o.o.o, a a h

UC DAVIS ART STUDIO
MFA EXHIBITION
2019

Bailey Anderson
Julian Childs-Walker
Adam Cochran
Rachel Deane
Sarah Frieberg
Brooklynn Johnson
do

anything.

Adam Cochran

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An exciting aspect of seeing the evolution of Adam’s work over time is not only the movement from an exploration of middle-class, white suburbia to physical and mental torture to his current work on toxic masculinity, but also the through lines of self-awareness and examination of how these themes relate to and inform his own childhood and how these ideas of entrapment play out in our political system.

The personal and the political is a universal theme described by American sociologist C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination*, wherein “neither the life of an individual nor the history of society can be understood without understanding both.” Later, feminists adopted the concept as a rallying cry to address how within a system of power relationships, one’s location within it can be traced by personal experiences. Adam’s paintings give us moments to address how experiences in our youth—television, movies, and other pop culture—are saturated with images and ideas of toxic masculinity, thus making it a comfortable enough concept and cog in a harmful political system.

Working in emblematic colors of red, white, and blue, Adam lays out a series of individual 22”x30” acrylic paintings on paper spaced 2” apart creating a grid 158” x238”. Images of Leave it to Beaver sit alongside superheroes, Rambo, and icons of the classic western movie—all the myriad ways in which toxic masculinity permeates our culture, subtly and not so subtly. Adjacent to the grid are two oil paintings, each 84” x 77”. Their large size is in play against the relatively small size of the paper, but dwarfed by the size of the grid as a whole. Similar colors are used, but this time the imagery Adam uses is more intimate, more personal. You can sense that he is in these paintings, and indeed, images of the artist begin to appear. Suddenly we know he isn’t an outsider looking in, this is the artist in the thick of it, looking OUT.

By exploring the genesis of the thought processes that allow us to set up systems in our society that normalize violence and the dehumanization of entire groups of people to such a degree that we are willing to call them animals, ban them from our borders, regulate their bodies, and strip away their rights, the artist is asking us to use our sociological imaginations to reflect on our personal experiences and gain awareness on how they relate to and uphold a toxic system of power.

—Jennifer Lynne Roberts
I have been thinking about power structures and the machinations by which they are sustained. Reflecting on my own past, I see a web. Each filament of the web is a sticky cog in a hegemonic machine: Pop culture icons; hyper-masculine political figures; Type-A one-liners that burn into my memory; idealized comic book figures; the pervasive, ever-present idea of the Hero - all play their part in perpetuating a hegemonic power system. This system is the sticky web, the spider is patriarchy, and when the spider bites, the venom is toxic masculinity.

The thrill of action movies are a mild addiction I have had my entire life. The unassuming, reluctant, lone white hero battling scores of bad guys, saving the day, and winning the girl is a trope that is hard to resist, but as I examine its very nature, I realize this fun escape is actually loaded with problematic venom - and I have been bitten once again. Lately, attempts have been made to exterminate the spider, but like any pest, it resists annihilation, and the more threatened the spider feels, the more drastic its measures of self-preservation become. Thus, frequently, those in power attempt to subdue people they feel most threatened by.

My current paintings are influenced by political attempts at group erasure and suppression. Empathic feelings of helplessness in the face of powerful institutional manipulations inform the work, as well as a furious rage against injustice. When I read of another death, or another law regulating a body, or another justification for hatred and intolerance, I am haunted by the inability of my paintings to stop it from happening. The paint on my hands feels as sticky and accusatory as the blood on theirs.

The paintings begin as multiple layers of splotches and shapes, marks burying marks. Eventually, they become records of meditations on the medium's inability to effect change. Repeated scraping, sanding, and paint layering become the visual language of frustration. Iconic references — the filaments of the web — from my childhood are used to illuminate ways in which toxic masculinity is subtly and overtly perpetuated.

The paintings are a way to work through frustrations and point a finger at power structures that are doing unprecedented damage throughout their death throes.
There’s little more disappointing in a work of art than the sense of the author’s underlying desire to be absolutely clever. I remind my creative writing students to avoid, at all costs, being clever when we workshop poems and short fiction, but the cautionary adage should hold just as sound when applied to the other arts. I first encountered Bailey Anderson’s work at an exhibit at the SOMETHING gallery of CSU-Sacramento, an exhibit I approached with no shortage of cynicism I had aggregated after many encounters with blossoming young artists. I dreaded, even expected, work that would be so tiresomely clever—wonderfully post-modern, traditionally subversive, and so preoccupied with identity to the extent that all matters of form and composition become moot outside of an overzealous political ideology.

