2009 Masters of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition

Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts
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Professor Sonya Clark, Craft/Material Studies chair, writes about the craft artists:

There is a certainty in craft materials, a language of the familiar: the clink of two glasses, the way porcelain warms to the touch, the sheen of silk, the glint of a wedding band, or the contour of woodgrain. Graduate students enter the Department of Craft/Material Studies fluent in this language. Their eloquence is enriched by skill, thousands of hours honing mastery in manipulating common materials. They know the rules and make the process seem effortless. But, the process is not effortless. These are intelligent artists who abstract from the familiar with a poet’s sensibility. From the ominous to the optimistic, these eight artists break from certainty and tinker with our expectations.

Ryan Gothrup explores the sublimation of violence in popular sports, as basketballs - real ones and those made of glass - alternatively bounce and shatter in a playground, the sound, an unintentional call for confrontation. Subtlety, violence, and transformation are seamlessly merged in Toshi Tanaka’s work. A bomb shimmers with a glistening surface as the innocent scent of baby oil permeates the air. The head of a trim woman erupts with foam. Are these thought bubbles or memories of a mushroom cloud?

Looming thick, industrial felt silhouettes of armoires hold muffled stories of Susana Marta Almuña y Martín’s heritage. Family secrets previously tucked into the wooden drawers of silent witnesses are reconfigured into dense cloth that absorbs the sounds of the gallery and hushes the voices of the viewers.

In her earnest attempt at finding belonging amidst a forest, Cari Freno both acknowledges the sapience of nature and the futility of the human condition. Her videos juxtapose her awkwardness against the confidence of the towering trees. Freno wields her vulnerability and draws us in.

Gabriel Craig poses a question, “Can jewelry do and be good?” As a writer, metalsmith, and performer, he executes a subversion of jewelry to connect our ethical and social values. His work is as much a critique as it is a genuine query.

Jon Sutter employs new technologies to do what would previously be near impossible to execute in wood. Aided with possibilities a CNC router presents in combination with MDF, he surreptitiously slips the question of what it means to make “now versus then” under a maze of pleasing pattern and repetition in form.

In hair, there is identity. Akiko Jackson places herself in the center of her exploration of identity. Her work expresses a sense of alienation through the manipulation of synthetic hair.

About the VCUarts Programs and 2009 MFA Artists

Introduction

Kinetic Imaging is committed to the artistic exploration of video, animation and sound. Our MFA program emphasizes the extension of these practices into contemporary art and culture. Graduate students are exposed to a vigorous visiting artist schedule. Through studio reviews, seminars and research, the students are expected to build an awareness of contemporary and historical definitions of art that will influence their creative work. In addition to their own investigations, graduate students participate in and contribute to the undergraduate program.

Althea Georgelas creates a multi-channel sound and video installation, WarWeaponBody. The piece references and reflects on violence and its impact on society, the individual body and those on the front lines of war. For both the visuals and sound, internet subject search terms were used to gather raw material that she then collaged into a dual-projection video and 6-channel audio mix.

The MFA exhibition is a turning point. With the momentum established here, the graduates of VCUarts Department of Painting & Printmaking demonstrate a remarkable breadth of approach to the practice. What you see here is the tip of the iceberg, the edit so to speak, of two years of self-reflection and query—from peers, faculty, and the many artists, critics, writers and curators who frequently visit the department. Voices resound and work flourishes as these individuals engage creatively within this fertile field of support and criticality.

The presence of each person at once alters the object and imbues it with a remarkable breadth of approach to the practice. What you see here is the tip of the iceberg, the edit so to speak, of two years of self-reflection and query—from peers, faculty, and the many artists, critics, writers and curators who frequently visit the department. Voices resound and work flourishes as these individuals engage creatively within this fertile field of support and criticality.

Keith Mendak’s work yearns to connect humanity. He uses the ubiquity of mirrors and masking traditions to elicit/engender compassion. A series of photographs documents a diverse cast of characters donning a glass mask. The presence of each person at once alters the object and imbues it with their collective identity.

Professor Bob Kaputof, Kinetic Imaging chair, and Professor Stephen Vitello, write:

The graduates of VCUarts Department of Painting & Printmaking demonstrate a remarkable breadth of approach to the practice. What you see here is the tip of the iceberg, the edit so to speak, of two years of self-reflection and query—from peers, faculty, and the many artists, critics, writers and curators who frequently visit the department. Voices resound and work flourishes as these individuals engage creatively within this fertile field of support and criticality.

