Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design

“Transformed”

Masters of Fine Arts Exhibition 2013
Aqua13 Art Miami
The Welch School of Art and Design is honored to support an M.F.A. Exhibition, “Transformed” at Aqua Art Miami for the third year. The individual voices and talents on display here offer a honed critique of the world around us and remind us of the critical role artists play in the evolution of a healthy society. Over the past three years, these graduate students in Art History, Drawing, Painting, and Printmaking, Photography, Graphic Design, Interior Design, Sculpture, Ceramics and Textiles have forged individual voices through personal journeys of self-reflection and exploration of the world around them.

Located in downtown Atlanta, The Welch School 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 and the streets. This urban experience has informed the ideas, messages, and approaches of each artist and scholar. Under the guidance of established faculty active in the contemporary art world, our students learn and explore the power of conceptualization as a critique device. As artists or scholars, we look forward to a continuing dialogue and commentary as these ten artists take their places in the larger art community. The Welch School of Art and Design is proud to present the works of its outstanding 2013 M.F.A. degree candidates at Aqua Art Miami 2013.

Michael White, Director
Welch School of Art and Design
I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best.
—Frida Kahlo

Is it possible to make art that isn’t, in some way, personal, whether explicitly self-referential or interpreted through a personal lens? Works by the ten M.F.A. candidates at the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design at Georgia State University in Atlanta suggest not. Nearly all look inward for inspiration, yet the resulting works are as diverse as the artists themselves.

Most of students entered graduate school with years of practice and successful careers -- commercial or artistic -- already under way. But they all shared a desire for a focused period of study to refine their ideas, hone their skills, and to have the freedom to experiment without market pressure. The demise of Curtis Ames’ marriage led the artist to explore other forms of failure, which he does using a broad vocabulary of modern and conceptual styles. No matter the form his works take, they all feature an element of brokenness or incompleteness. Ames sabotages himself in projects guaranteed to fail. An ongoing piece involves him constructing a Jenga-like tower of wooden blocks, one for every day he has been with his fiancée. The tower inevitably tumbles to the ground before it can be completed. He has cast a series of small sculptures from a miniature reproduction of Brancusi’s Bird in Space but the piece breaks near its slender base each time he tries to remove it from the mold, a problem he remedies with duct tape.

Other works suggest Barnett Newman or Lucio Fontana. An oval wall piece covered in a fitted canvas with a zipper at its center is actually a mirror, he says, “because sometimes I don’t want to look at myself in the mirror.” Half-deflated playground balls are employed in a variety of ways. He made Unfinished Sword for his son, a fan of the role-playing game Zelda. It’s about the “promises you make and don’t fulfill that make you feel like a shitty parent.” Failures aside, his works also have a sense of resilience and persistence.

Mark Errol makes exquisite ceramic vessels, all functional, adorned with scenes of his domestic life with his partner. Bearded men and bears are seen vacuuming, doing laundry, eating, and other activities. In many pieces, the men’s long beards are intertwined, merging into a heart shape, or circling the vessel like foliage. The bears are a reference to the culture of gay men who embody the image of “manly men.” He likens them to the coded language used by Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns in their works, at a time when they couldn’t be public about their relationship. Errol simultaneously embraces and undermines that masculine image with his cozy scenes on porcelain, made all the more poignant in light of the recent Supreme Court ruling striking down the Defense of Marriage Act.
Many of Errol’s works are multipart pieces that nest one inside the other and can’t function separately, serving as a metaphor for domestic nesting and mutual support. To add texture, he carves into the wet clay, giving it the look of a woodcut. Other projects include a quilt made from the couple’s T-shirts and Queen Anne chairs embroidered with their faces.

Megan Van Deusen’s artwork is about caretaking, of oneself and others, through such actions as personal grooming, making soup, and taking naps. She uses the “evidence” from those acts in works that “pull meaning out of things you do every day.” For the past two years, Van Deusen has made videos of herself taking naps in her studio, elevating an ordinary event into a meditative visual. In a piece that combines performance and artifact, a grid of these recordings is projected above her studio cot.

