



10 MOSS  
ARTS  
CENTER  
10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SEASON

**VT** VIRGINIA  
TECH.

## NO-NO BOY

Thursday, February 1, 2024, 7:30 PM

Cube

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# NO-NO BOY

Programmed by guest curator Shirlette Ammons

Program to be announced from the stage.

Co-sponsored by the APIDA+ Center,  
Ati: Wa:oki Indigenous Community Center, and the  
U.S. Department of Education AANAPISI Program

*This is the first performance by No-No Boy  
at the Moss Arts Center.*



## *THE SOUND, HISTORIES, AND PROPHECIES OF NO-NO BOY*

While guest curating two seasons of Moss Arts Center performances, I had the privilege of deeply engaging Virginia Tech students and faculty. The conversations and advice they offered proved formative to the serious process of selecting artists whose work reflects the campus landscape and expands our collective musical palette.

I was introduced to the multisphered performance of Julian Saporiti's No-No Boy project on a visit to Nina Ha's office in the APIDA+ Center at Virginia Tech one afternoon. She and I had been making efforts to bring an APIDA+ artist as part of my Moss Arts Center curatorship since our initial meeting a semester prior. On this day, our efforts converged. Dr. Nina says, "I learned about No-No Boy when attending a live performance at Boston's Pao Arts Center in 2018. The songs and storytelling were so haunting and memorable that I knew when I became director of the APIDA+ Center, I wanted to invite Julian Saporiti

to showcase his amazing talents at Virginia Tech. Thus, I'm really excited to collaborate with the Moss Arts Center and the ICC [Indigenous Community Center] to have No-No Boy interact and engage with the Virginia Tech community because of its social justice mission, community engagement practices, and educational philosophies."

On that afternoon, Dr. Nina told me that the term "no no boys" was a nickname given to Japanese American men during World War II who answered back-to-back interrogations of their American allegiance with consecutive "no's" on a loyalty questionnaire. Saporiti once said in an interview, "Music was the way I needed to tell this story ... I also looked to my own Vietnamese War-torn history and other stories of Asian American experience."

Saporiti's artistry brilliantly expresses his ethnomusicological proclivities as folk, Americana, and indie rock sensibilities to exalt lesser-known narratives of the Asian diaspora. To showcase his musical polymath as part of my final season as Moss Arts Center inaugural guest curator is an immeasurable honor and a worthy epilogue.

— *Guest Curator Shirlette Ammons*



# BIOGRAPHY

## JULIAN SAPORITI

Sounds contain histories and prophecies. If you listen closely, there are winding tales to be found in a string brushed by a handmade bow, worlds to be uncovered in the trill of a bird about to take flight, and truths to be reckoned within the grain of an unknown voice. This is the revelation at the core of *Empire Electric*, the third album by No-No Boy, and its songs that examine narratives of imperialism, identity, and spirituality. It tells stories rooted in years of research and relationship-building, made vibrant and profound through a rich congregation of instrumental, environmental, and electronically manipulated sounds from Asia and America. Every single sound, from the gracious swell of a pedal steel to the warbling pluck of a *koto*, becomes a part of the poetic recasting of shared post-colonial trauma and the startling joys that can be wrung out of that hardship.

Storytelling has always been at the root of Julian Saporiti's music as No-No Boy. The project developed as the central component

of Saporiti's Ph.D. at Brown University, drawing on years of fieldwork and research on Asian American history to write folk songs with uncommon empathy and remarkable protagonists: prisoners at Japanese American internment camps who started a jazz band, Vietnamese musicians turned on to rock 'n' roll by American troops, a Cambodian American painter who painted only the most beautiful landscapes of his war-torn home. Along the way he started to draw on his own family's history, including his mother's escape from Vietnam during the war. His 2021 album, *1975*, was called "a remarkably powerful and moving album," by *Folk Alley* and "gentle, catchy and accessible folk songs that feel instantly familiar," by NPR — a contrast that gets to the heart of Saporiti's songwriting.

After the completion of his Ph.D. and the release of *1975*, Saporiti found himself at an impasse. "My thinking had gotten incredibly deep," he says, "as deep as we can train ourselves to get, really. But it was so narrow. I was working on the belief that there was one very small path to walk down, and I had to take every footstep in that direction." Seeking refuge from a bleak future of academic posturing, Saporiti, along with his wife and collaborator, Emilia Halvorsen Saporiti, decamped to Blue Cliff, a monastery in New York state founded by celebrated Vietnamese Buddhist teacher and writer Thích Nhất Hạnh. There, they recalibrated. Sitting and breathing opened up a calm space for Saporiti to begin to reapproach many of the stories he'd collected as a part of his research with a new perspective, one rooted in raw honesty and a rejection of perfectionism. "The calcified mask of the intellectual professional began to crack open," he writes in *Empire Electric's* liner notes.