Their contributions to the contemporary cultural landscape are engaging. They have most certainly made a contribution to the alchemy of our culture. The MFA exhibition is a turning point. With the momentum established here, we look forward to the challenge and contribution they will make to the field.

Josh Borrom’s reverse paintings on Plexiglas are a synthesis of fast and slow media. References to the cultures of skateboarding, popular music, and video transmission are slyly inserted into layered works that collapse perceived binaries such as uniqueness vs. duplication, transparency vs. opacity, and analog vs. digital forms.

In Kate Kisicki’s work, the artist’s response to such diverse genres as street art and the sublime landscape, collide with her love for the physical and emotive properties of painting. The resulting compositions manifest a strong physical presence and a complex - and occasionally quizzical - approach to pictorial spatiality.
Tony Klotz is engrossed with research involving esoteric science and utopian communities; his inquiries result in intricate works in a variety of media. Always emphasizing the subtle and the secretive, Klotz’s etchings, drawings, and paintings depict imagined spaces, peculiar flora, and visionary worlds.

Ryan Lauterio’s MONO-RAIL (at wits end/infinite welcome), is a large fantastical transportation vehicle — a three dimensional embodiment of painting’s sublime metaphysical function. Crafted from a variety of materials, Lauterio’s work somewhat paradoxically resonates as both fallible and grandiose, and embodies a sense of striving for extraordinary experience in the context of the everyday.

Jill Ann Zevenbergen constructs large-scale, digitally mastered, laser-cut paper installations that examine semblance and differentiation within the mundane urban landscape. Her reconsideration of quotidian forms and her restrained use of color suggest that one might find within familiar spaces something surprising, illuminating, or transformational.

The Photography and Film Department’s Director of Graduate Studies, Professor Paul Thulin, writes:

The Department’s 2009 M.F.A. thesis exhibitions display an exciting exploration into a budding and often controversial category of artworks described as “Moving Image.” Arising out of a seemingly indistinct post-media theoretical discourse, “Moving Image” works have been spurred by a recent influx of innovative video-capturing capabilities within an ever evolving array of lens-based imaging devices. The adoption of this diverse category of works has been deliberately reflective and intensely scrutinized, while confirming the complexity and expanding potentiality of the future artistic horizons of our graduates.

Nia Burks’ video installations, Bootymeat and Reaction, balance appropriated web footage and inventive juxtaposition of content. Bootymeat presents a looping collection of video-streams of scantily-clad adolescent girls engaging their video cameras moments before and after gyrating to their favorite hip hop song. Reaction confrontationally positions adolescent boys laughing, pointing, and screaming at unseen footage, ultimately causing their gaze to fixate uncomfortably upon the viewer. Burks’ compositions examine the nature of sexual identity, rituals in the digital age, the mediated evolution of “gender gazes,” and the creative potential of user-generated video content through social-networking technologies such as YouTube.

Jennida Chase’s works combine lighting, complexly constructed stages, intricate sound design, and advanced digital editing. Lollipop, Don’t Be A Hero is a steampunk-inspired, cinematic joyride to an eerie but plush fantasy world of waiters, waitresses, and short-order cooks engaged in a choreographed deconstruction of the hierarchical roles in the food service industry and its clientele. Lollipop, Don’t Be A Hero (interactive sound performance) offers a performance-based “platter” of audio testimonies from seasoned wait staff sharing complaints and nightmare stories of working in the restaurant industry. Together, the works convey the absurdity of western social class injustices, the undervalued perspective of the “average Joe,” and the power of sardonic humor to stir social reform.

Hassan Pitts’ high-definition video Interstitial initially portrays an African-American man shaving in a bleak bathroom. However, an intensifying gestural energy of looped multi-layered imagery, coupled with a tapestry of ambient sounds, slowly transforms the mundane action into a metaphorical performance. The work posits the monotony of shaving in an iconic and transcendent frame, ultimately questioning the basis of masculine identity while simultaneously addressing existential themes of struggle, transformation, and maturity.

About the sculptors, Professor Amy Hauft, Sculpture + Extended Media chair, writes:

These works result from two years of study in the department. The artists worked intensively with our eight resident faculty and interacted with untold visiting artists and critics. But more important, they spent the last two years challenging and supporting one another in spirited critiques and conversations. The results demonstrate the broad and eccentric talents with which our highly regarded program has become identified. These ambitious projects run the gamut of materials and themes, all with a marked sense of materiality and presence — each set off by an abiding sense of curiosity and intellect.

