WHERE WITH ALL

UC DAVIS ART STUDIO MFA
EXHIBITION CATALOG 2021

HAVILAH AOS
SAM ARCARA
JESSE AYLSWORTH
DINO CAPALDI
GENEVRA DALEY
MERCY HAWKINS
GRETCHEN LEMAISTRE
DANI TORVI
Where With All, the 2021 Art Studio MFA Thesis Exhibition, represents the culminating work of eight artists committed to their studio practice during the unprecedented disruption of everyday life caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. They have proved to us that that the artist’s studio was a necessity. And I believe that the work done in the studio is the essential work - a way of surviving, a way of living. These eight young, extraordinary artists turned what was most inexplicable into something shared – transforming an inexplicable experience into the experience of art.

The essays in this catalogue were written by:
Seken Chung for Gretchen LeMaistre
Justin Desmangles for Mercy Hawkins
Sawyer Elms for Genevra Daley
Lauren Renee Frausto for Dani Torvik
Amanda Hawkins for Havilah Aos
Lenny Linsky for Dino Capaldi
Yumi Janairo Roth for Sam Arcara
Whitney Vangrin for Jesse Aylsworth

The Master of Fine Arts Degree in Art Studio, established in 1969, is a two-year, critically engaged studio program that provides an opportunity for interdisciplinary study in the visual arts. As part of a small tight-knit community, students explore a wide range of media and approaches to studio practice. The Art Studio Program faculty share responsibility for the graduate program. Current faculty members engage in a broad range of disciplines including sculpture, photography, time-based media, painting, drawing, printmaking, ceramic sculpture, and include Darrin Martin, Hearne Pardee, Shiva Ahmadi, Lucy Puls, Annabeth Rosen, Young Suh, Robin Hill, Tim Hyde, Graham McDougal and Gina Werfel.

For more information: arts.ucdavis.edu/art-studio-graduate-program

Young Suh
Graduate Chair
Department of Art and Art History
Art studio Program

Professor Annabeth Rosen
Arneson Endowed Chair
Department of Art & Art History Co-Chair
Art studio Program

In memory of Freemond E. (Pete) Gadberry, a retired fine-arts teacher at Vintage High School, in Napa, Calif., who gave a $1-million bequest from his estate for the Art Department. Mr. Gadberry, who graduated from the university in 1967 with a Master’s degree in Fine Arts, died in 2006 at the age of 69.
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Havilah Aos
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Havilah Aos
by Amanda Hawkins

She works with pulp. She blends paper in a blender that isn't very good. She is not concerned with being good. She tears the paper into pieces the size of her thumb. The pulp looks wet. Like paper soup. Like slop. She uses the word emulsify for what the pulp does with water. Pulp and water do not need to emulsify to make good paper. She needs a proper screen. She does not have a proper screen to evenly spread and dry the pulp. Also, the pulp in winter takes a long time to dry. It is basically winter and thus cold and thus harder to dry. When she began this batch of paper it was still fall. The afternoons too warm. The leaf blowers blew dust and leaf bits under the door, onto the just-poured pulp. She couldn’t hear herself think. Good thing she does not need to think to make things.

A strip like a scroll. Slur the pulp. Dirty the color. Two pigments like mud. Drop the darker, move it around. A hole in the center. A strip like a scroll. Shake it. Shake it down so it settles. Processed. Text block. To the pulp letters, bits of words. Forever to dry. Throw it down. Throw it down in handfuls. Sprinkle it in. Make the sheet. The sheet is not enough—like making planks to make a ship, like digging a hole. Like a canvas. Like a sail. You use the parts to build something else.

She left off at a point. Tells again how the paper is made, how she uses the paper to make something else, how she casts, how she casts objects in paper—the arbitrary features of the place she lives and has access to. Ask the question—what is real and what is imagined, what is constructed and what is void. To try to understand what she did, what she is doing she reconstructs memories of time in her studio, in her work. She casts around about her, the arbitrary memory, layers of human: activity, inactivity, explores place without going anywhere. So much paper. Such a switch—she began with cement. Filled a thing up—a plastic bag, plastic package—you’d be surprised how precise the surface, the sheen. And then again, the switch—paper moistened and laid over a thing, an arbitrary frame, and later still: buckets and buckets, a ladder, a rake, a wheelbarrow, a scrap, scraps of paper in purple and teal, pigment blue 29, blue 15, violet 23, colors of cobalt, color of something darker than black—the tailgate of a truck, the truck itself, a shovel, a box, a shelf that didn’t work at all, paper casts like histories piled outside the dark, the floor coated with dirt.