Anderson’s work, though licentious, commits none of these particular sins. This is not to say the work is not subversive—yes, the organic contours and visceral use of sanguine and seminal colors speak of the body, the erotic, of violence, as does the destruction Anderson works into her exhibits with the inclusion of shapes broken by concussion, dropping, mistreatment. This subversion, however, remains pleasantly to the left (hah) of Anderson’s genuine command of material and shape, the fundamentals of composition, to her practiced and refined talent in molding difficult materials into that which grabs and guides the eye.

Subversion in Anderson’s work manifests not as a symptom of tired ideology or a well-meaning but myopic obsession with affect but rather in the way her work acknowledges, entertains, then evicts the human need to classify. Yes, the work will lend itself generously to interpretations obsessed with the sexual, the feminine, the violent, with strong elements of eros, fertility, and injury prevalent; yet the work, however generous, resists ontological stasis, just as the shapes contract and expand, resisting their own given form, to please and frustrate the eye. The tangible materials Anderson uses charade, finely, the unmistakably organic—the thigh, the breast, the elbow—confounding the line between the industrial and the corporeal. Likewise, Anderson allows debris into her work and found objects, materials born from happenstance and disaster, along with the smooth shapes she has no doubt labored over with great care.

This juxtaposition, this push and pull between accident and intention, refines and contributes to a celebration of fragmentation, of transgressed boundaries. There is plenty that is decadent and wanton about the work, but Anderson respects the capacity for the viewer to appreciate contradiction and frustration enough to avoid toddling into didacticism, to the one, true mortal sin. If nothing else, Anderson’s work is one that glorifies both the erotic of contradiction and the contradiction of the erotic, the absurdity of what a body does when pressed against another body, of the potential violence of these bodies.

—Danny Morrell
This newest installation reflects my relationship to loss, identity, and memory as well as my explorations into the histories of human beings and the grotesque. These relationships are communicated by the use of cement, hydrocal, fabric, and pigment to create large, layered blankets of decay.

These blankets of seemingly bodily notions are cured over objects, giving form to the negative space underneath. The objects used act as a surrogate for the body and in turn the work becomes flexible and organic. As the process moved forward each layer of plaster and fabric was layered with another material, causing the blankets to be heavy with debris. This debris will escape the wall and settle into piles on the floor. As a result of this certain elements become hidden, or partially exposed, under a blanket of ruins.

As I moved forward with the piece it began to reference my own feelings towards aging, death, and mortality. In some ways the work has become a shrine to lost people, histories, and experiences, and as it grows it will encompass more.

I have always been intrigued by the idea of bodies engaging in behavior that is awkward and found that fleshy, vulnerable, and visceral forms and color give the awkward forms structure and fluidity. The color not just an attribute, it is part of the forms, integrated into them, like the skin on our very own bodies.

In the past my work investigated balance, frailty, and tension. My current work pushes these themes further to ask about memories left behind and the experiences that are attached to them. It has been a natural evolution in material, and in coming to terms with my own grief, history and identity.
Brooklynn Johnson invites you into the softest, most powerful realm of her psyche: her dreamscape, a place where the sensory precedes sense, where knowledge dwells before language, a place of all existence before definition. The dream is built from everything you’ve known from before birth to after the present moment—the fire hydrant, the snake, the blue and green water, the motion, and the stillness. Externalizing a state of pre-judgment and pre-category, Johnson’s work lends her subconscious room to manifest and play in our waking world. As dreams are the amalgamation of experiences collected through time, Johnson’s work speaks through an associative interplay of shapes, colors, forms, and dimension. It is through this interplay that her memories of her sensory world are articulated in painting and space building. The paintings use both vibrant and muted colors to lure you into the canvas as a space to inhabit and, in themselves, offer a dimensionality to landscapes and forms. This dimensionality is refracted as spatial properties in sculptures that constellate an environment providing further clarity and stability. Harmonious in their contortions, the lexicon of her imagery takes on the images of dendrites, branches, beautified intestines. The exchange between two- and three-dimensional modes exudes the spontaneous, co-creative quality of what is imagined to be natural and what is human-made. Together, Johnson’s paintings and sculptures work much like fractals extending the logic of her inner space, unfolding and interweaving the conscious mind’s impulse toward order. The different mediums of paintings and sculpture act as coordinates that sketch the experience of the underworld and coalesce into a concentrated experience of the playful dynamics of her subconscious. It is with a symphonic harmony that the individual pieces of Johnson’s work cooperate to crystallize and realize the wish to live companionably, joyfully even, with the subconscious. —Namu Ju
A broad array of mythologies paints the Underworld as a subterranean world full of spirits, reflections, and refractions of the living world. Early psychoanalysts refer to the underworld as a “subterranean” area located below the terra of consciousness. This psychological topography is where we journey to through dreams, where we connect with archetypes older than us to better understand our waking experience.

