Approaches and Forms for the 21st Century

The late 18th century and early 19th century was an age of originality, revolution, rebellion and youth. Makers and consumers turned to art to put themselves in touch with higher truths seeking experiences through objects and performances for philosophical speculation and for cultural veneration. The first decades of the 21st century likewise is an age of youth, rebellion, revolution, and originality, only now art is made and experienced in numerous new ways and for strikingly different reasons.

Let’s take a moment to recall what is affecting the art sphere today. In our time support for the arts has increased a thousandfold but so has the number of artists on the playing field. The commercial gallery scene has expanded astonishingly yet it cannot keep pace with such a rise in numbers, and ever more frequently, institutions, art fairs and museums exhibit art in increasingly market minded environments where philosophical speculation is brow beaten by spectacle.

There is a growing tendency now to find emerging artists engaged in multi-platform approaches, with a multiplicity of artistic identities, as compared to those with singular approaches and traditional forms of artistic expression. Our young artists today emerge amid a nascent technological paradigm shift in which our communications environment transitions from one that is largely word or literary based, to one that is steadily becoming image based, more visual. In our society most culturally relevant information is communicated via the Internet, thus, a non-stop flood of information challenges slow viewing and focused attention.
for even the most single-minded among us. Never before has there been such fluid access to an immeasurable supply of networked images, industry reviews, (un)editorialized macro and micro-blogspheres, and Internet magazines. Nearly everyone has an “awareness-at-the-finger-tips” to social, political, religious and cultural issues, while the News-feeds pulse incessantly with breaking stories of climate change, endangered species and the environmental crisis. Simply put, Graduates in Masters of Fine Arts at Indiana University today face a superabundance of information to be processed as sources surrounded by a world full of possible and acceptable material to choose from.

While, each of the 24 artists whom I spoke with in their work spaces candidly shared their ideas, research and above all their struggles to make meaning, I also witnessed an expanding range of vision, optimism, and modes of address in which personal subjectivities were coaxed into form. These Graduate students are passionately engaged in establishing new frameworks in art for their beliefs and consequently there are as many sub-narratives at play as there are students.

Despite the way attention has been captured by the digital flattening of imagery, all of the work seen or proposed evinces the awareness that making art is primarily a physical communication of consciousness. These art works are primarily objects and variations of object based installation, video and performance art in which form, color, space texture, gloss, glaze, depth, surface resolution, and scale continue as relevant and necessary aspects their imaginative work. Regularly employed materials and instruments of creative procedure include: software programs, microprocessors, large format 2D printers and scanners, 3D printers, poly-lactic acid, (repurposed) obsolete technologies, sound, furniture, felt, chemical dyes, baking ingredients, glitter, paper, pigments, clay, driftwood, metals and cloth.

Almost nothing is off-limits!!

My revelation is discovering that the revolution of this year’s class of Graduates is that as they absorb and express conceptualized realities in an ever-expanding world of possibilities, they continue to mine and passionately embrace real time, slow looking, emotionality and physicality in art and design.

The Work

Perhaps one of the stillest approaches is that of observational plein-air painting. It generally requires one to be physically at the site, carefully scanning the scene, experiencing its conditions to get to the essence of the site, and sustaining that attention for the duration of the work. Finding meaning in the everyday, Taylor Leaman makes small scale and larger scale paintings by studying the ordinary that surrounds him. Intimate verdant views of suburbia have recently given way to larger carefully cropped geometries and bold planes of a mid-century ranch house painted with a matter-of-factness that delights the eye and in its austerity delivers an uncanny emotional hit. Through his work Taylor aims to share his delight in finding interest in the banal that surrounds us all. Like Leaman, Greg Burak works from observation, collage and photo using familiar subjects. Burak addresses the
portrait genre as a point of departure to shape abstract thoughts and pictorial narratives that describe a personal engagement with reality. Burak works in two modes often favoring the intimate scale in oil paintings often no larger than seven inches. Tightly rendered hyper intimate paintings of minor objects; fabric remnants, found things, personal items, carefully arranged and presented just shy of descriptive detail causing the viewer to pause. With looser handling of paint Burak’s larger canvases depict people drawn from his personal context aiming to express a state of intermittent drama, a psychology of the ordinary.

Approaching reality through the camera lens and also on site, Adam Reynolds creates images of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and life along the edge of the Gaza Strip. These subjects required travel to locations where Reynolds spent time peering into spaces and places to gather and select information. Considering the complexities of the people living in this volatile region, the bomb shelter has become emblematic of a mindset of resiliency and survival of the Israeli people, making it an apt choice of subject for Reynolds. It allows him to document and report the facts but also to express his own personal views by showing spaces devoid of people in compositions that underscore his subjectivity. By showing people in ordinary action along the Gaza strip Reynolds also allows the viewer visually enter the works unselfconsciously. As a documentary photographer the challenge for Reynolds is to strike a balance between remaining honest to the subject while expressing his ever-evolving artistic values.

Metalsmithing and jewelry design encompasses a surprising variety of non-metals in the hands of Vincent Pontillo-Verrastro. Expanding upon the notion of jewelry as wearable art that functions conceptually as well as aesthetically, Pontillo-Verrastro’s current concern is to focus on the metaphoric and psychological properties of touch in his most recent work. Rethinking the word ‘brush’, a noun, and considering the verb ‘to brush’, Pontillo-Verrastro makes exquisite pieces of wearable art combining traditional and 3D digital crafting processes. With materials as varied as plastic, wood, fur, metal, paint and leather, Pontillo-Verrastro’s forms evoke a wide range of associations that invite a reconsideration of the notion of touch while challenging assumptions about definition and experience of jewelry.

