

# SLEEP TO DREAM

MARTIN DURAZO

**SLEEP TO  
DREAM**



Pitzer College Art Galleries  
Tel: 909.607.8797  
[www.pitzer.edu/galleries](http://www.pitzer.edu/galleries)

Curated by Ciara Ennis, director / curator, Pitzer College Art Galleries

Pitzer College Art Galleries Staff:  
Cheukwa Jones, Curatorial and PR Coordinator  
Angelica Perez, Exhibition Preparator  
Jillian Strobel, Research Assistant  
Tatiana Conejo, Fiona Higgins and Lindsay McCord, Interns

ISBN: 978-0-9829956-5-5

Catalogue Design: Terry Vuong  
Printing: Precision Services Group

The catalogue was produced in an edition of 500 copies and is available through Pitzer College Art Galleries.

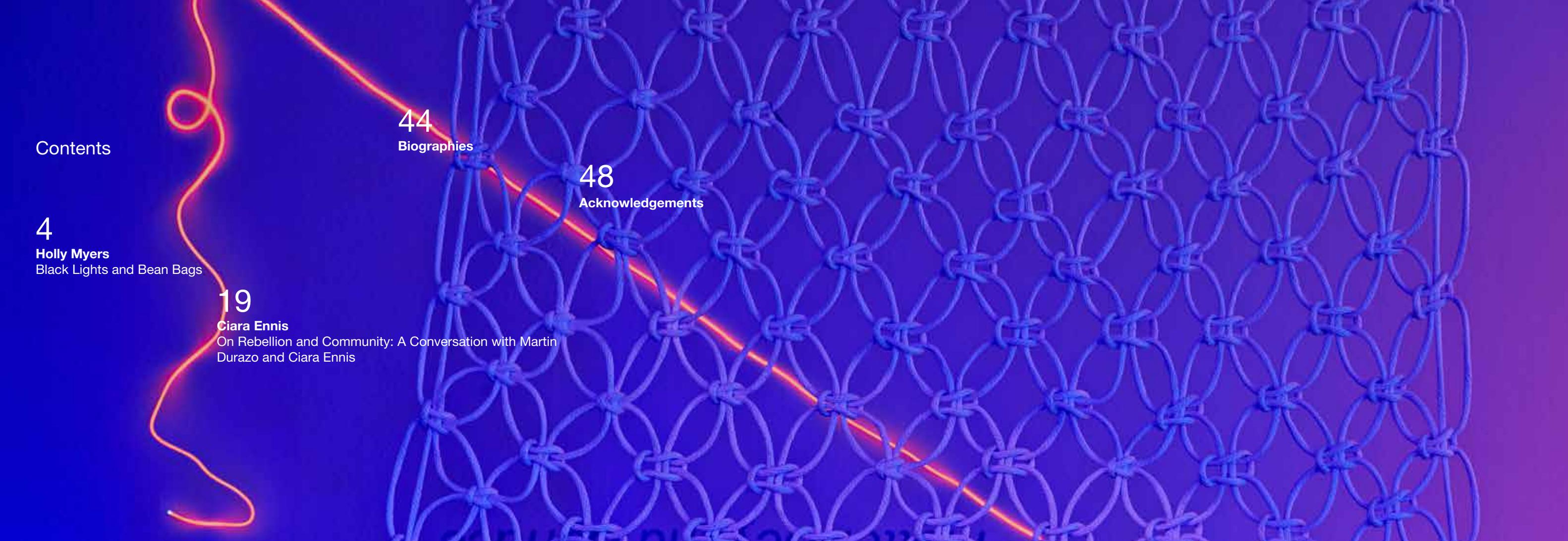
Images are courtesy of the artist and Pitzer College Art Galleries.  
Photo Credit: Sean MacGillivray.

The exhibition is supported in part by Pitzer College's 50th Anniversary celebration.

# SLEEP TO DREAM

Martin Durazo '90

Curated by Ciara Ennis  
Pitzer College Art Galleries, Lenzner Family Art Gallery  
January 21 – May 17, 2014



Contents

4

**Holly Myers**  
Black Lights and Bean Bags

19

**Ciara Ennis**  
On Rebellion and Community: A Conversation with Martin  
Durazo and Ciara Ennis

44

**Biographies**

48

**Acknowledgements**

## Holly Myers

### Black Lights and Bean Bags

There are aspects of the work of Martin Durazo that would likely perturb the high-minded critic. There are disco balls and black lights, bean bags and sofas, Day-Glo wigs and mirrored turntables. Durazo has a fondness for spray paint and metallic surfaces, and a fluency in the taxonomy of drug paraphernalia all but unequalled among his peers. The tawdry undercurrent is inescapable. Indeed, in his paintings, sculptures, and especially his installations, Durazo encourages—even obliges—his viewers to step in and partake. The disco lights shine on the just and the unjust alike. Ensnared in one of Durazo's environments, one is obliged to suspend any moral peevishness and accept as the basic ground for engagement the artist's own decidedly ambiguous fusion of hedonism and social critique.

