

Making It Alone

July 8 - 26, 2006

Exhibition Curated by:

Andy Campbell

Ashley Schmiedekamp

Erika Cole

Rachel Mohl

Featuring Work by:

Jani Benjamin

Robert Boland

Sarah Frantz

Buster Graybill

Jules Jones

Marinne McGrath

Kurt Mueller

Adam Schreiber

Amelia Winger-Bearskin

Virginia Yount

Published on the occasion of the exhibition.

Making It Alone, July 8 - 29, 2006

Creative Research Lab

The University of Texas at Austin

Design by: Kelly Green

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Curator's Statement

Making it alone, by yourself, in the studio, one on one, one after the other, in the world, in the market, in the scene, in the papers, in the galleries, with the critics, against the critics, on paper, writing on your computer, sending edits back and forth, laying it all out and hitting print, process-oriented, craft-based, by yourself.

Making It Alone highlights the work of artists directly engaged in the process of creating work within the studio environment. Kaleidoscopic in materials, methods and means, the artists represented speak to the diversity within the Art and Art History Department at the University of Texas at Austin. Making it Alone is one of two summer exhibitions; both are concerned with the processes of "making it." The second show, Making It Together, presents artists working in collaboration. What binds everyone involved in these projects, whether they are artists, writers, designers, or curators, is that we all desire success; we want to make it. It just so happens that our road to success lies in our creative abilities. To make it we have to make it.

These exhibitions would not have happened without the generosity and support of the following people: Hana Hillerova, John Yancey, Bernadette Ashman, Marc Silva, Jimmy Luu, Kelly Green, Alex Codlin, Laura Lindenberger, the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Texas at Austin, the writers, the artists, friends and family.

Sincerely,
The Curatorial Staff

Andy Campbell
Erika Cole
Rachel Mohl
Ashley Schmiedekamp

Jani Benjamins

My sister took a photo of me about five years ago on a dock at the far edge of Lake Interlocken in Switzerland. I stand before this vast expanse of gray nothingness. The horizon is subtly defined between two shades of gray; a perfect, undisturbed illusion between a vast body of water and misty atmosphere produces a delineation between heaven and earth. So many moments and environments provide unexpected moments where simplicity and serenity define a beautiful and blissful moment. Not unlike the effect captured in this photo, Jani Benjamins has focused on trying to capture moments between landscape, abstraction, and illusion in his work.

Looking through Benjamins' body of work various predecessors in the history of abstractionist painting come forward and recede to the background as a sort of unconscious sampling and a conscious methodology. Philip Guston changed his focus away from fields and washes; later paintings pulled away from the abstract expressionist school towards exploring and reinvestigating the role of the line. Benjamins took many routes in his investigation of abstraction before arriving at his current investigations of abstraction, color, and line in both painting and sculpture.

Past series in photography included studies of the sublime in nature by focusing on easily overlooked characteristics of environments, and they remain on the border between meditative peace, the sublime, and penetration. *Pungere, horizon*, 2005 (visible on the main page of Benmanins' website www.janibenjamins.com) is a mysterious image he either created or captured of a horizon line between two varying hues of

blue. His previous use of the tools in a traditional landscape form reference linear horizontal elements and a defining flat horizon line. This new series of work moves beyond unifying line and color-forms as traditional horizontal planes. He achieves this by playing with multi-dimensional perspective on two-dimensional surfaces and in three-dimensional reliefs.

Benjamins' recent Untitled studies from 2006 incorporate a variety of materials and techniques in order to investigate form and color through multi-dimensional surfaces. He has a difficult task in trying to create and define work with a sense of completion. This is further complicated because all of these works remain untitled, leaving the viewer to their own devices in reading his work. His method develops tools between the sketchbook, larger paintings, and relief sculptures for expanding color, surface, and texture into three-dimensions.

His initial series of experimental studies juxtaposed dozens of standard 8." x 11" notebooks full of combinations of collage and acrylic colors. He arranged a collection of successful pages upon his studio wall to create a contemplative surface. Composed of organic, painterly abstraction working in tandem with hard-edge, geometric forms, Benjamins used these studies for larger paintings that explore the potential beyond the boundaries of the 8"x11" surface. The relief works mirror the paintings in their investigation of the relationship between geometric and painterly abstraction. Yet, they also complicate these studies with the addition of a sculptural property, which allows the viewer to perceive the work from a variety of perspectives. The reliefs dismiss the necessity of a horizon line; instead, they allow juxtaposing colors of jutting spaces to further complicate abstracted spaces. His sculptures incorporate everyday found objects in the environment such as ephemerally short-lived branches and leaves and sturdier man-made plastics from construction sites. By incorporating this broad range of environmental debris, Benjamins highlights the potential of the developed environment to retain a sense of sublime landscape abstraction. But, at the same time, he subtly underlines the intrusion of mankind.

These objects don't ask for much more than a sense of place and a moment of contemplation. There are so many places in the world where one can go to experience a transcendent environment. I found the sublime the first time I drove out through the vast expanses of undeveloped spaces in west Texas. Live in one place long enough and one forgets how different the world looks through fresh eyes discovering a new environment. There are plenty of places and space to investigate the sublime; and, as for Benjamins' work, it is a matter of translating experience into a product of the studio.

