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The University of Tennessee

Knoxville

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MFA 2017

Thesis Exhibitions

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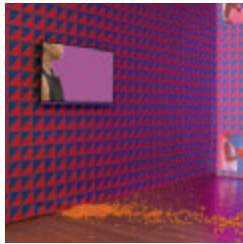
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MFA THESIS EXHIBITIONS 2017



6

REROUTED
Meg Erlewine



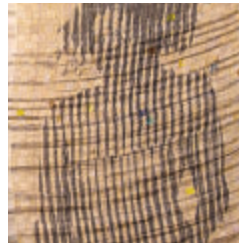
10

HERE, A VIBRATION
Jessica Gatlin



14

JUICE AISLE
Abigail Lucien



18

WE AM
Elysia Mann



22

THE LITTLE DEATH
Jing Qin



26

WHETSTONE
Corinna Ray



30

UNKNOWING WILD
Joshua Shorey



34

PROPRIOCEPTION
Geoff Silvis



38

RESOLVED
Christopher Spurgin



42

**TO TURN AROUND A
DRAWING ROOM**
Anna Wehrwein

school of art
FACULTY

4D/TIME-BASED ART

Emily Bivens
Paul Harrill
John Kelley
David Wilson

ART HISTORY

Mary Campbell
Tim Hiles
Suzanne Wright

CERAMICS

Sally Brogden
Frank Martin

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Beauvais Lyons
Althea Murphy-Price
Koichi Yamamoto

SCULPTURE

Jason Brown
John Powers

EWING GALLERY

Sam Yates

FORWARD

Three years ago, the ten artists in this stellar 2017 MFA class — Jessica Gatlin, Abigail Lucien, Anna Wehrwein, Geoff Silvis, Corinna Ray, Meg Erlewine, Jing Qin, Joshua Shorey, Elysia Mann, and Christopher Spurgin — began a challenging and fulfilling process, the culmination of which is presented in this series of exceptional exhibitions. As a whole, these exhibitions engage us in a conversation among distinct voices and individual approaches. In a larger context, they embody the potential of transformative discovery in contemporary art and design.

Both the creation and the experience of art is a mysterious process, one that we should never fully expect, nor seek, to rationalize or explain. The essence of art is the possibility of an inexplicable, but meaningful, dialogue through this potent metaphorical language. In the School of Art, we believe in the capacity of art and design to express beauty, evoke wonder, confront injustice, and test our values. The artwork on display exemplifies the ever-evolving and unpredictable journeys of individual artists in the pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and personal growth.

These artists now join a growing community of MFA graduates from the School of Art at the University of Tennessee. 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.

David Wilson

Professor
Director
School of Art

A special thank you to friends of the School of Art for their generous support in making the printing of this MFA exhibition catalog possible.



