

University of Cincinnati

2012 MFA Thesis Show



Master of Fine Arts Class of 2012

University of Cincinnati

College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning

Featuring the work of:

Saurabh Anand • Jio Bae • Dustin Boise • Zachary Copfer
Dan Dean • Erica Esham • Julia Feld • Cynthia Gregory
Johnathan McLemore • James Schenck • Nick Scrimenti
Randall Slocum • Michael Smith • Leah Stahl • Tilley Stone
Alex Walp • Jennifer Wenker

Saurabh Anand

Portal To Hope

Animation

The great sage, Gautam Buddha said ‘Mamaatma Sarva Bhutaanaa’, meaning ‘the very soul I have is in all living beings’. As such, we are not immune to the troubles of others; an important purpose of our lives is to help those in need. In this work, I am making an attempt to draw attention to a particular segment of Indian society – the poor farmers and the crisis that they are facing. By using their current predicament, I am trying to deliver the main theme of the work: to have hope in times of adversity. The broader perspective of my work seeks to call to those of us who are currently facing personal challenges in their lives. I want to reach out to them and let them know ‘to just hold on’ and that a new dawn will come in their life.

<http://www.pyxisstudioz.com/>



Jio Bae

I lost my way in the ocean

Video/mixed Media Installation

I often dream that I wander around unknown places. I sometimes find myself ecstatic when I am walking around without any duties or responsibilities. In a way that is detached from ethics, I am full of happiness from the pure sense of existence. I exist inside of myself and also exist outside of myself. I can be anywhere because I do not belong to any place since I do not focus on anything from the locations where I have been. I do not have any malicious intentions towards the world, and without any demands from the world I can be satisfied with myself. Therefore, I often smile genially, but I also cry as often as I smile. Whenever I notice how far I exist from myself, my eyes fill with tears, and they start to drop like raindrops at the end of some nasty weather. My work depicts the emotion of nomadism, continuously finding new identities while denying them without any restrictions on certain values or life styles. I express myself as a person who seeks, inquires, and creates herself while changing incessantly.

<http://jiobae.com>



Dustin Boise

Educational Confines of One's Mind

Sculpture/Mixed Media

Pasts are reconstructed rather than faithfully recorded. This is done with the needs of contemporary culture in mind...manipulate the past to mold the present. ~Michael Kammen

As an artist I memorialize my ideas through sculptural and installation-based works. Whether the subject is graduating from college, a broken relationship, or an illicit hatred of the dentist, my works stand as place-markers to the events and ideas in my life both tragic and triumphant. I tie these events to history, drawing out obscure connections between the past and myself. The work serves as a visual representation of a personal synthesis of historical events, readings, and personal matters. By juxtaposing personal matters, which are often times mundane and universal, with the tragic and triumphant events of our past, I construct a historical narrative. Through this narrative, I gain a connection to moments from the past for which I may have none. Much like Kammen's quote, I am manipulating the past to construct the present, creating a mythical history.

