

it can begin with clouds

01 November - 15 December 2019

MICA Faculty Exhibition

curated by John Ros

David Cloutier

Alfonso Fernandez-Vazquez

Kottie Gaydos

Barbara Gruber

Fabienne Lasserre

Giulia Livi

Ursula West Minervini

Janet Olney

Renée Rendine

Jann Rosen-Queralt

Lynn Silverman & Jason Sloan

Antoinette Suiter

i.

The day awaits – an empty stage of action and reaction. As an invasive species we assert ourselves on every surface possible. We press on surfaces to find meaning; to declare and to define. Our evolutionary propensity to question and explore, shapes our perceptions of experiences and determines the stories we tell, as we plot how to press on the surface of our contemporary moment.

it can begin with clouds

Juan Felipe Herrera

it can begin with clouds how they fray how they enter
then how they envelop the earth
in a second or two they vanish you
touch them they take you you find yourself in their absence
sometimes you read them somehow
the separation the losses the sky yes
it is the sky they were talking about the character for sky
you are there now
you have always been there now
where there is fine and
thunder-face behind the torn universe you can see this
how it shreds itself so you can see this that
is all there is then
nothing again then you again and the clouds
come to you and you pass⁰¹

What is it about clouds that engage our attempt to find likeness? Is it possibility? Ego? Our need to categorize and place things together, in action or commentary, is omnipresent. Herrera's poem, from which this exhibition takes its title, ruminates on this process with loss and hope – fear and longing – like mirror wrapped-nostalgia, clearly coded to resemble memory. Or is it a glimpse into our future? Regardless, process, time and passing fill the air in a way that is relentlessly human.

ii.

Curatorially, I am interested in moments of discourse – visual segues into discussion about larger topics that stretch throughout the fine arts vernacular and preferably beyond. These moments are set into motion by the artist in the studio – the walk begins here. From studio to exhibition, broader conversations can emerge. Dynamics materialize. Interpretation develops meaning. Intent solidifies assumptions or negates them. To press is a push of color – a melodic tick – flash of light, dark – an intentional pause. Congruous interventions press against (and sometimes with) space in order to set the scene. I imagine an explosion in reverse, everything slowly being put back together piece by piece. A spectator must witness, then press, the surface in her own way to see how it gives.

For the practitioner, time and contemplation in and out of the studio can solidify clarity, bring gestures to life and expose intent, necessity, or reaction. These victories are at times hard-fought, and at others, come in a glimpse – almost beautifully forgettable. Time forms sensible and insensible solutions and unmask the nonsensical which intimates at the possibilities ahead.

The instability of the journey is at the heart of the creative process. Questions such as "What is it that we do?" and "How is it we come to do these things?" are consequential and need revisiting. Where and when we press upon these questions will determine necessity and urgency. Cuban artist Tania Bruguera clarifies in her *Manifesto on Artists' Rights*:

Art is not a luxury. Art is a basic social need to which everyone has a right.

Artists not only have the right to dissent, but the duty to do so.

Without the possibility to dissent, an artist becomes an administrator of technical goods, behaves like a consumption manufacturer and transforms into a jester. It is a sad society where this is all social awareness creates.

Artistic expression is a space to challenge meanings, to defy what is imaginable. This is what, as times goes by, is recognized as culture.

Critical thinking is a civic right which becomes evident in artistic practices. That is why, when threatened, we should not talk of censorship, but of the violation of artists' rights.⁰²

The role of the artist is a serious one. Society often cloaks our activities in romantic stereotypes and haphazard dalliances, but in reality our survival is negotiated through the ways our culture presses on us, what it demands and how we press back.

The artist is distinguished from all other responsible actors in society – the politicians, legislators, educators, and scientists – by the fact that he is his own test tube, his own laboratory, working according to very rigorous rules, however unstated these may be, and cannot allow any consideration to supersede his responsibility to reveal all that he can possibly discover concerning the mystery of the human being. Society must accept some things as real; but he must always know that visible reality hides a deeper one, and that all our action and achievement rest on things unseen. A society must assume that it is stable, but the artist must know, and he must let us know, that there is nothing stable under heaven. One cannot possibly build a school, teach a child, or drive a car without taking some things for granted. The artist cannot and must not take anything for granted, but must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides.⁰³

We must know when to emerge, poke our heads out. We must know when to connect with community and when to safeguard our time. We must know that time and space are not forever and that they are forever. We must be comfortable with contradiction. We must be contradiction.

iii.

To place these notes as part of the picture within the academy, we must consider how the institution can help and hinder. When I think of the academy I think of hierarchy and power. There can be genuine purpose and consideration when intent is empathetic, impassioned and caring – love comes to mind. However, it can also quickly go wrong when it is ill-serving and ego filled.

