

# de Saisset



## *Maya Gurantz: The Plague Archives* January 28 – June 14, 2025

**January 07, 2025, Santa Clara, CA.** – Santa Clara University's [de Saisset Museum](#) is pleased to announce, *Maya Gurantz: The Plague Archives*, a site-specific installation presenting a multi-layered discourse on the shifting attitudes and definitions of disease, predominantly spanning the tenth through the twenty-first century, opening January 28, 2025.

*“The Plague Archive began as a quarantine sanity project,”* states Gurantz. *“In the first weeks of lockdown in 2020, I began [posting to Instagram](#) one image from the history of epidemics and outbreaks every day. Diving into the past as our present was unfolding anchored me in how our so-called “unprecedented” COVID moment was profoundly preceded.”*

Visually connected by Gurantz’s massive wall drawings, the exhibition installation is organized into thematic sections (including maps, public service announcements, charms and magic, and historical amnesia), and features three videos, an expansive collection of archival material sourced from film, science, religious, and museum databases on the social, cultural, and political histories of epidemics and outbreaks, as well as an interactive *Tracing Board*, which by dissolving visitors’ markings immediately underscores a historical tendency for collective amnesia—as witnessed by the AIDS crisis, and more recently, the post COVID condition.

Exhibited across the museum gallery in an associative manner, both the archive of images and its installation encourage a non-linear reading of the subject of disease and its (mis)representation across

different historical eras. According the Gurantz, “The viewer walks into an immersive Wunderkammer of malady to experience how people in circumstances of mass illness have negotiated their fear and suffering—their political, economic, and spiritual realities—their class and racial bigotries.”

Defined as experimental “lecture-performances,” the featured videos weave connections between disparate narratives associated with plague histories that reference materials from Gurantz’s growing archive of ephemera exploring disease through multiple intersecting lenses—scientific, cultural, social, and political. By linking these narratives, Gurantz emphasizes how recent this history is and how fragile our understanding is of disease.

First presented in 2023 at Pitzer Art Galleries, Gurantz’s *Great Men and Sheep*, examines French microbiologist Louis Pasteur, renowned for his breakthrough discoveries on vaccines and pasteurization, in relation to his experiments on sheep. Incorporating visual and textual information spanning a century, the video links various elements in connection with Pasteur: a conspiracy theory conflating vaccine fears with sex; patriarchy and the fiction of male genius; shifting notions of appropriate animal-human relations; and the mythical roots of Jesus as the “good pastor.”

Alternatively, *The Plague Roots of Hate* maps the relationship between pandemics and racism across multiple locales. These include the bubonic plague of 1901, and the creation of the first South African townships, which later became a model for the apartheid state. Other aspects of the video examine early twentieth-century typhus outbreaks resulting in humiliating and unnecessary disinfections forced upon Mexican workers in El Paso, which triggered the Bath House Riots of 1919. These mass decontaminations served as inspiration for Nazi doctors in concentration camps during the Holocaust.

The third video, *Germes and Cinema*, maps the period in which Germ Theory of Disease emerged alongside the birth of film at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Early representations of germs and disease on film have in part constructed our understanding of what germs look like. These images continue to influence how we visualize and comprehend disease transmission, the inside of our bodies, medical authority, as well as public health.

Additionally, *The Sounds of Syphilis* is an interactive work manifesting as a listening station comprising four turntables and a selection of vinyl records that viewers can play. These albums include recordings by composers such as Franz Schubert (1797-1828), Gaetano Donizetti (1798-1848), and Harry Partch (1901-1974), all of whom contracted tertiary neurosyphilis during their lifetimes, a disease that altered the nature of their later compositions.

*The Plague Archives* represents the second in a cycle of new contemporary exhibitions at the museum that support artists with research-based and interdisciplinary practices, to provide a critical and compelling lens through which to examine pressing concerns. The museum’s new contemporary exhibitions are part of the institution-wide *Museum in Progress* initiative launched in Fall 2024, which reimagines the museum as a fluid model that responds and adapts to changing ideas, contexts, and challenges that shape our world. Notes de Saisset Museum Director, Dr. Ciara Ennis, “the artists in our contemporary program privilege the experiential through visually exciting and provocative projects that challenge accepted norms while promoting pleasure and wonderment.”

*The Plague Archives* is curated by Dr. Ciara Ennis, Director, de Saisset Museum. The exhibition was originally staged at Pitzer College Art Galleries, Pitzer College (January 28 - March 25, 2023) and has been expanded for the de Saisset Museum iteration.

**Opening Reception:** Thursday, January 30, 2025 from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Brief remarks and walk-through with Gurantz and Ennis starting at 4:30 p.m.

In addition to a robust series of workshops, lectures, and tours for Santa Clara University students, the public will be invited in several programs throughout the course of the exhibition (details to be released in early 2025).