It is Durazo's formal acuity, in many ways, that holds the enterprise together. For all their air of slacker recklessness, his works are meticulously calibrated entities. The effect is especially pronounced in his paintings, many of which look as if they emerged from a spontaneous whirlwind of spray paint and stencils, others as if cut from a construction barrier on Hollywood Boulevard—but which retain, almost across the

board, an intuitive, idiosyncratic cohesiveness that results in an abstraction as nuanced as any on the West Coast today, and a good deal more vital and spirited than most. His sculptures play a similar trick: though seemingly random, even slipshod in their materials—fish tanks, Plexiglas, drywall, industrial shelving, tchotchkes of every imaginable variety—they cohere with a sense of scale and proportion that is almost classical, and certainly fastidious. There are towers and cubes and pedestal-mounted *objets d'art*, museological arrangements across walls and floors and centripetally engineered tabletop centerpieces, all evincing in their respective forms an instinct for cogent geometric principles.

If it is this formal aptitude that keeps the work from devolving into the rave it gives the impression of half-wanting to be, it is Durazo's all-inclusive generosity that keeps it real. In *Sleep to Dream*, he transforms the art gallery of his own alma mater, Pitzer College, into an interactive vessel of collective





memory relating to the American undergraduate experience. What focus he's brought in past installations to the party pad, he brings now to the space of the college dorm room.

It is, if you think about it, an unusual space. Where else save a prison are hundreds of strangers brought together indiscriminately to share in such intimate domestic communion? They come, ideally if not always in practice, from all walks of life, all corners of the country and even the globe. They are young and newly independent, full of desires and ambitions and curiosities that have yet to be put to much practicable use. It is the liminal space between adolescence and adulthood, defined by the friction of contradiction therein. Most people probably *don't* think about it—on-campus life is a common rite of passage, but most would recall the room itself as a container, merely, for the stuff of that experience. It is this very aspect, however, that Durazo seizes upon: the room as a shell, a locus of the self, the impulses and aspirations of which are made manifest in those objects that are gathered to fill it.

It is a time of life, after all, in which objects (and particularly consumer objects) assume a position of uncommon significance, as totems of a still quite nascent identity. A pin-up poster of your favorite band—or an Impressionist painting, or the solar system, or dolphins, or Gandhi. A jacket you wear out to the club every weekend. A blanket you've had since you were a child. A bong. In *Sleep to Dream*, Durazo combines objects of his own with those belonging to the school, items of personal resonance with those bearing broader cultural connotations. Several items—macramé wall hangings, a replica of Huey P. Newton's peacock wicker chair, a psychedelic butterfly poster—refer to America's most explosive era of campus life, the late 1960s and early 1970s. A row of black mirrored Plexiglas bars—recognizable as the logo for the punk band Black Flag—alludes to a subsequent incarnation of cultural volatility, while spinning

colored lights and Technicolor faux fur point to the raves of the 1990s. In these arrangements of objects, Durazo seems to be implying, we construct not only our décor but ourselves.

Note, however, that none of these allusions—the Black Panthers, Black Flag, 60s psychedelia or 90s rave culture—are neutral in character. Each was a cultural incarnation conceived in a spirit of resistance. Though varying in their politics, each set itself brashly against a perceived status quo, marshalling the energy of youth toward a fundamentally utopic vision of community. Durazo is not equating the aims of the black power movement with those driving the consumption of ecstasy and dance music, but rather underscoring the degree to which both were built upon and utilized this crucial period of identity formation (youth) to envision liberatory alternatives to prevailing social structures. That the two *could* be equated on the level of interior decoration is an irony that Durazo chooses to encompass, not a truism he endeavors to endorse. As in past work relating to drug cultures, his interest lies less with the movements themselves than with the longings that drive individuals toward them—which is also to say, with the social conditions that precipitate such longings. The critique, subtle though it may seem at times, is essentially democratic, aligning itself with the willing participant—the student, the activist, the artist, the fan—against those forces that would seek to curtail expression and discovery.

In making of his installation a space for use, with bean bags for lounging and a sound system available to any willing iPod, Durazo invites Pitzer students to relax, take a load off—take a moment, perhaps, to appreciate the downtime that is a crucial element of the contemplative college experience—while reminding those of us who look upon the dorm room as a memory that the culture of youth is a living thing, an ever-evolving process. Like all of the artist's installations, *Sleep to Dream* is complete only when



occupied, and thus, as a work, it is endlessly variable. It is a messy strategy, in many respects; those who prefer their cultural commentary anesthetized and encapsulated—those hypothetical high-minded critics, perhaps, uneasy with black lights and metallic surfaces—will surely find room to quibble. But what of it? The party pad Durazo is continually reinventing wasn't conceived with them in mind.