Edwin Stirman

Robert Boland



Have you ever tried to perfect a break dancing move for eighteen straight minutes? Have you ever tried to disappear under water? Have you ever pushed a building in the hopes of moving it just a little? Robert Boland has; these actions and others have formed the bulk of his series of six videos called *Methods for Training*, which includes *Toilet*, the video shown in *Making It: Alone*. For this series, Boland set up an immobile video camera and filmed himself repeating and attempting to perfect certain actions or gestures, often in public spaces. In the course of the videos, the actions are improvised; however, the concepts are not, for who would ever attempt to clean the same public *Toilet* several times over the course of eleven minutes?

In *Toilet*, the viewer has a waist-level view of the institutional *Toilet* and the character cleaning it. It feels intimate, and the audience becomes a part of the action. Yet, the viewer remains outside of the frame and the camera placement ensures that the audience cannot get in the way of the action. For most of the video, the viewer has only the visual context of the back of a cut-off figure doing work. According to Boland, this voyeuristic aspect remains important because the audience mostly sees the center mass of the character and not the action. The character, then, blocks out everything but the task, and the viewer is not automatically part of the action but only occasionally let into it.

There is also focus and earnestness in the way that the character delves into the task without seeming to question the purpose of repeating it. Boland, a former wrestler, claims that the physicality of action in *Toilet* mirrors the aggression and focus of the sport. The action becomes like a drill, but not something that the character had been told to do. The character's action and appearance suggest a vaguely institutional inclusion, as if he may be a cog in the wheel of a larger machine, but maybe not. For example, his clothing, a blue tee shirt and green cargo pants, seem on one hand militaristic and uniform-like, but also civilian in that they are simple clothes to which a civilian audience can relate. Through his appearance, the figure seems almost universal, but the repetition of his work keeps his action from being fully understood as institutional.

Looking at the *Methods of Training* series, one cannot help but see the studio films made by Bruce Nauman in the 1960s as a source. In this series, Nauman set up a still camera and filmed himself repeating an action, such as tossing a tennis ball. According to Boland, he enjoyed these films because Nauman questioned not only the action but also the purpose of the action. Boland states that he arrived at his video series through thinking about the interaction between artist and object in the sculpture-making process. For works such as *Toilet*, however, he has removed the sculptural output so that only the persistence and ritual of the action remain.

Despite the repetition of the action, *Toilet* has some surprises. The sound created by the action has rhythmic properties that are almost mesmerizing in their minimalist repetition, lending an interior beauty to a mundane task. The swishing brush and the metronomic dripping of an unseen faucet become complementary. Composer and Zen practitioner John Cage used to tell students to "let sounds be themselves," meaning that we should consider all sonorous material as music. If the repetition of the action seems fulfilling in its Zen purposefulness, that's not an accident. According to Boland, who studied at a Zen Buddhist monastery in Japan a few years ago, the purpose or concept of his work might be Zen, but he concentrates on specifically Western actions and tasks. The video contrasts the singlemindedness and mental discipline of Zen monastic traditions with the concentration and physical discipline central to wrestling. And, the idea of play is also important because the video contrasts seriousness with humor in the character's delectation of his work. (There is an unexpected ending—be sure to see the whole video).

As we observe the video, we become absorbed in the action. The few breaks where Boland exits the frame become a shock of stillness revealing the gleaming white *Toilet*, which becomes austere and sculptural from the camera's vantage point. Then, we find that we have been concentrating on the action as much as the character has. We understand it. We have been trained.

Melissa Warak



Sarah Frantz

It is O.K. to smile when viewing Sara Frantz's recent oil paintings. It is even O.K. to giggle. Frantz imbues her oil paintings with an unmistakable sense of fun, of whimsy even, due in large part to her consistent use of sheep as her subject matter. There is something inherently droll about sheep as characters, something both oddly comical and amusingly innocent. Frantz's paintings may initially strike the viewer as fun because her painted sheep are entertaining characters. At times, she paints sheep that are very obviously sheep, often in odd positions, limbs akimbo. Other canvases display sheep that seem barely sheep at all, exploded bits of colorful fur resembling smiling baskets of thick multicolored yarn or coiled fragments of fluff floating between layers of wet color. Frantz creates sheep that invite the viewer to further the anthropomorphization that she has begun. We may well imagine them chanting, "Four legs good, two legs bad," like George Orwell's sheep, unable to grasp the true nature of the volatile world around them, happy to follow the crowd. Frantz's sheep often smile out at the viewer with expressions of such dopey contentment that it seems as if they are as entertained as we are by their painted situations. For all their fun, Frantz's sheep

can also be overwhelmingly pathetic and devastating in their vulnerability. She often creates sheep surrounded by layered color; though lately she has worked to provide settings for her sheep, to locate her subjects in recognizable space and to give them homes. Whatever the setting, her subjects are always alone. This loneliness is striking because sheep are flocking animals, never straying from the mob. But, Frantz isolates her subjects, and their seclusion makes them all the more vulnerable. In fact, their compelling vulnerability played a part in initially attracting Frantz to the sheep as subject matter.

