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Ewing Gallery of Art & Architecture

Art

2018

2018 MFA Thesis Exhibitions

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, School of Art

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MARYANNE CAREY

CASSIDY FRYE

AMY LEFEVER

ALEX MCKENZIE

ERICA MENDOZA

AUSTIN PRATT

CHRISTIAN VARGAS

JOHANNA WINTERS

TOM WIXO

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

2018 EXHIBITION CATALOG

SCHOOL OF ART

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

MFA THESIS EXHIBITIONS 2018



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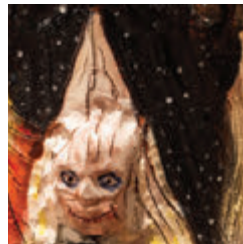
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CATALOG DESIGN meg erlewine

FORWARD

Three years ago, the nine artists in this stellar 2018 MFA class — MaryAnne Carey, Cassidy Frye, Amy LeFever, Alex McKenzie, Erica Mendoza, Austin Pratt, Christian Vargas, Johanna Winters, and Tom Wixo — began a challenging process, the culmination of which is presented in this series of exceptional exhibitions. As a whole, these exhibitions engage us in a conversation among distinct voices and individual approaches. In a larger context, they embody the potential of transformative discovery in contemporary art.

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

These artists now join a growing community of MFA graduates from the School of Art at the University of Tennessee. They will continue to be active agents in shaping the future of creative expression. We thank them for joining us and look forward to witnessing the fruits of their imagination.

David Wilson

Professor

Director

School of Art



maryanne carey
SECURITY UNIT

NOTE FROM:

THE SECURITY UNIT

SALUTATIONS!

WE HOPE THAT YOU ARE ENJOYING YOUR TIME INVESTIGATING OUR SPACE AND CONGRUENTLY WE WANT TO TAKE THIS MOMENT TO TELL YOU ABOUT OUR MOTIVATIONS! TOGETHER WE HAVE A DEEP SEEDED ETHICAL AMBITION TO RADIATE LUMINOUS ENERGY TO DESTRUCTIVE SPACES. WE ARE BEINGS THAT FIGHT OFF AMBIVALENCE WITH GESTURES OF LEVITY. WE WERE SPONTANEOUSLY BORN OF THIS MOMENT BUT OUR POWERS ARE NOT TIED TO TIME — WE MATERIALIZE IN THE LIMINAL VOIDS OF DARK[FALSE] OPTIMISM AND BRIGHT[HONEST] PESSIMISM. OUR DUTIES ARE DICTATED IN OPPOSITION TO COMMODITIES CRAFTED THROUGH DESTRUCTION. WE BELIEVE THAT OUR SYMBOLIC METHODS CAN CREATE A ROUSING ENERGY THAT EXTENDS TO OTHERS. SOME MAY CALL US TRAGICOMIC BUT WE ENDORSE THE LABEL - THERE IS PERVASIVE TRAGEDY IN THIS EXISTENCE AND IN ATTEMPTING TO CREATE A MEANINGFUL PURPOSE WE HAVE FUN BEING THE GREATER FOOL. THE GREATER FOOL BELIEVES THAT SHE CAN RAISE THE VALUE OF A ITEM OR DEED BY BELIEVING AND INVESTING IN IT IN ORDER TO ELEVATE ITS CONSTRUCTED VALUE. SHE BELIEVES THAT SHE WILL SUCCEED WHERE OTHERS HAVE FAILED — WE UPHOLD AND HONOR THIS BELIEF!





cassidy frye

PUSHING AND PULLING OVERWORKED SURFACES

Pushing and Pulling Overworked Surfaces is an indication of a fragmented incomplete home. A space where something is missing but you are attempting to uncover what is absent. The materials appear raw but every surface has been worked over in an effort to hide its imperfections. We try to give spaces a quick uniform clean appearance but not everything can be whitewashed. Often relocation is seen as a fresh start but the past cannot be forgotten. No matter how much white paint we put on the surface the memories are still there reminding you of the people, places, and events that have become part of you.

The two major parts of a building are the foundation, and the part above the foundation, the superstructure.

A frame building is one in which the skeleton of the superstructure consists of a framework of wooden structural members. This framework is called the framing of the building, and the framing is divided into floor framing, wall framing, and roof framing.

I am a house but I am not a home.

The size of the house, width and length, should be such that the standard-length joists and rafters and standard spacing can be used without wasting materials.

All of the connections have been made between person 1 from house A to person 2 and person 3 from house B. Thinking about leaving places I fall in love with them from the memories and the possibilities.

I am a house but I am not a home.

Partition walls are walls that divide the inside space of a building. The nonbearing type supports only itself.

