


# MFA11

ALLEN BEAN BERKOWITZ BYERS CHOI ĆOSIĆ DANIELS DAVING  
DEGENERER FLEISCHMANN FRANK KANIA MCCULLOUGH MCGIRK MILLER MURPHY  
NEALE OTTINGER PALMER PETRESCU PRESSLER ROBINSON SAGE SMITH

 Washington University in St. Louis

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 SAM FOX SCHOOL OF DESIGN  
& VISUAL ARTS



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## BUZZ SPECTOR

Dean, College and Graduate School of Art  
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

A highlight of the graduate studio art experience at Washington University is the culminating MFA exhibit at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum. Each year, graduating artists submit work to a curated exhibition that is followed by a catalog of works and texts. In previous years all the words that accompanied the pictured works were written by the artists themselves, but this year's publication includes something new: brief essays or more experimental texts about the art, written by graduate students in the University's *other* MFA program, Creative Writing, as well as by advanced degree candidates in Art History and Germanic Languages & Literature.

The writers and artists together participated in an informal workshop on writing about art, which I offered in three sessions in February and March, the first at the Kemper, and the second and third at the Lewis Center, the Graduate School of Art's studio facility. These sessions included readings from recent art criticism and scholarship on contemporary art as well as examples of recent fiction and poetry with art and artists as subject. Not all of the writers present at those sessions contributed texts to the project, but the discussions were expansive and lively, with significant enthusiasm generated by the sharing of writing samples and tours of individual studios.



The exhibition for which this publication serves as document was excellently installed by Karen K. Butler, assistant curator at the Kemper Art Museum, with the able assistance of Ron Weaver, exhibitions preparator, and Jan Hessel, facilities manager & art preparator. The complexities of documentation were handled by Kimberly Broker, assistant registrar. All of this effort took place with the encouragement and sponsorship of Sabine Eckmann, director and chief curator, and Carmon Colangelo, dean of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts.

This publication is an outgrowth of conversations I've had with, among others, Patricia Olynyk, director of the Graduate School of Art, Marshall Klimasewski, writer-in-residence, Graduate Program in Creative Writing, Elizabeth C. Childs, associate professor and chair, Art History & Archeology Department, Lutz Koepnick, professor, Germanic Languages & Literature, and Jane E. Neidhardt, managing editor of publications at the Kemper. The texts of writers and artists alike were edited by Eileen G'Sell of the Kemper's publications department. The support of these colleagues for interdisciplinary collaboration has made this publication possible, and I look forward to future collaboration.





## PATRICIA OLYNYK

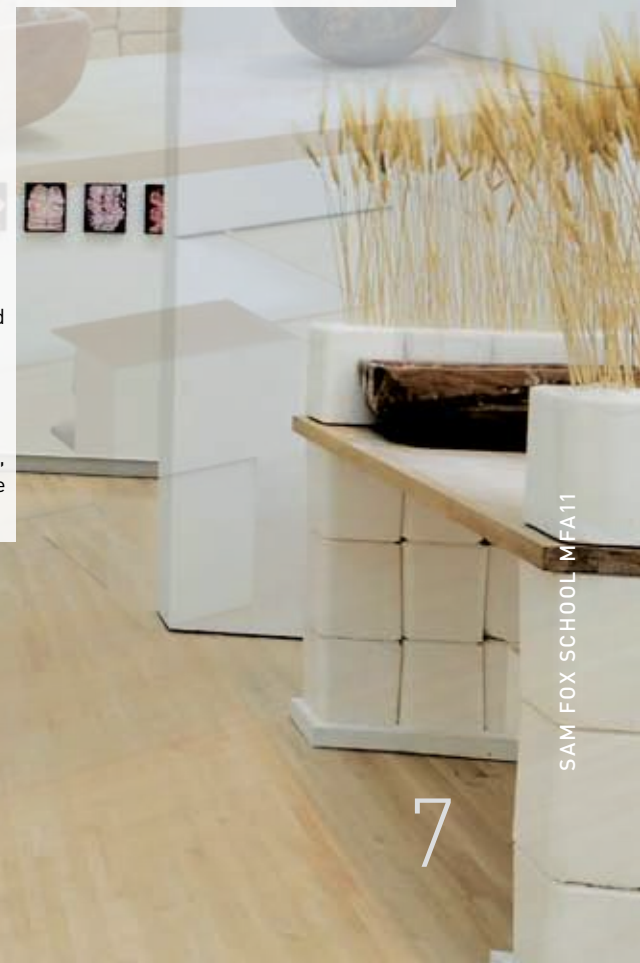
*Director, Graduate School of Art,  
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts,  
Florence and Frank Bush Professor of Art*

What is the collaborative potential of a critically engaged studio practice program in a research setting, specifically, for a graduate school of art?

Critical engagement provides a means by which to understand what is crucial to a subject or situation; it moves beyond simple binaries and generates new discourse, thereby providing not only a solid foundation for artistic production but also a rich array of opportunities for cross-disciplinary work. A critically engaged studio practice itself has no a priori medium—rather, it seeks the best means to a specified end.

These principles represent some of the key underpinnings of the Masters of Fine Arts program in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. They also represent several necessary conditions for exploring ideas and territories beyond the art studio. In relocating the discourse of art by resituating the subject of art—not simply the subjects of individual artworks themselves—the master's program in visual art has welcomed multiple disciplines across campus, which include, for the purpose of this publication, creative writing, Germanic languages, and art history. Conversely, these domains have been drawn to the territory of studio practice, arguably in large part due to a common desire to examine ideas from a new vantage point.

By encouraging a frame of mind for critical engagement, the university provides a sanctuary for cross-disciplinary collaboration and new forms of knowledge production. Projects such as this one, which forge connections between writers and artists across campus, reveal new and valuable perspectives on the work of emerging talent in the Graduate School of Art. Perhaps more significant, providing writers with the opportunity to offer new overtures, counterpoints, independent judgments, and novel interpretations of creative work generates new content that is evolving, dynamic, and responsive. Accordingly, participants transcend the limits of established disciplinary practices while new and experimental paradigms unfold.