Frantz's canvasses may share a similar subject matter, but she does not paint any of her sheep in similar fashion. In fact, she paints in a wide variety of styles, ranging from highly abstract painterly pieces filled with exuberant strokes of wild color, to subdued canvases reflective of dark urban influence, to collage-like fantasy-scapes inspired by everything from Disney cartoons to woodblock prints. Each piece seems a different approach to her medium and a further exploration of the possibilities of sheep as characters. Each is fun in its way, but each is also pathetic. One sheep sits awkwardly against a wall held in place by a metal device with missing limbs, and yet he is seemingly happy. Another's head rests just above the water of a fantastical river, his heavy woolen coat surely pulling him down, as cheery birds and squirrels look on. One smiles complacently as its wool seems to come alive like so many parasites and consumes the body within. Others look as if they have been turned completely inside out, freshly skinned but unarguably beautiful. Frantz's sheep are pathetic because they do not know the precarious nature of their positions. They are devastating in their naiveté, and they never seem to recognize their own dire circumstances. Like victims of nasty practical jokes who are incapable of realizing that the joke is on them, they evoke our pity as well as our laughter. The tragic nature of Frantz's paintings does not make them any less fun, or any less humorous. On the contrary, the sheep's seeming inability to understand the dangers around them makes them even more comical; they keep the joke going by refusing to see it as such.

Perhaps viewers will react only to the devastating aspect of Frantz's work, the part that invites us to sympathize with these anthropomorphized sheep. Indeed, much of the power of her pieces comes from Frantz's ability to make us feel for the sheep or feel with the sheep. But, at the same time, we are invited to laugh at them. Frantz welcomes your smiles at her work; she even welcomes giggles.

Alyse Levalley



Buster Graybill

Like many artists, Buster Graybill considers himself an observer of culture who passes through life and collects little details along the way. But, in contrast to the excessive amount of artists who focus on popular culture and current events, Graybill dedicates himself and his work to what he considers the underexplored and overlooked.

After spending much of his life embedded in the culture of rural and working-class Texas, Graybill directs his art toward preserving the exploration of a land and people that are now threatened by urban sprawl. The artist grew up in Conroe, about an hour away from Houston. He describes it as the “piney woods” of southeast Texas. Because of its close proximity to the metropolis and the effects of continuing urban sprawl, Graybill witnessed the growth and change of his tiny rural town. In his art, Graybill reaches back to capture the culture and feel of his small town that in many ways exists only as memories. He collects images, sounds, tastes, smells, and textures from this landscape and defends their memory in his art. Graybill

feels the culture of rural and working-class Texas as he knows it faces potential extinction, and he utilizes his work as a means to conserve these memories.

This project, however, poses a bit of a conundrum. The more Graybill devotes his life to becoming an artist, the more disconnected he feels from this familiar and beloved environment. His work then also becomes a ground on which he struggles with his personal sentiments regarding separation from native spaces.

As you talk to Graybill about his art, he often uses words such as “harvest” and “collect” to describe what he does. What he does not emphasize is the immense amount of construction and creation that is involved in his art. In his installation entitled *Corn Fed*, Graybill fabricated all of the steel structures in the piece. The deer feeder he built weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds, which is on the larger side in the world of deer feeders. This deer feeder sprung from his experience of the pervasive presence of hunting culture in rural Texas. Graybill has strong memories of deer feeders and other hunting paraphernalia scattered across the countryside and displayed for sale at roadside stores, feed stores, gas stations, and even grocery stores.

Graybill's feeder holds five hundred pounds of corn feed, and he engineered the motor in the deer feeder with a timer set to dispense fifty pounds of seed corn per hour. In some installations of *Corn Fed*, Graybill surrounds the deer feeder with miniature constructions of hunting stands with long spindly legs. The viewer is invited to move through the space, to experience the changing amounts of corn, and to leave his or her own trails and marks on the landscape.

This element of change and fluctuation, also present in other works, echoes the transformations Graybill sees in the rural Texan environment. Not only is the space Graybill creates in *Corn Fed* constantly changing, but this change is not solely the product of the art. It is the viewer who plays a large role in shaping the environment. As the artist invites the viewer to participate and experience his corn landscape, the art is also transformed by the interaction of the viewers. When you contemplate the mark each viewer leaves on the corn floor covering, you can't help but draw a parallel to the irreversible mark popular culture has left on the environment that Graybill references.

It is in this sense that the art of Buster Graybill is not simply an homage to past times and places. He does not create sentimental commemorations, which would make his much-loved rural Texas seem even more eroded and extinct than it actually is. Rather, he constructs spaces that foster interactions, keeping his subject matter in the present with the viewer.

Although Buster Graybill admits that in his quest to become an artist he sometimes feels that he has become distant from the environment he adores, to the viewer he seems anything but. The sturdy, constructed steel forms and organic seed speaks of his familiarity with rural Texas and its culture. And, the flow and movement in the space, combined with the viewer's interaction, maintain Graybill's collection of the past very much in the present.