The undergraduate experience is one that helps shape who we will become. It is a time to explore possibilities and to see potential in everything; a surface, material, sound, taste, texture, motion. These present themselves when we are ready and especially when we are not. Devoted time in undergraduate study invites us to see and understand when and how these moments reveal themselves. Graduate work has the added bonus of not only honing these abilities but learning how to share them. These experiences must then be guided by devoted practitioners across an array of disciplines that help broaden our own understandings as students by challenging our seeing, our making – our being.

This exhibition offers but a glimpse of these hard-working and multi-faceted artists, dedicated to their own fine art practice, while sharing with a broad range of learners. As professors, our audience expands beyond the public cultural sphere and into the classroom. These moments are precious and unforgettable. They shape our understanding of the world, allow the development of understanding and if we are all lucky, a little bit of empathy. At its best, this is what higher education is about.

– john ros 2019 / studio@johnros.com

-
01. Herrera, Juan Felipe. *Notes on the Assemblage*. City Lights Books, 2015. / p. 13.
 02. Liese, Jennifer. *Social Medium Artists Writing, 2000-2015*. Paper Monument, 2017.
Manifesto on Artists' Rights by Tania Bruguera / pp. 89-94.
 03. Baldwin, James. *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985*. St. Martins, 1999. / pp. 315-318.

iv.

NOTES ON ARTISTS

The sigh is the pathway to breath: it allows breathing. That's just self-preservation. No one fabricates that. You sit down, you sigh. You stand up, you sigh. The sighing is a worrying exhale of an ache. You wouldn't call it an illness: still it is not the iteration of a free being. What else to liken yourself to but an animal, the ruminant kind? ⁰¹

DAVID CLOUTIER

The newer work is thinking out of Homer's journey to the underworld. There is a question of what the dead want to say, or perhaps what they are witnessing. Odysseus digs a trench and then sacrifices around it to call to the dead.

Relationships between ever-growing ideas of fact and fiction, flash on and off in Cloutier's allegories. Images of dream-like moments are hurled at the viewer: ebbs tied to moon waves, flickering in the distance – the sounds of wings from fallen angels or the taste of flesh – recollections of Carpeaux's Ugolino from canto XXXIII of Dante's Inferno – the smell of acrid air like copper breath, fear laced with hope. Moments build on moments making time, encasing life, re-making now.

ALFONSO FERNANDEZ-VAZQUEZ

Fernandez's paintings are social, psychological, and personal investigations. His work brings to light the idea that borders can be blurred and overlapped in order to reconsider the associative labels of not only painting itself, but also the labels society assigns to each of us.

Fernandez stops time and brings us pivotal moments, factual histories written for the first time, freeze-framed and devoured by some, ignored by most. Equal parts stress and inquisition, cloaked in expressive willingness and an odd sense of hope, fight to clear the path or at least remember where it is so the voyeur can find their way. Memories woven

from past colonial histories – survived by some, profited by others. These passages are beacons. They are the new icon. Passers-by are mere flickers of time – light and dark pushing breath out for oxygen from tear-gassed air.

KOTTIE GAYDOS

Momentum is met with resistance; force with ease. Through material studies, I engage questions of the body's capacity to resist failure and the opening afforded by that process. Paper carries its history visibly, as skin bears marks of time and abrasion as scars, so too does paper.

Gaydos stretches skin across surface like taut membranes, breathing and exhaling moments of pain, tension, or release. They resonate as gentle hums to fill walls and rooms and blocks and streets; pathways across journey's pavement. Waves of color, light and sound bounce across time's spectrum. These exposures turn around and expose us. Confront us. The viewer becomes performer – we feel our skin as if for the first time.

BARBARA GRUBER

Painting, like life, is about relationships, and I think it is important to look carefully to catch them as accurately and economically as possible, to convey a richness of experience, sensation and emotion without sentimentality or excess.

Gruber takes us into the most delicate of moments. She whispers solitude with paint – creates quiet with reckoning. As if a time-based performance, each slow stroke contains a long history – memories of home – specific placements of objects – familiar smells recall an embrace, a book, a basement. Gruber's tireless pursuit of this space plots out her memories for us in the hopes that we too might remember.

FABIENNE LASSERRE

I see my pieces as embodying connections between entities usually seen as separate, where bodies, materials or things are porous and not ontologically distinct. Object-like and with bodily attributes, they exemplify a shared ground between the animate and the inanimate.

Light reflected from segments of moving fluorescence are not unlike choruses refracting off cathedral walled echo chambers – from Lascaux to Luray. But back in Brooklyn among similar vestiges, Lasserre humbly combines materials; building, layering and accumulating. There is an in-between quality that vibrates with timbre, ease and sophistication, flowing inside and out. The melodic pushes just enough to be off step, or is it out of tune? ... but welcomingly so. ... jazz-filled rooms, the key notes a bellowing horn. We are in a smoky bar – thick air cut with prominent bursts of light – a rainbow of color follows.