## On Rebellion and Community: A Conversation with Martin Durazo and Ciara Ennis

**Ciara Ennis:** As evidenced by recent exhibitions, your painting—which has shifted in both scale and color palette—appears to be playing a more significant role in your practice. I am referring specifically to your *Points of Entry* exhibition (2013) at Luis De Jesus Los Angeles, which was dominated by large-scale abstractions—gestural works characterized by voluminous swatches of fluorescent paint. Can you discuss this recent development and how it relates to your previous practice, which was more object-based?

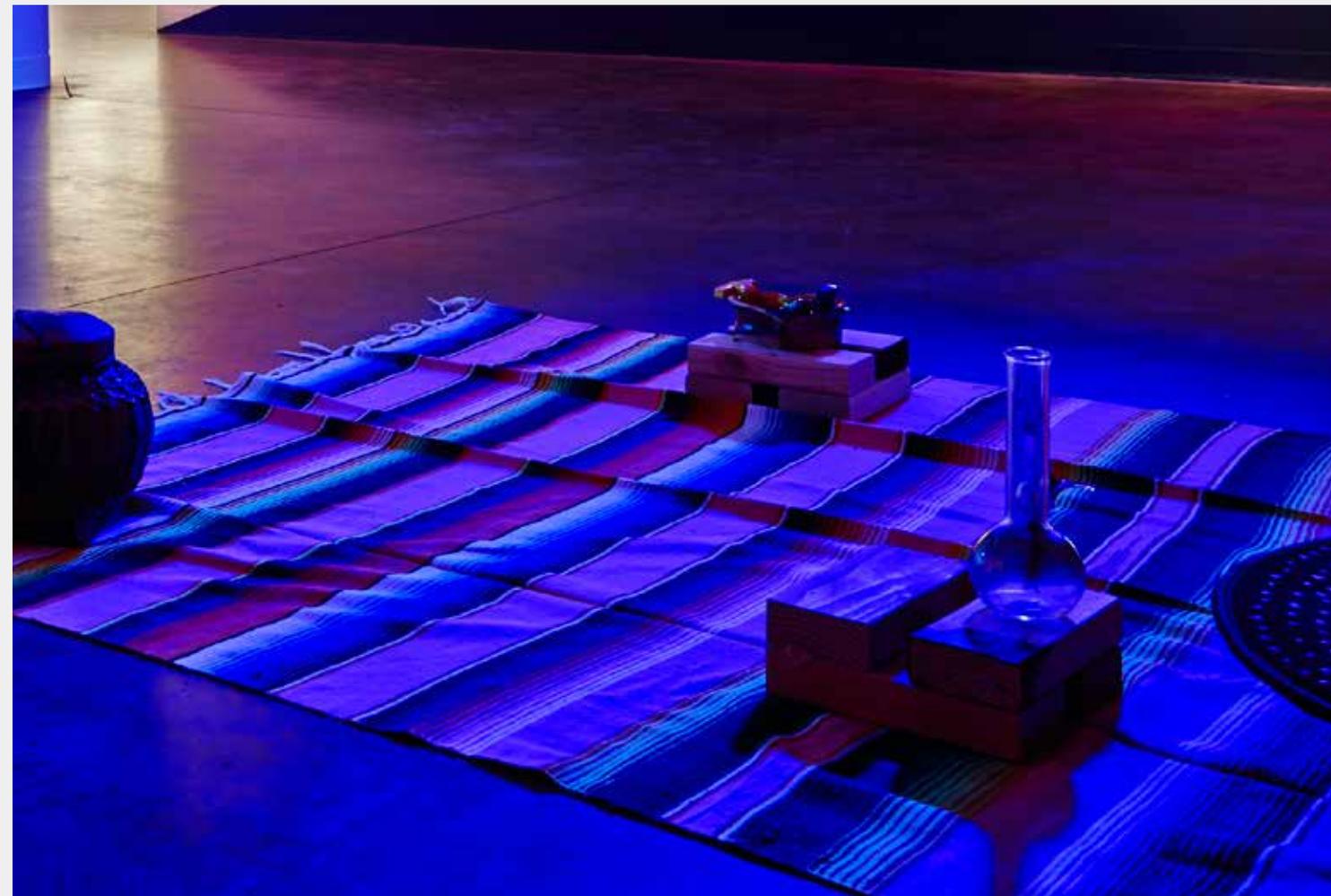
**Martin Durazo:** My paintings are a representation of light strobes that happen in nightclub environments. I use fluorescent colors to employ what Peter Halley described as the hyper-real. I find it fascinating that these colors are in vogue fashion-wise. I also feel that they have a relationship to punk and new wave music of the '70s and '80s, my coming-of-age years. In terms of my object-based practice I see these works as part of an even earlier painting practice that started during my time as a student abroad in London and my Pitzer and Scripps years. At that time I was influenced by neo-expressionism and artists like Schnabel and Basquiat. My practice moved into the object when I attended UCLA and was mentored by Halley, Paul McCarthy

and Jason Rhoades. I learned that I was already composing large blocks of color in my paintings and that translated into my choice of using charged objects. I believe that these influences still resonate in the current body of work. In terms of execution of these paintings, I use janitorial squeegees to spread the paint in a Zen-gardening fashion that has become what others have suggested is a sub-conscious performance.

