MFA THESIS EXHIBITION
Nidaa Aboulhosn

To Build Itself Ruin Or Wonder

They are only passing through
like all the others before them
and the ones to follow
They build, inhabit and name things They name themselves,
for purposes of self-identification, of belonging Forming a
connection with place,
a dwelling, a home
Anchoring themselves in time and space
These are their traces,
their particular activities and peculiar structures What they leave
behind, others stumble upon

These are only clues from a larger system
Evidence of their existence
of the significance of their lives
What makes a person?
What makes a place?

Archival Inkjet Prints
2012–2014
To Build Itself Ruin Or Wonder
Archival Inkjet Prints
2012–2014
Lisette Chavez

I lied at my first confession

Bored in weekly sermons and trips to holy sanctuaries, I often found myself distracted by over-the-top ornamentation and violent imagery. It was both divine and unsettling. Religious icons in and out of my home became constant reminders of morality, pain and the grotesque.

In this body of work, I use texts to reveal personal confessions that imply shame. Hand-drawn images and the printed word serve as a biographical narrative, which document what I suppressed, living in a conservative Catholic family. The “front” I carried became a way for me to conceal what I perceived then as a hypocritical household.

In this expansive collection of objects and icons, I have created a shrine-like space, which is simultaneously alluring and disturbing. My intention is to convey the unease between purity, seduction and evil. Intricate drawings, repetition and pattern have become rituals in my process, which allude to the monotony of mundane rituals that occur in worship. Gaudy religious icons, which were once dull, have been heavily accessorized with “bling” in an attempt to make the object more interesting. They allude to the mass production of holy celebrities in order to sell faith.

Although I feel reverence for these religious icons, I question my faith because I have no remorse for my actions and my sins. By revealing my personal confessions, I hope to confront myself with truth and disclose the discomfort in trying to balance religious beliefs and actions in every day life.
My First Confession (detail)
Mixed media installation
2014
100 Starts

I'm very good at starting things. It's in the space of beginnings that I am most comfortable; I am drawn to the rawness and immediacy that they offer, when the spark of the initial is still present, before apprehensions, frustrations, and exhaustions have the chance to take effect through courses of duration and trial.

I often find myself at a loss for how to move forward in my art while maintaining the qualities of the initial I appreciate most, so I asked myself the question: what would a piece look like that was made up of nothing but starts? I began to make works that I would abandon while still in the uninhibited space of their beginnings, interrupting their development before the first opportunity for conflict could arise. It was a method of control that allowed me to exist exclusively in the good parts, where things are always okay because they are never given the chance not to be.

Working only within the space of beginnings afforded me the freedom and non-commitment conducive to maintaining an open mind. Knowing that I would not have to worry about developing individual pieces further—essentially being able to work without repercussions—enabled me to turn off critical apprehensions of yes no right wrong and accept what occurred in my art from within each moment.

And the original question gave way to new ones: What would it look like to exercise this acceptance for longer durations? What happens when we stay present in the face of conflict and navigate the immediate instead of chasing fixed ideas and trying too hard to control our outcomes? In the proceeding works I challenged myself to continuously move forward while not becoming overly attached to the highs or fixated on the lows. I practiced total trust in my ability to work with whatever came my way, enabling openness to uncertainty and exposure of vulnerability in pursuit of growth and development.

Laurel Conradson
Jenny Day

Above And Below

Place is a location interpreted though memory, experience, and culture. I paint a fragmented space, examining human demand and the effects of environmental degradation on an understanding of place. My paintings present landscapes that address the unstable balance of order and disorder, nature and culture.

Transitional spaces are depicted through stratified landscape; the viewer is simultaneously confronted and enveloped by abstraction. Particulate matter creates an active field of engagement, at times hovering sensually or crowding violently around unformed structures and stands of aspen. The built environment is subsumed and the surroundings dominate. The collision of in-between spaces and imagined landscapes describe a virtual and actual space. Memory collapses into reality and the artificial stimuli of the modern world is revealed. The work references symbolist painters such as Gustav Klimt and the explosive weightlessness in the final scene of Michelangelo Antonioni’s movie “Zabriskie Point”.

