SENIOR
STUDIO
Acknowledgments

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Foreword

The Senior Studio Catalog is an annual publication that documents the final exhibition series of Oberlin College’s year-long Senior Studio Art program. Publishing students’ artist statements, photographs of their exhibition, and critical essays reviewing their work constitutes our approach for comprehensive documentation. We sought to publish a variety of types of texts, ranging from traditional art historical accounts to creative interpretations of exhibited student art. This catalog features a diverse group of writers, including Oberlin students across academic disciplines and staff members, expanding the parameters this catalog has traditionally followed. In full acknowledgement that the arts community of Oberlin College is an insular one, we hoped to make this year’s catalog more accessible through publishing both in print and online.

This publication includes the work of twenty-three artists, twenty-one authors, and the masterful photography of Jeong Hyun Hwang, composed in an original design by Edie Hanly. As a large scale collaboration of nearly sixty individuals, the publication reflects and considers dialogues between artists and their audience, the Oberlin community at large. Through individual and collective efforts, the catalog presents an integration of academic and practice-based study of art in Oberlin.

Juliet Vincente, Co-Editor in Chief
Mengchen (Sue) Xu, Co-Editor in Chief
“If you want clean ideas, change them, like shirts.”  
-Francis Picabia

I pursue balance in complex systems, arranging found items—hair, graphite, nails, pins, thread, lace, and dirt—into abstract swarms. With an interest in disorder and forward and backward processes, I resolve and destroy these surfaces using dripped paint, finger paint, collected objects, palette knives, and resin.

My process presents an expression outside of language, mainly for composing and organizing thought, following rapid decisions, and preserving impulse in space. Instead of planning, I confront the difficulty of starting from nothing; I turn to intuition and chance as primary sources of production.

In a frantic process of mixing manufactured objects with natural textures, my art reveals a perplexing sense of skin or leather. Tension comprises this body of work, at once organic and artificial; chaotic and composed; discovered and made-up.

cargocollective.com/celiakeim
Essay by Caroline Philo

In “the Nature of Chaos,” Celia Keim manipulates everyday objects and upsets our expectations for aesthetic pleasure: tacks puncture the surface of gauze netting; hair is cut from the artist’s friends and preserved in polyester resin; frayed undergarments discolored from age are flattened against a panel and put on display. Our expectations for tacks to be utilitarian, hair to be attached to a body, and undergarments to stay in domain of privacy are frustrated by their appropriation as artistic medium. Keim admits, “I was drawn to making art that is uncomfortable. It’s not supposed to be decipherable.” Although previous systems of association have broken down, the new vision that Keim presents us with has yet to coalesce into concrete meaning.

Keim’s work, which often points to a process of inscription, revision, and erasure, resists any sense of logical closure. Her work points to process, and gives primacy to bodily experience. A canvas is built up with gauze and gesso, scraped away with a palate knife, and struck with lines of graphite and chalk. The hacking lines and raised surface strongly resemble a landscape, and the tacks that impale the back of the canvas strongly resemble a thorns or a thicket. The viewer is also confronted with the sharp edge of the tack that could pose danger to the body, and subconsciously fears the nail piercing their own flesh. Associations of nature, violence, and process proliferate until they meet the flat, clean, white paint on the border. Boundaries between self and other, between body and object, are in flux. We are reminded of Keim’s bodily process of art making, the paint and canvas, and the materiality of our own bodies.

Visceral discomfort also arises when looking at panels impaled with tacks, bedaubed with hair resin, and layered with flattened, stiffened lace undergarments. These garments - thin, diaphanous, and aged bits of fabric - were salvaged from Keim’s childhood home. These pieces, destroyed are partially reimagined, point to the residue of loss. Keim explained, “I am always trying to destroy things and feel comfortable with what is left.”
Humans, similar to many other animals, need contact with others and crave deeper connections in order to survive. In understanding the similarities between nature and human cohesiveness, and I hope to shed light on the influence of nature’s commonly forgotten power and the consequences of our actions upon it. My work touches upon the intricacies of the natural world, in both its symmetry and lawlessness. Through all of its detailed structures, nature and the animals that inhabit it have a heightened sense of community and in turn unity.

I have studied the physiological as well as psychological connections between natural forms and human characteristics. I have employed both aggressive and gentle expression of these concepts. Some projects focus more on the detrimental effects of our actions upon the environment while others address the beauty that persists.

Using predominantly paint and ink I engage sensory experiences through sight, hoping to exaggerate the tactile quality reminiscent of natural forms through two-dimensional work. Mixed media forms in my hive installation shed light on the fragile and often neglected creatures we rely so heavily on. Through heightening a viewer’s use of sight and smell, my installation seeks to remind visitors of how they interact and form memories with nature through the use of their senses.

I challenge the viewer to reexamine their relationship with the natural world and realize that structures within this environment exemplify patterns of cooperation and harmony that people can benefit from understanding more deeply. I seek to express nature in its beauty and destruction, highlighting the importance of nature and the effects of assumed superiority over it. By reconstructing a setting that ties together the nature of us as beings and that of the environment, I hope to humanize what is taken for granted.

gracetobin.carbonmade.com
Essay by Mir Finkelman

Grace Tobin works with a certain intensity. Putting to use intimate and personal mediums in which she often works such as ink, paint, and silkscreen, *The Nature of Chaos* combines the ordered and the unruly in a confluence of images which seek at once to observe and heighten an interaction with the natural world. Grace works with the push and pull of the human interaction with nature, finding monstrosity in destruction as well as moments of quiet and introspection. The human viewer is always already both within and apart from nature, a product of it and one whose production has a startling impact upon it.

Working largely with the motif of the honeybee, Grace seeks to integrate the rough and seemingly chaotic qualities of nature with its symmetry, geometry, and cyclicality. Her works play on themes well embodied in the symbiotic relationship between humans and the honeybee that are often taken for granted or overlooked. In the bee’s wing there is strong symbolism - the anatomy itself reflects both the art and the artist. Delicate, intricate, and powerful. Grace produces all her work by hand, from drawing repeated and layered forms to installing a three-dimensional installation and building all her own frames to fit the specific sizes of the works. These productions, though trained, reveal the small inconsistencies of pattern and imperfect symmetry because, as she says, “nature itself is imperfectly perfect.”

In her hive installation, seen in its third iteration in “The Nature of Chaos,” Grace works in three dimensions, admittedly outside of her comfort zone. She envelops the visitor in a sensory experience wrangling materials such as ink, gauche paint, PVC pipe, beeswax, pollen, bees, and LED lights, into a work that is, in all senses, “multi-media.” The visitor enters the space of the hive, and is immediately engaged in the dripping wax affixed to the wall, at once containing the once-live bees held therein, whilst simultaneously breaching its hexagonal frames. Using materials to play on sensory experiences, the yellow cloth dims the gallery lights and the beeswax emits a heavy aroma, conditioning the visitor to engage with the hive in more ways than only the visual. In her two-dimensional works, cyclicality plays large role both in imagery and concept. Many aspects of environmental art, as she terms it, are interconnected - they must be. Nature itself is innately cyclical - birth, death, rebirth - the rhythm symbolic of a united whole. The cyclical patterns rendered out of composite natural elements (plant life, fruits, insects) in Grace's works demonstrate a movement that causes the viewer to engage and examine more critically their own role within the cycles of nature. “There's nothing that's not growing there.”
My experience in Theresienstadt, Terezin transit camp last summer inspired me to continue an exploration of both the visible and invisible architectonic boundaries that define human existence. I continue to transpose this form as it in turn continues to perpetuate demarcation and defines both the historic and current human experience as it is revealed to me in many forms.

The stories I discover within city spaces inspire a continuous process in which I explore new relationships between people and the spaces that they occupy. When I create installations and prints, I wonder, how does the geometry of these cities impact their people and how do they inspire the form of their cities’ architectonic boundaries?

I use reproducible media as well as threads, twine, rope and paper to transpose city spaces as prints and as installations. The material I use is drawn from the two-dimensional walls and activates three-dimensional spaces that defy the wall in its evocation of demarcation. As I recompose, reconstruct, and activate spaces, the structures that contain these stories discover new geometry as I redefine their form.

I draw from the geometry of converging form, deriving from many locations of discrepancy. My interest in the relationship between architectonic space and demography continued in the city of Siena, whose contemporary attitudes and ward-centric medieval traditions manifest both culturally and architecturally within the space of the city. I found new geometry as I drew with threads, rope, and copper wire in the alleyway of Vicolo Degli Orefici.

I draw from the geometry of converging form, deriving from the Dissonance and Concordance of movement so that as I twisted the planes of paper in opposite directions or as I drew the paper apart, the new geometry of converging lines came to life in the discrepancy of their opposing movement.

I draw from the geometry of converging form, deriving from the maps of transit systems that were printed in layers and interrupt the otherwise presumed demarcated space of the Hasidic community that surrounds the centrally located IRT metro station in Crown Heights, deriving from the discrepancy of the body and from the distinct forms found within the Star of David as they converge in space. As I defy concepts of demarcation, of deformation, and of dissolution, I transpose the boundary to accentuate the new geometry found in the intersection of form.

Unbound. Printed parchment paper, linen thread, wax, and screenprints on newsprint.