<http://dustinboise.carbonmade.com/>



Zachary Copfer

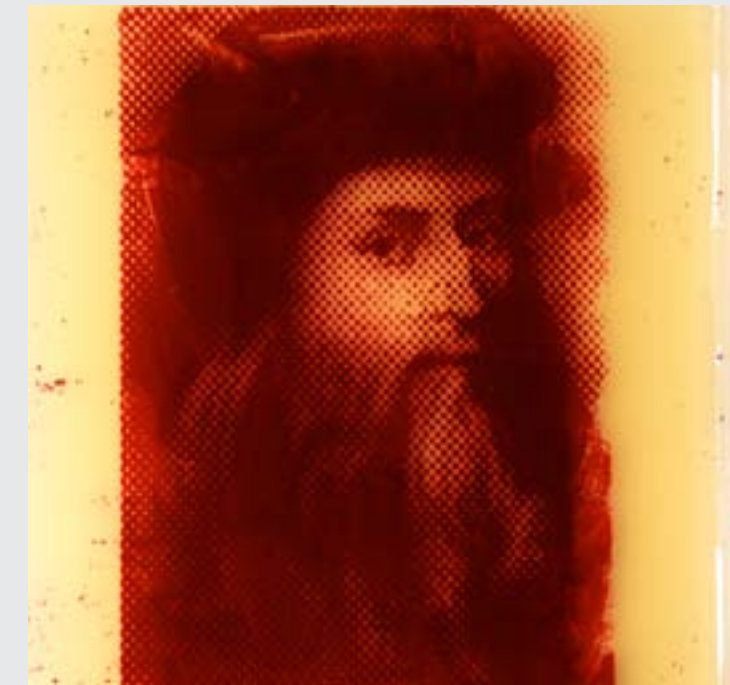
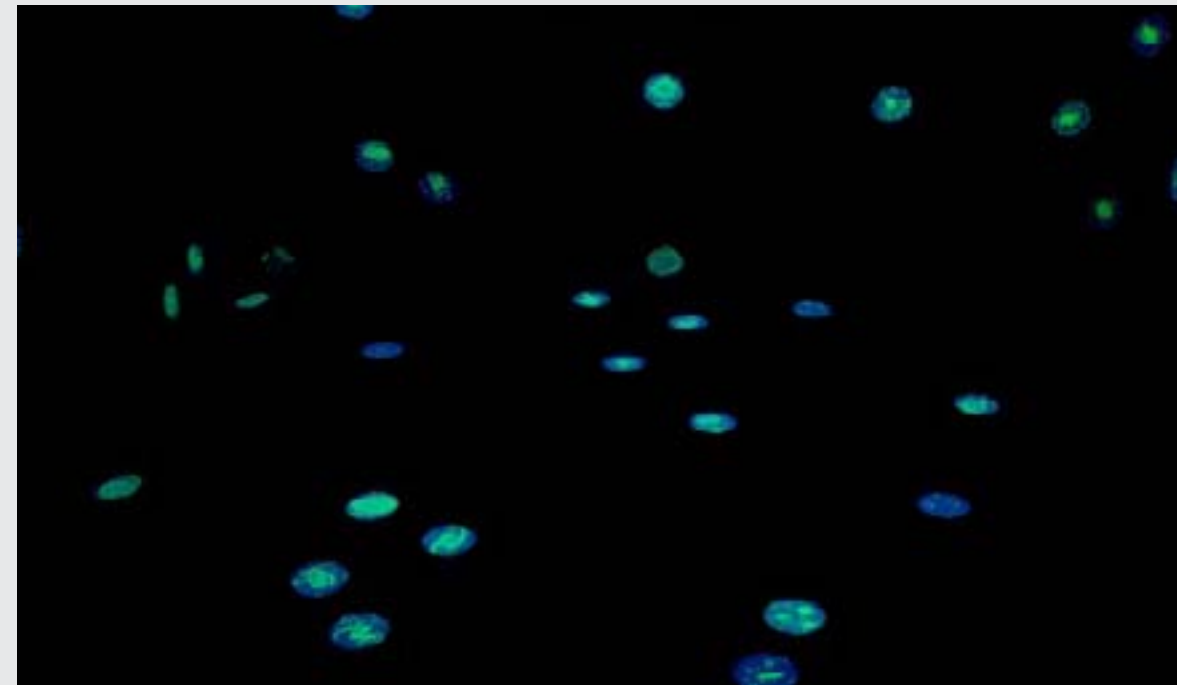
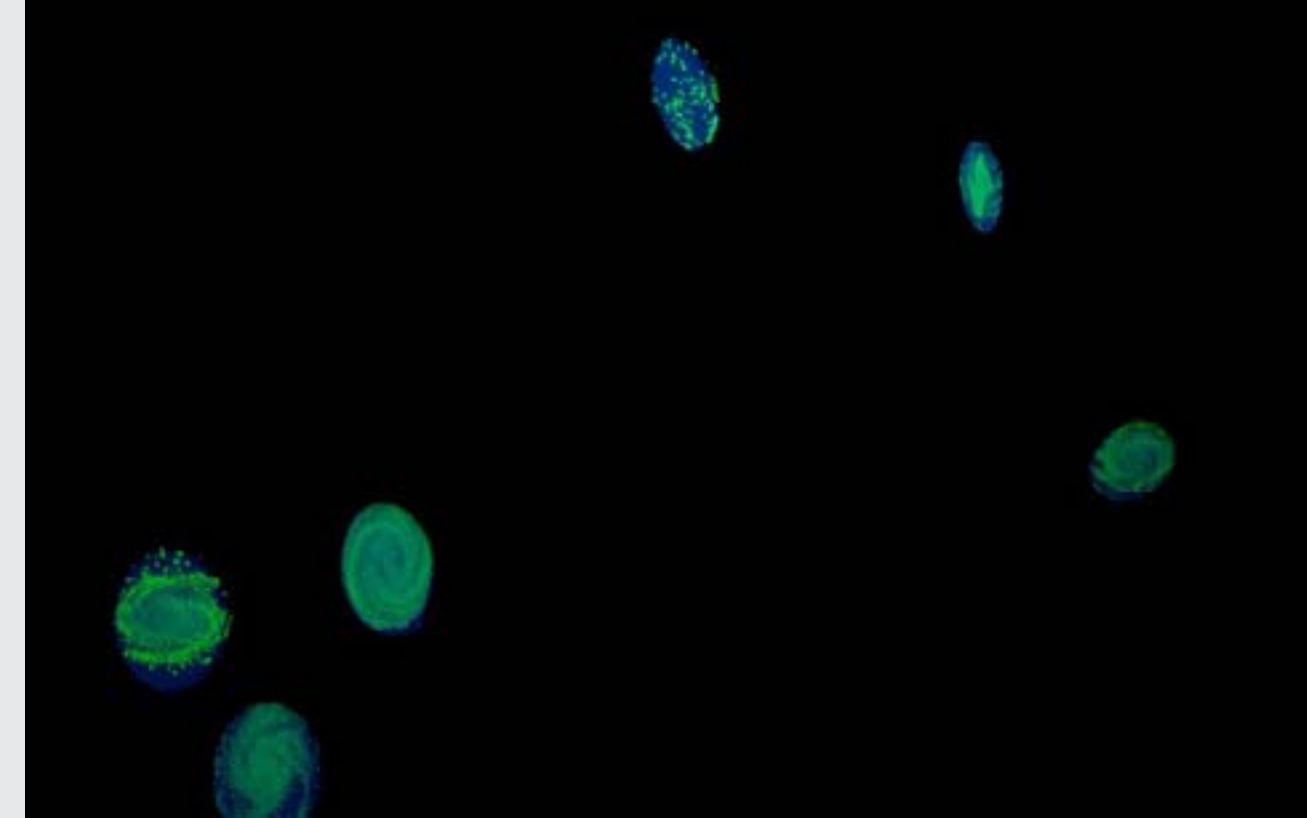
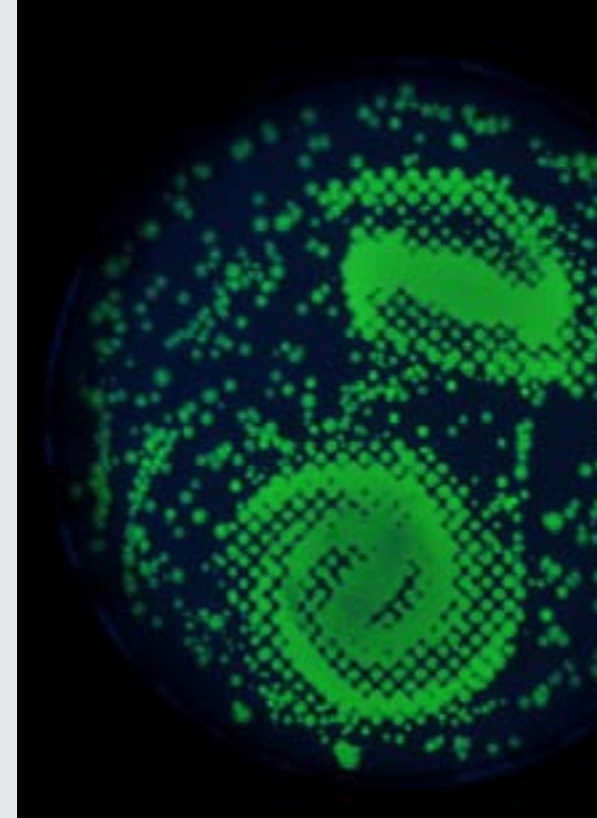
Star Stuff

New Media/Biological Science

As a former microbiologist recently turned visual artist, I seek to create work that is less of an intersection of art and science and more of a genuine fusion of the two. I believe that great beauty and poetry reside within the theories woven by scientists. And that it is through the unification of art and science that these treasures can be fully explored and made accessible to the world at large.

