

LIFT OFF

**San Jose State University's
Graduate MFA Exhibition**

**Main Gallery
Through September 10, 2011**

This diverse group of San Jose State graduates reflects the next generation of cultural makers and the creative vibrancy of our community. This year's multi-disciplinary exhibition showcases works in painting, drawing, sculpture, photography and installation. The varied artworks speak to issues of labor, digital culture, mapping, science, urbanization, family, human relationships as well as the incredible possibilities inherent in creative practice. From addressing personal histories to popular culture and social critique, the artwork challenges, inspires and reflects on the ideas and culture of our time.

While *Lift Off* marks a completion of three to four years of study in the Fine Arts Program at San Jose State for these 18 graduates, it also signifies a beginning of their post-graduate artistic endeavors. We invite you to pause and engage with the objects, images and concepts put forth by these artists as they embark on the next steps of their artistic journeys.

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Artists in alphabetical order:

From a refrigerator door to a sizzling frying pan, **James Allison**'s oil paintings capture the beauty of the ordinary, transforming a simple domestic scene into a poetic and painterly tableau. Allison's inspiration ranges from artists like Wayne Thiebaud, whose still-life paintings focus on objects of mass consumption, to Fairfield Porter, whose landscapes and domestic interiors evoke extraordinary movement through painterly techniques of pattern and light.

Toy Refinery is **Rod Ayers'** version of what a resourceful child who had no toys would make out of cast-off and found materials. Incorporating a flashlight, wood and metal scraps, the traveling metal refinery is comprised of three parts; a collector, to collect the metal materials; a smelter, to melt the metals; and a crane, to carry away the materials. The three units conveniently fit together like a Matchbook Playset, making it a portable case. In all of his work, Ayers uses found materials to convey a sense of child-like imagination and playfulness.

After his grandfather passed away several years ago, **Eric Baral** decided to document the last years of his grandmother's life. These works are part of an ongoing series that depicts intimate portraits of his beloved relative in everyday moments, whether at home reading the newspaper or quietly sitting at the edge of her bed. While the photographs are shot from the artist's perspective, the sensitive images illustrate the universality of the familial bond and our desire to imprint memories through the photographic image.

As a ceramic artist, **Nikki Ballere Callnan** does not adhere to a strict distinction between her functional objects and her sculptural work. Instead, she focuses on the process and expression involved in creating them. Using her hands to push, pull, throw, trim and sculpt the clay, she aspires to make work that "honors a natural organic approach to functional ware but also pays respect to design, allowing for aesthetic beauty of form to trump function." She continues, "My hands and personality are expressed through the work, giving the work a unique signature and personality all of its own, like a fingerprint."

In *Plaid Drawing #8* **Ryan Carrington** created the lines for a plaid pattern using a construction snap line, a tool typically used to make a straight chalk line in carpentry and construction. For the artist, the repetitive and labor-intensive effort to execute the drawing is a symbolic performance, referencing the endurance and precision required in construction work. The ubiquitous plaid pattern not only signifies working-class clothes but high-fashion luxury brands. In making this work, Carrington addresses the conflicting symbolism of plaid pattern and its relationship to labor, class and consumerism.

Steve Davis' figurative sculptures illustrate the darkness and humor of human relationships. His works include a motley crew of characters and clichés – including the sad clown, the pathetic mime or the vulnerable nude. *Turf War* and *Consequences of a Useless Career* depict twisted yet amusing narratives from his cast of characters. The small scale of the works relates the sculptures to toys, which heightens the dark humor and strangeness of the scenarios presented.

By altering a shovel into an inoperable device, **John Eames** upends the function of what we normally expect from this everyday object. Influenced by Dada, a cultural movement that embraced absurdity and irrationality as a protest of war and politics, Eames renders tools as failures, no longer functional for their original

purposes. In doing so, these familiar objects become humorous and illogical and we consider them in a new light.

Jessica Eastburn's works on paper are inspired by the aesthetics of visual information and digital culture. Sharp lines, vivid colors and geometric forms mimic maps, flow charts, and early computer-generated graphics. While the work evokes a sense of orderly systems that could have been created by a machine, the design is actually a result of an arbitrary set of rules developed by Eastburn, which she then meticulously paints by hand. The artist writes, "I take elements of language, music, design and other communication systems, and reinterpret and reassemble them through shape and color synthesis."

