2015

Annual Student Exhibition 2015: Senior Capstone Gallery Guide

Rachel Bonner  
*Ursinus College*

Angier Cooper  
*Ursinus College*

Ann Crowley  
*Ursinus College*

Randi Hladik  
*Ursinus College*

Jack A. Meyer  
*Ursinus College*, jameyer@ursinus.edu

*See next page for additional authors*

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We are pleased to present the inaugural edition of the Senior Capstone Gallery Guide, a collaboration between the graduating Studio Art and Art History Majors. This publication and the exhibition it accompanies celebrate the achievements of the Department’s Class of 2015.

Ursinus College, Department of Art and Art History

Deborah Barkun
Cari Freno
Colleen Gryzwacz
Kay Healy
Sarah Kaufman
Matt Shoaf
Angier Cooper

By Rachel Bonner

In her 2015 performance series *Interactions*, Angier Cooper interrogates individuality through a focus on bodily endurance. Her work picks gently at the threads of a perceived reality through its engagement with symbolic extremes and subtle humor, finding meaning in process rather than artistic product. *Interaction One*, in which the artist first holds her palms against and then stands barefoot in snow, draws the viewer into its unpunctuated discomfort. Vaguely reminiscent of earlier performance artist Ana Mendieta’s *Silueta* series, which consists of a series of imprints of the artist’s body, *Interaction One* draws attention to the body through semiotics and the highlighting of its contexts; the artist’s bare flesh appears darker and more vital juxtaposed against the harsh blue of the snow into which it settles. In *Interaction Two*, the artist attempts to hold a headstand for as long as possible within an elaborately constructed environment, inviting audience engagement via an assortment of carefully curated intermediary objects. While *Interaction Two* ostensibly investigates the audience’s participatory inhibitions or lack thereof, it is above all a meditation on the artist’s own capacity to exert an influence back onto her environment. This is evidenced by the emphasis on physical endurance, as the artist’s body shakes violently with the effort to maintain its precarious position.

*Interaction Three* similarly involves an effort to achieve and sustain an unnatural or difficult relational position, documenting the artist’s multiple attempts to integrate her body with an industrial gate in a wooded setting. While the swinging gate disrupts her attempts at balance, these relentless attempts simultaneously cause the contraption to swing more wildly. The interaction could be interpreted as a contemporary meditation, not without humor, on humanity’s precarious relationship to itself and to nature or the environment. This subtle, and effective, humor appears again the final video of the series, entitled *Interaction Four*. The artist, silhouetted against a white wall and connoting a butterfly pinned against a white background for inspection, does nothing more than quite deliberately peel and eat a clementine. This final video is perhaps the most uncomfortable to watch, as its endurance endeavor consists of the seemingly simple task of being closely observed while eating. Again, the artist deliberately engages with her environment: by simply closing her eyes throughout much of the performance, Cooper alters the entire dynamic of the piece, reducing the confrontational aspect while heightening the viewer’s sense of voyeurism or violation. In all four *Interactions*, Cooper presents “reality” as rich for its alterability, offering a highly contemporary approach to conceptualizing individuality.

Macro-micro-interactions are constantly occurring between humans and our natural and manually constructed environments. Through performance art, I explore these relationships and their potential to affect humankind and the physical world in which we are inherently intertwined. My work focuses on the lost awareness to these connections due to our often jam-packed, busy schedules. Additionally, it serves as a reminder to slow down and recognize what it means to be human in relation to the world around us.

Using my body as a medium, my work aims to reconnect with simple moments by challenging my psychosomatic limits and endurance. The art itself exists in the present moment of my action. The videos are a means through which an audience may witness and re-experience the performances. At a glance, my work is minimalistic, yet meaning lies in dissecting my layered process. It represents my emotional reaction to life as I perceive it. By using pathos as my foundation, my art further relates to the experience of the modern day human, where solitude and synergy is scarce.

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In her photography, Randi Hladik examines the broad concept and open definition of home. *Daily Chores* depicts an everyday task of cleaning dishes in a kitchen. In this image, two hands hold a dish covered in soap suds in front of a picture frame. In this work, one sees a comfortable and laid back atmosphere. By reflecting on this relaxed environment, viewers are invited to connect to their own home life and the actions they perform daily. Because of the angle from which this work is presented, one can place oneself close to the action within this welcoming home. The warm focus, the classic black and white medium, and the blurred subject’s defining features welcome others to relate to the chore itself and to find a place within the kitchen. These warm feelings feed into the entirety of Hladik’s series. By observing these works, one can either become a part of Hladik’s home life or fully immerse oneself in one’s own personal landscape.