Natasha Heines analyzes American beauty standards in order to explore issues relating to body image and the emotional struggles surrounding these conditions that many deal with daily. Heines knows that costumes create disguise and permit playfulness. She also knows that by offering wearable oversized custom dyed fabric headdresses, viewers might put them on! And Heines knows that with a good dose of humor in a fresh combination of theater and art she can address serious concerns of diet and image in our society. Humor is the greeter in Greg Watson’s semi-abstract object paintings, vignettes of abstract narratives that verge on the surreal. Robustly painted, color rich scenes are staged with elements culled from an eclectic range of sources including found and sacred objects, historical painting, graphic design and pattern. Watson’s forms and shapes take on human-like characteristics whose individual attributes lend a sense of wit, vitality and levity to psychologically loaded painted scenes.
Maps, specifically topographic ones are a point of departure for Tai Rogers ceramic and wood installations. Viewers are invited to chart paths through abstracted landscapes passing through the metaphysical to arrive at a metaphorical idea of a destination, a Shangra-La, if you will. By removing direct reference to place and by creating linear stick-like pathways that serve as roadways or communication lines, viewers are free to plot original routes through a network of locations. The work speaks simultaneously to notions of navigation as to the idea of the journey.

Seth Daulton speaks to the topic of travel in his multi-process prints. Achieving a sense of light and air surrounding and supporting layered imagery, these delicate images invite the viewer to pare away filters of the cognitive mind and to engage the intuition, to travel across time and space to unknown, newly imagined places. Daulton draws content for his images from his own travels, art, architecture, cartography as well as from his current circumstances, to reflect upon the sense of heightened perception and alertness often experienced during a state of travel.

Looking at the history of his hometown, the rust belt city of Buffalo, New York, Aric Verrastro embraces the city’s urban renewal plan as inspiration for his current work in metalsmithing and jewelry design. Updating the form of souvenir from say pins or buttons with a slogan, Verrastro pays homage to significant Art Deco buildings and feats of civil engineering by making wearable objects that recapture, essentialize and celebrate aspects of these urban icons. Verrastros articulate objects in sewn and painted metal and driftwood speak to the pride of Buffalo’s industrial past and to its location along one of America’s greatest lakes, Lake Erie.

The word ‘nostalgia’ immediately brings to mind words and thoughts such as longing, home and past times. In the process of finding meaning many artists at IU have brushed up against ‘nostalgia’ often expressing different aspects of it in their work. Paige Mostowy makes multimedia sculptural objects and vignettes that include collage, sound and video. Household furniture, porcelain figurines, archival family video and sound is a partial list of materials that Mostowy alters and recombines to explore her individual biography, other people’s biographies, memory and the irreversibility of time. Her work evokes the powerful notions of affection, estrangement, reflection and longing.

Painter, Ekaterina Vanovskaya is inspired by sharp clear memories of places and spaces of her childhood in Russia. At first glance, landscapes and interior scenes populated with figures appear to be about a longing for place, but extended looking begins to reveal more. Vanovskaya’s figures are often depicted in the midst of ordinary movement or gesture set within visually lush environments that recapture a different sense of time all together; one that evokes a time of childhood and the rhythms of our dreams.

Reconsidering the figure and the vessel, Carolyn Watkins’ forms reference the human body and corporeality as they defy easy answers about their existence. Departing from ordinary craft notions of utility, these objects with rounded shapes, with bulbous and body part-like folds and curves stand upon bathtub-like legs. Balancing the sensual with the repellant and the comic with the grotesque, Watkins’ objects, sometimes covered in Polka dots, speak simultaneously to the decorative as well as to more serious concerns such as body image, obesity and shame in our society.
Erin Tucker addresses the fluidity of identity through found and discarded garments. Stacks of used clothing become standing portraits where Tucker prompts a correlation to be discerned between today’s Instagram-fast rate of change of fashion and its affect upon the shaping and shifting of personal identity. By addressing notions of accumulation and quantity Tucker’s (other) sculptures aim to recapture a sense of portraiture by showing garment choices and habits of storage.

Large scale, nearly white collograph prints are like quiet echoes of the memories of actions carried out by Jody Mitchell with close relatives during childhood. Repetitive instructive acts, such as hanging the washing on the line and chopping wood are distilled into snapshot-like imagery elevating the ordinary and the everyday to a place of greater meaning. The absence of color and lack of anecdotal detail lends a ghost-like and meditative quality to the image evoking ideas of absence and presence.

Existential concerns are approached obliquely through modes of fiction and fantasy in Joseph Kameen’s larger than life paintings. Pondering a wide range of issues about physical identity, the relationship between the mind and the body, Kameen infuses personal imagery with concerns about the future and a myriad of social influences. As participant and potential victim, Kameen uses elements such as a conveyor belt as a metaphor to speak to the condition of the art star within the art industry including the educational arena and the marketplace.

Pursuing a less philosophical position Autumn Bussen has recently embarked on a new group of figurative paintings that more closely document her personal social situation in intentionally darker, slightly eerie, expressionist scenarios populated with a cast of characters culled from her immediate circle. This is a departure from her earlier work that features brightly colored, shallow space, landscape derived paintings. Small gestural paintings that harken back to mid-century abstraction and address notions of flux in both nature and in culture.

The durable and the ephemeral are notions addressed in Adam Rake’s mixed media work. Using printmaking actions of pulling, scraping, dragging material across massive surfaces and more physical approaches such as cutting and gouging the surface, Rake’s builds up and distresses surfaces to encourage a slowing down of time through looking, as a counterpoint to our society’s current taste for spectacle. Concreteboard, drywall and plywood bas-reliefs contain sites where unique marks and evidence of forceful actions focus viewers attention. Rake references historical poets, figures, works of art, as well as more contemporary sources using low and high materials to metaphorically reconcile the temporal with the eternal.

