ in the eyes of the West—textile practices being uplifted today in a Western art world is a form of resilience, as we reacquaint ourselves intimately with our embodied existence and decenter the Western view of moving through the world.” — **Nature Shankar**

In *Cactus of Jessie: la invisible, la bruja, la mártir* (2025), **Jessica Elena Aquino** assembles indigo- and cochineal-dyed yarn, synthetic yarn, clothespins, beads, screenprint on silk habotai and silk organza, sewing thread, and embroidery on letterpress satin ribbon to bridge Indigenous knowledge and diasporic life. From a multigenerational weaving lineage, **Hammad Abid**, in *Tracing Lineage* reimagines landscape as a textile meditation on home, displacement, and how fragile the ember of security really is. “Made on a jacquard loom, this piece embodies how landscape becomes an archive and a testament to countless pilgrimages of displaced communities over the ages. Migration stays with the immigrant—it influences each new generation, and is captured within the landscape's memory, transforming over the passage of time.”

In their own words:

“As a person of color who comes from a family of basket weavers, working with fibers and textiles is a way to preserve ancestral knowledge that has survived despite colonial erasure. It’s a practice rooted in resilience, care, and community. Textile practices invite a slow, tactile, and embodied way of working—qualities often dismissed in our fast-paced Western capitalist culture that celebrates efficiency, productivity, and burnout. By centering slowness and repetition, textiles disrupt this burnout culture and open space for reflection, healing, and connection.” — **Jessica Elena Aquino**

“As an Indian and a fifth-generation weaver, textile practices hold deep ancestral significance for me—but they also carry the scars of colonial disruption. Under British rule, India’s rich textile heritage was looted and industrially undercut, then appropriated and commodified. Entire communities whose lives were interwoven with the act of making were displaced, de-skilled, or reduced to labor within extractive systems. To me, reclaiming textile practices today is inherently political. It offers a way to dismantle colonial legacies by honoring the collective, place-based knowledge systems from which these practices emerged. By foregrounding the communal nature of weaving, dyeing, and stitching—often led by women, families, and

caste-based artisans—we shift the narrative away from the institution and toward lived experience and generational wisdom.” — **Hammad Abid**

Vanessa Nieto Romero's process in *Murmuro y lío* foregrounds the body's sustained labor. Soap, fiber, and print are translated into forms that oscillate between strength and delicacy, tension and release. Garments, transformed by the alchemy of the pressure of her palms become “*lios*”, totems of the journey. “A “*lío*” in Spanish can refer both to a troublesome situation and to a bundle of clothes tied together for washing and transport. Vanessa creates “*lío's*” “that are anointed with laundry soap, tied, rubbed, and imprinted with the vital testimonies of washerwomen from Colombia.”

Ana Luisa “Aheneah” Martins, with *Muga*—knotting each strand by hand—stretches textile tradition toward bio-based materials, where soft/hard and fragile/robust co-exist forming a gentle curve of a prickly fluidity. The work whispers of fields, and rustling wind transported for this moment, to breathe life and vibrance into a concrete jungle.

In their own words:

“We might stitch together kinship across communities, lineages, and imagined futures by collectively acknowledging—through conversation and material memory—what has been silenced and unwoven from sources of power. This involves acts of mending, patching, pressing, healing, washing, releasing, and allowing ourselves to be permeated—to move beneath and beyond inherited ruptures.” — **Vanessa Nieto Romero**

Wendy Cohen's *Gram's Door* (2024) holds memory and loss at once—linked together by precariously balanced crocheted and arm-knit structures that weave together the story of a life lived & loved, while offering us a passageway to a dimension of nostalgia, warmth and the safety of a Grandmother's embrace.

