

**For Immediate Release**  
May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2026



Erika Choe, *I spit myself out*, 2026, 52 x 28 x 52 inches, Forged steel, string, merino wool.

**Season II, 2026 International Residency Exhibition**

## ***Toward a Sentence***

**June 5–June 16, 2026**

Curated by NARS Curatorial Fellow **Vu Thien An (Thea) Nguyen**

**Opening Reception: Friday, June 5, 6–9 pm**  
**NARS Main Gallery**

**The New York Art Residency & Studios (NARS) Foundation** is pleased to present ***Toward a Sentence***, a group exhibition featuring works from the **Season II, 2026 International Residency Artists**: Ailyn Lee, Arom Ju, Aviv Grinberg, Chanya Vitayakul, Colby Lamson-Gordon, Erika Choe, Jill Smith, Jisoo Chung, Nicole Economides, Noa Klagsbald, Obadah Aljefri, Priyanka Dey, Rowan van As, curated by NARS Curatorial Fellow **Vu Thien An (Thea) Nguyen**.

A crossword is a word puzzle made of a grid with black and white squares. Words are entries. A crossword is a structure built through intersections. Words move horizontally and vertically. Depending on one another to form meaning across a shared grid, each entry remains distinct. No word fully exists alone. Meanings emerge through crossings, fragments, clues, partial alignments, and the spaces left unresolved.

Thirteen artists-in-residence and one curatorial fellow enter a crossword puzzle.

*Toward a Sentence* approaches the residency as a collective structure and a game in progress. Over the course of twelve weeks, the cohort shared an environment shaped by sustained looking, experimentation, and daily encounter. Studios became sites where practices brushed against one another, materials circulated, and ideas accumulated slowly through repetition and return. Like players entering a crossword grid, each artist selects a position, a direction, a word to place into relation with others. Some entries connect immediately. Some clash, overlap, or leave gaps still waiting to be filled. Meanings shift each time a new connection appears. One artist's clue becomes another artist's interruption. A sentence forms sideways before continuing downward.

The exhibition treats the residency itself as an unfolding puzzle: part structure, part improvisation, part social choreography. There are rules, but no single solution. Artists move across and down through shared time and space, building temporary alignments through conversation, observation, friction, support, and coincidence. The grid never fully closes. Something always remains unresolved, misspelled, or open to reinterpretation. *Towards A Sentence* captures this temporary state of becoming, where works exist not as isolated statements but as entries continuously shaped by their crossings with others.

The strategies a player uses when tackling a crossword, searching for a point of penetration or an accessible entrance point, mirrors the physical experience of moving through the exhibition. Some entries extend across while others descend vertically. Certain practices move "down," extending inward through memory, embodiment, intimacy and psychological space. **Ailyn Lee, Jill Smith and Nicole Economides** approach the game like archival entries scattered across the grid, constructing fragile clues through found objects, image transfers, and traces of emotional residue that ask the viewer to slow down, return, and look again. **Erika Choe** and **Chanya Vitayakul** press against the body as both structure and site of inscription. One clue locking into another as vertical entries accumulate through tension and repetition. **Aviv Grinberg** and **Colby Lamson-Gordon** complicate these downward movements through rupture, displacement, and reconstruction, where acts of separation and fragmented learning become partial entries still searching for completion.

Other practices move "across," expanding outward into systems of relation, circulation, participation, and collective encounter. **Jisoo Chung, Rowan van As, and Noa Klagsbald** construct social structures shaped through gathering, participation, and temporary alignment, where meaning emerges laterally through movement between multiple bodies occupying the same field. Nearby, **Arom Ju, Obadah Aljefri, and Priyanka Dey** operate like unstable connective clues crossing between multiple sections of the grid, navigating thresholds between familiarity and estrangement, obscurity and recognition, where forms remain suspended between appearing and dissolving. The participating artists approach these questions through distinct material and conceptual practices, each offering a different entry point into memory, inheritance, and place.

A crossword still in progress, *Toward a Sentence* remains intentionally unfinished. The exhibition lingers within crossings, gaps, and partial recognitions that continue to shift through each encounter. Meanings emerge gradually through relation: between words, between bodies moving through space.

### **Curatorial Note**

The idea for *Toward a Sentence* draws from the history of the crossword puzzle itself. In 1913, journalist Arthur Wynne introduced the first “Word-Cross” puzzle in the Sunday *Fun* section of the *New York World*. Before any clue was solved, the letters F–U–N were already placed into the grid, embedding play directly into the structure from the very beginning. That gesture stayed with me throughout the NARS Foundation, Season II, 2026 International Residency Program.

I became interested in the crossword not only as a visual system, but as a way of thinking about coexistence: how separate entries remain distinct while still depending on one another to generate meaning. *Toward a Sentence* is an invitation to move through the space intuitively, following fragments, crossings, interruptions, and unexpected alignments as one might slowly work through a puzzle.

### **About the Curatorial Fellow:**

**Vu Thien An (Thea) Nguyen** is a curator and art researcher based between New York and Hanoi. Her research considers how translation and communication operate within studio practice, tracing how ideas move across languages and forms of making. Grounded in care, her practice nurtures and presents evolving voices. She works as a facilitator and bridge-builder to bring together people, concepts, while responding to cultural narratives.