Star Stuff is a transgenic bio-art installation that visually explores the theory that the stars are the origin of all atoms larger than hydrogen. Each celestial photograph in the installation is actually comprised of billions and billions of genetically engineered E. coli cells. There are few ideas more poetic or more artful than the suggestion that all matter, all life, has a common origin in one of these guiding lights burning brightly in the night sky.

<http://www.ztcphotos.com/>



Dan Dean

Contemporary Portraits as an Honorary Device

Oil on Canvas

The men and women who are the subject of my paintings have been recognized by their peers as being exceptional in some way that benefits the community. Paintings depict business leaders, charity organizers, philanthropists, educators, clergymen, etc. They are being honored with these portraits as a way for the community to say thank you.

The portrait style is inspired by the work of several artists. Some living masters work “true to life,” and other artists have demonstrated the benefit of incorporating the visual language of advertising into otherwise realist artworks. My paintings reconcile the distance between traditional realism and contemporary painting practices.

deand329@yahoo.com



Erica Esham

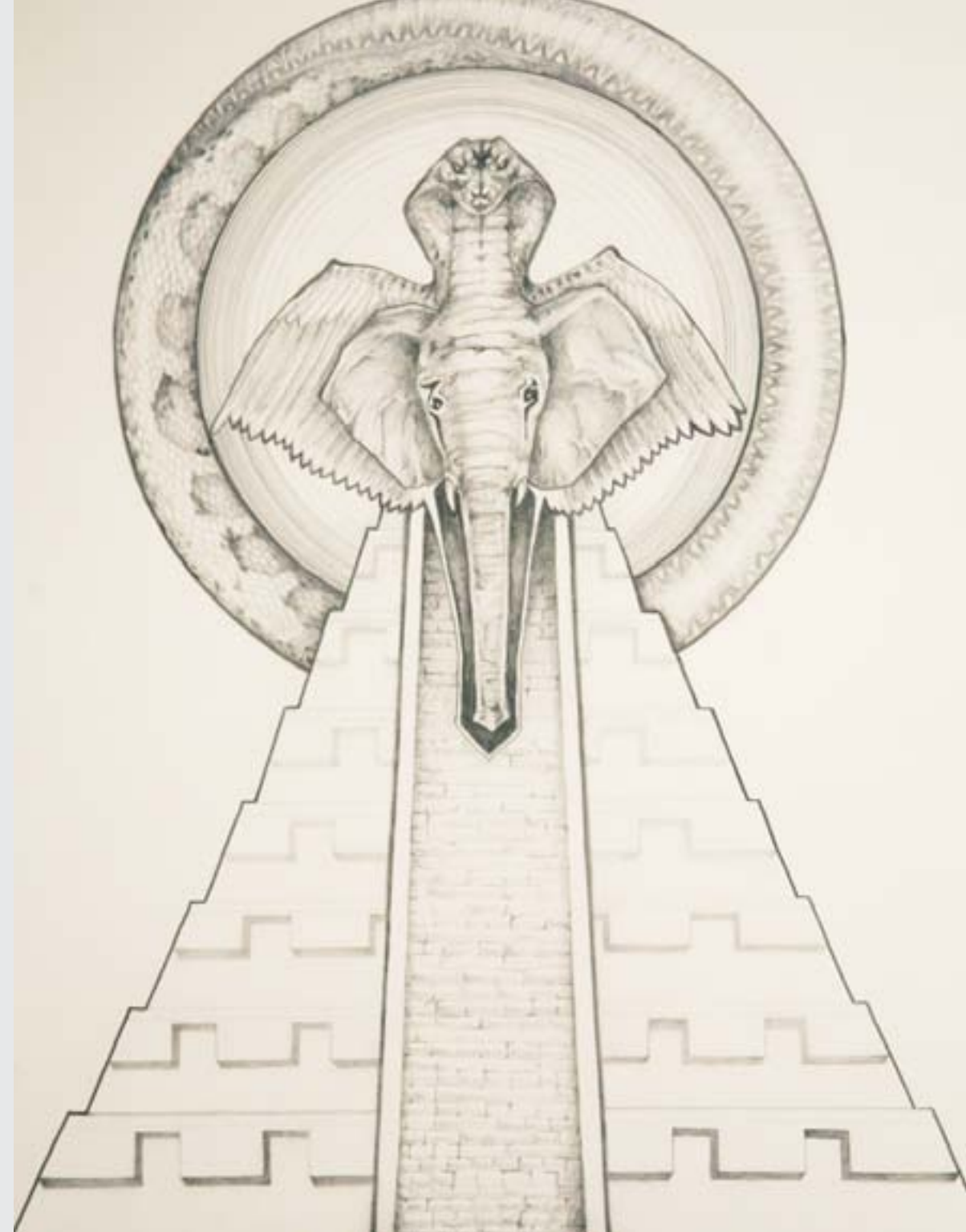
Into the Light

Graphite on Paper, Mural, Performance

Into the Light is a collaboration placing emphasis on enhancing community structures and social connections. My techniques are immersive and meditative. Each piece is meticulously planned and executed to reveal the subtleties surrounding us that we so often take for granted. The work is a way for me to process and understand my visions and dreams. A change is coming soon, a major shift in the world as we have known and perceived it. We can no longer attempt to be everything. Investigating our true strengths will enable us to contribute to our communities and be grateful to those who make up for what we lack. We must begin to repair our relationship with the earth and with each other.

I am still learning to be with myself,
And I will never feel alone again.

ericaesham@gmail.com



Julia Nicole Feld

Shift of Displacement

Ceramics

Shift of Displacement represents a body of work that depicts a transitioning from object making, to creating an installation, and exploring my feelings and thoughts through a physical manipulation of existing objects. Through this work I found joy in destroying things and resurrecting them in a different media, by manipulating objects and giving them life in a different form. Working outside of my usual practice gave me freedom to explore the ceramic medium from a different angle - I detached myself from its preciousness and permanency and discovered fluidity and immediacy of expression. This installation is a physical and emotional reaction to a personal loss; the tangible outcome of contemplation and thoughts and an attempt to deal with repressed emotions. Every piece is a small part of the puzzle that creates its own narrative that is linear and isometric at the same time. Every piece makes sense on its own and brings an emotional response, but altogether they create an atmosphere of loss, sadness and emptiness.