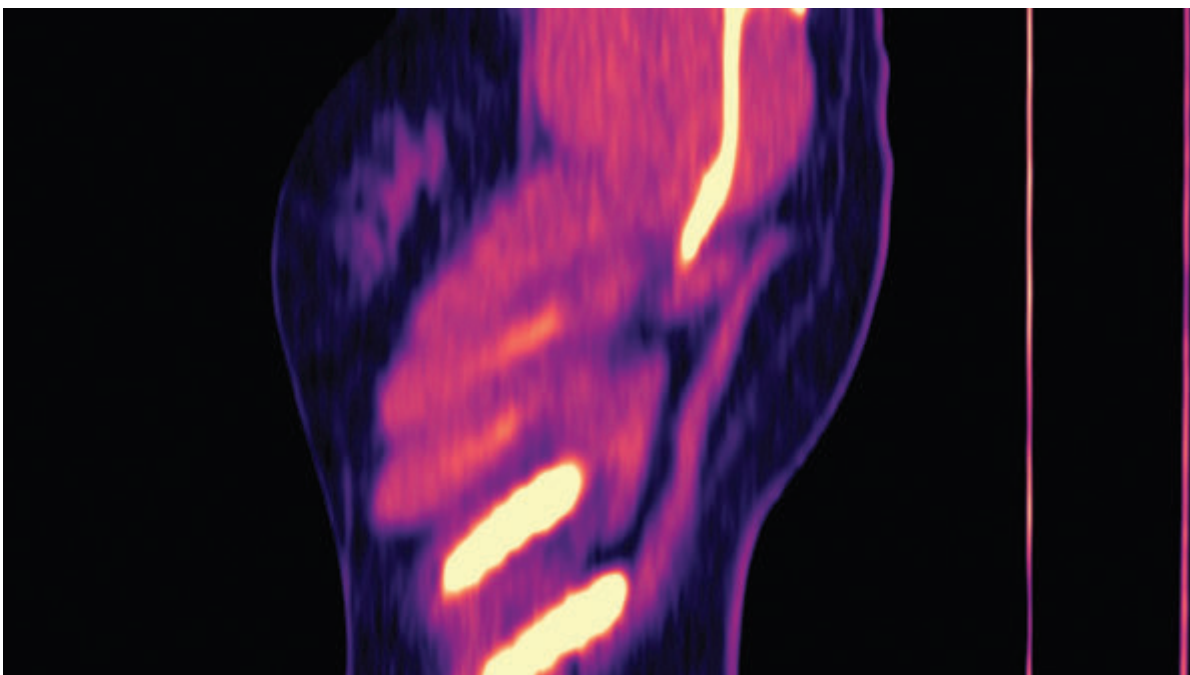
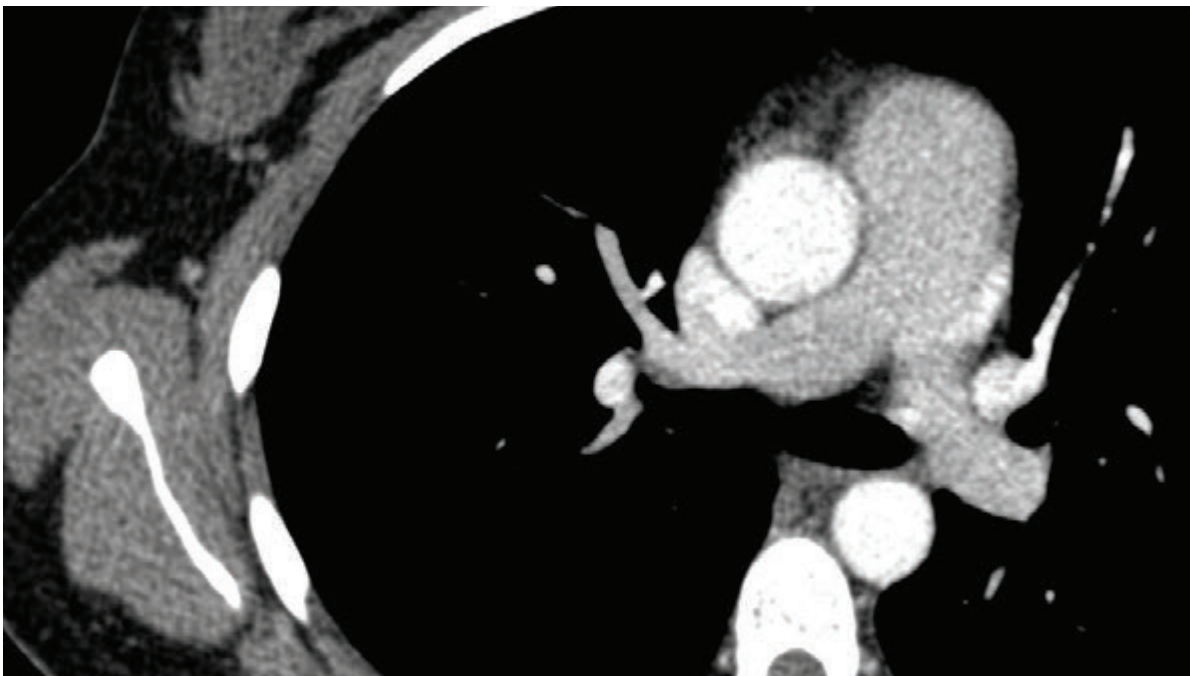
meg erlewine

REROUTED

After a routine physical and chest X-Ray, they discovered a growth on my ribs. Throughout the subsequent months, I was repeatedly scanned and tested, and lived under the looming threat of cancer. This exhibition was a reflection of my experience during that time as well as extensive research into young adults with cancer.

Throughout my research, I found common themes between cancer patients and what I experienced. The excruciating grey period between not knowing and the final diagnosis, or all clear. The questions that arise as to how to move forward, how to prepare for the diagnosis, and, of course, how to pay for it. Young adults with cancer are an overlooked demographic, rarely researched and often misdiagnosed. This creates new psychosocial challenges that young adult cancer patients may not be prepared to address.

Rerouted explores these challenges; specifically focusing on the relationship between personal identity and health through this lens of a cancer diagnosis. As you transfer from one stage to the next, you, and your identity, are continually shifted. From patient to survivor, you're faced with new challenges, new questions, and new experiences.







jessica gatlin

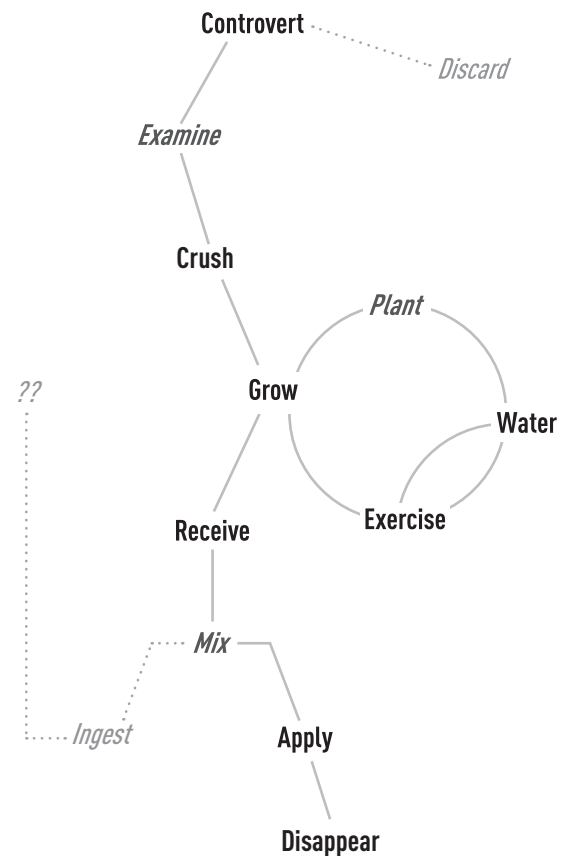
HERE, A VIBRATION

Imagine:

You have been educated and socialized into a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy with a long history (presence) of violence and colonization. You are a very tiny part of a complex and indifferent machine — a machine actively seeking to destroy that which it cannot exploit. How might you respond to learning about your programming?