Exhibition: Unbound

ALICE SHOCKEY

aliceshockey.com
Essay by Paolo Yumol

Francis, in the passenger seat, balled up like a napkin, shaking like a pair of dice, a stale biosphere of vehicular dust just dawning over him, his one foot dug deep into the floor of the car like a flaming hoof; either eye blinking but somehow closed, brain melting into butter, regarded the cheap crystal swinging gallows-like from the rear-view mirror with a newfound blankfaced awe as if it were a thumb-and-pinky-extended “hang loose” hand sign sent from a lazy version of God, a version of God that arrives at last but leaves a messy trace of empty cans and junk food refuse and leaves, extending that meager “hang loose” from the space in the doorway before vanishing. Francis, waiting for Jean to get back, regarded the cheap crystal as if it were new, though it had been there just short of forever, and had probably certainly been there since Jean had gotten out, livid and doing livid things like scratching his arms and pinching his tongue, miming pulling it out as though it were the pin of a grenade, the grenade in this case being Jean’s head, pink and sparsely scruffy in a pet way and ballooning out of its own control. A grenade, globular and composed of multiple geometric facets as the crystal itself was, hanging in front of him, exuding an infantilizing aura as though it were a mobile suspended over a crib. He closed his eyes and imagined holding either thing, the grenade and the crystal, in either hand, the grenade and the crystal, in either hand, and the sensation was palpable enough that he momentarily considered masturbating and breaking a storefront window with a baseball bat, simultaneously and respectively, holding both imaginary things, both of them also corresponding in some semi-subconscious way to Jean’s impenetrable head, wrapped as it always was in its own crystallized grief. And he clenched the crystal even harder with his mind’s fist, grinding and kneading it with his fingers, and the prism unfolded in a wrinkled way, map-like, unfurling into geometric lace, each line and vertex corresponding in some semi-subconscious way to all the difficulties of waiting, here, in the passenger seat, for Jean, and to all the difficulties of having a body that pines for another body, and how the distance between them no matter how minute and how sustained had cartographic intentions, etched itself into history even if just as a crooked line in a mound of city dirt or as a crease in a bedsheets, lattices that spun themselves into nonsense chronological fractals that presented helpful upon unhelpful narrative, double- and triple-exposed, so that he and Jean were identical and incompatible and in love and estranged and brothers and wrestling in mud and wrestling in honey all at once—Francis watched the crystal swing and sneezed in a way that it seemed to be freaking coming out of his eye, and he blushed at his body the color of which seemed to be bleeding cruelly outside of its own borders.
I am often stuck in between moments. It is there where there is the quiet to reflect. But each reflection becomes further abstracted by this time in between—a ripple moving outwards from where the stone has fallen, never the stone itself. My Body is Your Temple, is at once a reflection but also an exploration of where the stone goes once it has sunk below the surface.

However, this calls an important question: where does the surface end and the interior begin? When I ask this question of myself, I realize that the external and the internal exist as two realms for me. My body and my being are at once intrinsically linked and entirely separate.

In some ways, my sculptures are recreations of memories, images and symbols from my life. These things are external but have become internal parts of my architecture. Their externality is symbolized by their tangibility, by the physical space they take up and their reliance on the human body for their impact.

In other ways, they are interpretations of these same memories, images and symbols. There is the presence of my feelings, and the way in which they warp these external objects and actions into something I can understand and consume internally. This is symbolized by the surrealist aspects of my work, the painted paper bags, and the use of text in certain pieces.

Growing up, I remember often hearing adults say, “You will grow into yourself.” I had this idea in my head that one day I would wake up and suddenly, it would all be very clear: who I was and what I wanted. I’m still waiting on that day, but I haven’t given up on the idea that there is a true “me” underneath all the things that feel inauthentic.

There are aspects that make me who I am, some of which are experiential, while others are circumstantial. I often find myself lost in whether it is the small details, like eating the crusts of bread before I eat the insides, that make up the parts of who I am, or larger societal labels that I must learn to interpret my place within.

My art is what anchors me to my identity. It is at once an expression but also an exploration of people, moments and symbols in my life. By reinterpreting larger cannons through people, moments and symbols within my own life, I find that I am able to make sense of who I am at my core. I can explore collective aspects of identity, such as heritage, while also exploring more personal aspects of what makes me who I am.
Harley Bosco is expecting visitors—the front door is open. Her show “My Body Is Your Temple” begins in the living room.

The visitor finds women in black dresses posed throughout the house. Each woman wears a brown paper bag over her head, painted with a portrait of the same woman. These uncanny reflections of Harley have painted faces larger than their bodies. Each woman stands totally still, as if she were frozen.

Altars and icons surround these women throughout the house. On the living room table, baby blue underwear is found inside an open box of cordial cherries. A note upon it reads, “My armor once so strong, melts in the heat of his palms...” Nearby are puddles of cherries, seemingly made out of wax, echoing the melting of her narrative.

Another altar is found in an open fridge. Harley created meticulous sculptures of the Virgin Mary made out of sugar. They stand in a grid formation on the floor of the fridge. The colors and opacities are every shade between white sugar and molasses. On the shelf of the fridge rests a Bible open to a passage of the Book of Paul, discussing the merits of family members passing on doctrine. The piece suggests that the exchange of doctrine takes place in domestic spaces, rendering even the most mundane household objects didactic.

One cannot ignore the quietude that hangs over these altars and frozen women. The stillness and silence renders each piece like a separate snapshot of a memory. The interpretative problem, then, is figuring out how to connect them all. With all of these snapshots presented simultaneously, thematic connections can be drawn, but not logical ones. Cause and effect become irrelevant in recollection.

In Albert Oehlen’s untitled installation from 2005, a two-dimensional self-portrait of the artist is shown in a bed, partially tucked into a pink comforter. A three-dimensional hand appears to come out of the painting, holding a paintbrush that bends to touch the painting. Humorously, the painting appears to be creating itself. This installation is also completely silent. The comedy in Oehlen’s installation, as well as Harley’s show, derives from the hubris and discomfort of self-representation. It begs the question: Why represent oneself at all? Harley’s work suggests that the process is not completely in one’s control—it is guided by subtle doctrines. The gap between Harley and her representation is circumvented, but it is never shut.

Essay by Nolan Boomer

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The art that I make can be described as wooden and/or metal sculptural objects. My pieces can often be viewed as portraits even if they are not figurative. I want my viewers to see maybe me or someone they don’t know or themselves in them. If they are specific portraits I will title them accordingly. I make sculptures because they exist in space. They don’t represent anything but themselves; they make the viewer aware of himself while viewing them, and his physical relation to them. I make sculptures because I think sculpture is the medium that lends itself most to being humorous without the requirement of being clever. The objects I make embody paradoxes (e.g. functional/useless, aesthetically pleasing/ugly, new/old, maximal/minimal, genuine/fake, humorous/serious, permanent/ephemeral, sturdy/fragile, familiar/foreign, basic/complicated, purposeful/accidental, reasoned/arbitrary, vague/explicit, casual/fancy, professional/amateur, masculine/feminine, simple/confusing, original/stolen, good art/bad art). I believe that art in a similar way is a paradox in that it is completely necessary while simultaneously being completely unnecessary. In my work I am curious to explore why you are here, like, why did you come to this show marketed as an art show? What can these objects do for you? I make sculptures but I am not opposed to other mediums.
Outside of the Dionysus Club on a Friday, Risa wears mostly trash in the same way that she says, “I make trash art.” Neither her clothes nor her artworks are trash, but they are composed of unwanted and unused objects, found in the garbage, recyclables, or dedicated to being given away. Like her clothing, her materials are not inherently valuable. Mostly using wood and metal, they obtain meaning in their construction and collage. She pursues regeneration in the repurposing and re-materialization of wood and metal, that carry histories and characterizations unknown but referential in their form. The beholder is induced to experiences of intimacy, alienation, and indifference, not towards the object but from it. Walking into Fischer Gallery a miniature table constructed of raw wooden boards is ready to give anyone who dares touch splinters. It serves no functional purpose, but exhibits the names of someone unknown, persuading the beholder to make speculations. Her sculpture challenges where and what these objects should be as she declares them valuable because of and not despite their mundane materiality. A long metal chain hangs from the Fischer ceiling vibrantly colored it pulls downwards and then lifts up. It defies the connotations of metal as heavy and sterile, instead presenting a new situational reading of its circumstances. Risa works within a process of addition until subtraction or indecision until decision, resembling the unstable paradoxes that have come to embody her work.

“Your art looks really human,” was the comment Risa didn’t know she was looking for. In their humanness the beholder actualizes her sculptures, forming a likeness with the objects and using personal desires to create recognizable features that are not realistically identifiable. Occupying no man’s land, each work becomes a persona for the individual viewer. Meaning is created in comfort with the object, defying its material reality and inability to articulate itself. An absence of shared experience allows the sculptures to avoid visual recognition and encourages a relationship prioritizing feelings first, a sensual and abstract encounter. Her works question the ability to communicate and to designate, by avoiding totality while maintaining autonomy their paradoxical nature suggests no lack of presence.
Is it in my best interest to think of what I create as art or as a way to get to where I want to be? It is what felt right to do when I made it because it allowed me to release the emotions and work out the gestures that my creative being desired to experience. I think most people would argue that of course this is art but something about it feels like practice. Painting to me has become a means of construction. At this point in my life, art is about the ability to find dedication in my practice. I think the fact that I am creating is so much more important than what I am creating. I am pursuing artistic endeavors that are leading to constructions.

cargocollective.com/laurahartmann
Laura hasn’t ascribed to the principles of painting that define High and Conceptual Art, unless it is to poke fun at these arbitrary constructions. For as long as I have known her, she makes what feels right and creates with what she can get her hands on. Her materials aren’t precious - you could buy them yourself at a hardware store. Or better yet, pick them from the dumpster, like the abandoned crate that once held a Claes Oldenburg sculpture now used as a platform in Where Go Now. Yet Laura’s art is rare, and precious even. It is rare in that each object reveals a moment of discovery. Her paintings and sculptures materialize an experience that is as new to her as it is to her viewers.

Laura and I were in her studio one day in January. She was in the process of picking dried white house paint off of a small canvas. With each section she was able to pry from the surface, the paint removed a layer of the canvas with it, revealing delicate and brittle woven fibers beneath. She then took me to see what she had most recently been working on, a black tarp wrapped around a canvas with several layers of gauze adhered to the surface with white paint. The paint had dried and she didn’t like it. She ripped off the gauze hastily hoping to reuse the materials. She looked at the result, eyes widened, “Oh my god!” The painted gauze left a white impression on the black tarp that looked like marble, infinite, textured and rich, now called Untitled One.

Laura’s process is pitted between these two poles, the spontaneous creator and the aftermath editor. She is at once impulsive in her creation and hyper-critical of the final product. She’ll rip a canvas apart or add a bungee cord or plastic tarp where she sees fit. She sets rules for herself, a strict regimen through which she can channel her creativity. These rules, however, are not accompanied with a desired result. She is not disappointed if things do not work out how she anticipated. Everyday for the past year she endeavored to put on coat of white house paint on a door sized wood panel. 180 coats later, the surface of this board is textured white, raised and recessed. It remembers every time it has been painted over the past year, all the habitual brush strokes that determined its current appearance.

In reference to her canvas Extreme Stairs with a multicolored drawing of a spiral staircase, which is the only object that uses more than one color and was initially made on her iPhone, she laments that she has tried to recreate it several times and has never been able to do it successfully. It exists as an anomaly, a remnant of a day that will never happen again. Laura’s rare moment exists most poignantly in the objects she can never replicate. The inimitable ones. She memorializes these, paying tribute to their uniqueness, by exhibiting them.