## MARSHALL N. KLIMASEWISKI

*Writer-in-Residence,  
Graduate Program in Creative Writing*

I don't know how typical this experience is, but I managed to pass through an undergraduate and two graduate degrees in creative writing without ever working with a visual artist. I'm sure it was primarily my own fault and a product of my personal ignorance: although I was drawn to representing psychic experience and constructing enclosed worlds almost as much by certain painters, filmmakers, and installation artists as by other writers, I somehow failed to imagine what I could learn about fiction writing by speaking to artists, and maybe it didn't help that I was someone who, despite earnest efforts, didn't even seem capable of inspiring bemusement in my poor high school art teacher. (Others with little talent got bits of specific instruction if not encouragement from him as he made his slow, bearded way around the chemically fragrant art room; when he got to my work he often turned away after a silent moment to look wistfully out an open window, then might pat me on the shoulder and wordlessly pass on.) But it was also true that, despite the general vibrancy of their creative writing programs, none of the institutions I passed through bothered to cut paths of any kind over to the art schools.

So I was naively surprised, when I finally found myself in the mixed company of residencies—at places like Yaddo and the Fine Arts Work Center—to discover that it was more enlightening to talk craft with the visual artists than with the other writers. There was the way in which speaking across mediums refreshed the old metaphors we held in common and engendered new ones; there was the jealous fascination with a very different material practice and process, which clarified and then changed my relationship to my own processes; and certain questions which were either naive or taboo for each party within its own milieu—where do you get your

ideas? what do you do when you get stuck? how did you even think of that?—became productive and worthwhile again as each of us, to some extent, discovered the geography of a new aesthetic landscape. When I myself got stuck, especially through the long winter in Provincetown, an almost failsafe cure was to go and sit in a friend's studio, without talking at all, while he or she worked. Obviously, to have done the same beside a fellow writer's desk would have only been depressing.

That some experience of refreshed aesthetics has come out of this collaboration for the creative writing Masters of Fine Arts students and other writers seems clear from what they have written, and it has found its way into our workshops and thesis defenses as well (in the form of an idea, for instance, that Randi Shapiro is developing about pleating as a formal structure for her nonlinear narratives, inspired by the work of Lauren Pressler). But as interesting as it is on its own, I also hope that this catalog will help to open a much wider conversation between the writers and artists on our campus (and perhaps beyond—perhaps also among readers of this catalog), and might lead to many other forms of collaboration in the future. I'm grateful to Buzz Spector and Patricia Olynik for cutting this path, and I know the dozen or so creative writing students who participated in the workshops are grateful as well.





In this media-centric culture we live in today, our experience of the world through images often supplants and overpowers that of real experience. Millions of tiny, colored pixels construct a barrier between us and the world we witness through the television or computer screen. With this barrier or separation, a situation as serious and important as a war taking place overseas, involving the lives of American soldiers, becomes distorted, experienced solely through the lens of mass media outlets. War becomes a product to be passively consumed on the same level as an entertaining television show or video game that can be turned on and off at one's leisure. In this way, our understanding of war enters the realm of the hyperreal—a troubling psychological space where notions of real and representation, serious and trivial, and war and entertainment become conflated and indistinguishable.

My work traverses that indefinite space between the real and representation in regards to our understanding of war and violence. I take elements of a mediated war experience and present situations that create a series of tensions between otherwise opposing forces: the factual and artificial, the confrontational and detached, the unsettling and entertaining, the severe and playful, the threatening and innocent. With these tensions and the troublesome middleground they establish, one's familiar, expected, and safe experience transforms into something alien, indefinable, and perhaps even dangerous.

John Talbott Allen  
*Bit Bomb*, 2011  
Acrylic on Styrofoam  
and wood, approx.  
120 x 96 x 72"





My studio practice is invested in analyzing how social relationships are impacted by visual representation, and my art is about my reaction to representations and inter-relationships of marginalized groups and individuals. I am interested in what we can learn about contemporary society by tracing and deconstructing the genealogy of art historical images. Issues relating to feminism and animal advocacy are at the forefront of my current body of work. Through painting and other media, I explore the politics of gender and visual representation, questioning the relationship between the relentlessly painted female nude and what we encounter in popular media. Through its seductive form, visceral color, and tactile oil paint, my work uncovers the subtext of coded pictures, allowing me to express a wide range of emotions and provoke paradoxical feelings such as simultaneous desire and disgust.

I am further influenced by the ongoing revision of art history and culture initiated by feminist art. Feminism acknowledges that art is a continuous discovery of reality, with each artist contributing to the next generation's advancement. I share the vision that art should be used to describe the richness and complexity of the human experience and include a multiplicity of dialogues.

Meghan Bean  
*Absent Referent*, 2010-11  
Ten oil-on-canvas paintings,  
10 x 18" each





MAGGIE STANLEY MAJORS  
on Shira Berkowitz

*She Might Belong to You* casts the difficulty of positioning self and other in a territory defined by its fixity and fixed by its inability to be defined.

As a literal space constructed by the artist, the installation draws attention to the figurative construction of meaning in all spaces, specifically the contested space of the Gaza Strip—surprising given the initial invisibility of the work's cultural and historical markers. The viewer is first confronted by a rectangular box. Unfinished on the outside, studs support a drywall room nine feet long, five feet seven inches across, and eight feet high, open from above. The simple handwritten directive hanging on the narrow door reads: "Please take off your shoes / enter alone / shut the door behind you."

The interiority of the box is both enveloping and solitary. Detached from the museum space and other viewers, the participant inside is suddenly standing on a platform that radiates both warmth and caution, a stage upon which to consider the performance of self and other. Voices outside, including those of the audio track, are distinguishable but not comprehensible.

The audio loop, emerging from a speaker suspended opposite the structure's door, is dominated by a steady and unidentified voice. Throughout the nearly six-and-a-half minutes, new voices enter the mix, and slowly the culturally unmarked nature of the entire production shifts: A reference to Gush Katif. A voice speaking Hebrew. The difficult situation of the Prime Minister. The connotations of country and conflict, borders and occupation, artillery and uniform. What should one do with these pieces of information, dropped like hints? They stretch the participant's desire to produce knowledge from the experience of the installation, yet the overarching tone of the piece is couched in its own subjectivity, the intimacy of mine and yours. Even still, such intimacy is displaced through the still-undefined signifiers, the repeated pronouns without antecedents and unidentified adverbs of place.

Without evidence of process—traveling, interviewing, researching—in the visual and auditory materiality of the work, the viewer naturally wonders how it all came to be. The desire to assign roles to the she/you/they/we/here/there of it all becomes more real. Berkowitz capitalizes on and simultaneously subverts the desire to delineate and define, to make and reinforce borders between here and there, past and present, mine and yours. The installation proposes the (im)possibility of participating in a narrative, a narrative that might belong to someone else, or, rightfully, to no one. In doing so, *She Might Belong to You* could be called an uncertain testament. It becomes a monument missing its memorial tribute, a representation without a referent. It is the consideration of where one might fit on a map without borders.