I search for ways to resist and overcome this programming. In searching, I have begun to theorize that to be fully cognizant, less susceptible beings, the brain (sapience) and the gut (sentience) must both be healthy and in constant communication. While the brain reasons and makes sense of the world, it is also highly vulnerable to forces such as societal and cultural norms. In a society that values reason over intuition, we often ignore a major function of the gut, which is to perceive or feel. Over time, this neglect leads to a buildup of messages unanswered. Overwhelmed and unable to communicate with the brain, the gut shuts off.

Through a range of media including print, video, and installation, I present my investigations and findings. Findings which only lead to more questions, many truths, and multiple realities. Here, in this multiplicity, a vibration occurs.











abigail lucien

JUICE AISLE

A romance surrounds things of tropical descent that we have all either passively witnessed or actively indulged. It is a myth centered on the desire to retreat from our current realities. It is a vacation from the daily performances and personal narratives we recite to others and ourselves. It is a promise of an escape from the present.

This desire to be separate, or to begin anew, manifests itself in the form of consumerism. *Island Breeze*. *Tropical Showers*. *Bermuda Bliss*. We have been conditioned to think of the tropics as a luxuriant dream, a place not of our time, a destination ripe for the picking. We effortlessly identify with consumer goods, seeing others and ourselves in the bright colors and glossy promises of body care and household products. We invest in these items as a mode of

investing in ourselves, hopeful for their enhancement, body and soul. Though we can try to squeeze out every drop of culture, colonize it, package it, and consume it, in doing so we can only create an imitation, a fabricated idea of what the tropics represent.

In *Juice Aisle*, sculptures, sound, and video narrate an environment in which our desire to escape is tangled with what we are trying to leave behind. In repurposing the tropical, we glimpse a time that both precedes and follows us — a lush limbo of pre-colonialism and post-tropical where the past folds onto the present and begins anew.

To the question all explorers ask — “When is tropical?” — one can only answer: tropical is either for before or for after humankind.









elysia mann

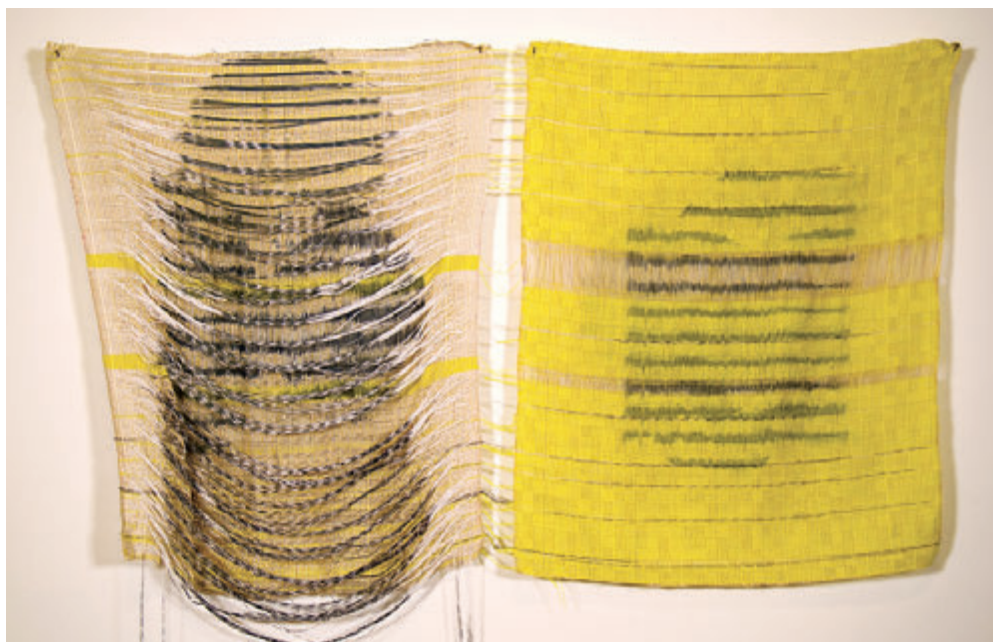
WE AM

Confusing the singular and plural suggests an alternative way of being in which self and other share definitions. The individual expands and opposites contract. We Am uncertain of our boundaries.

This exhibition embraces doubt as a way of knowing. Favoring *and* over *or*, we address an expansive range of topics in which doubt is an underutilized source of knowledge: self and other, personal and universal, verbal and visual, touchable and immortal. We Am tolerant of contradiction.