In another video, we see her hands close-up as she separates a clump of her partner’s hair and fingernails into two piles – an effort to bestow order and significance on the rituals of intimacy. Other pieces involve soup bones she used to make stock and images of her partner with heavy chains on his shoulders, a reference to a manic episode he experienced. She often touches on issues of mental illness, as in large, minimalist drawings that bear excerpts from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. The works rely on each other for meaning, Van Deusen says, “they need each other to tell a story and provide context.”

Ashley Maxwell practices a form of personal revisionism in her mixed-media sculptures. She is drawn to the Romantic movement in 19th-century England, when artists created escapist paintings and sculptures that sharply contrasted with their wretched living conditions. She is also intrigued by the concept of autobiographical memory, which author Dan McAdams has described as containing some reality and some myth, as being less about facts and more about meanings.

Exploring her childhood memories through adult eyes, she creates fantastical worlds that are intended to disguise the harshness of her adolescence. Classically sculpted female nudes – adult stand-ins for Maxwell and her childhood friends – recline on otherworldly “landscapes” made of roughly formed concrete and plaster and painted in a riot of color. The vaguely cloudlike shape of the landscapes is repeated in the clouds of spray foam that surround their heads like clouded memories.

The dreamlike black-and-white photographs of David King capture various models in landscapes in poses of struggle, surrender, searching, or ascension. King stages the cryptic scenes in order to give visual form to the emotional states and innermost thoughts that come to him while floating in a sensory-deprivation tank. In one image, for example, a woman struggles to climb up a boulder while
dragging three large rocks on ropes, symbolizing three personal problems the artist was facing. Other Sisyphean tasks, like shoveling water, are carried out by archetypal figures.

King’s photographs often seem lifted from myth, history, or art history. His previous training as a painter is evident in compositions reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelites and Italian Baroque painters. He sometimes uses digital manipulation to perfect scenes. In an example composed from five shots, a weathered man is perched on a ledge overlooking a mysterious circle of rocks on the ground below, as if he were a shaman or imaginative miner.

Namwon Choi has an extensive background in sumi ink painting, a venerable tradition in her native Korea but one with strict parameters and a hierarchical system. In the U.S. for a decade now, the Choi has used her graduate studies to experiment with new materials and styles, to break away from tradition and find a new artistic identity. This negation of her past has opened up new avenues of creativity. “I can now return to my older materials, like ink, with a new perspective,” she says.

Choi favors reflective surfaces — mirror, glass and copper – on which she paints large-scale self-portraits and body parts like ears and clusters of hands. A number of her works focus on her eyes in an attempt, she says, to confront who she is in the U.S., where she became acutely aware of her Asian features. She wants her works to be object-like. “I don’t want to paint a shadow,” she says, “I want to cast a shadow,” which she accomplishes by mounting or suspending her glass pieces some distance from the wall. She is drawn to sheets of copper as a painting surface, the result of her taking a printmaking class where the printmakers kept the “ghost” of their process and discarded the plates. For her, the plates themselves are more appealing for their innate luster, highlights, and hues.

Another artist turning away from his past is Kojo Griffin, who entered graduate school with a degree in psychology from Morehouse College and a healthy art career already under his belt. He was included in the 2000 Whitney Biennial, the landmark “Freestyle” show at the Studio Museum in Harlem (2001), and was represented by Mitchell-Innes & Nash, a prestigious New York gallery. His paintings at the time featured anthropomorphic animals enacting psychological dramas that, after nine years, had become too depressing. After failed attempts to forge a new artistic direction – “my ego took a big hit” — he decided to return to school.

His new works, devoid of figures, are pleasing colorful abstractions on paper, whose only issues are of the formal variety. Griffin decided to dispense with narrative and focus on the qualities of his old work that he did like. He casts a wide net for inspiration, ranging from modular elements in nature, like honeycomb, and children’s toys and games to such artists as Martin Kippenberger, Charline von
Heyl, and the CoBrA artists. His meditations on line, form, and color are decidedly uplifting.

Graphic, product, and interior designers make art that is functional, informative, or experiential, which is sometimes so seamlessly integrated into our surroundings or daily routines that we forget the creative talent behind them.