In dreams the mind plays and experiments. Sleep creates the space necessary for the mind to access emotional and sensory memories, which align with impressionable moments gathered while we are awake. Dreams then interlay memories of textures, tastes, smells, sounds, and images uninhibited by associations that a conscious mind would find illogical and seemingly unrelated. In this scape, the mind is capable of amalgamating experiences that have no apparent relationship in conscious thinking.

I treat my experience in the studio as a means of accessing this place, this Underworld, as the mind does in sleep. Paintings and installations begin with the idea of designating an experimental space with intuitive form, color, and texture. I utilize color and texture as elements that can free-associate with content and form, like memories in a dream. Rivers can be pink, plants can be blue. As the work progresses, these shapes gain more specificity, becoming plants, bodies of water, and human-like earth formations, before they morph again. Painted objects are then translated into sculptural objects, which transform back into paintings, ultimately creating reflections and refractions between the two dimensions. The movement between two and three dimensional matter bridges the distance between the logic of the conscious mind and the sensory memories of the body. I think of the resulting landscapes as sets characterized by my sculptural and painted forms; they become stages scripted for playing, testing, and reimagining my experiences of the conscious “upper” world.
There is something uncanny in Julian’s sculptures. The shapes seem like shapes I’ve seen. Postcards, walls, corners and bases of buildings, shrunk statues, ramps, even chance rubble scored from construction sites. And yet, if you look at the pieces, if you hold them, interrogate them, you’ll find they are too “right” to be found objects.

They’re all of the same scale. Each has its own little imperfections. They are exactly the same color, that bright grey of clean cement. For some reason I find this unsettling. The uniformity of color in all these geometries. Like the color is somehow infecting the shapes. The rough surfaces, the smooth surfaces, the kinks and bends and chunks where air settled leaving a scatter of holes, bound by the same color. The color of new foundation. That striking eye color you rarely see. Also the color of gravestones.

Gravestones. Markers of stopped time. I see the sculptures now, from a remove, like thoughts frozen before completion. Trajectories. Possibilities. Allusions to time, or art itself—liquid solidified into careful shapes. What is art but this? Time made somehow structured, solid. Captured but still baggy. The folds here become solid, textured.

One of my reactions was literary. I tried to imagine a dead writer handed this task—to meditate on these fragments, cement fragments. I thought of Beckett. Locked in a room with the sculptures and he might let his mind circulate them like the iterative sucking stones in Molloy, passing from pocket to pocket to tongue to pocket, each a variation on the last.

The pieces do feel iterative. Another allusion to time (and its artistic apartner process). Mutated Platonic shapes multiplying daily in Julian’s studio to tease a gestaltist should one arrive. Bound to each other by a host of similarities. They achieve their effect of “rightness” by their differences.

—Sam Schieren
The form takes shape, it's rendered, and it's gone. You can try to hold on, to make it eternal, but is that what matters, in the end? The work explores the fragile and the monumental in a context where reality is translated into objects revered for their appearance and ambiguity. The work poses questions that slow us down and encourage considerations outside ourselves. Inspired by uneven floors and shimmering flocks of starlings, I make work that speaks to the experience of learning to hold on and let go.