Major sites of uncertainty that repeatedly come into focus include language, time, the body, and the body politic. Here, borders are rewritten, data reshuffled. None of the individual works offers a conclusion nor a call to action. Instead, they act together in a tentative gesture of unravelling.







jing qin

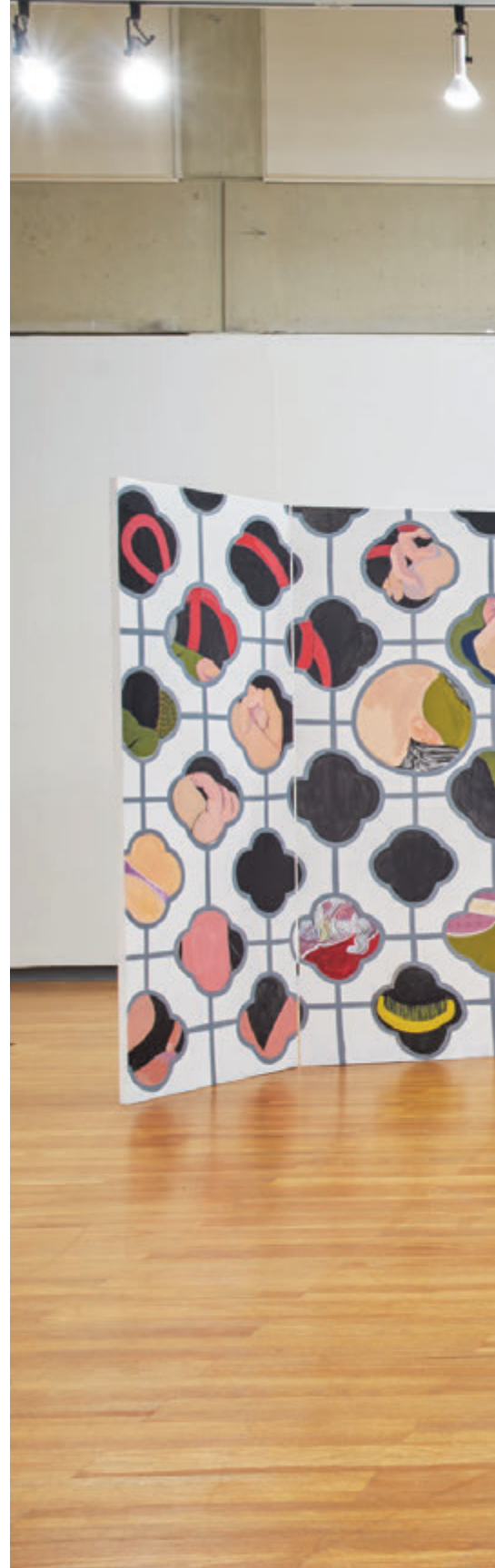
THE LITTLE DEATH

These tangled bodies, borrowed from Japanese “Shunga” prints, are replanted into screens, largely hidden from view. They are shielded by carved floral shutters and green climbing plants. Here and there trembling limbs appear through windows open to the viewers. In this moment, we are all voyeurs.

Staring, or looking, is a different kind of touching: the eyes linger around the fingers, follow the long ink lines of legs toward somewhere blank. I find this type of touch more real than the corporeal. Pleasure and guilt are intermingled here: succumbing to pleasure one feels guilty, while guilt itself can be pleasurable.

The more something is concealed, the more alluring it becomes. The cover-up itself is both an illusion of, and allusion to, seduction. Without direct signals, flirtations happen multiple times in this flat space: in the fragile rendering of body fragments, in the ink washes that mimic the surface of garments, in the rosaceous and misty grey hues. As the screen conceals the interior space, it meanwhile creates the fantasy of the unknown. The screen interdicts vision but does not impede curiosity.

Our desire to conceal is tied to our cognition of shame and sin, but also perhaps the weakening of divine consciousness (or of consciousness of divinity). The painter Balthus famously insisted that his painting had nothing to do with sex despite showing lithe young girls hiking up their skirts to reveal their tender thighs. But he betrayed a deeper understanding when he said of one of his young subjects: “You’d only come near her as you would come near the sacred.”









corinna ray
WHETSTONE

The narrow prison of being “separate,” of existence separated like an object, gives him the feeling of absurdity, exile, of being subject to a ridiculous conspiracy. — GEORGES BATAILLE, “THE CRUEL PRACTICE OF ART”

What falls when we leave it?

The whetstone unaffected when left alone. A simple machine that only acts when the other engages it. Unassuming. Another orthogonal. A block.

A block that encourages sharpness. Blocks your step.

Packing peanuts, acting as void-fill, lose themselves in their interlocking. Possessors of the true Methuselah gene, they insist that you regard their indisposable/disposable conundrum through circumnavigation, mocking your corporeality. Sharpening of a moment. Persistence is caught in your throat. The neediest thing in the room.

None of these are stable times. They lose footing quickly — an eternal present. Taped together, they whisper like a gnat. Seeking the warmth and coolness of a gravestone in sun and shade. Instead, only the weight is applied. You, the assessor, are left with a fragmentary hum. I just came and went.