Erika Morawski

Aron Johnson

Salutations. Dogs. Handshakes. Strain. Puppets. Billboards. Symbols. Text. Random. Related. Fragments of life connect in unlikely and atypical ways in Aron Johnston's artwork. Johnston weaves images together that do not usually or readily correspond. These visual and textual cues guide the viewer's emotions and function as a formal and stylistic anchor. Many of these images draw inspiration from billboard signs and popular culture. For example, in his reinterpretation of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, Johnston uses the Shell gas station icon to represent the shell from which the goddess emerges. He also employs text taken from old and worn-down signs found on roadsides, recreating its dilapidated appearance but connecting it to new images. By borrowing figures from the past and placing them in a present context, Johnston engages the viewer in his own reconsideration of images seen everyday. The artwork forces the viewer to notice and rethink symbols that he/she passes obliviously on a daily basis.

In the three dimensional rectangular structure *Hello*, Johnston explores different methods of greeting by juxtaposing text and images. On one side he has painted the word "Hello" in large letters. He includes a video playing on the perpendicular side panels that shows a variety of hand gestures between two people, such as handshakes and high-fives. The side opposite the text contains a number of dogs sniffing each other. Johnston has taken the many different ways to say hello out of their original context so the viewer can compare them and extract their own associations from the work. At the same time, he has humorously drawn a parallel between the physical greeting rituals of dogs and humans. Furthermore, the width of the structure represents the comfort distance between two people who have just met. In this way, Johnston allows the viewer to greet the artwork in her own manner.

Underneath the outline of the word "Hello," Johnston places lines that at first glance appear purely formal. When carefully considered, these lines, however, connect to form other words such as "Hey" and "How Are You." The layered text, as Johnston calls it, adds to the many variations of greeting in the piece. He

first became interested in hidden phrases and words when he photographed an old sign on Manor Road. The text read “Come and Get It.” Upon further examination of the picture, Johnston found that beneath these art nouveau letters existed another phrase, “Café”. Like this sign, he hides text within his paintings that in turn forces the viewer to take a closer look. The layers expand the meanings and associations that the viewer can draw from each work.

Johnston uses the idea of unlikely relationships supported by layered text in his most recent painting *Strain*. At the bottom of the work, he paints the word “Strain” on top of other terms such as “Pressure” and “Worry.” In this way, he guides the viewer to make connections based on the original word. At the top of the painting, he has included a puppet held by strings, adding an emotional value to the text. Perhaps the viewer feels like a puppet when experiencing tension and strain. Johnston combines text and image in a way that a viewer does not typically consider. This expands the viewer’s understanding of the variety of ways to see and interpret symbols that surround her in everyday life.

Figures and phrases function as complimentary entities in Johnston’s artwork. They provide new connections between symbols and offer multiple ways to understand the world. Johnston calls these works “clash paintings,” and he asks the viewer to “read into them” and create additional associations. He has the ability to mold seemingly different ideas into one unified painting, giving the viewer a fresh perspective.

Rachel Mohl

Jules Jones



Jules Jones twists commonly held perceptions about political and environmental subject matters, and he forces his reader to create narratives based on fantastical scenarios that are loosely based in recent scientific discovery. Within this framework, Jones strives to unravel the nature of human superiority over other species. In this show Jones exhibits a series of paintings that reflect his interest in combining and manipulating preexisting systems of classification.

Jones takes the current discoveries of hybridization occurring in nature as a point of departure for creating his own 'monsters.' These 'monsters' represent the animals that humanity, for a number of reasons, forces to evolve. Humanity's manipulation of species appears in society in a number of ways. One is the destructive nature of man's intentional manipulation of species; for example, a recent story in Harper's magazine

detailed how the United States was trying to use computers to control shark behavior for military purposes. Secondly, unintentional hybrids result from humans manipulating the environment. For instance, scientists recently discovered a mix between a polar bear and a brown bear. Lastly, Jones is intrigued by the natural occurrence of hybrids in the environment such as the commonly occurring ass, which is a cross between a donkey and a mule.

Jones' interests lie in blending popularized scientific accounts with the fantastical 'monsters' he creates. He buys into the fantastical power of these newly developed creatures and imagines what would happen if these 'monsters' overcame humanity. The theme of an apocalypse interests Jones and is an extension of his fascination with an abnormal hybridized world.