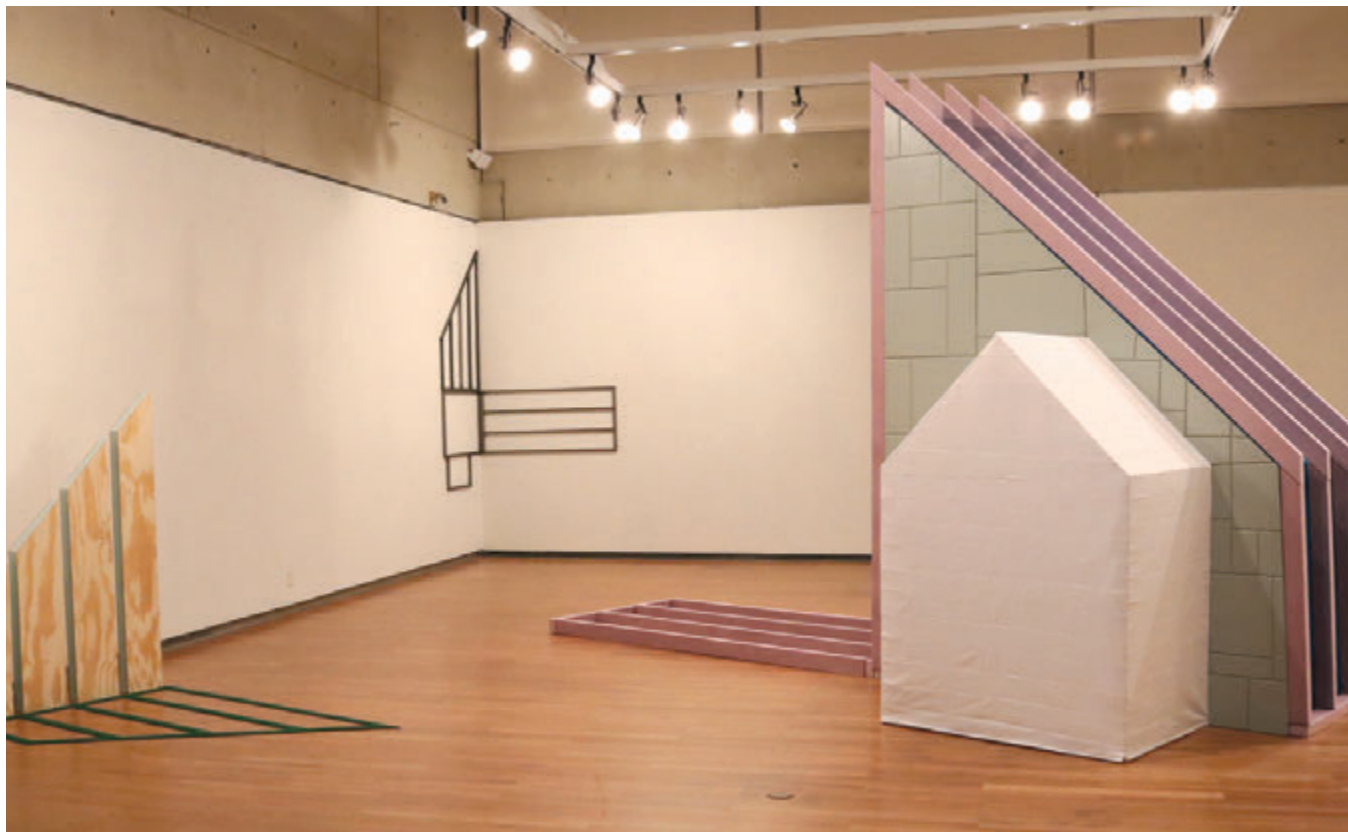
Seeing the city appear and disappear sums up a lifetime of memories. All of those huge memories based on locations and incidents turn into minuscule lights and marks.

