2011
MASTER
OF FINE
ARTS
GRADUATE
THESIS
EXHIBITION

Virginia Commonwealth University
School Of The Arts
Craft / Material Studies
- Lauren Abrams
- Amanda Briede
- Courtney Dodd
- Mary Elkins
- Kristoff Kamrath
- Gian Pierrotti
- Laina Seay
- Jacob Sorenson

Kinetic Imaging
- Nathan Halverson
- Ferwa Ibrahim
- Jason Robinson

Painting + Printmaking
- Catherine Brooks
- Michael Kennedy Costa
- Wesley Friedrich
- Luther Kroman
- Keith J. Varadi

Photography & Film
- Jeffrey Kenney
- Jamie Lawyer
- Alma Leiva
- John Petrenko
- Jon-Phillip Sheridan
- Naoko Wowsugi

Sculpture + Extended Media
- Ashley Lyon
- Andrew Brehm
- Ana Esteve Llorens
- Will Machin
- Oscar Santillan
- Jennifer Lauren Smith
An MFA thesis show is a particular thing. It is both conclusion and debut. It is about marking one’s territory and staking one’s claim. It is about determining what is necessary to one’s own practice and recognizing what is relevant to a larger cultural conversation. Writing about a thesis show(s) is also a particular thing. With 29 artists in the mix how does one concisely describe the group?

Naturally, as I looked at the work once, then twice, then three and four times, patterns and trends emerged—this is after all a group of artists working in close proximity to one another and with a keen awareness of a wider framework. I noted: an embrace of a neo-baroque spectacle and theatricality and an interest in the uncanny and the sublime. I also found an emphasis on the local as expressed through a focus on community, the siting of the work in and around the body, the adaptation of personal narratives and an adaptation of lo-fi aesthetics. Each of these tying to broader tendencies in contemporary art.

The neo-baroque — a sense of extravagance, a non-linearity that permeates structure and composition, an elevation of form and materials through emotion — was particularly prominent in the work by the Sculpture + Extended Media grads, from Andrew Brehm’s highly-wrought, over-the-top, super-refined Floridian kitsch to the grand actions implicit in the creation of Jennifer Lauren Smith’s video, which was coupled with a live performance of partially hidden Tango dancers. Even Will Machin’s rough-hewn, found materials and out-moded equipment were imbued with a sense of drama and spectacle.

Oscar Santillan’s installation of objects and videos continues this engagement with theatricality, and ushers in the uncanny — that sense of both knowing and not knowing that is vaguely disturbing. Such a sensibility also marks Ashley Lyon’s work through her rendering of form and the awkwardly prominent placement of her unsettling figures. A more subtle iteration of the uncanny hovers in John Petrenko’s photographs depicting the otherwise unremarkable and invisible site where two states meet. Similarly, Naoko Wowsugi’s class photographs channel a normalcy and sense of the mundane that borders on the disquiet.

The unease of the uncanny is closely linked to the sublime and its ties to awe and anxiety. An awareness of the sublime is present in all of the work described above. Yet, for other artists, the sublime is a more literal thing, almost a trope that needs to be dismantled. Amanda Briede represents the idea of capturing a fleeting experience, implying a human impulse to corral and control. The deep Milky Way space of Jeff Kenney’s photographs and the infinite-ness of Jon Sheridan’s images hint at depictions of the sublime. But the literalness of Sheridan’s content and the everyday-ness of Kenney’s materials undermine the metaphoric sublime and instead delve deeply into questions of representation.

Related to this consideration of the sublime are a number of artists whose work addresses perception and the ways in which one processes information. Ana Esteve Llorens’ installation is a portrait of sensory perception — visual, tactile and spatial — often turned on its head, both literally and metaphorically. Courtney Dodd considers the relationship between reflection and perception and Nathan Halverson’s brick wall denies the viewer the ability to fully know the source of his sound. All three consider the limits of perception, while Lauren Abrams explores the relationship between a conscious and unconscious understanding and use of pattern.

In Jacob Sorenson’s work, witnessing the sublimity of the natural world is a false experience that results from a disconnected and unbalanced relationship between man and nature. Sorenson offers an antidote through the sense of community that, to him, is embodied in the culture of the handmade. Kristoff Kamrath assigns socialist politics to this notion of craft-community suggesting the hand-rendered object so closely aligned with craft is a stand-in protest for unchecked wealth. These cultural anxieties continue in Gian Perotti’s DIY encampment, where a sense of a survivalist mentality is deeply rooted in the materials.
If a sense of dislocation is implied in the other works, in Perotti’s work it is actually represented.