A Caryatid’s Song:

When I went away I was away.
 When I went I came. Was here. Am here.
 Can come.
 To leave, though.

When I left I knew an end. An end (it) had
 come and gone and I was still trying to be in it.
 So, I couldn’t be. I left it even though it had already
 gone. If it was gone, could I leave it?

If it was no longer held there.
 If it was already gone and I wasn’t
 then it left me then I left it.

But if it had already left me then my leaving was not
 even leaving.

Just shifting, moving.
 I didn’t hope to find it when I came here.
 I was not leaving and not chasing.
 I just came and went.







joshua shorey

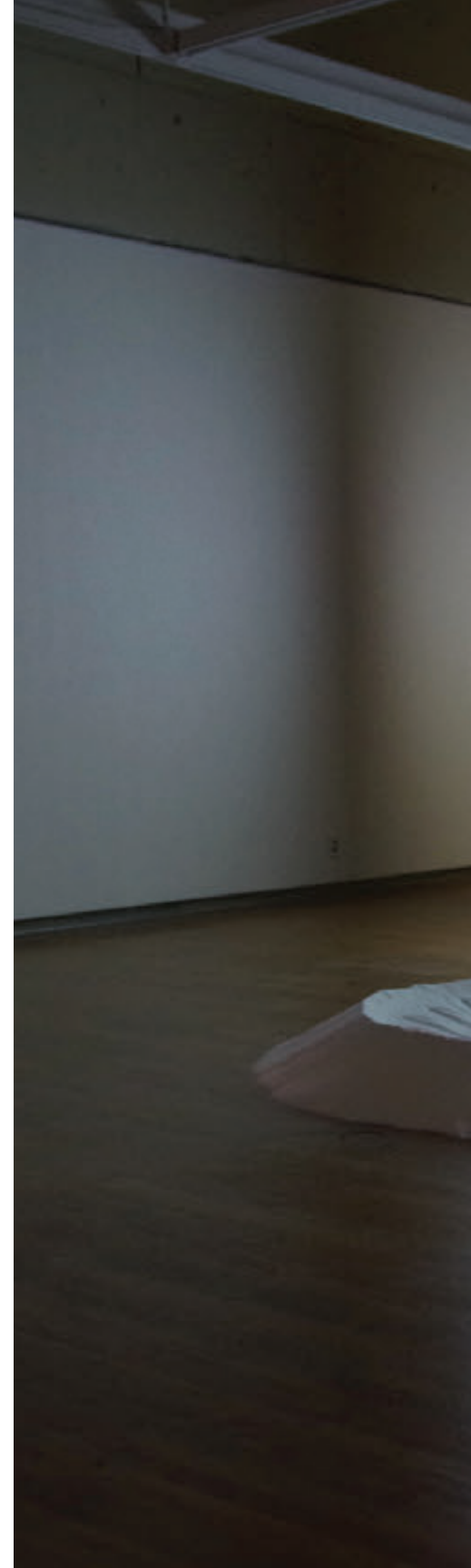
UNKNOWN WILD

In order to function in the world, you have to build armor. You have to. You have to be strong, you have to endure, you have to deflect blows of many kinds. You have to armor your mind, armor your body, armor your spirit. Armor your perceptions. Cut out the noise. Reduce the chatter. Identify the obstacles. You have to withstand whatever comes, and learn how to do that again, and better. This is a useful skill. But the armor guards the heart. If the heart dies from within, the armor is useless.

Living as we do, at or near the top of the food chain, is a precarious position. Opportunities to enter into and stay in a state of existential death until physical death comes appear everywhere and constantly. You know what I mean. You see this everywhere. Even pleasure (and often pleasure) can be a path to this state.

Ideologies, philosophies, religions, mantras, maxims — all of these can bring us around, back to some navigable position. We can orient ourselves, survey the terrain, mark the obstacles, and chart a course. But don't they always fail? Doesn't the landscape change? Won't the peripherals shift the moment you focus your attention? Is there some sustained soft focus for the anxious eye? Which is the way of true perception: To see through the veil, or study the veil?

It's possible that the experience of beauty is the only way to orient yourself without a map. You are here. Here all things are possible because here all things are. From here proceed all paths to anything good or worthwhile in this life. Here is the first step on the endless path to justice. Here is life beyond death. Here is no solution, but a sign.









An Introduction to the Logic of Alchemy

If you have the opportunity, go to the country. Find horses. They will be in a field. There will be a fence around the field. Go to the fence and wait.

In time, the horses will come to you. Trust me, they will. Wait. As they come, you will feel something. Anticipation, or fear, or curiosity. Some of all of these things. You will see that they are not a picture or a film of a horse. They are another thing entirely.

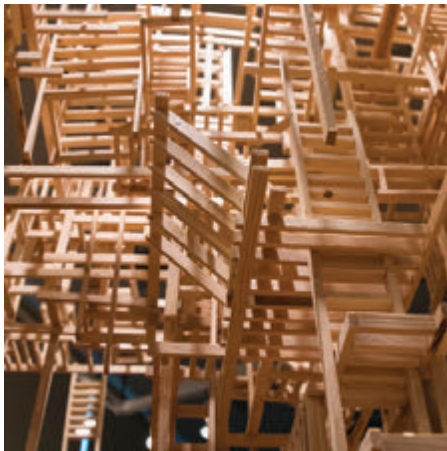
They are hair and hoof and eye and muscle and leg and neck. They are breath and heat and motion. Is there something else? An intelligence, certainly. Maybe some kind of love? They smell sweet. They see you. They want something.

