THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THINGS

Master of Fine Arts Exhibition
AQUA Art Miami 2015

Georgia State University
ERNEST G. WELCH SCHOOL OF ART & DESIGN
The Ernest G. Welch School of Art & Design and Georgia State University are honored to present this year’s MFA candidate exhibition, *The Relationships Between Things* at Aqua Art Miami 2015 — the emerging international art fair during Miami Art Week. This is Georgia State’s fifth consecutive year participating in this exciting satellite fair, now in its eleventh edition. Once again, the works produced by our graduate students offer a glimpse of what is possible when afforded the luxury of time, focus and unfettered exploration. Collaborative in nature, the art fair experience is a marquee highlight of our MFA program that provides real world practice for our studio artists, as well our graduate art history candidates who contribute to the editorial content of the catalog. Additionally, I would like to extend our appreciation and thanks to Victoria Camblin, Editor & Artistic Director at *ART PAPERS* magazine for her thoughtful catalog essay and taking the time to visit the campus multiple times to do studio visits with each of the artists.

Located in downtown Atlanta, the Ernest G. Welch School of Art & Design seeks to provide a challenging and cross-disciplinary studio setting where a diversity of experiences, backgrounds and talents are put forth and tested — in the studios, in the classrooms and on the streets. This urban experience has informed the ideas, messages and approaches of each artist and scholar. Under the guidance of established faculty, who are all active in the contemporary art and design world, the programs at the Welch School seek to cultivate a level of inquiry and commentary that is unique to each student.

The 2016 MFA candidates have used the past three years both to build on and to deviate from established practices in their respective fields. It has been a journey fraught with excitement, angst, clarity, uncertainty and passion — a passion for learning, for personal exploration and, ultimately, for making. These students of Art History, Ceramics, Drawing, Painting, Printmaking, Graphic Design, Interior Design, Photography and Sculpture have achieved much; but more importantly, they stand on the edge of even greater possibilities.

The Ernest G. Welch School of Art & Design is proud to present the works of its outstanding 2016 MFA degree candidates at Aqua Art Miami 2015.

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*Ernest G. Welch School of Art & Design*
*Georgia State University*
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I moved from London to Atlanta on December 1, 2013. A few days later I flew to Miami, where ART PAPERS was exhibiting in the magazine section at the Art Basel. I took an afternoon off to make the rounds at Aqua, a satellite fair housed in a rather splendid venue, where exhibitors occupy what are normally guest rooms off the blue-green courtyard of a “very Miami” hotel. Toward the back of this central space there was a sign directing visitors around a corner to a booth belonging to Georgia State University’s Ernest G. Welch School of Art & Design; I followed the signage, and was immediately compelled by a display of ceramic vessels there. I asked the bearded gentleman presiding over them to “tell me something” about an orange and black vessel etched with figurative line drawings of men and of things. The gentleman was Mark Errol, then a third year graduate student in GSU’s MFA program, who informed me that the work was his, and that this particular vase was “about how [he] and [his] partner feel when [they] go to Home Depot together.” I thought the narrative and the thing itself were great; I photographed the work and circulated the images and the story behind them to friends in the cities I used to live in, and they were seduced, too. The South had swiftly become a part of the world behind me—not a thing apart from it.

I asked Errol for a studio visit. He referred me to Joe Peragine, a professor in the art department at GSU who happened to be an ART PAPERS board member at the time, and who did far more than arrange for me to visit the ceramics department. In early 2014, he brought me to roughly 25 studios belonging to MFA students, and we visited them all in one day. This marathon would be defining for me, not only with regards to my time in Atlanta, but to how I approach any studio visit or perhaps any artistic intervention from now on in my career as someone who thinks about and works with art, and who goes into the places where it is made. These visits differed from those I had done in the past, in that the practices I encountered there were wholly unknown to me, and for that matter to most people outside of the program. Some of the studios I visited on that initial trip to GSU’s urban campus belonged to students who were in their first year of study at the time, and who are now completing their third.