The relationship of materials and content and the emphasis on community expressed by Sorenson, Kristof and Perotti suggests a foregrounding of the local that is continued by several artists for whom more personal experiences factor prominently in their work. Mary Elkins creates literal representations — talismans almost — of objects with references to her past and to her family as a way to preserve them. Alma Leiva weaves a narrative between bloody Honduran politics and her own history. Jamie Lawyer’s intimate portrayals ground her work in personal narratives while their anonymity offers a stage for the audience to enact their own stories. Laina Seay’s installation of human forms reference both a literal body — that of her mother’s who suffered injuries from an accident — and an imagined fully prosthetic body of the future.

For Lawyer and Seay, the body serves as a narrative tool or vehicle for biographical content. For Catherine Brooks and Ferwa Ibrahim, the body is the channel by which they know the world, as revealed in Brooks’ paintings and performances, which reference tribal body markings, shakras, and bondage, and Ibrahim’s videos enacting Shiite Muslim rituals.

At the opposite end of the neo-baroque spectrum are the artists who deliberately embrace a non-grand gesture. Michael Kennedy Costa works in the vein of “bad” expressionism with his scratched paint, rough marks and forms, and tears. Jason Robinson’s reductive process renders once-crisp, found imagery into moody, distorted figures. Wesley Friedrich flirts with realism and simplicity of form as a means of engendering familiarity and closeness, even if, in the end, these are denied. A related idea of denial filters through both the flatness and static tone of Luther Kroman’s game imagery and its implied sense of nihilism, and Keith J. Varadi’s references to impotence, desire denied, or the relinquishing of control.

In his essay for VCU’s 2010 MFA thesis catalogue, Jack Risley detailed a chronology of events that occurred during the 2010 grads’ time at school, defining it as an “inchoate moment.” If one were to continue the list to reflect the significant events of the 2011 grads, one perhaps sees promise diminishing in an increasingly confusing scene of dysfunction and anxiety marked by the twin poles of the Tea Party and the Occupy Movement. Risley acknowledges that the 2010 artists’ responses to current events exist just below the surface. For the Class of 2011, reactions to the greater culture temperature are still subtle—there is very little overtly political work.

However, across these 29 artists is a collective specificity of medium. The sculptors channel an understanding of theatricality and an engagement between object and viewer inherited from minimalism—that the viewer acts on and is acted on by the work. The photographers grapple with the notion of a photograph’s indexicality. The painters continue a long-running meta-painting dialogue. The Kinetic Imaging artists investigate multi-media strategies of representation and presentation.

I would offer that this embrace of “roots” demonstrates not a blatant answer to any state of crisis but rather an internalized unease. Anxiety is rife in most of this work. Anxiety in the face of contemporary culture’s ultra-hybridity, its never-ceasing flow of information, its replacement of real place with virtual space, and a subsequent lack of stable footing. Harold Rosenberg’s Anxious Object is still with us. Whether one’s response is to think grand or intimate, universal or local, refined or rough, there is a shared gravitation towards some known entity that binds this smart and talented group together.
Craft / Material Studies

Lauren Abrams
Amanda Briece
Courtney Dodd
Mary Elkins
Kristoff Kamrath
Gian Pierotti
Laina Seay
Jacob Sorenson
Lauren Abrams  
Craft / Material Studies

An Artless Dream  
installation view, 2011  
marker, resin, sterling silver

An Artless Dream, Brooch #6  
3½” x 2½” x ¼”  
marker, resin, sterling silver
An Artless Dream, Brooch # 9
3 ¾” x 2 ¾” x ¾”
marker, resin, sterling silver

Brooch # 9 (detail)
Amanda Briede
Craft / Material Studies

I Wanna Rock!
2010–2011
installation

I Wanna Rock! (detail)
12" x 12", 2011
wax record
I Wanna Rock! (detail)
found wine glasses and bowls

I Wanna Rock! (detail)
transparent plastic 3D print
Courtney Dodd
Craft / Material Studies

Condensation
12' x 11' x 3", 2011
eye glass lenses

Condensation (detail)
installation view
17' x 11' x 19', 2011
found opera glasses, blown glass, photograph

Drift
65" x 48" x 2", 2011
photograph

Fog Study 2
40" x 30" x 2", 2011
photograph
Mary Elkins
Craft / Material Studies

Based on a True Story
4’ x 6’ x 9’, 2011
low fire clay, glaze, gouache, paste wax, terra sigillata
Based on a True Story
(detail)
Kristoff Kamrath
Craft / Material Studies

> *Transhuman Baby Buddha*
22” x 12” x 6”, 2011
hot-sculpted glass

> *He who owns the youth...*
4” H glass objects, 2011
glass, mineral oil

> *Toppling Goliath*
life sized fist, 2011
glass, cast iron
A Voice From The Dust
4' x 10' x 8', 2011
terra cotta, stoneware, oak branches, wheatgrass, twist ties