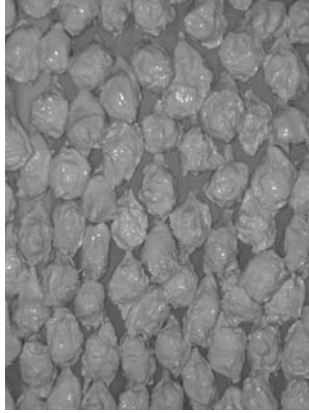
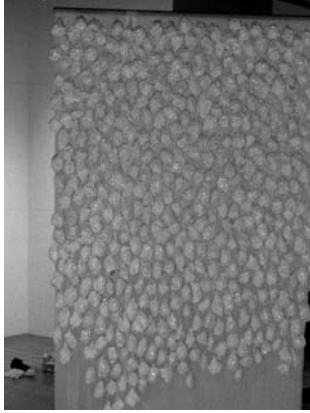
The work he exhibits here are small and intimate. The square wooden frames of varying sizes, which Jones either found or constructed himself, intentionally defy the ideas of the vertical/figural or the horizontal/landscape picture plane. He begins a narrative and wants a viewer to create their own conclusions to explain the images. Unlike other artists who try to reassure the viewer with a conclusion, his stories are not trying to appease the viewer or have a set conclusion. For Jones, the final piece is not as significant as the idea. Furthermore, he uses acrylic for its ability to go down on the canvas fast and dry quickly. Thus, he can focus on the ideas going into his work and not the finished application of the paint or the perfection of the final product.

In this exhibition, Jones plays with the hybridization of materials and landscapes in an attempt to challenge previously established notions of materiality. To read his work, one must consider the materiality of one element within a piece in the context of the other materials and objects presented. For example, when Jones makes a shark out of wood he displaces the shark's position in the water by having it rise to the surface. In the same work, he places a bird in the sky which is made of marble, so it sinks into the ocean. Therefore, Jones puts a new spin on the traditional cycle diagram popular in natural science books and science periodicals such as National Geographic.

Jones' works are both politically and environmentally minded. However, he does not want to 'preach' to his audience, but rather he wants to create a dialog. Jones addresses serious issues such as global warming, which both scare and make us feel helpless, but he does it in a humorous manner. This approach makes his work relevant to a large audience because of the universal appeal of his interests.

When seeing Jones' work it is important to pay attention to the surface and to understand the different materials that he uses. His paintings at first appear simplistic, yet upon closer examination they reflect a complex theoretical approach to analyzing the environment reality that we all too often ignore. He carefully juxtaposes different substances, subject matters, and themes in order to create an ironic and yet serious look at the popularization of science in our contemporary society.

Tracy Lea Hensley



Marianne McGrath

Marianne McGrath's artwork is about returning to the Earth. Her belief in the power of ceramic materials and processes could be taken as a direct reference to her own past. McGrath is a fifth-generation citrus farmer. When she was thirteen the family farm was sold. *There is a Wal-Mart in its stead.* The farm was relocated and still exists today. Marianne, as the oldest in her family, must feel the pressure of returning. I think she returns through her sculpture. Manifesting memory seems to be McGrath's chief concern as a sculptor. What is perhaps most striking about her artwork is its ability to speak of memory as a general process of making and remaking meaning. So whose memory is it? Hers? Yours? Mine?

My Hebrew name was Adam. I hated being called Adam by my teachers in Hebrew school. Eventually I renamed myself Aviv, Hebrew for "Spring." I thought it fit me better. Perhaps I disliked my name because I already had a friend whose real name was Adam, and I felt like an imposter Adam. It could also be that, even at such a seemingly young age, I felt uncomfortable with the resonances surrounding the name of Adam. In Judeo-Christian mythology Adam was the first man. Created from dust, he and Eve were the first to propagate humanity. I think I knew, even at thirteen, this was certainly not my role in this life. Etymologically, Adam is closely related to the Hebrew word for Earth, *adamah*.

A tree's root system functions to stabilize and support the trunk. Citrus tree roots are covered with little hairs that soak up water and nutrients from the soil.

Dirt is the carrier of meaning. Ceramics, as an artistic medium, carries with it connotations of life, death, and mythology. "Dust to dust" is a phrase familiar to many, often heard at services honoring the recently dead. It is meant to provide comfort. Comfort: we are returning to the place from whence we came. I think McGrath's sculptures provide this comfort. They often take the form of a mass of aggregated vessels. They float on water, hang from the ceiling, jut out from the walls, and hide in drawers and chests. The form of her ceramics is like the form of memory - globular, amorphous, and unexpected. They are achingly familiar. When installed McGrath's sculptures take on a life of their own; often they create sonic landscapes, tinkling and banging against one another.

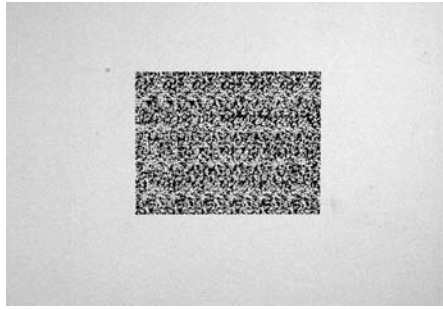
The trunk is like the highway of a tree. It is the path through which water absorbed by vast root systems makes its way to the branches and stems. The trunk reveals age, marks climate, and sometimes bears a more human mark - letters cut right into the bark, expanding at the same rate the trunk expands. A little kid in a citrus grove carves, "Adam wuz here."

Perhaps it is so difficult to describe Marianne McGrath's works because it is difficult to describe the process of memory. One thing is for certain, memory is not a stable thing. We are always losing it or, conversely, it is failing us. Memory is fuzzy and unclear. We do not know when or where memories will be made, just that they are.

