
OPEN CALL: PORTALS

A Student Guide to Art & Storytelling

Welcome to Open Call: Portals!

Step into a world where past, present, and future converge. In this exhibition, 12 artists open “portals,” or creative windows, into stories about migration, memory, spirituality, and identity. Each work invites you to feel, question, and imagine:

What stories do we carry?

How do we honor where we come from?

What does change look like—for us, our families, and our communities?

What You’ll Explore

- How artists use art to spark change
 - How to find meaning and intention in artwork
 - How to reflect your own story through art
 - How to imagine new futures
-

Zain Alam, *Meter & Light: Night*

A three-channel audiovisual installation enacting the interlocking rhythms of time in Muslim life after sunset

Zain Alam blends personal and collective memory in this meditative sound and video installation. Drawing from Islamic mysticism, Urdu poetry, and family archives, he asks: how do we preserve identity while moving through time and space? As video footage loops, it echoes the rhythms of prayer, migration, and remembering.

Look Closer

- What kinds of images, words, or sounds stand out to you?
- How does the artist's use of repetition affect the way you experience the piece?
- What kinds of stories might be hidden in a family archive?

Think About It

Imagine you're creating a memory archive for your own family. What would you include? A sound? A photograph? A story?

AYDO, *Border Ecologies*

A video and ceramic installation exploring on-site documentation of the Korean Demilitarized Zone and the United States–Mexico borderland through sociopolitical, cultural, and environmental perspectives

AYDO transforms everyday materials for use in sacred rituals. Using glittering resin and organic matter like salt, herbs, and bones, they build a spiritual space where ancestral myths come alive. AYDO invites us to rethink who writes history—and who gets remembered.

Look Closer

- What do you notice about the materials used?
- How do ritual and sculpture come together in this work?
- Why might an artist mix the spiritual with the everyday?

Think About It

What borders are you aware of in New York City—between neighborhoods, boroughs, or blocks? How can you tell where one place ends and another begins?

Mel Corchado, *\$TICKY \$IN\$*

A collection of sugar garments exploring sugar's history and its ties to identity, fashion, and the exploitation of land and labor

Mel Corchado is a Brooklyn-based Boricua fashion designer and artist who uses fashion to interrogate and reshape harmful systems. Her work focuses on decolonization through design, building community-driven alternatives to the fashion industry's norms. With a practice rooted in research, upcycling, and collaboration, she transforms clothing into a tool for political education and social transformation.

Look Closer

- What materials and textures do you notice in Corchado's sugar garments?
- How does the artist use fashion to explore history?
- What emotions or stories do the clothes seem to carry?

Think About It

If you could design clothes to share something about your culture or community, what would they look like? What would you make them out of?

Marwa Eltahir, *99 Names: My Liberation Is Tied to Yours*

An immersive, audiovisual performance examining themes of loss, grief, and connection using imagery from the Afro-Arab diaspora

Marwa Eltahir is a Sudanese artist and founder of Our Political Home, a creative space for trans and queer African storytellers. Through writing, visuals, and performance, she explores memory, ancestral knowledge, and queer narratives. Eltahir's work engages with cosmologies and diasporic connections to ask: what do I need to remember?

Look Closer

- What colors or sounds do you notice in the installation?
- How does the artwork express grief and connection?
- What symbols or patterns seem meaningful?

Think About It

What rituals are a part of your life? What do you do every day, week, month, or year, and why?

Patricia Encarnación, *Tropical Limerence*

An installation of video, performance, and ceramics that examines how love, exotification, and power imbalances influence relationships between the Global Majority and the Global North

Afro-Dominican artist Patricia Encarnación explores identity, memory, and colonial legacies. Her work reimagines Caribbean aesthetics and questions how history influences how people and cultures are seen. She uses a wide range of media to challenge power structures and amplify the voices of marginalized communities.

Look Closer

- What do the colors and shapes in the installation make you feel?

-
- How do the materials (like ceramics or video) help tell the story?
 - What do you notice about how people or places are represented?

Think About It

What cultures (other than your own) are you drawn to, and why? What are the first images or impressions you remember seeing or learning about those cultures?

Laurena Finéus, *Together, we could have made Mountains / Ansanm nou ka fè Mòn*

A collaborative textile and painting installation showcasing Brooklyn's Haitian migrant stories and exploring dreams, sacrifices, misconceptions, and collective scars

Haitian-Canadian artist Laurena Finéus uses imagined landscapes to represent Black geographies and migration. Her work honors untold stories and collective memory while imagining new futures. She collaborates with communities to create textured installations filled with symbolism and personal narrative.