In her own words:

“This crocheted recreation of my grandmother's front door weaves in the original doorknobs, locks, and other mechanical parts. Gram walked through this door – her hands held these doorknobs and turned these locks – every day for 30 years. These objects become vessels of her time and touch, much like crochet transforms yarn into collections of my own time and touch. [...] The work also incorporates four pieces contributed by my sister, mom, aunt, and girlfriend. My sister's contribution: a scarf she knit when we were kids. Together we honor Gram, who passed away six years ago. Love, grief, and memory tuck themselves into each thread.” — **Wendy Cohen**

Melika Abikenari with “Remembering Remembering: series” (2021) turns felt and clay—materials rooted in Iranian craft—into vessels for intergenerational memory and healing, asking how bodies seek safety under and after violence. Supported delicately by the joint of the corner walls, Malika's work invites us to consider our own pillars of support & safety that surround us in the process of healing and repair.

In her own words:

“Textiles have long held space for queer identity and history, embodying resilience and offering alternative ways of making and belonging. The growing recognition of Indigenous, non-Western, feminist, and queer textile traditions continues to challenge not only gendered divisions of labor, but also the colonial legacies that sought to devalue communal, embodied knowledge.” — **Melika Abikenari**

Listening in Tandem:

You are invited to listen to the following song selections in tandem with the works:

[Link to Playlist](#)

<https://music.apple.com/us/playlist/beauty-splendor/pl.u-KVXBq5Wu1Al4A1>

Track Flow

Hammad Abid — “Tracing Lineage” × “Made It” — Gayathri Krishnan

Nature Shankar — “It’s Just Us Now” × “In a Sentimental Mood” — Duke Ellington & John Coltrane

Vanessa Nieto Romero — “Murmuro y lío” × “Deus Deus” — anaiis

Sally Kong — “Mitos” × “Mood Indigo” — Duke Ellington

Melika Abikenari — “Remembering Remembering: series” × “Completeness” — Minnie Riperton

Jessica Elena Aquino — “Cactus of Jessie: la invisible, la bruja, la mártir” × “Meters” — Braxton Cook

orion — “ahhhhhhhh” × “Levels (Live at Capitol Studios)” — Robert Glasper

Rigoberto Flores — “anonymous” x Les Fleurs — Minnie Riperton

Elodie Blanchard — ‘Ninja Turtles” x Back Together — Hardsoul

About the Curator:

Joyous R. Pierce (she/her) is a multi-disciplinary curator/space shaper, artist, and researcher whose practice re-envisioning ceremonies of creation and collaboration through intrinsic relationality and care. Her work as an arts and cultural producer engages creative and cultural spaces as liberatory sites for transformation, reflection, connection, expansion, and joy.

She has collaborated with artists internationally and with institutions such as the Sugar Hill Children’s Museum, the Guggenheim, the African Artists Foundation, the Apollo, Christie’s, Sotheby’s, Barnard, Burning Man, and Google. She was a fellow in Cycle IV of the Innovative Cultural Advocacy Fellowship with the Caribbean Cultural African Diaspora Institute (Harlem) and Nafasi ArtSpace (Dar es Salaam).

Joyous holds a Bachelor’s degree from Muhlenberg College in International Relations with a concentration in Peace and Conflict Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa, and a Master of Science in International Relations and the Politics of Africa from SOAS, University of London. Some areas of interest include contemporary afro-indigenous migration, seabed mapping & ecosystems in the marine water column, immersive technology, and having way too many tabs open at any given moment.

About the artists:

Aheneah is Ana Martins, a Portuguese textile artist, researcher, and material maker who is currently based in New York. Her work explores the intersection of traditional textile and contemporary art, innovating with fiber, bioplastics and creating new textile structures. Fascinated with dualities, soft versus hard, structured versus fluid, delicate versus robust, Aheneah explores materials, scale, and movement, seeking the perfect balance between opposing forces. Her journey has led her to create public art installations across Europe, exhibit at the United Nations in New York, collaborate with brands such as Tous and Taguspark, and participate in collective exhibitions. Her work has been featured in publications like *Unravelling Women's Art book*, *Designboom*, and *This is Colossal*. Currently, Aheneah is pursuing a MFA in Textiles at Parsons School of Design, with the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. She is committed to challenging the boundaries of textile art by creating a dialogue between craft and innovation.