Drawing upon myth, cultural lore, nature and symbolism Benjamin Timpson’s highly processed, hyper detailed digital photographs, appear to be images of lacy, delicate figures nestled into richly hued painterly grounds. A closer view reveals a shadow lurking in the space around the figure, perhaps a symbol for life and death, the alter ego or the idea of the doppleganger. Each shape’s unique contour describes a human figure in various states of ecstatic expression from
joy to suffering and most poignantly, carefully comprised of bodies of other animals, insects and plants as well as shapes and textures of found and organic matter. Recalling Renaissance painter Archimbaldo’s witty, surreal portraits made of fruits and vegetables, Timpson’s figures also evoke more recent subjects such as the eclectic Viennese, Egon Schiele’s, twisted figures and Willem De Kooning’s, dismembered, re-assembled and distorted, expressionistic women. Yet Timpson’s ambitiously scaled collaged figures occupy a space of their own.

Soda fired glazes cover delicate line drawings of anatomical imagery pull the viewer into close range of Kimberly LaVonne Luther’s ceramics installation. Surprise colors, stippled drawings and sculptures of organs allude to historical medical practices and Reliquary Art. Luther brings to mind a time long before X-rays, scanners, or digital imaging that yield Technicolor pictures of organs and viscera. Drawing a relationship with this imagery to the rituals and meanings of reliquary art, Luther installs her work to underscore her aim of creating moments of self-reflection.

Mining the concept of identity, Tyler Lee Wilkinson, Zachary Carlisle Davidson and Liz Clayton Scofield each address multiple, intersecting identities in their works of art. In their work, they challenge the roles of various forms and labels specifically in the context of race and gender identity. Most labels fit too neatly within cultural narratives for these artists, so they make work to cause viewers to focus more on the individual than on labels. Tyler Lee Wilkinson’s stunning, dark, and poetic paintings employ various images such as signs, fences and bars as symbols that he wants viewers to ‘cross’ in order to see the truth in being human regardless
Digital artist Shan Yu’s mixed media installation uses camera, video projection and gaming programming to present a Virtual Reality video game along with Lego sculpture. Yu aims to express the ongoing cultural struggles that she perceives as an Eastern person living in a Western culture. Yu relates her thoughts to the form of the Chinese “Theory of the Five Elements”: “Wu-Xing”. The (Taoist) theory is derived from observation of the natural changes, the creative changes of the five elements that make up the natural world, which according to the theory are: Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth. The theory confirms that all forces and energies in nature can be smooth and harmonious from phase to phase such as that of the seasons. Yu’s gorgeously colored video/print “Life Map” assumes a totem-like form in which the five elements are symbolized in stunning chroma of digital spaces and pathways, offering the opportunity to let the imagination run free in plotting one’s own course.

Zachary Carlisle Davidson embraces cartoon and animation styles to soften the poignant message of police brutality and racial profiling in his print based, multimedia installations. Drawing from his broad exposure to different cultures and continents, Davidson’s social critique might employ a fuzzy cop-car that projects a film that literally shoots a target image across the room at a hooded youth, presumably a black youth. Davidson knows that art can be a space to initiate dialogue between people who feel conflicted about personal and racial identification.

It is not by making objects that speak to these concerns but by making themself into an object that Liz Clayton Scofield endeavors to insert their own identity as a material in performance based work. In a project conceived as a miniature store, Scofield assumes the role of shopkeeper, hawking miniature versions of themself. As a commodity for sale, these figurines, arranged into a pile invite playful participation by attendees to the exhibition. Replacing the toy soldier with toys modeled on themself, using 3-D body scanning technology, Scofield aims to draw awareness to changes in gender socialization and to what it is to be a marginalized person in our society.

Also combining aspects of performance, relational aesthetics, graphic design and letterpress - typographer and graphic artist Michelle Winchell addresses the notion of ephemera and how we communicate. Winchell bakes edible words offering visitors the opportunity to eat their own words – or to eat other people’s words or phrases. The work draws a metaphor to her observation that what used to be considered ephemera; the posters, flyers, newspapers etc., is reconsidered as hand crafted artifacts. By contrast, our ubiquitous digital cell phone texts, which at times contain our best communications and thoughtful writing, once consumed, are gone forever.
The need to connect to some kind of reality while purposefully choosing an unsentimental method of doing so is the major paradox that interests me in painting. The results of my efforts are works that encompass conventions of figurative painting and portraiture, but do not strictly adhere to their typical objectives.

Spending time with a familiar subject in order to gain an understanding of its form and relationship to the environment around it creates an intimate knowledge. Whether the subject is an actual depiction, referent, situation, detritus, or remnant there is always some kind of human presence. Visual repetition in the form of standard tropes and pattern serve as a metaphor for cultural recycling, as a sort of concentric pastiche. The paintings are about the subject in relation to myself, objective in formal construction but subjective in their deliberate references. The act of painting people or the evidence of people depersonalizes the subject during the process of creating the work, but ultimately creates an image that holds some kind of inherent meaning.

1. Dead God II, 7” x 5”, Oil on Panel, 2014
2. Two Guys, 5” x 7”, Oil on Masonite, 2014
Oh the Places We Will Go

Nature presents itself to us as a broken home, we are in the process of breaking it even more, and as we’re breaking it, the horrors and ecstasies that we perpetrate are on view, like a Pandora’s box. With my paintings, I want to use personal narrative as a means of composing, but it is important to know that they are only a starting point for a composition of destruction and the ecstatic within nature.

The densely painted, claustrophobic surfaces on the canvas convey both a sense of immediacy and wonder, a feeling both critical and celebratory of the American landscape and the times we live in. Rules are being broken, bent, and ultimately distorted to meet my needs of creating a space that buzzes, vibrates, compresses, expands, and feels charged with the energy of a changing environment. The emotional stock of my paintings is in constant flux, seeming to denote feelings of the flesh, form, nature, machine, energy, architecture, good/evil, sex, life/death, etc. They show scenes that are wild and overgrown, blighted and chaotic yet still somehow transcendent, and illustrate my fascination with the intricacies of nature and its unlimited depth and variation. With these new paintings I am exploring the idea of a return to nature, however life, natural catastrophes, and the pursuit of constant change in our social order make it seem a temporary reprise or an unreachable state.