To make his large scale black-and-white photographs, **Ron Garavaglia** exposes a negative directly to an electric current. Similar to a photogram and early photographic techniques, this experimental process yields unexpected imagery. The resulting photographs evoke a sense of mystery and wonder, resembling scientific specimens, distant constellations or unknown organisms.

In his attempt to reconstruct the locations where his friend lived at different points in his life, Alex Gibson's *He is In...* presents a fragmented map comprised of glass panels. For the artist, these maps are representative of geographic and psychological sites. The layered charcoal marks and engraved lines further abstract the imagery while the fragility of the glass reminds us of the ever changing and vulnerable nature of life.

Growing up as a twin, **Dana Harris** shares parallel experiences with another person, and yet, their recollections of the past often vary drastically. In her work, Harris attempts to reconstruct her fragmented and layered childhood memories. Using iconic symbols – like hot air balloons, a carousel horse, and sailboats – and playing with transparency and overlay, Harris renders the vague and dream-like quality of memory.

Inspired by the Bay Area's geography, **Evan Hobart's** imagined cityscapes presents dense landscape, with tangled freeways, crowded buildings and towering high rises. For the artist, the modern city illustrates the complex relationship between man and nature, as humans attempt to control and architect the surrounding environment while depleting nature's resources in the process.

Melody Kennedy carved into the surface of drywall to create *Transcendence: Stage One (Cinderblock/Figure)* and *Transcendence: Stage Two (Ladder/Figure)*. Made out of a material typically used for constructing walls and ceilings, the graphic forms represent personal symbols for the artist. The figures and objects suspend in space, illustrating an uncertain yet tense narrative. As a viewer, we fill in the blanks of the open-ended scenario, allowing our own experience to make sense of what we see.

Presley Martin embraces both intention and accident in his art practice. Employing organic materials like clay and graphite, his process draws on elements of serendipity and alchemy, where he pushes materials to perform in unexpected ways. In this series of works, Martin applies graphite onto wood and then pours liquid clay on top of it. When the clay dries, he removes it from the surface to reveal its traces on the panel. The subtle contrast of the clay residue on the graphite resembles the fluid and organic marks of snail tracks, tree shadows or ripples in moving water.

With *Timo's How To* performances and marketing materials, **Timo McIntosh** pokes fun of the popular self-help culture by employing the same media in which these messages of self-improvement are often propagated. McIntosh presents himself as an authority on how to become, in a few easy steps, the individual who we aspire to be. By presenting basic instructions that often masquerade as substantive ideals, his work asks us to question culturally constructed standards of identity.

In her series, *Sensory Evidence: a Kleenex Project*, **Windy Rhoads** prints family photos on Kleenex facial tissue. Its soft and open fibers distort the printed image, transforming personal photos into anonymous images typical of the 1970's and 1980's. These hazy pictures spark nostalgia for this era, and the ephemeral nature of the tissue reminds us of the fleeting and ever-changing sense of time and memory.

Nancy Sevier repurposes musical instruments to create her whimsical installations and sculptures. While she renders the musical devices as non-functional in the process, she is interested in how we still connect them to a familiar audio experience – like the circular rhythm of a record, the wooden clink of a piano key or the hiss of a cassette tape. Like every sense, sound has the power to conjure particular memories, emotions and ideas. Through her constructions comprised of musical instruments, Sevier intends to stimulate our memories of the sounds the objects once made.

In **Nick Tranmer's** fantastical landscape *Lenticular Revelations*, bulbous ceramic clouds host a miniature city made of cast-off industrial waste. Hanging from metal chain-links attached to the ceiling, Tranmer's cloud city appears heavy with its sculptural weight, revealing it incapable of defying the force gravity. Constructed from clay and the waste of the technological era, the clunky cityscape presents a strange and surreal vision of the world, where the city precariously and ominously looms above the land.

**Price list of available works
located at the front desk.**

**Catalogue available?
Inquire at the desk.**

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