Don’t want to call it darkness, but it is dark like memories when they don’t want to be found. It all started as a list of words—but the words weren’t very good. She casts the shape of things around it. What is precision anyhow? Chromatic black is darker than other blacks—black with color in it. See the difference here—subconscious versus unconscious, the dive of memories into an unconscionable deep. These are the deepest part of the mind. These are the places of no access.
Mine tailings, felled trees from national forests, adobe bricks, displaced earth: these are all materials that Sam Arcara has returned to time and again to explore our relationship to place. Although the natural and manufactured sit side by side in many of her projects, the distinction between those ideas is rarely clear. As an undergraduate, Sam routinely dragged felled trees on her trailer from the nearby national forest for various projects. With one of those 15ft logs of lodgepole pine, she carved the form of dimensional lumber at the center, its identity split between romantic visions of the wilderness and the stacks of 2×4s found at Home Depot.

Sam’s photographs, site-based interventions, and sculptures all call attention to displacement, whether it’s unfinished wall framing set atop mine tailings and facing new housing construction surrounded by the majesty of the Rocky Mountains or the reconstruction of a decommissioned dam within the gallery. Sam’s trailer, a tool for displacement, that has carried so much material back and forth from site to studio now takes center stage in her thesis exhibition and functions as a platform for her itinerant objects and debris while also reminding us of our own peregrinations and interventions in the landscape.

Yumi Janairo Roth
Professor of Sculpture and Post Studio Practice, Art and Art History, University of Colorado-Boulder
Metallic Yet Liquid,
Matter Yet Spirit
The Painted Invocations of Jesse Aylsworth

by Whitney Vangrin

♀

When you encounter the paintings of Jesse Aylsworth you experience an immediate ocular attraction. Luster and gloss are embedded in a lipid matrix; paint keeps the memory of past action as the outermost layers build upon erstwhile deposits. For each viewer there are beguiling access points in the work. Be it the hypnotic glow of gold and silver, or the visceral amalgams of gelatinous pigment. You become absorbed into tactile configurations of oil and color. When one gazes deeply, the pictorial plan begins to flicker. Relax the ciliary muscles in your eyes, and hallucinatory phantoms emerge. For the initiated, the paintings take on enhanced layers of encryption, echelons of exploration and clandestine meanings. Coded paint pays reverence to antiquity, philosophy, and alchemical processes. Minds with adroit eyes can see tinted daubs full of esoteric allusion, surreptitious talismans to queer ancestors and divination with painting pioneers. The pictorial plane swells and alters perceptions of veracity. New cosmological possibilities are constructed. The paintings are portals.

As a digital intuitive, Jesse inhabits gaming and online communities, transmigrating the realms of MMRPGs (Massively Multiplayer Role Playing Games), exploring one state of being to another. The Internet is a realm where content is deliquesced and new meanings to words and symbols emerge. In many ways the functions of online networks were prophesized in The Cut-Up method, an aleatory technique forged by Brion Gysin. Gysin slashed and rearranged image and text to reveal its implicit content. Jesse employs a parallel algorithmic permutation method. He annihilates images with editing software and reconfigures the forms onto the dense, physical canvases. In tandem with his transient existence online, Jesse values the tangible, hands on quality of painting and engages with the medium’s materiality.

Paint is the Prima Materia, the dust that is the root of all matter. Applying the method of alchemy, Jesse understands that thought and actions are of equal importance. With abandon Jesse throws himself into the experience. Colorful goo, viscous and unbridled, Jesse conjures as well as surrenders to its form. He builds worlds out of mud, hypnotic voids that manifest consciousness into the corporeal. Like Mercurius, whom the alchemists speak of, the work is

“..metallic yet liquid, matter yet spirit, cold yet fiery, poison and yet healing draught – a symbol uniting all opposites.”