“What Do Now,” though the culminating exhibition of her senior year, presented works that were still in process. Her painting New Bases, for instance, was completed when a cascade of wet blue paint fell to the floor of Fisher Gallery while everyone else drank wine and ate cheese. This quality served as her principle critique of the physical and conceptual parameters of the exhibition space. The exhibition becomes inherently a part of her process, not the end of it. Laura is not interested in the final product, but the steps that archive it. “What Do Now” provided a moment of pause for her to reassess and reevaluate her work; so much so that Laura has now destroyed, or, rather, repurposed, the pieces from her show to make new ones.
My cubby here has only gotten dirtier and more full of stuff. I have a hard time cleaning out crumbs. I can, however, obsessively arrange crumbs, blow them up big on a screen real quick, and see if they make an experience. Come look in my cubby.

Imaging technologies are what allow me to arrange my found materials. They allow me to seal a crumb forever. They allow me to transform. To tell a technical truth, and to lie about it just as easily. To begin to reveal a language in found materials. To find materiality in language. To lose some of it during a file conversion. And ultimately, to blow it all up to a size befitting an Immersive Experience.

I hope to make works that, within their mediums, are futile. That grab and then disappoint. That cross-reference social anxiety, isolation, and boredom with marketing’s promise of pleasure and ease, the art world’s promises of authenticity, and cinema’s promise of cohesion across time.

The images should read as social and antisocial, Structural and medium specific and a total mess. Technologically confused and pristine. Highly polished and deeply troubled. Entertaining, and in the back of your mind, a waste. Waste is the star. I just go here.
Essay by Wayon Cunningham

The black picture frames in art museums have the curious power to uplift even the most mundane experiences into the rarefied air of “art.” Reed McCoy, like all good artists, knowingly exploits this to push boundaries. But unlike most artists McCoy does not do this for the effect of highbrow or masturbatory reflection on the nature of art. He wields the power of the aura to elevate the most garbage things. Pizza boxes, beer cans, VHS and bachelor pads. It’s not that McCoy doesn’t want to ask deep questions, he just also wants to hang. This is the dude life aestheticized. The college dropout at the art museum.

Consider Deconstruction: Cold as the Rockies. Here McCoy presents a photograph of a Coors Lite can and, through a series of images, isolates the blue color the cans become when they’ve reached the right temperature. The last frame holds a single canvas by Laura Hartmann, in which the blue color has been slabbed on thickly with a custom house paint. Over the course of the show, this blob of color, not fully dried, burst and dripped onto the gallery floor, providing a collaborative and live finale to the series of static images.

Equally important to McCoy’s banal endeavors is a social element. There can be no chilling without the company of another. He intends to show us that the creative font never comes from deep within the mind of a reclusive creative, but always from encouraging friends, passionate people. This is the beauty of the real world, always presented in a social context.

The presentation of the four short VHS pieces, Dry Grass, Nailed Gummis, Trash Metal, and Strong Coffee, invites more comfort and participation than most museum guests are used to. A TV, couch and rug invite viewers to put the tapes in and experience them at their own pace. Each offers a tourdeforce of garbage, thrown through some horrible artifacting machine, and packed with text that confuses cinematic titling and stilted observational comments. Once McCoy has his friends all packed into the living room with him, he offers these short, paranoid speeches as the entertainment.

On a far wall hangs another social experiment. The Intellectual Property synthesizes microscopic imagery taken by a Geology professor, and the unique warp of an aircraft propeller as controlled by a flight instructor—both acquaintances, now accomplices—into a knowingly absurd design, printed giant and slapped to a far wall like an oversized decal.

McCoy wields an impeccable wit, an eye for the weird, and a taste for packaging that tests good taste. It doesn’t so much matter if any of his messages make it to you intact. It works as long as it summons up any adjective— and the slangier, the better.
My work is an inventory of invented archeological objects that explore how we make meaning of materials unearthed from the soil to formulate the canonized histories we read in books and view in museums. I utilize traditional Indian Madhubani paper mâché, Bengali Kantha stitching, and Bandhani techniques to not only refer back to toys and textiles that have surrounded me from my childhood, but to also engage with the history of these labor intensive artisanal practices.

In 1969, at Inamgao, a post-Harappan village and archaeological site, female figurines of the early Jorwe phase were found in a clay receptacle buried under a house floor. The provenance of such objects suggest that these figurines were part of an important household ritual and represented a goddess connected with fertility, childbirth, or the welfare of children. The contorted bodies of my figurines revisit and reimagine these historical understandings of womanhood and how they have branded brown bodies in our contemporary post-colonial society. These ideas manifest in three categorized types of figurines: Carriers, Sounders, and Idols. These systemized types, each with their own signifying characteristics, reference Western archeological, art historical and pseudoscientific processes of analysis to address past investigations that have mutilated our understanding of foreign cultures: transforming bodies and their practiced rituals into displaced, consumable objects. Furthermore, it creates a system by which we can understand current depictions of brown women. The contorted figures, ultimately characterized by these manipulations, persist: surviving silently. As statuettes, which have persevered through each wave of historical oppression, the images become miniature monuments for Endurance.

The central temple, “shakti” (“strength”), engages in the process of Return to the scarred, but idealized purono bari (old house). Each visitor’s entrance is marked by the establishment of a reciprocal ocular and corporeal relationship between them and the space. The friezes, lined with images of contorted figures, reference the pantheon of female Hindu deities and false constructions of “feminism” within the Hindu tradition. Reductive narratives celebrate the presence of female deities within Hinduism and erase the patriarchal mechanisms by while these deities are produced and mobilized by men.

These invented primordial figurines resonate within my textiles as vestiges of these historical objects. This nostalgic reproduction holds onto a lost inheritance, and investigates how these oppressive narratives have historically infiltrated and silently manifested themselves within our domestic spaces.
Essay by Shani Strand

Experiencing “I Will Not Be Buried is the revealing of both the dream and the nightmare. Tinni recalls the position of the fallen woman in remembering Hindu deities recently unearthed from the foundations of Indian homes. By claiming the holiness of the soil as an origin and return point she choses to repurpose the above/below binary. She continues these dual interrogations with the real/imagined, and the face/mask, placement and reorientation is central to the audience’s experience as much as it is to Tinni’s material objects.

Her unknown Hindu deities challenge the relationship between face/mask, presenting her figures honestly, with marks of manipulation, control and contortion yet forces them to appear purely aesthetic in their de-contextualization and distanced display. The dye of the henna returns the white fabric bodies to their natural brownness as skin hold impressions of the fingers that both held and pushed. The beholder thus gazes at the mask of the object unable to see the face beneath until it re-enters and is gazed upon within its native religious and social context. An accurate but grossly oversimplified expression of Tinni’s work would be “an exploration of processes by which brown bodies are categorized, classified, and then presented in white space.” More than anything, she is continuously complicating the process of meaning making.

Her imagined spaces are romanticized returns of brown bodies to their native cultural communities, but not without critical reconstruction. In considering positions of abjection in Western and Native cultures, she remakes sites of learning such as the temple, book, and bed to provide a new system of understanding. These objects become places in which the body can become a part of the sculpture, installation, and space. Returning to Tinni’s figurative deities and the creation of an imagined space, she reveals their masks to be misread faces, their burned branding as the evidence of Hinduism's patriarchal violence. Her figures are wounded, beautiful, un-idealized, yet still present. Conscious of two systems, Tinni re-centers her objects in their native community and culture allowing them to be critical in the disruption of their intended context.

If perception is created in the viewer and not the object then Tinni challenges the beholder to a new awareness of their system of perception and value of context. Through meticulous and intentional gestures her work expresses a human fragility as well resistance. Her subtle articulateness puts the audience to the task of not needing works to be simplified, consumable, and easy to chew before they swallow.
For several years I refused to paint myself, giving into the idea that I wasn’t beautiful (white), cool (straight), or important (man) enough for other people to notice. But fuck that. Now I am celebrating my body through paint, reclaiming decades of queer brown beauty. I am working to fill the vacuum of narratives about my body that has denied my brilliance, demanding to be seen and heard in the ways I decide. To me, each piece is a litany for survival. An exploration of the body and its capacity as a visual language. Painting becomes a process of healing and reflection, a place where dreams become material, but painting is not the locus of change.

Art cannot change the world in the ways I’m hoping for. I do not believe objects can spark critical consciousness so much as the conversations we must insist to have around them. Art must be of consequence, or else the structures we inhabit will persist as tools for the reproduction of injustice. In all our work we must ask ourselves, who do we work for? What do we work toward? In which systems of oppression are we complicit? When we receive praise we must question where this praise comes from. When we face criticism, anger, even failure, we might take this as a sign we are doing something right. My work, artistic and otherwise, will not be validated in the ways we are taught to dream about—in the ways we are supposed to measure. Wealth, power, fame, acclaim, institutional recognition. If I ever get to that point, I think I would have failed.

Instead of traversing ugly streets to reach the nest of beauty constituted by a painting exhibition, we will traverse increasingly beautiful streets. There will no longer be any nests of beauty, because the beauty will be a forest, it will be the whole city... at least as a plan, a dream: that life and art will fuse and blend, and the world of justice we are fighting for will also be a world of total beauty.

– Fernández Retamar (Cuba, 1980)
Letter to Anders from Noalle Fellah

Dear Anders,

Your self-portraits offered viewers an initial point of entry within the exhibition space. Neatly placed in a single row against a white wall, the series of images portrayed naturalistic depictions of the artist, the complexity of the body seamlessly captured through the mixing and blending of colors. Looking at the portraits set against the “white cube” of the institution, though, I wonder if your work and your reclamations of “queer brown beauty” become politically neutralized by their placement within the “nest of beauty.”

To answer this question, I looked towards your assemblage of emails, Facebook threads and comments presented at the peripheral of your self-portraits. The collection of digital messages charted conversations that you had throughout the year, sharply pinpointing continual instances through which the art department failed to create intentional spaces that addressed topics of privilege, oppression, and difference. Through carefully penned responses to classmates and declarations of frustration extended towards professors, you presented moments through which your reclamations of queer brown beauty found meaning beyond the confines of institution.

To this end, I do not want the catalog to undo the work your exhibition performed. I do not want to present any of its readers with a neat and tidy review that essentializes the experience of your art. After all, I think your art wasn’t meant to be reviewed for that publication.

I think about the viewer that described your self-portraits as “homoerotic.” I think about the viewers that thought your zine should have been distributed to everyone. I think about the viewer that found humor in your modes for survival. I think about the viewer that responded to your frustration with laments of unfriendliness. Ultimately it becomes clear that your art is not meant for these viewers. It never was.

