

THE SAN JOSE
INSTITUTE OF
CONTEMPORARY
ART PRESENTS
THREE EXHIBITIONS
THAT EXPLORE
IDEAS RELATED TO
SIZE AND SCALE

URGENCY

February 26 – June 4, 2011

Focus Gallery

An immersive, site-specific
installation by Portland-based
sculptor Mike Rathbun

POWERS OF TEN

February 26 – June 11, 2011

Cardinale Project Room

The seminal documentary
short film by renowned
American designers
Charles and Ray Eames
that depicts the relative
scale of the universe
in factors of ten

SIZE MATTERS

March 12 – June 18, 2011

Main Gallery

A group exhibition that
addresses ideas of scale
through physical and
conceptual explorations

Join us for a conversation
with the artists:
Thurs, June 10, 7-9pm

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FOCUS GALLERY

Mike Rathbun: Urgency

Entering Mike Rathbun's *Urgency* is like stumbling down a rabbit hole. This bizarre world recalls the magical darkness of the Brothers Grimm and the wondrous imagination of Maurice Sendek's *Where the Wild Things Are*. Rathbun's powerful installation evokes both unease and wonder. On one hand, the space compels exploration, but it also is filled with a sense of foreboding. As visitors in this strange environment, we are swallowed up by its monumental scale and dwarfed by a menacing forest of thorns that appear to burst out of the gallery's ceiling. With only a narrow passageway around the perimeter, the installation overwhelms the space, making it difficult to maneuver. Even still, our scale in relationship to it is confounding: are we the size of insects in a field or have the thorny trunks taken over this world?

How Mike Rathbun created *Urgency* is part of an intensive and intuitive process. Once he arrives at an idea, no matter how spectacular or unfathomable, he works with urgency to build it. Like an undying itch that needs to be scratched, he labors frantically until his vision is realized. The fact that *Urgency* is a physical astonishment and displays the skill of a master craftsman is only part of the equation for the artist. For him, the real challenge is the process - the intensive effort and labor involved in his quest to find answers. He writes, "I am trying to find epiphanies. These are moments when ... I seem to be connected to something outside of myself. This happens when a set of circumstances arises and is triggered by something ... I then feel an emotional swell that is so profound that it becomes physical. I experience a moment of clarity ... a glimpse of something that seems to be the most important thing!"

Ultimately, Rathbun is a seeker, an inquisitor pursuing a state of momentary clarity in the creation of his monumental works. Inspired by legends and heroic actions, *Urgency* presents an environment that is both dream-like and daunting. If only momentarily, the work jolts us into an alternate reality, changing the way we perceive ourselves in this strange place.

Originally from the Midwest, Rathbun currently lives in Portland, Oregon where he is an Assistant Professor of Sculpture at Lewis and Clark College. He received his MFA from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis and his BA from Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota. His installations and exhibitions have appeared throughout the US, including Art Gym, Marylhurst University, Portland, Oregon; Franconia Sculpture Park, Shafer, Minnesota; Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California; Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island City, New York; and Huntington Beach Art Center, Huntington Beach, California. Rathbun has also been awarded prestigious national and regional grants from the Jerome Foundation, Minnesota State Arts Board, The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts and the Bush Foundation, among others.

Mike Rathbun would like to thank the following individuals whose hearts and hands were instrumental in the production of this work: Zoe Clark, Caitlin Ducey, Rick Holden, Lewis Feuer, Kelly Kuykendall, Riley Meinershagen, Kathryn Miller, Molly Montagna, Sandra Moll, Meagan Nuss, Kim, Melissa & Ameilia Rathbun, Steve Rathbun, Sonia Stolfo, and Kyle Thompson.

CARDINALE PROJECT ROOM

Powers of Ten

When *Powers of Ten* was first conceived in 1968, the world was a very different place. However, despite the introduction of the cell phone, the internet, and the plethora of technology that has dramatically altered our contemporary lives, this celebrated film by Charles and Ray Eames remains profoundly relevant today.

