

# SPF Projects

May 30–August 26, 2018

## SPECIAL SPECIAL EDITION NO. 22

*It Takes 11 Years Practice  
to be at the Same Pool*

by Lu Zhang

*Shot, Neat, Daiquiri, Martini, Manhattan,  
Sunrise, Coconut, Lime, Olive, Maraschino  
Cherry, Orange Peel, Pineapple, and Ice.*

## SPECIAL SPECIAL EDITION NO. 23

*Towelkini*

by Aria McManus

Edition of 42

In Hot Pink and Athletic Gold

## SPECIAL SPECIAL EDITION NO. 24

*Hibiscus Hawaiian Shirt*

by Benjamin Langford

Edition of 50

*Overflow* Exhibition curated by John Belknap  
Featuring 22 New York based artists:

Ginssiyo Apará, Patrick Carlin Mohundro,  
David Chan, Sujung Chang, Sam Cockrell,  
Dana Davenport, Leah Dixon, Luba Drozd,  
Ian Faden, Winslow Funaki, Jackson Hallberg,  
Tallulah Hood, Tiffany Jaeyeon Shin,  
Emily Janowick, Khari Johnson-Ricks,  
Bianca Kann, David Kirshoff, Grace  
Linderholm, Umber Majeed, Tristan Scow,  
Buzz Slutsky, Ondine Viñao

# Testing

Aria McManus

Lu Zhang

# the

Benjamin Langford

# SPF

John Belknap

# Water

# Introduction

*In the summer of 2018, Special Special presented its first group show "SPF," transforming the East Village storefront into an imagined swimming pool, a fluid arrangement of artist projects evoking the spirit of a poolside retreat, offering New Yorkers a refuge from the sweltering heat.*

*We asked each artist to create a work of art that reflected their summer pool experience. The start of each project addition was highlighted and celebrated with a 'pool party' opening.*

*The results in chronological order were: A Pool Date experience by Lu Zhang where people could sign up for a platonic blind date at an imagined pool installation, Towelkini poolside leisurewear by Aria McManus, a Hibiscus Hawaiian Shirt installation from Ben Langford, and an Overflow exhibition of 22 artists curated by John Belknap. Each project was like a layer of sunblock or SPF, reflecting the experience of nostalgia and exoticism of pool cultures from the the artists' own references of the swimming pool, whether of exclusive urban pools or suburban backyard pools, community pools or athletic pools. Each artist collaborated with Special Special to present an art edition that was produced for people to collect and take with them to the actual pool or beach. As the artworks were introduced into the space, artists and artworks came to be in dialogue with one another, like different bodies of water filling into one pool.*

*The following texts have been extracted from dialogues conducted between the artists and the curator, to draw out their inspirations, references, and collaborative processes. Coming from vastly different cultural backgrounds, they discuss their art practices, their engagement with and sense of communities, and their process of working with Special Special. This booklet is a little keepsake from that pool party, in case you miss or missed it.*

# Swimming Pool Cultures

## Lu Zhang

Special Special (for the SPF show) has this pool feeling, it's in the city, it's isolated, and there are blue dots. For me, pools are about community. I didn't grow up having a pool, and when I went to a community pool, there were kids screaming and grandmothers running around chasing them.

## Aria McManus

I grew up with a pool that was a neighborhood pool. I lived there every single day of the summer. That's where my parents sent me to be baby-sat. I would talk to the lifeguard, I would talk to anyone that would talk to me. It was this really interesting moment like what you were talking about, where, to me—it was the one place where school didn't matter, age didn't matter, and gender didn't matter. We would just play cards with everybody, it didn't matter if you were a toddler or eighteen, you would just play cards with everyone. It was like this universal acceptance of non-ageism and non-sexism. We are all equal here. Even school is a place that classifies you. But when you're at a pool, nothing is there to classify you, besides maybe the shallow and deep end, but besides that, there's nothing that's like 'you're in this group, don't stray'.





Keeping the bath's at bay



#TOWELKINI



TowelKit package display

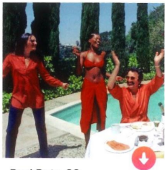


Lu Zhang's ceramic cocktail vessels



Aria and Lu on a Post Date





### Pool Date, 28

📍 less than a mile away

Pool Date is an art installation by Wildman Club hosted at Special Special in the East Village, built on the concept of sunbathers who're each's good

**EDIT INFO**

[View on Instagram](#)

Pool Date Trinder profile



Pool Date installation



Asia Art Museum profile

Towelline installation during the opening

# Conceptual Art and Ceramics

Lu Zhang

'Pool Date,' came from a previous project called 'Boat Date' that I did at a residency at L'Ners Foundation. I thought since Special Special is a space for functional editions, it would be an interesting idea if I presented an art project that could also be functional.