Warmly,

Noalle
As an artist and as someone committed to social change, I believe art can be a revealer of truth. My work locates the ugly and the beautiful, the systemic and the organic, in the intersection of fences, walls, and borders. Such borders are sites of control and violence where people become bodies. Immigration and incarceration in the US are intertwined, both are systems of barriers, punishment, and criminalization – systems which we must not ignore.

Using imagery of people sleeping, wrapped in blankets, their enveloped bodies morphing into a landscape of mountains and hills, I transform sensational images of huddled masses in detention centers and refugee camps into something grounded in peace, rest, and homeland. I choose to focus on the imagery of figures in blankets, asleep amidst the land in moments of humanness, beauty, and peace amid turmoil.

I am informed by a tradition of radical politics that examine punishment, exploitation, displacement, and simultaneously refuse victimization. I hope to make visible what is often warped or hidden from sight: the strategic reduction of immigrants and people of color to disposable bodies.

I choose to make prints, drawings, and video because they are distributable and accessible mediums, and can be easily shown in public spaces. I want my work to spark thought and dialogue.
As you walk into the main gallery of FAVA, the group statement of the show, “I Will Not Be Buried,” is accompanied by Gaby Hurtado-Ramos’ large print entitled (Im)migration Enveloped and Unraveled. The linoleum relief print through its depiction of incarcerated bodies, deteriorating fences, faceless police figures, and a landscape composed of sleeping figures swaddled in the ground itself, immediately illuminates the concept of the show. The idea of burial and resistance is visually contrasted with Gaby’s portrayal of serene sleeping figures opposed to the harsh presentation of manmade barriers, being the fences.

This motif of the chain link metal fences and walls in the larger print is revisited throughout her work. Her screen prints Behind Walls, Under Fences, and In the Rubble each depict a pattern of chain link fences situated on top of caskets. This repetition around the space of the gallery creates an overwhelming sense of buried bodies. The figures are rendered in flat profile and reveal the caskets to the viewer while they are invisible to the world above ground. This chain link trim is initially overlooked, but once noticed, its poignancy makes it impossible to ignore. It speaks to issues of immigration in the US: like the border itself, the problems are not hidden, but are still ignored by the general public.

On the opposite wall of the gallery, hung alone is the charcoal drawing, Stage for Body Capital. Its scale, high contrast between the black and white of the charcoal marks, and its isolation on the wall calls attention to it. This charcoal drawing is the physical manifestation of the projected video in the next room. This large drawing serves as the stage for her animation. Through its exhibition Gaby alludes to the creation of the animation. The stationary drawing allows for extended visual investigation of the image that the animation does not. This drawing initially appears as a dystopic scene, with organic, serpentine tunnels and sleeping figures in the landscape imbued with a dark and dreamlike character. However, upon inspection, the structures are immediately recognizable as factories, walls, prisons, and caskets. The piece illustrates how immigration policy treats the migration of people, simply as bodies that can be incarcerated or used to fill factories.

In a separate room the animation Body Capital, derived from this piece, plays on repeat. The industrial sounds of the animation confront the viewer before entering the space or seeing the projection. The video depicts the movement of people in black boxes, resembling caskets, from factories to a prison. The dystopian feeling of the charcoal drawing is accentuated in the animation by the sprawling tubes that funnel bodies into an ominous walled off box that can be quickly interpreted as a prison. The format of the animation draws the viewer in and forces them to pay attention to the discomfort of the lingering memories of seeing the figures reduced to bodies in caskets.
Struggle | Trauma | Pain

Bến Tre Province is known as the coconut paradise of Viet Nam. This is where my family calls home, despite living diasporically in Chicago for the past three decades. For a long time, my home was in constant disarray from warfare, martial law, and subjected to extreme defoliation from the mass spraying of Agent Orange by the U.S. I’ve always been lost in the process of negotiating this duality and proximity to culture and identity. I find myself intrigued by how my personal identities are constantly transforming and re-shaping themselves relative to where I’m physically situated in the world. Because of the deeply rooted connections to Viet Nam and the U.S., my artwork is articulated through the themes of belonging and the fluidity of cultural difference and dispute. I begin my work with a confession to myself and draw inspiration from crucial moments in history. My intent is to honor the forgotten, expose corruption, create a voice for the unheard, and set a pathway for narratives that are, more often than not, silenced. I do this not only for the othered, but in order to validate and authenticate my own being. I aim to introduce/reintroduce, claim/reclaim, define/redefine history as a way to heal and grow, not only for myself, but for my communities. Through research and analysis, oral history, living, struggle, and the use of culturally self-specific histories, my artwork seeks to convey these ideas in the most visceral way possible. Currently I find mixed-media, performative installation, and sculpture to be the forms that most powerfully articulate the concepts I’m working with. My goal is to provide an understanding, a narrative, a truth, and a tangibility, to those who need it most. I do this because I can. I do this because others can’t.

Resilience | Rebellion | Liberation

ntqrt.tumblr.com

Exhibition: I Will Not Be Buried

NGUYEN TRAN QUYNH // RICHARD TRAN

Still Life: Clay, thread, tumeric.
Shards of rice paper crunch with a snap. Under the pressure of multiple foreign shoes, the rice paper crinkles and gives way to the weight. Larger pieces break into smaller parts, disrupting the otherwise quiet gallery. A sharp reminder that we, too, are participants in this construction of a particular space. It is in this space that the lines between participant and observer is blurred: are we merely an observer (and consumer) of art or are we a participant as well, a participant of transnational power structures that govern the boundaries of place, nation, home and belonging? Richard Tran // Nguyen Tran Quỳnh’s work in the multi-artist exhibition “I Will Not Be Buried” explores such topics, carefully balancing the themes between fragility and strength, temporality and permanence, and memory and forgetting.

The first experience of walking into Tran’s exhibition is the crack of rice paper in broken remains that breaks, slides, and scatters throughout the floor as viewers walk through the exhibition. While the rice paper continues to break, shifting its form, it still continues to be omnipresent on the ground. The sharp and dry crinkle of the broken rice paper contrasts with the intimate and familiar setting of how rice paper is traditionally used—in Vietnamese cuisine. Likewise, Tran demonstrates a careful consideration of juxtaposing materials with each other: Styrofoam, often known as packing peanuts whole, decomposing the indestructible substance. Even from the title alone, it is both a quiet reminder of the deadly, and often permanent, effects of Agent Orange, the main herbicide used by the U.S. military in the Vietnam War, and the use of the acetone further alludes to toxic health conditions that large number of Vietnamese women working in the nail salon industry face.

The Vietnam War and chemical warfare is a central subject throughout Tran’s work: it is impossible to ignore or dismiss the pervasiveness of Agent Orange in still life, where many clay figures of fetuses align the wall, each hand-made and distinct. Thin strings emerge from a pile of bright orange powder representing Agent Orange on the ground that are tightly linked to the still life paintings in the western tradition, but also a grim reminder of the stillborn, born with genetic disabilities/differences that Agent Orange produces. Tran questions the delicate balance between the intimate and the dangerous, the familiar and the foreign by forcing to reckon not just the past atrocity of the Vietnam War, but the current manifestations of its violence. Tran further challenges us to consider their work not just in relation to “past” events; it is not simply the “past” but a series of past crimes that are yet to be reconciled nor pardoned by the lived experiences of those in the present. For instance, burning monk is a reinterpretation of the iconic image of Thích Quảng Đức, a Buddhist monk who self-immolated himself in protest of the persecution of Buddhists in Vietnam. Transforming it from a 2D image to a 3D installation, Tran uses Vietnamese sandalwood incense to add an olfactory experience; this reinterpretation is significant because it calls into question the impermanence of memory and forgetting. Most, though not all, of the audience were college-aged students who were not alive during Duc’s self-immolation nor the Vietnam War. Tran acknowledges how subjective the act of remembering can be, particularly if the violent and physical reality of war cannot be reproduced, only remembered and recalled through metaphorical representation. Indeed, in operation ranch hand, Tran screenprints scans obtained from war that also have scraps of balloon, and sprays of the same bright orange powder from still life on them. The facts, cold in scientific tone, of the violence of the war invites the viewer to realize that these crimes were premeditated, intentional, and committed by the nation they reside in, the United States.

At the same time, all of Tran’s works, in its entirety, calls into question the participation and the extent of that participation, of the viewer. These acts of violence that Tran represents are results of transnational power struggles. Yet, the acknowledgement of these power structures is different from realizing that one, assumingly an American citizen, is not simply inheriting a legacy of a global superpower, but is responsible for being accountable to these atrocities in the present. It is not my intention to question whether or not viewers considered their own complicity in upholding the narratives of American exceptionalism that privilege the United States as the destination of dreams and better lives. What Tran does is the creation of a space to explore such questions, questions that recall the intimacies of memory, the politics of diaspora and the decision of who gets to speak, whose voice is heard, and whose silence is protected. Tran’s work is at once intimate, intricate, powerful, political and personal.

From the series, a history of agent orange // operation ranch hand. Screenprint, balloons, tumeric.
Maddie Painting. Acrylic, yarn, and paper mache sculpture on canvas.

I’ve always had an issue with deadlines. Ten minutes before my show went up in April I was still painting on the floor of the exhibition space. The styrofoam plates I mix my paint on were strewn all around me in a sort of wet miasma. I had no shoes on and a good deal of paint on my face. A professor, who was in the middle of showing me paintings on Google, interrupted herself to ask what time the opening was. I told her, and expletives followed. Plans were delayed. She came to my rescue.

I’m uneasy about calling things finished, and that’s probably the root of my issue with deadlines. People who know me know that I am constantly painting things over. White paint serves as an eraser. Some figures survive, others perish. At the time of the show half the paintings were still wet.

The words I use to explain my work are largely words I have borrowed from other people. It is hard to explain a thing you have made. It is hard to assume a distance sufficient enough to evaluate something you have made properly. It is easy, however, to ask a question of the viewer, like, for example: what do you see?

When asked, most people respond to color, which pleases me. I have always strived to make paintings that elicit joy, and I think color is one of the first things in life that does that for us. Walking down the street, certain colors or arrangements of colors command attention. That is what I am trying to replicate in my paintings. The figures I render are not exalted figures, not human figures, but quotidian figures. A fire hydrant, a glass of orange juice, a ladder. Just things you could see on main street.

Exhibition: *Low Hanging Fruit*

ALI AXON

cargocollective.com/aliaxon/
Essay by Madeleine Aquilina

Ali’s artwork articulates a love for paint. Her imagery—ladders, stairs, leopard print, checkerboard, fire hydrants and actual woven string—emerges from vibrant fields of color. These icons are hollow bodies into which Ali pours color, almost like a child’s coloring book. The resulting interplay between icon/color field exemplifies what it is like to paint: a teetering balance act, that is maybe almost always unraveling.