In a Thoreauesque refusal of cultural conformity, individuals with undefined expressions frolic around the paintings quite unaware of the broader order of things or, on the contrary, all too cognizant of what they are desperately trying to forget. The paintings are a chaotic blend of mark, color and narrative clarity that appear as loud, ever-changing, and overwhelming at times. The sense of unease that feels very much descriptive of the times we live in pervades the space of the painting, but it is not something you discover at first glance. It is basic human nature, I suppose, to try to find the fault in something beautiful, so my game is to accept this attribute, and play it up; to accept flaw, imperfection, and name it uncontrollable nature.

1. Eye of the Storm, 7.75" x 9.25", Oil on Panel, 2014
2. Bacchanal, 7.75" x 9.25", Oil on Panel, 2014
My visual exploration is driven by my phenomenological interaction with travel and the hyper-awareness that occurs when visiting unfamiliar places. I seek out the unanticipated. I create ethereal images that call for an introspective response from the viewer. The artwork serves as a pathway to reach uncharted destinations that defy articulation and are in constant motion. There exists an interstice between our lived experience and memory. My work probes this ambiguous zone and attempts to render its description visually. Ultimately, the destinations I search for are unknowable and just out of reach. However, my artistic search embodies a relevant practice of looking, providing some direction to find their true whereabouts.

The challenge of presenting an image of great depth and captivating believability upon an inherently flat plane is fascinating to me. The use of malleable media relates to my conceptual focus of reaching for a space in between experience and memory. There is no direct link to the real spaces that inspire my works or the new places I am presenting, but only materials attempting to describe an ethereal plane that is both fleeting and opulent. How can a viewer enter a surface psychologically and be in the space they are seeing? This is a question I persistently strive to answer. If I can find a way to enchant the viewer, make them wander within in the image even for a moment, then I have done my job successfully. My work then rises above its materiality and enters into a deeper realm of experience.

1. Site IV, 30” x 22”, Color lithography, paper lithography, woodcut, silkscreen, monotype and graphite
2. Site VII, 22.25” x 27.25”, Color silkscreen, woodcut, monotype, graphite and colored pencil
3. Site VI, 22” x 30”, Color lithography, paper lithography, woodcut, silkscreen and colored pencil
I am, and always have identified by my otherness, but not in a pejorative, typecast manner. More as an awareness of my disposition constituted of Nigerian/Scot-Irish/Eastern Band Cherokee-Apache, left-handed, frequent expat & traveler, perpetual skate-rat, über-ectomorphic, auto-didactic, insomniac, deistic, recitin', socialist/populist, vandal-lovin', chronic pain sufferin' Oklahomie/Texan that I have had many opportunities to utilize and mature an outside perspective. This has evolved and transformed me into a pursuer of knowledge, particularly delving into socio-political, subcultural and pluralistic subject matter to broaden my scope.

1. Am i n0t A br0tHEr & A mAn, 10' x 12' x 2', Screenprint on PETG, GIF animation (installation view)
2. CCTV: 中国制造, 16" x 20", Cyanotype with collage & screenprint chine collé
3. tHe'y're ©0min' AGAin, 37" x 25", Spraypaint stencil with screenprint, collage & intaglio chine collé
I have come to fine art textiles from a background in costuming for the theatre, and often embrace the language of garments and other wearables. Though I have a deep love for fashion and costume, neither has consistently been a vehicle for my work. The difference in creating wearables in fine art is that they can be separated from these traditions and their connotations, or choose to reference the contexts in very specific ways. I also make a conscious choice to include evidence of my hand in the finished work, allowing what was once behind the scenes to come into the spotlight.

Creating hybrids of fashion, costume, and art, I explore issues including American beauty standards, body image, and emotional struggle. To bridge these weighty topics with my audience, I utilize humor and the inherent familiarity of textiles.

Recently, I have embraced my audience’s frequent desire to wear my works, especially those based on the form of headdresses. I am investigating ways to give structured permission to viewers, allowing them to engage in the type of improvised play that we are rarely allowed as adults. In this approach, I seek to combine theatre and fine art with an interactive element beyond static gallery presentation, in a manner that can be more inclusive for a variety of participants.

1. The Plucky Princess, Variable; larger piece approx. 6’ 5” x 4’ 8”; mixed media and Twitter feed, 2014
2. No., 10’ 4” x 24”; silk organza, textile paint, wooden hanger, 2014
3. Inextricable, Variable, larger headpiece is 14” x 9.5”; industrial felt, plastic beads, silk habotai, embroidered letters, 2013
Many of our greatest questions are perennial in nature. Such questions persist not only because of their significance, but because they elude satisfying answers; they are too general to be solved directly. Abstract ideas like these can, however, be dissolved into their constituent parts, narrowed and placed into more understandable contexts. Myth and fiction often serve this role, concentrating cosmic ideas and applying local, human significance.

My recent work attempts this feat of using fantastic narratives to discuss complex existential issues in understandable and relatable ways; by mashing existential questions up against familiar devices, I can approach them more productively and make relevant findings. These images represent attempts to propose “solutions” to these questions. These solutions assuage logical concerns by bypassing logic, appealing instead to intuition. The answers proposed in the images are not final, oftentimes even questioning their own seriousness.

The specific imagery I use draws on a cultural vernacular of fiction. Video games, movies, television, illustration, animated gifs; these form the foundation of my generation’s imagination. I don’t usually make explicit reference to specific sources, but I am influenced by their aesthetics and sensibilities: intense colors, exaggerated action, bombastic melodrama, levity in dark situations, and self-aware attempts at profundity. By filtering my ideas through this lens, I can frame eternal questions in a personally relevant light.