I did not go to art school; prior to my work with GSU I was a stranger to the kinds of material research and conceptual progress that can happen as an artist works toward an MFA, perhaps especially in a 3-year program. The exercise taught me how to look at things, really. I learned something about the relationship between people and the materials through which we express ourselves; more broadly, considering this class’s various investigations has lead me to consider the relationship between “things” – animal, mineral, vegetable – in general.
In the sculpture department, **DEREK FAUST** had in 2014 imposed some very elegant geometries – using paint, I think – onto large, found pieces of wood and other materials; the resulting work seemed thoughtful and pretty. Faust has since translated these shapely interventions into multiple dimensions, using elegantly placed prisms of color not decoratively, but as a challenge to the found or represented object to step out into the room. In *Plot* (2015), an orange ribbon attached to a fan tongues a photograph of a house’s eave and gable; this streamer, flying up towards the pictured architectural detail, extends Faust’s geometric gesture into 3 dimensions. Faust’s work continues to implicate found objects, as in *Bollard and Drift* (both 2015), and presents them adroitly, spreading the persistent residue that quietly coats industrial materials towards the viewer in an almost human way, as though offering to shake his/her (clean) hand.

**NATHAN SHARRATT** was experimenting with a newly acquired scrapbooking die cutter called Silhouette Cameo on my initial visit to GSU. This was part of what turned out to be an ongoing provocation (and possible celebration) of the inherently imperfect image- and object-reproductive technologies that nonetheless excite us, collectively. Sharratt has used often-clumsy 3D printers, for instance, to recreate and at times to rescale body parts (his own, and others’) – plastic experiments reminiscent of the investigations presented in Diderot and D’Alembert’s 18th century *Encyclopédie*, in which men of letters and science recorded the often very “wrong” results of their biological and technological experiments. The Enlightenment that gave us the *Encyclopédie* gave us the Guillotine, too, an instrument created to fragment bodies, which Sharratt’s *Distillation of Complex Ideas Into Manageable Chunks, Model 1792* (2014) brakes down and recreates in multiple 3D printed parts (requiring assembly). Sharratt’s practice also includes internet data-driven work; its methodology, and its effects, are similar to those of the blade: it calls bullshit on the cult of “high” technology by engaging it to make things and narratives that debase it—an act of revenge, perhaps, against our tools’ seemingly systematic way of morcellating their users.

**GINA THOMPSON** engages the ostensibly fragmented reality of and between people and “things” with *Family* (2015), an empty dollhouse made of small white panels, stitched together in the manner of a patchwork doll. The hollow work is suspended at eye height, such that one stands- “inside” it. This effect illuminates Thompson’s *Inside* (2015), a photograph of what looks to be a door shot from within a neglected but full-sized home. Once the viewer has popped into Family, however, this home is revealed to be a dollhouse, too.

**TYLER NICHOLSON’S** molded “toy soldier” sculptures also harass what we perceive to be the size and impact of our physical and material lives: they rescale and reproduce the artist’s own body until it becomes a collective one, and then a “thing” itself. Nicholson’s *in(action figures)—waiting for the latrine* (2015) is a series inspired by his time in Active Duty, and emphasizes mundane aspects of that experience. His figures are cut off mid-torso, a gesture that anonymizes them; each one holds a cigarette, and wears identical (and essential) shower shoes. The *in(action figure* is an individual whose membership within a collective has turned him into plastic, fusing his feet to a “base” that is perhaps more restrictive than it is bracing.
TREVOR REESE’S work is about the conventional relationships between and the received function of things, to the extent that it is devoted to thwarting them. Handtruck 1, Handtruck 2, and Handtruck 3 (all 2015) are non-functional tools, dressed with the mafia-style “cement shoes” you put on an enemy before you throw them into a river. These are attractive pieces of sculpture, and like many attractive things, their charisma is inseparable from a kind of arrogance, most certainly intentionally. Reese’s Handtruck motif takes useful things and casually “whacks” them for their use-value: not only can they not be employed to move anything, but they also look bloody hard to move around. Some time ago, Reese had a wind instrument in his studio that was carved out of wood, and devoid of the holes that would allow for the passage of air and thus, for the production of sound. These objects are pretty and punishing, like those beautiful people who pass by you on the sidewalk, but don’t turn around to look back. Reese’s works don’t simply refuse their perceived intention; they accuse us of idiocy or delusion for even imagining that such “things” might fit within our received notions of how we might engage them.

