MFA (2018)

UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
THESIS EXHIBITION
Director’s Notes

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Hannah Fournier

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Eric Wilson

2018 Marcia Grand Centennial Sculpture Prize Winners
As the culminating experience of the program, a tremendous amount of time, energy and anticipation goes into each year’s Masters of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition. We expect our students to demonstrate a mastery of their chosen medium or mediums as well as the ability to do a rigorous and in depth exploration of a specific theme or concept they explore on a visual level. More important, we expect them to push boundaries and explore new territories in the creation of that work. They are the next generation of contemporary artists, and as such, we look to them to create new knowledge and direction in their chosen disciplines. We guide them, we push them, but in the end it is up to them to choose the direction their work takes.

The burden of these expectations is immense. Yet, as I watched this year’s exhibition come to fruition, one thing became clear: it would readily rise to meet those expectations. I offer my congratulations to our MFA class of 2018.

*The MFA exhibition is hosted in the Joseph Gross Gallery and the University of Arizona Museum of Art.
The work in *Shelter Phase* can be thematically traced to a single dramatic event in my personal history: a fire that caught in my primitive childhood house—a repurposed horse barn—and burned it down. In the aftermath, sifting through the ashes, I discovered familiar objects fused with the unfamiliar, what had been valuable suddenly value-less, and what had gone unnoticed reborn in strange and beautiful forms.

*Shelter Phase* pulls formally from a range of sources: industrial ruins, construction scaffolding, vascular system of plants, and the 1970’s back-to-land homes of my childhood. The recognizable materials of steel, clay, and wood are rooted in contemporary and historical uses of construction. Steel, the structural bones of modern infrastructure, contrasts with the raw clay and painted wood. Hovering between utility and decomposition, the sculptures are constructed from unattached movable sections, furthering the precarity of their current form.

Shelter is something that protects from dangers – weather, thoughts, loneliness. It is, also, something that contains, often our bodies, ultimately our memories. Through rendering these precarious architectonic forms, I reframe the word shelter as something that can be simultaneously known and unfamiliar, and as something that is both static and shifting.
A wooden sky
not yet lit to burn,
out of this plateau blue
what’s left standing?
a built place up from
the hello trawling of the mind
despite the day, now, wiped sheer
broke down burned out barnhouse
the living glands, dug out
beams all wrong in the thawing earth, mud
pooling our empty footprints, as if
we had just gone.

The Present Mirage
Steel, raw clay, plexiglass
107” x 94” x 68.5”
2018
IDYLL
Wood, paint, drywall, beeswax, rope, plaster, cement,
found rocks, tarp
2018
IDYLL (detail)
Wood, paint, drywall, beeswax, rope, plaster, cement, found rocks, tarp
2018
LAUREN BUCHNESS  ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Will I fit? Will I fit….into a physical space, a psychological space, a societal space, and if I don’t, why not? Am I more than my fat body? Am I seen beyond my fat body?

These questions haunt me throughout every day as a fat woman. I often feel both invisible and hyper visible simultaneously. Contemporary culture criticizes the fat woman and limits where she is allowed to exist. My work challenges the idea that fatness defines the individual, and confronts the validity of body standards.

While the paintings are self portraits, the lack of identifiable features strip me of my identity to suggest that society uses my fatness to dehumanize me. My hands interact with the faceless fat figures gripping and squeezing the flesh, trying to keep the forms contained while forcing the viewer to confront my fatness. The videos parallel these actions by constantly reshaping amorphous faux flesh into a neat and tidy form. Grabbing, squishing, pressing, pinching, and shaping convey the frustration trying to fit, and of not being seen beyond the fat.

I will Fit.

I am seen.

I am more than my fat body.
Carry That Weight
Video still
2018
Elephant in the Room
Installation view
2018
namesake. is my response to the ongoing American crisis of racial inequality and violence. White privilege has a long history; it can be seen in historic lynching photographs that were shared as postcards or saved as souvenirs. This installation uses three historic lynching photographs, coupled with facial recognition technology that searches to recognize members of the lynch mobs—interrupting the impunity bestowed on the participants and spectators. Audio from a recent Unite the Right rally and a 1960’s KKK rally connect the historic mobs to contemporary mobs. A screen in the installation plays YouTube videos made in response to former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick’s recent protests against police brutality in the United States. Using visual media and technology, these white performers create a message that is intended to evoke fear without concern of consequence.