This exhibition marks the first time that McGrath has consciously chosen to utilize tree imagery. In some ways this new trend is a logical extension of the material McGrath uses; after all, dirt and clay give way to plant life in the natural world. Trees also connote genealogy, which is our way of connecting and diagramming our past. The trees in this installation hover over and protect the bulbous forms below. The plexiglass (the only industrial material McGrath uses) is the mediator, the ground and the horizon.

This essay has been an experiment in grafting, an experiment in genetically modifying content into blocks and bits, helpful and superfluous. Citrus trees hybridise easily, and so we have a wide variety of citrus fruits available for our consumption, easily purchased from bodegas, fruit stands, grocers (local, organic, national), and Wal-Marts across America. Marianne presents the viewer with the beauty of her medium, of living and working closely with a material so resonant that, in the end, all that's left to do is shape it. Meanings are carried through, around, and in spite of McGrath's medium, and like memory, we claim and take our own memories, bring them out to play, and hope that they have something to do with one another. Maybe I'll go back to being Adam.

Andy Campbell



Kurt Mueller

Kurt Mueller is a second-year MFA student at UT. We met a few times this spring to talk about his work, and conducted the following interview in May.

Amanda Douberley: *When I first visited your studio, we looked at a few projects whose proper place was the city rather than the gallery. The “work” was not so much an object you had created for display, as an insertion of something into the urban environment that people might notice and engage.*

Kurt Mueller: My desire to intervene stemmed from a rejection of the gallery space. I was interested in triggering aesthetic experiences that were not already pre-coded by their site. I guess you could say I wanted the picture without the frame, though I eventually ran into a problem with how to re-present this work. What I think the gallery does is to focus or cluster those aesthetic events that continuously occur around you; it makes them more certain, clearer, and perhaps more meaningful. The stereogram tag makes this relationship between inside and out more concrete. The gallery version hopefully functions as a trigger, a suggestion, which is reinforced as you encounter it outside. Conversely, the gallery version imbues the outside tags with the authority and endurance of “Art”, but importantly without removing them from their active (transitory) play in the everyday world.

AD: *So with the stereogram you strike a balance between the gallery and the street. This is possible because the thing you create is a sign, which is appropriated through reading rather than touch. Your tag will be read differently inside and out of the gallery, but the mode of interaction remains essentially the same. Typically, the movement of everyday objects into the gallery functions in a fundamentally different way because a urinal in the gallery, to use one famous example, loses its use value and takes on the values of art. It becomes sculpture. I’m curious about why you chose to make a stereogram, since they’re generally seen as a diversion or game. Is this play element important to you?*

KM: There is a bit of humor there, in the novelty of the stereogram, but I like its potential for subversion. Hopefully, the game is seductive enough so I can have your attention. The message, “Remember Yourself”, is a mantra, a teaching of G.I. Gurdjieff, as explained in P.D. Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous*. Later in the book, Ouspensky, a pupil of Gurdjieff, describes his own theory of memory. Our strongest recollections, he explains, are formed when we become aware of ourselves within a particular moment of experience. Instead of just watching a movie, let’s say, and remembering what happened, we sense, watch even, ourselves watching the movie. It is self-reflexive, a doubling effect. The result is a remembering of the self. I can’t remember, but the stereogram format may have come after the message. I was interested in a double-focused manner of looking; not only looking at something, but also being very aware that you were engaged in this act, this looking, which is precisely what a stereogram does. The suggestion to “Remember Yourself” hopefully ensures this doubling, or now, tripling.

AD: *The message is also an inversion of most tags, which seem to say “remember me.” The fact that your message is coded, however, lines up almost perfectly with other tagging conventions, since they are written in a script that is barely comprehensible to the uninitiated. Still, I wonder why you’ve chosen graffiti as the mode of dissemination for your work. You could just as easily use a paste-up poster rather than paint, and get a permit for posting. The biggest change would be in the legal status of your action, from illicit to permissible behavior.*

KM: I am not sure if the legality matters or not; permission would not necessarily change the way the work is read. However, making it into a poster would. It would read as an advertisement, and therefore appear more self-conscious and less trustworthy. You would probably say that I am appropriating the authenticity of the graffiti tag, the sincerity of its expressionistic impulse. Yes, that honesty is something I am interested in, and I think it comes through the commitment of attaching the work directly to a surface. That is another big difference: the poster is added on to a space, whereas the graffiti mark becomes part of it. The insertion is deeper, and the messaging arguably more effective.

AD: *Legality does matter here because part of the honesty you’re after is tied to a notion of graffiti as a subaltern practice relative to the authorities, or whatever you want to call “them.” A tag is an unauthorized use of private property that can turn any surface into a public platform for expression or speech. Have you considered the political implications of graffiti in relation to this project?*

KM: I think of this piece as a humble gesture, unlikely to be noticed and even less likely read. I do not imagine it screaming (“I’m here”, like a tag) nor preaching (“Do this”, like an advertisement). Likewise, the political implications seem limited. It is not critical of a government or “the system” but rather a general state of human affairs. And, yes, I am appealing to a trust built into the history of the medium. Traditionally, a graffiti tag cannot be purchased nor condoned and likewise represents a high degree of autonomy; it does not exert nor regard any authority except that of the individual. So the politics of freedom are there, and perhaps necessary, as they tie into the responsible independence espoused by the appropriated Gurdjieff message.