The medium of photography plays an important role in the theme of the collection. A historic process, film implies the theme of home life and a sense of nostalgia, as well as representing a synthesis of evolving routine. By depicting subjects and locations close to the Hladik’s home, these photographs allude to the paintings of Andrew Wyeth. He also created realistic works of his home life that have the appearance of timelessness. This quality of enduring familiarity is what makes home so desirable: the feeling that, while home evolves, it is always a welcoming and recognizable place, at least in our minds. This work and the collection ultimately suggest that home is not just a place but is defined by the people, activities, and connections that are found within whatever one may call or see as her own “home”.

This body of work aims to uncover the everyday life of “home.” I am interested in these ideas because they hold a multitude of meanings. To me, home can be mundane and ordinary, full of insignificant beauties, full of secrets, and full of life. Home is my house, town, those I love, that love me back, where I’m comfortable, a refuge, a place to unwind and relax, and sometimes a place too busy to even take a breath. It’s the people, things, or places that have touched my life in different ways. It’s a place also divided, broken, separated, and crushed through deaths, diseases, and divorce. It’s where I share common experiences and memories, good or bad, with those around me. Home can be familiar everyday scenes that keep me grounded in who I am but also challenge me as a person.

Home doesn’t mean one thing to me, and I don’t expect it to mean one specific thing to anyone else. Maybe my idea of home has nothing to do with yours, but one thing is certain; home (whatever the meaning) can speak to who someone truly is, which is why I believe it is important to discover.
The artwork of Emily Immel transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. Consisting of mostly found objects, her work deliberately alters these everyday items into powerful social statements. Immel has collected a variety of ordinary objects, from videotape to cassette boxes to fishing wire, to achieve her final product. Immel’s work combines classical artistic traditions with new means of expression. While focusing on the theme of sexual violence, Immel’s enigmatic work allows for countless interpretations. Powerful and mysterious, the artwork of Immel asks the viewer to look at everyday objects in a new light.

Eject, a white bust, is one of Immel’s most prominent works. The bust, which lacks arms, nods to the celebrated Venus de Milo. The bust is a cast of the artist herself. While the composition alludes to tradition, Eject is injected with Immel’s unique touch; Eject is covered in little black flies that swarm across her chest, mouth, nose and eyes. Upon closer inspection, the flies are revealed to be constructed of videotape. Immel has collected educational videos on sexual assault, disassembled them, and refashioned the tape into the little flies. These flies are not unique to Eject, but abound on several of her artworks.

Pause consists of a videocassette box, videotape flies, and fishing wire. The white cassette box, which Immel acquired from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, is titled “Sex Without Consent: An Interactive Education/Awareness Program.” The cassette box features a photograph of a young man and woman kissing, along with the caption, “When a Kiss is not just a Kiss.” Immel has propped the cassette ajar and filled it with her black flies. The cluster of black flies seems to burst from the interior of the white box. Long, spindly fishing wires add a dramatic touch to this evocative work.

Rewind features a showerhead mounted against a wall. However, water does not spout from this shower; rather, long strands of fishing wire carrying Immel’s thematic black flies emerge from the fixture. Rewind conjures the macabre showerhead featured in Alfred Hitchcock’s thriller Psycho. Hitchcock, like Immel, was a master at transforming ordinary objects and scenarios into haunting new visual experiences. Immel’s artwork revels in the unexpected, while retaining the everyday, thereby crafting a fascinating artistic language.

These grotesque installations represent the apex of a suspended plague of flies. Each fly is made from videotapes that were once used to educate and raise awareness about sexual assault. These swarms of flies represent the consuming memories, emotions, and fears that I and anyone else has experienced due to sexual assault. By conveying the thoughts and feelings of decay that can occur within sexual assault victims, this work aims to provoke a sense of understanding, empathy, and communion from the viewer.
People hide their own insecurities from their closest friends and family members. How we view ourselves can change how we interact with people. Often people make fun of themselves or pick themselves apart as a way to put themselves on the same level as friends. Though we criticize ourselves and wear a colorful façade, there is a pain associated with negative words.

In Christa Oestreich’s *Sunrise* and *Sunset* series, the use of hands to cover the face is symbolic of ways to hide flaws, even ones that others cannot notice. These layered hands show a vulnerable side of Oestreich and when the layers of vellum are peeled away she shows her true self to people.