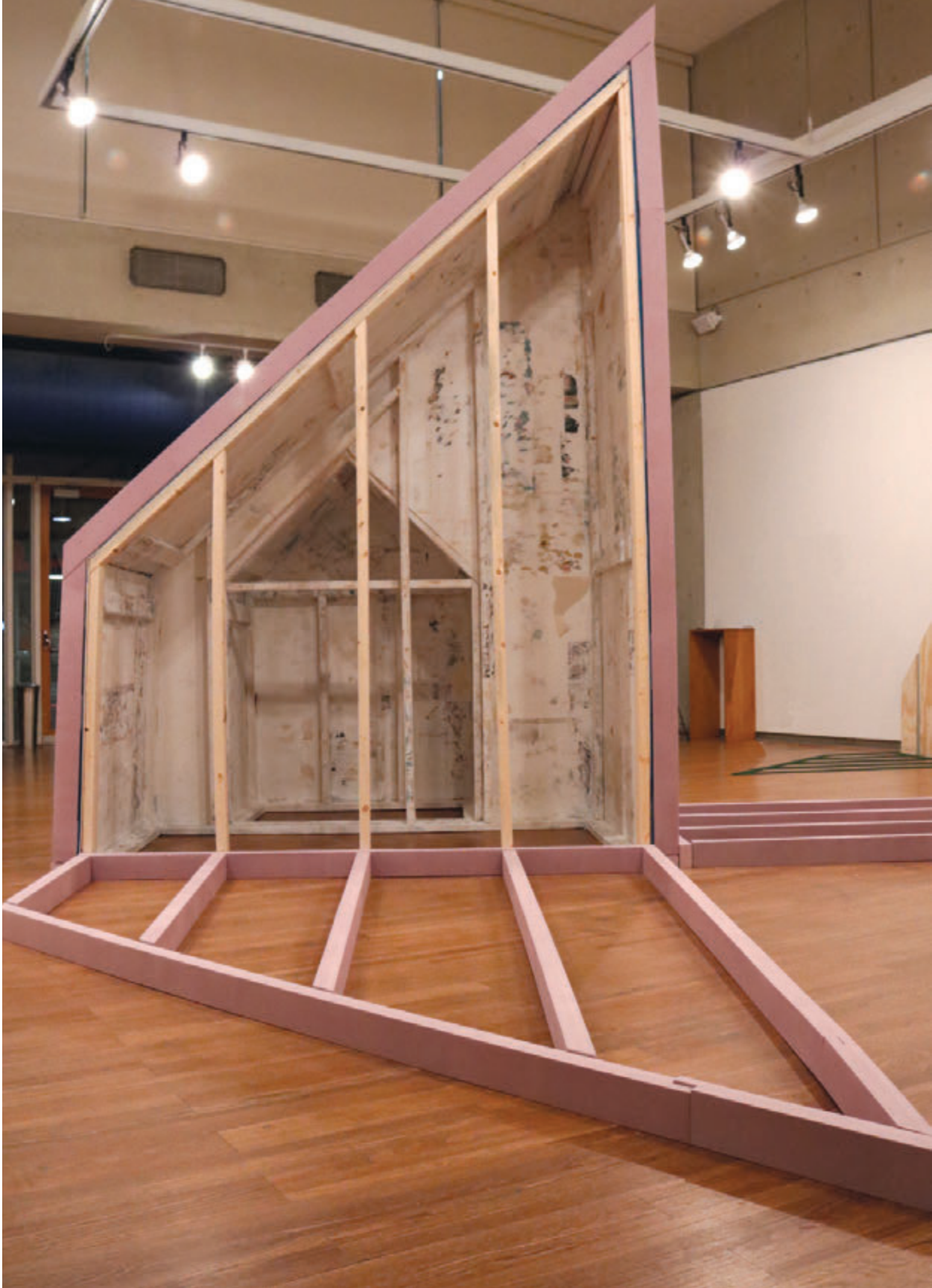
I am a house but I am not a home.

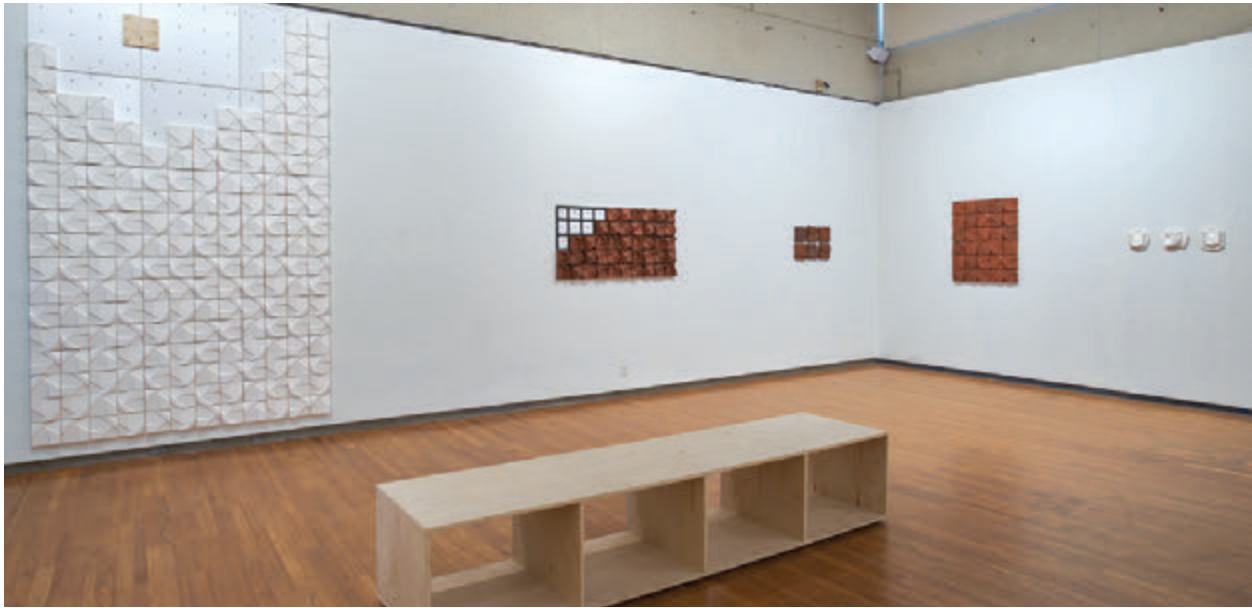
The type and grade of materials used in a house can vary greatly. It is poor practice to use a low grade or inferior material that could later result in excessive maintenance.