Look to your left and look to your right down the running line of the fence, however far it goes. Get a sense of its boundary. These horses are contained in this place and are of this place.

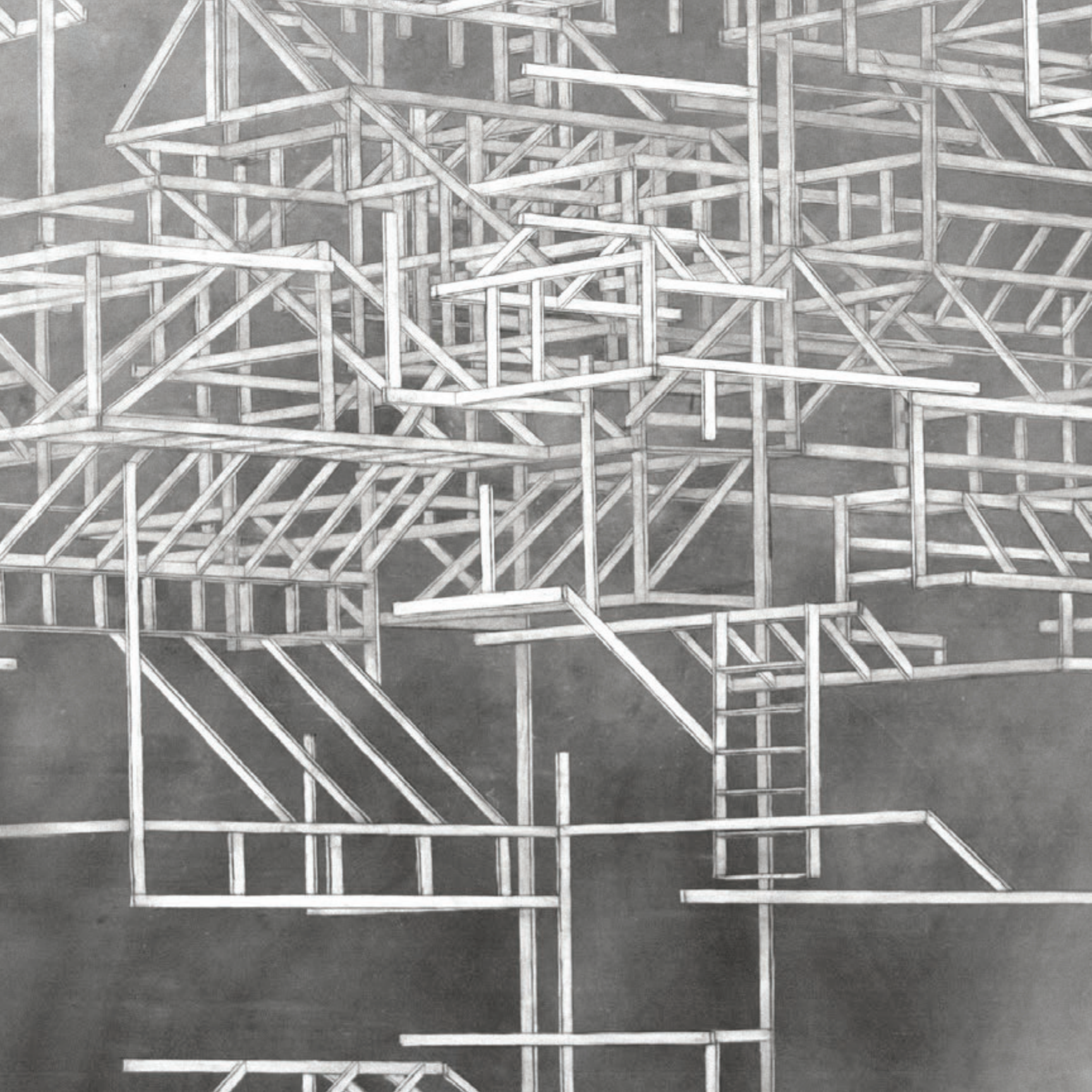
They are made entirely of :