Mining the allure of superficial appearances and the instability of living temporary lives, I work primarily with concrete and clay, two materials that exist both as malleable mass and then, irreversibly, a matured structure. These parallel curing processes provide structure around which I play and create and serve as a reminder of the inevitable progression of time.
Throughout the history of museums, art and nature have been held as extremes and curated thusly. At one end of the spectrum is the world in which, us, the human conscious inhabits, full of wonders and impossibilities. Countless species of fauna, which are far surpassed by the near incomprehensible magnitude of flora, have occupied what are now natural history, ecological, and science museums. The other end of the spectrum is the absorption, filtration, and reinterpretation of this world via the human medium, art. Capturing the human essence, via thoughts, emotions, imagination, art has been heralded as one of the vitalities of the human condition. Wealth, fame, nobility has been cultured through the creation and collection of art, creating the massive institutions that have become the modern museum. Western culture has come to distinguish and segregate these two worlds into distinctly separate categories, almost as though they are unlinked, as though art is not a reaction to nature, nor that nature is fundamental to art. Ink and paint are pigment made from the earth and plant and insect, while clay and marble are the essence of the earth itself. There is a resonance between the intrinsic essence of art and nature that mimics the resonance between all humans and all of life.

Pushing through hard packed earth
Persevering through hardship and strife
Growth is natural, but also difficult
For nothing in life is easy, and neither is art

The work of Sarah Frieberg is a mingling of her artistic nature and her horticulture background. Frieberg graduated with an undergraduate degree in horticultural sciences, which lead to employment as a landscape architect and even interior designer; this was followed by a BFA then a MAT, and now a MFA. Despite her pursuit of art and passion for educating, plant sciences have never left her work, drawing upon her complex knowledge to inform her work. The ecologically friendly work is composed of natural materials itself: teaclay, beeswax, mud, eggs, mushrooms, flower petals, walnut ink. While much of her older drawing and print work often take the form of scientific schematics, her contemporary works draw from the life essence of the natural world that resonated within everything, striking a harp’s note of emotion.

Take a moment and find Stillness
Seek the resonance in presentness
Whether in gallery, studio, or on the trail
For it is in the now that we find peace and beauty

Frieberg’s artistic practice is infused with art historical and theoretical knowledge, but finds a resonance within many disciplines and styles, defying any attempt at stylizing or classification. Her work is informed by minimalism, inspired by abstraction, and influenced by feminism, soaked equally in the nature of impressionism yet distinctly more than an impression. Her work takes time, ages, epochs, which is mimicked in the viewers experience. Just as Frieberg mediates on her work, both in nature or within the studio, the viewer is nothing but awestruck by the nature of her work. The work is drawn back to the most basic, yet complex of principles, line, color, form. It is strictly controlled work, as in so far that it is not spurious, and is based on repetition of movement and style, yet in so many ways it is completely instinctual. Tea-clay reaches the correct consistency based on texture and there is no formula for color, but simply a feeling.

First, she gathers walnuts from the wild
Then she crushes and mixes them into ink
Applied to wooden canvases, they Decay and fall
There is no ending, as life always resonates.

Wyatt Haywood
Chasing blindly in moments of my own misguided interpretations, often lost in the dark hole of pressure and control, I have been looking for a crack roughly the size of a honey bee wing in a towering 1,000 foot granite rock to experience the elusive impulse of resonance; a resonance that calms a raging river to a still reflecting pool. It’s not something I can hold onto and trying to conjure it up is like prying the granite rock crack open wider with bruised fingers. Though when embodied in creative forces of making art, I am quietly ushered in.

I remember holding lichen that had fallen from a tree for my 1 year old daughter as she inspected the nearby dewey grass for worms. In that time, I held and observed the lichen in my hands; the intense color of greens, spongy texture and musty smells lured me onward. Without thinking, marveling at all of it’s tiny holes, I allowed myself to be present solely focused on this object and was quiet enough to listen, where wonder and awe took over. Joseph Beuys uses a term; “substance” when referring to the materiality of objects and he encourages one to open to it’s will of existence. In that moment with the lichen, my eyes opened wide and I experience a resonance that could direct, possibly even demand.

I am often exposed to the will of materials as I experiment with them in the studio. Working from my science background in horticulture, I play with materials that I would find in a garden like clay, decomposed plant matter, and herbs and combine them with the preserving qualities of honey, essential oils and egg. The smooth slimy texture of clay runs through my fingers and musty aromas fill the space igniting my senses. I often want to scream in moments as the whole piece falls apart but then with a little time and begrudging courage, something beyond what I could imagine forms from the reactions and I am left stunned.