**CE:** There seems to be a definite focus on class-consciousness in your work, which plays itself out in references to both popular and alternative cultures—movies, raves and leather bars—do you see your work in opposition to the rarefied space of the art world? And if so, how does your positionality impact your association with the elitist world of contemporary art?

**MD:** Let's start with my working class beginnings and work our way to now—a middle-class, middle-aged artist. I explore the aesthetics of accessible culture or let's just say popular culture that is layered with a darker intent. I look toward the object and its color, sound and texture, which elicit desire and provide comfort. I am interested in the collective willingness to collect possessions and experiences as part of Modern Capitalism. With art, I am able to reinvent a consciousness, develop a spirituality beyond a vacuous pleasure principle, as I see it, and perhaps it is my Aquarian nature that wants it both ways: an opposition to the rarefied space of the art world and a desire to present an embraceable polemic.

**CE:** As evidenced by a certain punk aesthetic, anarchist groups such as Dead Kennedys, Sex Pistols, Black Flag, Circle Jerks and the Jody Foster's Army appear to have been a major influence in your work,





which manifests on a thematic as well as formal level. Does the anti-authoritarian nature of the movement fuel your interest, or is it some other aspect that fascinates?

**MD:** It would be very easy to claim the anti-authoritarian nature of the punk movement as a motivation for my work, however if it does, it is not in a naïve, adolescent manner. It takes the form of questioning established norms and presenting an ulterior mental and physical space for viewers to lose themselves in and hoping that they end up discovering surprising revelations about themselves and their relation to art and beyond. What is evident throughout the development of the work is the influence of the punk movement's fashion and its use of the dilapidated, the S&M leatherwear, the DIY, the shocking color—all which are in vogue and present in today's youth culture. This allows me to continue to navigate and play

as an artist. I am able to cull artifacts and re-contextualize them to present environments that are simultaneously familiar and queer.

**CE:** In your current exhibition at Pitzer College, *Sleep to Dream*, you have created an idealized dorm room experience comprising multiple elements that allude to '60s radical politics—Huey Newton's peacock chair; '70s homespun craft; '80s punk; as well as late '60s copies of *Playboy* magazine—can you comment on how these disparate elements fit together and how they resonate or reflect with contemporary dorm culture?

**MD:** It was challenging to consider historical signifiers through the decades that frame the school's 50 years, so I thought in a stream-of-consciousness sort of way. I thought of objects like the *Playboy* magazines and how they used to inform sexuality the way that Internet searches do now, and the peacock chair reminded me of black identity in the gaze of non-blacks and the ongoing dearth of black students in higher learning. Additionally, the walls are painted black and white as a sublime symbolism of the inequity of class and race that continues to work toward improvement of its situation.