Patrick Cadenhead’s Untitled Landscape and Sunset Boulevard is a site-specific project in which the mundane bears close scrutiny. Among others, a Dixie cup, a machine screw and a linoleum tile reveal themselves as animators of the space.

Ma Feuer investigates the absurdity of our constructed landscape. The physicality of her barrage of exploding bridge parts, entitled Collapse, attempts to understand our impulse to control the movement of others.

Julie Ang Nagle assumes the role of alchemist, romantic, pioneer, and innovator in work that mirrors the experimentation of 19th-century scientists. Nagle’s myriad fabrication techniques impart important content in each of her sculptures.

Chris Mahonski gathers objects from nature and culture, making rough approximations of that which cannot be gathered. In The Void, the Coach and the Future, he coaxes a wrestling mat, a charred tree, metal halide lights, coal chunks and folding chairs fitted with miner’s headlamps into an improbable sculpture. His inquiries result in intricate works in a variety of media.

Maria Pithara’s Saturday is a multi-channel video tableau in which she creates haunting juxtapositions of Baroque portraiture and childish games of make-believe. Both come to life in lushly colored and textured circumstances of deadpan absurdity and play.

Brian Taylor’s Going Drawings, Shoulder Bell, Touching The Floor, One of the Big Fat Forms (Hir-khrebi) and Purpleheart create a rebuff of implied experience for the viewer. Taylor uses multiple media to investigate phenomenological and historical references, expecting and providing much for the viewer.
preceding pages: Secrets and Light (installation view), 12’ × 19’ × 16’, 2009

Aqui quedaron los secretos de TA (detail), 8’ × 6’ × 1”, industrial felt, 2009

facing page: Aquí quedaron los secretos de JA (detail), 9’ × 6’ × 1”, industrial felt and ellipsoidal reflector spotlight, 2009
preceeding page: Red Moon (detail), mono screen print with oil paint on Plexiglass, red spray paint, 20” × 22”, 2009

facing page: Yellow Moon, mono screen print with oil paint on Plexiglass, fluorescent yellow spray paint, 4’ × 6’ feet, 2009

Green Moon, mono screen print with oil paint on Plexiglass, fluorescent green spray paint, fluorescent light, chroma key blue painted Plexiglass, 24” × 33”, 2009
Bootymeat, video installation, variable dimensions, 2009

preceding pages: Reaction, video installation, variable dimensions, 2009
preceding pages: Untitled Landscape, pacing bolt, dripping light bulb, Dixie cup with drain, polymer worm, gilded oatmeal, linoleum, carpet padding, buckets, pumps, pillar, and a 1:5280 scale pencil drawing of Sunset Boulevard, 300” × 300” × 144”, 2009

right top, middle, and bottom: Untitled Landscape (detail), 2009

facing page left and right: Untitled Landscape (detail), 2009
Gabriel Craig
Craft/Material Studies

**top:** Altruist No. 7, signet ring, sterling silver, gold plate, 2” × 1.5” × 1.25”, 2009

**bottom:** Altruist No. 7 (detail), 2009

**top:** Altruist No. 8, signet ring, recycled sterling silver, citrine, polymer clay, 2” × 1.5” × 1.25”, 2009

**bottom:** Altruist No. 8 (detail), 2009
Altruist No. 5

Philanthropy Failed (installation view), 2009

Altruist No. 5 (detail), 2008

top: Altruist No. 5, signet necklace, recycled sterling silver, 18 karat gold, rubies, thread, silk cord pendant, 3" × 2.25" × 2", chain 44", 2008
preceding pages and details: Collapse, steel, Styrofoam, FGR, enamel paint, 28' × 6' × 16', 2009
war weapon body
preceding pages: WarWeaponBody, print graphic, 10" × 20", 2009

left and facing page top and bottom: WarWeaponBody (detail), sound & video installation, 36' × 18', 2009

WarWeaponBody (installation view), sound & video installation, 36' × 18', 2009
TV Slugger and Diversion (installation views), video performance, 2009
preceding pages left to right: Roots Embraced and Heritage Braided (installation view), 2009

facing page: Roots Embraced (detail), epoxy resin, metal, wood, 9' × 3' × 6', 2009