<http://www.juliafeld.com>



Cynthia Gregory

The Poet's Table

Installation

The Poet's Table presents an installation grounded in drawing as a form of haptic perception through traditional drawings on paper and via the “drawn object.” As the title suggests, I am referencing my other life as a writer and the on-going dialog in my work between drawing and writing. I extend the concept of haptic perception to my process and experience of drawing as a form of filtering experience, sensation, observations, thoughts, and feeling into the current moment. My drawings represent studio efforts that are gestures of the personal. They embody a sincerity based in a desire for a “tuning in,” a slowing down, and they seek to build authentic, sensory connections to the present moment for myself as maker and for individuals as viewers. While the hyper-realism in the work lends itself to the tradition of trompe l’oeil, I’m less interested in fooling the viewer’s eye. Rather I am more interested in how the drawings encourage the viewer’s “habit of attention” to literally be drawn in, to reevaluate and unravel what is seen. The table itself possesses a mysterious character, and the objects chosen to rest within, on top, or around embody an equally enigmatic quality. Suggesting a poet’s desk, an artist’s studio table, and even a work space from a scholar’s study, the table is a vessel for secrets. It, along with the drawings and objects it houses, serve as metaphors for containment and the tension between disclosure and withholding.

<http://cynthiagregoryart.com/home.html>



Johnathan McLemore

I-V-VI-Vii

Video/Sound Installation

Color provokes a psychic vibration. Color hides a power still unknown but real, which acts on every part of the human body. ~Wassily Kandinsky

For centuries philosophers, artists, and musicians have journeyed to find the penultimate translation of sound and vision. The quest to render one sensual experience to another, from vision to hearing and back again has been an elusive quest that has led to many open-ended questions and methods of interpretation. The search for “audible color” has taken many forms, from early Pythagorean theories on the harmony of celestial spheres to contemporary experiments with electronic music. Yet centuries of exploration still leads aesthetes to ponder the direct and indirect implications each sense has on the other. As a result, I seek to explore my personal connections between sound and form through the synthesis of abstract video and audio. I am curious as to how my personal cross-sensory decoding can inform a sense of harmony in the audience’s experience. I wish for this process to translate fascination of “how our existence is woven into relationships that defy our understanding.”

<http://johnathanmclmore.com>



James Schenck

Stud

Installation

Through both 2-d visual art and installation, schenck addresses the conditions of the gay male, as well as the role society plays in the construction of identity. The artist's body of work articulates tactile and gestural expressions of self-examination, the importance of visual balance and clarity, and the numbness in a daily life's journey for approval.

Schenck summarizes the results of his process as "2-d performance." The aesthetic should always feel fun and welcoming, while the undercurrent stems from an urgent, honest insecurity.

<http://www.jamesschenck.com/>



Nick Scrimenti

Untitled

Oil on Paper, Oil on Panel

My current work is based on my experience of being employed by a hoarder to help develop a strategy to clean and organize his property. The process of painting has a direct correlation to the process of cleaning up a hoarder's mess. When dealing with such an overwhelming amount of excess, decisions regarding what stays and what goes must be made quickly. These are hard decisions for the owner of the objects, or the composer of the painting.

Each painting begins from a small, chaotic collage created as a rough guide. The imagery contains subtle hints to the story unfolding. The excessive amount of information in the collage is organized through the act of translation into a painting. The paintings begin as a mess without a specific end point. New possibilities and forms arise and are pursued along the way, ultimately resulting in an unpredictable yet cohesive image.

<http://www.nickscrimenti.com/>



Randall Frank Slocum

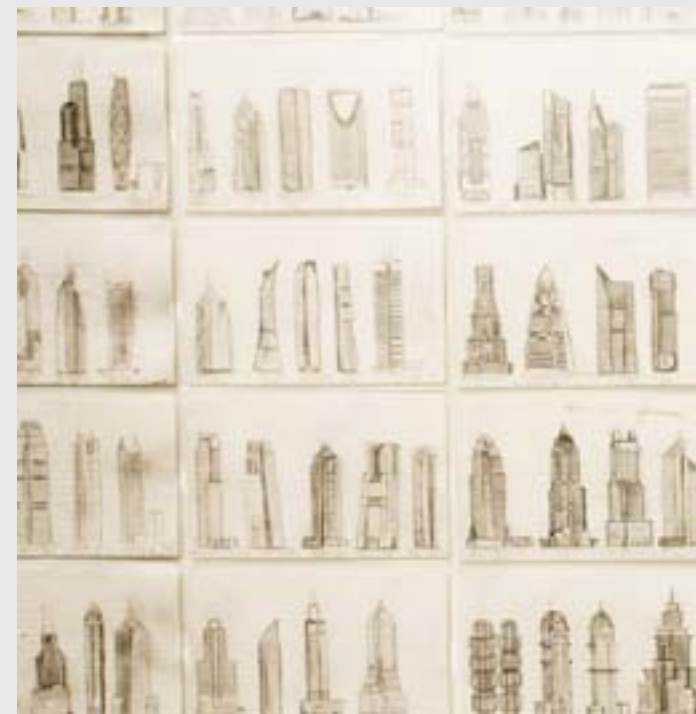
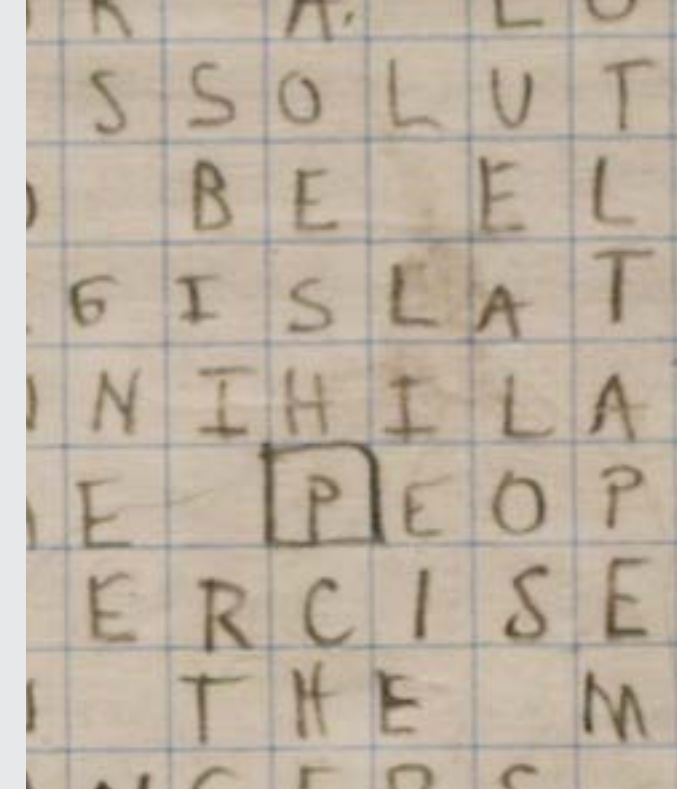
Art is History