The multiple layers of Oestreich’s work come together to create a single image. These layers show how people have many layers, and that peeling back the layers exposes secrets about how a person truly feels. Oestreich paints with oils on transparent vellum and each layer features a different piece of her body. Together, the compiled images create one complete image. This invites viewers to think about themselves and how we are layered. What parts of ourselves blend together to create us as a person?

*Sunrise* and *Sunset* each use the colors of a sunrise or sunset to paint a self-portrait. The vibrant colors are cheerful and bright, taking away how we pick ourselves apart. She uses lighter colors in the series *Sunset*, in which she continues to cover pieces of her face. She appears puzzled, giving an insight into what she might be feeling. Is it a sense of anxiety? *Sunrise* is comprised of two oil paintings that show how the artist believes people look at her. These works show smiles, smirks, and expressions that friends of Oestreich see. The color shows beauty, light, happiness and joy. When looking at the work there are two equally colorful sides that suggest two interpretations of how one believes others see them. Beneath the bright colors lingers a truth and vulnerability.

Too often have I been alone, thinking about myself and picking apart the individual components that make me who I am, when I should have been out in the world living. There is harm in becoming too self-reflective, because after a while, like many people, I begin to only see the negative. Rather than keep this bottled up, I have transferred these reflections onto canvas so that my own perspective of myself is exposed for all to see. Similarly, I can examine others through my self-portraits and create a dialogue with how I see myself and how others see me. In the past I have confronted my fears through my artwork, but now I am confronting myself, deconstructing my body and my insecurities.

My use of vellum allows light to pass through in the pieces I create, creating a translucency as well as providing layers that don’t interfere with the canvas beneath. The works are literally affected by light as a material, transforming the smooth pastels into harsh brushstrokes and exposing the imperfections on my painted figure, “highlighting” the parts of myself I don’t want others to see. I want to show that there is more to a person than what first meets the eye in public, while also tapping into the universal feeling of self-doubt that we all experience in our private lives.
Kyle Peterson
By Olivia Z. Schultz

Kyle’s work is incredibly personal, using her body, childhood home, and a plethora of materials to create her pieces. The sculptures that Kyle makes are cast from her body to convey the theme and tell the spectators some of her story. Dealing with issues inspires Kyle to create these pieces. Kyle’s work deals with coping with being born female, and now identifying as agender or without gender.

Kyle’s many sculptures, drawings, and paintings come together to collectively create one piece. The wall featured in the exhibition represents the home that holds Kyle’s most profound early childhood memories, as well as where Kyle first began physically developing and noticing a personal change. Each sculpture shows a piece of Kyle and a piece of the struggle that is going on within the body and breaking through for the participant to see. What Kyle shows lets the visitor walk in her shoes and through a place of great significance: a remake of her home.

I see an anxiety in Kyle’s work due to her female anatomy and how it is being ripped apart. This anxiety is seen in the cast of Kyle’s hands tearing at the torso and creating a space for something missing. There is a societal pressure that females are placed in this world to give life. There is the thought that women are meant to have and raise children, and if they choose not to do so they are missing out. The entire work seems to show a fear of being a woman, menstruating, children, and motherhood.

Already Filled shows Kyle’s torso being ripped open. Filling this hole is a collection of objects, including pompoms, googly eyes, leaves, feathers, metal pieces, bottle caps, and more. In the torso are molds of Kyle’s hands holding objects that will be placed inside. The things inside Already Filled represent how one’s life and body can be filled without having a child. The things present in the work can be seen as the everyday objects we use in our lives. We use things as a crutch and associate memories with objects. These items show what Kyle is surrounded by and that life is already filled and there is no need for a child.