CATHERINE TRUGMAN’S work explores purpose, too, by documenting, diverting, or implying signs that convey the function of a place, and how that place reflects and crystallizes the identity of its occupants. Mikvah Steps, Mikvah Rail, Mikvah Door, and Mikvah Chairs (all 2015) are all photographs that visually reveal far less than their assigned titles do. Some show only ceramic tiles and guide railings, discrete signs of architectural functions relating to water and bathing; others contain explicit signage – such as the word “MIKVEH,” mounted on a wooden door – divorced from its context. Here, Trugman’s covert and overt portraits of Jewish tradition are taken through the lens of the Mikvah, a bath used for purifying ritual immersion in Judaism; these photographs are accompanied by collateral images of bodies of water in nature, and of desolate cityscapes, embedding the Mikvah within the evolving landscape of para-urban Georgia, and suggesting that parallel evolutions of a particular set of traditions might be taking place within the sprawl. A new Mikvah will in fact soon open its doors on the grounds of the city’s Congregation B’nai Torah. Perhaps the ripples and tides of Jewish cultural presence in this particular American locality are mirrored by those of the tributaries that quietly surround and feed it.

Photographs by JACK DEESE address a watery community presence as well. His images convey a Southern narrative of vacations remembered through watermelon binges, inner tube burn, and dad sitting shirtless on the old couch, the imperfections on his back chronicling a lifetime of regional summers. These are extended family and community portraits made with the peripheral markers of communal habit and experience. Two years ago, Deese was making large reprints of screen grabs poached from tablets on sale at electronics chain stores around Atlanta (Best Buy, and so on): throwaway selfies as far as their subject-authors were likely concerned, which Deese compiled to form another cumulative portrait of the artist’s environment, mitigated by available means of access. Back of Daddy’s Head, Cody, Kimmy, David & Stormy, and Watermelon Slice (all 2015), are not quite about the relationships between people and “things,” be they rinds or tablet devices: here, “things” enable the communal activity and habit portrayed. The material leftovers of these experiences sometimes litter the
banks of creeks and lakes, beneath the depths of which swirl metaphor and memory native to a particular American regional psyche.

Psychic murkiness, and its relationship to portraiture, is the thrust of painter **ARYN ROSENBAUM’S** work: people are its arguable subjects, but its most assertive component is the material with which we seek to represent ourselves. The static subject matter of Rosenbaum’s paintings—the face, parts of the bust—make them an apt platform for her relentless study of painterly media, and of their antagonists. Her material applications are assertive, and at times unorthodox, even unfriendly: she applies acrylic upon oil, cracks and crevices be damned, or Gesso smudges upon crystal clear renderings of eyes, for instance in *Imaginary Head* (2015). These activities place materials—the “things” we commit to our representation—over and above our likeness.

**KRISTA CLARK’S** clean and generous mixed media drawings are reminiscent of blueprints. Her works initially suggest the possibility of three-dimensional iterations of real, even inhabitable spaces; they swiftly proceed to undermine it. Alluding to the two dimensional visuals we associate with prospective architectural realities—with a rigor that does the form of the rendering justice—Clark’s work turns toward collage, deploying the vocabulary of geometry to surreal ends. Works such as *Where is Mills* (2015) encourage viewers to imagine a sketch’s eventual material, three-dimensional resolution, and then make us aware of its spatial impossibility—curiously supplying us with executional cement shoes, or fusing us to the plastic balancing base of the toy soldier.

**TORI TINSLEY’S** work is the result of an investigation into paralysis and reciprocity, to put it reductively. An initial point of departure for Tinsley’s research was her experience of loving and caring for a close relative with a degenerative brain disease called fronto-temporal degeneration, the uncanny and agonizing effects of which she sought to provoke, in her first year, through a kind of shredded portraiture. She has since developed a nuanced and visceral series of paintings, which includes *Hug No. 10* (2015), that narrativize emotional and logistical dead-ends through “hug” themed vignettes, set in a purgatory reminiscent of de Chirico’s no-man’s-land. These fleshy works apply humor to all the wrongness and paradox of human interaction and duality. Their huggy protagonists seek a complicit resolve— not in the scientific sense of resolution, but in the lyrical sense, like the Tristan chord—in the face of a loss that is real before it is actualized in physical terms. The problem is that of the dissipation of the connection between body (matter) and mind (not matter), and even less tangibly, between a sense of self— of intimacy— and of our learned ideas of the material world. Tinsley’s textile sculptures include scraps of fabric that belong(ed) to her mother, and use them to take the plushiness of Mike Kelley’s stuffed animals or Cosima von Bonin’s monumental sewn creatures and endow it with a self-contradictory longing for softness. Tinsley’s work within this rhizome of unavailability thus intersects the “relationships between things” motif that I suggest is engaged, through very different methods and means, by each member of this class of GSU MFA graduates; it contains a desire to see and to have a say in the tactile marks that we make, and to watch that imprint rebound in its plasticity.
KRISTA CLARK