URSULA WEST MINERVINI

I wonder, "Am I wasting time? What is the value of a pointless activity? Why do this? Why do anything?" I don't have a good response, but perhaps it is useful to ruminate on the questions.

The clock ticks as time moves. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. The pendulum swings just a fragment too slow, which somehow slows time as if slow-motion inhabited these spaces. Only then do we notice the sped up version – the idea of 'moments' screeches to a halt. Passive note-taking builds like a pressure regulator dancing over steam, singing its tune like a metronome. The print sets this time in history like lived time by performing the marking of time on the canvas of space, note by note.

GIULIA LIVI

I interpose objects of the everyday to distort our sense of space, explore our ability to inhabit rooms, and merge the dreamlike with the rigid. My geometric objects and paintings focus on materiality to investigate light, shadow, and the weirdly functional.

How does space stand still? Dust frozen mid-air, vacuum-like stillness and silence. The home is much louder. It never stands still. More like grandma's house. Plastic-wrapped couch. My thighs sweat so much on that couch. She yelled at me when they left a mark. There is no silence in skin against aged, yellowed plastic. Yet it still looked impeccable. I awake in an Ikea. "Perfect" in other ways, like at the end of the month in NYC when whole apartments end up on the curb for trash pickup. There is noise and a sense of belief in a broken system, but then comes the bell jar. A moment of perfection in the imperfect. A moment to reflect and dream and remember what grandma's home smelled like.

JANET OLNEY

Using a personal language of shape and color, Janet Olney reframes the familiar to reveal an alternate world populated with things that defy naming. Her paintings and installations investigate the realm of uncertainty that lies just outside our awareness: a peripheral world straddling analog and digital spaces.

Mechanics, inter-workings and the relationships between utility and beauty fold into and out of Olney's pieces. Enveloped whole segments compress and churn associations to objects, reshaping our understood landscape. Developing a new visual nomenclature, more than parts becoming whole, these objects articulate at the mechanization point – function meets hand, or in this case eye – coming together to inform sight and feel.

RENÉE RENDINE

Utilizing temporal materials such as gelatins, fluids, or water-soluble plastics, I speak to the notion of time and change. These are repetitive actions that build and transform a work, like a spider, strand by strand, spinning a web, or a wasp, layer by layer, building a nest.

Like a swarm building, activating, sensing – yet Rendine is but one. Her swarm activity resembles the absurdity of work, the pressure of labor, to build, then destroy, systems. A performative push and pull begins from the moment works sets out. Collecting, saving, categorizing for a stage, a nest, or a home. Actions continuously echo as they push against the built ecosystem; its undulations move as Rendine presses, pricks, pokes, prods. Hapless actions reveal more important, if not more subtle, results of pursuance – rigor in patience extends to meditative fortitude in anxious wait.

JANN ROSEN-QUERALT

Curiosity drove me beneath the surface of the water, where my method of discovery begins. A sense of wonder and an interest in technology and human relationships is what inspires me to create situations where people re-acquaint themselves with the importance of and our dependence upon water.

Deep underground – underwater – unearthed microcosms make up entire systems. Marking, layering, re-marking, re-layering – this delicate archive punctuates as it undulates. Like an ebb and flow, metered rhythms develop songs of desire, hope and maybe even reality. A song emerges, like soft staccato stains – oil extracted from earth to mark, bubbling, in-rhythm and without regard. Photos and sculpture and spatial gatherings become the place where marks are allowed to fade. Meditative brushed water circles on slate, all so that particles evaporate into air. These moments captured and released, continue the cycle of marking and re-marking.

LYNN SILVERMAN & JASON SLOAN

The visual and sonic journey in Interior Lights consists of a series of dissolves, overlays, multiple layers, and abrupt flashes (like switching a light on and off), which creates a dynamic relationship between one still image and the next.

Walls can talk? They throb like heartbeats and pump blood through veins of electricity, pulsing and passing filled spaces, the sound current making notations on the occasion of time. Unearthed, these idiosyncratic melodies become visual references: streaming code or DNA strands. Flickering black and white (lights)? echo sounds floating overhead, or breath on glass. Come and go... come and go. Home as the central character resembles us almost without notice.

ANTOINETTE SUITER

The objects I see as de-contextualized movie props in terms of form and subject matter, but also self-contained units complete in their own existence rather than secondary forms remaining from a larger whole.

Rugged and rough landscapes like a landfill are turned and toiled – fertile enough to grow something, but its usefulness is still uncertain. Elements grow like mosses or liverworts in spaces once occupied, consumed, ignored. These spaces echo dreams from another time as it stands still, or is it on a slow motion loop, filling space with light and subtle motionless action? Spaces accumulate like dust or dirt or memory, slowly filling already full space as a way to expose possibility within the ordinary.

01. Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: an American Lyric*. Penguin Books, 2015. / p. 60.