M.F.U. Mobile Firing Unit
5' x 3' x 4', 2011
stoneware, industrial cart
Blanket
3' x 4' x 5', 2011
terra cotta, twist ties, glaze

Crawdaddy Trap
8" x 10" x 8", 2011
stoneware, bronze glaze
Laina Seay
Craft / Material Studies

Craft Cyborg (series)
14’ x 17’ x 10’, 2011
ceramics, paint, chalk, stainless steel, strapping

Anatomical Studies
3’ x 3’ panels, 2011
paint, chalk
Extra Head
1 ½' x 1 ½' x 1'
ceramic, paint, strapping

Body Additions
dimensions vary, 2011
ceramic, paint, strapping
Jacob Sorenson
Craft / Material Studies

installation view
2011

Greetings From Oregon:
Ocean in View
12" x 32" x 20", 2011
shredder motor, fiberglass,
wood, spray-paint, cfls,
electronics, wire, and acrylic
Greetings From Oregon: Wolves
18” x 25” x 16”, 2010
processed wood, a log, spray-paint, steel, wire, lights, motors, electronics, hardware and acrylic

Greetings From Oregon: Wolves
33” x 28” x 30”, 2010
mdf, veneer, shellac, wood, led’s, wire, and electronics

installation view, 2011
Nathan Halverson
Kinetic Imaging

Rendition(s)
2011
brick, mortar, audio equipment
(behind brick wall)

Audio playlist: Sesame Street, Bodies, The Real Slim Shady, Babylon, We Will Rock You, Raspberry Beret, March of the Pigs, I Love You, Derrt: America, Killing in the Name, Born in the U.S.A., Fuck Your God, Enter Sandman
Ferwa Ibrahim
Kinetic Imaging

A New Year (Nouroz)
14 min 5 sec on loop, 2011
video installation
Ablutions
3 min 9 sec on loop, 2011
double channel video/audio installation
Jason Robinson
Kinetic Imaging

Resolution
4 min 50 sec, 2011
analog video
ablutions
3:09 min on loop, 2011
double channel video / audio installation
Catherine Brooks
Painting + Printmaking

> **Threshold**
> 70” x 1”, 2011
> hand-dyed and hand-stitched silk

> **Fortuna**
> 42” x 42”, 2011
> hand-dyed and hand-stitched silk

> **Ancestor**
> 18” x 18” x 4”, 2010
> hand-molded, raw Virginia clay
Catherine Brooks
Painting + Printmaking

Wilted Tulip
14" x 11", 2011
oil and wax on canvas

Book of Brass
42" x 11", 2011
oil and wax on canvas

Ceiling
14" x 11", 2011
oil on canvas

Marfa Mandala
18" x 18" x 2", 2010
acrylic on panel

Brigid’s Mask
12" x 18", 2010
digital c-print

Marta Mandalia
Michael Kennedy Costa
Painting + Printmaking

- Wilted Tulip
  14” x 11”, 2011
  oil and wax on canvas

- Book of Brass
  42” x 30”, 2011
  oil and wax on linen

- Ceiling
  14” x 11”, 2011
  oil on canvas
Marker
20” x 16”, 2011
marker on canvas

Clay Pope
42” x 30”, 2011
oil, wax, and dry pigment on linen

Blind
42” x 30”, 2011
dry pigment and wax on linen
Wesley Friedrich
Painting + Printmaking

- M.F.A. installation view
  2011

- From the Car to the Studio
  2011
  acrylic on nylon jacket, men's medium
Steamed Mirror
18", 2011
clear acrylic and clear
dispersants on mirror

Weather
14 ¼" x 9 ¼", 2011
inkjet print on aluminum
and inserted into wall
Luther Kroman
Painting + Printmaking

Missed Moves
11” x 14”, 2011
oil on Canvas

Zero Love (detail)
41” x 72”, 2011
oil on canvas
No Más
24" x 23", 2011
oil on canvas

No Más (detail)

Power Play
36" x 48", 2011
oil on canvas
Keith J. Varadi
Painting + Printmaking

- Larry and Magic
  17 1/2” x 8 1/2” (each), 2010
  maple and walnut veneers, mdf, brass hinges, acrylic latex paint

- Strange Sentiment
  16” x 20”, 2010
  oil on canvas
Blue Balls
dimensions vary, 2011
oil on canvas

Nut Shot
10 x 8", 2011
acrylic and screenprint
on canvas
Photography & Film

Jeffrey Kenney
Jamie Lawyer
Alma Leiva
John Petrenko
Jon-Phillip Sheridan
Naoko Wowsugi
Jeffrey Kenney
Photography & Film