The accompanying books speak to the spectators in the lynching photographs whose privilege grants anonymity: the participants, the bystanders, the witnesses, the racists—they are everything but held accountable. Each book is named after individuals who have evaded conviction in their actions against black Americans. Technology has evolved, but it continues to fail as evidence for marginalized populations.

I have often heard black Americans discuss the likeness of their bodies to those who have been lynched. I had never considered the likeness of my white middle-class female body to that of the lynchers. I often ask myself, when does the crowd become a mob and when does an individual get lost in it?
namesake
Artist books, 5.5” x 8” each
2018
With Your Permission
Installation, 15’ x 15’
2018
With Your Permission, detail from monitor
Installation, 49” monitor
2018
In the process of searching for vestiges of US military intervention in El Salvador I leave my own trace. My practice of research and representation produces a residue of my emotional entanglement with Central America, as well as my connection to US foreign policy. *Pisar Pasos* (step in footsteps) consists of five video works and a tabloid newspaper. These works both conceal and reveal information. They show traces of US military intervention in El Salvador and my relationship to the region—a place where I spent the better part of five years.

In some ways it is easy to see the US influence in El Salvador. The signs of North American companies dot San Salvador’s urban space. Money-wiring businesses are ubiquitous, allowing people to receive remittances: cash sent back by family members living in Los Angeles, Virginia and everywhere in between.

Other forms of US influence are less visible, as though shrouded by the mist that rolls in from the ocean during El Salvador’s rainy season. As recently as the early 1990s, the US supported a military government in El Salvador. In the process of trying to quell a guerrilla uprising, the Salvadoran military routinely massacred innocent civilians. With the exception of a handful of small memorials and underfunded museums, this recent history can appear forgotten—as if obscured by the inexorable encroachment of jungle foliage.

It is harder still to visualize how my presence in El Salvador, first as a Peace Corps volunteer and now as an artist, is part of US involvement in the region. Despite having worked for a government agency, I initially believed that there was a clear
distinction separating me from my country’s foreign policy. I drew a line between my work and that of the State Department. But research and reflexivity has worn away at this mental partition. My trips to El Salvador echo the broader US involvement—past, present and future—that haunts this part of the world.
Pisar Pasos
Installation view
2018
As a popular internet insult, #snowflake has become the term of choice to shut down an argument. However, it is a misconception that #snowflakes are simply fragile, easily angered, with an exaggerated level of self-importance. When you feel upset or angry by someone expressing their opinion, you are being a #snowflake. When you think your opinion is right and need to tell the opposing party how wrong they are, you are being a #snowflake. In an argument, the important part isn’t how the term is used but rather who uses it. Once someone uses #snowflake against their opponent, the argument is over. The reasoning is gone, and only juvenile slander remains. Being a #snowflake comes down to differences in opinion and the lack of empathy when listening to those differences. Our values and choices make up part of our existence, and when those beliefs are challenged it is common to feel vulnerable or emotional.

Forecast: Whiteout is a contemplative space that puts the viewers in front of their own reflection paired with the endless voice of the internet. Reflections in the hashtag shapes create a funhouse effect which is both familiar and unnerving. As viewers walk around and see their reflections, they are also met with a continual stream of messages pouring out from the internet. Forecast: Whiteout aims to show viewers that no matter who you are, the one behind the screen or the one in the mirror, that we are all the same.
Forecast: Whiteout
Mixed media installation
2018
In the Eye of the Storm
Installation detail
2018
Growing up, I was often told that I was mature for my age. It wasn’t really about being mature, just the facade of it.Exercising self-control and reserving my ill-formed thoughts was easier than stumbling for explanations when faced with confrontation. And my escape, the compliment, was evidence that I had fooled adults into thinking I was becoming more mature due to my intense silence and observation. But I knew nothing. I didn’t understand them. After all, what would a child know amongst adults?

*Impressions of a Skeptic* is a collection of restrained reactions to aspects of my upbringing. Within the books, my reflections don’t feel concrete as I struggle to gather and organize certainties about my past. By providing a space for the viewer to be the observer and to be observed, I recreate the anxiety that I often feel when curious eyes pass judgment. I stay within my introverted cage to avoid ridicule, but without the judgmental eye I am unable to determine the appropriateness of my actions. I cling to these impressions in attempt to decipher when good intentions go awry.
Introverted Cave
Birch plywood, hard maple, metal fasteners,
Ikea sectional
Installation: 10’ x 7.5’
2018
Introverted Cave (detail)
Birch plywood, hard maple, metal fasteners, 
Ikea sectional
Installation: 10’ x 7.5’
2018
Out of Relation and Out of Room
Birch plywood, waxed string, uncoated translucent vellum, drawing paper, binding super, adhesive
5 ½” x 8” each
2017
Mitchell Mantle