My process begins with collaging and sketching. I methodically layer paper, paint, and transparencies, often obscuring the original source photographs and photocopies. I move to canvas after the initial collage is resolved; the work becomes sculptural with the insertion and removal of cut paper, creating a complex hierarchy of surface. With a background in Environmental Studies and a reverence for wild spaces, my paintings discuss how the fractured landscape, once altered, reconstructs itself. The remnants of human activity, juxtaposed with the lack of human presence, evokes a narrative of impermanence.
Cloud Industry
Acrylic And Mixed Media On Canvas
72" × 54"
2014

Annie Birch: Submission
Acrylic And Mixed Media On Canvas
72" × 54"
2014

Afterwards Everything Was Red
Acrylic And Mixed Media On Canvas
72" × 54"
2014
In Proof And Permutations, I Work Through Discomfort And Physical

challenges, considering what it means to seek rites of passage and personal transformation through self-inflicted distresses. I engage myself as an individual in pursuit of understanding, betterment, and accomplishment, examining the states experienced toward these ends. These genuine internal ambitions are skewed toward stagnation in the repetition of compulsions, conflicts, and neuroses that potentially obstruct true progress. The actions I carry out simultaneously help and hinder, assert and take away power.

Just as Sisyphus pushed the boulder up the hill only to have it roll down and start all over, I engage in effort that is perceived as futile. However, through accumulation and persistence futility is converted into a means to find repose and order. In performing these tasks I prove to myself the capability to complete the action; and through completion I affirm my presence and physicality, my self.

Anna Garner

Sequential Interactions
Single Channel Video
2013
1:54

1. Sequential Interactions
   Single Channel Video
   2013
   1:54

2. Surrogates
   Single Channel Video
   2014
   3:02

3. Unyielding
   Single Channel Video
   2013
   3:30

4. Lineage
   Single Channel Video
   2013
   1:39
Slowing the Time
Single Channel Video
2014
15:50

Proof and Permutations
Multi-screen video installation
2014
Artist Statement

I find myself constantly chasing fleeting feelings and experiences. I am starting to understand that my way of thinking is an addiction or even a disease: a disease of nostalgia. In desperately seeking out ways to put myself closer to the past, I realize that my attempts are always met with the disappointment of never really being able to come close enough. It is a lesson learned, but quickly forgotten.

My new work explores a preoccupation with history and memory, and my need to link the past with the present. I use the home as a symbol for its elusive ability to trigger responses that suggest: what was, what is and what could be. At times it suggests a physical location, structure or time period while at other times it becomes a vessel that houses a set of emotions, feelings, relationships or a state of mind. This work reflects a much more complicated set of experiences confronting our interpretation and reformation of the past.

Nyla Hurley
My memories of growing up on the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Reservation from childhood to adolescence, are composed of playing under the sun, swimming in ditches, hanging at parties with family and friends, and occasionally preparing for traditional O’odham ceremonies. The negative reflections consist of violence, gangs, drugs, wakes, and the constant observance of the diabetes sickness among my people. It is these memories that drive my work to analyze the modern Indigenous experience and produce a narrative that highlights current Native American challenges: Alcoholism, drug abuse, diabetes, obesity, violence, loss of culture and tradition.

The use of humor is an important, as it is a “trickster” strategy used to address difficult situations and circumstances. Like the Garbage Pail Kids cards of the late 1980s, the characters in my narrative are rendered in cartoon fashion, displaying a morbid abnormality and are placed in horrendous situations. It is layered within the jolly and joyful characters where disturbing reality lurks and beckons the viewer to contemplate their own addictions, defects and guilt.

The Maze is culturally significant as it is an ancient symbol my people use to describe the path of life. The compositions of my paintings are tied together by the flow of the maze. In this maze space is fractured, causing shifts from one plane to the next. This speaks to the fracture of Indigenous cultures, as the people must shift between two ways of life.

It is through love and concern that I address these issues through my experience as an O’odham person growing up on the reservation. Although, I do enjoy the occasional taste of a handsomely topped Indian Taco with an ice cold Sprite, I can’t help but reflect on the many family and friends I have buried due to addiction and sickness.
Pima Ben has A lot of Work Ahead
Acrylic
8' × 6'
2014

Boyz-N-The Rez
Acrylic
8' × 6'
2014
Tom Mickelson

Artist Statement

Using stunted narratives and associative leaps, my videos patch together a parallel reality with its own distorted logic. An affinity for a crude, ‘smoke and mirrors’ approach to visual effects reflects my desire to let viewers in on all the jokes.

I am fascinated with paranormal phenomena and the provocative nature of that which lies beyond comprehension. Ghosts, aliens, figures emerging from dreams—these serve as fragmented characters caught in a dystopic environment. Echoes of meaningful connection linger amidst the absurdities of current societal structures.