As a graphic designer, Diane Speight is charged with transforming tedious data into appealing visuals for such outlets as magazines, advertisements, and corporate reports. She favors handmade processes, like collage, which, when digitized, lend an appearance of tactility. For Aqua, Speight is using monoprint, letterforms, collage, and found objects to create low-relief constructions that explore memory and family relationships.

Interior designer Mary Horne is interested in how our environment might affect our actions and interactions. To that end, she creates modular, flexible designs that can be customized for diverse spaces and is particularly focused on creating sensory experiences using interior elements. Here, she engages the intangible properties of sunlight and shadow to activate the space and viewers’ experience.

Trained as an architect in China, interior designer Yue Zhao combines a traditionally minimalist Asian aesthetic with 20th-century modernist principles. “I don’t want to distract from experience of the space,” he says, “I like to leave room for the imagination.” His understanding of both structural and interior design provides a well-rounded spatial experience. Like Horne, he’s interested in creating flexible environments that can be customized according to need. His design for a wall of wooden mailboxes – literally, boxes for office mail – allows users to place their individual box wherever they choose, and provides space for decorative objects.

From the representational to the conceptual, whimsical to utilitarian, the works by these artists exemplify the ability of art to carry us away, stimulate the imagination, and offer different perspectives. The commitment of individuals who pursue a career in art is a testament to their passion and willingness to sacrifice. For them, art is vital and necessary. We’re fortunate to have them share that passion with us.

—Stephanie Cash
Curtis Ames

Area of Research: Drawing, Painting and Printmaking
Undergraduate Institution: University of Georgia
Place of Birth: Columbus, OH

Curtis Ames works in a variety of forms, choosing his media based off of the best mode to express his concept. Many of his pieces contain found objects that are only minimally manipulated. These simple acts mean a lot, since Ames envisions the objects as having had previous lives, and sees in them the artistic potential of a future condition. Specifically, he works to subvert the functionality of an object, and while some may view the results as failed or broken, Ames sees it as the object’s second life.

Some of his found objects are reminiscent of elementary school, evoking the loss of childhood innocence or the trauma of grade school. Other objects are artifacts from his experiences, and through them he explores themes of failure, doubt, and hope. Ames finds inspiration in philosophers and artists such as Georges Bataille, Gedi Sibony, and Constantin Brancusi. He speaks to the failure of modernism to fix society through art, demonstrating that every generation does not necessarily improve on the one before it.

- Megan Piorko

Curtis Ames

“Pierced Ceiling Tile,” 2013, ceiling tile, pencil, wood, 27.5” x 24” x 7.5”
Namwon Choi
Research Area: Drawing, Painting and Printmaking
Undergraduate Institution: Hongik University, Seoul, Korea
Place of Birth: Seoul, Korea

Namwon Choi’s use of reflective surfaces as the base of her figurative paintings effectively disrupts the knowledge of the surface in relation to its depth. This formal indeterminacy encourages the viewer to reflect on the inversion of inside and outside that occurs to the figure, to see it as a transgression of what is typically hidden behind the façade. Choi’s use of the mask in her paintings functions as a symbol that leads to her investigation of the self. The artist’s combination of additive gestural marks and subtractive etching techniques is a metaphor for identity as an ongoing, layered process. Desiring to reveal her interior consciousness, Choi is an artist that never settles. A finished painting is the trace of this experience and is a conceptual base for further investigations into new work. Commitment to this self-reflexive expression, and to the use of the body, serves to communicate with the audience without any barrier.

- Christina Price Washington

Namwon Choi
“Seer,” 2013, oil on canvas, 36” x 48”
Mark Errol

Area of Research: Ceramics
Undergraduate Institution: SUNY New Paltz
Place of Birth: Woodside, NY

Mark Errol combines traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity to produce work that has subtle details, yet is functionally tough. The artist finds inspiration in the unschooled skill set of folk artists, as well as in the work of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Errol’s ceramic signature is a hand-carved chair, which is symbolic of the moment of utilizing and enjoying the work. His goal is to establish a connection between the time spent making and using the piece. The entire process of creation is important, which is why Errol chooses to display his preliminary sketches alongside the completed object.