Just imagine you're on a pool date and you want to have something to drink but at the same time you are also using a weird sculpture that you hold. In my previous project (Boat Date), I had tea and tea cups. Ceramics can be sculptural and functional, like the bowls and plates you use everyday.

*I started working in ceramics by accident, and it just felt more right for me than what I had done before. When I worked on photography projects, I always had a concept before I began, but for ceramics, 90% of the time, it's about the process, so I learned to let a lot of things go. I've gotten to the point where I almost don't want to make art anymore, as I started to think about the community around me. To work with community, you just have to let a lot of things happen on its own and let things go. People will come with all different intentions, backgrounds, and knowledge of things, and you just have to let go.*

*You set a goal but you don't really design the route to get to that goal. You just let the process direct you. I love that part about each project.*



Pool Date participant takes a sip from Lu Zhang's vessel



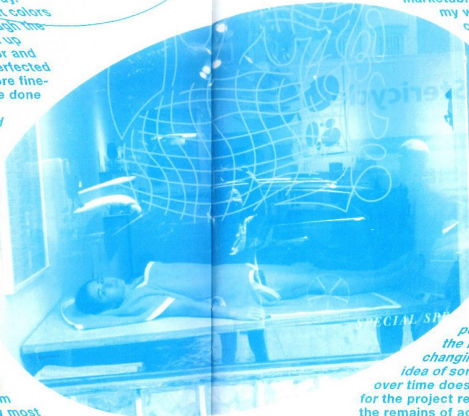
# *the Concept of the Towelkini*

Aria McManus

I had made these two prototypes for the Towelkini before. They had only been shown once before in a two hour setting so they hadn't really gotten out there in a way.

We originally wanted different colors and maybe different trims. But through the process of making it again, it ended up just coming back to its original color and form. There are minor things that perfected it, which is great, it just became more fine-tuned. And I don't think I could have done that alone.

You probably won't be naked with it, but at the same time if you are, that's cool too and that's a whole other statement. I just like the idea of it being a simple modification to an existing thing. It's 2018 and no one has done this yet? It's like the Snuggly where—maybe it's not the best invention—but there's a use for it. You feel silly wearing it and silly around it and that's what's special about it. Normally when I do things, it's so thought out and every little thing is like, "and you hold it like this, and this part is attached to this, and it's all perfect," but with the Towelkini, I like that it's like "do what you want. Embrace the freedom of it." And weirdly, this project is my most widely understood and loved. With a lot of things, I try too hard to think of it heady and then it's this perfect crystal, but no one can penetrate it. And this one is more like an oblong rock and you're like "yeah, I get it!"



# *Selecting Flowers for Artworks*

Benjamin Langford

Developing my first "product" has revealed to me how much of my natural artmaking process is not concerned with practicality or marketable packaging. I think a lot of

my work is actually difficult to collect because of how loose the materials are and how they hang differently in different places—they even move around with changes in humidity.

A product requires something quite different. The assumption is that a product comes in a complete form, something that won't change or require any special thought to hang or use. Even with the shirts—despite my best efforts—we found there was no truly permanent way to keep the natural hibiscus dye from changing over time. Again, the idea of something I've made changing over time doesn't bother me, and my idea for the project required that they be dyed in the remains of actual hibiscus flowers—so to me, the concept is complete regardless of any naturally occurring inconsistencies across the edition. But, in the context of a product, this would usually read as a flaw. It's interesting that even when making a



"product," my tendency is still to experiment with unpredictable techniques in a way that ultimately leads to something not so product-like.

For the installation, it came naturally to me to treat the flower sculptures as decorative objects, beyond their life as an image and all. I've actually had these Hibiscus flowers in my living room for most of the time since they were previously shown (at Zaha Hadid 28<sup>th</sup> Street building). I like living with the artwork and having it around.

I like flowers that work for the effect I would like to achieve. That would only make sense for flat-based flowers. Anything that's more

like a cluster flower or something that's too delicate, in a way, becomes less easy to deal with.

I think that mentality kind of started when I was trying to be more minimal about the shapes, to have it be like bleedy, color field mentality. But

I'm actually starting to push the limits of this. I'm starting to do slightly smaller pieces that are more intricate

cuttings, that are more precise, little dangling edges and things like that. It's less about initial impact and more about light airy pieces.



## Garden Cultures

Benjamin Langford

I have a little garden—which is a pretty big wooden planter that I built. But it's hard in New York City to grow anything too substantial. My mom is essentially a gardener. My earliest life is in Connecticut, where my mom to this day has a really nice garden. Spending 6 years in London as a kid and living in Singapore for a few years in high school, I feel like all of these places have such an emphasis on garden culture and they are also such different climates. I feel like I have all this nature built into my mind subconsciously.