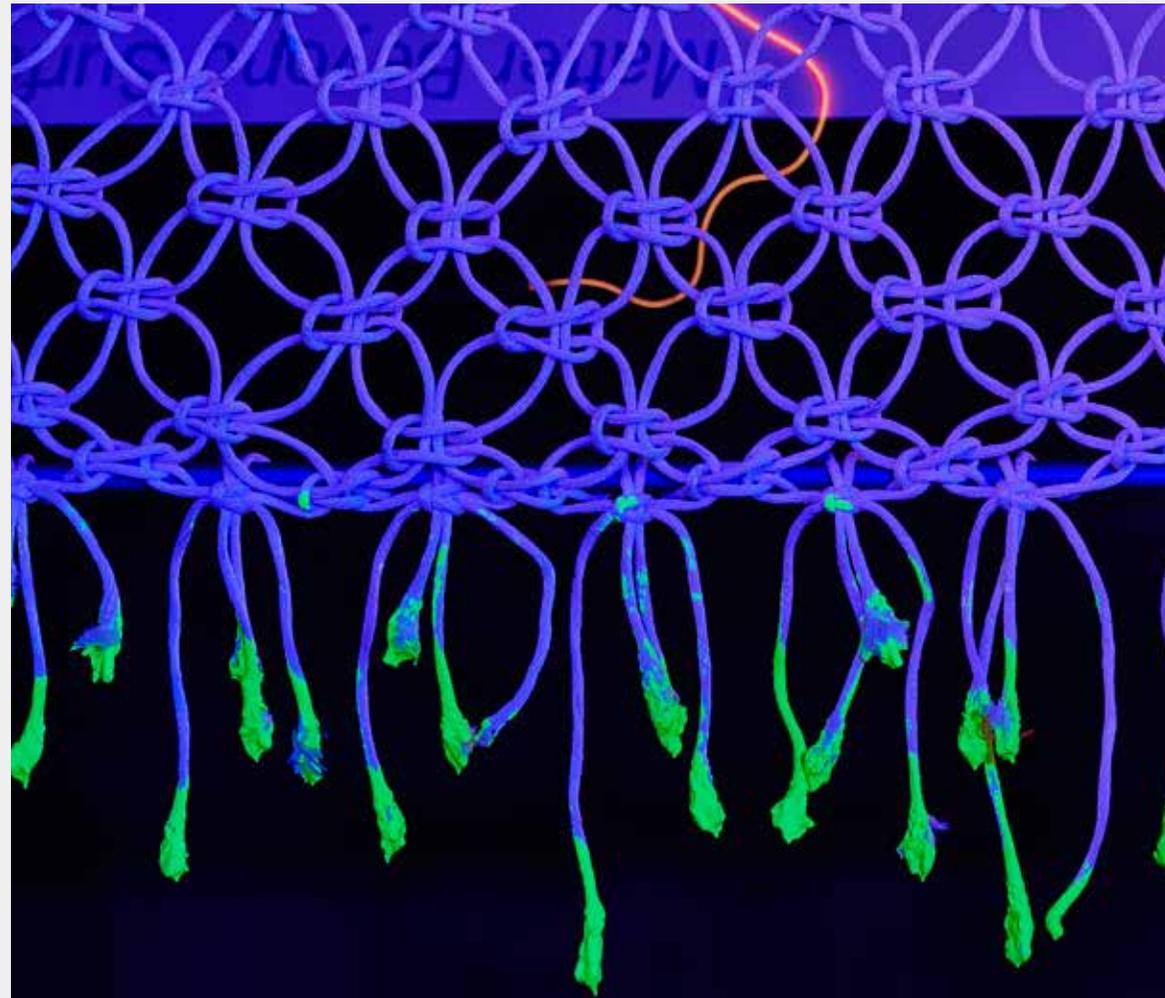




I also used a very sublime Black Flag symbol combined with macramé to operate as a secret code to those that appreciated the '80s punk movement. What is intentional is the layering of the present and the past with the use of macramé and the use of club lighting and neon Day-Glo, the thought was to create a historical push and pull of narratives.

**CE:** With *Sleep to Dream*, you have created a predominantly male hetero-normative space, which privileges a certain kind of interaction and response—is this a reflection of your own interests or a critique of male-dominated college culture? Either way, how do you expect non-heterosexuals to engage with the installation?

**MD:** I hope that non-heterosexual males and females will identify with the sculpture *Life on Mars*. With this piece I speak specifically about the club-like environments in which, as the work suggests, many students try to create an oasis in order to explore their sexuality, regardless of gender preference. The work is inspired by David Bowie's androgynous alter ego Ziggy Stardust, the texture, the reflection, with holes cut out of it, a reflection of an identity, developing one's identity, or that of a fragmented identity, during a coming-of-age stage.



**CE:** In addition to suggesting '70s vernacular décor how does your use of macramé—a highly feminine coded craft material—inform your conceptualization of the installation? Is this an attempt to inject a feminine space within a hyper-masculine environment, or a purely formal decision?

**MD:** It absolutely was a way to feminize the work and create a challenge to masculine overtures. I also conceived of the macramé to serve as a visual obstacle or layer to be contemplated as an acknowledgement of time gone by. I was looking to create multi-faceted nostalgia pieces as an ode to the history of this college. I also consider many women artists who have influenced my practice. Jessica Stockholder with her large colorful installations, Ann Hamilton and her austere and powerful performances, and more recently, the jarring work of Teresa Margolles all have played notes within my aesthetic musings. The atmosphere of *Sleep to Dream* may have its masculine movements through its overload of sensory devices but they are rooted in achieving masculine/feminine harmony.

**CE:** One component of your installation features a macramé hanging/screen suspended in front of black mirrors—an abstract reference to Black Flag. This results in the clash of two ideological movements—one hippy, the other anarchist. What is your intention behind this juxtaposition?

**MD:** I'm suggesting that in looking back upon my personal narrative as a student and punk rocker with an affinity for rebellion I came to realize that the hippy and the anarchist share the same ideology. Free love and peace are very radical ideas in the face of the human penchant for violence and selfishness. Moreover, the agitated music and slam dancing that was the major identifier for Black Flag and others like them were just youth culture's reflection of a then very violent society. The reverie did have an agenda much like the hippy movement did 20 years prior.