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Krista Clark brings architectural elements together in an abstract plane and takes viewers on a journey in the search of the space she constructs in her paper collages using pastels, colored pencils and graphite. The works also allow viewers the freedom to explore their own sense of space within her pieces. The images are not created with a specific orientation, so they can be displayed differently, as if to continue the play of newly discovered spaces within the works. These newer pieces have moved from the purely organic feeling of her earlier works to include geometric elements influenced by Mies van der Rohe. In particular, Clark connected with the orange color she saw in the works of Mies van der Rohe that had personal significance for her. This marigold hue now appears in all of the works in the series. The uncertainly of viewer location in relation to the image, as well as the sometimes impossible geometric space within the work, pulls observers to see the piece from multiple perspectives and from multidimensional points. The artworks lack the typical horizon line or sense of a single plane seen in the artist’s earlier abstract works. Through this new inclusion of geometric shapes into her usual organic compositions, she adds another visible layer of interaction that continues to play with the opposition and binary flip sides experienced in everyday life.

Where Is Mills, 2015
mixed media
38” x 50”
Jack Deese, recipient of the 2013 Ernest G. Welch Fellowship, is currently working on a series entitled, *How to Orient Yourself in the Wilderness*. His photographs, such as *Congress St.*, incorporate prosaic markers of demarcation—landmarks that elicit the duality of the southern highway as a paved burden of truth, as both a thoroughfare and encroachment, in an otherwise quotidian environment. The four teenaged adolescents in *Cody, Kimmy, David, and Stormy* evoke memories of hot Georgia summers, yet arouse feelings of being uncomfortably young in a moment before youth becomes systematically stripped away for a better, brighter, more refined life. Undoubtedly, the thin pink fruit in *Watermelon Slice* (right), with its play of color and natural light, is equally nostalgic. Deese’s other photographs glamorize the unglamorous, such as line dancers, workmen, and down-and-out strangers. Through this pictorial language, Deese chips away the preconceived notions and stereotypes of the American South and distills what is left into something pure. It is the essence of what can only be called a return home, a return to truth before the superhighways and flash of the modern city. Moreover, it shows a community where rural people, gritty as they may be, are unceremonious exemplars in reflection to the astringent and perfectly polished other. Questions about southern society and cultural identity are part and parcel to Deese’s work at Aqua Art Miami.
Derek Faust has been a self-described “maker” his entire life. He has tinkered with, manipulated and otherwise crafted beautiful objects since he was a child. Like many artists, once he mastered the rules and techniques of his craft Faust found a certain freedom in breaking and questioning those foundational tenets. He has reveled in this freedom with his latest sculptural work that focuses on the gravity of existing materials. Faust appreciates analyzing found objects and their materiality in great detail and finds that he can “activate” these objects in different ways, depending on their relationship to one another within the scope of an exhibition.