###

**For more information, images, and interviews, contact:**

Lauren Baines, Assistant Director  
[lbaines@scu.edu](mailto:lbaines@scu.edu) or 408.554.2741

**de Saisset Permanent Exhibition: *California Stories from Thámien to Santa Clara***

The ongoing permanent exhibition *California Stories from Thámien to Santa Clara* traces aspects of Ohlone heritage and Mission period history. The Ohlone aspect of the permanent exhibition was reimagined and revised in 2020, in collaboration with the Ohlone community. Although permanent, this exhibition is in a state of continual revision as we address, with our Ohlone partners, appropriate ways to interpret absent and erased histories.

**About The de Saisset Museum**

[The de Saisset Museum](#) provides ambitious and groundbreaking exhibitions and educational programming to our diverse publics on and off campus that are timely and multifaceted in nature. We foreground projects that highlight the varied realities lived by our diverse community of practitioners and support [Santa Clara University's](#) goal of educating the whole person through interdisciplinary collaborations and partnerships. Our work is experimental; we function as a test-site for new ideas, methodologies, and practices and aspire to be in a constant state of evolution. We are governed by a code of ethics that foreground diversity, equity, and inclusivity, which is reflected in all that we do.

de Saisset Museum

[SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY](#)

500 El Camino Real  
Santa Clara, CA 95053

**Artist Bio**

Maya Gurantz's interdisciplinary research-based practice incorporates dance, video, performance, text, installation, and community-generated projects, which she uses to examine constructions of race, gender, and class in relation to shared myths, public rituals, and private desires. Her work interrogates social imaginaries of American culture and how constructions of gender, race, class and progress operate in our shared myths, public rituals and private desires.

Gurantz's solo shows include, LA Artcore (as the [inaugural recipient of Prospect Art's PRESENT WORK](#) award), [Pitzer College Art Gallery](#), [Catharine Clark Gallery](#)'s Box Blur Commission, collaborative with Ellen Sebastian Chang and Sunhui Chang, [Grand Central Art Center](#), commissioned and curated by John Spiak with support from the Andy Warhol Foundation, and [MCA Denver](#). Her work has been included in Group shows at [HomeLA](#), MoCA Utah, LAND (Nomadic Division), Art Center College of Design, Navel LA, Angels Gate Cultural Center, OMCA, [High Desert Test Sites](#), Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall, Autonomie Gallery, and Movement Research at Judson Church, among others.

Gurantz's films have been Official Selections at the Ann Arbor Film Festival (Leon Speakers Award, Best Sound Design; selected for 62nd Annual Ann Arbor Film Fest Traveling Tour), Arthouse Film Festival (Eisenstein Award, Best Editing), Athens International Film and Video Festival, the New Renaissance Film Festival in London (Nominee, Best Art Film), the Austin Dance on Film Festival, OnArt in Warsaw, San Francisco Dance Film Festival, and InShadow in Lisbon, among others. As well, her writing has been published in Contemporary Art Review LA (CARLA), *The LA Review of Books* (where her essay, [Kompromat](#), was their most read of 2019), *This American Life*, *Notes on Looking*, *The Frame at KPCC*, *ACID-FREE*, *The Awl*, *InDance Magazine*, *Theater Magazine*, and an anthology, *CRuDE*, published by the École Nationale Supérieure d'Art, Bourges. She also co-translated two novels by Israeli writer David Grossman, *Be My Knife* and *Someone to Run With*, for Farrar Straus & Giroux. Gurantz co-hosts the weekly culture and politics podcast, [The Sauce](#).

[Social practice](#) has been integral to Gurantz's work since 2001. Notably, [Hole in Space \(Oakland Redux\)](#), commissioned by The Great Wall of Oakland in collaboration with Ellen Sebastian Chang, was recognized as the "Best Public Art Installation" in the Bay Area. For [the Field Experiment Atlanta](#) 2016, Gurantz was commissioned to make new sound and video installations exploring Atlanta's charged racial history. In 2016, she was also awarded the Media Design Practices Summer Research Residency at Art Center with interaction designer Elizabeth Goodman for [Gunworlds](#), mapping the intractable world of the gun debate.

Gurantz was the recipient of the Simons Humanities Fellowship from the University of Kansas, a Los Angeles Performance Project R+D Grant, the inaugural recipient of the Pieter Performance Grant for Dancemakers, and a recipient of the 2023 Hambidge Artist Center Residency (NEA Distinguished Artist Fellow) and the 2020 Artist Residency at the McColl Center for Art and Innovation. Additionally, she has received funding, awards, and recognition from the Andy Warhol Foundation, the NEA, the Institute of Cultural Inquiry, Contemporary Collectors, the Center for Cultural Innovation, the Fleishhacker Foundation, the Zellerbach Family Foundation, Theater Bay Area, the Puffin Foundation, and the Bay Area Critics Circle. Gurantz teaches art at the university level, and has taught graduate critique, undergraduate honors critique, video and performance at UC Santa Barbara, ArtCenter College of Design, and UC Irvine, among others. She has a B.A. from Yale and an M.F.A. in Studio Art from UC Irvine.