*Little Monk*, which Saporiti describes as the heart of *Empire Electric*, is a rare autobiographical song that reflects on the process of opening up that began at Blue Cliff. "Tend your garden, do not harden, at

# BIOGRAPHY, cont.

the cruel and constant spinning of your mind's demands," he sings with a collected exuberance over a nearly baroque arrangement of guitars and strings. He embraces difficulty and contradiction, observing the similarities between raging protests on the street and the screaming of the discontented inner child. To feel calm in the face of injustice complicates the narrative, but it is a mindset that can lead to deeper understanding.

When the mind slows down, the world of sound opens up. *Mekong Baby* was written and recorded almost entirely on a sampler while Saporiti sat in Tryon Creek State Park in his new home of Oregon, taking the sounds of nature and transforming them into a prismatic soundscape of wind rustles, chirps and syrup-slow bird songs, and gentle drum machine. He's joined by the Vietnamese singer Thái Hiền, the daughter of ethnomusicologist and Folkways Records compiler Phạm Duy, their voices blending into a pan-Pacific chorus of yearning, Saporiti's birdsong overlaid with field recordings from the war. Though the destruction and heartbreak of the past is only hinted at in the lyrics, its sound sits just underneath it all, barely perceptible.

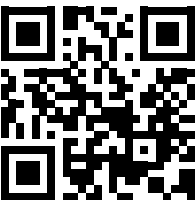
Saporiti talks about these techniques as "bridging space" between Asia and America, creating a sonic manifestation of the places lost to conflict and geopolitical fuckery. "I'm sampling instruments from a place that is very difficult, or impossible, to get back to," he says. "If you're born into one of these families like I am, your mom's country doesn't exist anymore, or its name has changed. The country she was born in was French Indochina, and then South Vietnam. How do you find that place that only exists in the past?" If you're Saporiti, you take an instrument native to that place, in the case of the song *Nothing Left But You*, the monochordal đàn bầu, and you sample it, layering until it becomes a wobbling organ drone: a foundation to sing the place back into life, if only for a few minutes.



These deceptively meaningful details are scattered all over *Empire Electric*. The opening theme of *The Onion Kings of Ontario!*, which tells the story of survivors of the Heart Mountain Japanese American detention camp as they start an onion farm in Oregon, was created by throwing samples of *koto* and *shakuhachi* into reverse. Saporiti notes that even the “American” instruments here have histories to consider; the electric pedal-steel guitar that underpins country music has its origins in the East-West melting pot of Hawaii, and the tom-toms that anchor the drum kit that were originally called the “Chinese tom-toms.”

*Empire Electric* is abundant with substantive storytelling. Saporiti’s knack for melody and the directness with which he sings make the picture whole. Without pretension and preachiness, listeners are drawn into the world of real people and their struggles, while also being uplifted by melodies that tug the heart and ears in several directions at once. With the sincerity of a folk singer and a master producer’s ear for minutia, Saporiti probes the edges of pain for joy, using history and its remembered landscapes as a way to understand the ground on which we now stand. Sings the little monk, “Pro-tip for a good heart, be where your feet are now.”

## TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!



We’d love your feedback on this performance. If you complete the short survey, you can enter for a chance to win two tickets to Sō Percussion with Caroline Shaw and special guest Shodekeh on Wednesday, March 20, 2024. [bit.ly/no-no-boy-feedback](https://bit.ly/no-no-boy-feedback)

# ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30-THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2024**

## **UNIVERSITY EVENTS**

Spanning class visits, community dialogues, and small-scale performances, members of No-No Boy participated in four programs with Virginia Tech students, hosted by the Department of English, School of Performing Arts, APIDA + and Ati: Wa:oki Indigenous Community Centers, and Creativity and Innovation District Living-Learning Programs.

*Special thanks to APIDA + Center, Ati: Wa:oki Indigenous Community Center, U.S. Dept. of Education AANAPISI Program, Creativity and Innovation District Living-Learning Programs, Kevin Ayoub, Christopher Campo-Bowen, Gena Chandler-Smith, Kayley Carter, Melissa Faircloth, Nina Ha, Audrey Reeves, Jessica Taylor, and Sophia Terazawa*

## GO DEEPER

How would you describe the interplay among the projected archival images, lyrics, and folk music styles in No-No Boy's program? How does this mix of media impact your knowledge and feelings about the historical topics in the trio's songs?