Recently, Nguyen curated Leah Liu's solo exhibition *susurrus* at the Chinese American Arts Council | Gallery 456 (New York), and co-curated *Womb of Fire*, a traveling exhibition and publication project featuring 100 works by Vietnamese and diasporic Vietnamese women and non-binary artists. She is part of Parsons School of Design, Design History and Practice Program Class of 2026 and currently serves as Curatorial Assistant to guest curator Phil Zheng Cai for the 2026 NYC-Based Artist Residency Program at Residency Unlimited.

### **About the Artists:**

**Obadah Aljerfri** is a Brooklyn-based multidisciplinary artist and designer rooted in long-term investigations into identity and perception across queer, Muslim, and diasporic experience. Their conceptual practice integrates painting, sculpture, installation, performance, and illustration with satirical, abject, and tender gestures that trouble the violences of the gaze. Holding an MFA in Integrated Practices from Pratt Institute and a BFA in Illustration from the Savannah College of Art and Design, they bring over ten years of experience in art production, art direction, illustration, and branding across art, design, fashion, and marketing. Aljerfri has worked on major exhibitions with Muhannad Shono, Jenny Polak, and Andrew

Woolbright, and has exhibited internationally at Ithra, the Bronx Council on the Arts, 21,39 Jeddah Arts, and Volta Basel.

**Erika Choe** is a Brooklyn-based artist working across sculpture, performance, video, and installation. She creates abstract portraits of bodies in mid-movement, taking on positionalities of weightedness, gravitational yield, subversion, pain, and grief. The bodies negotiate with constraint and separation - contained within the vessel bound by membrane, and disassembled into batched-out body parts that toe the line between recognizable and indistinguishable. Her sculptures store the implicit memory of her actions, where the imposition of her body lands as an imprint of a gesture, and the work becomes an archive of a performance that is no longer present for the viewer. Choe holds an MFA from School of Visual Arts and a BA with highest honors from University of Virginia. She is recipient of the NARS Foundation Full US Fellowship 2026, James Bernard Haggarty Scholarship Award by NYC Crit Club '25, Artist Sculpture Award by Zola '25, Ceramics Residency by NYCxDESIGN Festival '24, and the Ruth Caplin Dance Award for Artistic Excellence '15. Erika performed at renowned venues like The Shed NY, Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), The Fridge Art Gallery NY, and Schrittmacher Festival in Germany, performing for international choreographers like Akram Khan, Alejandro Cerrudo, and Yin Yue.

**Jisoo Chung** is a multimedia artist working across video, installation, drawing, and performance. As a Korean artist who relocated to the United States, she examines failures in language—mistranslations, autocorrections, and linguistic omissions—to trace the sociocultural power embedded in language and names. Her practice considers how identity is negotiated, distorted, or rendered invisible through systems of translation. Chung is a nominee for the United States Artists Fellowship, a fellow of the MacDowell Residency, and she has received grants from the LACE Lightning Fund (Andy Warhol Foundation), the Puffin Foundation, the Seoul Arts and Culture Foundation, and Jungwoon Prize at the Seoul International Experimental Film and Video Festival, among others. Chung holds an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles, and a BFA from Seoul National University. She served on the production committee at GYOPO, is a co-founder of an after school art program Drawwing Cabinet, and is currently an adjunct faculty member at Bakersfield College. She lives, works, and teaches in Los Angeles.

**Priyanka Dey** lives and works in Brooklyn, NY and holds a BFA from Pratt Institute. Originally, Dey is from Mumbai, India. Dey aims to create works that play with optics of perception by experimenting with and leveraging obscurity. Her process lays emphasis on striking balance between a calculative yet intuitive paradigm and resists a definitive categorization.

**Nicole Economides** (b. 1992, New York, USA) is a visual artist working between Athens, Greece and New York, USA. She holds an MFA from Parsons School of Design, The New School (2019). Economides has presented solo exhibitions including Sunday Afternoon (Callirrhoë, Athens, 2024) and Illusion of Home, as a Memory (Callirrhoë, Athens, 2023), and participated in group shows at MOMus, Athens (2023); Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, Athens, and Lincoln Center, New York (2021); and Queens College, CUNY, New York (2020). She has received the Hopper Prize (2024), ARTWORKS Stavros Niarchos Foundation Fellowship (2022), and the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant (2018). Her work has been featured in Financial Times, Coveteur, Loophole and Kathimerini.

**Aviv Grinberg** (b. 1991) is a multidisciplinary artist working across painting, sculpture, installation, and readymade. His practice investigates systems of order, concealment, and transformation through both industrial and organic materials. Drawing from personal history, including his identity as a gay man, his late

sister's mental illness, and his service as a prison guard, Grinberg's work engages with structures of control and the ways in which they shape behavior, perception, and memory. He has worked extensively with everyday maintenance objects such as carpet beaters and cleaning product containers, using them to explore how social and psychological systems are maintained, hidden, and internalized. In recent work, he shifts from industrial defects to organic ones, focusing on damaged plants, diseased leaves, and natural processes of growth and decay. Through this transition, he examines the tension between control and release, and questions whether what we perceive as flaws are disruptions or inherent conditions of living systems.