Errol works in both ceramics and fabric; a passion for embroidery was fostered by his studies of fashion in New York. Both mediums are vehicles for him to explore themes of domesticity and marriage. The home is a subject that is repeated throughout his work, depicted literally in shapes of houses painted on walls and in the conceptual presentation of his nesting ceramics pieces displayed on tables. The nesting aspect is a coded and autobiographical reference, inspired by the artist’s home life with his partner.

- Megan Piorko

Mark Errol

"Containment," 2012, porcelain, cone 6, underglazes, 9” x 5” x 5”
Kojo Griffin
Area of Research: Drawing, Painting and Printmaking
Undergraduate Institution: Morehouse College
Place of Birth: Boston, MA

In his latest body of work, Griffin has moved into the abstract and aniconic. In negotiating the internal/external pressures of identity, Griffin considers the often revisited question of what African American art should look like. For the artist, the work itself becomes an extension of him and his humanity, but pushes back against any expectation of African American essentialism. The political and social aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is an important subtext of this new work. The graph paper grid overlaying the blue waves shows the highly structured and ostensible reified nature of our polite and hands-off, mind-your-own-business culture. Where the deteriorating of the graph paper exposes the chaotic waves, there is an implied breaking down of the structure, exposing the fundamental goodness of humanity underneath. The wearing away exposes the commonality beneath signifiers of difference and gesture of indifference, to reveal a cohesion and unity instead.

- Chris Langley
Mary Horne

Area of Research: Interior Design

Undergraduate Institution: The Art Institute of Tampa

Place of Birth: Atlanta, Georgia

As a designer, Mary Horne is interested in pop-up design and in creating a memorable sensory experience in an interior space. By going beyond the functional requirements of a space, Horne seeks to inspire on many levels through design. With an emphasis on research, experimentation and process, her approach lends itself well to problem solving in various interior environments. A goal in this approach is to reduce resources and energy by the use of sustainable, recyclable, and reusable materials. In this installation, Horne uses flexible wire covered with flowing strips of fabric rising from a wooden base, introducing movement into the piece in order to enhance the space with the play of sunlight and the resulting patterns of shadow. This experimentation with the effects of light, materials, and art provides the necessary sensory experience to engage the viewer.

- Taylor Deane

Mary Horne

“Vertical Strands,” 2013, wood, wire, and fabric, 4’ x 6’
David C. King’s large-scale black and white photographs harken back to late 19th century Pictorialist photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron and Alfred Stieglitz. Initially inspired by the Jungian archetypes of Anima, Shadow, and Self, these painterly images from the series “Axis” are visual manifestations of King’s personal struggles and representative of his “fruitless effort to rise above.” The archetypal characters are trapped seemingly by their own means, and their tragic portrayal functions as a contradiction to the lush surroundings. The images can be experienced on multiple levels, and a casual observation will appreciate the vivid landscapes and idealized figures while a closer examination finds elements of symbolic significance. King’s meticulous process finds him minutely involved in every aspect of each photograph to ensure a consistent vision. Operating without a linear narrative, these photographs are meant to intrigue and evoke the collective unconscious within all individuals.

- Candice Greathouse

David C. King

“Axis: Untitled 5,” 2013, archival pigment print, 36” x 48”
Ashley Maxwell
Area of Research: Ceramics
Undergraduate Institution: University of North Florida
Place of Birth: Atlanta, Georgia

Drawing on specific memories from early childhood, Ashley Maxwell’s work is a reflection and reaction to the artist’s harsh upbringing. Each work incorporates various landscape and architectural elements associated with a specific memory. Once in the studio, the harshness of the original location’s features is disguised in the dream-like setting Maxwell creates. In “Intro to Maplewood,” the figures of the artist and her two childhood friends are reminiscent of representations of women in the Romantic period. By combining actual events with classically rendered figures, Maxwell casts an adult perspective on a time in her life when she was forced to grow up prematurely. The insight from these autobiographical memories inform what the self was, what the self is, and what the self can be. The end result is a sculptural narrative that focuses on the beauty of human life.