orion is an artist whose work queers space by blurring boundaries and disrupting power structures. their work interrogates how systems such as racism, imperialism, and the patriarchy converge to impede and complicate what could be beautiful intimate connections. drawn to highly tactile materials and playful processes, Ariana often works experimentally with fabric, food scraps, found objects, and handmade paper. Ariana's practice is motivated by their grief and rage for lost connections, as well as their desire for a softer, more interconnected world. In addition to their visual arts practice, Ariana is an educator, production worker for live performance, and organizer based in New York.

Elodie Blanchard is a French-American artist and designer based in Brooklyn, whose textile-based practice transforms discarded materials into sculptures, wall hangings, vessels, and immersive installations. Working primarily with used clothing and textile remnants, she reclaims these forgotten or overlooked materials through layering, stitching, and embroidery. Blanchard's work is both intuitive and intentional, balancing technical experimentation with emotional resonance. Her process often begins with accumulation and sorting—collecting fabric like a painter builds a palette—before deconstructing and reassembling it in unexpected ways. Through repetition, fabric manipulation, and exploration, she constructs new forms that embody resilience, imperfection, and playful reinvention. While vibrant and whimsical on the surface, her work also explores themes of time, and personal and collective memory. Blanchard describes her aesthetic as “joyful, with a tint of gloom, melancholy, and weirdness”—stitching remnants into a new narrative.

From a lineage of Indian weavers steeped in textile traditions, **Hammad Abid** is a fifth generational weaver descended from Ansaris, a weaving community in India. He is an award-winning textile designer with extensive experience working and designing in the textile industry. Graduated with MFA in Textiles at RISD in 2021, Hammad specializes in weaving. His Textiles degree is augmented by a Bachelor's degree in Commerce and Finance, which has informed his perspective on sustainable design and approach to independent craft economies. He is motivated to translate the philosophies learned in his fine arts education at RISD into a holistic economic model that supports and centers textile artists, artisans, and other creators in the textile industry.

Jessica Elena Aquino is a multidisciplinary artist, educator, and horticulturist from Santa Ana, California, currently based in Brooklyn, NY. She holds a B.A. from Colgate University and an MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Her work has been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Arlington (VA), Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts (MI), Creative Alliance (MD), and Anna Zorina Gallery (NYC), among others. Aquino was recently an Artist-in-Residence and Windgate Fellow at the University of Arkansas–Fort Smith, and she is currently a Printmaking Fellow at Manhattan Graphics Center (Summer 2025). Her past residencies include the Oak Spring Garden Foundation, Santa Fe Art Institute, Chautauqua School of Art, Textile Arts Center, and the Chrysalis Institute. She is a recipient of the Murray Dessner Travel Grant, which supported her research in natural dyeing and tapestry weaving in Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca, Mexico.

Melika Abikenari is a Brooklyn-based artist, educator, and community organizer. She holds a BA from UCLA's School of the Arts and Architecture (2017) and an MFA in Sculpture from Cranbrook Academy of Art (2021). She has participated in the New York Foundation for the Arts Immigrant Artist Program and completed residencies at Cerámica Suro, Art Cake, and Textile Arts Center. Abikenari is a recipient of the Creatives Rebuild New York grant, the Anderson Ranch Arts Center 2020 Scholarship Partnership Program, and the Meredith Beau CAA '97 and Scott Beau Materials Fund. Her work has been exhibited at Riverfront Art Gallery (Yonkers, NY), Bronx Council on the Arts (Bronx, NY), New York Live Arts (New York, NY), M. David & Co (Brooklyn, NY), Art Cake (Brooklyn, NY), Cranbrook Art Museum (Bloomfield Hills, MI), The Sculpture Center (Cleveland, OH), and The Main Museum (Los Angeles, CA), among others. She is a teaching artist at LEAP NYC and has taught at Pratt's Center for Art, Design, and Community Engagement K-12, Creative Arts Work, and NY Enrichment Group.

