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THE CURRENT AND FORMER HEAD SHARE THOUGHTS ON THE JOB.

SUSANNE SLAVICK

I always loved (and still do), connecting opportunities and the appropriate people, whether it’s faculty or grad students or undergrads, trying to match people to the right sorts of situations or grants or scholarships and advocating for them.

CARSON: That’s an aspect which I like a lot—the enabling. You see the connections and the opportunities, and sometimes it’s just enough to say yes to something. It’s a form of social sculpture—trying to get the best out of people, encouraging folks to work together.

SLAVICK: I think that’s part of what the head’s role is; finding ways to keep fostering those opportunities.

CARSON: Sometimes it just happens through personal connections which can be more effective than trying to create a new course through formal structures and then trying to railroad people in there, because the fundamental thing that drives it is personal enthusiasm and passion for the idea. That’s what brings people along.

SLAVICK: I am intrigued by the menu system of classes in the USA, whereby students create their own individual program by the combination of their selections. At best it allows a rich and diverse self-directed path of study, and at worst it can result in a kind of ‘pick and mix’ dilettantism. The traditional arts school system in the UK is linear system where, after the initial foundation year, there are three years of continuous sustained studio practice, to focus on and develop an area of interest or a set of ideas, guided by a number of tutors. Rather than the tutors or professors determining what students do through classes, projects and assignments— they are prompting, facilitating and supporting each individual student’s area of exploration and practice. Instead of a combination of choices, its one big choice for each student to define the direction and subject of their own inquiry.

SLAVICK: It’s all relative isn’t it? As much as you see the American system as providing flexibility and choice, it does have its own restrictions and requirements and I know that some students feel the program to be quite prescribed in some respects, in terms of what’s compulsory and what electives are available, or not available.

CARSON: Well there are pros and cons within both systems. The US system is certainly more structured, but it has a lot more faculty/student contact.

SLAVICK: I was going to ask you about the difference between art schools and a university. We are certainly training artists of the future within a university context, but we also recognize that not all our students will persist as artists in the traditional sense of the word or earn a living from the work they produce. Regardless, we still expect these students to play a creative, collaborative role in shaping creative opportunities, so they need to be nurtured through all the resources of the university toward that end.

CARSON: But that’s education. We’re involved in art and art education. So one part of what we do is to provide a system that will allow people to become the best possible artists they can be. The other part is to give them a good general education, a set of versatile and transferable skills, and flexibility of thinking, so that they can creatively adapt and contribute to all sorts of different situations in the world.

SLAVICK: What do you see as the biggest challenge that we face as an art school— or art schools in general, aside from the usual budget and space problems?

CARSON: I could talk about the particulars of what might benefit the CMU program in terms of tweaking or altering the curriculum, but I think there is a bigger issue which is the challenge of how we deal with the millennium generation: this generation of students who think via computers, who can happily operate within a virtual environment. When I was a kid my father had a tool-shed and we fixed things when they got broken. Now, things don’t get repaired; they just get replaced. And so there’s a
whole seismic shift in the generational mind-set. Whilst many of our generation hold onto the belief that it’s important to learn through engagement with materials, we have a generation of young people for whom that doesn’t really have any meaning. Those material processes for them are outdated, inappropriate and time-consuming. They may become hackers rather than mechanics, creating software and virtual phenomena rather than artifacts. We have to lead in providing an increasingly expansive and innovative curriculum that addresses this potential.

SLAVICK — Exactly, and there has always got to be a continual recalibration of the balance, whether it’s between physical or virtual realms or between academic courses and concept or media studios. How do we integrate all of those in a meaningful way to optimally prepare students? Curriculum design is an ongoing balancing process. I’d say every five to ten years you pretty much have to do a thorough curricular review, and we’re pretty much due for that, you know? I think our curriculum has worked very well for a long time, partly because it has a kind of in-built flexibility and is open to cross-media exploration. It isn’t as segregated as other art school curricula, and I think that has served us well, and I hope it continues to do so. But we have to respond to and shape the developments that you just articulated.

EPLLING

CARSON — It’s a tremendous thrill, when the people that you had as students are doing well and enjoying success.