I am a house but I am not a home.









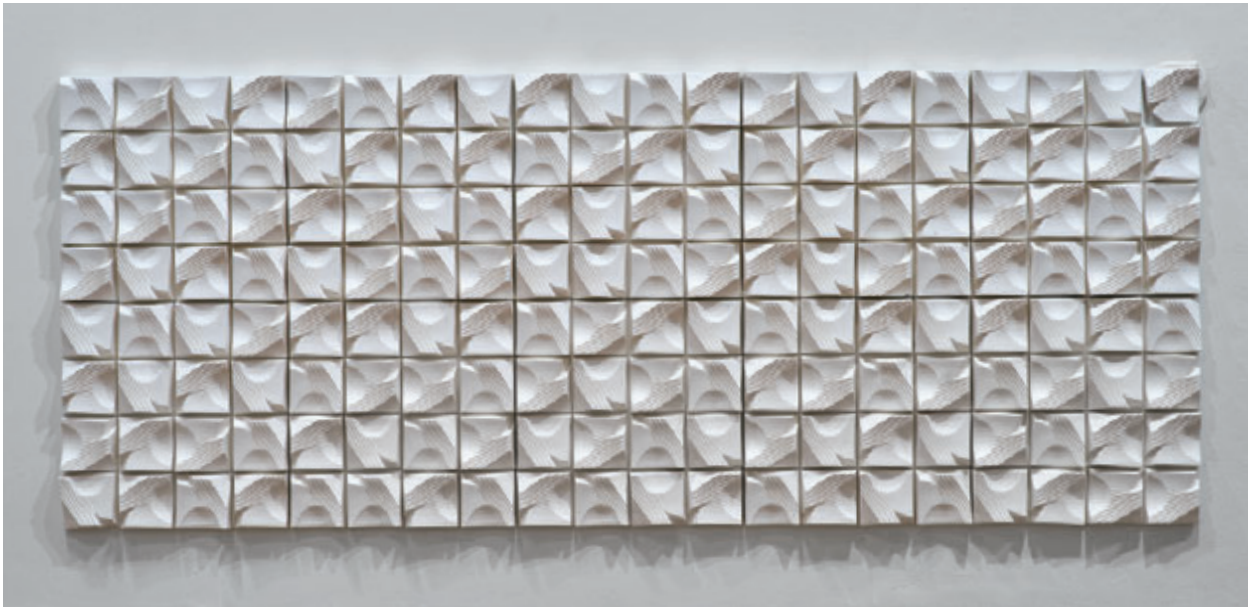
amy lefever

COUNTERPOINT

Arched fingers fall onto keys with weight and precision.
A crisp, tight-metered melody forms.
After a few phrases, the single line splits
into two.

The first recedes, granting dominance to the second.
The two weave and tumble across
and through each other—two distinct melodies
meeting at points to form harmonies.

More layers—and
The sound swells in richness and complexity,
as each layer holds its own weight. Pushing forward,
falling back,
the phrases call out and echo one another,
simultaneously working independently and cohesively.



I don't like words meddling in my studio practice. I think I hate them and have fought battles with them. I think they ask the wrong questions, and give the wrong answers. I think they make things too concrete, too black and white. That they trivialize joy and strip the dignity and truth from the rawness of pain and grief. That they don't deserve a place in my studio.

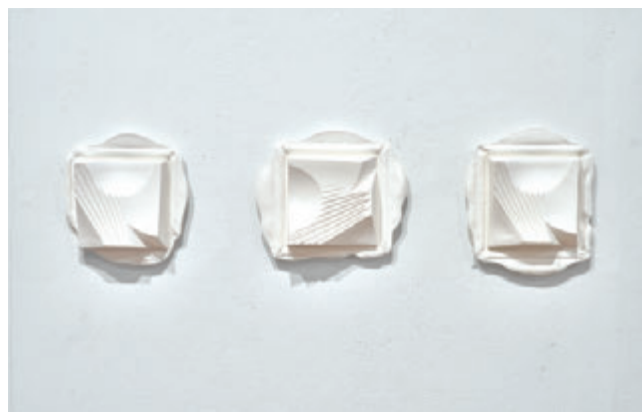
Yet here I am; struggling to make sense of my work, of my practice. Using. Words.

Perhaps the best way to understand my work and studio practice is to listen closely to Bach's Fugue in G Minor and allow yourself to follow the individual melodies, to float between them, focusing on one, then another. To be in the foreground, then quietly slip to the background, teasing apart the complexity of sound into small bits and phrases that repeat and echo.

And here I am, sidestepping words yet again (while simultaneously using them), wanting to allow music to make sense of my work.