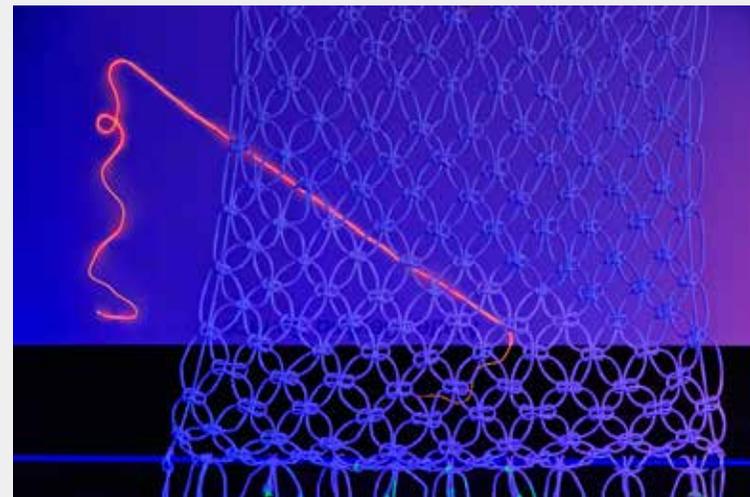
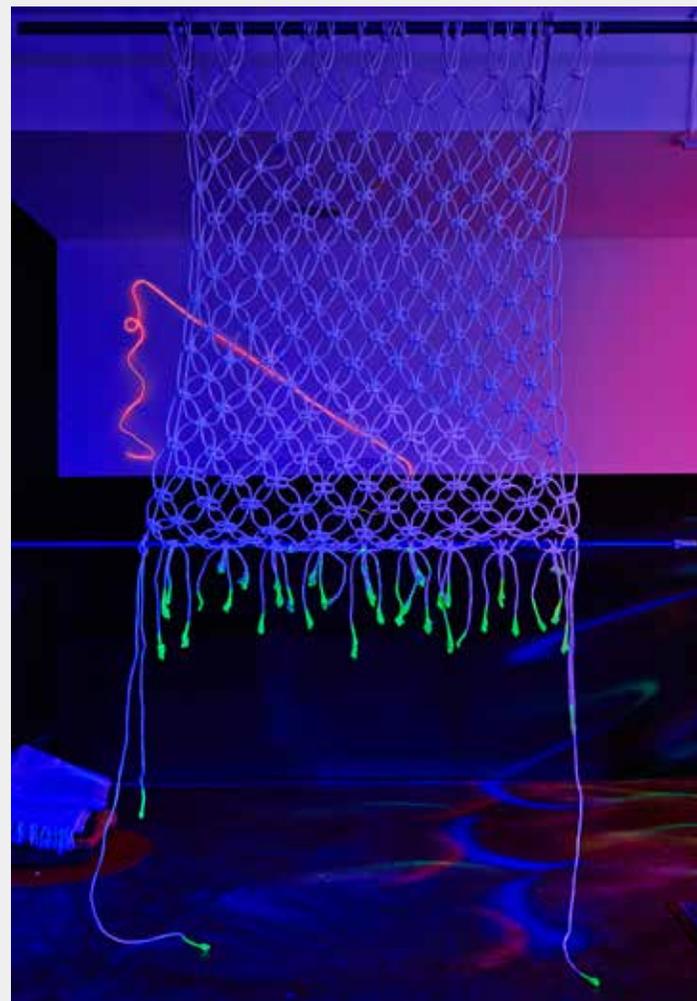
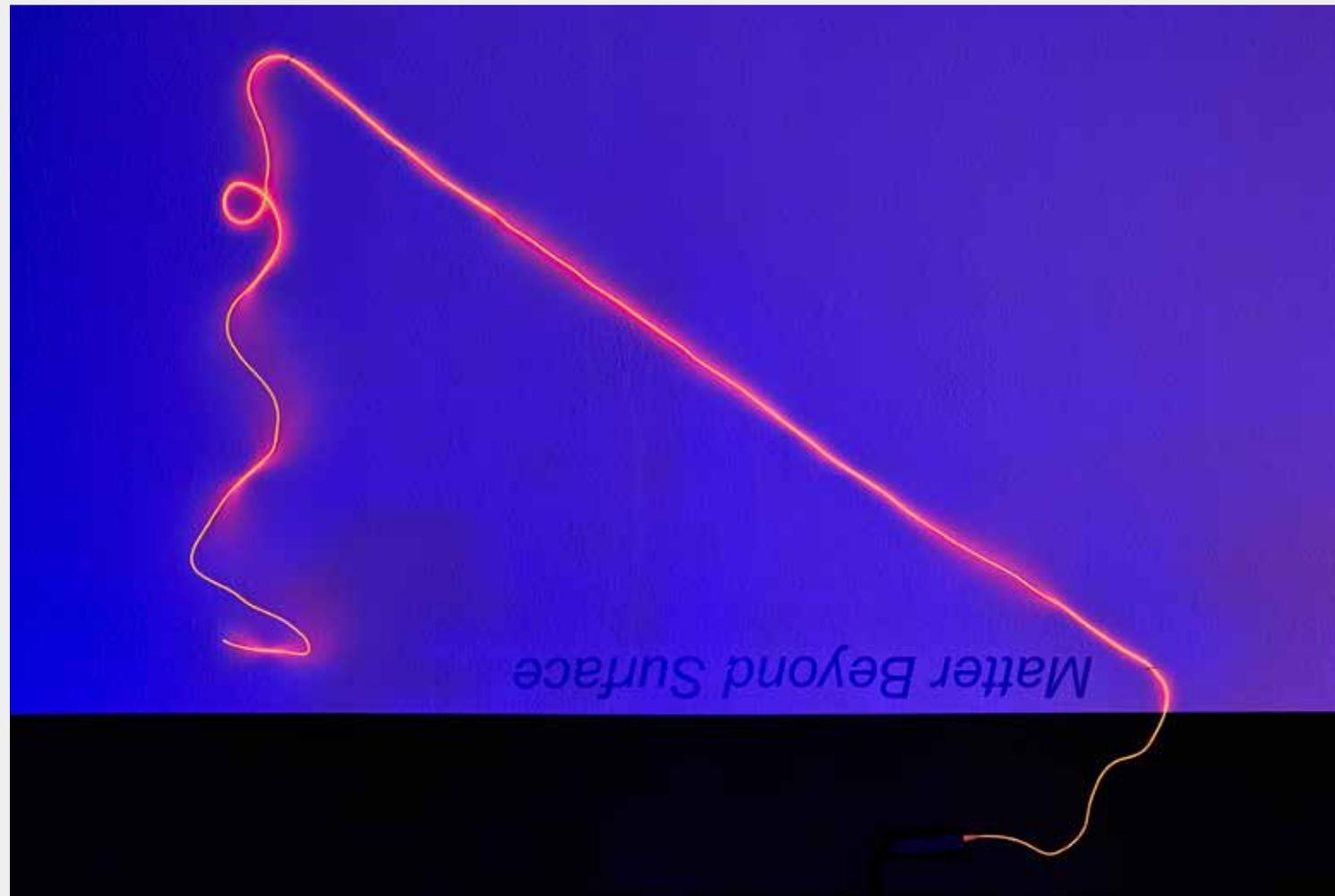
I think that this work served as the linchpin for the show in that it was my identity when I came here as a punk in a school that still holds onto its hippy-Grateful Dead-loving identity. I came to feel very good with that dynamic and I still do today.