This keen sense of balance is achieved through a process that seems as important as the finished canvas. Ali frequently returns and revises her works: whiting out areas and repainting, or sometimes leaving the voluminous whiteness to billow. One painting, mostly white with a large blue ladder and red electrical outlet towards the center, has been in process since the summer. It is one the largest paintings in the show and its white but anything but blank center, lucidly embodies Ali’s process. As this painting reminds us, Ali could white out any symbol at any moment or efface the checkerboard pattern. That is not to say the works she showed in April are not finished, but rather that Ali’s method explodes notions of what an object is. Instead of preciously regarding her work, she shows us how her paintings are conditioned by a particular moment. That is to say, the viewer encounters Ali’s work incidentally; perhaps her paintings just happen to look this way today.

Ali’s painted world is populated by exuberant characters that repeat from canvas to canvas. Last summer Ali and I rode a bus in Miami to the beach. On the bus, I remember Ali speaking about her choice of imagery. Traffic cones, arrows, leopard print, a fishbowl from Matisse’s paintings of domestic space, a dotted red line and fire hydrants filled her paintings last August. Many of these symbols remain in the current iterations of her work, though the new areas of pure color could white out any symbol at any moment or efface the checkerboard pattern. That is not to say the works she showed in April are not finished, but rather that Ali’s method explodes notions of what an object is. Instead of preciously regarding her work, she shows us how her paintings are conditioned by a particular moment. That is to say, the viewer encounters Ali’s work incidentally; perhaps her paintings just happen to look this way today.

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Through the process of repeating imagery Ali projects personality onto certain objects. She wrote to me the week after her show: I break down the process of painting into a series of automatic functions. A figure is drawn from memory. It is a figure I have rendered ad nauseum. Being a human being and therefore an inefficient replicator, small components of these figures are apt to change with repetition. These (largely unintentional) deviations give my figures personality. The imperfect human ability to replicate transforms a fire hydrant into Ali’s fire hydrant. Realized through an involved process and skillful eye, Ali’s paintings are joyous documents of process that celebrate simplicity of visual pleasure. Ali offers us, speaking of color: It’s as simple as seeing a tracksuit and saying, hey, that looks nice. In the world Ali has created, of colliding pinks and turquoises and stairs that lead nowhere, I am compelled by the possibility that ‘looking nice’ suffices.
My relationship with making is entangled in my interactions with my daily routine: my tendency to take long showers, my inability to wake up to alarms, and my habit of holding onto plastic bags and scraps of paper. I navigate the world by cataloguing and categorizing images. I learn about the poetry of objects from other artists and writers, taking note of the ways these artists manipulate, collect, destroy, arrange, fabricate, play, present, install, compose, hang, and build. At the basis of this practice, the curation and creation of objects, is obsessive observation. Helen Marten beautifully describes collecting: “Perfunctory details are like chemical markers because they can become notations of a daily ritual. Teabags, cigarette packets, sellotape, rubbish bags, mouthwash, and vegetable peelings all fall into this category. And we understand them precisely because we can hold them. I like the idea of trash becoming something that can ultimately be picked up and dispersed into a new flat image.” My necessity to collect and curate objects is a way of organizing the constant bombardment of information and images that surrounds me. Growing up in a city and finding beauty where there otherwise was none influenced this practice. For a while I found it difficult to understand that others did not notice these intricacies, these beauties that were so essential to my humanity. Throughout this year, I have strived to separate myself from objects. This separation is part of an necessary journey of relieving objects from their ego and preciousness and releasing them into the world.

Drawing from life allows me to grasp the weirdness of objects: their sensuality despite their coldness/stillness/deadness. The beauty of drawing is discovering the essence of an object as oppositional to its natural existence or function. EX: the flexibility of the spoon is not secondary but necessary to its form. The flattening of space that occurs in drawing enacts violence on the balance of reality, while also reconciling the messiness of interpretation and representation.
Essay by Jack Lazar

A can of Goya brand apricot soda sits in front of a fake miniature tree, in between a drawing of a dog and a plastic bag with a picture of apples spilling out of a barrel... plus Molly makes hot pink not harsh in her piece with a glass and two bowls and a blue window... jeez this one (^ ^ ^) rests on a wall in a corner with a duplicate small fake tree... here, Molly's use of color and form aligns with classical conceptions of beauty which is significant because in most of her work she seems genuinely unconcerned with that...

A lot of Molly's work expresses freakiness and messiness — in many of her drawings, the shapes are unruly, the colors overwhelm the eye. By placing these drawings alongside drawings that comprise more "palatable" shapes and colors, Molly implicitly questions orthodox notions of beauty: she seems to assert that what is beautiful is not necessarily what is elegant, but what is sincere.

Another important aspect of Molly's show is her synthesis of two contemporary stylistic modes: one that seeks to organize the massive array of imagery produced and consumed today, and another concerned with expressing messiness and chaos, primarily through drawing, painting and collage. This is not to say that Molly picks and chooses themes, forms, and ideas from these movements — Molly's work dive placed on top of a washing machine, next to the snack table. The invisible level is Molly's refusal to present the works in their most impressive arrangement. Individually, the pieces are attention-getting because they are excellent. However, the manner in which they are arranged partially obscures their excellence. In other words, Molly is fully capable of arranging her work in a maximally impressive manner, but consciously chooses not to. Because this choice is not apparent to the viewer, it represents an attempt to act modestly in a secret and sincere fashion.

Finally, Molly's (and Ali's) interest in collaboration exemplifies a dedication to compromise. Molly and Ali do not label their art, and so do not allow the viewer to differentiate between their work. This imbibes the work with an egoless quality that seems to exist at the heart of the show... which, in conjunction with Molly's individualistic mark-making (that expresses her own beautiful, personal essence) affects the viewer deeply... the work is not ironic, it's not arrogant, it's not mean-spirited — it's personal, principled, sincere, serious art. Art like this, understood in its totality (and if you're in the right mood) is invigorating, hugely inspiring, and maybe even life-affirming.
Emerging from childhood into adulthood brings new worries and anxieties as the rose-colored glasses of early life are lifted. The body can become central to these worries and insecurities, especially for young women. I am interested in translating these personal experiences, many that may be familiar to others, into productive work and pieces that are beautiful, natural, and peaceful. My work conveys the connection between nature, the body, and the insecurity of early adulthood.

I use natural elements and materials that reference the natural world as a way to redirect focus from the negative onto something positive, strong and peaceful. To me, nature represents femininity, childhood, strength, and harmony. The emotions and roadblocks of my everyday life are reconstructed into something I see as beautiful and worthy. I am inspired by my early childhood connection to nature, and the loss of that connection—the fight to regain it is present in my work.

My process started by embroidering stories related to my adolescent body onto garments that evoke those memories. Many of these memories were negative or shrouded in confusion and uncertainty. I then began to make my own garments out of mesh to transform these feelings and my body image into something that I see as growing, transforming, beautiful, and powerful. The see-through mesh fabric removes the purpose of the clothing as a way to cover the body. However, the sheer material is only provocative as long as we see nudity as provocative. The form of the garments and the plants highlight parts of the female form traditionally seen as taboo or subject to societal control. I am changing the body from the problem to the answer by relating it to the innocence, strength and calm of the natural world. I then moved to creating books and gloves that deal with another problem that inhabits my mind and body during my journey into adulthood—mental illness. In these pieces I use more subtle references to nature to act as a form of healing.

Art can be a way to work through personal problems, questions, and experiences, not only thematically but through practice. Meticulous handwork like sewing, bookbinding and growing plants are slow processes that allow me to take a step back from the larger issue and focus on the task at hand. These processes become meditative, and allow me to lose track of stressors and anxieties. Not only does the process help me to work through difficult emotions, but focusing on these small tasks becomes a way to tackle larger problems.

The final products convey something that I hope that others can relate to, as the emotions are familiar to many. A large part of these pieces is communication of the taboo and overcoming fear of judgement. This is what no one told me about growing up, but what I find to be the most difficult parts about the process.
Essay by Harley Bosco

The three graces: wood (beauty), grass (delight), and pantyhose (blossom).

Wood: I have a grain. I have a way in which I was growing, a language revealed in the lines of my skin that run all the way through me. Burned into me the imprint of hands, of peppermint leaves and the human brain—things etched across my eyes in carbon so every time you looked at my face you could see something you left behind.

Grass: I am many blades and you are afraid of me. You cut me down before the edge of my knife can gut you. Make you bleed. Did you know a blade grows from the base and not the tip? You cut me down, again, and again, and again. With your thoughts, with your words, with your eyes like rolling stones flattening my earth in your wake. But you cannot reach that which gives me life. Long after you have rolled yourself into the sea, into a fine and powdery dust, I will still be here. Fighting upwards from beneath the surface. Many blades, from the root of something you cannot touch.

Pantyhose: I am being stretched across the sky—just a lung full of cotton expanding to the pushpull of your arms. I am overflowing with abundance from underneath, I push it downdowndown because this is what I am supposed to do. I spill over and out in petals that look like candy, wrappers saying touch me in the corner underneath the black light.
This body of artwork was created both as a response to and a reflection on the recent abolishment of the “One Child Policy” in China. The policy lasted for two decades, creating a huge social impact during the period. Through the series of portraits, self-portraits and installations, I reflect on my experience being the only child of my family, a daughter, now a woman, and soon to be the sole supporter of my aging parents. The two keywords underlying the theme of the work are dichotomy and sacrifice.

At times I feel like I am held hostage by my parent’s love, hopes and expectations, a sentiment not uncommon among many people of my generation in China. Other times, I feel compelled to devote everything I have in hopes of securing them the most comfortable retirement life imaginable. While creating this work, I reflected on and reevaluated the choices and compromises I made in order to fulfill the unfulfilled American dream of my father and the family responsibility I have taken as the only child of the family.