## Cultural References

John Belknap

I lived in Ankara for a few years when my parents were in the US military. Growing up as a military brat meant we moved around pretty often and part of what we did to embrace wherever we moved to next was spending time exploring the historical aspects of our new home.

Turkey is a nexus of mythology and religious iconography and my imagination went wild when I was a kid. The ruins,

*statues, mosques, and temples we saw every day I know now are just stories people in the West read in high school or talk about at church or see on the news. It's very mediated.*

The site of the Trojan horse, the temple that housed the Oracle of Delphi, the mausoleum that Caesar built for his father, the Virgin Mary's final resting place in Ephesus, the Hagia Sophia, Whirling Dervishes, belly dancers, or call to prayer at the local mosque down the street from where we lived were all real! I noticed that these places were all built on movement and rituals and that's a really different dynamic than just reading about a Whirling Dervish that spins around and around. In America, movement and rituals include watching TV or working out at the gym.

The moment we moved to the States, and of all places, Washington, D.C., I was immediately disoriented. There's really no culture in America besides pop culture and I felt this especially when issues of *Vogue* or *Pottery Barn* came trickling in the mail each week. The glossy surfaces were just that, surfaces.

*It wasn't that Americans didn't have rituals but rather the rituals for so many Americans were taken for granted and were really rituals that were self-congratulatory.*

I've asked myself this question a lot, "Where are the places we go to that we partake in ritualized practices and have a sort of mythology to them?" My immediate impulse was the bathroom because as a queer person these spaces have the obvious potential to become social.

I found that when I left school, I had been asking myself about rituals because I was studying really dense material and that density seemed like yet another way Americans obstruct things. Rituals offer a different way to learn, gather, collect.



## Curating Overflow

John Belknap

I wanted to pivot from making my own work to maybe collaborate more with the space, and with Wen-You, and as well as with other artists. That was a very simple premise, where there's a lot of young artists that I think are making compelling enough work.

One night I came across Hannah Black's lecture on YouTube where she makes this somewhat confessional statement: "I now believe that art is less interesting in what I now will call 'life' or more precisely that art is a neurotic overflow or residue of failures in living." It resonated. I approached the show with a totally open and short prompt and sent it out to several artists I knew. Some of those artists reached out to their network and soon the body of the show really started to morph into very local but amorphous spirit which felt like a pool: social, playful, and wet. It made perfect sense to show overflow as part of the larger *SPF* show because each artist captured the spirit of the summer and the themes overflow explored ("playful interventions," "craft," "cuteness," "the quotidian," and "ephemera").

When I first finally came to Wen-You and Khoon, I was like here are my five pages of weird notes, references, and things that I'm pulling from. In trying to figure out an idea for *Overflow*, we went with the idea of using overflow as a verb, which I really liked, instead of being just a descriptor. The idea of a verb is something more fluid, and allows anyone to kind of literally play with how they approach something like overflow.

# Aesthetic Usefulness

Benjamin Langford

It's interesting to extend art to objects for living with because it's actually not that common in artists' mental processes these days. It's more relegated

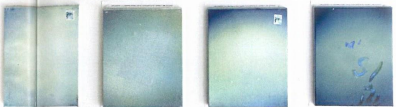
to design, objects that are intended to be lived with rather than contemplated and seen. So I feel like, not that that is creating a new direction in my work really, but it's kind of an interesting tangent.

*I might actually be reacting against it in my more recent projects because I'm starting to make some pieces that have more of a serious tone. I'm trying to push the flower motif into an as-not-kitsch of a direction as you possibly can with flowers. I'm going further in the direction of it not being a luscious experience to look at.*

Another reason why I was so quick to arrive at this decision on the shirts, to digitally print the hibiscus pattern but then subsequently dye them in the remains of hibiscus flowers, is because I'm always interested in this weird circling back of materials. I think it's interesting how, through its synthetic quality, digital representations do actually make you arrive at a final point closer to nature than a representation that is less digitally perfected. The accuracy of this versus what a painting of a flower is, kind of intrigues me. That it's this objective cold way of viewing flowers, but then paired with either the physical remains of flowers or something that breathes some life into it. That's my fascination.