**Arom Ju** is a multidisciplinary visual artist from South Korea, now based in the U.S. Beginning in digital illustration, she translates the flat precision of screen-based imagery into painting, bridging digital and physical languages. She has recently expanded her practice to include mobile-like moving elements that explore motion and fragility. Ju holds an MFA from Hongik University and has exhibited in the United States and Korea, including at the New Museum Los Gatos, A Space Gallery, and Bushwick Gallery in Brooklyn. Her work has also been featured by institutions such as Microsoft and The New York Times.

**Noa Klagsbald** (b.1992) is an interdisciplinary artist living and working between Tel Aviv and London. She holds an MA in Photography from the Royal College of Art, London, and a BFA (Magna Cum Laude) from Shenkar College of Art. Klagsbald creates staged photographic and installation works exploring power dynamics and masculinity within culturally charged arenas such as sport. Her work has been exhibited internationally, including Camden Art Centre, OOF Gallery London, the Jewish Museum Lecce, Museum on the Seam, and the Cultural Olympics Paris. She was selected for New Contemporaries 2023 (UK) and is a Forbes 30 Under 30 alumna. A photograph from her GOAL series was presented aboard the International Space Station as part of Axiom Mission 1.

**Colby Lamson-Gordon** is a Brooklyn-based artist working across image, video, and sound. Adopted from China to the United States, they explore (dis)placement and imagined memory through process-driven images and experimental documentary. Their practice draws on the archive and embodied knowledge to probe longing and the instability of personal history. Lamson-Gordon's work has shown at Ridgewood Off-Kilter Film Festival, East Village Film Festival, Residency Unlimited, Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Mannes School of Music, and Gallery ZXY. They hold an MFA in Design & Technology from Parsons School of Design and a BA in Economics from Barnard College, where they received the O'Connor Award for best economic thesis. An upcoming resident at NARS Foundation and Vermont Studio Center, they live in Brooklyn and teach at Parsons.

**Ailyn Lee** (b. South Korea) received her MFA in Fine Arts and BFA in Illustration from the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York City. She has exhibited her work at various venues in New York and South Korea, including A.I.R. Gallery, Latitude Gallery, SVA Chelsea Gallery, and the Busan International Art Fair. She has been an artist-in-residence at the New York Art Residency and Studios (NARS) Foundation, International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) in 2025, Wassaic Project, and Vermont Studio Center.

**Jill Smith** (she/her) is a queer, Jewish multi-disciplinary artist, born and based in Tkaronto/Toronto. She is interested in the archival properties of materials, objects, and rituals. Through her material and process-based practice, Smith explores the tensions between presence and absence, connection and distance, and the ways in which perception of memory and lineage may shift over time.

Smith has exhibited work in Canadian spaces including the University of Waterloo Art Gallery, Centre[3] for Artistic + Social Practice, The Brandscape, Ed Video Media Art Centre, Forest City Gallery, and Friends and

Neighbours Gallery. Smith holds a Master of Fine Arts from University of Waterloo, (Canada, 2024) and a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honors Specialization in Studio Art) from Western University (Canada, 2017). She has participated in artist residency programs at AGA LAB in Amsterdam (2017), and Luminous Bodies at Artscape Gibraltar Point in Toronto (2018), and is currently artist-in-residence at NARS Foundation in Brooklyn (2026). Smith is the recipient of grants and awards from Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), and the Keith and Win Shantz International Research Scholarship, among others. Upcoming projects include a solo exhibition at Cocoon in Montreal (2026).

**Rowan van As** (1991, Goes, NL) is a Rotterdam-based visual artist who creates installations, sculptures, and performances, often as social gestures. He studied at the Willem de Kooning Academy (2010–2014) and earned his MFA at St. Lucas, Antwerp (2015–2016). He draws from everyday urban life, remixing found images and objects into layered, surreal works that shift the meaning of the discarded. Food forms an intuitive part of his later practice — as material and connector. From April to June 2026, he will be in residence in New York, developing a project on the city’s oyster history. His most ambitious project to date is a functioning reinterpretation of a classic yellow cab, which he aims to bring to New York. His work explores the relative powerlessness of the individual, seeking a poetic language that is playful, confrontational, and open to dialogue.

**Chanya Vitayakul** (they/them, b. 2003) is a multidisciplinary artist from Bangkok, Thailand. Their work has been exhibited in New York, Rhode Island, South Korea, and Thailand, and has appeared in publications including Curatory Magazine, Divide Magazine, New Visionary Magazine, and the Survivor Arts and Writing Collective. Chanya holds a BFA in Graphic Design from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and is based in Long Island City, New York.

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The NARS Galleries are open Monday - Friday from 12 to 5 pm. For more information, please call the office: 718-768-2765 or email [info@narsfoundation.org](mailto:info@narsfoundation.org).

**The New York Art Residency & 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.