**CE:** Adorned with beanbags and yoga mats in addition to a loft-like sleeping space, *Sleep to Dream*, like other installations that you've created, demands active engagement with the viewer. In addition to physically inhabiting the environment and identifying with the dorm-room aesthetic, what other experiences are you hoping a viewer might have?



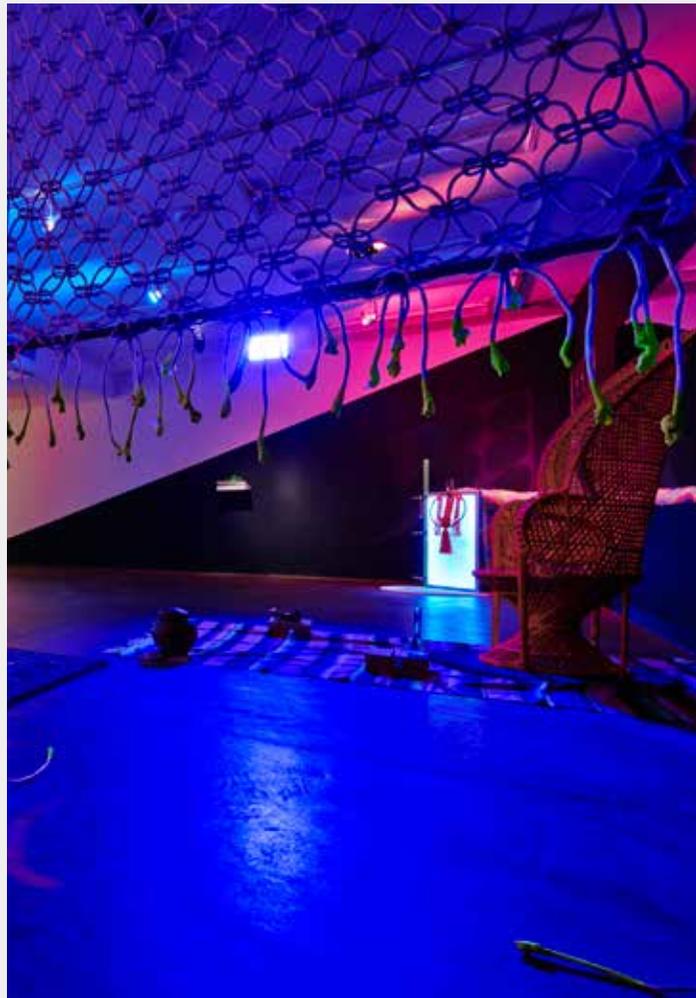


**MD:** The word that comes to mind is comfort. Often the dynamic that exists when viewing art in a gallery situation is of the viewer looking at work on a wall or on a pedestal. I create environments that envelop the viewer by turning them into participants. By using said elements, viewers/participants are welcome to touch, relax and engage. My use of yoga paraphernalia is a device to suggest that experience should be a move toward the spiritual, one of healing and rejuvenation.













