



LIFT OFF

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**San Jose State University's
Graduate MFA Exhibition
April 25 - June 14, 2008**

Lift Off is the fourth annual exhibition at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) featuring San Jose State University's Master of Fine Arts (MFA) graduates. Throughout its history as a non-profit exhibition space, the ICA has been dedicated to providing meaningful opportunities for emerging artists and *Lift Off* is an extension of this commitment. The exhibition not only marks the culmination of two to three years of intense investigation in the Fine Art programs at San Jose State but also launches the artists in the next chapter of their artistic pursuits.

Featuring work by:

Colleen Arakaki
Susan Burgers
Ben Eberle
Mark Fox- Morgan
Benjamin Hunt
Ethan Miller
Andy Muonio
Amanda Smith
Gabe Toci
Ashley Vander Meeden
Tammy Jo Wilson
Bryan Yerian



Lift Off Artists in Alphabetical Order:

Colleen Arakaki expresses a visual language that is fluid and personal. For the artist, the lines in her monochromatic etchings express energy and the marks record a moment of her psyche. Concerned primarily with formal issues – like line, color, texture and form – Arakaki's abstract imagery are open to interpretation, referencing forms that could be either interpreted as landscapes or figures.

Susan Burgers

For the past year, Susan Burgers has enlisted the stunning natural landscape and changing seasons surrounding her Aptos, CA home as collaborators in her art making. During this ongoing project, Burgers photographed a large piece of paper as it blew around in her backyard – subjected to bright sunlight and torrential rain and all other manifestations of the changing seasons. In all of these instances, the paper is a dynamic object, living between stability and fragility and dependent on the elements. Constantly in flux, the paper ultimately records the events of each day – including rain, sun, frost, and wind.

Ben Eberle's curious ceramic and wood objects are influenced by the things you would ordinarily find in a hardware store – gears, cranks, saws, bolts, and odd hardware. Combining these familiar forms with his artistic imagination, Eberle constructs mechanical-looking contraptions that reference industrial tools, gritty objects, ships and vessels.

Mark Fox-Morgan describes his work as “cruddy.” For him, this is not a bad word since his artwork is inspired by cast offs and garbage. To make these intentionally crude objects, Fox-Morgan employs his own invented version of paper molding. In *Mouse, Can, R2*, he casts Mickey Mouse, a tin can and the Star Wars robot R2D2 out of pulped newspaper. The resulting objects are intentionally clumsier than the slickly manufactured originals. Comprised of discarded paper, they are products of a culture of excessive waste. Though critical of our society's excessive consumption, Fox-Morgan acknowledges his own conflicted relationship to the environment in his work and process.

Benjamin Hunt describes his recent sculptural work as “secular alters.” He makes mid-century furniture replicas out of Plexiglas and “decorates” these translucent fixtures with altered domestic objects. For the artist, what we contain in our homes and how we display these things- knick-knacks, family snap-shots, trophies etc. - are expressions of our interests, desires and psyches. Though his work references his personal experience, the relationships between the objects he uses –clocks, bronzed figures, photographs, etc. - reference the collective American home.

Ethan Miller

On the internet our identity is reduced to data comprised of a series of zeros and ones. Click on a book at Amazon.com and five other books you may enjoy pop up. Social networking sites like LinkedIn.com are aware of your social connections before you are. We are constantly bombarded with information, and marketers use our online identity to capture and even predict our interests. Ethan Miller visually interprets this process of data collection through *Netbody v2*. Miller starts with a random word like “identity” and then searches for all the ways “identity” is represented on the internet. The program visually traces these to create a web that interprets relationships between the data. *Netbody v2* renders our identities as fluid and constantly in flux. YouTube videos, jpg images, text and the overwhelming amount of information available on the world wide web are represented in this continuous looping network.

Andy Muonio's large-scale portraits are both expressive and contemplative. Based on an amalgam of images from video footage the artist has taken of his family, *Helen* depicts his wife and *Jeremy age 15* is a painting of his son. The grid in *Jeremy age 15* reveals Muonio's process, showing the detail in the background as much as the actual depiction of the person. Allowing the paint to drip, meld, and coalesce, Muonio's works are not only informed from images he selects from his digital archive but are representations of the emotions, memories and relationships he has with his familiar subjects.

Amanda Smith's ceramic reliefs of blond girls in embellished and exotic settings are sweet and quirky. Informed by the decorative motifs and architecture of Indian miniature painting as well as the narrative illustrations of outsider artist Henry Darger, Smith's works are personal illustrations of growing up with five sisters and her mom. In a world infused with cuteness, and meticulous adornment, the imagery reflects childhood naivete that is cleverly subverted with a dose of curiosity and mischief.

Gabe Toci

The puka shell necklace is a classic Hawaiian emblem. Its shells are native to the island and the jewelry is worn by surfers, locals and tourists. Gabe Toci's large-scale *Puka Shell Necklace* is not made out of Hawaii's indigenous shells but out of clay saucers called “pigeons” that are used as targets in the sport of pigeon hunting. A native Hawaiian, Toci has witnessed dramatic changes to the cultural and environmental landscape in his homeland. For the artist, the clay pigeons are stand-ins for the shells, indicating a culture that is endangered by over-development, gentrification and cultural homogenization.

Tammy Jo Wilson

Prior to the feminist and civil rights movements of the 1960's, a young educated woman basically had two career options: teaching or nursing. Although Tammy Jo Wilson grew up in the 1980's, this still felt applicable. Her mom was a nurse and her aunt was a teacher. As a young person, she admits that she may have internalized this saying as truth. However, quite to the contrary, Wilson is now an artist who explores her personal history to address questions of social inequality. With visual language that mimics a year-book layout, *Teacher or a Nurse* depicts row after row of anonymous female nurses. The work pays tribute to these women who provided opportunities for the next generation of young females. While inequality for women still exists today, Wilson recognizes that feminist ideas are still relevant and necessary to create a more equitable society.

Ashley Vander Meeden

What makes a place a religious place? Ashley Vander Meeden's images document school gyms, university auditoriums, and conference rooms both before and during a religious gathering. Unlike a cathedral or a mosque, these spaces are not routinely used for worship but rather for secular activities. The "churches" Vander Meeden documents, like "The River Church Community" and "The Highway Community," repurpose public spaces for their religious celebrations. These services transform the spaces with people, artifacts, and lighting signifying a religious ceremony. As with much of Vander Meeden's work, this project explores the complicated layers of religion and faith in contemporary American culture.

Bryan Yerian

When Marcel Duchamp declared a urinal a work of art entitled *Fountain* (1917), the readymade was born. The idea of a readymade – a found object presented as art – has shaped the way we see contemporary art today. Bryan Yerian does not make readymades. Instead, he meticulously crafts objects into latex and porcelain facsimiles that are accurate replicas or in-versions of the actual thing. Obsessively attentive to process and detail, Yerian's non-functional copies allow us to see the humor, sadness and strangeness inherent in his objects. *Remnants* is an installation comprised of latex casts of a ladder, a rope swing and a tricycle. The brown latex deflates the objects, making the once fun rope swing pathetic; the ladder futile; and the tricycle collapsed and useless. Familiar and unfamiliar, believable and absurd, the objects are ultimately open to our own interpretations.

Hours

Tues - Wed, Fri 10 - 5
Thurs 10 - 8
Sat 12 - 5

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