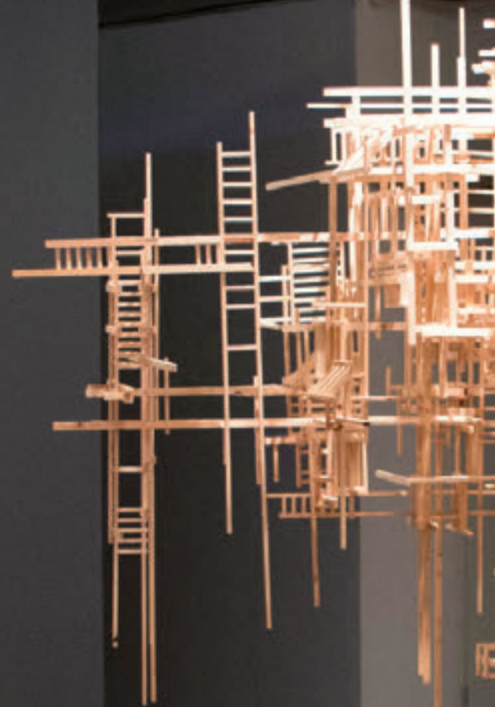
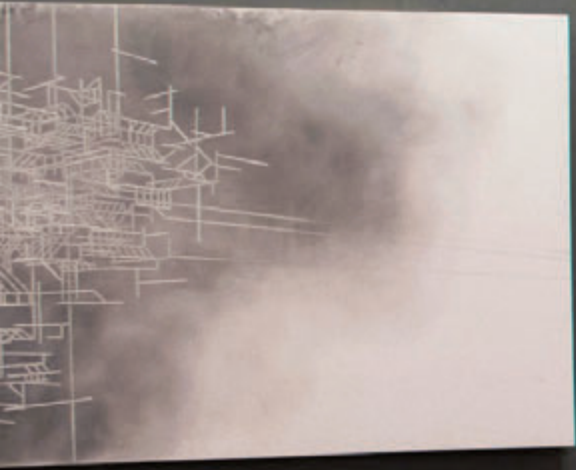
grass,
water,
sunlight,
air.

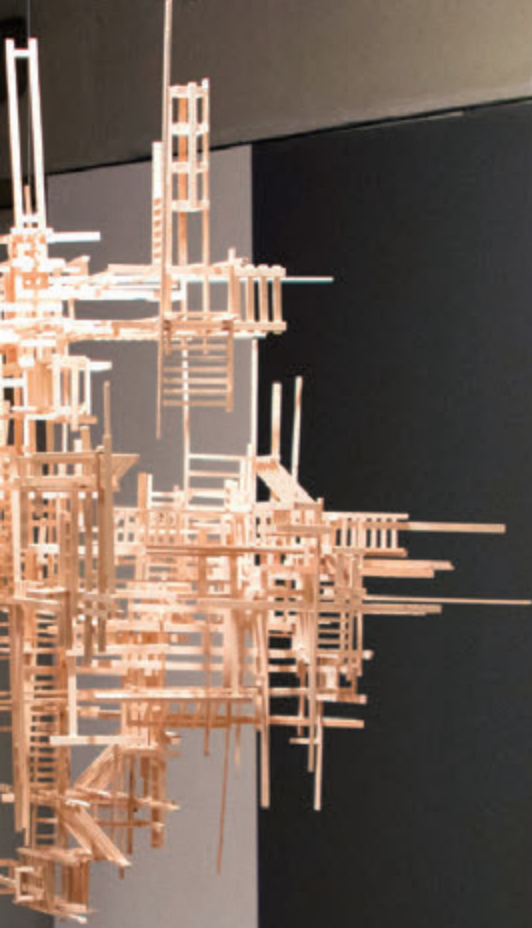
geoff silvis

PROPRIOCEPTION

When we converse with each other about our ideas, we're usually creating pictures with words to describe what our mind's eye is seeing, or sketching the essential qualities of what makes these ideas. Words have limitations — it's not exactly the same as what we imagine when we put language to our thoughts. My imagination is hyperrealistic: a strong sense of nuance and character when contemplating scenes and spaces, filled with illusions of atmosphere and sound in discriminate detail, while peripheral information is barraged by change. My mind's eye fluently operates in this duality — a vague cacophony of hyper-realism but ambiguous structure. However accurate my imagination seems to be, I'm aware that my descriptions of it are unavoidably flawed by lapses in adequate language. Descriptions of this space rely exclusively upon my sense of proprioception, locating myself through contextual clues of spatial awareness, geometry, and balance.







christopher spurgin
RESOLVED

Whereas contemporary circumstance has invalidated conventional wisdom,
reordering logic and the value of fact;

Whereas devaluation of truth leads to the loss of certainty;

Whereas this erosion of confidence has inspired concerns now pervasive
across the broad spectrum of society;

Whereas retreat to an imagined or revised past offers relief from the fear
of change;

Whereas comfort inhibits progress through mechanisms including —

- (1) denial;
- (2) inaction; and,
- (3) impotence;

Whereas the above influences result in a society suspended in a moment
of cultural limbo: Now,

therefore, be it

Resolved,







anna wehrwein

TO TURN AROUND THE DRAWING ROOM

The alternative is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire. — LAURA MULVEY, "VISUAL PLEASURE AND NARRATIVE CINEMA"

This room is probably familiar. We've been here before — Ingres's bathhouse, Cassatt's blue chair, Matisse's red studio — rectangles (rooms and pictures) filled with women. And while these rooms may be outworn and oppressive, what with their heavy drapes and plush rugs (I do quite like the pattern), my desire is not to leave, but to radically rearrange.