Whether revisiting this classic or viewing it for the first time, *Powers of Ten* is extraordinary. The film takes the viewer on a thrilling and disconcerting journey to the outer limits of time and space, traveling to the edge of the universe on one end of the trip and to the most inner depths of the human body at the other. Ultimately, the film addresses scale and the relative size of things, a concept that powerfully extends across disciplines. Eames Demetrios, director of the Eames Office, explains the importance of thinking about scale in practical terms. He writes, “So many of our challenges today are ultimately matters of scale. To be a good citizen of the world and have a chance to make it a better place, a person must have a real understanding of scale.” By presenting images in measurements we can barely fathom, *Powers of Ten* pushes the boundaries of how we think about our relationship to everything around us

Powers of Ten is based on the 1957 book, *Cosmic View: The Universe in Forty Jumps*, by Kees Boeke. The Eames’s enlisted scientific advisors from disciplines including astrophysics, biology, genetics, physics, and particle physics to ensure the accuracy of the film. And, in order to achieve the smooth and realistic motion we see in the footage, the photographs were arranged frame by frame on a 40-foot-long animation stand -- an incredibly innovative process for the time.

In addition to the *Powers of Ten*, the husband-and-wife team of Charles (1907-1978) and Ray (1912-1988) Eames embarked on an astounding array of enterprises during their collaborative years. While the Eames name is most notably known for Charles’ design of the Eames Chair, together, they were visionaries ahead of their time. Pushing the possibilities of design and materials, Charles remarked that their approach was to “bring the most of the best to the greatest number of people for the least.” *Powers of Ten* is an important example of their values and practice. Using spectacular imagery, the film breaks down complex ideas into a format that is accessible, exciting and most importantly, relevant.

MAIN GALLERY

Size Matters

Size matters insofar as it tells us something about an object's dimensions in relationship to other things. We understand the difference between what is small versus what is big due to a comparison between them. While our understanding of size is intrinsically tied to human scale, science and technology have opened new perspectives into the cosmic and infinitesimal, dramatically altering the way we understand ourselves in relationship to an expansive universe. The work in *Size Matters* speaks to the conceptual and physical reaches of size. From the monumental to the microscopic, the ten contemporary artists in this exhibition have created work in various proportions and forms and utilized scale to challenge and shift our perception of the world around us.

Artists Gail Wight and Klari Reis enlarge the microscopic to render visible what is ordinarily invisible to the human eye. The larger-than-life figurative works of collaborators Ian Harvey + Koo Kyung Sook are comprised of thousands of small molecular-inspired paintings that suggest the complex building blocks of the human body while Dana Harel's drawings of enlarged hands reveal hairs, pores and skin with painstaking detail. At magnified scales, these biological structures resemble one another, implying an interconnectedness of all things.

In sculpture and photographs respectively, Terry Berlier and Elaine Ling compare our lifespan to the resilient endurance of trees that live for generations. Beneath the surface of Eamon MacMahon's aerial photographs of vast northern landscapes and Christina Seely's stunning images of cities, emerge a narrative of humankind's cumulative impact on earth and the overwhelming scale of nature. With their incredible detail and exceptionally small size, Dalton Ghetty's graphite pencil sculptures and Kevin B. Chen's miniature hand-drawn cityscapes evoke a sense of wonder to the point of impossibility.

At some point, numbers become so big or small that they are incomprehensible and abstract. However, understanding size in relationship to our daily lives is essential in solving problems and understanding the world around us. While there are still limits to our knowledge of the universe, humans continue to ask questions and push forward. Ultimately, the works in *Size Matters* reflect the infinite promise of the human imagination to create, challenge and surprise.

Artists in alphabetical order:

Terry Berlier

Perfect Lovers represents the cross sections of two trees, a familiar reference to nature's clock and a dramatic visualization of time. In her large-scale installation, Berlier illustrates that the life-span of a tree is measured in centuries, and by inference, reminds us that human life is most often measured in decades. In a fast-paced short-attention-span culture, this vivid reminder gives us pause.

Berlier's "clocks" also reference a work by Felix Gonzalez Torres (1957-1996) *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* that is comprised of two synchronized clocks that inevitably become out of synch over time. Both of these works serve as symbols of time's inexorable flow.

Currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at Stanford University, Terry Berlier received an MFA from University of California, Davis. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and is held in the collections of Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento; Savannah College of Art and Design; University of Illinois, Chicago, among others.

