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institute of contemporary art

MAINE COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

The Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art & Design presents

Dear Data,

On view from October 2 - December 13, 2026



Nouf Aljowaysir, *Ana Min Wein? (Where Am I From?)*. Still image courtesy of the artist.

PORTLAND, ME — August 21, 2026— The Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art & Design (ICA at MECA&D) is pleased to announce the opening of *Dear Data*, a group exhibition that examines how we negotiate attention, agency, and memory in relation to technology, featuring artists working across painting, photography, sculpture, film, digital media, and more. *Dear Data*, opens on Friday, October 2, with a public reception from 5:00–8:00 pm, in conjunction with Portland, Maine's October First Friday Art Walk. The exhibition and accompanying programs are free and open to the public, and will be on view from October 2 through December 13, 2026.

The distinction between data consumption and production is narrowing. Today, commonplace activities like voting, ordering takeout, boarding a flight, or solving a CAPTCHA

now entail being captured and folded into algorithmic systems, built by corporations whose priorities carry no obligation to the social values of the people routed through them.

Artificial Intelligence may well be the defining technology of our lifetimes. As a breakthrough, it is less like the internet (which it is often compared to) and perhaps more like electricity. It is already wired into so many surrounding systems that move power: energy grids, healthcare, transit, law enforcement, customer service, cartography, and so on. AI might best be understood as an accumulation of digital dependencies decades in the making, arriving now as infrastructure. And while nearly every technology of record—from the knotted cord, to the woven cloth, to the photographic negative—has shaped how memory and history are retained, generative systems infer rather than retrieve. What is offered as recall is closer to a forecast.

Dear Data, operates in the space between aggrandized promises of disruption and salvation and the routine experience of being processed, analyzed, and consumed. Artists examine how databases can preserve lost and overlooked histories while also reckoning with generative software that fills gaps in our recollection with fabricated memories—making false generalizations and amplifying harmful biases. Other work reflects on the practical benefits of efficient systems while also examining urgent concerns in human development, such as disordered attention spans, “unreal” performance expectations, and mental short circuiting. The exhibition moves between the intimacy of personal devices and photographs, to the impossible reckoning of planetary-scale computation. *Dear Data*, invites audiences to interrogate the consequences of leasing our selves to our screens, and to consider how we might demand more equitable and supportive systems amid the ever-increasing weight of accelerated technology.

Dear Data, is the fifth installment of *Getaway!*, a multi-year exhibition series that explores the power and pitfalls of escapism as a reaction to the question, “What do we do in response to our current crises?” These group and solo exhibitions explore various topics within the broader theme of escapism, examining both the complex impulses that drive us away from challenging circumstances and the destinations and activities we pursue when we do. Through diverse research and artistic practices, this series aims to provide a space for imagination, enabling us to equip our communities, both within and beyond MECA&D, with new tools to create the worlds they envision.

Exhibiting Artists: Nouf Aljowaysir, Alice Bucknell, Sarah Friend, Claudia Hart, Heesoo Kwon, Maya Man, Amor Muñoz, NOCELLCOVERAGE, Analia Saban, Tianyi Sun, Vickie Vainionpää, Amelia Winger-Bearskin, Anna Zhang

Dear Data, is curated by ICA Director Iris Williamson and independent curator Eileen Isagon Skyers, with support from Curatorial Assistant Katie Devlin '27. Production management by Exhibitions Manager Sarah Sawtelle '19 and Exhibitions Assistant Caroline Kouba '22. Design by Omnivore.

In addition to curricular programs, *Dear Data*, public offerings include:

- **Opening Reception / October First Friday Art Walk**

Friday, October 2, 2026, 5:00–8:00 pm, The ICA at MECA&D

- **Visiting Curator Talk with Eileen Isagon Skyers**

Monday, October 5, 2026, 12:00–1:00 pm, Osher Hall, MECA&D Campus

- **November First Friday Art Walk Reception**

Friday, November 6, 2026, 5:00–8:00 pm, The ICA at MECA&D

- **December First Friday Art Walk Reception**

Friday, December 4, 2026, 5:00–8:00 pm, The ICA at MECA&D

All programs are free and open to the public; additional programming will be announced. For more information, visit meca.edu/ica.

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ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART AT MAINE COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

The Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), cultivates engagement and dialogue regarding contemporary visual art practices, aiming to foster discourse regarding the critical conversations of our time, and to enhance understanding of visual culture. Located in stunning galleries in Maine College of Art & Design's landmark Porteous Building, the ICA presents an exhibition calendar of ambitious work by living artists, operates as a learning laboratory for students, and as a center for public programming regarding contemporary art that engages with the local, national and global art community.

Hosting five exhibitions each year accompanied by a dynamic series of public events and artist talks, the ICA also supports Maine College of Art & Design graduate student exhibitions and events. The ICA is dedicated to working across platforms collaboratively and thinking with others to inspire creative action, reimagine our future, and create compassionate communities together through visual art.

The ICA is open Wednesday–Sunday, 11:00am–5:00pm, and Thursdays until 7:00pm. Exhibitions at the ICA at Maine College of Art & Design are free and open to the public.

ABOUT MAINE COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

Maine College of Art & Design (MECA&D) has been activating students of all pursuits to make art and inspire change since its founding as Portland School of Art in 1882. Located in Portland's thriving Arts District, students have access to state-of-the-art facilities,

24-hour-a-day studios, a 10:1 student-to-faculty ratio, and unparalleled Artists at Work resources—giving every student the place, pace, and space to be seen and make an impact with their work. The College offers BFA Majors and Minors, Graduate Programs, Online Learning, Continuing Studies, Pre-College, and includes the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies and the Institute for Contemporary Art.