## Artist Biography

Martin Durazo '90 is an artist whose work explores a palimpsest of social distortion shaped by intoxicating forces of the extreme and the expression of personal fulfillment from dangerous excesses and an alternative spirituality. Presented with sleek modernist design elements, Durazo's work explores the intersecting aesthetics of punk rock, metal and electronic music, hippy and new-age shamanism, sexuality, narco-drug trafficking paraphernalia and Mayan iconography. The deeply layered content of Durazo's art culminates in the form of large-scale installations that employ reflective surfaces, ready-made objects, painting, sound, lighting and performance that engage sensory perception, entertain, perplex and implicate the viewer.

Durazo holds a Master of Fine Arts from the University of California, Los Angeles, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Art from Pitzer College. He has exhibited at Luis De Jesus Los Angeles, Mark Moore Gallery, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, CB1 Gallery, Torrance Art Museum, Pomona College Museum of Art, Harris Art Gallery at the University of La Verne, as well as White Box, New York City;

Galería MDF, Mexico City; Gallery Lara, Tokyo; ArtForum Berlin, Art Basel Miami Beach and VOLTA Basel, Switzerland. His work has been written about in *Flash Art International*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *LA Weekly*, *Art Ltd*, *Artweek* and *Art Review*.

Durazo was awarded the 2012 COLA Individual Artist's Fellowship from the City of Los Angeles, 2011 California Community Foundation Fellowship Award, funded by the Getty Trust, and was an artist-in-residence at the 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica in 2010. Most recently, Durazo was commissioned to create original images for the Los Angeles Metro Transit Authority for the El Monte Metro station.

While pursuing his master's degree at UCLA, Durazo established and co-directed Miller-Durazo Contemporary Artists Projects (an artist-run initiative) producing numerous solo, group and curated exhibitions.

Martin Durazo currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

## Contributing Writer and Curator Biographies

**Holly Myers** is a writer, critic and sometimes curator based in New Mexico. Her art writing and criticism has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *LA Weekly*, *The New York Times*, *Art + Auction* and *Modern Painters*, among other publications. Her fiction has appeared in *Zyzzyyva* and *Joyland*. She is the founder and co-editor of *Rabble*, an imprint of Insert Blanc Press that aims to foster and promote innovative critical writing. She is currently at work on a book exploring the concept of value in art.

**Ciara Ennis** has been director/curator of Pitzer College Art Galleries for the past six years. During that time she has curated a number of exhibitions including: *Capitalism in Question*, co-curated with Daniel Joseph Martinez (2010); *Euan MacDonald: Kimball* (2011), *Synthetic Ritual*, co-curated with Gabi Scardi (2011); *Liz Glynn: No Second Troy* (2012); *Charles Gaines: In the Shadow of Numbers* (2012); and *Andrea Bowers: #sweetjane* (2014). Ennis' curatorial practice explores identity, narrative and representation through a socio-politically inflected lens that focuses on the intersection of art, politics and activism. She received her MA in curating contemporary art from the Royal College of Art, London.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my very great appreciation to Ciara Ennis for giving me the opportunity to create this exhibition. I would also like to thank President Trombley for her support of superb gallery programming. I am particularly grateful to Cheukwa Jones and Angelica Perez for their support and help. I would like to offer my special thanks to Claudia Huiza, Vanessa and Brenda Reyes, Ben Goren '90, and to Luis De Jesus and Jay Wingate for their continued support.

Lastly, I would like to thank the entire Pitzer Community for providing me with a wonderful educational experience and now a fantastic place to be an alumnus. I wish for another 50 great years and beyond.

— Martin Durazo '90

Pitzer College Art Galleries would like to thank the following individuals for their generous support:

Laurie Babcock

Stephanie Estrada

Mark Bailey

Holly Myers

Max King Cap

Joyce Ostin

Anna Chang

Scott Phillips

Joseph Dickson

Muriel Poston

Stacy Elliott

Susan Warmbrunn

# SLEEP TO DREAM

50  
FORWARD  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

 PITZER  
COLLEGE  
A MEMBER OF THE CLAREMONT COLLEGES



Pitzer College Art Galleries  
Tel: 909.607.8797  
[www.pitzer.edu/galleries](http://www.pitzer.edu/galleries)