# GIVING DAY

VIRGINIA TECH

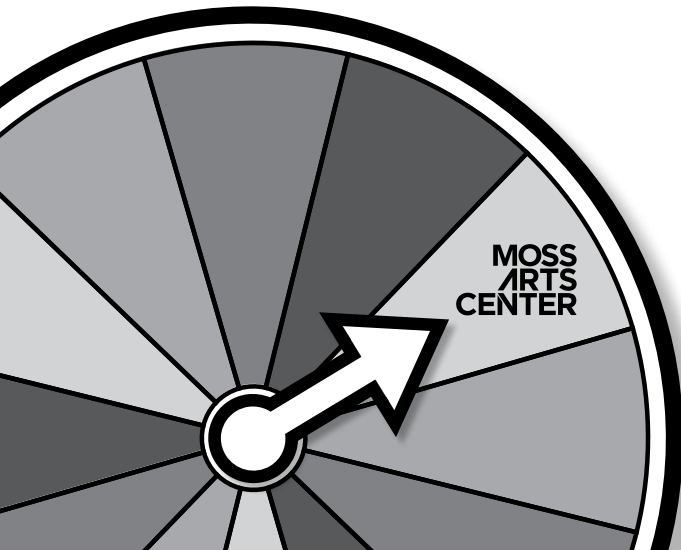
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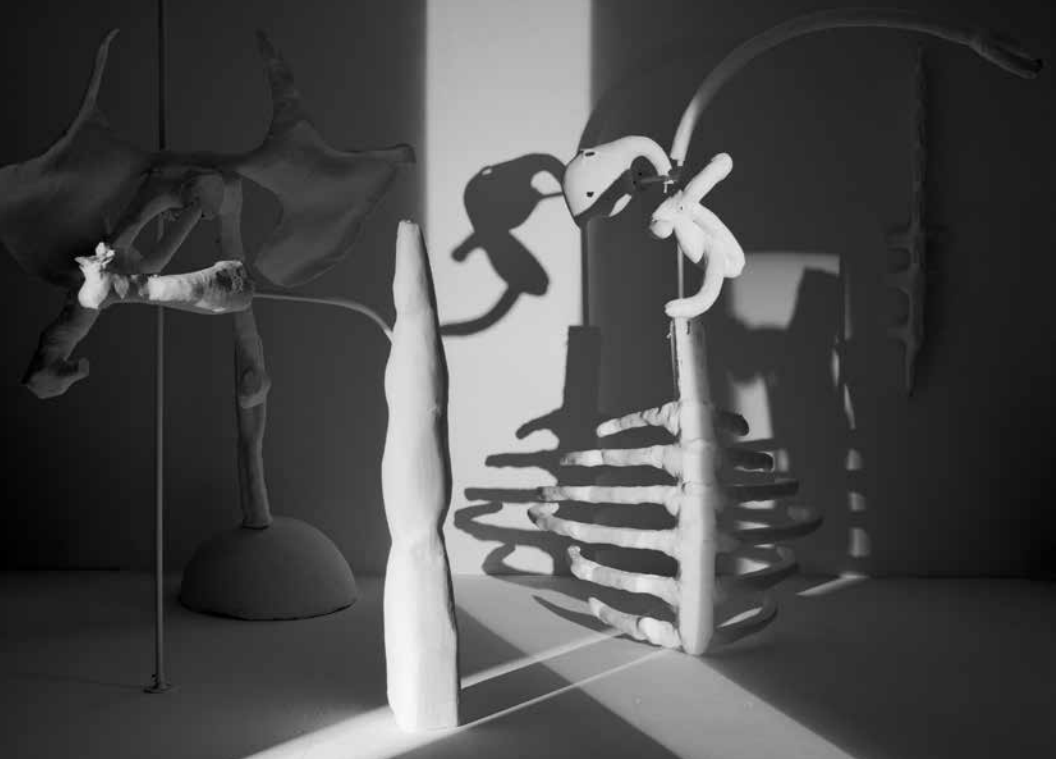
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[artscenter.vt.edu](https://artscenter.vt.edu)

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# IN THE GALLERIES

THROUGH SATURDAY, APRIL 20

**ARTIST TALK:**

Friday, February 2, 11 AM

Cube

Free

## **Messengers**

**Leslie Hewitt | Tarrah Krajnak | Rodrigo Valenzuela**

All galleries

*Messengers* explores the use of photography to communicate — not only through visual aesthetics, but to transmit more profound personal, cultural, and societal messages. Photography acts as a conduit for the artists' hybrid interdisciplinary approaches, enabling them to convey rich and multifaceted narratives, evolving through their formal and material languages.