Graphite on Paper

Dr. J.H. Robinson contends that man's dependence on the past gives rise to the "continuity of history." Our conviction, opinion, prejudices and tastes, our learning and our technology are all owed, with few exceptions, to knowledge that began in the past, often the remote past. History is a scientific codification of human memory and event. My art interprets such memory as personal and applies history to investigate the present and future in art. Every human achievement in science, art, government or religion, is first conceived of in the mind. It must be a plan before it is a reality. Even abstract expressionism can be said to be a "plan"

Thus my research and artistic practice is an accumulation of inquiry and discovery that forms and shapes my worldview, and through my art, communicates to the outside world.

<http://randallfrankslocumart.tumblr.com/>



Michael Smith

Touch is Telling

Photographic Ink on Paper

Drawings herald a certain response from us. The works that I create serve to arrest; they draw on the temporality of solitude yet ask of the viewer to remain fixated in their gaze. Movement corresponds to senses of unease and restlessness that follow desire: how desire, in itself, awakens a hunger of belonging to or with another body. A certain tone occurs within the happenings of hiding and exposing that I am striving to define visually – how the distinction of a body's boundaries become hazy through movement, invitation, and intrusion. Drawing not only demands our visual focus but becomes a kind of mirror that reflects us once we surrender ourselves to its seduction. My work proves that the act of drawing, through its haptic nature, is comparable to human encounters through touch, desire, and seduction.

<http://mmsmithart.com/home.html>



Leah Stahl

Saccade: The pre-cognitive, sudden, jerky movements made by the eye

Video/Mixed Media Installation

When does sight become vision? My work provides a discourse on sight as drawing. I really on the eye as my camera, thus providing a basis for discovering vision. The installation illustrates the saccade- that brief moment of seeing that we all share with one another prior to cognition, and before we color it with our own individual experiences and memories. The unconscious sketches that our eyes make, produce a dispassionate image for our minds to interpret, calling into question the instinctive repetition of visual tracking. The inward examination of a crucial sense begins to unravel our concept of singularity, drawing attention to a kind of unconscious link, connecting us all. What if there was a way to prolong that moment, where we all see the same thing? By eliminating the object, the viewer is forced to engage with the space, be aware of their surroundings, embracing nothingness, and truly be in the moment.

<http://leahstahl.com>



Tilley Stone

Artist as Translator: Rearranging Dimension and Changing Perspective

Graphite on Paper, Mixed Media Installation

A drawing is analogous to shadow; both are two dimensional representations of three dimensional reality derived from a translative process. I explore conceptual and aesthetic parallels between surface media (drawing and painting), an object's shadow, and metaphors in transformative processes by documenting projections through tracing while incorporating grids, units, and modules in the compositions. In order to signify structure and reduction, my work exudes a quiet, minimalist aesthetic which relates to the fading quality of shadow and systems of translation.

<http://tilleystone.com/home.html>



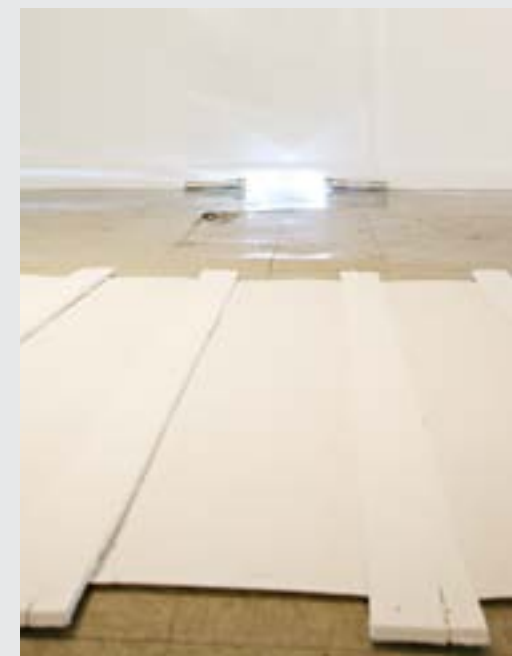
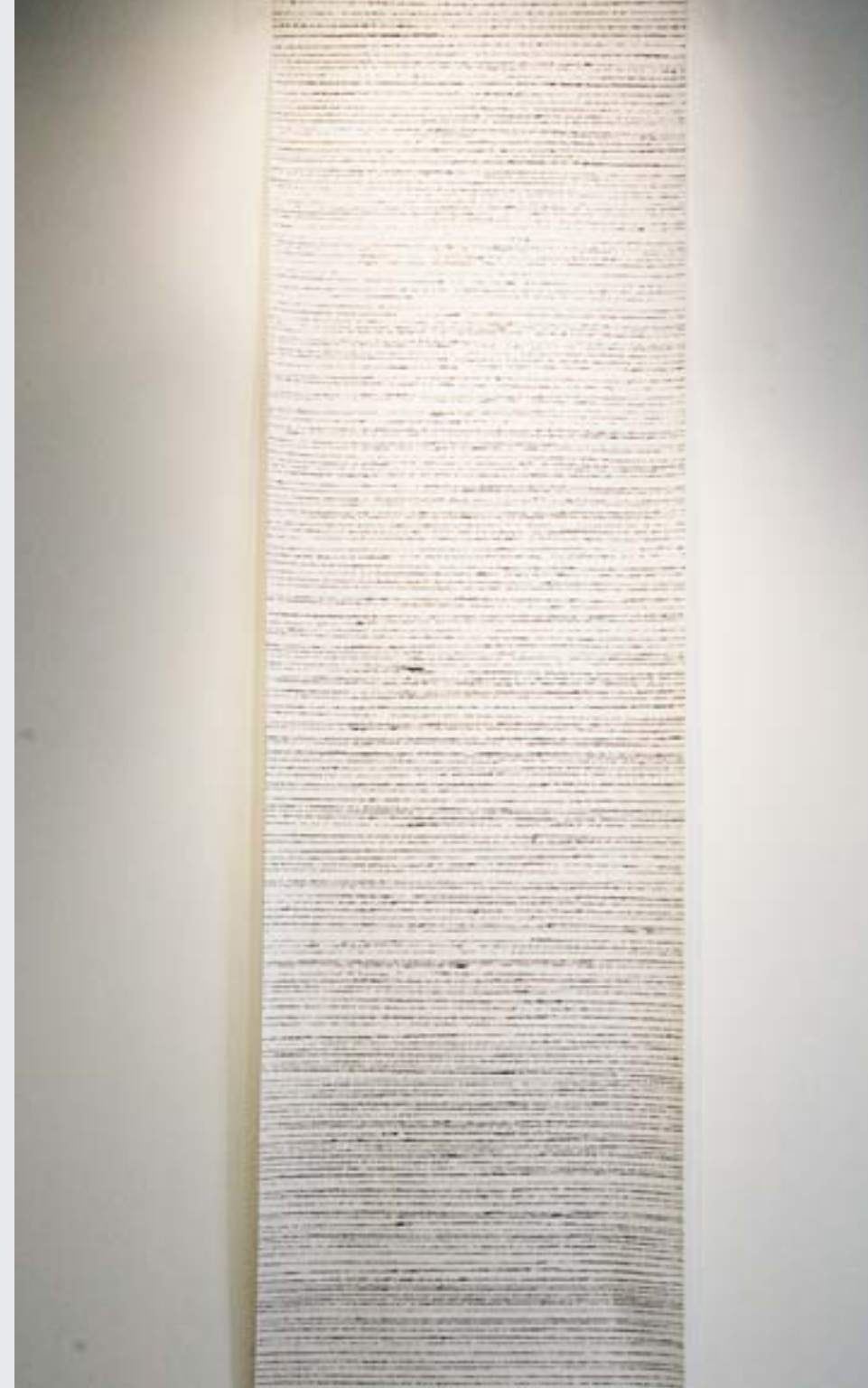
Alex Walp