My recent video, Outer Spaces, was shot while spending three weeks at Snyder Hill, a patch of BLM land outside of Tucson. I invited people staying there to be a part of my project: documentary meets campy sci-fi. Reflections on forms alienation dissolve into sequences of absurd alien activity.
Outer Spaces
Video (still)
2014
Deanna Pizzitelli

Artist Statement

... But I taste other visions too: the stripper with the scar on her stomach, the bottle of cleaner, the baby, the other baby, the cat you drowned. Lying in an ordinary room, I knew the danger of this place. But I didn’t want his love. Did I? ...
Mena, I  
Chromogenic Print  
10” × 12.5”  
2013

Michelle, I  
Chromogenic Print  
10” × 12.0”  
2013

Skull  
Inkjet Print  
20” × 25.5”  
2014

Snake, I  
Chromogenic Print  
10” × 12.0”  
2013
Walled In / Walled Out visually works through the various types of violence happening on the US Mexico border. Scholars have identified three key forms of violence—structural, cultural, and direct. Each is at play on our border: structural violence limits the choices of migrants so that they risk their lives crossing an inhospitable desert; cultural violence blames the migrants themselves or simply hides the fact that this is happening; and direct violence occurs when migrants are beaten, raped, or murdered by drug cartels, human smugglers, or US Border Patrol. The juxtaposition of the loss of life and the loss of humanity, along with the educational e-book in Walled In / Walled Out is meant to bring these three forms of violence into view together.

This piece memorializes, educates, and asks questions. The wall memorializes two forms of loss on the border—the loss of life and the loss of humanity. On one side of the wall, hundreds of toe-tags hang. On the other, hurtful quotes hang in frames. Since 1990, the remains of approximately 2,500 people have been found in the borderlands of Arizona. Found in remote desert areas, these people are either known to be, or believed to be migrants who died attempting to cross the border. Although most are Mexican, they are also from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and other countries. The toe-tags on the wall represent this loss of life—each stands for a real decedent, including the case number from the Pima County Medical Examiner's Office and the name if they were identified. Hundreds remain John or Jane Doe’s.

The opposing side of the wall reveals another side of loss occurring on the border—the loss of humanity, sympathy, and compassion. Each quote comes from a real person who wrote the comment in an online forum following a news article about the deaths of migrants in the desert. The intent is not to dehumanize the people who said these things, but to treat this loss with compassion as well. The internet has provided a space where people feel a high level of anonymity to say whatever they want without repercussions. Fake names and the comfort of one’s own home can encourage people to say things they might not be proud of in other settings. Picture frames—usually used to display something beautiful—are used here to ask, is this something to be proud of? Some of these quotes received hundreds of “likes” or positive comments from other users. This piece asks, “Is this who we are?” And, although these comments may seem extreme, the interactive e-book (found on the iPad) reveals how such thinking is normalized by the policies of our government, and vice versa. In addition, the e-book provides background, data, and analysis about the border, immigration, and the loss of life in the desert.

The viewer is invited to interact with the piece—touch the toe-tags individually and read the name of a real person, use the hashtag #WalledInWalledOut in social media to stimulate a dialogue about cultural violence and the loss of humanity in the immigration debate, and to learn about the issue and the forms of violence through the iPad interactive feature.
Walled In/Walled Out (detail)  
Nails & Paper (toe tags) & MDF Board  
8’ × 10’  
2014

Walled In/Walled Out (detail)  
Metal and wood frames & iPad  
8’ × 10’  
2014
Artist Statement

Snow falls, floating downward, slowly, making sudden sharp turns like startled prey. Whisks away in the blink of an eye as it concedes to an unseen current, drifts, eventually settling where it needs to be.

My work is about following intuition and placing importance on the understanding that the best path in life is not always the straight one. It speaks to letting go of the past, taking chances, making sacrifices, and allowing failure without judgment. It is about appreciating a journey that can often seem unbearably long, difficult, and isolating; recognizing experience as a steppingstone to what comes next; and surrendering to that unseen current that allows us to settle where we need to be.

Video Documentation

Drift hangs at a height of seven feet and is roughly a distance of four feet from the back wall. This is to encourage viewers to walk around it as to actively engage with the silk fabric and two video projections. As one circulates around the silk, it gently wafts from air currents generated by the movement of the viewer. By passing behind the piece one casts a shadow onto the silk, which is viewable from both sides. Within the large curl of silk one finds a short piece of prose located on the floor. It is placed directly below a video projection of a lone person walking slowly through the snowy landscape. All of these elements work together to suggest the idea of movement and the personal journey.

Alice M. Vinson

Drift
Installation
33′ × 16′ × 8′
2014
Drift (Text Detail)
Installation
32’ x 16’ x 8’
2014

Snow falls, floating downward, slowly, making sudden sharp turns like startled prey. Whisks away in the blink of an eye as it concedes to an unseen current, drifts, eventually settling where it needs to be.