Kyle prefers to be called Kyle. Just Kyle. They made all of this “to deal.” Out of canvas, concrete, plaster, menstrual blood, and wood Kyle built this series of fantastical objects in an enclosed public platform to speak of what troubles Kyle in their private mind. In working with their body form Kyle is exploring motifs of production and reproduction; home and origin; gender and the body; often through sanitized gore and varying degrees of abstraction. Through manipulation of memorized glimpses of Kyle’s childhood home, casts of their gendered body, construction elements and craft-making Kyle creates a relatable narrative about these aspects that they discern as “origin.” Kyle extends an invitation to view these contained moments to help others “to deal.”
The expansion of digital technology has cultivated a culture saturated with visual images. The constant stimulation by images leads to decreased time observing and interpreting them. Through her art, Monica Reuman explores how modern audiences view and interact with art. Her observations rely on connection between the virtual world and our physical reality. Reuman critiques the dual life we participate in by mixing the old with the new. Her works portray images from quotidian life. She selects images she encounters via technological mediums while working in traditional artistic mediums. Her use of traditional mediums, such as pencils, paper maps, and oils on canvas, challenge the viewer to re-experience the contemporary world through the lens of the past. Reuman highlights the ironies and absurdities of the contemporary world by painting screenshots she has taken on her mobile phone. The irony lies in the process and installation. It takes Reuman several weeks to months to paint a screenshot. Instead of printing and exhibiting the original screenshot, Reuman painstakingly paints the image as a means of challenging the viewer to observe the image for a longer period than they would via a screen. She takes the image out of context and moves it from the virtual world to physical space. This critique is seen in Snapchat, a painting in a series of paintings depicting different social media platforms, where Reuman has painted a self-portrait from a screenshot of a photo taken with the popular mobile application Snapchat. Snapchat is an application that allows individuals to take photographs and send it to other users. The receiver has ten or less seconds to view an image before it vanishes. In Snapchat, Reuman plays with the concept of time and accessibility by extending the life of her screenshot, originally created to expire after six seconds (this is the amount of time she has chosen to let her viewers observe this particular picture, although the application allows one to view a picture for up to ten seconds), by painting it onto a physical canvas which ensures a longer life, and hence a larger audience.

My artwork explores personal identity in relation to place and environment. By incorporating technology into my art, I seek to connect virtual worlds to physical worlds. I mix the old with the new, using antiquated or obsolete media to talk about contemporary culture. My art critiques the ever-expanding link connecting technology and identity.

I explore the role of art in the Internet age: how art is viewed—and for how long—and how it is created, reproduced, shared, sold, etc. I paint a glimpse of what I honestly see on the average day: my phone’s screen. Through the familiar lens of technology, I work to make sense of my own confused conceptions of artistry, creativity, and originality as they exist today.

Technology has already changed art. We don’t spend very long looking at images anymore. Wildly popular apps like Snapchat give viewers fewer than ten seconds to see a photo before it disappears forever. In one TV show, we see billions of pixel arrangements form millions of moving images. Overstimulated, we guzzle up media morsels, rapid-fire. The goal is always to do more, go faster, and look more quickly than ever before.

My art discusses these phenomena, and although I critique the way things are, I am completely part of it; I am one of the people I criticize. Addictive yet creatively constricting, technology has me hooked—and I resent this fact. I am immersed in this tech-world to the extent that it is part of my environment and the landscape of my life. This series records my struggle to navigate both myself and my art through the physical and virtual worlds in which I live.
Brenna Simon’s work attests to her love of using clay as a medium. For the artist, using clay provides her with a connection to the materials the earthly origins. This connection between her and the natural world enables her to find inspiration deep within to create her work. By looking at the work, a viewer can interpret the spiritual cultivation Simon finds from creating her work as a gateway for expression. The work evokes something of an emotional and physical trauma. The pain she feels is conveyed through the way she handles the ceramic. She molds her inner emotions into this physical representation of distress that stems from the spiritual interconnection between her and the medium of clay. She uses solely her hands as a tool for her chosen medium. This maintains a connection between humanity and clay. The interpretation of the work in this exhibit is left up to the viewer. The subject provides a sense of ambiguity. However, Simon’s work aspires to express something greater about fostering growth and connecting the physical and spiritual realms from an unexpected place.
Art History Senior Research Abstracts

Generative Contradiction: A Negation of Static Image in the Art of Heather Cassils
Rachel Bonner

As one of the earliest proponents of conceptual and performance art, Allan Kaprow, articulates in his 1958 Notes on the Creation of a Total Art, “we ourselves are shapes, though [we are] not often conscious of this fact.” In the work of Heather Cassils, a biologically female artist who has extensively documented his experience with gender fluidity, a consciousness of the body-as-shape is actively cultivated. This paper seeks to examine the ways that Cassils elaborates on earlier performance works to subvert art historical precedents and challenge their cultural implications. In works such as Becoming an Image (2013), Tiresias (2010), and Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture (2011), Cassils demonstrates the fallibility of the static image in order to critique the power structures manifest in dominant narratives of representation. In this paper I argue that Cassils’s body of work is inseparable from his physical body in its demand for a re-conceptualized syntax, constituting a non-binary language, which endeavors to undermine oppressive ideologies, most notably those of gender.