In its simplest form, my work and life operate in counterpoint—"The technique of combining two or more melodic lines in such a way that establishes a harmonic relationship while retaining their linear individuality" (American Heritage® Dictionary). As such, there is an ongoing dialogue between my life experience and work, yet it remains unencumbered by narrative.

Severed and shifted
Fragmented Broken
yet whole





alex mckenzie
AGAIN AGAIN

A word repeated 100 times breaks down phonetically. As auditory perception changes, meaning is separated and a word as simple as “dog” can sound foreign. This semantic satiation acknowledges that repetition is not always sameness but can be understood as a form of change and detachment.

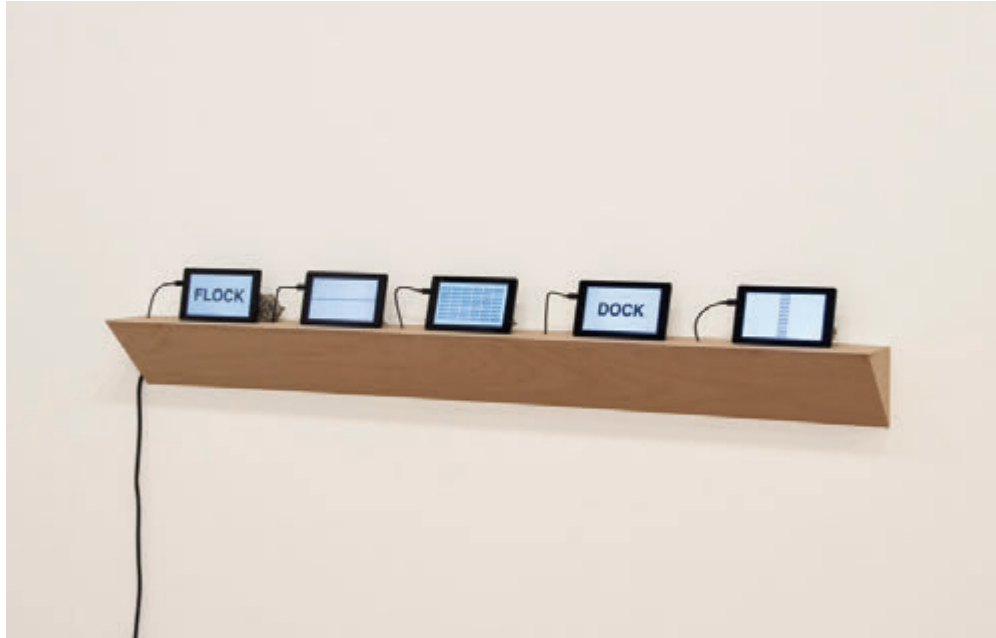
My practice utilizes transmission as both a medium and subject. Working with a range of audio equipment, I loosely use this term to refer to ideas and issues relating to communication technologies as a whole.

McLuhan’s popular notion “the medium is the message” acknowledges that the manner in which we are presented content through these various communication technologies can affect the way we identify with or distrust information. Today, the consequences of rapid content exchange, “fake news,” and information bubbles are becoming more and more apparent, ultimately reaffirming this sentiment. The rate of information exchange leaves many of us feeling powerless. It can be isolating and force a sense of doubt in relation to belief, ideology, and self-image. The information overload is much like (the aforementioned) semantic satiation; repetition can lead to detachment.

Again Again is a multi-state* audio installation that manipulates sound through a continual process of transmission and reception. Centered around the rhythmic ticking of a clock, the installation functions as both a recorded auditory circuit and a feedback loop. Over the course of the exhibition the initial ticking is recorded, played back, and re-recorded multiple times such that the original input is dissolved through its own accumulation and repetition. The rhythmic becomes tonal in a process that seeks transformation through reiteration.

**in reference to a system, process, or state of being*







erica mendoza
PRIVACY SETTINGS

Privacy Settings is shouting aloud
everything you've kept to yourself for so long.

It's remembering the sand between your toes,
but still feeling the grit in your teeth.

It's every toss and turn
that feels like a looping procession of yesterdays
and more yesterdays.

It's when you try to fix something
and it still doesn't work
or you've made it worse.

So how do you pick up the pieces of what's left
when your hands and your body feel like a sieve
that could never hold anything?

Could you allow yourself to let them go?