SLAVICK — It’s funny whenever people ask who, are CMU’s notable alumni? They are always surprised to know who has graduated from here. Sometimes those same artists also have graduate or undergraduate degrees from other schools, and a lot of times the other schools get the glory. We have a great record of producing really strong, inventive artists, and I love letting people know about them. Just take four alumni who graduated in the stellar class of 1999. Mitzi Pederson showcased in the 2008 Whitney Biennial and has her first solo museum exhibition at Hammer Projects in LA. Innovative projects by Cat Mazza and Rich Pell have won fellowships from Creative Capital and Renewal Media, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Nathan Martin, white at Carnegie Mellon, was a collaborative creator of MapHub (maphub.org), which has now developed into Deep Local (deeplocal.com), a successful software design firm that helps clients and communities in finding solutions to information collection, analysis and management.

At the grad level it is great to see the surging careers of Shana Moulton, Jacob Ciocci (Paper Rad), who has recently shown exhibiting and curating in one country after another!
The wanderlust of the artist is a chronic and fortunate condition—one that the School of Art has happily indulged. Over the last 15 summers (and a few other seasons), faculty and students have periodically traveled together to work with peers from many countries. Their projects have transformed a former distillery in Sardinia; private gardens, a tour boat and a meat packing house in Venice; vacant army barracks in Metzingen, Germany; a winter castle and frozen lake in Skoki, Poland; a former gorgonzola factory in Billabio, Italy; and Turkish baths in Belgrade just to name a few.

RECORDED OUTSIDE PROJECT -- BELGRADE, SERBIA -- SUMMER 2006

This collaborative project combined the critical and creative energies of CMU School of Art students and faculty and their counterparts in Belgrade and Florence. The project included meetings with noted artists, historians and cultural workers along with seminars and workshops in the fields of visual culture, contemporary art and art history. Participants created projects that responded to Belgrade, representing and promoting the host city’s historical and contemporary position within an international artistic context. The project as a whole culminated in a citywide exhibition spanning diverse venues ranging from city museums and art centers to a 17th century Turkish bath.

I am often influenced creatively by my immediate environment, so I was interested to see how a radically different environment would change my work. Instead of being inspired by media and pop culture, I found myself much more stimulated by graffiti on the street. I appropriated an image I found on the street and spoke with some local kids about what they thought it meant. I used that image in an installation at the Turkish bath, coupled with recycled objects I found at the Recycling Center. It was really interesting to work in this extroverted way as opposed to the internalized way that my soft little comfort relationships between different communities in Marfa was a complex undertaking. Through the radio program our group was able to cover the widest range of angles to the story. We talked to people ranging from a senior officer of the border patrol to local business owners and recent Manhattan transplants, as well as recording soundscapes. Other undertakings included performance interventions, sound mapping, and interviews with tourists, border patrol agents, and restaurant owners.

The Making of Marfa, that aired last October on Marfa Public Radio

RECORDED VOICE EILEEN MAXSON

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RECORDED ARTMECCA: THE MAKING OF MARFA -- MARFA, TEXAS -- FALL 2006

School of Art faculty Melissa Ragona and Bob Bingham accompanied graduate students from Ragona’s MFA Academic Seminar to Marfa, a high desert town in west Texas. The group’s project was to interrogate this phenomenon. Participants considered the underlying issues of cultural tourism within this specific context including the realities of real estate, labor and border politics. The group produced a 30-minute radio program, ArtMecca: The Making of Marfa, that aired last October on Marfa Public Radio.

RECORDED VOICE BETH MAREK

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On our travels throughout Peloponnesos I carried a digital audio recorder and captured sounds in the caves of Diros, chanting in the ancient tombs of Mycenae, fellow students singing in the amphitheater of Epidaurus, cantors performing the Liturgy in a Greek Orthodox church, and Greek folk songs exchanged among family and friends. Having the portable audio recorder filtered my perception, increasing my sensitivity to the ongoing sounds of the environment.