Untitled

Graphite on Paper, Mixed Media Installation

My current work addresses the theme of production by emphasizing the materiality of information. The works in this show present ink, as well as other materials related to information distribution, as substances. This shifts the act of drawing from one of communication or expression and reframes it as an act of depletion. The scale of the work is important and specific, as some works are produced based on the size of the exhibition space and others are produced at a scale that references popular media, especially magazines. This specificity of scale is used to address the viewer's body, as well as draw attention to the space of exhibition. In this way, the exhibition space and the paper support for the works can be viewed as subjective information delivery systems, rather than an objective blank slate.

<http://alexwalp.com/>



Jennifer Wenker

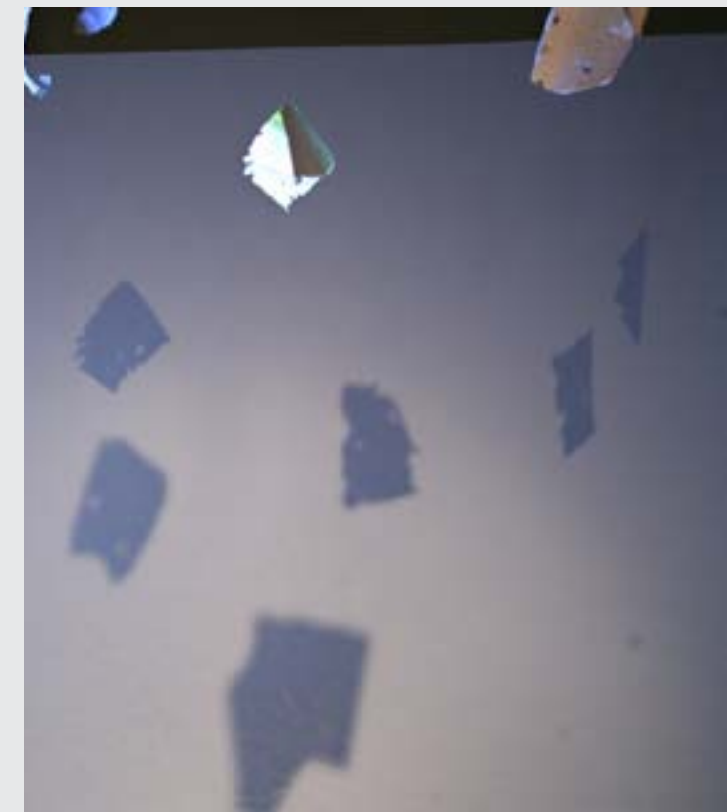
deeply rooted *drifting*

Video/Mixed Media Installation

I am deeply rooted to place; the rolling Appalachian foothills farmed by eight generations of my ancestors are imprinted upon my very DNA. This land to which I am rooted is literally part of my biology, my cell structure, my bones; everything is interconnected with the being I have become, and so, protecting the land is a way of preserving myself.

My thesis work challenges the historical relationship of human beings in Nature--that of domination over all that is non-human. I am interested in re-envisioning and remediating our relationship to one which respects Nature's deeply-interdependent ecological webs and gives reverence to our Interconnectedness. It is my hope that my projects engage others and act as a catalyst for dialogue, and that these conversations are carried out into the world like fertile seeds drifting in the wind...

<http://jenniferwenkerart.com/home.html>



Contributions by Mary Hancock, Chris Reeves, and Ashton Tucker, organized in collaboration with graduating MFA students, and written as a supplementary project by Art History MA students enrolled in the art history ‘Aesthetics and Art Criticism’ graduate seminar, Fall 2011.

Project co-ordinator and text editor: Morgan Thomas (Art History, School of Art)

Thanks to Julia Feld, Randall Slocum, James Schenck, Michael Smith, Denise Burge, and Johnathan McLemore for their generous assistance and participation in this project.

Resurrection in the Face of Loss: Julia Feld’s Shift of Displacement

Julia Feld pays homage to mourning in her serial installation entitled Shift of Displacement. The series, broken up into four parts — ‘Pursuit of Thoughtlessness,’ ‘Ephemerality of Existence,’ ‘Shredded Memories,’ and ‘Unfulfilled Expectations’ — recalls her emotion on learning of and coping with her mother’s death. Using white ceramic squares and teddy bears, Feld produces a visual representation of a range of emotions, encompassing grief, shock, and abandonment, as well as the process of coming to terms with the inevitability and permanence of death.