austin pratt

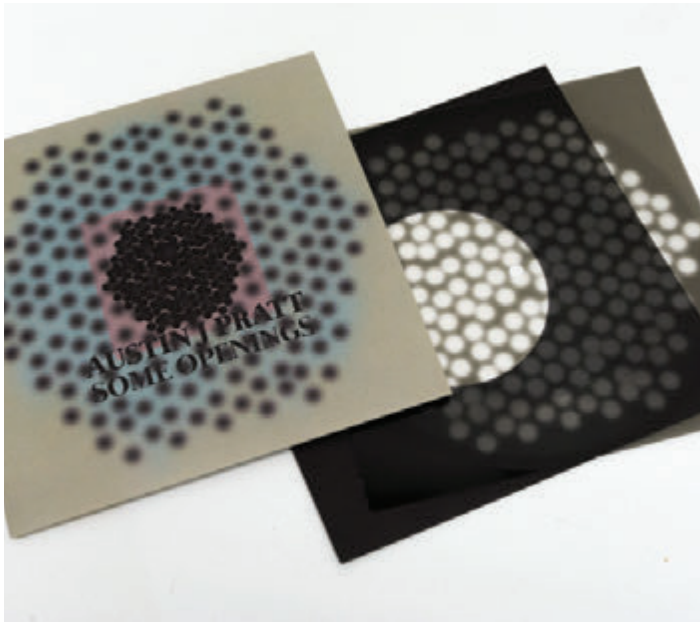
SOME OPENINGS

This exhibition has two major parts; a set of open-ended and generative questions, and a few subjective ways of answering them. Part of my practice concerns the importance of how to engage in wild, associative, and lateral thinking while remaining centered in my own body, time, and space. Synthesizing interests in perception psychology, consciousness research, and meditation with my background in a punk band in a basement in the high desert, my work often utilizes the languages of art and psychology, such as color perception and gestalt principles to opine on the limitations of the dominant pervading worldview, and romantic ideation of other possible options. Playing at the borders of legibility between signal/noise, pattern/insignificance, and figure/ground, much of my work concerns subverting or collapsing dualities, and

obfuscating temporal history and causality to create meaningful ambiguity, and stimulate nuance in a world that continues to demand division and simplicity. I work toward a place where the granular detail is highly considered; a kind of quantum synecdoche, self-referencing and recursive, where parts stand for the whole, and the whole is denser and more expansive than the sum of its parts.

By emphasizing or disrupting our inclination toward image and pattern, the work allows room to consider what we believe are givens. Through allowing these novel associations, our worlds can become more refreshingly expansive, excitingly stranger, and more poetically meaningful.

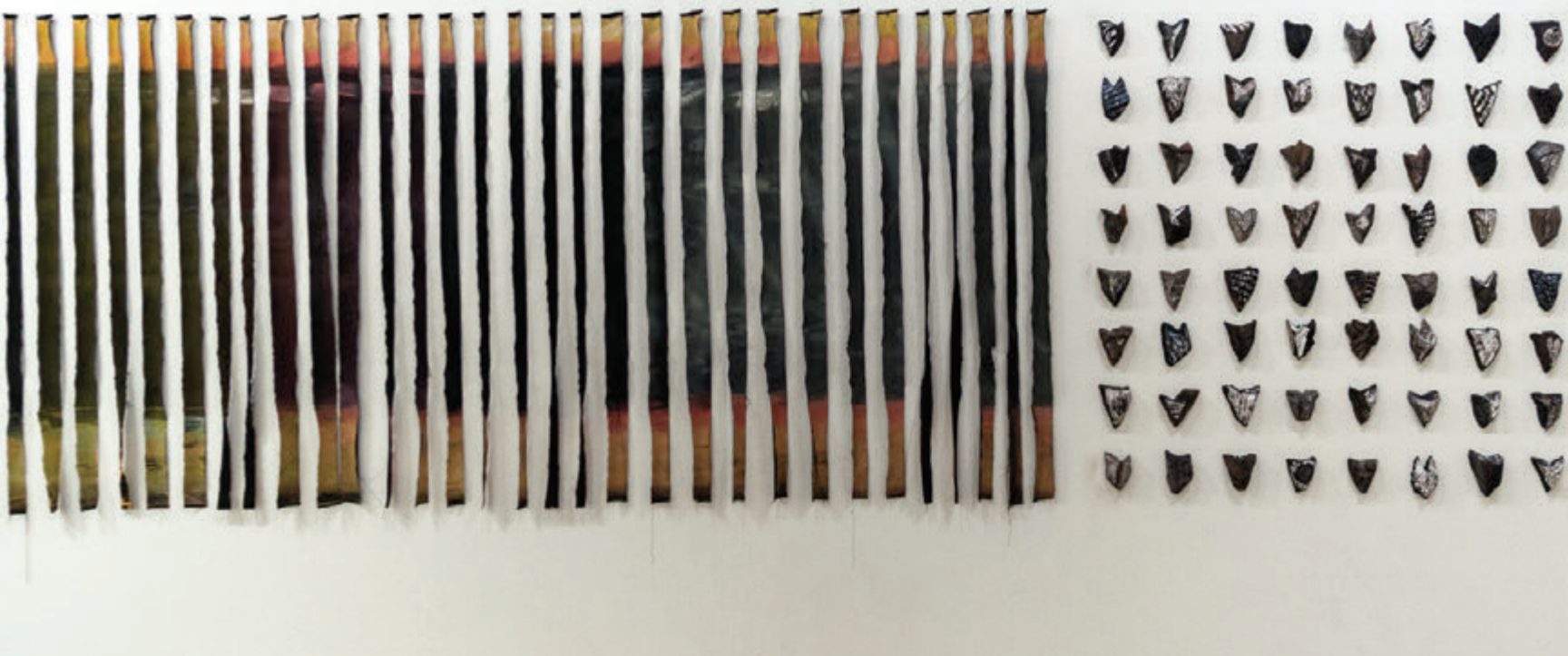




Pressed on a seven-inch flexi-disc record, “Some Openings” shares context in Zen Buddhist kans, punk dispassion, industrial noise, inward-looking mantra, outward-facing provocation, magical language, and the history of permutation, concrete, and mystical poetry. The recording is a six-minute reading of 192 distinct questions I generated which require answers beyond a yes-no binary and are all communally engaged, present tense, forward thinking, and action oriented.