1. Gotz, 3’ x 4’, Oil on canvas, 2014
2. Ship of Theseus, 3’ x 3’, Oil on canvas, 2014
3. Building Homunculi, 8’ x 10.25’, Oil on canvas, 2014
Kimberly LaVonne Luther

MFA Ceramics
klavonneluther.wordpress.com

My ceramic sculptures combine occult relics, anatomy and collections, generating insight into the nature of being and seeing in order to gain self-knowledge. I use the idea of the occult to refer to objects imbued with secrets. In so doing, I am imposing my portrayal of the occult through new constructions of the body. Anatomy texts from the Renaissance and 18th c. revealed hidden parts of the body to the viewer, which I reference through clay. I allude to a collection by presenting the body in different iterations. These are displayed in relation to the viewer's body in order to necessitate an investigation of the self. Through a synthesis of otherworldly and anatomical imagery and ceramic techniques the viewer is exposed to my new secrets of the body.

1. Heart & Soul, 33” x 7” x 5.5”, Ceramic & mixed media, 2014
2. Reflect I, II, & III, 32” x 6” x 11”, Ceramic, 2014
3. Portrait IV, 5.5” x 4” x 3.5”, Ceramic, 2014
4. Portrait X, 5.5” x 4” x 3.5”, Ceramic, 2014
I continually have this feeling that there is an experience to our lives that we are missing. There is a whole world of information in the things we pass every day that we will never be able to fully appreciate—there is too much and we often see it only as ordinary. We live with these things that are essential to every part of our existence, our emotional balance included, and we hardly even notice they are there. We are continuously searching for the extraordinary, something new and different to help keep us inspired and moving forward, yet maybe what we already have is enough. The common things around us may be ordinary but they can hold a great transcendent power that we could have never expected.

1. *Pine Cone*, 12” x 15.5”, Oil on panel
2. *Woodlawn*, 30” x 36”, Oil on canvas
3. *Ossa*, 29” x 42”, Oil on canvas
Developing a concept of who we are, for what purpose we exist, and how we should live our lives is a basic impulse of human consciousness. For me, family is the most important context through which I find purpose, meaning, and define myself. Familial roles and interactions are the first models that teach us how to relate to others, and interpret the world. As my roles change and expand within these structures, it is essential for me to examine, and interpret these relationships and experiences in order to continue making sense of and giving meaning to my life. It is not thru understanding identity I wish to differentiate my experiences and myself, but rather to share those experiences in order to form a connection or bond with another person.

My current body of work is concerned with finding meaning in the everyday. I reflect on specific everyday acts that took place between me and other family members when I was a child. The work focuses on repetitive instructive acts such as helping my grandmother wash and hang clothes or cutting down trees and pulling up the stumps with my stepfather. These acts, at the time when performed, had a specific utilitarian purpose or value. I believe reflecting on these everyday acts and turning them into objects, icons, and symbols, ritualizes the act and elevates them past their utilitarian purpose endowing them with a greater intrinsic, transcendent meaning. I use the work to share my personal experiences in hopes of forming a connection with the viewer.

The works are made by blind embossments on paper through collagraph. This is done by peeling away and building up layers of chipboard or carving linoleum at different levels. The blind embossed areas, while making an object from texture, form, and shape, simultaneously create an absence. The object becomes a mere trace or vestige of itself, a rift of that which we have and that which escapes us. The visual absence of line and color erases the absolute of specificity, allowing the viewer to fill that void with meaning.

1. Patriarch (detail), 40” x 60” ink on paper; collograph
2. Patriarch (detail), 40” x 60” ink on paper; collograph
Exploring the parallels between phenomenological-based lapses in memory, perception and object association, I question how an individual’s history impacts their ability to partake in a consistent present. The work, rooted within a place of loss and trauma, combines installation, sound, sculpture, and video to generate an environment seeped in nostalgia and exploration. I fabricate occurrences of familial space by altering discarded household furniture and knick knacks that once expressed endearment and sincerity. Emotions from the physical transformations of these items have the capacity to internally inundate a person or family within their own interpretations. By intermingling the passage of time with the petulance of perspective, archival video and current audio recordings act as partial descriptors of reminiscent recollections. Further, these memories, when triggered, have the ability to transport a person to an instance which is neither past nor present, piling regret onto longing and longing into a moment which can never be fully returned to. These types of relationships are transformed through re-allocation within the work as well as collaborating unencumbered familiarity, precarious formations, and a reconstituted timeline within a living space to illuminate the inconsistencies that arise when perspectives are muddled and the discerning act of recollection is questioned.

1. You’re Late, 11” x 5” x 4”, clock, porcelain, crystal, 2014
2. Stop Fighting Near the Fireplace!, 5’ x 4’ x 2’, 8mm projection, discarded furniture, porcelain, crystal, fabric, 2014
3. 50/50, 5’ x 7’ x 7’; Discarded furniture and household items, 2014
My current work is an attempt in appropriating the function and tactile properties of the brush, and re-proposes this function within the format of jewelry. I compare the ubiquitous experience of brushing with the intimacy inherent in jewelry which touches the wearer and in turn, asks to be touched through its haptic quality. I am inspired by the manufacturing processes involved in brush-making, and in looking to historic and contemporary approaches to fabrication for both the brush and jewelry, these works seek to seamlessly blend digital and traditional craft processes. By adopting these physiological and metaphoric associations, I hope to present a dialogue emphasizing the primacy of touch in experiencing jewelry.

1. Prim, 49” x 11” x 6”, PLA, ebony, fox fur, graphite, leather, thread, paint, 2014
2. Not Only a Brush, 7.5” x 9” x 3”, PLA, birdseye maple, paint, steel, 2014
So much of contemporary culture celebrates spectacle. As an artist, I have rejected this penchant for momentary experience in favor of the sensuous, aesthetic experience, which requires the mind’s full participation. I believe a work of art must mirror the mind in how it accounts for reality. This means conscious intention is not enough. Consciousness unearths the experience of reality out from under the constant pressures of transformation, time, memory and context and gives the illusion of permanent form and structure to a fugitive present. My work seeks a balance amongst intended conscious marks, inevitable subconscious intuitive marks, and natural physical marks caused by gravity, time, and forces beyond my hand. The results are vignettes, preserved in a material state, of my psychological experience of time and struggle to maintain a coherent sense of self and history. They are quite literally constructions made from common building materials we see around us everyday, collaged elements of my own work, or reproductions of works of art. They mirror the process of attempting to build and preserve something lasting and real only for it be broken down and worn away by inevitable forces. While the experience of this in life is frustrating, contemplating it in artistic terms allows one to suddenly be struck by the reflection of something deeper than consciousness and beyond time: truth. I see my works as objects of compassion and respite from the exhausting struggle for temporal meaning. I hope they ignite an honest and enduring experience of beauty to countervail the self-destructive nihilism of spectacle in our age.