Nature Shankar is a mixed-media artist informed by craft sensibilities. Her practice explores the body as a site of emotional memory (personal, generational, communal, and political), and the act of making as a means of reclaiming embodied knowledge. Shaped by a bi-cultural upbringing, and an adult life lived between Southeast Asia and the West, her work engages questions of belonging, womanhood and its daily resistance, and the multiplicity of the felt self in relation to those who came before. She has exhibited internationally such as at Gajah Gallery (Yogyakarta, Indonesia), The Esplanade (Singapore), Art Fair Philippines and Singapore Art Week. She has participated in residencies internationally such as: ChaNorth (NY), OH!Open House (Singapore), Studio Batur (Indonesia) and The LMCC Arts Center Residency (NYC). Shankar holds a Diploma in Fine Art from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Singapore), a BFA from Loughborough University (UK), and an MFA in Painting and Drawing from Pratt Institute (Brooklyn, NY). Based in Brooklyn, Shankar is currently preparing for her first solo show in New Delhi, India.

Rigo Flores was born in Guerrero, Mexico. Flores received a BFA from Arizona State University and a MFA from Rhode Island School of Design in 2023. Flores has exhibited nationally and internationally.

Sally Kong is a textile artist and software engineer based in Brooklyn, NY. After studying computer graphics and robotics, she has built software for artists at Blue Sky Studios, Netflix and Rockstar Games. Inspired by the shared mathematical foundation of linear algebra in computer graphics, robotics, and weaving, her practice focuses on computation, craft, and non-human scale systems.

Vanessa Nieto Romero is an interdisciplinary artist working primarily in print, sculpture and installation. She has exhibited widely since 2012 in a number of group exhibitions in Bogotá, New York, Rhode Island, France, Japan and Spain. Vanessa holds an MFA in Printmaking from the Rhode Island School of Design (2017), and a BFA in Visual Arts from the National University of Colombia (2012). She has been the recipient of awards including the Fulbright Fellowship (2015), the 98th ANNUAL International Competition of The Print Center, Philadelphia (2023-2024), the first prize at the VII Visual Arts Biennial, Fundación Gilberto Alzate in Bogotá (2024), ArteCámara Award in Bogotá (2024). She has taught at National University of Colombia, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design.

Wendy Cohen is a sculptural textile artist, educator, and exhibitions manager based in Brooklyn, NY. Their work is currently on view in *Sacred Threads*, curated by Haifa Bint-Kadi, at the Riverfront Art Gallery (Yonkers Public Library, August-October 2025). Her piece Gram's Door was recently on view at the Brooklyn Museum as part of the Brooklyn Artists Exhibition (October 2024 - January 2025). She was featured in *Fiber in 3D* in *Fiber Art Now* magazine (Spring 2024), and was awarded a residency in sculpture at the Vermont Studio Center (January 2020). They earned a B.A. in Visual Art from Brown University in 2019. Wendy's work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions at spaces including: Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition (NY), Chashama Matawan Gallery (NJ), List Art Center (RI), Sarah

Doyle Gallery (RI), Temple Rome Gallery (Italy), Riverfront Art Gallery (Yonkers), Granoff Center (RI), Kimmel Galleries (NY), and Greenpoint Gallery (NY).

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The New York Art Residency and Studios (NARS) Foundation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit arts organization committed to supporting artists and curators on an international level as well as engaging the local community in Brooklyn and the Greater New York area. Our mission is to present diverse platforms on which to nurture creative inspiration and innovative cross-pollination of ideas.

The NARS Galleries are open Monday - Friday from 12 to 5 pm. For further information, please contact us at www.narsfoundation.org / info@narsfoundation.org / 718-768-2765.



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