We spent our first week in Nagoya, Japan, working with students and faculty preparing the exhibition, eating eel, squid, and raw horsemeat, and drinking many bottles of Sake and Shochyu. We slept in a student apartment the size of a bathtub and squandered thousands of yen at the Pachinko parlor. We also watched the K-1 Kickboxing Finals naked with dozens of other men at the local hot springs. After the exhibition, we had an extended weekend in Tokyo exploring the many facets of the businessman lifestyle, including sleeping in a Capsule Hotel, getting Chinese massages, and shopping at a 10-story Anime Mega store. . . On the way home, we spent a day surfing at Waikiki beach during our 10-hour layover in Hawaii.
OUR DAUGHTER AUDREY REMEMBERED THIS PAINTING THAT I HAD PAINTED IN A BARN IN ASHLAND MASSACHUSETTS WHEN SHE WAS FOUR, AND SHE ASKED ME IF I WOULD GET IT OUT AND SEND IT. SHE LIVES IN FLORIDA IN A HOUSE WITH A WALL THAT'S BIG ENOUGH FOR ONE OF THESE. SO I WENT INTO THE STORAGE AT CMU—YOU KNOW, ONE OF THOSE CADAVER PLACES OFF OF THE LOGGIA—AND I GOT ALL OF THEM OUT, AND I FINALLY FOUND IT AND TOOK IT HOME AND UNROLLED IN OUR BASEMENT, BECAUSE IT HADN'T BEEN OUT FOR THIRTY-FIVE OR FORTY YEARS. SO, I HAD TO MUD AND DOING LITTLE THINGS HERE AND THERE, JUST THIS KIND OF IMMEDIATE CONTACT WITH COLOR. I THOUGHT, WELL, MAYBE I'D BETTER GO BACK AND TAKE A LOOK AT THESE...
Solar Vision: Vision of the 13 Suns, 16 'X 8', 1964
LOWRY  I brought all the old paintings over to my studio in Lawrenceville, and I got out all of my old things, all my old records and my old overalls, and my old everything, just kind of picking up my brushes where I stopped.

CLAYTON  What was the most obvious thing when you first pulled them all out after not having seen them for thirty or more years?

LOWRY  There were surprising things there that I had forgotten. And things that I didn’t understand that were simply visionary presences back then. Now I knew what they were, and I could begin to fill in the blanks. There was this very strange folding of time in both directions. I could take a very small slice of now, start to open it up and create a time space that I could start to live in. I think that’s the deepest motivation of what occurred…this serendipitous thing dropped out of the sky and…became a refuge out of time.

CLAYTON  There’s no contemporary time or even modern time left. That’s a deeper dilemma behind all these things coming out.

LOWRY  These painting seem very geological, with strata that are loaded with visions.

CLAYTON  These are visions and yet they’re not illustrations or direct depictions of the visions, they are trying to make the feeling of the presence of the visions. There are direct quotations from many many visionary experiences in the paintings. They are brought together around specific themes from The Quiet Axis, which is the big forty-year, almost fifty-year work now in my life, which is scattered all over the world. These are glimpses into critical nodules of that bigger work.

LOWRY  The work is so prismatic in that way. Everywhere the suggestion is that these are pieces of some bigger whole. The whole set of paintings function that way, and all the little elements in the paintings function as the prismatic constituent parts of other bigger things.

LOWRY  Well, I think that’s a really good metaphor. They are spectral—They are spectra of manifestations that go back to the primal that lies behind them: primal forms, primal thoughts. And in that sense they are like very large holograms too, because it’s as if you got at a certain angle to something where the image could suddenly play out as they do with holograms.

CLAYTON  This summer in Greece you just completed another major piece of The Quiet Axis.

LOWRY  This summer I finished 32 years of work by placing the two Seeds of the Infinite Absolute, which you see here [pointing to the painting]. One was placed on top of the tallest mountain in southern Greece, and the other in the 20,000 foot deep sea trench nearby. So both of these things are tugging at the earth in this very interesting place where you have such a close proximity of high and low and about 30,000 feet difference in the crust of the Earth. For me all infinities are “two” and this two-ness is about these two seeds that contain 36 waters of the world, 33 bloods—your [Clayton Merrell’s] blood is right there.

CLAYTON  Yes, mine is in there.