The first part of the series, ‘Pursuit of Thoughtlessness,’ presents four whole ceramic squares and one jaggedly broken half-square, arranged in an unfinished grid. A lone teddy bear sits below. There is a sense of attempted composure, yet also of ignoring the truth. The squares are cracking but the teddy bear looks away. Feld herself struggled with memory, oscillating between wanting to remember and wanting to forget.

‘Ephemerality of Existence’ admits the certainty of death. Life passes quickly and sometimes ends without warning. Feld had no idea that her mother was close to death. She had not seen her for a while. She was not able to say goodbye; she did not have the chance to draw closure from a personal exchange. The teddy bear is splayed on its back with its arms stretched, perhaps beckoning for comfort. Feld shows its vulnerability — she turns the tables on who plays the role of consoler. The two vertically aligned squares above it bubble, as if caught off balance. In mourning there is a desire to appear composed and to fool people into think things are not as bad as they really are.

‘Shredded Memories,’ the largest section of Shift of Displacement, harkens back to memories of childhood and twists them into something sacred and eerie. On the floor lies a pile of discarded white teddy bears, their eyes hollow. Above, a white ceramic square is mounted and molded so that it appears as if it is pushing out of itself, trying to break out of its skin. Although the teddy bears initially read as white, a variety of hues and characteristics in fact differentiate them. Some have what appears to be a smooth, flannel texture; others look friendly and fluffy to the touch. Yet they are sharp and rigid. Without their eyes, they have become something of a shell of their former selves. This was intentional: some of the bears were press-molded, some slip-casted, and others were dipped in porcelain, destroying any original faux-

fur or stuffing. This is Feld's way of showing the different levels of emotional involvement associated with handling loss. The teddy bears that were dipped in porcelain are a metaphor for resurrection, something Feld felt she needed.

'Unfulfilled Expectations,' the haunting final part of this series (which, as the artist acknowledges, does not have to be viewed in a linear fashion), is made up of ceramic molds of fabric draped over three rectangular platforms. Each fabric-mold lies on the block like a limp body. It is there, but has no form. It is an echo of what used to be. Feld describes it as the 'ghost,' the after-effect of tragedy.

This somber series differs from the vibrant color and smooth textures characteristic of Feld's previous work. In the past, she has made teapots, swirling ceramic sculptures covered with painted depictions of curious children. She has also worked with smooth egg-like and sea-creature-like forms. In one collection, Erotic Sculptures, her work is sensuously and ambiguously shaped. Yet in the face of recent events in her life, Feld felt her art needed to change. The square blocks and teddy bears of Shift of Displacement gave her an opportunity for closure and resurrection. Shift certainly marks a promising new direction. Here Feld experiments with narrative and — with subtly hued whites — color; at the same time, she communicates powerfully and directly with her audience.

Mary Hancock

Accumulation Zero: Randall F. Slocum's Art is History

A large, faux-pedagogical treatise on progress, Randall F. Slocum's Art is History functions as a polemic in view of its postmodernist positioning (the title alone may be seen as scathing), as well as on account of its implied critique of the drive toward canonization in art itself. Slocum's work consists of five parts: a reference book that outlines the history and planning that went into the project, in a similar vein to the Green Box of plans for Duchamp's Large Glass; the 350 drawings of buildings on sixty-seven 5" x 7" notecards, arrayed on the wall; a handwritten re-transcribed Declaration of Independence, executed on graph paper;

the desk that it sits on, evoking the display of the original; and, also on the desk, to the left of the American Declaration, the French Declaration of Rights, handwritten on graph paper as well.

The pedigree of the media and materials employed by Slocum are decidedly simple (drawings, handwriting, paper), but the ideas that he is interested in are not. The reference book chronicles the history and social products of the Industrial Revolution in exhaustive, if not exhausting, detail. Sometimes this may well take a facetious turn; the cartoon drawings of 'heroes of science fiction' are a case of this. Sometimes the tone is profound, for example, with Slocum's insistent references to the writings and thought of English mystic Aleister Crowley. The drawings of buildings track manifold episodes in the history of architecture, from old standbys (the Empire State Building) to recent developments like the Burj Khalifa. Next to Slocum's painstakingly executed renditions of two path-breaking documents that, in vastly different ways, affirmed revolutionary notions of emancipation and sovereignty, these histories make a muddy, yet incisive, point. All the thinking and freedom in the world will not get us any closer to heaven.

The story of the Tower of Babel, a biblical tale about the effort to build a structure that would ascent to the heavens, is pertinent to Slocum's project. The story is meant to show that mortals cannot reach heaven through any device other than faith. Further, it shows how God, after seeing what the people were up to, thought it best to confuse their language, and thus to make a united front of tower-building to heaven impossible. Like the two Declarations — significantly, composed in different languages — Slocum's 350 buildings, a testament to the phallic power of industrialization, reflect the old impulse to reach for the sky, as well as modern incarnations of the story. Slocum in effect undertakes a retelling of the Babel story. He shows us visual and written texts that exemplify a humanity seeking salvation, recurrently attempting to break through perceived oppressions, using any number of industrial and non-industrial means. Crowley always espoused an alternative to the standard, however spectacular; the prose of a "hero of science fiction" like Isaac Asimov, is at times borderline futurist in its allegory.

What's on display is modern man's quest to figure it all out — and somehow to break out of historically situated fates and debilitating social conditions. Art is History suggests something of the futility of this striving, mired, as it so often has been, in politics that look positive yet eventually bring us right back to zero. Where and how art would fall into this schema is a slippery slope. With his careful copies of world-renowned ex-

amples of urban architecture and historic documents, Slocum hints at a kind of failure inherent in dreams of innovation. Interestingly, he also wants to connect this idea of the failure of innovation with a retrospective of art's push to historicize. As a discipline, art history has typically been invested in linear paths of progress and influence — seen, for example, in Alfred Barr's famous schematic diagram 'Cubism and Abstract Art' (1935), which outlined a flow and exchange of influences, large and small, necessarily leading forward rather than back.

