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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Marooned

RISD MFA Painting 2026

Curated by Ajay Kurian

Lloyd-Princeton Cangé, Callie Coccia, Isabel Horgan, Siran Liu, Kati Lowe, Lucy Luckovich, Banshee Maria, Shiyeon Monk, Pavol Roskovensky, Talha Shams, Ricky Vasan

July 10 – August 28, 2026

Opening Reception: Friday, July 10, 6–8pm

There is a moment, familiar to anyone who has tried to move through something that matters too much, when the ground beneath you becomes a trap. Not because you can't see it, but because you are so entirely *of* it — so shaped by its weight, history, and demand — that its other possibilities become almost impossible to apprehend. The ground is all you know how to stand on, which means it is also all you know how to imagine. This is not a private problem. Many of us are living inside systems that were never designed to sustain us, inside structures that absorb our energy and return very little, inside a loneliness and alienation that does not diminish with time but accumulates. The feeling of being left behind — not by accident but by design — is one of the defining emotional facts of this moment. It is the ground these artists are standing on.

To be marooned is to be abandoned — set ashore on some inhospitable coast and left there. In its common usage it is simply that: stuck, stranded, cut off. It is punishment. It is exile. And yet the word carries within it another history, one that marronage reclaims: the enslaved people of the Americas and Caribbean who fled into the mountains, the swamps, the unreachable interior, and built sovereign communities there. They did not simply escape. They disappeared in order to return — to raid, to rescue, to resist. The leaving was tactical. The return was the point.

It would be too easy — and not entirely honest — to carry this history directly into an art exhibition without acknowledging what gets lost in the translation. The Maroons were not developing a “practice”. They were surviving one of the most sustained and brutal systems of human domination ever organized. The stakes were not aesthetic. To invoke their strategy in a curatorial context is to risk a kind of extraction: taking the elegance of the idea while setting down the weight it carries.

And yet the reach for this lineage is not arbitrary or innocent, and perhaps that is exactly why it is worth examining here. These are young artists making work inside a present that is, for many of them, genuinely dire — politically, ecologically, personally. The question of how to remain in full contact with a reality that threatens to consume you, how to find the distance necessary to return to it with greater force, and clarity, and life, is not an aesthetic question. Or

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it is not only that. The Maroons knew something about what it means to leave not as defeat but as strategy, to build in the interior what cannot yet exist in the open.

Marooned is a show that inherits that knowledge imperfectly, partially, and with full awareness of the debt.

It is also worth saying plainly that a thesis show is an imperfect vehicle. The conceit of any MFA group exhibition — finding a curatorial frame large enough to hold everyone — is always too heavy a blanket: it cradles some work and compresses others. The alignments here are real but they are not total, and the artists in this show are not illustrations of a thesis. They are individuals whose practices happen to share certain dispositions — toward withdrawal as method, toward the strategic use of distance — and the frame is offered in that spirit, as an opening rather than a conclusion.

The artists gathered here have each developed practices of strategic withdrawal. Sometimes this means moving through film and media, using the remove of the screen to return to the real with a sharpened eye. Sometimes it means stepping outside a self too burdened by a situation to move freely through it, inhabiting the many positions a political reality actually contains. Sometimes the departure is from pain itself — not as avoidance, but as the only route back to its source with anything useful in hand. In each case the work refuses the idea that rigor requires unbroken proximity. To leave wisely is its own form of commitment.

I'm grateful for the time I've gotten to spend with this cohort of RISD painting MFA students, and appreciate the conversations, kindnesses, and their intention to show up for one another time and again.

— Ajay Kurian

Image: Siran Liu, *Horizon Patience*, 2026, oil, acrylic, colored pastel on canvas, 30 x 24 in (76.2 x 61 cm)

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