

List Projects 34: Brittany Nelson
Bakalar Gallery
January 15 – March 29, 2026



November, 2025, Cambridge, MA – The List Visual Arts Center, MIT’s contemporary art museum, is pleased to announce *List Projects 34: Brittany Nelson*, on view January 15–March 29, 2026. The exhibition debuts new photographs and a moving-image work filmed at the Green Bank Observatory (National Radio Astronomy Observatory) in West Virginia, home to one of the world’s largest radio telescopes and a central site for SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) research. Nelson’s new body of work considers how scientific inquiry and emotional projection converge, transforming instruments of cosmic detection into metaphors for intimacy, distance, and longing.

Trained as a photographer, Nelson reimagines analog chemical techniques such as mordantage, bromoil, and tintype, merging these early processes with archival research and the language of science fiction. Her practice moves between the speculative frontiers of

science and art, surfacing hidden histories and institutional artifacts to reflect on how contact, whether human or extraterrestrial, is imagined and idealized.

“Brittany Nelson’s work brings the analog alchemy of the darkroom into dialogue with our speculative investigations of the universe,” says Natalie Bell, List Center Chief Curator. “She turns instruments of astronomical detection into mirrors—reflecting not only how we search for contact but also what we hope to find.”

Nelson’s new video work, *Rebecca* (2026), is also shaped by literary and cinematic references, particularly Daphne du Maurier’s 1938 novel of the same title, in which a young woman develops an obsession with her husband’s late first wife. Like the novel—and Alfred Hitchcock’s 1940 film adaptation—Nelson’s video work plays with intimacy and distance, presence and absence. Its soundtrack incorporates the high-pitched hum of the telescope’s liquid-helium pumps, which throb like mechanical heartbeats. Visually, it alternates between quiet 35mm photographs of the Observatory’s telescope and increasingly frenzied handheld sequences; at times, the camera appears to be hurled in frustration toward the massive structure. As the pace escalates, so does the emotional charge, producing a tension mired in longing and rupture. Nelson has likened the telescope to an “ex-girlfriend,” and the piece unfolds as a kind of breakup narrative—at once intimate and expansive. Drawing from the spectral atmosphere of both the book and film *Rebecca*, Nelson’s work frames the search for contact as both a scientific endeavor and a mirror of the self.

List Projects 34: Brittany Nelson is organized by Natalie Bell, Chief Curator, with Marina Caron, Assistant Curator.

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LIST PROJECTS 34: BRITTANY NELSON

January 15–March 29, 2026

MIT List Visual Arts Center, Bakalar Gallery

20 Ames Street, Bldg. E15-109

Atrium Level

Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

IMAGE CAPTIONS

Brittany Nelson, *Greenbank Telescope*, 2026. Gelatin silver print, 40 × 60 in. (101.6 × 152.4 cm).

Courtesy the artist and PATRON, Chicago

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ABOUT BRITTANY NELSON

Brittany Nelson (b. 1984, Great Falls, MT) is an artist based in New York City. She studied at Montana State University and Cranbrook Academy of Art and is an Associate Professor of Photography at the University of Richmond. Her work has been exhibited at KIASMA, Helsinki; Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm; Le CAP - Centre d'art, Saint-Fons, France; Fotogalleriet, Oslo; Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Norway; the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit; and Brooklyn Academy of Music; among others. She has been an artist-in-residence at the Headlands Center for the Arts and the SETI Institute, both in California.

SPONSORS

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ABOUT MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

The List Visual Arts Center is a creative laboratory that provides artists with a space to freely experiment and push existing boundaries. As the contemporary art museum at MIT, the List Center presents a dynamic program of six to nine special exhibitions in its galleries annually, including a program of evolving site-specific work by emerging artists known as *List Projects*, as well as a broad range of educational programs, events, and scholarly publications. Beyond the full slate of special exhibitions and projects it presents each year, the List Center maintains and adds to MIT's Permanent Collection, a collection of more than fifty site-specific artworks throughout the campus; commissions new works through the MIT Percent-for-Art program; oversees the loan of artwork for the campus (in the President's House, labs, and administrative offices); and oversees the Student Loan Art Program, which lends approximately seven hundred works of art annually to MIT undergraduate and graduate students.