Before she graduated from UT in 2009, Leanne Moe-McQueen was already planning her pottery business. While still an undergraduate student, she designed her first kiln with Frank Martin, associate professor of ceramics, and opened a small studio at 212 East Harper Street in Maryville, Tennessee. Within a few years of earning her BFA, McQueen had moved Studio 212 into a much larger building, expanded her business to offer community art classes, and established her brand, McQueen Pottery.

Her tableware, which has been featured in The New York Times and on the cover of The Art of Entertaining Relais & Châteaux, is now touring the globe with Chef Joanne Weir on her PBS show Plates and Places. Launched in February, each episode follows Weir, a James Beard award-winning chef, as she travels the world to research the key ingredients of extraordinary dishes and culminates with Weir preparing and presenting the dishes on McQueen Pottery.

McQueen’s handcrafted dinnerware is no stranger to fine food. Her pottery is on the tables at In Situ, a Michelin-star restaurant inside the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Sean Brock’s Husk, with locations in Nashville, Savannah, Georgia, and South Carolina, features her pottery. McQueen’s dinnerware is also featured locally at Blackberry Farms in Walland and J.C. Holdway in Knoxville.

Garden & Gun, which named McQueen a runner-up for the 2016 “Made in the South” award in craft, describes her Speckled Ware as subtle and elegant. “Tiny brown flecks of clay peek through the dishes’ soft gray glaze, and naturally undulating edges complement instead of compete with the food they hold,” judge Natalie Chanin wrote.

McQueen values how the UT ceramics program encouraged her to experiment with materials.

“Clay is something that takes time, practice, and patience, a lot of patience,” McQueen says. “Some of my fondest memories are of my failures and how they pushed me to figure out the problem and work it through. That exploration of materials, whether successful or not, promoted growth in my work.”

“Leanne’s success is no surprise,” says Sally Brogden, professor of ceramics. “While at UT, Leanne was a very determined, hard-working student. Going out on one’s own to start a pottery business is a huge undertaking and it involves a lot of risk. It’s been wonderful to watch her success continue to grow and it will be really exciting to see how her studio business evolves.”
Series of Student Expressions

The UT student art competition in the Ewing Gallery of Art + Architecture is an annual School of Art spring highlight. The competition is the longest continuously running student art competition in the United States. Initiated in 1947 by our first department head, C. Kermit “Buck” Ewing, this year marks the competition’s 71st straight year. This is an amazing record of longevity and strength. Juried by nationally recognized artists, critics, and designers, thousands of selected students have exhibited their creative work in this venue. The art competition exhibition is widely popular with students and the public. Any UT student is invited to compete. In conjunction with the competition, awards and other prizes are presented to winning entries in Fine Art, Art and Architectural History, and Graphic Design categories, and students are encouraged to sell their work. In the 2017 spring competition, students were awarded a total of $7,050.

Also each spring, the Ewing Gallery hosts a series of MFA thesis exhibitions that represent the culmination of the graduating MFA student experience. These exhibits are consistently stunning examples of the vitality and breadth of our nationally ranked program. These artists now join a growing community of MFA graduates from the UT School of Art. They will continue to be active agents in the cultural conversation that will shape the future of creative expression. We thank them for joining us and look forward to sharing the fruits of their imagination. In an effort to sustain and celebrate the exhibitions, we have committed to create an MFA thesis catalog for each graduating class. These beautiful catalogs are distributed to hundreds of donors, peer institutions, and prospective applicants. The current issue is available as a PDF on our website, art.utk.edu.

Individual support allows the School of Art to do so many things that would otherwise be beyond our capability. Individual support builds on our strengths and helps us plan for the future. Student scholarships and awards, visiting artists and scholars, support for our galleries, and support for faculty research are the elements that make our school distinctive and rich. If you have not yet donated, please consider making a donation using our Give to the School of Art webpage.

Thank you to all who help support the mission and ideals of the School of Art at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
Ashlee Mays, a first-year MFA student in printmaking, started a hotdog business when she moved to Knoxville. Using her hand-built cart, she sells limited edition printed images of hotdogs with the customer’s choice of live-printed condiments for one penny less than the price of a prepared hotdog within a mile of the venue.

This past winter, Mays’s piece, HOTDOG Cart, was chosen by Garth Johnson, curator of ceramics at the Arizona State University Art Museum, for a national juried exhibition, Nature and Neon, organized by Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

Mays’s idea for HOTDOG Cart began when she visited UT to decide where she wanted to attend graduate school.