LOWRY  What else? 52 flowers and 44 trees and 120 people’s telepathic projections of hope into the substance that is the red on the painting. But behind that is this whole story of Greece this summer of finally getting these things that I’ve been collecting for so long together and distilling them into these two seeds. The one, the top one, had flown into zero gravity, so it’s the one that tugs the earth up. The other one is the hyper-gravity seed, which pulls down. The dragonflies came up to me at the Menelaion overlooking Sparta, and I thought, “Oh my goodness, I want to be a dragonfly.” So we got a helicopter and that’s how we did it then, floating up gloriously over top of the landscape to the top of the mountain and then out to the sea in the most beautiful kind of chattering arc of flying. After all the labor of gathering all this stuff, distilling it, forming it, let alone getting everything through customs, it was very easy…so graceful…a light touch.

CLAYTON  We see them in these paintings, and yet they’re sitting on top of the mountain and bottom of the ocean too.

LOWRY  Yes. There are very long, complex stories behind many of the elements in the paintings. I should explain the Buddha vision a bit. This is during the Vietnam War in 1966 in Cambridge, Mass. I had studied South-Eastern Asian anthropology and history at the University of Pennsylvania in 1960 and was rather surprised with our government’s incursion into a situation that had been a historical disaster forever. I had done teach-ins, as we all did in the peace movement, and that wasn’t having any effect at all.

CLAYTON  This summer I finished 32 years of work by placing the two Seeds of the Infinite Absolute, which you see here [pointing to the painting]. One was placed on top of the tallest mountain in southern Greece, and the other in the 20,000 foot deep sea trench nearby. So both of these things are tugging at the earth in this very interesting place where you have such a close proximity of high and low and about 30,000 feet difference in the crust of the Earth. For me all infinities are “two” and this two-ness is about these two seeds that contain 36 waters of the world, 33 bloods—your [Clayton Merrell’s] blood is right there.

CLAYTON  Yes, mine is in there.

LOWRY  So, one evening there was a really massive slaughter on both sides and I walked out on my deck in Cambridge looking over towards the sun setting and looked out, thinking what to do. And I saw a lake, eyes open, a lake sloping up in the air, with water lilies on it, in a place where there was no such thing, towards the sun. I thought, well, if you want to do something, go make a lake slope in air in Afghanistan. Six years later, we went to Afghanistan and made a holographic lake a mile and a half long in the valley opposite the Buddhas, as if the Buddhas were looking out at it. That’s the clearest historical reference in all of these.

CLAYTON  But there is also an art historical genealogy there, when you dig a little bit.

LOWRY  Historians have written about my art to connect me in that stream of people back to Blake. And I feel resonance with the northern Germans like Runge and Caspar David Friedrich. And then back to the very late, big paintings of Delacroix in Saint-Sulpice. So this line from Delacroix that flows through Redon and all those people, the southern French painters that I love. And then off to Mexico and through Russia and back then from Byzantine stuff into La Farge and the late Sargent stuff in Boston, that was very powerful to me. So here are all these off-line influences on me. I’m almost an anomaly in the sense that these paintings are a very different history of 20th century painting.

CLAYTON  Everything on the fringes. What about Grunewald?

LOWRY  He’s the source point, period. Everything collapses back to Grunewald’s Isenheim. So you can understand why in 1966-67, these paintings in the studio were historical anomalies, to put it mildly. With Greenberg dominating everything in sight, there was no breathing space anywhere.

CLAYTON  It’s no wonder you rolled them up for thirty years.

LOWRY  I have this sense of an ever-expanding spiral that comes out over the same issues again and again. It seems that all the works in The Quiet Axis live that way, that they come back in strange ways and they don’t finish themselves.

CLAYTON  Well, the question of finished, obviously in a project that’s taken this long to come full circle…will they ever be finished? Will you ever think of them as finished?