*Rodrigo Valenzuela; Garabato #21, 2023; archival inkjet print; 30 x 24 inches; ed. 1/3, 1 AP; courtesy of the artist and Galerie Kandlhofer, Vienna*

# K-12 PROGRAMS AT THE MOSS ARTS CENTER

Experiences with the arts cultivate the next generation of creative thinkers, engage learners of diverse backgrounds, and foster community dialogue. The Moss Arts Center has been dedicated to providing K-12 students in the region with free, high-quality, and exciting arts programming since opening our doors in 2013. Through school-day matinee programs, gallery tours, in-school performances, and workshops with artists, we are passionate about serving our youngest community members and schools.

**Learn more at [bit.ly/moss-K12](https://bit.ly/moss-K12).**

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Moss Arts Center's four-story experimental Cube is a highly adaptable space for immersive environments, intimate performance, audio and visual installations, research, and experimental investigations. A space shared between the Moss Arts Center and the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology, the Cube houses a motion capture system that can identify human performance across the entire space, one of the largest immersive audio systems in the world, and a new projection system that enables projection mapping on all walls.

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Virginia Tech acknowledges that we live and work on the Tutelo/Monacan People's homeland, and we recognize their continued relationships with their lands and waterways. We further acknowledge that the Morrill Land-Grant College Act (1862) enabled the commonwealth of Virginia to finance and found Virginia Tech through the forced removal of Native Nations from their lands in California and other areas in the West.

# LABOR RECOGNITION

Virginia Tech acknowledges that its Blacksburg campus sits partly on land that was previously the site of the Smithfield and Solitude Plantations, owned by members of the Preston family. Between the 1770s and the 1860s, the Prestons and other local White families that owned parcels of what became Virginia Tech also owned hundreds of enslaved people. Enslaved Black people generated resources that financed Virginia Tech's predecessor institution, the Preston and Olin Institute, and they also worked on the construction of its building.

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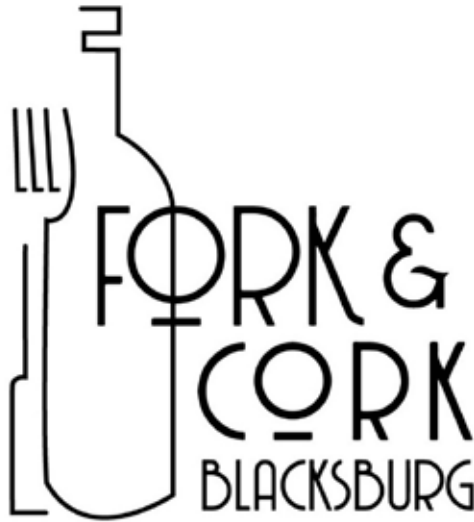
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# YMCA AT VIRGINIA TECH

## Meet the Y Team

### Karys Blakemore

Class of 2015 at George Mason University  
BA with a double major in Spanish and Russian  
Member of Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society.  
Director of Food Security Programs at the  
YMCA at Virginia Tech

I have been working for the Y since mid 2020 and have run the food security program since late 2021. My favorite thing about my job is the awesome people I meet every day. It's pretty exciting to be involved with an organization that is celebrating 150 years of service to this community!

You'll rarely catch me in jeans. I'm an amateur pool player and a cat owner (to a very temperamental but adorable cat named Midge!)

**Meet more Y Team members in the next MAC program!**



Karys pictured above,  
Abby pictured below



### Abby Touchstone

Junior, Architecture Major (Class of 2026)  
YSP Vice President, Y-Toss Program Leader, and Board Member

Favorite thing about the Y: I love that the Y connects me with not only Virginia Tech students, but other members of the Blacksburg community too! It's a great opportunity to give back to the community and form relationships with those involved.

This 150th year anniversary is a super exciting milestone - especially since we are following up the celebration of Virginia Tech's 150th! This shows how closely connected we are to the university and how much of an impact the Y has had in the development of VT. I am excited that I have the opportunity to be on the board during this occasion!

The YMCA has always been close to my heart since I grew up going to YMCA Summer Camps every year. No matter where you are, the YMCA creates a welcoming environment that focuses on giving back to communities, which is what made me want to get involved at Virginia Tech.



## Celebrating 150 years of service!

Founded in 1873, the YMCA at VT is one of the most respected and flourishing campus and community YMCA programs. This is due to the long-standing and mutually beneficial relationship that exists between the YMCA and Virginia Tech as well as the community.

From its opening, the mission of the YMCA at Virginia Tech is "building community through learning, leadership and service." Through its diverse programs, the Y serves the community through four main programming areas: Community, Education, International and Student Programs. The YMCA at Virginia Tech provides a variety of services for those in need, creates volunteer opportunities open to all, provides leadership development and training opportunities for students and is one of our community's leading non-profit agencies focusing on community education.



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"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."  
Mahatma Gandhi