“I saw the man outside of the Art + Architecture Building selling his hotdogs,” she says. “Most of my work at that time was specifically interested in what physical elements shape a space. Printmaking has an industrial and utilitarian history; prints can be used as physical snapshots of information about a time and place. I felt like a hotdog cart was capable of both these things. Hotdogs have a story of industry and utility; I sell printed hotdogs as a way to exist in that history.”

Mays admits that printing in front of an audience is not her favorite thing to do. “On the other hand,” she says, “I thoroughly enjoy selling my prints in public spaces.”

Mays was especially happy to be part of a juried exhibition at Arrowmont because, before beginning the master’s program at UT, she took courses there in fibers and material studies, pottery, and bookmaking. Her experiences at Arrowmont have been critical in shaping the way she thinks about craftsmanship.

The proximity of Arrowmont to Knoxville was important in Mays’s decision to attend UT. Even more importantly, the printmaking faculty made UT her top choice in graduate programs.

“I feel so lucky to be a part of an institution with such diverse practices,” she says. “I feel just comfortable enough in this program to take risks with my work, but uncomfortable enough to work really hard and think critically about those risks.”

“The hotdog business has been going well, but I am really an entrepreneur at heart,” says Mays when asked about her plans after graduation. Before beginning her graduate studies, Mays co-founded two businesses: Twin-Peaks Press in Chicago and Pretty Good Printmaking in Gatlinburg. She plans on trying out a few other business models, as well.

“But, it is good to know I can always fall back on my hotdogs,” Mays says.
Facilitating Community Art Projects

Jillian Hirsch

This spring, first-year graduate student Jillian Hirsch and a group of dedicated undergraduate students are launching the Maynard Project, a weekly after-school art program at Maynard Elementary School, located a mile north of UT in a historically underserved Knoxville school district. With guidance from Hirsch and Jason Brown, associate professor of sculpture, the undergraduate students will work directly with elementary school students to design and install a series of collaborative art projects throughout the Maynard School building, beginning with a mural in the library.

Hirsch, who is earning her MFA in ceramics, has a wealth of experience in facilitating community art projects. Prior to graduate school, she collaborated with many partners such as nonprofits, schools, and neighborhood groups on large-scale mosaic murals.

“Most of the work I have done is highly participatory in nature and structured in a way to provide many opportunities for direct community participation throughout all aspects of the project,” Hirsch says. “It’s important that community art is democratic, and that the creation and installation of artwork cultivates a sense of community.”

With those principles in mind, the undergraduate students will serve as art mentors, ensuring that the elementary school students are an essential part of the creative team. According to Amanda Beasley, a junior studying art history, the primary artists will be 10 students in kindergarten through second grade.

“We’ll be teaching the kids how to paint, but also letting them express themselves,” Beasley says. “We’ll be having conversations with them about themes, composition, and even color theory, but we also want to open up the idea of expressing yourself, not just explicitly, but through subtler forms, such as symbolism.”

Hirsch anticipates putting a lot of effort into establishing and maintaining healthy relationships with new community partners, managing many people, voices, and moving parts, and, of course, securing funding. The group has already submitted a grant application and will find out the results later this spring. Their long-term goal is to provide an established platform for UT students and faculty to engage in cross-disciplinary research with various local partners on impactful community art projects.

Hirsch has thought extensively about how the Maynard Project addresses research questions in her own work.

“I am interested in creating artwork at the intersection of studio and social practice,” she says. “How can fine art, especially fine art in public and community spaces, be more inclusive, engaging, and accessible? How can those of us creating fine art use our practice to enrich and impact our local communities?”

You can follow the progress of the Maynard Project at art.utk.edu/maynard.
In creating this series, Mendoza was influenced by #WasteHerTime2016, a trending hashtag that amassed tens of thousands of tweets and Instagram posts. She describes the posts as “funny, kind of relatable, with really sad or dark undertones.” The idea for her series sparked when she was cleaning and came across a scarf from a person whom she had liked and who had stopped contacting her. It occurred to her that she still had articles of clothing from other unsuccessful relationships, which felt a little absurd to her.

“I dug through drawers and boxes for these clothes, embroidered them out of spite, and hung them on my wall for critique the next morning,” she says. “What started as an automatic response became a portrait; a group shot of ex-boyfriends, a self-portrait for having chosen them, a portrait of pseudo trophies, and a snapshot of my inability to let go. The work is a little sad and a little tongue in cheek, kind of like that hashtag.”

Mendoza, who recently served as a Hot Metal Artist-in-Residence at the Franconia Sculpture Park in Minnesota, works with a variety of materials, but, she says, all of her work comes from a deeply personal or autobiographical place.