Shira Berkowitz  
*She Might Belong to You*, 2011  
Installation with digital audio,  
120 x 108 x 62"



The Institute for Progressive Humanities (IPH) is a community-based artwork that takes the form of a not-for-profit organization that supports collaborative projects committed to educational, cultural, visual, and environmental innovation for social good.

IPH began as the shared creative agency between the two of us, but has grown to include diverse community partners. Existing within the continuum of community-based art practices as articulated by Walter Benjamin in *The Author as Producer* (1934), IPH situates pairs of artists within struggling communities and provides them with the opportunity to collaboratively engage a range of educational, cultural, visual, and environmental issues. Through direct community engagement, artists are called upon to cultivate and employ a hybrid skill set.

Partnering with community organizations for one-year collaborative projects, IPH strives to "Teach and Empower Communities and Organizations," or TECO. Expanding the dialogue surrounding completed projects, IPH develops "Tools for Education and Curriculum in Art," or TECA. Through these initiatives we hope that IPH artists will honor the tradition of community-based art practices, and function as "operative" artists working in partnership with communities to generate creative outcomes and cultural value.

The Institute embraces an ideology of collaboration with a renewed depth of interdisciplinary working, which IPH defines as *Collabortarianism*—directly engaging the public in its collaborative projects without regard to race, gender, ability, or economic status.

The Institute for  
Progressive Humanities  
*Collabortarianism*,  
2009–present  
Mixed media,  
dimensions variable





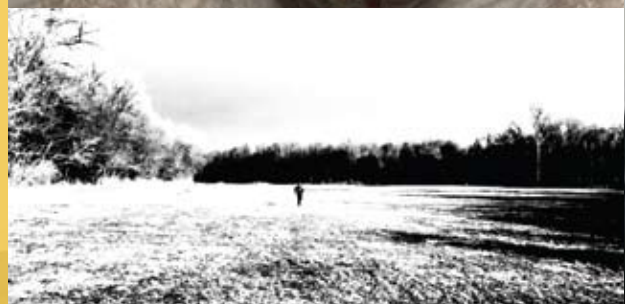
The desire "to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul."<sup>1</sup> For that reason, a so-called desire to belong may be considered natural when a person experiences dislocation or displacement. Regardless of whether a person chooses to relocate or is forcibly uprooted, culturally displaced individuals are simultaneously insiders and outsiders. Such people, according to Salman Rushdie, may be bestowed with a "double perspective," or a kind of "stereoscopic vision [that they] can offer in place of 'whole sight.'"<sup>2</sup> I am interested in how the increasingly commonplace experience of cultural displacement in this contemporary era of globalization offers the potential for artists to transcend boundaries in an expressive and self-reflexive practice.

In my artwork, the concept of cultural displacement is conveyed through the juxtaposition of reality and unreality. For many individuals affected by dislocation, the articulation and exploration of a world of unreality or "fantasy," according to Rushdie, can offer "one way of dealing with [identity and dislocation] problems."<sup>3</sup> As a culturally displaced artist, I may eventually become accustomed to unfamiliar surroundings and might even appear to successfully transplant my roots to new soil. However, the emotions that naturally arise due to the loss of my former home and the emptiness of the present can sometimes drive me to daydream, living in a world of illusion. Since this illusory world is not permanent or stable, and fantasy offers only a transitory refuge, a return to the world of reality is unavoidable.

<sup>1</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties toward Mankind* (New York: Putnam, 1952), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 19.





I attempt to bridge the concrete and abstract and explore real stories in experimental ways. My work involves creating experimental and documentary art, including short films, installations, public and theater projections, and live video performances. In the process of creating an art piece, I alter visuals and experiment with form and structure. By adding abstraction and implementing sounds, I construct another level of aesthetic experience. Recently, I have been creating

video installations focused on social and political issues that reflect my experience of the war in Yugoslavia. My themes often touch upon issues of identity, immigration, and the complexity of living in a new environment. My work concentrates on the necessity to embrace cultural differences in order to allow communication among people, prevent future conflicts, and give viewers the opportunity to consider their own styles of self-expression.



Zlatko Ćosić  
*The Voice of a Pioneer*, 2011  
Three digital videos  
on DVDs, 6 min.





James R. Daniels  
*Still the Table, More Than a Table, 2011*  
Stained wooden table, four wooden chairs, fluorescent lights, and stained paper, dimensions variable

I am interested in working with a range of objects for three distinct reasons: the materiality of the object that provides it with its idiosyncratic features; the object's ability to represent something outside of itself through the forming of an association, with the potential for the artist to either embrace the inherent association or modify it; and the object's capability to construct narratives based on metaphor.

By employing these shifts in perception of how we view and interact with objects, a break in our everyday experience can be established that can provide a means of questioning the way we accept what is presented to us. This epistemological approach, when applied to the process of making art, challenges the way that viewers see things function. I choose common objects for this reason; they are easily identifiable but often forgotten or disregarded. Embracing the thingliness of things, the qualities that make the object what it is, or make the situation how it is, it becomes impossible to dismiss the material quality of objects as being trivial.



I believe that real experience is masked by our habitual interaction with everyday stuff, and that masking, in turn, causes a loss of focus toward not only what surrounds us, but the essential qualities of life. Life should never be static or fixed—it is through the use of artistic practice that we identify a life that has the potential to be fully engaging, a life that interacts with the world for what it is.





I am interested in highlighting the remains of plastic products found in our oceans, encouraging new discussions on social and ecological stability. My work embraces the post-environmentalist philosophy of not limiting human interaction with nature, but instead welcoming humanity's sustainable development.

Rather than through typical didactic environmental slogans, I advocate for change through the poetic narrative in the form of humorous myth. Conceptually, my work is strongly influenced by sea folklore and our superstitious relationship with the sea. Nautical stories are reflected within my narrative where anthropomorphic absurdity is used to recontextualize traditional seafaring warning signs. My assemblages can be seen as malformed plastic flora or mythical fauna, forecasting danger with a kind of supernatural vigor.