Unlike many artists, Faust does not have a message or a narrative that he is attempting to deliver. Instead, his latest work presents existing items that he manipulates in an attempt to create tangible metaphors. The metaphors created by these objects can often exceed the artist’s expectations, a phenomenon that may be replicated by viewers as they contemplate the work. Derek is not afraid to lose control of his metaphors once they go on display in an exhibition or gallery. In fact, he hopes to inspire thoughts and ideas beyond anything he had in mind when assembling the pieces. He is more interested in proposing questions through his work than he is in providing answers.
Tyler Nicholson’s sculptural and ceramic work stems from personal experience. His practice, inspired largely from his time spent serving in the 1st Cavalry Division of the U.S. Army as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom II, walks a tightrope between criticism, humor and depression. The work speaks to the stagnation and futility that often goes along with active military service. In his current series, Inaction Figures, Nicholson has molded eleven plaster figures inspired from familiar, plastic toy soldiers. The soldiers are headless – segmented – in acknowledgement of the work representing his specific experience of military service. Additionally, the segmentation adds to the “toyness” of the sculptures, as the clean break where the head should be evokes the way in which plastic toys will easily snap under pressure. Transporting the headless soldiers into the realm of toys, Nicholson creates a commentary on the normalization of violence in the U.S., as military service is imagined through playful children’s toys and glorifying video games. At the core of Nicholson’s work is a critique, both careful and clever, of such normalization and the resulting willingness of the U.S. public to involve the military in foreign conflict that benefits the country’s economy, more so than its citizens’ freedom. The soldiers, created from the same mold, subvert the American conception of the heroic soldier – they stand in line for the shower, stripped of the iconic green color, out of uniform in undershirts and shower shoes, smoking cigarettes and waiting. Waiting is an essential theme in Nicholson’s work – the hurry up and wait nature of service, the meaningless and menial tasks, and the overwhelming boredom.

InAction Figures: Waiting for Latrine, 2015
ultracel, pigment, tile, wood, paint
10’ x 18” x 14’
Trevor Reese’s sculpture practice is a study of varying levels of connectivity, often taking the form of pairings. His work, in conversation with the traditions of both minimalism and found art, employs everyday materials ranging from musical instruments to utility equipment. In their state as “art,” however, the materials are often rendered inert or incomplete. In polyphony printers, a clarinet is paired with two printers. The instrument is no longer used to create music, but rather repeatedly scanned and reproduced as gallery attendants replace the ink cartridges. Such physical care is often required in Reese’s work – in other installations attendants are required to water plants or eat and replace fruit. The physicality speaks to his dual role as preparator and artist – his own lines are blurred between handling art and the art itself. In his current series, *Conditional Arrangements*, the artist presents three red hand trucks, atop which sit a door-less workshop cabinet, crushed metal shelving, and a jumble of lighting units customary for business places. The objects are unused, and at the same time, safely secured to the hand trucks and pristinely clean. The lines are blurred between objects that are used for handling and those that are the artworks themselves. Within the context of an art gallery, Reese equalizes the playing field for the adorned sculpture and the ignored sculpture stand.
By creating dialectic between abstraction and realism, Aryn Rosenbaum transforms the flat pictorial plane into stunning portraits that are embedded into an abstract world of erasure and blur. Rosenbaum, a 2013 Ernest G. Welch Fellow, uses friends and neighbors as portrait models to create avatars of herself that express her own personal emotions, fears, and solicitudes about body and mind through her models’ expressions and gestures. Interestingly, these models are of all races, sizes and genders and peer out from the canvas. Often, their gaze and that of the viewers is interrupted with spray paint, oil paint, and clay, which are complemented by a cool bluish-grey color palette with pops of reds and bright magentas as in *Surface History 1* and *Surface History 2*. These material additions create spatial ambiguity within the surfaces. In this obscured space, Aryn purposefully creates a tactile push and pull of this world and the other that engenders an aberrational experience of presence and absence. In turn, they become statements about existence and the internal dialog whose hum never seems to stop. Her artistic practice is a statement on the human condition, namely her own through the form of another.
Nathan Sharratt’s work is influenced by the technology and social media that have come to mediate the everyday life of people today. He created his guillotine *Distillation of Complex Ideas into Manageable Chunks, Model 1792* from a 3D printer he assembled himself. He purposely kept all topographical imperfections in the work as the “mechanical brushstrokes” from the machine used to create this piece, allowing the process of the creation to be fully expressed. The use of cutting-edge technology to create what was in the 1790’s, an “elegant machine” (thought to be a scientific advancement and a humane form of execution, yet forever associated with the Reign of Terror) brings the concept of the timeliness of machinery to the forefront. The use of CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black) colors reference the world of print magazines where Sharratt formerly worked, and that are slowly losing ground in this digital world. This produces yet another nod to the evolutionary nature of mechanical life. Nathan’s two paired works (*From Dusk (Don) to Till Dawn (Doff)* and *I Want to Do Bad Things With (To) You*) continue to deal with the idea of time and media, both referencing vampires in popular entertainment. While popular entertainment is constantly changing, the vampire is immortal and timeless. These works have been created with lenticular lenses, which show different states of the work based on the viewer position, in the same CMYK color scheme.
I WANNA DO BAD THINGS WITH YOU
GINA THOMPSON