Look Closer

- What details in the textiles and paintings stand out to you?
- How do the colors and materials reflect emotion or memory?
- What stories or communities are being shared?

Think About It

If you wanted to start a new community, where would you go and what would you carry with you?

Lily Honglei, *KITES: A Poem by an Immigrant*

A painting series inspired by traditional Chinese kites that depicts Asian immigration stories reflecting the artist's family saga and community life

Based in Queens, Lily Honglei is a Chinese immigrant artist duo whose work connects East Asian traditions with immigrant experiences in New York City. Their paintings are full of symbolism, history, and quiet strength, sharing personal and communal stories.

Look Closer

- What do you notice about the shapes, patterns, or movement in the kite paintings?
- How does the artwork blend traditional and modern elements?
- What might these images tell you about life in an immigrant community?

Think About It

If you painted pictures that told the story of your neighborhood, what symbols or images would you use? Who would you include?

Tyson Houseman, *The Six Seasons*

A live, operatic video performance and installation featuring soundscapes and lyrics sung in nēhiyawēwin (Plains Cree)

Tyson Houseman is a nēhiyaw (Plains Cree) artist who works with video, puppetry, and sound. His work reflects Indigenous teachings, non-linear time, and relationships with the land. Through experimental and ceremonial art forms, Houseman creates immersive experiences rooted in ancestral knowledge.

Look Closer

- What kind of rhythms or sounds do you hear?
- How do the visuals and music work together?
- How would you describe the video, music, and materials?

Think About It

What is it like to listen to a language that you don't understand? Does the music give you any clues to what the meaning might be?

Jarrett Key, *Hair Painting No. 40 (in three parts)*

A live performance in Key's "Hair Paintings" series, in which the artist uses their hair to create paintings honoring their grandmother, Ruth Mae Giles

Jarrett Key's work blends performance, painting, and memory. Raised in Alabama and now working in Brooklyn, Key creates with a deep sense of heritage, identity, and care. They use their own body as a tool, inviting viewers to think about family, legacy, and expression in new ways.

Look Closer

- What do you notice about the technique used in the painting?
- How might using hair as a paintbrush change the meaning of the artwork?
- What feelings or memories does the work seem to carry?

Think About It

If you made art honoring someone in your family, who would you honor and what would you make?

Chelsea Odufu, *Gold with a Mind of Its Own*

A video installation foregrounding dance and movement to uncover the haunting legacy of the gold trade in Côte d'Ivoire

Chelsea Odufu is a multimedia artist known for work that bridges storytelling and activism. Her installation reflects on colonialism and exploitation through movement and rhythm. Odufu uses art to uncover hidden histories and connect people emotionally with justice-centered stories.

Look Closer

- How would you describe the movement that you see in the video?
- How does dance communicate ideas or feelings?
- What is revealed about history through this work?

Think About It

If you could tell a story using only movement, where would you begin? With a gesture? A rhythm?

Victor “Marka27” Quiñonez, *Elevar La Cultura NYC*

An immersive sculptural installation of a large Mayan pyramid, composed of ice coolers, textiles, and spiritual objects, honoring the beauty and resilience of immigrant street vendors

Marka27 mixes street art with ancient Indigenous traditions. His work speaks to resilience, culture, and honoring the people and practices that often go unnoticed. By transforming everyday objects into spiritual monuments, he invites viewers to recognize the sacred in daily life.

Look Closer

- What materials in the sculpture surprise you?
- How does this piece celebrate culture and community?
- What does the structure remind you of?

Think About It

If you made a monument built out of objects that represented your home or community, what objects would you choose and why?

Yelaine Rodriguez and Luis Vasquez La Roche, *Residence Time / The Sea Is History*

A mixed-media sculptural installation that reimagines the Door of No Return in Ghana as an archaeological ruin

Together, Yelaine Rodriguez and Luis Vasquez La Roche examine how memory and history shape Black identity. Their installation transforms a site of trauma into a

space for reflection, rooted in Afro-Caribbean heritage, faith, and resistance. Their work honors ancestors and reclaims lost histories.

Look Closer

- What elements of the sculpture feel historical or spiritual?
- How do the artists use texture, shape, or space to evoke emotion?
- What emotions does this “ruin” give you? What do you think the artists want you to feel?

Think About It

What does the image of a door or portal make you think of? What could it represent?