In our century, where the idea of linear progress seems more and more misguided, if not entirely abstract, this concept of history looks at once too subjective, as well as extremely limited in its application. (The idea was also lampooned by Ad Reinhardt, along with many other twentieth-century thinkers and artists.) In our current situation, art, which has so often been supported by mechanisms of canonization and institutional power structures, is a difficult place. Yet this is nothing new — a point that Slocum makes in *Art is History*. Along with architecture and 'guaranteed' freedoms, art has an idealist lineage, yet it may still strike us as constituting an essential part of the social fabric. The possibilities for realizing human progress are surely in the hands of twenty-first-century inventors and their approaches to these questions. With *Art is History*, there are no solutions, but rather a call for awareness and critique, in the tradition, perhaps, of artists like Marcel Broodthaers or On Kawara. Slocum quotes Leon Trotsky: 'Art must not limit itself internally. It must plow the fields in all directions, seeking all discoveries, and leaving no earth unturned.' Tolstoy's words — which convey what Slocum aims to do with his current project — imply a view of art as essentially open and vulnerable. This idea of art, and what it must do, is not simply 'history'; it resonates and acquires a new currency in post-9/11 America.

Chris Reeves

James Schenck's Stud

James Schenck is an artist whose work crosses several genres. This is perhaps a result of his bi-coastal education and midwestern upbringing. Schenck was born in Cincinnati, educated at Vassar College in New York State, and lived for some time in Los Angeles. Much of his work concerns the social stages which

guide the construction of identity, particularly that of the gay male in American society. Schenck's contribution to the 2012 MFA Thesis Exhibition is a mixed media installation titled *Stud*. It consists of a wooden bench and two backdrops, each with a piece of wood reclined against a metal prop. I suggest here that a central aspect of Schenck's work lies in how it combines an engagement with the gay male gaze and relational aesthetics.

Schenck's experience as a gay man informs his artistic production. The artist admits to thinking about the idea of 'the object' and the gaze, noting that this had a profound effect on his thesis project. Amusingly, so has his experience in the gym. What can be easily called 'gym ecology,' features the male stud—a man who is not only physically fit, but who is also primping, priming, and ready for his close-up. It is impossible, then, not to immediately think of the art-historical and cultural concept of the gaze. A psychoanalytic term originally popularized by Jacques Lacan, the term gaze is more than the process of looking. It describes the idea that one can desire to look and that one can be gazed upon. It is the relationship between the viewer and the object. For feminist scholars like Laura Mulvey, the gaze comes primarily from a male subject and is directed at a female object. Schenck, however, has blended his sensibilities as gay man with the idea of the male gaze and directed this gaze toward a male subject, i.e. the 'stud.' The backdrops in the installation are representative of this idea, with studs leaning back and ready to be contemplated. There is also a play with visual language. The physical wooden wall studs in the backdrop are studs in one sense and yet suggest human studs in another. Furthermore, the phallic connotations of 'wood' did not go unnoticed by this viewer.

Schenck's contribution to the MFA show is closely linked to relational aesthetics. In the 1990s Nicolas Bourriaud coined the phrase relational aesthetics to describe the tendency of contemporary artists to create work that focused on the interactive nature of gallery spaces. According to Bourriaud, the idea of an interactive gallery space begins with sensibilities that are common to the 1990s. He identified a group of artists who, in response to the breakdown of social relationships alongside the exponential growth of electronic media, used social interaction as the basis of their artwork. In Schenck's words, his work focuses on an aesthetic that is 'welcoming and fun' but at the same time has an undercurrent of "urgent, honest insecurity." This interest in an aesthetic that is 'fun' or 'welcoming' indicates precisely where Schenck's concerns link up with those of relational aesthetics and the interactive nature of contemporary art. *Stud* is an example of this tendency, whether Schenck intended for this to happen or not. Visitors to the exhibition reclined on

the bench, drinking and contemplating this work and other artworks in the gallery.

In these terms, Stud becomes both a work that concerns the gaze and a relational work. It is not only a complex installation that invites and plays with a number of modes of looking, but also a facilitator for interaction in the gallery around it.

Ashton Tucker

M. Michael Smith's Touch is Telling

Sensuous, seductive, enticing. These are the kinds of words that I'd use to describe M. Michael Smith's project for the 2012 Master of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition. Smith has worked in a variety of materials, from photography to graphite, but his project here fits most appropriately into the genre of drawing. However, his idea of drawing may differ from the preconceptions that many spectators coming into the exhibition may have about what drawing is. Amongst his influences, Smith counts Eva Hesse as one of the most important. He describes Hesse's constant relationship with drawing, regardless of whatever other kinds of artistic production she practiced, as an involvement he shares. Smith's study of Hesse has allowed him to come up with new methods of drawing. This is profoundly evident in his work. Like Hesse, Smith combines the tradition of drawing with unconventional means to create something that is ultimately intimate and seductive.

In order to understand Smith's work, it is important to understand his philosophy. To quote the artist himself, "My work proves that drawing is not merely an act of mark making, but an intimate encounter that is comparable to the relationship had by humans through touch, desire, and seduction."

Therein lies the theme of Smith's theory of labor. Smith's portion of the MFA exhibition is aptly titled Touch is Telling. This collection of works describes a tendency in the artist's practice to tell the story of this intimate encounter between artist and work and the work's interaction with the spectator. Touching, as Smith comments, "leaves behind traces of our individual existence." The act of touching is a gesture in which

an individual makes a proverbial mark on those with whom he passes. This touch is also highly individual. Once again, to quote the artist, "the active gestures behind our touch carry profound significance, for no one touches exactly the same." Touching — and thus drawing — is not only a mark left by the artist, but also one that the artist leaves upon the viewer.

Touch is Telling is a collection of drawings made by applying inkjet printing ink as watercolor to stonehenge paper. Smith's process comes from an experimental phase in his career. Smith's earlier experiments involved pressing the emulsion at the base of expired Polaroid film as a means of making painterly marks on the face of the filmstrip. This practice opened him to the possibility of a more contemporary idea of drawing. This, in turn, led to his current work, which is distinctive for his way of using of inkjet printing ink like watercolor paints.

Here, Smith combines printing ink and stonehenge paper to produce a collection of drawings in light blues, greens, yellows, and pinks. The colors are faint, so much so that one is drawn to the work to even see it. The drawing entices me—begs me to come closer to it and contemplate. This is in itself intimate—my appreciation of the work is based on getting up close and personal with it. In other words, getting to know the work personally and intimately is what allows me to understand it.

I will end on this note. The artist refers to his work as an encounter in which the act of drawing lures and hypnotizes. I would add that Smith's drawing not only lures and hypnotizes the artist, but also does the same for the viewer. The work revolves around the notion of drawing as an intimate act. The drawing is alluring; the act of seeing it is an act of seduction. The act of drawing is thus an act of affection.

Ashton Tucker



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