I use allegorical tales derived from collective mythologies and appropriate sea shanties to whimsically reveal the economic drives that injure the natural world. Just as sailors sang shanties to comprehend their omnipresent fears of the vast, threatening ocean, I use the shanty verse to act as a cautionary tale, bringing to light society's consumerist burden on aquatic ecosystems:

*For once there was a ghost ship  
That ten knots an hour could clip*

*It sailed along through frost and snow  
And took you where the wind didn't blow*

*Sailing south the stars were calm  
Mapping the crew to riches beside the palm*

*Gold was not found, only plastic debris  
As if a distant land were on a consumer spree*



Kara Daving  
*Rainbow to windward, foul fall  
the day; / Rainbow to leeward,  
damp runs away. / Put plastic in  
our future, the human odyssey  
may conclude; / Put plastic in  
our past, and amend this  
here feud., 2011*  
Acrylic, plastic, and mixed  
media, 168 x 84"







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Andrea Degener  
*Owl, Totem, Frog, Rabbit,  
 Turtle, and Swan*, from  
*Object Series 1, 2011*  
 Six digital C-prints,  
 30 x 31" each

Culture has its curiosities. We all interact with them in some shape or form, be it aware or unaware of their constant presence. To present one of culture's oddities is to challenge its form and function in a new way that cannot be found in normal contexts.

The objects I photograph—obtained from national home and garden chains—are so ingrained into the landscape that they have become arbitrary. So what does a collection of photographed woodland creatures mean when grouped in a playful way? Does it present a personal narrative, one influenced by fantastical views of the natural world? What may be extremely personal and aesthetically pleasing to one could be the epitome of kitsch to another. Either way, the placement of these objects in a group forces them to be recontextualized, and allows a conversation to be had about them.

Without studying a culture's facets, a person simply exists within his or her confines. Why not then consider the building blocks that are responsible for establishing personal meaning in our fast-paced, perpetually changing society? Within a stark, clean museum context, these simple mass-produced objects transform in ways that force us to reconsider their placement within our personal space, as well as in a larger cultural scope.



SAM FOX SCHOOL MFA11

ANDREA DEGENER

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RANDI SHAPIRO  
on Kristin Fleischmann

It is a painting, or a wall; in either case, it obstructs. Keep out or keep in? The canvas is pale—a wound soothed by plaster; elsewhere—look—a seam. You see the coloring, where it is innocence left out in the rain, where it is still dripping or stained the body's pink. In places, the surface has been ruptured and is no longer serene. The stubs of cardboard cutouts and painted things like blooms. What is behind is yearning through. Say you remember. Knock, and be invited in.

*This is where you used to live. Do you still take your tea—with dolls—as air and water? Then take and breathe—remember how to break a cup or a fever.*

It is the solid wall of an empty structure; behind it the pine frame angles and slopes like jointed bones. There are outsides and insides. Between them, the space of a door.

*Knock and walk backward through the years; see your small afterimage, burning, wearing your mother's leather shoes. This is the playhouse of your youthful devising, half-real, half-imagined. Why have you returned? What do you want from here?*

Outside, fabric tubes shape a beginner's question: What is a little boy? An answer: Blue plaid, with unexpected projections. But the blue is soft and hand-stitched, domestic with plastic buttons. Its form reflects your early mind with its clumsy tentacles of thought. A rudimentary mathematics: girl to boy, and vice versa, the addition and subtraction of parts.



Kristin Fleischmann  
**Cutting out Paper  
Spaceships, 2011**  
Mixed media on canvas  
with wood, fabric, and  
cement, 84 x 84 x 48"

*You were learning to live by play, then, to assemble each body with the sure arms of scissors. Now you are seeking home and are reconstructing this, like a ghost, from lost paper. Shelter; enter. But your body is too large to reside here. Your forehead is high, brushing the shallow rafters.*

Inside, the canvas back is adorned with cement and feminine marks. Sewing thread binds an edge, and rosettes are brushed on, or traced in thick paint. Red, pink, grey. *Your mother snipped the wilting flowers from their stalks and said, It is for their health. You collected the severed blossoms, the dead heads. They stayed here and in your absence grew into*

*other parts: fingers, fists, the limbs that invade the space. You yourself were changed.*

Touch the picture frames, the one that enters the canvas, and the one without its lid. The image has escaped, or is too big. What has been lost? Did it resemble you? Make wholes of the fragments, and ask your lifelike questions. *Do you remember your former whimsy? You were safer then. You imagined more dangers than were present, but invented vehicles of shelter and escape. Search yourself and the room. Do you know whose body you find yourself in? Do you know what to ask?*





William Frank  
**A Prairie Lexicon, 2011**  
 Artist's book, 6 3/8 x 26 1/2"  
 (closed)

**Out of Sight of Land, 2011**  
 Ink on paper, 48 x 80 1/2"

**Herbarium, 2011**  
 Glass, grass, and wood,  
 19 1/2 x 15 1/2" each panel

LAWRENCE YPIL  
 on William Frank

**Prairie**  
 after Will Frank

what the mind : forgets : what the eye  
 dismembers : leaf  
 that we once named and field  
 that we once walked into : the grass  
 a lexicon of glass : horizon  
 definition : *long ago*  
 what we *had* once discovered  
 is now dead : ghost of  
 ghost of gap : is it a gaze?  
 in scaffold  
 stall : to grapple with : and guess  
 to gather gather : into view  
 where wind goes through  
 to keep you : parallel  
 and near  
 we'll let the eye believe : we're here.





Nicholas Kania  
*Southern Praise*, 2011  
 Mixed media, 48 x 96 x 36"



I identify the visual representation of the American South as a major contributing factor to misperceptions of the region, and address the stereotypes that have occurred as a result. Important to the pieces I create is an ambiguity of authorship that provides the viewer with a permeable threshold between what is document and what is fiction. If one understands one of my signs as appropriated from the real world, the work takes on the status of a document. If a piece is understood as a product of the artist intended to mimic a sign found in the South, it is to the viewer a form of fiction. The difficulty in distinguishing between the two allows the viewer to

consider the South as much a construct as it is a real place. I argue that many previous depictions of the South have been presented and accepted as factual reportage, with the editorial role of the artist all but forgotten. In searching through my materials for hints of authorship, the viewer realizes the complexities of representation. It is my hope that upon analyzing my work, viewers will take the time to question representations not only of the South, but of all regions and cultures.