Art can be a powerful way to search for purpose and meaning. Anything we wonder about, question, or experience can later breach the surface of the subconscious to become an iconic visual symbol. In my own work, figures, animals, and buildings interact in a metaphorical narrative that is autobiographical and, hopefully, universal. I imagine they are me. I am every man, woman, and animal that I draw. I am everybody and nobody in particular. My pieces attempt to explore and celebrate the certainties and ambiguities of personality, relationships, and being.
Building Houses
Acrylic and collage on canvas
2018
Palm Sunday
Acrylic and collage on canvas
2018
A Devil in Pajamas
Acrylic and collage on canvas
2018
What would it feel like to hold a tiny universe in your palm?

From Kevo Subarctic Research Station the earth and the universe are being observed, every little detail and change registered as significant and measured by multiple devices to minimize the margin of error. It is located in Utsjoki at the northernmost tip of Finland (69°45’ N, 27°01’ E), high above the Arctic Circle and only about one hundred kilometers from the coast of the Arctic Ocean.

The darkness that falls with the polar night (kaamos in Finnish) reveals an array of lights. Animals and humans alike have to adapt to these changing conditions. What is it like to see a tiny dot of the sun peaking above the horizon for the first time after 52 polar nights? There is no magic to it and yet it is there.

The synoptic weather measurements were made eight times a day, every three hours, every day and night with no exceptions. To observe and research was to stay put. To station yourself and perceive the world around you. The scale was from a singular ice crystal or snowflake on your sleeve to seismic activity all around the globe.

The observer was also to keenly follow the changes in weather between the measurements. During the night, in between these measurements, the observer slept. My parents were attendants of this station for six years. I was born there.
The Pocket Book
The covers are cut with a sunshine recorder.
2018
Left: **Night vision / Tapetum Lucidum**  
(Shining layer behind the retina)  
Retroreflectors, nails and red spotlight.  
2.17” each  
2018

Center: **Terrella Cubica (Little Earth)**  
Video installation  
Wooden box, display, computer, acrylic pyramid, and wire.  
17” x 15” x 15”  
2018
Top: **Sounding Balloon**
A weather balloon from the Finnish Meteorological Institute and a video projection made of consecutive radio frequency sun radiation maps by Metsähovi Radio Observatory in Finland.
350 grams balloon and a projection
2018

Bottom right: **A Tiny Universe**
Light installation with paper, welding glass, LED-lights and wooden box.
6.7” x 5.5” x 5.5”
2018

Bottom left: **Aurinkoautografi (Sunshine Recorder)**
R. Fuess Berlin-Steglitz Nr. B 5163, owned by Jussi Paatero from the Finnish Meteorological Institute
Leaving Alice is a photographic journey to locate and reconnect with my twenty-five foster brothers and sisters across the country. I traveled back to my grandparents’ home in North Carolina, where I was raised as their own child. Assisted by my grandmother Alice, I reached out to my foster siblings who we are still in contact with, hopeful that they could help reunite me with other members of our family that we have lost touch with over the years.

Alice emerged as the underlying foundation that shaped my process of looking, responding, and processing our shared experiences. My foster siblings and I did not share the same biological parents, nor the same circumstances that placed us under my grandparents’ care. We were not all raised together, and most didn’t have access to the continued stability that I was provided. But we did share Alice.

The process of loving and losing that characterized my childhood was a cycle that Alice helped me through again during this past year as we reconnected with my siblings. It gave me back a part of myself that I had lost over time. The complexity and adversity we endured are imagined in this installation, as is the capacity for love that she provided and continues to feel for us all. Alice serves as the connective thread between us, linking our present to our past.
Leaving Alice
Installation
2018
Leaving Alice
Installation view
2018
Leaving Alice
Archival pigment prints
2018
GALEN TREZISE  

TRANSMISSION: BODY-ODY-ODY

I am an extra-terrestrial.

At the same time, I feel rooted in nature, identifying with plants, animals, and minerals more often than humans.

As a child, I was not comfortable within my biologically assigned gender. I wanted an alien craft to pick me up, take me beyond, so I could take a different form. Since being female was not an option, I longed for a mythical embodiment and transformation, resulting in the unusual belief that I was a unicorn in a human body. My queer identity has, and is continually shaped by the displacement of gender onto beings that are beyond male and female.

