

MEDIA RELEASE

[University Galleries of Illinois State University](#) is pleased to present Rafael Soldi's solo exhibition, *A moon, a peephole, an explosion, or a flashing memory*, from August 13 through September 29, 2024.

A moon, a peephole, an explosion, or a flashing memory features photographs, a handwritten text installation, and an EKG made from 2009 through 2023. Informed by the artist's queer, Peruvian identity, the selected works reflect on the possibilities of language, memory, and imagining. In Soldi's words, he "probes states of in-betweenness—especially as it occurs across tongues—providing nuanced insight into immigrant identity while also offering a rich metaphor for queer experience."

The exhibition title is excerpted from one of Soldi's own texts, which appeared on the cover of his *Imagined Futures* book. In the text, the artist addresses *The Sun Will Set in the Same Place*, a photograph featured in this exhibition. Soldi grew up in Peru and moved to the United States as a teenager, first to the east coast and then to the west coast. When he saw the sun setting over the Pacific Ocean in Seattle, 15 years after regularly seeing the same sight as a child in Peru, he was struck by a wave of nostalgia and a desire to reconcile his feelings about his home country. He then made the black-and-white photograph of what appears to be a brilliant, radiating orb. He writes, "I liked the ambiguity of this image too... it's like being blinded by the sun, or it could be an eclipse or a black hole or a camera shutter or a moon or an explosion or a flashing memory or a peephole." Special Collections at Milner Library recently acquired Soldi's *Imagined Futures* book, and it will be on view in the exhibition.

Imagined Futures comprises 36 tiny, black-and-white self-portraits made in photo booths. Rather than making silly faces with friends or posing for an identification photo, Soldi was repeatedly photographed alone and with his eyes closed. In his words, the project marks his "persistent attempt at acknowledging the grief surrounding the futures abandoned after immigrating from his homeland and the social violence enacted on queer bodies." Soldi extended the project to other queer, male-identifying, Latinx immigrants for *Entre Hermanos*. He collaborated with social worker Joel Aguirre to facilitate a conversation about how the participants "perceived their future as young people in their countries of origin," how that perception may have changed, and how they could "reimagine their futures and pasts today." Following the discussion, each participant could make their own self-portrait in a photo booth while being guided through a meditation exercise. The resulting photographs are presented in color and at a significantly larger scale than Soldi's self-portraits.

For *mouth to mouth*, Soldi explores fluidity between two languages, Spanish and English, one that was slipping away and one that he was learning. The installation features dozens of handwritten words presented in individual frames: *poema, problema, home, body, historia, histeria, memoria*. Soldi said that the errors and mistranslations "yielded a directory of invented terms, a collection of tiny unintended poems." Meanwhile *Shards*—which brings together poetry, astronomy, history, and language—is titled after one of Jay Hopler's poems. Soldi etched four glass panels with a single word each: *mother, boy, soft, and tongue*. The words can form a variety of combinations and evoke a range of feelings depending on the background of the viewer. Behind each word is a black-and-white photograph depicting the stars over his mother on the night Soldi was born. The artist visited the observatory in Lima, Peru, to create the images. *Marcapasos*, an EKG displayed as an artist's book, demonstrates another form of language. The EKG recorded the electrical activities in Soldi's heart when he was eleven years old. The artist writes, "I was moved by finding this 'written record of my own heart as a child, at a time when I was aware of my queerness and my difference but had no language for it."

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 22, 2024

This exhibition is the center point of multiple programs. Soldi is delivering a public artist lecture, which will be a part of Illinois State University's Latinx Heritage Month events. University Galleries' staff is leading art-making workshops for ISU students, K-12 students, and community members. Sensory-friendly times and scavenger hunts are available. Virtual and in-person curator-led tours are available by appointment. Field trip reimbursements are available for K-12 schools and community organizations.

Rafael Soldi: *A moon, a peephole, an explosion, or a flashing memory* is curated by Kendra Paitz, University Galleries' director and chief curator. This exhibition and programming are supported by University Galleries' grants from the Illinois Arts Council and the Alice and Fannie Fell Trust. Programming is co-sponsored by AIB Grant—a Multicultural Center Initiative. Workshops and field trip reimbursements are supported by the Lori Baum and Aaron Henkelman University Galleries Community Fund.

Artist biography

[Rafael Soldi](#) (b. 1987, Lima, Peru) is an artist, curator, and writer based in Seattle. His work has been exhibited at the Frye Art Museum (Seattle); Frost Art Museum (Miami); Griffin Museum of Photography (Winchester, Massachusetts); CLAMP (New York City); The Print Center (Philadelphia); Museo MATE (Lima); Filter Space (Chicago); and Burrard Arts Foundation (Vancouver). His work is included in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Tacoma Art Museum; Frye Art Museum; King County Public Art Collection; and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. He has been awarded fellowships at MacDowell, Bogliasco Foundation, Vermont Studio Center, and PICTURE BERLIN. His work has been reviewed in *Artforum*, *The Seattle Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *Photograph Magazine*, *The Seen*, *Art Nexus*, and *PDN*. He has completed commercial and editorial assignments for *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, Microsoft, Seattle University, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, among others.

Soldi is the co-founder of Strange Fire Collective, a project dedicated to highlighting work made by women, people of color, and queer and trans artists. He is also the co-curator of the High Wall, a yearly outdoor video projection program featuring immigrant artists and artists working on themes of diaspora and borderlands. Soldi received his B.F.A. in Photography and Curatorial Studies from Maryland Institute College of Art.

Events and programming

All events are free and open to the public.

- **Independent Drawing Hour**

Wednesday, August 28 from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Spend time looking closely at artworks in the exhibitions and drawing at your own pace. Materials provided.

- **Sensory-friendly morning**

Saturday, September 7 from 11:00 a.m. to noon

Visit the galleries before opening hours where you can enjoy dimmed lighting and a quiet space.

- **Events with Rafael Soldi**

Wednesday, September 18

4:00 p.m.: Artist lecture by Rafael Soldi

5:00 to 6:00 p.m.: Artist reception with Rafael Soldi, Norman Long, and Libby Rothfeld

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- **Poetry at the Galleries**

Thursday, September 19 from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m.

Write and perform poems in response to artworks on view. Performance is optional.

- **Guided Meditation**

Friday, September 20 from 11:00 a.m. to noon

Cortney Crosson will lead a guided meditation, which will be followed by a discussion of Rafael Soldi's artworks. [Registration required.](#)

- **Independent Drawing Hour**

Wednesday, September 25 from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Spend time looking closely at artworks in the exhibition and drawing at your own pace. Materials provided.

- **Text-based Artmaking Workshop**

Saturday, September 28 from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.

Create text-based artworks inspired by Rafael Soldi's [Shards](#). [Registration required.](#)

- Field trip program, curator-led tours, and workshops available by appointment throughout the exhibition. Reimbursements are available for K-12 schools or community organizations to offset the costs of transportation. Please contact University Galleries at Gallery@IllinoisState.edu or (309) 438-5487 to schedule an appointment.

University Galleries

University Galleries, a unit in the Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts, is located at 11 Uptown Circle, Suite 103, at the corner of Beaufort and Broadway streets. Parking is available in the Uptown Station parking deck located directly above University Galleries—the first hour is free, as well as any time after 5:01 p.m.

You can find [University Galleries](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#), and sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](#). Please contact Gallery@IllinoisState.edu or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to this exhibition.