Adam Schreiber

Adam Schreiber's photographs take the viewer on a roller-coaster of emotion. His quiet, unassuming views of suburban Orange County are at once familiar in appearance yet haunt the spectator with a sense of estrangement and isolation. Comprising three photographs taken at dawn, Schreiber's images illustrate a community of which we are all aware, a fixture of all metropolitan cities. This neighborhood is not extravagant in appearance and made up of small cookie-cutter like homes—a distinctively middle-class environment. These photographs speak to a common visual language and experience. Yet, under the guise of an ordinary urban landscape they force the viewer to question what lies beneath the comfortable façade.

Schreiber's images are far from ordinary. Elements such as the abandoned sofa teetering atop a curb in his *Orange County #1* as well as the eeriness associated with the lack of human presence promotes a "ghost-town" atmosphere in the work. Whereas the viewer recognizes and accepts the suburban vista, there remains a sense of mystery in the surroundings. Something in this neighborhood is, like the sofa, askew—walking the fine line between the safety of the curb and the danger of the street. Schreiber even refers to

the couch as having a “haunted quality.” His images reflect a suburban dystopia, comforting the viewer with their accessible elements and jarring them with what is unknown.

Essential to Schreiber’s photographs is the fear and exploration of what we cannot see—who lives in these houses, what is going on behind closed doors, what is lurking underneath the surface of this quiet neighborhood. In some ways the uncomfortable nature of these suburban surroundings, magnified by the discarded couch and the slightly tilted parking job in *Orange County #2*, provide a discomfort reminiscent of the suburban dysfunction apparent in movies such as Todd Solondz’s *Happiness* or Sam Mendes’ *American Beauty*. Fundamental to Schreiber’s work, like these filmmakers, is the mantra *look closer* and seek to unmask the hidden truths in the image. The viewer finds that the answer lurks somewhere beyond the trimmed hedges and finely manicured lawns, somewhere deeper and obscured by the light of commonality and normalcy.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the hazy, early dawn light seems to further this notion of the unknown. As with the houses that you cannot see through, the atmosphere is foggy, providing another protective layer to the secrets lurking within this neighborhood. This element of uncertainty is what makes Schreiber’s work so compelling.

Although not appearing in this show, his photographs concerning elements of an industrial, clean room provide the viewer with the same isolation. In these instances the objects photographed are not as familiar, and instead they promote a sterile environment and technological severity. In these works Schreiber plays with notions of science and technology, again emphasizing what is underneath the surface. His focus on clean rooms stems from an interest in the hidden and specifically invisible information that is imbedded on a silicon wafer. Through this emphasis on the manufacturing of silicon discs, he highlights the invisible components needed in the dissemination of information—again what lies beneath, the unknown. Moreover, Schreiber agrees that the goal of his recent photographs is to explore aspects of a “mundane, banal reality” but simultaneously juxtapose this normalcy and cleanliness with “something you cannot see.”

This juxtaposition is what makes Schreiber’s photographs so relatable and comprehensible, at least initially. This accessibility sucks the viewer into a world where answers, like the hazy atmosphere, are not clear. This realization forces them to *look closer*, not only at Schreiber’s photographs but at the society around them. The everyday objects we take for granted possess a new meaning upon deeper inspection, a new essence. This ability to provide introspection is why these quiet images provide such a convincing and compelling shock to the senses.

Bonnie Casson



Amelia Winger-Bearskin

The name Amelia Winger-Bearskin sounds like the best stage name ever for a performance artist, or at least that is what I thought when I first met Amelia. Little did I know that her surname, Winger-Bearskin, is not a figment of her imagination but rather real and deadly serious in its hybridity.

Born to a Jewish father and a Native American mother, Amelia straddles the divide between two ancient and dying cultures to create a new culture, one mixed and based on love rather than logic. In her recent work, Amelia harvests from the rich story telling traditions of her parents' cultures to investigate what it means to be mixed, the perfect blend of different races, religions, ethnicities, or world views. For her, the mixing of cultures is based on a complex set of human emotions including love, hate, not belonging, loss, death, violence, and hope. Amelia's work reflects her activist aims by involving the viewer and forcing her

into a dialog with the issues that her performances address. She attempts to find ways to use her own personal experiences and present them to her audience as metaphors through which they may understand their own lives. Amelia wants her work to provoke the viewers into questioning their own status as potentially mixed or not and to ultimately recognize the prevalence of mixed people in today's society.