1. Have you thought of Gaspara Stampa hard enough?, 31.5” x 42”, Lithography, woodblock, plaster, mesh, lathe, iron oxide, clay, and earth on plywood, 2014
2. But who’d claim from that to exist?, 36” x 60”, Drywall, plaster, sand, latex paint, gauche, graphite, latex glove fragments, paint roller, foam brush, 2014
3. For as we feel we evaporate, 36” x 60”, Concrete board, plaster, sand, latex paint, gauche, printmaking ink, graphite, latex glove, 2014
Architecture of an Existential Threat

Since its creation in 1948, the State of Israel has felt itself isolated and beset by enemies seeking its destruction. I feel that this collective siege mentality is best expressed in the ubiquitousness of the thousands of bomb shelters found throughout the country. By law all Israelis are required to have access to a bomb shelter and rooms that can be sealed off in case of an unconventional weapons attack.

The shelters come in all shapes and sizes. Along with the more typical below-ground bomb shelters, there are underground parking garages that can be converted into nuclear-proof bunkers and hospitals able to accommodate thousands, entire schools encased in reinforced concrete with blast-proof windows, and small, one room “mamads” in private residences meant to withstand rockets and chemical and biological attacks. It is not unusual for bomb shelters to serve a dual purpose, such as dance studios, community centers, pubs, mosques, and synagogues.

For Jewish Israelis haunted by a history of exile and persecution, these shelters are the architecture of an existential threat – both real and perceived. These shelters embody both Israel’s resiliency as a nation, and its inability to come to terms with itself and with its neighbors in a volatile region. The photographs documenting these spaces offer a window into the collective mindset of the Israeli people, how they have normalized this “doomsday space” into their daily lives.

1. Public bomb shelter at Kibbutz Ein Zivan, occupied Golan Heights, 25” x 20”, Archival Inkjet print
2. Bomb shelter inside of a school, Druze village of Hurfeish, 25” x 20”, Archival Inkjet print
3. Home cosmetics studio inside of a ‘mamad’ safe-room, Gedera, 25” x 20”, Archival Inkjet print
I am drawn to working with maps because of their innate aesthetic qualities. Beyond their capacity to graphically describe space, they function as utensils for navigation and orientation; tools for defining real and imagined worlds, chronicles of past journeys, as well as instruments to understanding ourselves in relation to the world. The maps I investigate are inquiries into my own world; a collection of destinations and landmarks. I make aesthetic selections based on the dance and flow of lines or contours that describe the land. Fabrication is an action where information is lost in translation, allowing me to reimagine the cartographic data.

1. *Systems to Decoding Myself*, 12’, Ceramic and wood
2. *Organic Growth*, Variable dimensions, ceramic and wood
3. *Coal Island*, 65’, Ceramic, wood and charcoal
As a queer, non-binary trans individual, my body occupies a space of tension between my identity and how my identity is perceived. Through performance, I use my body as a site of ambiguity and fluidity, while objectifying and commodifying myself. I create situations in which my body must endure various tasks or conditions, sometimes involving pain, discomfort, and violence. Through this process, I challenge my own relationship to my body as well as others’ understanding and perception of it. I do so to investigate social constructs, disrupt normative values, and interrogate modes of capitalist production and power systems. I often employ humor as a strategy, for a variety of reasons. Currently, I think of comedy as a refusal of tragedy and potential subversion of systems of power. I want individuals to recognize absurdity in societal norms and constraints, engrained roles and structures, and strict confines of heteronormative culture. I am fighting not only for my own existence but also for the liberation of every individual from this dominant, oppressive heteronormative cultural stasis.

I don’t attempt to offer solutions, answers, or plans for progress, but I do document the continuing exploration of my own identity; an ever-shifting understanding of myself, my body, and my identity; and a genuine hope that if we just keep pushing, maybe some walls will fall down, some things will change, and we may just have a brighter future after all. If we maintain a vivid imagination, a refusal to accept what is handed to us, and an ability to see beyond our current situation, then anything is possible.


   Exercises in Masculinity is a performance video series that presents a narrative addressing constructions and performances of gender. The character I have developed in these videos is shown performing mundane tasks as absurd exercises in "passing" as male. This series encourages the viewer to consider how everyday behaviors and interactions are heavily gendered and how they are affected by those expectations of gender.

2. *NOBODY CAN EAT 50 EGGS*, Performance video, 2014

   This performance, in both its manifestation as live interaction and as video, reenacts an iconic scene from 1967 film Cool Hand Luke.


   I keep pushing against these walls, and they keep not falling down.
ACT NATURAL

Being alive is hard to express through any medium, and so I turn to the bodies and textures of former living forms to connect the viewer conceptually to primal forces, psychological states, and deep-seated, archetypal trials. Leaves, insects, seeds, fur, the bodies of dead reptiles and amphibians, and other natural detritus are collaged and manipulated to illustrate clear moments of struggle. The leaf is used as the symbol of human individuality within the collective whole. Housed inside individual human figures, recognizable living forms are juxtaposed to signify voices in contest. The animal forms represent the choices themselves: one choice will consume the other in this battle— to eat or be eaten, an epic struggle playing out.

I use a combination of photography and painting to visualize the subconscious nature of humanity. I am fascinated by choice making and the paradoxes of consciousness. Choices ripple out to affect our lives in ways that are not always clear or understood, but are often felt intrinsically. I turn to the beasts, forms, and textures of the natural world in my work, and use these symbols to reveal secret dramas and dichotomies, and illuminate the natures that position humanity within the microcosm and macrocosm of the universe.