LOWRY  No, I don’t think they will ever be finished, in fact there will probably be new things growing out of them. These are just, what would you say…they are ripe enough to eat.
A MORATORIUM ON MAKE-BELIEVE
MARCH 21–APRIL 20, 2008

VARYING FROM ORCHESTRATED SPECTACLES TO UNDER-STATED EPHEMERA, FROM SPLIT PERSONALITIES TO DISCREET OBJECTS, AND FROM INFORMAL ECONOMIES TO INVENTED MYTHOLOGIES, THE 2008 MFA CANDIDATES ARE LINKED BY A SERIOUS PLAYFULNESS. UNWILLING TO SETTLE, THEY THRIVE IN AN OPEN-ENDED PRACTICE. EXPLORATION, EXPERIMENT AND INQUIRY ARE AS IMPORTANT TO THEM AS ANY RESULTING ARTIFACTS.
It is extraordinary that, while still in school, our grads have been awarded national residencies, designed projects that have garnered international media coverage, and put Pittsburgh on the map as the site of the first choreographed performance on Google Street View. They operate in the world beyond CMU’s campus, extending not only their own boundaries but also the boundaries for artistic practice.

Michelle, Jennifer, and Ben’s projects demonstrate the kind initiative and ambition of graduates that seek out and thrive at Carnegie Mellon.
SITES OF THE UNCANNY:

MONA HATOUM

Mous Humzoué is an artist whose work creates both physical and psychological fear. She uses materials in a visceral way to make metaphors for suffering, pain, danger, and torture. Her work is tough and uncompromising. Within the work there is also a sense of defiance, resistance and resilience. She speaks, particularly, to the exile, the outsider, the dissident, and victims of control and oppression. Her work tackles uncomfortable aspects of the troubled world in which we live.

Over the years her subject matter has broadened in scope to embrace global and universal themes. The work, however, has not softened. It is still tough. It is intense, and it challenges us to confront difficult truths. The following text is made up of extracts from a lecture given at Carnegie Mellon University on 28th September 2007, as part of the School of Art’s visiting lecture program.

People are very often intrigued when I refer to myself as Palestinian or British, although I was born in Lebanon. I actually was born into a Palestinian family. And like the majority of Palestinians who ended up in Lebanon after 1948, after Israel was established, my family was never able to obtain Lebanese identity cards. For complex reasons they became naturalized British, and I have held a British passport since I was born.

In 1975, I traveled to London. I was supposed to be there for a week to ten days on a holiday. But the war broke out in Lebanon, and I was stranded. I ended up going to art school in London and completed my studies in fine arts in 1981.

I have now been exhibiting my work in one form or another since 1980. To start with, I worked mostly in the area of performance and video. The work was issue-based, with a narrative that touched on social and political issues. It was certainly not political propaganda. I never liked work that revealed itself too directly. The work was centering around using the body as a metaphor for society. Toward the end of the ’80s I started making installations and sculptures in which the content became more implied rather than directly stated and more embedded within the formal aspects of the work. I was then able to combine my interest in exploring the phenomenology of materials and space with political and social concerns.

In this showing of slides of work from the last 15 or 16 years. To make the presentation more efficient, I have made 4 groupings of works that have similarities, because there seem to be more than one rich thread that runs through my work.

The first group of installations deals with containment and barriers, through the use of the grid and repeated modules. The second group consists of works based on furniture and household furnishings. The third group deals with the home as a site of the uncanny, or the familiar turning unfamiliar, which is a phrase that could probably apply to all my work.

For the purposes of this article, one example of work has been chosen from each category.

CONTAINMENT AND BARRIERS

This work, called The Light at the End, is one of the first times where I was able to create a work that you experience intensely on a physical level, as you have a gut reaction or experience it intensely through the body, and then the associations might come out of that initial physical experience. Also, there is the minimal aspect with which I had a very long relationship as a student. In this work and the works that came after, I was able to adapt this minimal aesthetic to my own purpose. The work was made for The Showroom Gallery in East London, and was inspired by the wedge–like shape of the space, which narrows from 20 feet down to 5, like a tapering tunnel. So you walk into a disorienting, darkened space, and all you see are these bright lines hovering in space at a distance. When your eyes get accustomed to the darkness, you start walking to the end of the room, and when you get to within a few feet of the structure, you start experiencing an intense heat, and suddenly your perception of the piece shifts. You realize that the bars of light are actually red-hot electric heating elements.