—Psychology and Alchemy, by C. G. Jung

Raw pigment contains all the components needed for self-actualization, however it takes the adept hand to animate into reality. Jesse Aylsworth possesses that charmed appendage.
On The Work of Dino Capaldi

by Lenny Linsky

“Where the fuck is Dino,” we say, a group of sixteen-year-old boys, unaware that the emergence of a new universe is forming within Mr. Mead’s High School ceramics room. The origins of an open-ended, evolving landscape unbounded by over conceptualization and sparked from initial explorations of form, texture, and color, which are repeated and duplicated, leading to non-linear leaps that evoke familiarity yet arrive at new undiscovered associations. Dino has been my best friend from these beginnings, allowing me the great privilege to witness this ever-unfolding cosmology develop within its dynamic, interactive, and adaptive ecology.

While I have been granted the pleasure of witnessing this evolution, additionally, years of conversation and surfing the same stretch of coastline have helped me navigate the intricacies of his work. Dino draws from an eclectic network of associations ranging from natural and human-made landscapes, ruins, surfing, punk, graffiti, and ceramic history to produce his sculptures. In a process I would describe as ‘subjectification and re-objectification,’ Dino subjectively observes the objective objects, colors, textures, and forms in his physical environment, which collide, reorganize, and synthesize with said influences combusting into new abstracted objects that populate his artistic landscape while also referencing ceramic’s historical vocation as a vessel. This gives us a glimpse of the world through Dino’s mind and challenges the viewer to interrogate their own conceptions of the nature of things.

Perhaps more fundamental and often pooh-poohed in the halls of formal academia is Dino’s defense of joy, which I believe allows this cosmological blossoming to occur. His work can be thought of as negating the negation that is the overly formalized and myopic conceptual squeeze plaguing our institutions of cultural production and reproduction. Much in the way that contemporary hegemonic ideology seeks to bound and extract every last drop of what makes us, us, for its own profit and domination, academia demands that the artist do the same. Dino refuses to placate to such demands and instead places joy at the forefront of his work. Rather than leading with conceptualization, he allows his love of ceramics to guide his playful exploration of material and process. In doing so, Dino pushes ceramics towards new qualitative territory while rightfully affirming joy as a valid form of inquiry and investigation.
Untitled Outcrop

24” x 16” x 16”, Ceramic, glass, sand, fabric 2020
**Devilock**
8” x 20” x 10”, Ceramic and sand, 2020

**Altamira**
15” x 6”, Ceramic, glass, sand, 2021
Genevra Daley

By Sawyer Elms

Here you are, your day has been long, you're weary, but you are here, and now you find yourself staring into a mirror you didn't expect to see. Of course, you see yourself, as is the way of mirrors, but you also see me, and everyone who has ever been graced by the gravitational pull of Genevra Daley and her sculpture.

You’re reluctant to react at first, uncomfortable to find this empty hall of art suddenly crowded with you and me and all of them, which is to say, us. You see your second-hand coat hanging in front of you, the same you’re wearing. You pull on your own sleeves as you wonder if you feel more like the coat, like you’ve taken on one too many responsibilities, one too many impossible deadlines. Or are you the exhausted, excised skin-like lining, collapsing, so tragically, under its own weight? Maybe you can be both, you think.

You feel the air subtly change as if someone has opened a door into a cool evening. You believe that you can smell the sculptures on this new air, it’s that specific smell of the closet your parents shared, that musky-sweet smell of Mom and Dad in one place. It is as if the fabric itself is woven from the smell of your memory, and that texture...you want to feel it but know that it will feel like forgetting or wanting to forget. There is trauma too, you wonder, but you aren’t sure if it is yours or mine or theirs. Which of us could it belong to? You’re surprised to find yourselves intertwined together in this way. You’re happy to help bear that universal load.

Now, your shoulders begin to relax under the familiar weight, and you stare back into the mirror Genevra has made for us. You can feel it, your body, the tubes of you so full of the mundane frustrations of your day that you feel close to bursting. Your clothing, that thin veneer, is splitting, and you’re leaking through the seams. Comforted, and surprised, yet again, by the walk-in closet of all these intimate forms of you, you can’t help but reach out, to run a hand along your uncanny hem. You know that you should leave, that it can’t be healthy to see yourself so plainly before you. There is more art to see, anyway. But here you are, stepping forward, eager to try everyone on, to test the fit of yourselves.
On the work of artist, Mercy Hawkins
By Justin Desmangles, Columnist-in-Residence, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art “Open Space”