1. Opinion, 35” x 76”, Acrylic, encaustic, red oak, archival inkjet print. Original composition created from praying mantis, red fox, green anole, magnolia leaf, plastic film, acrylic
2. Decision, 36” x 70”, Acrylic, encaustic, red oak, archival inkjet print. Original composition created from praying mantis, caterpillar, dragonfly, magnolia leaf, plastic film, acrylic.
3. Choice, 34” x 72”, Acrylic, encaustic, red oak, archival inkjet print. Original composition created from gardner snake, mouse, magnolia leaf, Lupin seedpod, plastic film, acrylic
My current work explores personal relationships and interpersonal experiences with clothing, as well as concepts of identity and the daily construction and analysis of the self. This is a process that is amorphous and ongoing, one that is emotionally charged and loaded with contradiction. Clothing is a means of personal and social communication, a threshold to the inner self and a boundary for the physical body, a shared yet personal daily experience.

Through the creation of object based portraits, sculptural works and installations I develop thoughts with the use of clothing and items related to clothing storage. The garments are employed as placeholders for the absent wearer and vessels for larger thoughts on existing with, and through clothing on a daily basis.

Using my own garments as well as found clothing as the primary material in my work allows me to manipulate and control a pre-existing system of visual communication. Clothing is familiar, and visually comfortable. The garments naturally connect the scale of the work to that of a human body, pushing the viewers to have a personal experience with the works.

1. *stacks of Carol and Katie*, found clothing, hangers and laundry baskets, 2014
2. *the softest nightgown*, cast iron lingerie hanger and artists night gown, 2014
3. *untitled dresser study*, wooden drawers and dresser parts, gold leaf and artists clothing, 2014
Ekaterina Vanovskaya

MFA Painting
www.vanovskaya.com

My daydreams are flooded with memories of places and views long ago. I exist in a state of oscillation between the present world and images conjured up by memories that come and go. Sudden and sharp memories of long forgotten places or events flood my senses. Similar to the way smells trigger the strongest memory response, my paintings have trained me to repeatedly enter states of memory relapses. The places and people depicted travel from the particular to the unsaid. It is as if I am painting about a secret that nobody else knows. The past is an effect on our present and painting serves as reconciliation with the self.

1. Alice in Wonderland, 30” x 26”, Oil on canvas, 2014
2. Untitled (Blue Pattern), 40” x 35”, Oil on canvas, 2014
3. Seaweed, 36” x 48”, Oil on canvas, 2014
Aric Verrastro
MFA Metalsmithing and Jewelry Design

Timekeepers

These souvenirs in the form of jewelry are meant to capture noteworthy places and events from the past and present of my hometown of Buffalo, New York. They are wearable testimonials to be sported with pride, to honor my roots, and inform the public of this unique city. Each piece in this body of work will provide a glimpse into the surroundings and atmosphere the citizens encounter everyday. Buffalo is a rust belt city with a rich and significant history in the context of the national and global setting and the remnants of its past have become the base for revitalization. The city has put in place an urban renewal plan to recover its past economic and cultural success it once held in the late 19th and early 20th century while simultaneously proudly clutching with humility to its rustic charm, which can be seen in the aesthetics of the work. While the vibrant colors highlight the unwavering optimism and energy the people and I have during the city's renaissance.

Historically, the economy of Buffalo was primarily dependent on steel production, grain mills, the use of the ports on Lake Erie and the Erie Canal. These once prosperous industries collapsed, leaving the ruins to be left and forgotten. These abandoned sites have recently been reintroduced in new light with potential revenue. After reflecting on this topic I decided to memorialize my personal sentiment and pride through the preciousness and durability of metal as well as driftwood collected from Lake Erie.

1. Distribution, 7” x 4” x 4”, Steel, PLA, copper, sterling silver, thread, acrylic paint, oil pencil, 2014
2. Lock(ed), 20” x 7” x 1.5”, Steel, driftwood, sterling silver, thread, acrylic paint, 2014
My ceramic work is an exploration of the intersection of the figure and the vessel. I combine elements of both to create sensual sculptures that are as much about one as about the other. The tensions I find in bringing together these elements have led me to a space where I discover and uncover my own attitudes about my body and about the world it inhabits.

In my sculpture I emulate the breath and refined craft I see in pottery and the figurative distortion I see as a means of expression. My approach to the figure is surreal. Like the surrealists, I am interested in an automatic approach to making. My decision to use the coil method is part of this. By using a method that allows for variegation during building, I can leave aspects of the outcome unknown and let myself find them during building. I hope to access something sincere that circumvents conscious awareness. I tell the story of my experience in a visual language. As an artist, I am responsible for filling in the gaps of the story others are telling. Art tells the story between media, science, and history. This is why I make objects and why I have chosen clay as my medium.

A deep admiration for the history of ceramic vessel making manifests as material study. I enjoy the nuances I discover in different clay bodies and surface treatments, and believe that the building process is an inherent part of my work.

1. Candy Aisle, 21” x 19” x 19”, Earthenware, slip, lithium glaze
2. Putti, 21” x 20” x 19”, Terra cotta, slip, lithium glaze
3. Arbitrary Indignation, 22” x 12” x 15”, Stoneware, paint
This body of work relates to my long held beliefs as a novice spiritualist. I am a blend of Catholic-Hinduism, Joseph Campbell and the History Channel’s Ancient Aliens. I feel it is perfectly plausible that humans and animals once conversed, levitation was used to build monolithic stone structures and that Atlantis was real. I think some “truths” in life should be treated as metaphor because it is dangerous and at times hateful to take them literally; but when it comes to myths that are intriguing fun prospects, that animate the past or mystify my present moment, I choose to believe them, just because.