Katherine McCullough  
*Filter*, 2011  
Mixed media installation,  
dimensions variable

I seek to articulate the temporality of spatial experience through material improvisation. The hopeful materiality of the fleeting visual instance is briefly suspended in my ephemeral installations, caught between momentary color and poetic plastic wanderings. Successive acts of mark-making through paint and mundane materials spread out on the space of the painting and reach out into the realm of the viewer. Each gesture insinuates the ever-varying nature of the human mark, the axial relationship that the drawn line has between the body and the world. My marks imply duration beyond the installation, each one a strand of a connecting thread to the next piece.

My process is characterized by an applied methodology of conceptually transforming an accumulated array of materials into the simultaneously revealing and concealing substance of paint. This playful and explorative transformation results in a rhythmic synthesis of abstractions. The hints and traces of incomplete representations and translated memories make space for one to impose visual expectations upon the work, but also room for those expectations to succumb to the surprise of unexpected visual discovery.

The outcome of my process is dependent upon the particular environment where the piece is created. Any change in location, situation, or community yields a different result. I invite the innate qualities of the architecture and site-specific visual culture to become part of the painting, the boundaries between inside and outside, art and architecture, made permeable in the process.





ADITI MACHADO  
on Jordan McGirk

In Jordan McGirk's studio you will find a brute paint. Paint thickening like blood, paint that is dry but looks wet, paint so red you think it came right out of a living, breathing thing: the artist has wrestled with the paint; the paint has wrestled with itself and with its painter. Here the figure is the body, but the act of creation itself is bodily. Each stroke encompasses the being that interacts with it—the artist, the viewer, the wrestler. The

material of the paint, the thickness of its red and pink and blue, invites, asks you to touch: suddenly you are within the memory; you are within that same fighting space of pleasure in which the stroke was produced, the stroke that is now a muscle exploding.

McGirk has created a set of oil paintings of men in the physical act of an accepted violence. These are men who wrestle, who play in the dirt, who wound themselves and each other. And if they are wrestlers, they are also saints. They are saints of the flesh. They have made contact; they have bled, their eyes turned up, their mouths half-open in ecstasy and relief.

So much of the body is in the faces of these men. The face is the focus of our attention. Little else is within the frame. Sometimes a knuckle, a neck, the suggestion of a shoulder or a limb. In one painting, the tongue is the arbiter of violence: as one man licks the other's face, there is an erotic charge to this weapon made of flesh.

If you have seen a boxer punched and wrecked in the face, then you know the vulnerability of this humanity, and its strength. There is sacredness and ritual to these rent bodies. On their edges, everything spills away. The figuration of the face is stark against the broad, abstract paint around them, rendered in strokes of pleasure and strokes of pain.

There is a trajectory to these paintings. The bodies become less and less defined until it seems they have exploded into the very energy that formed them. In the final painting, *Rupture, Rapture*, the face is merely an outline in a corner of the vast canvas. Elsewhere there is an ear, an eye—the body is disintegrating; its reds and pinks and deep yellows give way to the blue of world, encroaching the borders like bliss.

Jordan McGirk  
*Rupture, Rapture*,  
2011  
Oil on canvas, 84 x 120"







My artistic practice investigates color as it pertains to painting and consumer culture. Researching this vein has generated a body of work that mixes the chromatics of consumer goods packaging with the canvases of color field abstraction. Branding's trademark colors make up the commercial surfaces of our common experience. Exploring how they intersect with a painterly notion of color has allowed me to consider the contemporary moment through an oblique angle.



Zachary Miller  
**Skittle**, 2011  
Oil on canvas, diptych,  
56 x 52" each





Esther Murphy  
From the series  
*in / un sighted*, 2011  
Two pigment prints,  
55 x 45" each

MAGGIE STANLEY MAJORS  
*on Esther Murphy*

Esther Murphy's prints from the series *in / un sighted* are big and flat and cool. They do not shine with the light of photographs. These oversized color prints both defy and exemplify their craft. From one perspective, they are photographer's photographs, the product of a large-format camera and real film. Nearly four by six feet, the images seem to emanate the slowness of their own process. The scene is composed, the tripod fixed, the film plate loaded away from light, the moment captured. But this moment is actually an extended still life. Here, the photographic capture of the ephemeral is actually static, its contents could stay in their position eternally. One cannot imagine them moving, even rusting or decomposing. In this way they seem a genre onto themselves: objects pictured are as fixed as the photos themselves.

What the viewer finds is the flattened shine of glass and metal. The materiality depicted is clearly the product of an industrialized society, but somehow it seems to exude a certain natural quality: the surface is like that of a still lake covered in cloudy air. The identity of the objects depicted is obscured by the grand scale of their surfaces. In simple white frames against a white wall, they are pools of pigment that mimic puddles of unknown depths. No glass obscures their matte finish. To seek meaning in these prints is an attempt to interpret a muted reflection. And to seek meaning in a photographed reflection is to seek a truth that is more than twice removed, mediated many times over. The photos depart from the source image. The original point of reference fades away.

Murphy's series considers what it means to eschew digital technology in favor of older methods, and in doing so brings forward the essential and paradoxical nature of the photographic act: the way in which it directs our attention to the real and the seemingly tight relationship between the signifier and the signified while simultaneously obliterating that relationship to create something new.



Kathryn Neale  
**Sharkey Grey, 2011**  
 Acrylic on cotton  
 tablecloth, 60 x 96"

Nature is a construct of culture; examining the historical roots of this construct reveals how certain ideologies are still with us today. Pattern can function as a visual strategy for reflecting on these ideologies because so much of patterned designs throughout the centuries have directly referenced natural, organic forms, either through representation, stylization, or abstraction. Our need for pattern can also result from the constant separation from nature in our contemporary lives. Our response has often been to bring these natural forms into our interior environments through decoration, an attempt to domesticate nature in an idealized form.

Inspired by the language of painting, interior design, and the decorative arts, my artistic strategy is to react to these patterns, expose the structure of the design itself, and elevate the role of the hand. I have lately referred to my works as "hybrid paintings" in response to their complex layering, not only in the materials that I use but also in reference to their exploration of the complicated ideas about nature and culture that challenge us to constantly make meaning of our world. In my recent series painted directly onto

tablecloths, the patterns are a predetermined commercialized image that I personally respond to, my paints mostly premade colors from swatch brochures bought at a local hardware store.

I am a painter and I think through the act of painting. I also contemplate how natural it is for me to turn to paint to express myself. But even through the process of making marks on my canvas, I am constantly repeating, imitating, and copying from visual sources around me. Therefore, I myself am also a product of pattern.