These objective and process oriented questions are met with my own subjective “answers,” in the form of existing songs that read as a kind of a primer in the crossover regions of psychedelia, punk, highway troubadours, inner travelers, and Romantics. Serving as placeholders or hyperlinks towards symbols or heuristic openings into greater and numinous world views, the cassette tapes become a part of the initiatory process of sharing knowledge.



Idiosyncratic mark-making — whether in painting, ceramics, or in the installation, serves as an index of my own hand, touch, and presence, yet also as an evocation of semi-legible or mutable visual forms: sagebrush, rock formations, handwriting, drawing, figuration, devils, hearts, teeth, the ubiquitous “goat head” thorns found in Nevada.

christian vargas

TIANGUIS

The altar is gone and is now replaced by the display, resembling a swap meet stall, an ethnographic exhibit, a voyeuristic view into the beliefs, interests, social class, and biases of its quintessential vendor. The vendor wears a mask. Identity is conjectural and not essential, the vendor wears a mask and does not speak. The display is a collage of chaos, filled with objects that inherit within their veneers hold the history and interest of individuals. They are cross-cultural representations, multigenerational memorabilia, suspended objects caught in the fog of memory.

Unfortunately nostalgia holds no charm, and is easily overcome by necessity. The objects are sold, and sold at a loss. Entrapped in this act is the loss of value, belief and faith. The display is an attempt toward ecdysis.

These objects enter the space of display not for the purpose of being exhibited; rather, they become stripped of value in the act of being displayed away from their primary intention and function. The exhibited objects lose their intentional value, becoming open to interpretation and adoption. Adoption becomes assimilation, and assimilation becomes symbolic appropriation. The objects' loss of value is threefold. Aside from losing its intentional function, its "utilitarian value" as well economic value (being sold at a loss), the third and most

important aspect is the loss of history. This is embedded in the very act of purchase (adoption); the moment the object is no longer the property of the vendor, ecdysis is complete.

Within the arena of display "the arrangement" is of utmost importance. Objects are susceptible to inventive recombination and juxtaposition. Hybrid objects placed next to each other begin to unravel the layers of its vendor. It is this very juxtaposition that heightens the symbolic meaning and layers the narrative. With layered meaning comes layered materials, and layered history. Thus, the bundle sells better.

It is better, but it is not a "deal." Within the display no one object is more valuable than any other, there is no hierarchy, there is no religion, nor attachment and meaning thus, becomes fluid. To compose and recompose, to arrange and rearrange is to continually question the objects' hierarchies and relationships to one another. The bundle is to level the playing field, and flatten importance. More does not mean, more in this case, it is just simply an abandonment of distinction between high and low culture.







johanna winters

THE MIDDLE TELL

The Middle Tell is a shadow-puppet performance, video projection, and sound piece that chronicles a trio of female bards as they reluctantly surrender to a deteriorating condition. These *middle women* reveal their story through a muted language of hinging limbs and dousing light. A barrier of screens encloses them in-between performers and audience — a middle space defined by cast shadows. Suspended in a time that is both passing and returning, sustaining and releasing, the *middle women* hover in a state of hesitation between undoing their youth and summoning the process of aging. They are neither bitter nor tolerant of their inevitable decline — they tepidly hinge against and toward it.

This work addresses the lack in popular understanding of female desire, and how it is enacted, inhibited, sustained, and diminished over a lifetime. *The Middle Tell* reclaims this account — it is both a dispatch about the anxieties of aging women and their shame, vanity, restraint, disappointment, and pleasure, and a confrontation of the social conditioning that perpetuates the repression of female sexuality, empowerment, and agency. The *middle women* are harbingers of this quiet yet sincere release of anguish.