My paintings and sculptures are musings on these and other fantastical speculations - mashed up with a cartoon aesthetic and improvisation. I reinterpret historic forms like Egyptian Tekhen, West African fetish figures and sacred animal art to transform their significance into familiar personifications. I elevate contemporary stuff like tin foil wrappers and reappropriated trash to signify totems or ritualistic objects. In this way, I am interested to invert meaning not to undermine genuine sentiment, but rather to question how we perceive facts, preconception and mythical heritage.

1. Bird Poles, 65” x 73”; Oil on canvas, 2014
2. Block Party, 22” x 30”; Acrylic on paper, 2014
3. Mars Rover, 22” x 30”; Collage on paper, 2014
1990 – 2014: Shackled to an inferiority complex reinforced by daily experiences great and small; tethered to the smallness of my unrealistic conception of my general inadequacy, enslaved and entrapped in free “post-racial America”: Dead. Black Stereotypical archetypes: American Negroes drawn up by colonial hands, retooled and repackaged, perpetuated generation after generation. My work has been an investigation into the legacy of historic racial stereotypes of African Americans, how blacks have been viewed in American history and how they’ve come to view themselves as a result of demeaning stereotype. In order to understand where we are in the present moment it seems necessary that we locate ourselves in relation to the history of blackness from slavery to today.

1. Family Portrait, 60” x 72”, Acrylic and collage on canvas, 2014
2. Double Self-Portrait as “Nat” and “Tom”, 10” x 16”, Paper collage, mice and gilding on panel, 2014
I am fascinated by written language and the ways in which its visual forms illuminate the interpretation of a text. In my work, I investigate my role as a typographer by presenting text in an unexpected context or constructing it from unusual materials. Recently, I have been working with sculptural letterforms composed of edible materials. This material choice renders the text literally consumable, dissipating its emotional weight as its legibility simultaneously disintegrates. The sensuous quality of the materials entices viewers and provides a sometimes humorous contrast to the content of the text itself.

My content is collected through the use of project-specific prompts. I aim to construct these prompts in a manner that makes space for vulnerability. For this reason, collected texts are unattributed in their finished form. This anonymity also allows each text to become more universal, inviting viewers to empathize with the experiences of others. My own response to the content guides my aesthetic choices as I reconstruct each text.

1. *Eat Your Words (detail).* 108” x 24”. Cake, cookies, icing, fondant, molded chocolate.
2. *Eat Your Words (detail).* 108” x 24”. Cake, cookies, icing, fondant, molded chocolate.
Shan Yu
MFA Digital Art

As a digital artist and graphic designer, I have a great passion in integrating art design with computational tools and methodologies. I am dedicated to research on the new media’s role in expanding human beings’ perception of our world, including new methodologies and approaches, as well as models of interaction. My diverse training from my undergraduate study at Beijing University of Technology has provided me with versatile skills in digital art design and technology.

I completed my bachelor of art degree at the Beijing University of Technology, majoring in Digital Media Art and Design. The four-year education there not only trained me well in digital media and human computer interactive design, but also provided me valuable experience with techniques. I excelled in my undergraduate digital media art and design and Human Computer Interactive Design related courses, which provided me with an understanding of social scientists’ role in the design of technologies. Since then, I have been striving to achieve a balance among the designer, inventor, and scientist in me.

My skills and creativity have been demonstrated by my work "Search Engine" and "Life Map". "Search Engine" is a piece of interactive piece, whose concept is based on our daily dictionaries, talking about "globalization"; "multi-culturism". I made this piece with Flash and actionscripts 3.0. When players type in some phrases related to "dictionary" (based on their understandings), the engine will take you to the movieclips related to they keyword you type in; "Life Map" is one of my typical video work, which mainly talks about our Life Path that is based on Chinese “WuXing”: “Metal, wood, water, fire, and earth”, which are typical of Chinese traditional elements that could represent five periods in our life. I made human being’s life process be a circle; no matter who you are, where you are from, nobody can escape from this inevitable “reincarnation”. When we get born, our properties belong to “Metal”; which means that we are. As we get born, our properties change to “Water”; Then with time going by, we gradually enter our next period, “Wood”; After that, we are “Fire” Finally, we prepare ourselves well for our last phase, “Earth”. When audience enjoys what I have created, this multiplies my pleasure immensely.
2015 MFA Thesis Exhibitions

**Grunwald Gallery**
Grunwald Gallery  
1201 E 7th Street  
Bloomington, IN 47405

**March 25–April 4**  
Gallery Talks: Friday, March 27, 12:00 p.m.  
Reception: Friday, March 27, 6:00–8:00 p.m.  
Jody Mitchell, Liz Clayton Scofield, Ben Timpson,  
Aric Verrastro, Tyler Wilkinson, Shan Yu

**April 8–April 18**  
Gallery Talks: Friday, April 10, 12:00 p.m.  
Reception: Friday, April 10, 6:00–8:00 p.m.  
Seth Daulton, Zachary Carlisle Davidson,  
Kim Lavonne Luther, Adam Reynolds,  
Michelle Winchell

**April 22–May 2**  
Gallery Talks: Friday, April 24, 12:00 p.m.  
Reception: Friday, April 24, 6:00–8:00 p.m.  
Greg Burak, Natasha Heines, Adam Rake,  
Tai Rogers, Erin Tucker

**IU Art Museum**
IU Art Museum  
1133 E 7th Street  
Bloomington, IN 47405

**April 1–12**  
Gallery Talks: Friday, April 3, 6:30 p.m.  
Reception: Friday, April 3, 6:00–8:00 p.m.  
Joe Kameen, Greg Watson,  
Vincent Pontillo-Verrastro

**April 15–26**  
Gallery Talks: Friday, April 17, 6:30 p.m.  
Reception: Friday, April 17, 6:00–8:00 p.m.  
Ekaterina Vanovskaya, Autumn Bussen,  
Paige Mostowy

**April 29–May 10**  
Gallery Talks: Friday, May 1, 6:30 p.m.  
Reception: Friday, May 1, 6:00–8:00 p.m.  
Taylor Leaman, Carolyn Watson
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