I blur conceptions of gender and representations of the body. In my work, gender takes a fluid position, moving away from entrenched physical and social factors. Transmission: Body-ody-ody envisions gender as an abstract and psychic space, where binary signifiers dissolve and merge into mutable forms.

The work is both otherworldly and transformed in nature. I flirt with the collision of human, extraterrestrial, plant, and mineral-like forms, creating open structures with their own ecology. Using transparent and visceral materials combined with my own personal symbols, I generate strange objects of otherness, addressing what a body, in all its spatial, spiritual, and psychological multiplicity could look like.
Transmission: Body-ody-ody is a freeing and empowering expression of gender displacement. In the work, I leverage abstraction and its amorphous qualities to trouble static classifications, and unseat fixed designations. It is a resource to envision new human potential. The human body, seemingly contained, becomes expansive, shimmering with changeable identities. The work redefines the idea of transformation itself, from a space of rebirth, into an entity without a designated or desired outcome. A space one can occupy indefinitely, with unlimited possibility.

Untitled
Expanding foam, human and synthetic hair, silicone, epoxy clay, epoxy resin, mica pigments, spray paint
2018
Catalytic Peacock Flow
Steel, polystyrene foam, expanding foam, epoxy resin, silicone, synthetic and human hair, mica pigment, spray paint
2018
Transmission: Body-ody-ody
Installation detail
2018
ERIC WILSON  
**ERIC WILSON’S GREAT AMERICAN ROAD TRIP**

My work is a response to the narratives and images that create our American identity. Although my work is leavened with irony and humor, it is underpinned with criticality. Issues such as the glorification of the West, nuclear armament, and Manifest Destiny are residual concerns from our collective past that affect us today in major ways. I embrace kitsch and Americana in my work by examining mass production and common symbols and by employing familiar and ordinary cultural vehicles like dioramas and wallpaper in my installations to attract the viewer into a space that seems comforting and nostalgic. The real purpose, to rethink the contemporary state of America, is only realized after some time is spent in this created world. The uncertainty as to who made the work, when was it made, and why it was made creates a dissonance between romantic images of our past and contemporary issues.

My most recent installation is an exploration of the American Road trip, a patriotic exploration loaded with centuries of conflict and struggle. Since our country’s beginning, there has been a desire to create an empire spanning a continent. Lewis and Clark opened the west for exploration. Manifest Destiny proclaimed that the land was ours to tame. And in the modern era Dwight D. Eisenhower’s interstate highway system, built primarily for defense, paved the whole country for us all. As we spread our country westward we have displaced groups of people and destroyed the land. This installation is a critique of the icon status of the American road trip while proposing questions regarding the consequences of our expansion.
Eric Wilson’s Great American Road Trip
Installation shot
2018
Eric Wilson’s Great American Road Trip
Installation shot
2018
Eric Wilson’s Great American Road Trip
Installation detail
2018
Building on the excellence of our graduate program, the Marcia Grand Centennial Sculpture Prize Competition is intended to provide MFA-seeking graduate students with up to $8,000 to support the completion of work in the sculptural/3D arts.

Congratulations to Karlito Espinosa Miller and Olivier Dubois-Cherrier for their excellent projects!

**KARLITO ESPINOSA MILLER  UNTITLED (POINT OF ENTRY)**

The installation created by Karlito Miller-Espinosa is informed by a devastating local crisis of migrant death and disappearance in the Arizona desert. It is a monument for those who have died and who continue to die as they attempt to cross the Sonoran desert borderlands northward.

**OLIVIER DUBOIS-CHERRIER  EXPECTING NOTHING IS GOING TO CHANGE**

*Expecting Nothing is Going to Change* consists of an 8’x16’ billboard made with untreated wood located in a sublime landscape. The billboard has been painted on site in an impressionist manner, utilizing found materials as well as acrylic and house paints. The view is hidden from the painting, but the painting itself creates a presence that draws one deeply into the view. No effort will be made to preserve the installation; its decay until full erosion will be documented over time.
Untitled (Point of Entry)
On view at the ENR2 building atrium, The University of Arizona
Nothing is Going to Change (back view)
On view at The Land With No Name Sanctuary, an alternative art space that promotes a habitat for sculpture and a place for people to gather and engage in various art experiences, art appreciation, ecological awareness, and educational endeavors.
ISAN BRANT
LAUREN BUCHNESS
STEPHANIE BURCHETT
CONOR ELLIOTT FITZGERALD
ASHLEY FITZPATRICK
HANNAH FOURNIER
MITCHELL MANTLE
KAROLIINA PAATOS
DUSTIN SHORES
GALEN TREZISE
ERIC WILSON