Heritage Braided (detail), 700 ft. synthetic hair, 24' × 2' × 9', 2009
100% (detail). Latex, acrylic, oil on canvas, 90” × 49”, 2009

preceding pages: 3 Flavors, latex, acrylic, spray paint, collage, oil on canvas, 56” × 48”, 2009

Faux Coup!, oil on canvas, 96” × 96”, 2009
Tony Klotz
Painting & Printmaking
The Christian Topographical Multiverse, nine hand-colored stone lithographs, 14” × 17” each, 2009

preceding pages: Mars and Its Canals, graphite on paper, 15” × 15.5”, 2009

facing page: Gravity, silver metal-point on gessoed board, 30” × 24”, 2009
preceding pages: KINGDOM COMPOSIBLE (installation view), dimensions variable, 2009
BARA, acrylic on wood panel, 86" × 84", 2009

facing page top: MONO-RAIL (at wits end, infinite welcome), mixed media, 166" × 79" × 66", 2009
facing page bottom: MONO-RAIL (at wits end, infinite welcome) (detail), 2009
Chris Mahonski
Sculpture + Extended Media
preceding pages and details: The Void, the Coach, and the Future, wrestling mat, charred tree patched with concrete, charred root patched with concrete, charred gymnasium doors, metal halide light with powder-coated hood, three fabricated crosscut saws with vintage handles, coal, steel sheets with metal flake powder-coating, chromed and painted folding chairs, antique carbide miner’s head lamps (mounted in the chairs), hardware, concrete, blue stain, Velcro, acrylic, iridescent pigment, green colored pencil, 15’ x 18’ x 7’, 2009
Departure and Artifice, (installation view), mixed media, dimensions variable, 2009

Departure (façade detail), 2009

Artifice, photo series, 16" x 20" each, 2009
High School Hookups (detail), 60” × 70”, 2009

La Philosophe (detail of skull)

La Philosophe (detail of barrel)

Madame L. (detail of rabbit)

Birth of a Universe, 60” × 90”, 2009

preceding pages left to right: La Philosophe, Midgley’s Lead Constitution, Madame L., High School Hookups, installation view, dimensions variable, 2009

facing page: Madame L., 5’ × 5’ × 9’, 2009
all pages: Still images from Saturday, multi-channel video installation, variable dimensions, 2009
You have to build it to know it, photograph, 30” × 40”, 2008

Recognition, photograph, 30” × 40”, 2008

Comfort Zone, single channel video, 32” monitor, 7 min., 2007

Interstitial, 47” video monitor installation with sound, 11 min. 5 sec., 2009
preceding pages: Incomplete Spiral, MDF, 12” x 18” x 12”, 2009
Stretched Sphere, MDF, 26” x 26” x 26”, 2009

facing page left: 90 Degree Lattice with Counter-facing Nodes (detail), MDF, 90” x 30” x 30”, 2009
facing page right: Column, MDF, 120” x 16” x 16”, 2009
preceding pages: S. Fountain, urethane resin, plywood, glass, air pump, synthetic detergent, 68" x 13" x 13", 2009

Missile Fountain, foam board, urethane resin, plywood, pigment, pump, baby-oil, 76" x 20" x 20", 2009

facing page: Cicada’s shell, blown glass, pigment, epoxy resin, 20" x 14" x 13", 2008
Brian Taylor
Sculpture + Extended Media
preceding pages left to right: Touching The Floor, Shoulder Bell, Gong, Drawings (installation view, northwest corner), paper, China marker, weights, cast aluminum, steel, aluminum tripod, cork, video, 2009

Purpleheart, wood, sling, photographs, daily activity of oil investment, 2009

left: Purpleheart (detail), 2009

facing page top: One of the Big Fat Forms (Har-khebi) (installation view, southeast corner detail), weights, paper, sand, plaster, pigment, sawdust, adhesives, cement, metal lath, weights, 2009

Shoulder Bell, cast aluminum, steel, aluminum tripod, cork, 2009

facing page bottom: One of the Big Fat Forms (Har-khebi) (installation view, southeast corner detail), weights, paper, sand, plaster, pigment, sawdust, adhesives, cement, metal lath, weights, 2009

Purpleheart, wood, sling, photographs, daily activity of oil investment, 2009

left: Purpleheart (detail), 2009
preceding pages: All Parts Tree Book (detail), hand-bound book; lithograph and laser cut paper, 12.5” × 17” × 1”, 2009


Like Aike (installation view), lithograph and laser cut paper; dimensions variable, 2009
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