The title, The Light at the End, sets up a hopeful expectation that is disrupted as you approach the work. It becomes something dangerous. It conjures up images of imprisonment, torture and pain. At the same time, there is something very tempting and seductive about it. It therefore sets up conflicting emotions of attraction and repulsion, fear and fascination in the viewer. This contradictory aspect where you are pushed and pulled in different directions was something that I tried to explore in many works that came after this one.

FURNITURE AND FURNISHINGS

I was interested in using pieces of furniture in my work because they are objects that we encounter in our everyday life, so we already have an established relationship with them. But in my work those familiar objects are transformed in such a way that they are unable to fulfill their intended function. They become strange and sometimes threatening and dangerous objects. Also, pieces of furniture are very much about the body and become a site for projection. We can easily project ourselves onto these objects or imagine ourselves using them.

Incommunicado. This is a child’s hospital cot, left to the bare metal—cold, harsh, with the metal bars turning it into more a confining structure instead of being one that offers protection and support. Also, instead of having a solid base that would usually support a mattress, there are thin wires that have been stretched across the frame, reminiscent of cheese wire or an egg slicer. There is an immediate connection with some kind of child abuse. But as is often the case, there is an ambivalence about it. You can project yourself in either the role of the victim or perpetrator or both, depending on your personal history.

THE BODY

Corpo Etranger (which means Foreign Body), is a video installation from 1994. This work originated from a series of performances in the early ’80s, where I used to pretend that my video camera could see through the clothes of the audience. I was very much dealing with aspects of surveillance at the time. Here, it takes on the aspect of a scientific eye surveying the body and invading its boundaries. So, this is a circular room with two narrow openings, and a circular video image is projected on the floor. It leaves a very narrow space to walk around it, so when you’re standing in there you are in very close proximity to the image.

Both the video and sound were recorded using special medical equipment to probe and explore the body: endoscopy, colonoscopy, and equipment to record the echo of the heartbeat. So there’s one sweeping, continuous shot of the surface of the body, shot in extreme close up. Eventually, it penetrates inside the body through various orifices — into the stomach, intestines, vagina. I wanted to give the feeling that the body becomes vulnerable to the scientific eye, an invasive device, probing it, turning it inside out, objectifying it. On the other hand, when you’re inside the structure, in places you feel like you are standing on the edge of an abyss that threatens to swallow you up, especially in this kind of situation where the camera is traveling down the esophagus.

THE UNCANNY

In Freudian terms, uncanny is the familiar turning unfamiliar, or even threatening. Mobile Home is a recent work consisting of two parallel metal barriers with wires strung between them. The area in between, about 18 feet, is full of objects that refer to domestic life and travel: table, chair, bed-roll, two suitcases. These are strangely together with wire and are in perpetual slow motion. They constantly move towards one and then the other barrier and give a sense of instability. It is quite slow, so unless you stop, you don’t notice the movement. It makes you feel like the ground is shifting under your feet.

At the end of the talk there were a number of questions on various aspects of the work.

ON THE DARK NATURE OF THE SUBJECT MATTER

There is also humor. Very often when I talk about a work or when I’m conceiving it, I’m thinking about the negative side. But, it’s not all doom and gloom, because there are some very seductive aspects within the work. A lot of the works have contradictions. You often feel pushed in two opposite directions. They can be very beautiful and seductive, but also very dangerous at the same time.

I hope that the works have more than one reading and different levels of meaning. For instance, the last work I showed is actually very beautiful and elegant, but at the same time the globe structure is reminiscent of a cage, and it looks dangerous because it is buzzing with energy. So I’m always exploring two directions, at least.

ON THE MATERIALITY OF THE PRACTICE

I’m constantly involved in the finding of the materials I want to work with. Most of these works are made by professional fabricators. There are so many skills involved in the making of each work that I could not, in my lifetime, learn all these skills. I actually spend most of my time searching for materials that embody the ideas I’m trying to convey. And I am also constantly searching for people who have the skills to work with these materials. It’s not based on my abilities or skills. It’s more about the ideas.