“And our bodies are mad with the forgotten memory that we are creatures!”
– Michael McClure

The voice of Nature speaks through the artist as music through an instrument. To hear this music, the artist as an instrument then must be properly attuned. How then in this contemporary world of electronic signal bombardment does one find this attunement? How can the artist as instrument sing the music of the spheres, the cosmic song? Through color, through light, through sound, yes, but the question of time is and must also be key. Time, as it is often said in American culture, is money, but anyone with an eye on the sunset can tell you this is not altogether true. As short as any one life is, or as long, there will never be enough money to buy another. Death will come in time just as surely as the birth that brought you here in the first place. The mystery of life then must be solved elsewhere, beyond the material world as such, and with the hearts of others, their own eyes and ears, in harmony with our own. The natural rhythms of the body are a set of clues along this path, all of our outer movements a response to an inner music. It is in art that these pathways are revealed, the integral paths interweaving our inner and outer worlds, joining us with others throughout space and beyond the reach of any single culture. In the art of Mercy Hawkins, we see this uncommon vision generated and actualized.

As with the great American poet of Nature, Walt Whitman in his masterpiece “Song of Myself” inviting us to discover the great mystery “observing a spear of summer grass,” so too is Ms. Hawkins extending a similar invitation. It is an invitation, as again with Whitman’s poem to “go to the bank of the wood and become undisguised and naked, . . . mad for it to be in contact with me.” It is an invitation not only to a relaxed, pliant, and supple contemplation, but also to a distinct and necessary quietude. To relax the eyes that the inner ear might open and we hear what it is we see, a skill all but lost in the contemporary world. While sonic tones values are the palate of every musician, they are rarer still among visual artists. Vibrant, oscillating, pulsing, writhing Ms. Hawkins sculptural pieces resemble just as often those patterns drawn by the improvising musician playing with and extending a given song. The systole and diastole of our heart is beating here only if we are willing to slow down, gently to feel its drum.

Each individual work, each sculpture contains a unique, organic syntactical integrity, relating to the others as of a genus or familial species. The element of time is consistent throughout, inviting the viewer to a gentle stillness, as one may observe the delicate intertwining of undergrowth in a forest. Our perception is slowed down, graciously, to breathe in the quiet rhythmic patterns that are evidenced in the many various close and careful details of each piece. The effect is astonishing as we settle our own sensorium to the time signature of the individual sculptures themselves. The multi-colored, multi-layered stitching and cross-stitching, holding each piece of the larger works assembled in a unique balance. The delicate unfolding patterns of the watercolor on each piece, as if a sweet rain may have fallen there. Frozen for a moment in time, the arc of each individual sculpture’s growth is captured, not unlike the time-lapsed photography of plant life, or even the emergence of a butterfly from its cocoon. It is the gentle unfolding of waves on a secluded shore, the expansive ripples along the mirror of a once placid lake. These are the musical forms in Nature suggested here again and again.

To the poets we return to find adequate description of the phenomenon and aesthetic affect of the work here described, and it is Dylan Thomas that I see, hear, igniting the space created by these works.

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams
Turns mine to wax.
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks.

Far be it from me to remind the incredulous contemporary reader that the use of the word dumb in Thomas’s famous poem is not to denote an absence of intellect, but rather the mute awe when faced by forces of Nature, eternal and overwhelming to the individual sensibility. Indeed, it is this sense of awe, this naked and unabashed sense of wonder at it all that pervades and seems to motivate much of the work of Ms. Hawkins witnessed here.

As with the voice of Nature speaking through the artist in much the same way we hear the voices of music emerging through an instrument, in Ms. Hawkins we find both. The poetry of the art works themselves forms a composition in silence, one that allows the work to speak in gentle quiet. This invitation she has extended to us, as mentioned above, is also one best received by a slowing of tempo, a slow dance, if you will, wherein the muses awaken.

Mercy Hawkins
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Gretchen LeMaistre

By Seken Chung

Gretchen LeMaistre takes us on a journey that seems to emerge all at once from the past, the present, and the future. With a critical lens, she probes the underbelly of privilege, injustice, and inequalities witnessed growing up in the South. LeMaistre looks both outwardly and inwardly, reexamining her colonial ancestry and reflecting on how we have arrived at this place. At the same time, she challenges the immutability of our memories, the permanence of stone, and our own understanding of history.