I hope my work is able to portray a sense of tension and despair without being excessively self-victimizing. I hope to convey an idea about the helplessness and uncertainty the lone children of my generation, especially girls and women, feel towards their future. On a personal level, I want to use the photos as a channel to express a sense of confusion and lack of confidence about my own identity.
Yingran Zhang’s “Works My Parents Will Never See” is an honest yet aestheticized portrayal of her social roles as a daughter born under China’s One Child Policy, a woman raised in the hegemony of Confucianism, and an international student at a small liberal arts college in the United States. Usually unseen by the public, these roles are revealed and dramatized in her photography series taken in domestic spots. The miniature baby doll soaked in egg white indicates her constant fear of pregnancy as premarital sex is strictly forbidden in the Confucian ideology, which simultaneously burdens her with son-bearing responsibility as the only child in the family to fulfill filial piety. The suitcase with an itinerary tag and her hair pouring from the inside imply a sense of homelessness triggered by frequent long-distance travelling and the experience of living abroad. In order to accentuate the otherness of the figure captured in the photographs and create a ghostly representation of her inner self, Zhang covers her body with paint or moth cutouts, masking and dehumanizing her existence in the roles. These black-and-white images carry the heaviness and vulnerability of repressed emotions, evoking an atmosphere of depression. To the audience, they draw attention to the mental health issues suffered by many international students, the majority of whom are marginalized and muted on campus; to the artist, they situate her in direct confrontation with her inner self and thus help her to cope and negotiate negative sentiments. These eerie photographs construct a psychological world drastically different from the supposedly grandiose, otherwise studious lifestyle her parents envision as her life abroad. They shatter her parents’ idealized conception of America and therefore have to remain as the “works [her] parents will never see.”

Facing the photography series is an installation consisting of semi-transparent fish strings suspending a variety of objects in a rhythmic arrangement, occupying a liminal space. On the outer layer of this column-shaped ethereal zone, the black moths appear again as a metamorphosis of the artist’s presence. These nocturnal light-seeking moths fly towards the center, where a hand-sized golden frame displays the photographs of Zhang’s parents. They are the targets of worship and the omnipresent demigods. However, as the artist takes the agency to shape their appearances and idolize their presentations, her role as a submissive follower is transcended while her parents’ role as dominant rulers is challenged. The power hierarchy in a conventional parent-child relationship dictated by Confucianism is thus complicated.
My Jewishness is central to my entire identity. I am a woman, I am a Jew, I am an artist, I am a daughter, sister, friend. It is at the core of my entire person.

The inspiration for my art comes from my academic studies in college, through my own research into my family history, my personal understanding and experience as a woman and a Jewish woman, and through the work I have done surrounding the Israeli Occupation throughout my time at Oberlin. For the past four years I have been studying Religion and Jewish Studies, focusing on gender studies and feminist studies within these departments. My work in the Studio Art department over my college career has been almost exclusively focused on my Jewish identity as well as the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. In addition to my academic and artistic studies, I am deeply involved and invested in Jewish life on Oberlin’s campus and have found an immense amount of love, community, and spiritual fulfillment through this engagement.

Like many American Jews I have had a very complicated relationship with Israel throughout my life. I went on Birthright my freshman year of college and came back stock-full of Israeli pride, feeling connected to my Judaism, my people, and my history.

Over the past three years these feelings have chipped away. I am left at the end of my senior year of college with a deep sadness and shame in the actions of Israel towards the Palestinian people. I feel hopeless, I feel guilty, I feel that my Judaism and my history are marred and debased through the violent occupation occurring in the land of Israel-Palestine.

For my final exhibition in the Studio Art department I am looking at 1) my relationship to my own Jewish identity through explorations of self and family, 2) biblical women’s stories, 3) the Shoah, and 4) the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Through the use of text—from testimonies, books, personal interviews, news articles, and the Bible—I draw connections between these four subjects. I am investigating how to pay homage to other Jewish women from my own life, from the Bible, and to those murdered in the Shoah, while also showing how my own Jewishness makes me implicit in the actions of the “Jewish State” of Israel, which has been violently occupying another people. I am attempting to make art that can inspire people who view it, specifically other Jewish women, towards healing, change, growth, and justice.

returningaliyah.tumblr.com
Essay by Clara Berger

On the night of Sophie Weinstein’s exhibition, attendants were instructed to view her nineteen drawings from right to left. This arrangement presented a thematic order: first biblical themes of women rooted in her own family, second the Holocaust, and finally the history of the state of Israel and the occupation of Palestine. On the very far left sat a computer where a person could sit, reflect, and make a now-educated choice to return their Jewish right to Aliyah.

Understanding Weinstein’s exhibition requires the context of Weinstein herself and her conscious, continuous decision to make art. Her identity as a Jewish woman is central to her entire sense of self, not just as a religion, but as a culture that stresses family, ethics, and peace. Her art reads right to left because that is how you read the Torah. She draws on paper as a reflection of Judaism’s text based tradition.

Having grown up in communities where her Judaism made her an outsider, when Sophie visited Israel at age eighteen she fell in love with the country for its embrace of the Jewish identity and the cultural motif to “come out of the ashes” of the Holocaust. When she embarked on political studies of Israel, however, she was heartbroken she began to learn about the realities of the experience of the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. If for Sophie Judaism meant peace and justice, then Israel was inherently un-Jewish.

Weinstein’s art aims to deconstruct the crisis of conflict within the American Jewish community that condemning the violence of the Israeli state is anti-Jewish. Instead, her art depicts the crimes of the Israeli state while also illustrating the vibrant culture that is Judaism. She shows this rich history through the incorporation of Biblical passages, testimonies, personal interviews and news articles within her drawings. Finally, she refuses to let her audience forget the Holocaust in the midst of this political critique. Weinstein’s work depicts the Holocaust as what it was; the systematic killing of six million people and an attempted destruction of a culture, a history and an identity. Her use of a personal narrative demonstrates a refusal to let the Jewish identity be diminished.

The State of Israel offers Jews the right to declare citizenship through the process of “making aliyah.” Weinstein rejects this. Alternatively, she invites American Jews to her call to action, through participation in her self-created letter campaign that returns the right of making Aliyah as a stand against the violence allowed by the State of Israel upon the Palestinian people. These letters are then sent to the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Jewish Federation of Cleveland.

Weinstein’s art is a simultaneous act of self-reflection and a selfless call to action for the greater Jewish community. Her art is both beautiful and transparent. It is informative. It is politicized. It is aggressively sincere.
My work attempts to rationalize the emotional realm, to track the pathway between an experience and its aftermath, to extend a feeling outwards and explain it. It borrows from the visual system of medical illustration and educational charts, granting a framework that implies clarity where profoundly unclear images and thoughts are housed. The work places a sense of wrongness in a visual structure that we are conditioned to perceive as true. Biomorphic forms hovering on some precipice between accurate and false information. Fabric and paper present themselves as artifacts of process, platforms for an investigation that blurs the line between a science textbook and a convoluted diary entry. Embroidery acts as a meditative and laborious practice, forcing introspection while reinforcing image. The impulse to chart personal experience locates humor and absurdity in processes of documentation and classification. Record keeping and labelling assert themselves as obsessive inner compulsions, implying a progression towards a sense of closure that never arrives. There is a sense of a final destination, but it will never be reached. There are multiple answers to the same question. You can’t get there from here, but that won’t stop you from trying.
Essay by Juliet Vincente

Ava explores her own emotional reality with text and didactic diagrammatic illustrations. She populates sensuous, silken fabrics and translucent white sheets of paper with pastel hued texts and images that extrapolate and postulate on a specific problem, on a thoughtfully constructed research question. Organic biomorphic shapes, anatomy, and architectural spaces are methodically diagrammed. The impersonal quality of her pseudo-scientific illustrations is complicated by both the content of her hastily penned lists, labels, and jokes on the margins and her refined and historically-informed use hand embroidery. Ava’s penmanship appears incidental, even instantaneous. It is descriptive of a fleeting feeling, yet through her meticulously applied stitches these impermanent emotions are made permanent. Her blunt exhibition of her specific emotional landscape is tempered by dueling modes of representation present in her work: objective scientific illustrations rendered in the loaded, intimate medium of embroidery. This dichotomous method illuminates the feminist politic that permeates Ava’s work. She places swirling tides of emotion into a scientific, rational framework that seeks to organize this confusion and elevate the content.

Ava’s rational exhibition of emotion and embroidery uses bold vulnerability and female subjectivity to subvert misogynistic narratives. Embroidery in the Western tradition has long been considered “women’s work.” It was an activity to occupy young girls’ days while their male counterparts received an education. Exhibiting embroidered textiles around a home symbolized a family’s wealth. It proved, through the exposition and exaltation of her crafts, their daughter led a passive lifestyle in which she learned to decorate and be a decoration herself. In the hetero-patriarchal construction of High Art, embroidery has since been ghettoized as a craft, merely decorative, and an unnecessary ornament to a functional fabric. Ava’s exhibition “Ends Bad: Ends Badly” profoundly overturns this history. In her work, embroidery is far from a decorative flourish - it is the central means through which Ava comments on the complex contemporary social construction of the female condition that informs her emotional reality.

Ava’s feminist method is located in a powerful and triumphant retelling of her experiences. It is the claim that her stories, big and small, can illuminate larger societal truths. Her use of printmaking and embroidery are both mediums that are deeply embodied, underscoring this radical subjectivity. Both processes, controlled and singular, transform transitory feelings into permanent marks, remade over again for emphasis. The process of embroidery requires Ava to sew for days at a time, laboring over one square inch of a piece, and to sit with a feeling longer than comfortable.

Ava’s prints, textiles and stories become sites of exploration and contemplation for her audience. Through her humorous maneuvering of subject matter, Ava makes her emotional landscape readable and relatable. Each work exists as an individual study in itself, a contained surface for her to display her inquiry. She does good research - she shows her work, she leaves open doors for her beholder to join her in this compassionate treatment of self. Through her rigorous study, she is left with more questions, more loose ends, than concrete answers.
For most of my life, I have made an annual trip to Bangkok, Thailand to visit my mother’s side of the family. During my visits, everything feels familiar to me—sounds, smells, tastes, images, places and people, yet at the same time I feel foreign for my lack of fluency in the Thai language and American upbringing. At the same time, this push and pull between foreign and native exists in my experience in the US.

The series ‘In Its Place’ is shot in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Hua Hin, capturing the landscapes of the city, mountains, and sea of Thailand respectively. When taking pictures, I don’t think much and deeper contemplation arrives later. Throughout these different landscapes, I notice I am drawn to the subjects that don’t quite belong. These subjects simultaneously stand out and fit in through pattern and correspondences contained in the image.

I am interested in photography’s power to grant validity. Using the medium of film, which literally fixes images in place, I try to give the out of place some authority to fit in, creating an in-between home for my images in which I can identify with as well.

allegrasussman.com
Essay by Liam Casey

While walking through “In Its Place,” Allegra Sussman’s exhibition, one is easily transfixed by the contrasting white walls and muted tones of FAVA gallery’s glossy floor in relation to the vivid and florid splashes that comprise Sussman’s photographs. With Thailand as the series’ backdrop, “In Its Place” focuses on Sussman’s complicated yet inextricable relationship with her Thai-American identity. In recognizing the all-too-frequent white, American touristic gaze, particularly present in a setting like Thailand, Sussman thus operates in a mental and spatial in-between. She acknowledges her presence as both foreign, but also distinctly familiar and her image-making as fragments of truth-telling, but also “distanced from real experience.”