Mendoza’s thesis exhibition, the culminating event for MFA students in the studio art program, will open March 19, 2018, in the Ewing Gallery. Her work will be displayed alongside that of her studiomate, Cassidy Frye. This past year, Frye was also recognized for her excellent work in sculpture with two awards: the International Sculpture Center Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award and the Mid-South Sculpture Alliance Scholarship for Outstanding Achievement.

Mendoza applied to several graduate schools, but what drew her to UT was the support from faculty and the connection to other graduate students.

“When I Skype interviewed with Jason Brown and John Powers, something clicked. I thought I would definitely love to work with them AND they laughed at my jokes,” she says, adding that both sculpture professors have been exceptionally supportive in nominating her for scholarships and fellowships. She was also attracted by the opportunity to work on interdisciplinary projects.

After graduation, Mendoza hopes to continue teaching at the university level and to inspire others to create well-made works that continue the dialogue within the field of contemporary sculpture.
Timothy Hiles, associate professor of art history, joined the faculty of the School of Art in 1991 and for the last two decades has taught a popular course on the history of photography. Over the years, his research interests have also turned in this direction, most recently to the intersection between disability studies and art history.

Hiles will present a paper during the 2018 College Art Association (CAA) conference in Los Angeles titled “Challenging the ‘Normal’: Expanding Human Perception in the work of Sue Austin and Alice Sheppard” that explores works created by two artists with disabilities. Sue Austin is a multimedia performance and installation artist who perhaps most famously conveys the freedom provided by her wheelchair through graceful underwater routines. Alice Sheppard, formerly a Medieval Studies professor, became a dancer and choreographer who uses movement to explore the “societal and cultural significance of difference,” according to Sheppard’s website. Hiles will examine how the works of these two artists can be understood within the categories of “Movement,” “Performance,” “Beauty,” and “Diversity.”

Previously, Hiles has worked on images of the disabled in post-World War II photography. His presentation on photographs of the disabled during the Civil Rights era delivered at the 2013 meeting of SECAC (formerly the Southeast College Art Conference) was well received and led Hiles to explore this topic further. In July 2017, he gave a paper on “Disability, Perception, and Postmodern Photography” at the 17th International Conference on Diversity in Organizations, Communities, and Nations in Toronto. Later published in Review of Disability Studies, this article explored how the act of staring was used in photographs of persons with disabilities by Gary Winogrand and others to challenge the idea of what was considered “normal” at the time.


Disability Studies is a fairly new field of study, originating in the 1980s, and although persons with disabilities have always been depicted in art, it is only recently that art historians have focused explicitly on such images. According to the authors of Disability and Art History, it is the first book of its kind to feature interdisciplinary art history and disability studies scholarship.

Hiles is planning a book project that will encompass both aspects of his research—works depicting the disabled and work by disabled artists—but in a thematic manner based on the categories he is exploring in his upcoming CAA paper.
The Ewing Gallery of Art + Architecture hosted the 2018 Artist-In-Residence Biennial Exhibition this past January. Featuring the four most recent resident artists, Ezra Tessler (fall 2016), Dana DeGiulio (spring 2017), Clare Grill (fall 2017), and Caitlin Cherry (spring 2018), the exhibition showcased this group’s diverse styles of work. The January 12th reception drew a large crowd of alumni and current students, many of whom commented on the difference between seeing the works in person and seeing slides during lectures.

“These artists and their paintings are real and current voices contributing to the conversation that is currently happening in and driving the direction of the art world,” says Sarah McFalls, collections manager for the Ewing Gallery.

The Artist-in-Residence program has been running since 1982 when painting professor Carl Sublett retired and the faculty decided to convert his position into an ongoing semester long visiting artist position in the painting and drawing department. According to McFalls, it was important to show the work of the visiting artists in addition to having them come to campus and teach. Over the past 36 years, the series has changed from an annual to a biennial exhibition to reflect the university’s change from a quarter system to a semester system. The artists, who used to be based in New York, Chicago, or LA, are now almost all based in New York.

The artists live in the Artist-in-Residence apartment, located within walking distance of UT, and have studio space in the Art + Architecture Building. Each artist teaches a graduate seminar and courses in painting and drawing for undergraduate students in their junior year. They also deliver a public lecture during their stay. The AIR Biennial provides access to the residents’ works that is highly anticipated and valued by students and faculty alike, according to McFalls. The exhibition also serves as a reunion for the artists themselves, some of whom have attended graduate school together, or shown together previously.

An important part of the Ewing Gallery mission is to use its university ties and budget to bring to the city and campus artwork that is not readily available in Knoxville. The gallery actively collects work by past artists-in-residence.

“To have a donor purchase the work of an artist-in-residence for the gallery would be a wonderful thing,” McFalls says.
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