MELISSA OLSON  
on Christopher Ottinger

The 3M Pocket Projectors that face-off in Christopher Ottinger's *Unconcealing Apparatus* were manufactured to instantly transform any surface anywhere into an interface display. With the ability to connect to all of your favorite digital media sources, PCs, DVD players, iPods and iPhones, digital cameras, and cell phones, these mobile projectors can take your handheld hyperreality and project it (in both the psychological and physical sense) onto real-world walls that previously stood only for enclosure. Yet the walls that frame Ottinger's piece are left tellingly blank. Instead of projecting the viewer out of the enclosure by providing a link to another time and space, a process with which we are familiar from cinematic traditions, here the mini-projectors are turned on one another, foregrounding the technological apparatus itself. A triad of projector beams converges on a wooden screen that spins tirelessly at their center, creating a whirling cylinder of light whose colored bands expand and contract. The screen then stirs the air back out beyond the projectors, brushing across the cheeks of those looking on and whirring in their ears like the sound of mechanically beating wings. The effect is magical, playful, and provocative.

Ottinger's work recalls the fascination with moving image technology that undergirded early cinematic exhibition practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unveiling the apparatus behind the visual spectacle in allowing the projectors to participate in their own revealing, his work presents, in wonderful animated form, the bands of colored light associated with television broadcast NTSC color bars. Most viewers will recognize these as the colored bands

that often appear after late-night television programming has ceased but the transmitter is still active. Often used for calibration purposes, the color bars in Ottinger's piece fittingly align viewer awareness with the thingness of visual technology itself, transforming a recognizable technological glitch into an aesthetic object. Thereby, Ottinger's piece invites the viewer to question, in the Heideggerian sense, the essence of technology that is often concealed within the phantasmagorical web of interfaces through which we conduct our lives with increasing dependency. The *Unconcealing Apparatus* demonstrates how art can disclose to us, through aesthetic play, the fantasy that may otherwise threaten to become more real than reality itself.



Christopher Ottinger  
*Unconcealing  
Apparatus* v1.0, 2011  
Video installation



SAM FOX SCHOOL MFA11

CHRISTOPHER OTTINGER





Maia Palmer  
*Citli, Juana Jane,  
and Julien, 2011*  
Three digital animations  
on DVD, 13 min.

Identity is a flexible concept heavily influenced by our communities' construction of language. It is my curiosity about how we desire to be portrayed that motivates me to create these "Dialogical Portraits: Animated Conversations." I am especially interested in how language and our interactions with others affect our sense of self, which is in turn reflected in our imagined or ideal self-image. Because language is unstable with a fluidity of meaning, within the act of speaking our self-narratives take on new shades. As dialogue moves from one person to the other, our understanding of ourselves shifts in tandem with the flow of conversation. Those functioning on a daily basis in a foreign language are often more keenly aware of the impact that language and our relationships have on our sense of self. Therefore, for this project, I met with various members of the international community in St. Louis.

These dialogical portraits are created through a collaborative mechanism of in-depth interviews and an exchange of stories. I am interested in having conversations that open up questions about the complexity of self-identification. This process ultimately involves the cocreation of a new and imagined identity, one that challenges initial surface-level self-identifications. The resulting portraits and animations reference existing images and media that have been imprinted in the memories of the sitter, myself, and the viewer. A fictive space is created, allowing the sitter to assume various personae as well as construct an alternate reality where the perceived real and the imagined merge.







Nicole Petrescu  
*Body as Matter, 2011*  
Mixed media installation;  
bread; salt; video projection;  
and performance;  
dimensions variable



## MELISSA OLSON

*on Nicole Petrescu*

Nicole Petrescu's installation welcomes its viewers as to a kitchen table, one set as a space of reverence, like an altar or a cinema reimagined; but unlike those spheres, Petrescu's space does not suggest a mysterious submersion into myth or fantasy. Rather, it prompts an embodied experience grounded in familial history and the artistry of bread-making as passed down through generations. Taking on the appearance of a thick, enveloping quilt, Petrescu's bread-tiled wall reflects the projected moving-image of the artist's hands along with her mothers' and her daughters' engaged in the practice of making bread. Resisting temporal fixity with this layering of past, present, and future, her work recalls the ten thousand years that

humanity has been developing the transformative practice of plucking grains of wheat, kneading dough with the hands, exposing the bread to heat, and then sharing it as a practice of community building and nourishment with family, friends, and guests. Yet, even as the work reveals a longstanding intersection between technology, nature, and human craftsmanship, challenging the contemporary fragmentation of these spheres, the presence of the baker at her table reinvests the viewer in the current moment and invites us to reexamine our relationship to our own physical environment. Offering recipes to make our own bread, the work further asks us to reconsider eating as a practice that collapses distinctions within time and space, between subject and object, and advances a contemporary experience of communion.





Lauren Pressler  
*Eros in Pursuit of the Riven Body*, part 1  
 from *Press and (Com)pleat*, 2011  
 Fabric, dimensions variable  
*Petrified Flutter*, part 2 from  
*Press and (Com)pleat*, 2011  
 Wood, plastic, and metal, 40 x 18"

RANDI SHAPIRO  
 on Lauren Pressler

Lauren Pressler's series *Press and (Com)pleat* is preoccupied with what she calls the "riven body," the human form—usually female—split asunder and reconfigured as a commodifiable object of aesthetic or sexual desire. It is a literal and conceptual body located at the intersection of multiple theoretical, sociological, and artistic narratives, and is the special subject and by-product of haute couture.

The wall-mounted component of the series, *Petrified Flutter*, is a spare work: a smooth wooden column suspended by a catenary wire and flanked by a flourish of transparent Mylar. Its vertical orientation and height parallels the viewer's spine, but the juxtaposition of artificial materials with the natural undermines any reading of strictly organic mimesis. Instead, the structure of the body is presented in relationship to the structure it wears, the titular flutter, a theme that is taken up and complicated in its paired work, *Eros in Pursuit of the Riven Body*.

This latter is a soft sculpture created from silk chiffon and organized via horizontal pleating and a copper wire and weight suspension system. The fabric likewise serves as a corporeal surrogate, but whereas *Petrified Flutter* offers a division between the body and the manufactured embellishment, *Eros* provides a locus for multiple identities: its material and form suggest a garment; its translucence, an evacuated skin; its knife pleats, a ribcage, clavicle, and pelvis. It is soft and hard, ephemeral yet gridded and therefore quantifiable. Indeed, it is both living and dead—the shot silk reads as iridescent mauve but is comprised of two distinct thread colors, a warm golden-brown and an anemic lilac. These embodied sets of binary attributes position the work in dialogue with the historical development of feminine fashion, from the external boning of corsets to the modern internalization of the "hard body" through diet and exercise.