I make paintings and drawings that reimagine the domestic space as a site of creative action and communal agency. Within the established settings of home and garden, the women in the paintings — all of them friends and fellow artists — engage in manual and immersive tasks. They cut each other's hair, give each other tattoos, and repot houseplants. These are scenes that, while based on real events, appear fictive, even utopian. Through the limited aperture of cinematic

lens and painting precedent, intimate gestures and mise-en-scène may be interpreted as zones of maternal nurturing or eroticism. But this limited reading of madonna or harem is not so much inaccurate as unsatisfying. The figures themselves are not particularly concerned with how they are being looked at or who is looking at them. Instead, they are absorbed in drawing, watching, and listening — in what they are looking at.

Creating a space for female viewers means more than simply not making women objects of desire, not turning them into an odalisque, an Ophelia, a houseplant. Nor does female authorship (mine included) necessarily create a progressive gaze. Rather, the act of looking must accommodate multiple positions, with the opportunity to rotate the roles of object, subject, author, and audience. And yet this



last vantage point, visual theorist Griselda Pollock writes, is both the most important and the most elusive. For “without that possibility” of the “female spectator,” she warns, “women are denied a representation of desire.”

And where is desire more palpable than in painting? What is more pleasurable than a surface covered in opaque pigment? A buttery shape, a dense field of pattern? These joys should never be denied. Yet within these surfaces and narratives, where might it be best (as Mulvey challenges us) to break from pleasurable expectations — to leave empty or cover over? My only answer is to return to where the paintings begin, to the ultimate act of looking and watching — to drawing.





**THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE'S MFA PROGRAM
IS RANKED #16 AMONG
PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AND
PRINTMAKING IS RANKED
#2 OVERALL BY U.S. NEWS
AND WORLD REPORT. MFA
STUDENTS WORK CLOSELY
WITH FACULTY IN SMALL
STUDIO CLASSES AND
PARTICIPATE IN REGULAR
CRITIQUES, STUDIO VISITS,
AND SCHOOL-WIDE GRADUATE
REVIEWS. IN ADDITION, MFA
STUDENTS TAKE ADVANTAGE
OF UNIVERSITY-WIDE
GRADUATE COURSES THAT
RELATE TO AND EXPAND THEIR
CREATIVE HORIZONS.**

THE MFA PROGRAM

The University of Tennessee is one of the nation's leading public research institutions committed to excellence in art and design. The MFA program is a NASAD-accredited, 60 credit-hour, three-year, terminal degree in Studio Art with concentrations in Ceramics, Painting + Drawing, Printmaking, Sculpture, and Time-Based Art.

The MFA program includes workshops and lectures that cover the fundamental skills artists and designers need to develop and sustain a professional life. Embedded in the common curriculum are experiences that help our students to plan, promote, fund, organize, and build community as part of their creative practice. Students work closely with the 24 Art, Design, and Art History professors as well as with each other. The three-year degree gives students time to research, experiment, and hone their practice. The final year is devoted to working on a thesis project that will serve as a career springboard.

The School of Art also oversees a host of visiting artists' programs. Scores of artists from a variety of disciplines visit campus each semester for lectures, critiques, and week-long collaborations. Additionally, the nationally recognized Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program in the Painting + Drawing concentration brings a different visiting professional artist to the UT campus each semester to teach undergraduate courses and a graduate seminar. The AIR, who typically works and resides in New York or another urban center, acts as a bridge between the university and life beyond it.

EXHIBITION OPPORTUNITIES

The experience of showing work in a public exhibition space is one of several experiences that help graduate students build their professional skills — a significant aspect of sustaining a successful professional practice as an artist or designer. The School of Art has several outstanding opportunities.

ORANGE

This is an exhibition opportunity that occurs annually, coinciding with the College Art Association Conferences. The exhibit features exceptional current graduate work that is curated by the SoA faculty. Orange Exhibitions have been held at the UNIX Gallery and the White Box Gallery in New York; Co-Prosperity Sphere in Chicago; The Fridge in Washington, D.C.; and Coagula Curatorial in Los Angeles.

STUDENT-RUN GALLERY

The School of Art operates an off-campus gallery space that is completely student run. New exhibitions are presented every week. Graduate students apply to serve as the gallery director and assistant director, and students coordinate the screening of all exhibition proposals. Experience overseeing the gallery has helped MFA students secure museum and gallery-related positions after graduation.

OTHER MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Other exhibition spaces in Knoxville include the Knoxville Museum of Art, which has world-class exhibition programming; the Emporium Center; Striped Light; Central Collective; A1LabArts; Fluorescent Gallery; UpFront Gallery; C for Courtside; and more.

THE EWING GALLERY

The Ewing Gallery serves as a cultural resource for the University of Tennessee, the School of Art, and the Knoxville community. The gallery curates and programs exhibitions to support the university's academic goals. These exhibitions focus on historical and contemporary movements in art and architecture. Each spring, the gallery hosts an annual student art competition and MFA thesis exhibitions, which showcase student achievement and research.

UT DOWNTOWN GALLERY

Located in the heart of downtown Knoxville, the UT Downtown Gallery presents a series of innovative solo and group exhibitions that offer students and the community an opportunity to see both international and local perspectives. First-year graduate students use this space to present their work to the public.

WE ARE AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

Equal consideration for admission and employment is given without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical or mental disability, genetic information, veteran status, and parental status.



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