In her latest performance *Johnny My Love*, Amelia turns the magnifying glass away from her own mixed identity and focuses on the mixed up emotions of passion, loss, destruction, and violence in contemporary society. Performing the role of a cabaret singer, she sings the story of three loves beginning with her true love, Johnny Justice, who tragically dies and leaves her a widow. She next has an affair with Johnny Chaos who leaves her and forces her to become a whore for Johnny War, a masochistic lover of whom she is at the mercy and against whom she is powerless. As the song progresses from one love story to another, the woman's appearance and status in life changes from a blushing virgin bride to a bedraggled whore filled with the violent passions of her master. Amelia's performance draws upon the rich story telling of Native Indian culture to present a modern day fable about the United States' fast decision to go to war, making war not an intellectual or rational decision but rather one based on impassioned emotion. The metaphor of loving men who she knows are bad for her is an appropriate metaphor for the complexity and difficulty of the war. The woman singing about her Johnnies ultimately becomes a whore to the war machine, emotionally violated and too ashamed to be talked about publicly. At the performance's end when the vengeful seed of Johnny Chaos is painfully expelled from her body, every viewer is implicated in being part of a society that lets war rage on.

Although *Johnny My Love* is the beginning of a new direction in her work that is no longer beholden to the past, Amelia's experiences are and will always be evident in her art, the choices she makes, and the issues that she address just by her being who she is. From her unique vantage point as a Native person, she sees the Native community in America as a living record of what happens when the US takes on the role of the aggressor. She compares American attempts to bring democracy and self-sufficiency to the Iraqis and Afghans as a contemporary successor to early settlers' efforts to "civilize" the Indians. For her the current plight of the native people of America is the future for people in Iraq and Afghanistan, a future with very little hope. Being Jewish, Amelia also understands the threat and repercussions of America fighting and persecuting those around the world that are supposedly different from "Americans" and need to be eradicated in order to make the world a safer place. By tackling these powerful issues in her work, Amelia's performances provide a sense of hope to a bleak present and future. Maybe we can change the world after all or at least begin talking about issues that need to be acknowledged.

Alex Codlin



Virginia Yount

In her most recent body of work, painter Virginia Yount has combined images of the American landscape with man-made structures or fixtures, creating a dialogue between the organic and the synthetic. A Virginia native and a newcomer to Texas, Yount takes inspiration from diverse aspects of the Texas landscape, such as the hills, deserts, greenbelts, and natural caverns. An avid camper, Yount claims that she has become more interested in not only the surprising features of the Texan terrain (“Look! Another natural spring!”), but also with the architectural structures that humans have imposed on the land in order to best enjoy it.

In her untitled painting in the Making It Alone exhibition, which Yount saw as the most recent culmination of her experimentation with landscape views, the artist has created a work that imparts a vaguely sinister feel to it. As a backdrop, she painted a glowing and peaceful view of Southwestern hills. On the right side of the image, she has created a fanciful and geometric residence/lookout tower in bright greens and or-

anges. The architecture is angular and coolly minimal in contrast to the warm landscape scene over which the tower looks. The structure seems environmentally friendly, yet its appearance is quite out of sync with the prevailing landscape.

According to Yount, she envisioned the owners and creators of this modern vessel as wealthy nature lovers with a penchant for soft science. Thus, she placed several objects that appear to be scientific instruments at the top level of the observation pod. In the foreground of the painting, however, we see a further manifestation of the owners' interest in science. In a round pit in the ground lies a group of human bones reminiscent of a burial ground. What are the owners doing with such a pit? And, what kinds of mystical powers are they tapping into with such an exploration?

In Yount's recent work, the human figures who have made such structures become conspicuously absent. In essence, these small man-made impositions on the land become their own centers of a controlled technological world within the much larger and chaotic natural world. Interestingly, in what may be a nod to the notion that the truth is stranger than fiction, Yount prefers to use photographic images from periodicals such as National Geographic as her sources. Instead of creating preliminary sketches, however, Yount often creates models and collages to figure out how certain structures will work within her topographies.

This is not the first painting in her oeuvre in which she has created a humorous dialogue among the wild world, technology, and somewhat supernatural forces. In a smaller untitled work, Yount filled a lush green landscape with boulders and Stonehenge-esque dolmens. Under the main structure, she has placed what appears to be a marble or stone cult statue, again recalling Druidic ritual. However, she has also painted speaker wires that stretch from the statue out to stacks of sound speakers in other areas of the environment. A viewer can only imagine how the modern convenience of speakers may have eased the labor of whatever seemingly spiritual ritual or event took place at this spot. Yount says that, with this painting, she imagined religion as a kind of shelter and the sound coming from the speakers as the gravelly radio sound of people talking from far away. Here, like the Jumbotrons found in many larger Christian churches, the collision of old-time religion and new-fashioned technology strikes a viewer as bizarrely ironic.

Although Yount's paintings do not necessarily have narrative aspects, the absence of human figures makes them that much more imaginative for the viewer, who can only guess at what kind of person would create such unnatural looking tableaux or buildings in the middle of the country. One also cannot help but wonder how these rural living spaces have evolved to have such an insistence on modern ambiance and convenience when located in the middle of nowhere. In these works, the colorful utilitarian aspects of the buildings recall the geodesic domes that Buckminster Fuller espoused as the ultimate sustainable living spaces in the 1960s and that still dot the northern California landscape. In the end, it is up to each viewer to determine whether they find these structures flagrantly disrespectful of the land or a full-on admission that any man-made structure can never be fully integrated with nature.

Melissa Warak

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