The sculptures, taken individually or as a complementary unit, possess a kind of aesthetic wholeness, derived, in large part, from Pressler's restraint as an artist. There is an allowance for negative space, both between and within the pieces, which plays out productively in the viewer's encounter with the works. *Eros* presents through its diaphanous surface not a dense network of organs, but a sanitized cavity to be filled. The rounded neckline visually echoes the wire mount of *Petrified Flutter*, inviting the onlooker to imaginatively insert the wooden spine into the fabric's empty form. Or—more intriguingly—the viewer can stand in the gap between the spine and skin, becoming, as Pressler suggests, Part III of the series, a participant in the work. It is an invitation to heal the sundered body by supplying one's own: the chiffon gently swinging, activated by the viewer's breath.





ALIYA A. REICH  
on Whitney Sage

As its human occupants live, love, work, play, and die within it, a city too lives and breathes a parallel life of its own. When new, its structures gleam with the pristine, modern materials of their making and stand colossal against the sky. As they age, buildings show signs of the epochs they have seen, sagging like bodies with the passage of years. Deterioration is offset by renovation in some cities, while others bear the marks of time much more brutally.

Detroit native and artist Whitney Sage explores these notions as they are manifested in the structures of her hometown. Her two works in the MFA show—both titled *My City, My Home, My Body* (2011)—could be fragments from those very structures, jagged chunks severed from the crumbling buildings of Detroit. Images of this decaying, once-prosperous homeland of Motown and Ford have become such commonplace symbols of economic recession and urban blight that they border gratuitous indulgence. Yet, seen through Sage's eyes, the structures of Detroit maintain poise and pride. The pieces are installed side-by-side, flush against the white gallery wall, and sit like exquisite scabs that bear the conspicuous evidence of their richly layered wood, plaster, and paper construction. Their rough, unrefined edges are strongly contrasted by the smooth plaster surfaces of Sage's bulging Detroit walls. Her segments are in conversation with one another; as the plaster in one swells out over the chair rail, it hollows to form deep cavities in the other, creating uneven, temporally driven rhythms of presence and absence.

Their verticality also links these conversing, undulating forms to aging human bodies. In their near-human scale, the works both evoke interiors frequented by people as well as imperfect, slumping human forms themselves. Yet, this decay is not glorified,

nor is it voyeuristically aestheticized. Rather, one gets the impression that in this work, Detroit is seen through the eyes of an insider, which is indeed what Sage is. Her work bears the scuffmarks and indentations of domestic use; these blemishes are traces of previously extant bodies. A crooked picture frame—containing a postcard of Detroit's Book Tower, a memory of a brighter era in a struggling city—is devoured by an amoebic wall. Book Tower reappears below, subtly inlaid into the florid wallpaper that is echoed in a decorative low relief in the other panel. This design is a visual staccato to an otherwise neutrally colored, smoothly surfaced work. When these details are considered, the works' signification—of Detroit, its structures, and the bodies within them, past and present—becomes apparent. In the attention to detail with which Sage has carefully, if not lovingly, constructed her works, a quiet, insistent spirit of Detroit persists through the rubble.



Whitney Sage  
*My City, My Home, My Body*, 2011  
Drywall, wood, joint compound, and ink, 84 x 32 x 6"  
*My City, My Home, My Body*, 2011  
Digitally printed wallpaper, drywall, wood, latex paint, ink, joint compound, and picture frame with postcard, 84 x 32 x 6"





Cultural constructions define our roles as people. Through our culturally constructed, repetitive actions, expectations for how a person should act can be psychologically confining. Once the body is in distress or experiencing trauma, however, one may, to survive, try to distance his or her physical body from its psychological state. A person's existence within society breaks down and the body and mind are no longer containable, leading me to question how a person reconciles experience of the two.

Through performances involving video and installation, I investigate how we deal with trauma. I define trauma as an experience or event that remains prevalent in a person's life, resulting in repetitive actions performed in order for the person to express emotions. Occasionally, a person's performed outer façade is permeated when the boundaries of emotions and logic are crossed, causing a psychological or physical breakdown, or both. How one navigates the inevitable confrontation between the physical and psychological compartments of the body becomes a challenge. In my videos, the tension and anxiety caused by watching a person undertaking a cathartic experience can provide a surrogate for the viewer.

The home, which presents itself as a safe and secure place, informs my work as I think about potential roles and trauma. Domestic spaces are used as sets for these permutations of a person's state of being. What emerges is seductive, sometimes absurd, imagery that can allow for abstract narratives.

Donna Smith  
*Cyclical*, 2011  
Digital video on DVD, 1:30 min.

Donna Smith  
*Table for One*, 2011  
Digital video on DVD, 4:13 min.











## CONTRIBUTORS

**John Talbott Allen**, MFA Visual Art 2011, is from Louisville, KY. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Kentucky in 2008.

**Meghan Bean**, MFA Visual Art 2011, is a multimedia artist from Cedar Rapids, IA. Her work focuses mainly on issues relating to the body and contemporary feminist theory.

**Shira Berkowitz**, MFA Visual Art 2011, is an installation and new media artist constructing spaces that confront issues of the Israeli / Palestinian conflict, loss, and intimacy. In 2011 she was recognized for professional development by the Graduate Professional Counsel for cocurating the art exhibition *Fox and Hedgehog*.

**Darrick Byers**, MFA Visual Art 2011, graduated with a BA in studio art from Hanover College. Working with the Institute for Progressive Humanities has solidified his belief that the encompassing nature of art allows the discipline to efficiently flow between rigid academic barriers. With proper visioning, this new means of production may engage diverse constituents through creative, socially-conscious actions. Byers is dedicated to educating children through arts-integrated curricula and is currently also working on his master's in education at Indiana University.

**Jisun Choi**, MFA Visual Art 2011, is originally from Seoul, South Korea. She addresses personal issues of cultural displacement through the use of performance, video, and sound.