THE MIDDLE TELL







tom wixo

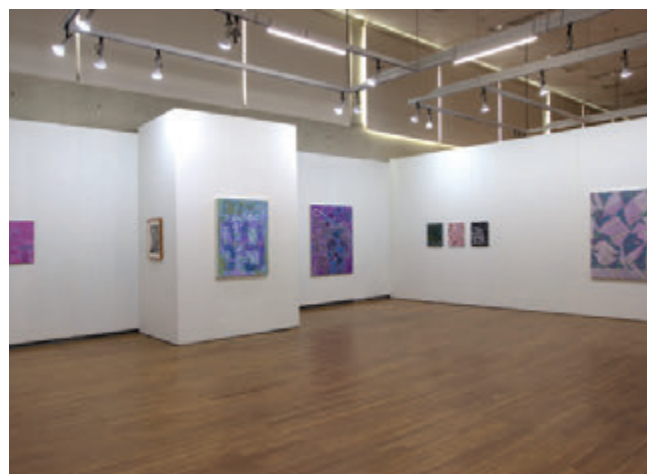
COWARD OF THE COUNTY

Weaving together images of struggling male hockey players through a mantric drawing practice, my work remains situated between the existential endeavor of looking for meaning in the hopeless, and the heroic effort of generating substance from the mundane. Rather than defining outcomes, each painting serves as a surface for repeating, regenerating and obfuscating symbols of fragile masculinity, arriving at uncertain meanings cradled by the paintings' surface. Just as the game of hockey is defined by physicality, the figures in the paintings are unable to escape the chaos of the conflict — knowing all the while that these very planes also construct the parameters of definition. The figures become both metaphor for, and distraction from, one's own struggle for meaning in an age of...distraction.

Behind the singular surface of the painting lies a system of fractured pictorial planes. These fragmented planes become the vulnerable space in which the viewer begins to generate meaning. Rejecting the modernist imposition of a Cartesian grid, each painting remains in a constant state of becoming, while an ever-elusive meaning is negotiated among pictorial planes, positive/negative space, and an apparent duality of symbolic language. As forms begin to identify themselves, they are undone by their opposite; form becomes line, positive space becomes negative, meaning becomes uncertainty, certainty becomes doubt. My slow searching for this negotiation amid fast, flat-footed, and repetitive images

naturally emphasizes the practice of mark making over other tools for meaning making. Small, soft, passages of paint and graphite declare an overly sentimental dedication to a set of motifs interested in violent gestures of heroic masculinity. Begging for a pause for these moments to be understood prior to their inevitable destruction through critique and applied identity politics. In the pause, the fragility of the mark presents itself as the representation of intimacy felt in moments of masculine competition. Oscillating between representation and a camouflaged abstraction, the work flips back and forth between trusting ideas of heroism, greatness, masculinity, and hope with total sincerity and laughable irony. Virtue and ideology are held up in the highest esteem, even as they become fluid slipping through the fingers of both *artist* and *viewer*.

As the motifs repeat they too become fluid. Ironic cynicism becomes a practiced vulnerability before evolving into an earnest plurality of meaning. Within this cycle, bridges to the viewer are burnt even as they are built. Following the repetitive, circular narrative, it becomes apparent that multiple outcomes are necessary to reconcile a meaning for the *painter* with a meaning for the *viewer*. In this effort the work remains quixotic as it destroys its own order of meaning. The work remains known and mysterious, descriptive and elusive, masculine and fragile.







**THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE'S MFA PROGRAM
IS RANKED #15 AMONG
PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AND
PRINTMAKING IS RANKED
#2 OVERALL BY U.S. NEWS
AND WORLD REPORT. MFA
STUDENTS WORK CLOSELY
WITH FACULTY IN SMALL
STUDIO CLASSES AND
PARTICIPATE IN REGULAR
CRITIQUES, STUDIO VISITS,
AND SCHOOL-WIDE GRADUATE
REVIEWS. IN ADDITION, MFA
STUDENTS TAKE ADVANTAGE
OF UNIVERSITY-WIDE
GRADUATE COURSES THAT
RELATE TO AND EXPAND
THEIR CREATIVE HORIZONS.**

THE MFA PROGRAM

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

The MFA program includes workshops and lectures that cover the fundamental skills artists and designers need to develop and sustain a professional life. Embedded in the common curriculum are experiences that help our students to plan, promote, fund, organize, and build community as part of their creative practice. Students work closely with the 23 Art, Design, and Art History professors as well as with each other. The three-year degree gives students time to research, experiment, and hone their practice. The final year is devoted to working on a thesis project that will serve as a career springboard.

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

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

ORANGE

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

THE EWING GALLERY

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

UT DOWNTOWN GALLERY

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

GALLERY 1010

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

LIFE IN KNOXVILLE

Knoxville has a population of more than 180,000 and is home to an Urban Wilderness of 1,000 forested acres with 112 miles of paved greenways and natural trails, plus lake and river access. Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a 45-minute drive away. Knoxville is also home to Big Ears, a world-renowned avant-garde festival for music, film, performance, and the visual arts.

WE ARE AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

Successful creative thinking requires the perspectives of diverse people. For this reason, the School of Art strives to be an inclusive community, defined by respect and civility without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical or mental disability, genetic information, veteran, and parental status. True diversity is defined not merely as differences in individual backgrounds, personal identities, intellectual approaches and demographics; it is also the removal of barriers and the creation of space that allows individuals to fully engage, freely think, and creatively explore.



School of Art Contact Information

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