Kevin B. Chen

At first glance, Kevin B. Chen's drawings of miniscule-sized skyscrapers may be mistaken for blank pieces of paper. The highly detailed renderings barely skim the bottom of a sheet of paper, leaving a wide and open space above. At this scale, the work requires close and intimate inspection to view the incredible architectural details the artist has crafted. Inspired by the perspective on the Bay Bridge during his daily commute from the East Bay to San Francisco, Chen's images are based both on his experience and imagination. However, while the stacked buildings of an urban skyline normally tower over its inhabitants, Chen's drawings give the viewer the perspective of a giant overlooking a tiny city.

Based in Oakland, Kevin B. Chen's work has been exhibited throughout the Bay Area including Ampersand International Arts, Southern Exposure, New Langton Arts, Kearny Street Workshop, among others. In addition to his art practice, Chen is the Program Director at Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco.

Dalton Ghetti

For the past 25 years, Dalton Ghetti has crafted exceptionally small sculptures on the graphite tip of pencils. Without using a magnifying glass, he patiently scratches into the graphite with either a razor blade or tip of a sewing needle. Working at this scale, a piece can take several years for the artist to complete, as it requires Zen-like composure and steadiness of the hand to carefully carve the tiny pencil tip. Because they are so fragile and miniscule, the finished works incite wonder to the point of skepticism, as one may question how they could possibly be made. However, the fact that these miniature marvels have been sculpted from an ordinary pencil by Ghetti's hand is both an inspiration and testament to the possibilities of human creativity.

Born in Brazil, Dalton Ghetti currently lives in Bridgeport, Connecticut. He received an Associate Degree in Architecture from Norwalk Community College, Connecticut. When he is not chiseling the tips of pencils, he makes a living as a carpenter and handyman. Though he does not own a cell phone or have an email address, his works have "gone viral" on many websites and blogs. His artworks have been exhibited in the East Coast, London and most recently, Hong Kong.

Dana Harel

In her *Kin* drawings, Dana Harel has enlarged human hands to the scale of the animal that they reference. For example, *Alces alces* is the actual size of a moose and *Elephas maximus* is drawn in relationship to the size of elephant. At this proportion, the hands are both familiar and foreign: the human pores, hairs, textures and crinkles of the skin are magnified with painstaking detail only to reveal a strange creature of threatening dimension. Harel revels in the tension and questions that arise in disrupting our sense of scale with the depictions of her animal/human hybrids. She writes, "[In] exploring our kinship with nature,

I want your question to be, 'who dominates, man or animal?'" As humans we are led to believe in our control and domination. However, the question is a bit of a quandary as man is also a participant of the animal kingdom, even though often disconnected from this reality. Harel's drawings imply a unified animal/human form that encapsulates this tension, a transitional state defined by our imagination.

Born in Israel and currently based in the Bay Area, Dana Harel studied architecture at California College of the Arts in San Francisco before shifting her drawing skills to the visual arts. Her work has been exhibited throughout the Bay Area as well as nationally.

Ian Harvey + Koo Kyung Sook

The collaborative team Ian Harvey + Koo Kyung Sook creates large-scale figurative works that are comprised of hundreds and sometimes thousands of painted business cards. The individually painted cards reference a cellular structure that makes up the complex organization of a human body. To paint each "cell," the artists combine materials that may react unpredictably, like shellac, polyurethane, synthetic gold and silver pigment, which result in abstract, chaotic and flowing imagery and recall elemental and biological forms. After painting thousands of cards one by one, the artists slowly assemble them to develop a much larger work. Out of the disparate arrangement of these smaller paintings, sizable and haunting figures emerge in what appears to be ripples of water and scorched topographic landscapes.

Ian Harvey + Koo Kyung Sook began collaborating in 2006 during a residency at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha. Their collaboration combines their interests in abstraction, materials and the figure. Their work has been exhibited in the US and South Korea. Currently they are based in Sacramento where Harvey teaches at California State University, Sacramento. Kyung Sook recently immigrated to the US from Seoul, Korea, where she was a Professor of Art at Chungnam National University from 1989 to 2010.

Elaine Ling

The towering Baobab tree grows in the arid and infertile regions of Africa, Madagascar and Australia and is known to be one of the largest living things in the world. Often living for over a thousand years, it is referred to as the tree of life because it is capable of providing shelter, food and water for the animal and human inhabitants that live around it. Intrigued by the tree's enduring presence both in the landscape and in the lives of its surrounding community, Ling photographs the Baobab tree alongside a person who lives in close proximity to it. Standing next to its enormous bulbous trunk and gnarled branches, the figure is dwarfed in comparison. The image reflects both the resilience and ephemeral nature of life: while the human will eventually die, the tree will continue to be a living resource for several human generations to come.