These frenzied conversations happen, sometimes lasting for weeks. Observing, tearing apart, crying, watching it decay, starting again on top of the old, are all responses the work and I have together. In moments we can’t stand to be in the same room (because I tried to muscle my way through the crack again) and other times we heartily laugh as the resonance resounds itself fully alive in the piece. Once I get out of my own way, I acknowledge and agree to the materials request to innately listen and see beyond myself and into my work. Like a moth to a flame we are back at it again the very next day.
Come and sit for a while, in the home in which you are forced to live. This chair is designed to fit the shape of your body, so you will find some comfort here. Though the walls are beginning to crack under the weight of history, this is not an ugly house. No, look at the colors you’ve painted on the walls, so bright, and the view, so familiar. Outside the window you’ll see the deliverance of bad news you once received. When you look back inside, you will see that you share this house with every man you ever fucked, every lover who made you cry, and every moment that altered the course of your life. And yet: here you always are. This is your home, but do not think it haunted. These sights are not ugly like ghosts, but pink, beautiful, shaped like the inside of your body: warm pulsing cells, the breath of a lung preparing to sing.

Rachel Deane’s work is, both in process and form, an act of storytelling. As she sings the stories of women punished for the fact of their bodies, it is the act of singing that tells the story of what it’s like to exist with your own history during every minute of today. And in this way, the body itself is the container for a story. Deane’s artwork enters the flesh, replete with traumas that exist not as sores or broken bones, but as part of the body’s cellular structure. These traumas coexist in equal measure with everyday moments of joy and stillness.

But the body, too, is a home in which you are forced to live, and thus, one that you must face with determination if you are to heal from the traumas that once did, and still do, threaten to break you. When a bird crashes into a window, it falls to the ground and begins to shake, like Deane’s repetitive brushstrokes and flicks of the needle, in its effort to expel excess energy generated by trauma. Deane meditates on the effort of a repetitive act, which is an act towards healing. Look on the walls of the home you’ve been given; see if you can find evidence of your own shaking. Go down the hall, and you’ll find an enormous mural, painstakingly composed with scratches and dots. This is good. You are on track to possess your body again, and fly.
On Tuesday, coffee overflowed and puddled beneath my mug. My eyes began to water. They stayed wet for the remainder of the day.

On Wednesday, when sunlight breached my window, fat tears welled and spilled onto my cheeks. Anytime the light caught me, the tears returned. The wet spots on my white dress never dried.

On Thursday, when I brushed my hair, tears began to follow each other down the nape of my neck. They swam down the length of my arms in clean lines, dripping from my fingertips. The animals of my home lapped at the puddles. Before long, their breath quickened and eventually ceased. The holes I dug in the ground filled with water.

On Friday, I hammered boards over my front door. The tears ran over me in my entirety. The clothes that stuck to my sopping skin disintegrated. Naked, I could see that the tears left trails of their paths down my body. The faint red lines caused me no pain, but I was ashamed. My mattress sank into the floor with the weight of the water while I dreamt of mazes.

On Saturday, I found my old box of paints. The puddles of tears marked the floor with rotting footsteps. I tied buckets to my wrists to collect the streaming water and I painted lilies on my walls to pass the time. When the buckets filled, I walked through a field of poppies to a small pond in the acres of unclaimed land behind my home. I dumped my tears there and returned to the laborious pattern making. The path I carved through the field was quickly reduced to dirt. When my tears mixed with the ground, a slow stream began to flow into the pond.

On Sunday, I ran out of space on my walls and began to ornament my furniture. My tears stripped the hair from my skin. The paintbrushes I used constantly slipped from my damp fingers. My rooms turned dizzying as they became completely occupied by pattern. With each trip to the pond, I tracked more earth into the water. In the evening, a clay woman rose from the surface and followed me back through the poppy field. When she entered my home, an invisible force beheaded her, reducing her to a pile of snakes. They told me that my shame was misplaced and that the woman I created could not survive under the weight.

On Monday, when I began to recount my own history, the tears finally tore through my flesh. I located all of the ways I didn’t listen to myself and I told stories of those times through pictures. I turned the patterns into my memories, depicting city streets and figures from my past. With each story told, my tears dug deeper into my body. The sting of the water shocked me out of my self-imposed numbness. Although I was weak, I could see more paths forward than I ever had before. Clarity finally reigned when I let the tears eat through me completely. The search for a new body could finally begin.

—Rachel Deane