Gina Thompson describes herself as a “Conceptual Sculptor/Photo Stylist” and her work reflects that claim. Thompson uses her art as a form of therapy to address the abuse she suffered while growing up. The artist’s sculptural work is conceptual in a very specific and personal manner, which generates interest despite the difficult subject matter of abuse. Her process begins with collecting discarded dollhouses that she manipulates and whose display and destruction she documents via “photo-styling.” The artist states this as an attempt to dispel the illusion of the perfect family, calling attention instead to the fractured homes with which many of us can identify. Thompson allows her work to speak for her with the hope that the vulnerability communicated through the subject matter will help overcome feelings of shame. Each “final piece,” that is realized through her process, be it sculptural or photographic, becomes the conceptual groundwork for her next piece in an ever-present process of evolution. The collective effect of each piece becomes a part of the larger whole, much like the singular days in an examined life.

Far from sensationalizing her experiences, Thompson’s art is more about her process than it is about the subject of abuse. The journey is a process of destruction, and a process of healing in order to arrive at the greater and ongoing process of recovery where one no longer feels the weight of victimhood. For this artist, process quite literally becomes the concept.

Inside, 2015
photo
36” x 24”
Driven by her own personal experiences, artist Tori Tinsley explores the uncertainty and fear of losing her mother to a degenerative brain disease called fronto-temporal degeneration. Upon discovering this disease, Tinsley began using her art as a form of self-care and personal therapy. Through her exploration of her newfound relationship with her mother, she developed a style of painting that focused on her grief and her fear of the unknown future of her mother’s fate. Inspired by artists such as Dana Schutz and Chantal Joffe, her paintings often display two figures, with one representing her and the other her mother. Recreating mannerisms similar to the surrogate monkey mother figures created by psychologist Harry Harlow, Tinsley incorporates intensified colors and a heavy hand to haphazardly construct impressions of her own mother’s physical and psychological presence. Their exaggerated expressions, bulging eyes, and blend of pale pastel colors, stem from an intuitive place and remind her of her time with her mother. Their ‘hugs’, never fully reaching each other, echo the separation and rift between a caregiver and one who is dying.

By employing such exaggerated forms and methods, Tinsley’s paintings allow the viewer to bring their own encounters of loss to each work, while serving as a witness to her own. Above all, her works serve as a way to connect with others who experience similar struggles as caregivers and to address the stigma attached to particularly perplexing mental diseases.

Hug No. 10, 2015
acrylic on canvas
24” x 20”
Catherine Trugman's photographs explore the history and religious traditions surrounding the sacred space of the mikvah, a Jewish ritual bath dating back to ancient times. In Judaism, this ancient practice of bodily immersion originally occurred in natural bodies of water, providing a sacred space for families to celebrate their faith. Due, in part, to prevalent anti-Semitism, mikvahs have evolved considerably, moving to private indoor environments while remaining in accordance with religious texts. Though these spaces were traditionally restricted to private areas, the modern mikvah is being reinvented, allowing for a more liberal reinterpretation of this practice. Trugman explores these reinterpretations, delivering documentary style photographs that exhibit a more modern mikvah in a realistic manner. In her work, she addresses how a religious space evolves throughout time and how a community responds when forced to migrate to an indoor space. These photos provide a rare look into the modern mikvah and its construction, capturing everyday moments in a seemingly traditional space. In presenting a more realistic style of photography, she hopes that viewers make their own interpretations of the sacred space.

Today, the indoor mikvah has become the cornerstone of Jewish communities around the world, with its use closely linked to the law of family purity and human reproduction. Trugman sought to capture these concepts, providing viewers rarely seen images from the inside. Since documenting the space in her utilitarian-style technique, this particular mikvah has been demolished, further establishing the importance of her photos.
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