Nature, degradation, and dispossession are tangled themes in LeMaistre’s work. She steadfastly invites us to examine the complex interconnections between a colonial past and the breakdown of ecosystems. Alongside elements of comfort and material wealth, we see images that are somber and heavy. Whether it is building ruins of formerly enslaved individuals or new construction, this heaviness can be felt in the legacies of exploitation and the ransacking of lands—sacrificed for industrial development, rapacity, and unfettered growth.

These images exude a certain roughness, a painful reminder—the sensation of slowly running your hands across broken oyster shells. A horse appears spooked, ready to jump the fence, or throw its spurred rider. A burned out delivery truck spouts an invocation. All this leaves the viewer with an uncomfortable feeling, a cumulative unevenness. Yet growth and equity, sustainability and the environment, the past and the future are somehow colliding in unison. Gretchen LeMaistre’s work strives to capture these moments before the entire foundation is swallowed up by the dense understory.
Dani Torvik
By Lauren Renee Frausto

The surprising scale of Dani Torvik’s art fills her lofty studio such that entering her workspace for the first time feels like a technicolor cinematic immersion. Her three wall-length paintings are taller than I am. The way in which Dani’s careful abstraction and deconstruction wrap all the way around me is like the combination of relief and shock found in the plunge beneath the roll of waves on a hot day. Pervasive warm tones provide a striking undercurrent of vitality to the world which Dani has created for her viewers. Despite an array of reds reminiscent of blood, this world is not overtly violent. Rather, airy mints and peaches and ghost-pale filigree traces, the borealis of confetti, serve to draw the harshest edges out of the reds, creating a sense of breath. Her paintings are undeniably festive, yet the levity in the riot of deconstruction also dances frantically. There is a sense of nudity, but it is bravely unaware of itself. The accompanying hedonism is so precisely rendered by a gifted abstract visual artist that it could only be approximated lyrically: as if in a footnote left waiting beneath the vase. Amidst the promenade of color, I see a devastating black hole rent in space, but one dressed like an angel. Layer upon layer of intuitive contradiction and dichotomy, her paintings present convoluted metaphors of cultural trope and historic and artistic allusion which have been meticulously synthesized through her own personal mythology. Hints and whispers are birthed into the clandestine found objects and broken textures, which are protected among the drenched hues of paint that serve as Dani’s primary element.

Dani’s cathedral workspace is complimented by a vast wall of windows, early summer sunlight filtered through leaves; the verdant, ethereal light could be manifesting from the memories of redwood forests that so pivotally influence Dani’s work. Through an intuitive process of layering and revealing — painting, scraping, and the application mixed media — Dani gives form to foundational memories of altered time and place in combination with an amalgam of homage to the contemporary western zeitgeist of the enchanted, the fantastical, and the speculative.

Dani’s paintings emanate a call to adventure from each cardinal direction. Like the many layers of paint and ephemera pregnant with imbued meaning, making my fingers itch with the need to peel away and peel away and reveal what is beneath, there are entire vibrant dream-lives full of joy and pain waiting to be lived just out of sight beyond the edge of each frame.

As an academic and as an intersectional woman of this moment, Dani reinterprets and reinvents — she ‘misappropriates’ a historical artistic cannon plagued by misogyny and transforms it into a wanton gust of petals punctured with a glint of foil. Her work strikes an uncomfortable chord with anyone who doubts the beauty of magic, who gives no credence to the evil inherent in mythology and fairy tales, or who questions the power of escapism. Dani’s art both articulates and provides an escape for a scary world that is freshly fracturing along fault lines of profound polarity and suffering. Her art sees the magic evident in a world seeming to drown in colossal global disaster, yet which still scrambles to save itself with everyday heroic acts of small, sparkly kindness — and which celebrates and mourns these phenomena with a vain and ostentatious parade.

Like a benevolent eye keeping watch on proceedings from the occasional hash of bare canvas, Dani infuses herself in her art but then sublimates into the aether and staunchly refuses to mediate her viewers’ experience. Rather, her world speaks: Glance at your feet at these glittering, oozing breadcrumbs you otherwise might never have noticed. Here is a path should you lose sight of the importance of marveling in the mysticism of the redwoods or misplace the promise inherent to the wonder you so amply possessed as a child.
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