Progressing through Art Education: How and Where the Progressive Educational Movement Influences Urban School Art Programs
Ann Crowley

Progressive Education is a theory of teaching and learning that began in the late 19th century and revolutionized the way we, as people, are taught, even in contemporary education. Progressive education applies to a vast reformation and pedagogical movement. Some main pillars of progressivism include experience as education, a focus on an interdisciplinary curriculum, and the support of quality education for all socio-economic classes. Progressive education has influenced art education since the 20th century and there has been a productive relationship between the two. However, in the contemporary age, art programs in schools have been under attack due to budget cuts within the failing economy. They are also subject to insistent pressure to assess educational value in standardized testing, which ultimately also leads to cuts in programs. With all these pressures on art programs, specifically in major urban school districts, progressivist influences are falling apart and seen as increasingly unnecessary. However, museums’ and community organizations’ educational programs present hope for providing progressive art education for schools in major cities. Through the analysis of programs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Barnes Foundation, the Fleisher Art Memorial, and Free Arts NYC, and the ideas of progressive thinkers, I argue that accessible and progressive-based art programs for school-aged children can be found most productively within museums and community organizations, and that these models should be used to better the future of art education.

Isabella D’Este and the Role of Renaissance Women Patrons
Camille Didier

Patronage was a driving factor behind the production of art in Renaissance Italy. Holding the title of patron was a symbol of social and political capability and monetary wealth. It served as a tool to cultivate power and transmit a message of authority. The role of the patron was one typically held by a male. Female financiers did exist; however, they existed in fewer numbers. The type of art females commissioned ranged due to legalities and social constraints on women and was often constrained when compared to the art commissioned by men. One woman in particular, Isabella D’Este, was one of the largest and most influential female patrons in Renaissance Italy. I aim to uncover what set her apart from other female patrons of the time. By closely examining her actions and involvement in the Italian Renaissance art world, I argue that D’Este harnessed the power of patronage in a number of ways, including methods of acquisition, beholding, and curating the private art space of her studiolo, in a manner typically undertaken by male patrons. In so doing, D’Este shatters the role of the female patron in Renaissance Italy, setting her apart from her female counterparts.

Inspired Images: Georgia O’Keeffe & Alfred Stieglitz’s Collaborative Photographs
Jack Meyer

Throughout the years 1917-1937, American Modernist painter Georgia O’Keeffe was photographed in an iconic series of images by her husband, American photographer Alfred Stieglitz. I understand the relationship as a complex collaboration between two determined artists equalized by the camera. The resulting images were achieved through Stieglitz’s technical mastery and O’Keeffe’s enthusiastic participation. O’Keeffe becomes a “participatory muse,” inspiring Stieglitz while actively posing for his camera. However, O’Keeffe’s role as muse is complicated by her manifest identity. My thesis explores O’Keeffe and Stieglitz’s collaborative photographic process, while emphasizing her evolving role as a participatory muse.
Women are Heroes: Fostering Social Justice Dialogue through Street Art Narratives

Kim Quintero

I am interested in exploring the intersection between street art and social justice. My scholarship focuses on the street artist JR and his project *Women are Heroes*. *Women are Heroes* is a project that pays tribute to the women who are the pillars of their communities. The women belong to disenfranchised communities that have been negatively depicted by the media. *Women are Heroes* allows the women to reappropriate their story and share it with not only their local communities, but also with the global community. The photographs serve as a platform for disenfranchised communities to tell their stories to privileged communities in a non-confrontational manner, while remaining impactful. By sharing their narratives both orally and visually, I argue that *Women are Heroes* fosters critical dialogue about social issues pertaining to women in communities torn by violence.

Israeli Art: Discovering the Bermans Hidden Treasure

Oliveia Z. Schultz

At Ursinus College’s Hillel House, there hangs a small collection of prints and paintings by four Israeli artists: Reuven Rubin, Ruth Schloss, Aharon Giladi, and Yosl Bergner. These works are part of the Berman Collection, which is displayed in the Berman Museum and across campus. Prior to my research, there was little to no information on these works. I have researched the artists and the works’ provenance, as well as the history of Jewish and Israeli art. Israeli art encompasses a broad spectrum of topics ranging from Jewish identity to landscape work, showing contemporary issues of land in the Middle East. As an Art History student who happens to be Jewish, I want to differentiate the Jewish and Israeli identities of these works. All of these artists were born before Israel became the official Jewish state in 1948. My research looks at the journeys that each artist made to Israel from Europe. This interdisciplinary project is influenced by Israeli religion, politics, national identity, and immigration issues.