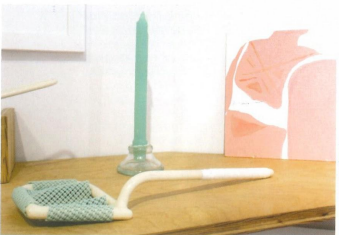
Jackson Hallberg (above), Sam Cockeril (below)



Talibah Hood (right), Emily Janoveck (left)



(Right) Emily Janoveck, (center) Parick Mohandiro,  
(left) Winslow Bowick



Umber Aljased (above left), Buz Shutzky (below left),  
Emily Janoveck (right), and Ondine Ytano (right below)







Hibiscus shirt before and after dye



Window Poohki



Benjamin Langford in front of the Hibiscus installation



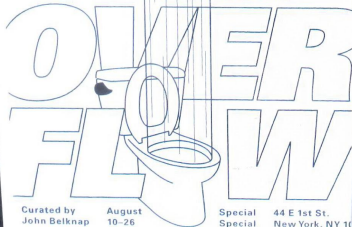
Bianca Kano (left above), Lu Zhang (left below), David Chan (middle), Sam Cochrill (right)



Tristan Seow



Ginssiyo Apará  
 Patrick Carlin Mohundro  
 David Chan  
 Sujung Chang  
 Sam Cockrell  
 Dana Davenport  
 Leah Dixon  
 Luba Drozd  
 Ian Faden  
 E. Winslow Funaki  
 Jackson Hallberg  
 Tallulah Hood  
 Emily Janowick  
 Khari Johnson-Ricks  
 Bianca Kann  
 David Kirshoff  
 Grace Linderholm  
 Umber Majeed  
 Tristan Scow  
 Tiffany Jaeyeon Shin  
 Buzz Slutzky  
 Ondine Vináao



Curated by August  
 John Belknap 10-26

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 Special New York, NY 100

# Usefulness

Aria McManus

My college thesis was about design

movements and what the next movement's evolution would be... there's eco-design, ergonomic design, I thought the next movement would be emotional design. There have been bad examples of objects like that happening now, like a Chia pet which tries to cater to your emotions through being kitschy and cute, or there are more high-brow examples like a pillow in the shape of a nuclear bomb cloud by Dunne and Raby. But what's missing is high-brow emotional usefulness, whereby using the product for a function is at the same time emotionally engaging.

In most examples of this in art and design, it seems the emotional component is just tacked on as a visual tool rather than a functional tool.

I want to find/create things that are hyper useful and high-brow. And mix those two.



Poster for Overflow

# Usefulness to be playful

## Aria and Lu

A: (to Lu) You're like, I want to be the most useful... That's so funny because I feel like when I was in school studying product design, I was like, I want this THING to be the most useful. And Towelkint was a fun one, but normally I'm like, this has to be so useful. I'll "make a chair", and "It's going to fold, it's going to sit on your fire escape, it's gonna..." It always had to have three uses.



L: Or you think that art is purely useless. And that's where I'm pulling out from. Even when I find something useful, it's still off, it's neither useful nor useless.

When I think about Special Special and Wen-You's book, When You

Make No Art, I think that's how one could understand what art is—it's just in this in-between space.

A: I think both of us have this feeling. You want to be so useful but you don't think you are yet. But I think you are!

L: I feel my way is, I want to be useful by doing useless things.

A: Let's make business cards... I like that.

All photos by Special Special, Wen-You Cai  
With the exception of:  
"Aria McManus Poolside," by Georgia Read  
"Keeping the Bae's at Bay," by Tyler Healy

### Works in Overflow:

I put the yogurt in the fridge, Ginssiyo Apará  
Somewhere Else, David Chan

Alika, David Chan

Nate, Thomas, Justin, David Chan

Thomas, David Chan

Drew, David Chan

Christian Christian, Jungle Juice Platinum, David Chan

Platinum, David Chan

The weight of doubt, Sujung Chang

The heavyweight of doubt, Sujung Chang

Two Cars In Every Garage And Three Eyes On Every Fish,

Sam Cockrell

Box Braid Towels (네가) (naega)—I, 너가 (niga)—you,

Dana Davenport

Banned Words (Black, Gray, and White), Luba Drozd

Destroyed Towers Turned into DJ Booth, Leah Dixon

Conduit II, Ian Faden

Tool #1, Winslow Funaki

Tool #3, Winslow Funaki

Tool #6, Winslow Funaki

Fence in Tumbleweed, Jackson Hallberg

Romantic Dinner For One, Tallulah Hood

Untitled (Monkey), Tiffany Jaeyon Shin

Burn Mask, Emily Janowick

Disparagus, Emily Janowick

Snitches Get Stitches, Emily Janowick

I'm About to Dive in, Khari Johnson-Ricks

Shoulder Pain, Khari Johnson-Ricks

Swimmers, Bianca Kann

Bird Bubbler, David Kirshoff

Sunblock, Grace Linderholm

The Complete Picture, Umber Majeed

to light a candle is to cast a shadow, Patrick Carlin Mohundro

generic landscape painting, Patrick Carlin Mohundro

Stool (with Pochets), Tristan Scow

Luv 2 Case, Buzz Slutsky

Adam & Eve (Kentucky), Ondine Viñao

Edition of 100

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