**Zlatko Ćosić**, MFA Visual Art 2011, is a video artist and filmmaker. He was born in Banja Luka, former Yugoslavia, and began his experimental filmmaking in 1995 at Belgrade's Academic Film Center. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Video Production and Interactive Digital Media from Webster University. Ćosić currently lives in St. Louis and works as a multimedia producer and artist creating films, public projections, video installations, theater projections, and live multimedia performances. Examples of his work can be seen at [www.zlatkocosic.com](http://www.zlatkocosic.com).

**James R. Daniels**, MFA Visual Art 2011, specializes in sculpture and mixed media. He is a Laura and William Jens Scholar recipient at Washington University and in 2009 was the visiting artist to Pfeiffer University in North Carolina.

**Kara Daving**, MFA Visual Art 2011, was born in Buffalo, NY, in 1982. She graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Bowling Green State University in 2004. Her recent work explores political narratives and abstraction through a sculpture and painting discourse. Prior to graduate school, Daving was selected for Albright-Knox Art Gallery's *Beyond / In Western NY Biennial*, and exhibited work in Buffalo, New York City, Toronto, Las Vegas, Atlanta, and Honolulu.

**Andrea Degener**, MFA Visual Art 2011, specializes in photography.

**Kristin Fleischmann**, MFA Visual Art 2011, specializes in painting, sculpture, and material play. She is graduating as a Mr. and Mrs. Spencer T. Olin Fellow and was awarded a solo exhibition at the Craft Alliance to exhibit her MFA thesis work.



**William Frank**, MFA Visual Art 2011, practices with prints, drawings, and glass, and currently lives in St. Louis, where he works for Emil Frei and Associates Stained Glass.

**Nicholas Kania**, MFA Visual Art 2011, creates artwork about the American South.

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**Maggie Stanley Majors**, PhD in Germanic Languages & Literatures 2012, focuses on borders, identity, and the relationships of media and imagination to travel. In 2005 she completed a Fulbright Fellowship to Ilmenau, Germany.  
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**Katherine McCullough**, MFA Visual Art 2011, creates painting installations that explore the relationships between formalism and the ontology of line, repetition, and architecture. Her work was published in *New American Paintings*, MFA Annual, #93.

**Jordan McGirk**, MFA Visual Art 2011, is from Rockton, IL. His large-scale oil paintings typically investigate the relationships between paint, violence, and the kinetic body.

**Zachary Miller**, MFA Visual Art 2011, has concentrated in painting, with a thesis focused on color in art and consumer packaging. He is currently represented by the Schoolhouse Gallery in Provincetown, MA.

**Esther Murphy**, MFA Visual Art 2011, focuses primarily in photography.

**Kathryn Neale**, MFA Visual Art 2011, was awarded the Belle Cramer Graduate Art Award, as well as the Louise Roblee McCarthy Scholar and Helen Faibish Memorial Scholarships for 2009–2011. In 2008, Neale graduated with an MA in Painting and Drawing from Eastern Illinois University and also received her BA from Principia College in Art and Graphic Design in 2003. Neale is represented by Bruno David Gallery in St. Louis and in 2009 had a solo show in the Project Front Room as an upcoming artist.

**Melissa Olson**, PhD in Germanic Languages & Literatures and Comparative Literatures 2014, investigates early twentieth-century visual culture in Weimar Germany, including film and poster art. Her work examines the intersection between nature and technology in modern aesthetics.  
PP. 46, 51

**Christopher Ottinger**, MFA Visual Art 2011, is a native of St. Louis and came to Washington University after spending 12 years in Chicago, where he received a BA from Columbia College Chicago in Film / Video and worked at the motion picture lab Filmworkers / Astro on many high-profile projects, including *Batman: The Dark Knight*. He opened his own recording studio, Heartkill Studios, in 2005, and has written and self-produced several full-length records and other sound projects, as well as engineering and producing albums for dozens of accomplished musicians.

**Maia Palmer**, MFA Visual Art 2011, is currently working on a series of animated portraits inspired by in-depth conversations held with various participants in St. Louis.

**Nicole Petrescu**, MFA Visual Art 2011, was born in Bucharest, Romania, and lived more than half of her life trying to escape—physically and psychologically—the influence of the communist regime. She graduated from Washington University in 2009 with a BFA in Painting, and has since established Washington University's *Art and Community Project*, partnering with community art organizations such as Art Saint Louis, Artworks, and others.

**Lauren Pressler**, MFA Visual Art 2011, was born in Berkeley, CA, in 1986. She graduated with a BA in Studio Art and History from Willamette University in 2008. Pressler has exhibited in multiple venues on the West Coast, including the Oregon Jewish Museum and the Hallie Ford Museum of Art.

**Aliya A. Reich**, MA Art History & Archaeology 2012, is concentrating primarily on French art between 1870 and 1920; her research interest is in international artistic and cultural exchanges and religion. She ultimately hopes to make a career in the museum world and will be interning at the National Gallery in the summer of 2011.  
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**Bryce Olen Robinson**, MFA Visual Art 2011, spent his undergraduate years studying communal insects such as termites, ants, and bees. It is only within the last few years that he has begun exploring direct artistic engagement with communities through collaborative work. Robinson sees the Institute for Progressive Humanities (IPH) as a vehicle for high-impact community projects with the capacity to generate significant aesthetic, cultural, and educational benefit for the immediate stakeholders and beyond.

**Whitney Sage**, MFA Visual Art 2011, is a mixed-media artist. She received Bachelor's degrees in Painting and Art Education from Miami University in 2008. Whitney is from Farmington Hills, MI, and was recently featured in the group exhibition *Detroit: A Brooklyn Case Study* at Superfront Gallery in Los Angeles.

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**Lawrence Ypil**, MFA Creative Writing 2012, grew up in Cebu, Philippines. His first collection of poems, *The Highest Hiding Place* (Ateneo de Manila University Press), was published in 2009.  
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## SAM FOX SCHOOL OF DESIGN & VISUAL ARTS

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Today's vastly expanded context for art-making requires artists to understand various modes of critical analysis and strategies of production, distribution, and reception of creative work. The Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts is an interdisciplinary and diverse community of architects, artists, and designers dedicated to excellence in learning, creative activity, research, and exhibition. The School's unique structure allows it to build on the strengths of each unit—Art, Architecture, and Museum—and to draw on the resources of Washington University.

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throughout the program, and prepares them to incite progressive social change and assume their roles as global citizens.


As a collaborative project between the Graduate School of Art and the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, this publication presents twenty-four artists whose creative work thoughtfully confronts the challenges and optimistically engages the possibilities of our world.

MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM

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