→ Alpha Mist
  32" x 40", 2011
  inkjet print

→ The Fifteen Unnecessary Motions of a Kiss
  66" x 52", 2011
  36 photocopies
MFA installation view
2011

Paraffin and Gasoline, July 1944, I
50" x 40", 2011
inkjet print
Rewrite (series)
MFA installation view
30” x 45”, 2011
digital c-prints
Alma Leiva
Photography & Film

Producto Centroamericano:
Made in Honduras
MFA installation view
dimensions vary, 2011
led lights, sound, metal, found objects, wax, vine, fabric
Producto Centro Americano: Made in Honduras

a work by Alma Leiva

Honduras during the 1980’s, nearly 200 civilians were killed for political reasons. These individuals came to be known as the disappeared” or “Los desaparecidos.” The remains of only a few have been found. Twenty years later, after the 2009 military coup, the practice continues.
John Petrenko
Photography & Film

N 38 00.108 W 75 32.543
Maryland and Virginia (Eastern Shore).
34" x 59", 2010
archival pigment print

N 39 19.378 W 77 43.862
West Virginia, Maryland, and Virginia (Harpers Ferry)
44" x 54", 2011
archival pigment print
MFA installation view
2011
archival pigment prints
Jon-Phillip Sheridan
Photography & Film

Plex (series)
MFA installation view
2011
mfa thesis exhibit

Nomad
53" x 43", 2011
archival pigment print
Berg
40" x 30", 2011
archival pigment print

Line of Flight
28" x 40", 2011
archival pigment print
Naoko Wowsugi
Photography & Film

Contact Improvisation for everyday people
installation view
10 min on loop, 2011
4 channel videos

Contact Improvisation for everyday people
Teacher and Student’s Contact Improvisation
Father and Daughter’s Contact Improvisation
Customer and Server’s Contact Improvisation
Partners for 25 years Contact Improvisation
Group "VCU Undergraduate Printmaking Class" (Andy to Conor)

Group "Reference Gallery" (Conor to Ross)

Group "Lamplighter Roasting Company" (Ross to Zach)
Sculpture + Extended Media

Andrew Brehm
Ana Esteve Llorens
Ashley Lyon
Will Machin
Oscar Santillan
Jennifer Lauren Smith
Andrew Brehm
Sculpture + Extended Media

- MFA installation view
  - Xlthlx (left side)
    - 15’ x 15’ x 5’, 2011
    - wood, epoxy, paint, plaster

- I’ve Seen Enough (center)
  - 15’ x 4’, 2011
  - alcoolsalin sailfish, wood, epoxy, paint, plaster

- Crescent Club (right side)
  - 20’ x 20’ x 20’, 2011
  - wood, epoxy, paint, plaster

- Xlthlx
I've Seen Enough
15 x 1 x 4’, 2011
aluminum-sailfish, wood,
epoxy, paint, plaster

I've Seen Enough (detail)
Ana Esteve Llorens
Sculpture + Extended Media

Mapping the Distant
2011
installation view

Imaginary Geography
(foreground)
70” x 70” x 70”
plywood, polystyrene foam, enamel paint, pigment

A Room for All Seasons
9’ x 9’ x 9’; 2011
drywall, polystyrene foam, steel, brass, resin, light bulb, c-print, wood, enamel paint, plexiglass
Ashley Lyon
Sculpture + Extended Media

Marian Marion
46” x 23” x 32”, 2011
victory brown casting wax, chair, pigment

Tin Cry
45” x 19” x 4”, 2011
38 lbs cast tin
Contralto
38” x 80” x 10”, 2011
foam, plaster, joint compound,
water-putty, polyurethane,
acrylic paints, pigment, epoxy

Tin Cry
45” x 19” x 4”, 2011
38 lbs cast tin
Will Machin
Sculpture + Extended Media

Thicket
11’ x 14’ x 3’: 2011
tree, thornbushes, roadside mixed media, railroad ties, overhead projectors
Oscar Santillan
Sculpture + Extended Media

A Knife To Defeat The Night’s Breeze
2009–2011
ashes of a cremated coyote fixed on acrylic sheets
The Telepathy Manifesto
performance, 2011
high definition video loop, documentation

Cascade
2009–2011
high definition video loop

Juana Inés de la Cruz
several minute performance presented throughout exhibition, 2010–2011
five performers’ intermingled hair
Jennifer Lauren Smith
Sculpture + Extended Media

February
9 min 23 sec, 2011
High-definition video with sound
Ghosts from Candombe
continuous live performance, 2011

Ghosts from Candombe
(tango dancers, theatrical stage)
Special thanks to Photographer Terry Brown
Designed by Daniel Cole and Cassandra Ellison

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