With photography, viewers often, and understandably, focus solely on the subject that has been photographed. While this process is foundational in a gallery setting, let alone anywhere, one should also consider asking what led the subject to be photographed. When one peruses through the oeuvre, one is confronted with images that induce and display an immense reverence for the unconventional and mundane. It is precisely this feeling of the mundane to which Sussman is attracted.

In one photograph, a shirtless painter, with single droplet of white paint upon his left shoulder, balances on a complicated and precarious bamboo assemblage that kisses a freshly finished temple. In another, Sussman documents a small, lone, poured concrete public bench, modestly decorated with faded primacolored tiles. A tomato decal is also emblazoned on a few tiles to form a triangular shape. Whereas a tourist would most likely blindly walk by this bench without second thought, Sussman takes the time to admire a much worn but simultaneously neglected public structure.

“My position allows me to shoot like a sensitive tourist,” Sussman states. In a country where foreigners can easily exoticize the surrounding spaces, photographing only ornamental shrines and exploiting ladyboys for instance, Sussman owns to her American-ness, but also exercises her Thai identity. This dual role leads her to photograph subjects that aren’t conventionally beautiful or “easy,” giving validity to subjects that are not typically present in the tourist’s eye. “I’m not going to objectify the people or the culture, because it’s mine as well,” asserts Sussman.

Sussman’s yearly visits to Thailand revolve heavily around family functions, yet family is absent from this photographic series. When asked if the exhibition alluded to notes of nostalgia, Sussman clarifies that these photos are “distanced from a real experience that looks like nothing I did.” Although one could interpret many of the exhibition’s images as nostalgic, Sussman suggests that because the series omits any documentations or indications of the true day-to-day activities in her family trips to Thailand, she isn’t ready to agree that they are in fact nostalgic. Thus “In Its Place” captures both the innate reality of Sussman’s experience with the subjects’ presence, but also the unreality of the situation and space in which these photographs were documented.
I make computer games and toys that appeal to a childlike, energetic state of wonder in order to create fantasy worlds and explore the absurdity of what we believe to be real. The viewer or player becomes part of this world, adds onto it with their own memories and fantasies and creates something new. I want to open up my and my viewer’s mind and spirit to the possibility of new worlds and axioms. I want to make my fantasies into reality, escaping the oppressive bounds of this body and earth and enter something new and, to me, real.

I use interactivity to compel the viewer to engage with and have an intimate relationship to my work. I think people have a special connection to games and toys because we had private and extensive experiences with them as children that border on romantic, obsessive, and even spiritual. By appealing to this state of mind, and to my generation in particular with computer-operated games that may inspire familiarity and sentimentality from childhood and early adolescence, I hope to coax the viewer into a state of openness and excitement that they once had while playing and guide them into a fantasy world. By playing the games, each individual viewer joins the game world, becoming a performer and collaborator inside the piece.

Leaving the physical world is an essential element of my work because I want to explore multiple worlds, universes or realities, and for the viewer to perceive this world that they create with me to be just as real as objects that they physically interact with. I also think of the games as functioning in a similar way to spirituality, in that within it individuals have complex personal relationships with some aspect of the divine. In the same vein, I examine how faith in something is inherently as real as the physical world because the faith itself exists; I propose that everything, from scientific knowledge to the most miniscule, disembodied protozoa of belief floating through your psyche, is equally real and important.

Humor is also a significant part of this work because, however seriously I’m taking the questions I’m addressing, they ultimately don’t matter. Whether or not the world around us exists, everything is impermanent and our actions are basically inconsequential. If everything “really exists” then nothing really matters, and it doesn’t matter if what you’re doing or thinking is stupid or fake or funny or mundane. So why not make our time here stupid and funny?
Luisa’s “BIG FUN SLEEPOVER” took place in her home. Each room on the first floor was lit in a different color. The red room had couches and cushions pushed together to make a large bed. The blue room displayed her hand-made stuffed objects (using the term ‘animals’ or even ‘creatures’ would be a misnomer here). The blue room and another green room each house had a computer with a web browser open where a user could play the four short video games she designed, which constitute the bulk of her work. The main screen of Luisa’s website, where her Flash-animated video games are hosted, is a simple black screen with the titles of her games: Transcend, Ascend, Touch, and Exorcise. Each game is solo play, designed for one user. The interface is intuitive for any average computer user. Controls are limited to clicking the mouse or hitting arrows on the keyboard. Each game is a mix of hand-drawn characters, photographic images of nature and famous art, colorful computer glitches, rich sound design, and religious references.

The craftsmanship in Luisa’s work is not in the complexity of the game programming, but in her ability to combine hand-drawn animation with a digital aesthetic. Her hand-drawn characters, referencing the doodles in the margins of a school notebook, walk a perfect line between being fantastical and relatable; like mythological creatures such as the Sphinx, they retain enough human-like characteristics that we identify with them as protagonists.

For Luisa, there are connections between child-like curiosity, spirituality, and the art-making process. By creating video games, as opposed to videos, there is a sense that the user is a part of her process. She is interested in creating fantasy worlds through which one can, in her own words, “escape the bonds of this body and earth and find something really really real.” While video games certainly provide a strong ability to self-forget (thanks in part to our mediated senses and embodied familiarity with computer interfaces) the characters and scenes in Luisa’s work are deeply visceral. For her video game characters, their bodies are the vessel through which transcendence occurs, whether through the smashing of the flying creature in Exorcise (complete with a pool of blood) or the pulling open of the protagonist’s belly in Touch. Even some of her hand-made stuffed creatures resemble organs.

Her focus on single-player games and the “doodle aesthetic” reflect the childhood loneliness unique to the first generation to grow up with a computer in every home. This, more than any other part of “BIG FUN SLEEPOVER,” feels deeply personal. For Luisa, video game escapism is a form of transcendence, and a spiritual connection with the natural world is not to be privileged over the digital. Yet in the end, the message is not so dark. It is a “big fun sleepover,” after all. Despite the isolating or violent imagery in her games, the audience is experiencing the work together. The relational aesthetic of “BIG FUN SLEEPOVER” serves to acknowledge the power in human connection. The work’s effectiveness is in the complexities of the dichotomies at play: aloneness vs. togetherness, the digital vs. the natural, and violence vs. innocence.
Diagrams, architectural models, and advertisements inform much of my work as an artist and researcher. Addressing the assumptions of order within these visual representations, I confront the fabricated reality and social influences that are present within glorified spaces. Home is one of those spaces. Home is a unique concept because it implies both a social, familial, and architectural location. It can travel, disappear, and transform. During the rise of midcentury suburbia in the United States, homes were spaces of greater control and technological advance. From family to fences, structure and separation became idealized. Along with homes’ geometric syntheticism came the rise of the atomic family and its values. I find these familial archetypes to be much like players in a videogame; they seek to represent a specific reality, but simultaneously are accepted as fake. This duality extends to the private yet communal functions of the idealized suburban home, where effort was made to play entertainer as well as fenced-off neighbor.

Multiplicity is a point of connection between my conceptual explorations and my printing practice. Being able to reproduce imagery and ideas through printmedia mimics the repeated construction and culture of the American Suburb that still exists today. Using the control present within screen and press printing, I combine commercial imagery and family photos, videogame iconography, and toys such as building blocks. These manipulations explore the largely contrived social and structured aspects of the idyllic American suburban home and the separation present within these domains.
Essay by Mickaela Fouad

"Why the pineapples?" I asked as we walked through his show.

"I just liked them," he replies quietly with a smile.

I had a notebook open to take quotes from Soren but instead of asking questions I kept getting lost in the layers of print on each piece—the textures, the colors—and while I inched my face probably too close for comfort to his works he would disappear briefly to accept congratulations from another admirer. The prints were something I was able to lose myself in. I couldn’t tell where they started and ended in their numerous textures, images, and colors.

"Who’s that?" I pointed at the woman covered in a blind and pineapples.

"Oh, that’s my grandmother."

The rise of Suburbia in the 1950s was as much about assimilation as it was about exclusivity. Through the manipulation of generic and stock images in tandem with personal family photos, Soren Carlson-Donohoe immerses us in a family story. The setting is what one associates with white suburbia: culs-de-sacs, cars, and identical houses... the characters: Carlson-Donohoe’s grandmother, mother, and aunt. The collection is less so a commentary on Suburbia in general and more so a recreation of the artist’s maternal grandparents’ life in stereotypical 1950s America. We see a milk carton, pixelated clouds that evoke Mario Cart, and television sets. Through the medium of print the work echoes the reproducible nature of a lifestyle that focuses on fitting into an idyllic lifestyle. There is no mention of the effects suburbia had on low-income families: the forcible moves to inner-city ghettos, the color divide. But that absence immerses us into the story—where a family counts only their own blessings.

The work is beautiful, if not a little eerie, and focuses on aesthetics. Cool colors, black and white photography, symmetry and order abound each work. Children, a photograph of Carlson-Donohoe’s mother and aunt placed on top of a grid and mounted on a Lego embossed paper, evokes the sentimentality and rigid order that is present throughout the collection. Two girls, one slightly taller than the other, smile for the camera in a driveway framed by manicured grass. A sparkly Ford sits in the street in the background. Everything in order, it makes for a very pretty, albeit impersonal, photograph. There is a distance—a secret—within the perfection that is impenetrable. It’s all too too and perfectly in keeping with the artist’s statement: From family to fences, structure and separation became idealized.
When I was thirteen, I went to sleep one night and woke up the next day paralyzed. Three significant things happened afterwards. First, I spent six months relearning how to walk, footstep by buckling footstep, as a baby does. According to my neurologists, there was no reason as to why this autoimmune disease, A.D.E.M, attacked my particular spinal cord. So that is why, secondly, I’ve spent the last nine years questioning why it did. And why I was able to walk again. I would be lying, though, if I didn’t include the third, most significant thing that occurred to me after this event. An immense gratitude for simply existing. It would happen to anyone, really. After being unable to move for so long, movement becomes the most important thing. After a month of white hospital walls, even the colors of crossing a busy street will make you hold your breath.