- Taylor Deane

“Intro to Maplewood,” 2013, clay, concrete, plaster, foam, rebar, resin, dirt, moss, and paint
22" x 18" x 17”
The meaning of a work of art often lies in its materials. Diane Speight is a graphic designer, but when she is not working on behalf of a client, she investigates the contextual significance of the materials at hand. Working with collage, Speight introduces materials into her work that are charged with past narratives. Her carefully constructed collages can be linguistically linked to the idea of thesaurus, or literally a treasure house. More commonly, a thesaurus, like Speight’s work, is a reference work that lists words grouped together according to meaning. Speight often uses an actual page out of the thesaurus or dictionary as the foundation of her colleges. All of her materials carry prior associations but also function iconographically in relation to the artist’s craft. Thus a slippage occurs between the found material and Speight’s subsequent reinterpretation of it.

- Christina Price Washington
Megan Van Deusen

Area of Research: Drawing, Painting, and Printmaking
Undergraduate Institution: University of North Carolina at Asheville
Place of Birth: Westerly, RI

Megan Van Deusen’s body of work explores through various mediums the umbrella concept of “human caretakership,” including self-care, administered care, and received care. In “Naps,” Van Deusen recorded over a year and a half’s worth of naps, which we see as a projection playing in real time superimposed by an actual bed and the simultaneous performance by the artist sleeping, the two creating both a compositionally and psychologically intimate space. Similarly, in “Separates the Hair from the Fingernails,” Van Deusen offers another uncomfortably close view of “self-care” that exacerbates the repulsion of the abject. Reminiscent of the artworks of Marina Abramovic and Ulay, Van Deusen examines the interdependent relationship with her partner in the work “Chains,” a series of film stills on panel. Culled from personal experiences of “caretaking,” the artist seeks a cathartic release in the layered process of mark-making and physical manipulation to each image’s surface. Through the documentation and exposure of these private acts, Van Deusen challenges viewers to reconsider the contemporary emphasis on self-sufficiency versus the necessity of mutual dependency.

- Candice Greathouse

Megan Van Deusen
“Separates the Hair from the Fingernails,” 2012, Digital Video on Television
Yue Zhao extols a notion that great artists and designers must draw on multiple disciplines to create truly innovative and effective works. As such, he combines interior design with architecture to achieve his goals. Zhao examines a space and tries to imagine traversing it, noting in the process what may be missing. “Toy Story” addresses a common problem of a lack of a storage unit for everyday objects such as keys and phones. Zhao’s work functions as both a shelving unit flexible and functional to the space in which it is located, and a design that can be parlayed into plans for suites of rooms and offices. Seeking harmony between the elements of color and texture within a given space, Zhao calls on minimalist ideas of functionality and design integration. Design itself is often said to be best when it goes mostly unnoticed but is frequently used, and Zhao has offered this exactly in ‘Toy Story.”

- Chris Langley

Yue Zhao

“Toy Story,” 2013, metal and ceramic, 5’ x 5’ x 9”
Art Historians

Taylor Deane is pursuing an M.A. in Egyptian Art History with a focus on Eighteenth Dynasty tomb paintings in the Theban Necropolis. Deane received her B.F.A. in Studio Art from Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia. Deane wrote the catalog entries for Ashley Maxwell and Mary Horne.

Candice Greathouse is pursuing an M.A. in Contemporary Art. Her thesis focuses on feminist performance art. She received an M.F.A. in photography at Georgia State University and an undergraduate degree in photography at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Greathouse contributed the catalog entries for David C. King and Megan Van Deusen.

Chris Langley is pursuing an M.A. in Contemporary Art with a focus on ritual and spectacle. His thesis research concerns the artist David Best and the seven temples Best built over twelve years at Burning Man in the Nevada desert with a special focus on the Temple of Juno during the Fertility 2.0 themed 2012 Burning Man festival. He contributed the catalog entries for Kojo Griffin and Yue Zhao.

Megan Piorko is pursuing an M.A. in Early Modern Art with a focus on Netherlandish devotional images. She received her B.A. in Art History and Studio Art from University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Piorko contributed the catalog entries on Mark Errol and Curtis Ames.

Christina Price Washington is pursuing an M.A. in Contemporary Art. She also received an M.F.A. in photography at Georgia State University and a B.F.A. in Photography and Drawing from the Atlanta College of Art. Washington wrote the catalog entries for Namwon Choi and Diane Donaldson Speight.
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