Photographer Elaine Ling was born in Hong Kong and is based in Toronto, Canada. Trained as family physician, her practice took her to small and isolated communities throughout Canada. During these travels, she began her photographic work and has since visited rural regions around the world to

produce her photos. Ling's artwork has been exhibited extensively in North and South America and Europe. Her works are held in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Henry Buhl Foundation, NYC; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; Museet for Fotokunst, Denmark; Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa, among others.

Eamon MacMahon

Eamon MacMahon's aerial photographs of second-growth forests, glaciers and frozen wilderness resemble abstract and painterly quilt work. However, upon closer inspection the images quickly reveal a barren and frozen topography representing thousands of years of snow, ice and trees. While the photos capture only a split second of these places, embedded in pictures is the continual evolution of nature over time. The earth's glaciers, the largest store of freshwater on the planet, are melting faster than normal while the ancient forests in Ontario are rapidly disappearing. These changes in the Northern ecosystems are a result of human activity, with implications of great magnitude, from rising sea levels, loss of species and climate change.

Based in Toronto, Canada, Eamon MacMahon studied photography at Sheridan College of Applied Arts, Ontario. His photographic works have been exhibited in Canada and the US including the Griffin Museum of Photography, Boston; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Higher Pictures Gallery, New York; Bau Xi Photo, Toronto, among many others.

Klari Reis

Klari Reis' works are based on time spent looking through an electron microscope at the molecular structure of pharmaceutical compounds. As a result of these observations, Reis has blown up the cellular forms to create gigantic Petri dishes. Made out of resin and pigments, the seductive surface, color and scale of the works immediately capture our full attention. However, Reis' use of synthetic resin to make the cell-inspired art also addresses the increasingly fuzzy distinction between the artificial and the natural, especially as it pertains to designer chemistry in the field of pharmaceutical science.

Reis' work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and is held in both public and private collections throughout the world. Recently, her work was included in Factor XX at the Los Gatos Museum of Art.

Christina Seely

From outer space, the largest cities on earth glow from the light they emit. While NASA's satellite imagery of earth is seductively beautiful at this distance, it also reveals human's negative impact on the planet. Interested in this tension, Christina Seely traveled to the brightest regions on the world map to photograph cities in the United States, Western Europe and Japan. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, these illuminated regions are also the economic and political powerhouses of the world. Collectively, they consume the majority of the world's electricity, energy and natural resources. For *Lux*, Seely documented the impressive built structures, sprawling developments and nighttime glow of these urban regions. The beauty of the resulting images is undeniable, especially since man-made light has signified hope and progress for most of human history.

However, beyond the surface beauty of the photographs, the project prompts a deeper investigation into the scale of human's destructive impact on earth.

Seely received her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and currently teaches photography at California College of the Arts in Oakland and San Francisco. Her work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally, including at the Center for Photography, Woodstock; the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; The Bronx Museum, New York; The Center for Contemporary Art and the Natural World, UK among other venues. Her work is held in the collections of Yale University, Boston Public Library, Walter Art Center and the Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art.

Gail Wight

For *Hydraphila*, Gail Wight cultivated slime mold in Petri dishes with tinted agar and recorded its growth patterns over time. Like a lab scientist, she used a microscopic lens to magnify the microorganism's life cycle, documenting its lacey patterns as it rapidly pulsated and expanded. Viewed at this magnified perspective, the stunning images recall the internal structure of the human body as it would look under a microscope. The reproducing slime mold resembles arteries, veins or the branching structures of the lungs or nervous system. In playing with scale and drawing visual comparisons between this microscopic life form and the complex internal structures of the human body, the work suggests the interconnectedness of all life's species.

Gail Wight holds an MFA in New Genres from the San Francisco Art Institute where she was a Javits Fellow. She currently is Associate Professor at Stanford University. Her work has been exhibited internationally, including the Natural History Museum, London; Ars Electronica, Austria; Exit Art, New York; the Physics Room, New Zealand; and Cornerhouse, Manchester. She has worked for a research project on cognition at MIT, in the Exploratorium's Performance Program, and has held residencies at the Rockefeller Foundation in Bellagio, Italy, Capp Street Project, the Exploratorium, the Albuquerque High Performance Computing Center, and Headlands Center for the Arts.

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