On the surfaces of my paintings, images appear and disappear. Levels of colors and figures from my sketchbook are fragmented together. As I intertwine these layers, I am most interested in exploring complexity, and not in the resolution of meaning. I would like to force the viewer to reconsider their perceptual approach of viewing the world.

I take inspiration from the invitation in Rauschenberg’s collages, the enigmatic quality in Robert Frank’s photographs, and the immediacy of Eva Hesse’s work. I am inspired by the exactness of nature. The way my body, a part of nature too, was able to repair itself, cell by cell.

If you can wake up paralyzed one day, why trust anything in life, right? I don’t believe so. As I was regaining feeling in my muscles, I felt a sudden connection to something much greater than myself. It was the same as when I would sit in church pews as a child, not exactly listening. Just feeling red, green, yellow, and blue stained glass reflecting warmly on my face. Within the overlapping layers of these colors in my own paintings, I aim to explore what it means to hold onto this kind of moment when, really. You are just a human body in a very shaky world.
Walking into “Retroflect” one quickly notices the range of materials that make up Carolyn Burnham’s work. Paint, ink, photography, glass, resin and other found objects appear in different combinations throughout the show. It is not only these materials that resurface in different permutations, but images also reappear. Looking around the room one sees the human figure in multiple works. A telephone wire appears in both her photos and paintings such as *Between Here and Now*. The luminous orb in the hazy street lights of her photos, is echoed in paintings such as *Orbs Like Me* and *Our Sinking Mind*, and even conceptually in the potential for light held in the unilluminated light bulbs that protrude from the surface of her works. These images, repeated time and time again through digital and analog means, as well as the repetition of techniques, mediums, and colors, tie Carolyn’s exhibition together. These formal repetitions force the viewer to see her paintings, photographs, and collages not as individual efforts, but as parts of a process, of a whole.

As the installation of “Retroflect” displays a range of materials, the surface of each object is also layered, busy with many marks, materials, and forms. Each artwork is inhabited with diverse modes of image making. A single meaning or message within individual objects cannot be found. Carolyn is not interested in resolving meaning, but in exploring complexity. Confronted with her works, the viewer grapples with the impossibility of finding a straightforward reading and becomes conscious of their own perceptual processes. Focusing on the dense, multicolored, swirling, abstract pattern, outlined in black and filled with transparent color, that undulates in and around itself in the bottom corner of *Brain Scan*, *Stained Glass*, I questioned how Carolyn painted this intricate detail. Perhaps she first painted the black outline and then filled it in with color? But no, Carolyn has said that the work was actually drawn by hand and then given color digitally. She even points out that the same digital detail occurs in other works. Through this experience of discovery I became conscious of the act of seeing. Through a destabilization of my own viewing, I began to question, how much of her other work I had misunderstood?

This uncertainty is at the core of Carolyn’s process. Having woken up one morning paralyzed, at the age of thirteen, Carolyn has since grappled with the question of whether we can trust our own perceptions. If with no warning, and no explanation, you can wake up unable to move, how can you believe in any notion of permanence? All we can know are our present observations.

Carolyn accepts that the viewer will not arrive at a specific, predetermined conclusion, only that they will perceive her work with their diverse subjectivities. She does not push the viewer to understand a specific image, but instead privileges their sensory experience. She presents works that force the viewer to be conscious of, and question, how they see an image and build meaning from it. Her work attempts to heighten your understanding and appreciation of the viewing process, it is about your seeing.
I came up with the title “Shi no Mori” from the idea of Aokigahara Forest (青木ヶ原樹海), a forest which is known as the most popular site for suicide in Japan. Nearly one hundred people choose to end their lives in the forest each year. Some of the people who were saved from the forest said they had a vague feeling of being pulled towards the forest as if there was someone calling them to come and end their journeys there.

In Watanabe Junichi’s excruciatingly beautiful love story A Lost Paradise (失楽園), the protagonists, who are at the height of a torrid love affair, choose to commit suicide by taking poison during their last intercourse. They wanted to “feel the temptation of death at the highest point of pleasure” and to “preserve this love and not let it demeise in the abrasion of marriage and mundane life.” I dare not to say that the concept of the “temptation of death,” “pleasurably/allured death” or “creating immortality by committing the fact of morality,” abounds in various cultures, but one thing is for sure, the aesthetics towards death constantly draws us to a sorrowful, thrilling, flaming, or tranquil beauty.

I wonder, could death be a lure? Could it be a temptation? Could it be transcendence? Or at least, could we only mourn over it? Could it be something people appreciate or crave even if they still fear it?

I can’t read or define death. I don’t know what happens in the forest. But when I see the shadow vanishing, or flaming into the mist of the forest, I feel the chilling sorrow of its beauty. We always lose the beauty of death when we are blinded by torturing grieve and only shed tears; but beyond grieve and the pain of loss, what’s in there?
rope, a traditional Chinese symbol representing the bond of marriage and love, is broken by the artist herself, indicating that she is no longer bound with the mundane world; later she grabs a new rope and thusly joins to another world. Her wedding dress is black, so are the extinguished candle and the designed dim light in the gallery, creating a by no means flamboyant or joyful atmosphere that we are accustomed to see in a wedding banquet. The rising black veil is the ghost of an unknown being who is going to take her. This is the furthest marriage one could imagine; she creeps through a dark path where the end is an incorporeal bridegroom and there is no return. This is the most intimate one could ever get; ultimately, she is in a tight embrace with the only one whom she is willing to bond with. The message of love carried by the process of a wedding and the allusion of death invoked by her black wedding dress echo with her ideology of the show. The icons and symbols in her performance surpass boundaries among different cultures.

Aodunne successfully expresses a cohesive language of her ideas and shows her work ethic through the laborious embroidery and deliberately designed details on her art. As a friend of the artist, I witnessed how the show came into being. When I finally saw her performance in Fisher Gallery and the rest of exhibition proving her commitment into art, I was genuinely proud of her. This show marks a great and solid beginning of her long journey in art.

Essay by Mengtian Bai

Aodunne’s show “Shi no Mori” is built upon her understanding of the beauty within death. Driven by her fantasy, she intelligently, intricately and consistently incorporates her inner feelings with literature and artistic representations from different cultures ranging from The Roses of Heliogabalus to Chinese traditional ink play, from Salome the play to Paradise Lost by Watanabe Junichi. Meanwhile, a multitude of ideas collectively reflects the inseparable nature of love and death. In the senior show, her use of various media, including book art, glass painting, embroidery, performance, acrylic painting and installation, all speaks to Aodunne’s years of experimentation with arts. She frees herself from the confines imposed by the more academic but less inspirational art training that she received before attending Oberlin College.

Encouraged by her senior studio class and especially her instructor Professor Yannuzzi-Macias, she decided to do a performance piece in the show. The performance is entitled Foris, a Latin word meaning “faraway”. In the performance, with a piece of broken mirror, a lighting candle and the wedding dress she has prepared for herself, she burns the red rope tightened around her wrists, smothers the candle with bare hands, crawls through these conventional symbols of wedding, clutches a new red rope, lifts one end of the long black veil, and finally covers herself with it. This is not a wedding ceremony that we usually see in the East or the West. A broken mirror instead of an intact one denies the connotation of consummation that a mirror is supposed to invoke in a ceremony. The red
My art practice pervades my life and vice versa. I believe in the power of an ontological mode of art making— one that emphasizes everyday life. My experiences in the rural South, growing up trans, queer, a white trash first-gen college student informs my motivations and obsessions as an artist. I use materials that’ve always been with me: a diary, watercolors, pens, cell phone photography, the internet. I’m inspired by trans, postcolonial, race and queer theory. Place/time play a big role in my art via visual canons and languages of current pop music, news, politics, social media and fashion. Art helps me understand a world that necessitates violent attachments to normalcy, control, categorization. Our society enforces these attachments through affective technologies—compulsion, desire, ideology. I hope to interrogate cultural assumptions through creation. What larger affective systems reveal themselves via widely available imagery of the commonplace, the average, the “masses”?

I'm in the amoral comp. Colored pencil, watercolor, and marker.

Exhibition: Trans/Women ONLY pARTy
DYLAN GOOD

thisnewmillennium.tumblr.com
Dylan was one of the first friends I made in college. I began noticing their artwork in unexpected moments. After lunch, scribbled on a paper menu at the table in Dascomb. Picking up the latest copy of the Grape. Hanging out in my room, a sketch of me playing guitar. Dylan's art at once captures the everyday and the surreal. The human figure becomes a site of the grotesque, the confused, the empowered. Dylan makes us question what we considered beautiful in the first place. They question what we considered art in the first place.

Walking into their senior show, I felt comfortable being surrounded by Dylan's whole gang of ugly creatures, in all of their gender-bending, hairy legs and high-heel wearing glory. Dylan's work creates a visual space for the queer imagination, full of bright colors and crooked teeth and torn dresses that made me feel among old friends, both make-believe and real.

Dylan's show explored the themes of transness, ru-
rality, and dominant ideology. Upon first entering the space, there were two comics and a series of digital photo-collages. I loved Clown Beaut, a comic about two "ugly" people who want to find a sense of belonging and connection at a carnival. I can imagine these comics being eaten up by queer and trans youth, providing a much-needed alternative to the heteronormative misogyny of Archie.

Walking into the main room of the show, the viewer was faced with a television screen flashing a series of messages, such as "whites desperately desire an understanding of their own creation: race." On the walls were a series of photo collages, which are pulled from Dylan's collection of cell phone photos. Dylan explained that they've been "accumulating these images kind of randomly for years." Dylan's materials are reflective of their life and ultimately accessible to them and others, "colors that you see everywhere that are mass-produced. Things that I can just pull out anywhere, which is why I love watercolors and pens."

There were also a few groups of mixed media drawings, dynamic and arresting with swirling strokes of paint and clusters of sparkly smiley face stickers. It was hard for me not to smile. It was hard for me not to see the pain beneath the toy store iridescent and globs of paint. There were also cut-out mermaids that seemed to no longer be mermaids, but perhaps, some form of future sea people who defy gender and normative beauty. My favorite drawing was a skeleton figure, wearing a skirt with hearts that matched highlighter pink hair and with the phrase "let us be women" floating over her head.

In describing why they make art, Dylan said, "to process emotions and experiences...it gives me political agency...and a way to do politics." Further, Dylan said, "it's really exciting to create a forum to talk about coded negative emotions. Because I feel like in every conversation and in how the larger world sees them, it's so impossible, there's no space to talk about these things." Dylan's use of the public vocabulary of mass-media images and childhood art class supplies makes it easy for the viewer to make connections, whether that be through nostalgia, life experience, political beliefs, or through the heart.