ON THE LACK OF POLITICAL SPECIFICITY IN THE WORK

My work does not deal with political issues in a direct way. I am never trying to illustrate a specific issue, and most of all, I’m not trying to narrate my own story in the work. I like to create work that makes the viewer somehow experience some of the feelings of a displaced person for instance. It’s not a defined or predetermined narrative. It’s much more abstract—creating a situation where you have to come up with your own interpretations. I like for instance to use objects with certain associations or create a displacement on the level of materials or scale to introduce ambiguities. This is not to make art more ruffled or difficult to understand. In order to engage the viewer’s own capacity to find their own story out of the multiplicity of references. And that story will be different depending on the viewer’s own experience and background.

I actually work in an intuitive way. Sometimes I find myself in a place where there’s some kind of material or craft or manufacturing, and it inspires me to do something: it is often just a series of happy coincidences. And I hope that the works have more than one reading and different levels of meaning. I am never trying to illustrate a specific issue, and most of all, I’m not trying to narrate my own story in the work. I like to create work that makes the viewer somehow experience some of the feelings of a displaced person for instance. It’s not a defined or predetermined narrative. It’s much more abstract—creating a situation where you have to come up with your own interpretations. I like for instance to use objects with certain associations or create a displacement on the level of materials or scale to introduce ambiguities. This is not to make art more ruffled or difficult to understand. In order to engage the viewer’s own capacity to find their own story out of the multiplicity of references. And that story will be different depending on the viewer’s own experience and background.

I actually work in an intuitive way. Sometimes I find myself in a place where there’s some kind of material or craft or manufacturing, and it inspires me to do something: it is often just a series of happy accidents. I don’t have strategies. It’s kind of coincidental how it works.

ON THE LACK OF OVERT REFERENCES TO RELIGION

I’m actually Christian. You probably didn’t expect this. My family is Greek Orthodox, but I don’t care much about religion. I grew up in a place where religion was, and still is, a source of enormous conflict, and I have had a complete reaction against it from the very beginning.

Brooke Singer (MFA ’02) is a digital media artist based in New York. Her work uses Wi-Fi, digital cameras, and RFID (radio frequency identification) technologies. She is currently Assistant Professor of New Media at Purchase College, State University of New York, and co-founder of the art, technology and activist group Preemptive Media. [Embedded link] http://www.bsing.net http://pm-sar.net/AIR_PR

What are some of the more tangible effects CMU has had on your practice and career?

**SINGER** Studying at Carnegie Mellon dramatically changed my art practice and how I approach my work. It was during graduate school that I began to collaborate and to this day I still am working with CMU alum, Jamie Schulte (MS Computer Science) and Beatriz da Costa (art exchange student). We formed a group in 2002 called Preemptive Media. We built a series of mobile air monitoring devices that visualize localized pollution in real-time. The project launched in September 2006 in New York City, and we are continuing to develop and deploy it. This is the third major project we have created together as a team. I am also working on my own, currently on a project called Superfund365. This is an online data visualization project that spotlights a different toxic site in the U.S. everyday for a year. My work is research-based, which feeds my penchant for sleuthing and entering the unknown.

If you were to support a new initiative or current program at CMU, what would it be?

**SINGER** I would create a new initiative that would bring graduates back to CMU for a residency every ten, no, probably five years. That way we could take advantage of all the things we missed or did not have time for while we were students. Alumni could in turn share all their knowledge and expertise acquired since graduating. It’s a win-win situation really.

Since graduating from Carnegie Mellon, Justin Giunta (BFA ’01) has pursued painting, fashion, industrial design and jewelry-making. His paintings use White-Out and highlighters to create a contemporary version of the glazing techniques of Dutch “old master” paintings. In 2003, he opened his company, Subversive Jewelry, in response to the high demand for his one-of-a-kind wearable works, which embrace high art concept in combining refined and mundane components. [Embedded link] http://www.justingiunta.com http://www.subversivejewelry.com

What is the thorniest problem you have faced since graduating, and how did you address it?

**GIUNTA** I often found myself in position to be taken advantage of in the market. Eventually, buyers started respecting me for my business skills, which only consisted of being able to understand and negotiate business propositions (sale or commission). Speaking up when something was not right earned me the reputation of being smart, serious, and above all, talented. I think many young artists want only to be the talent and to divorce themselves from having to sell their own work. I have seen many be pricked by this thorny rose. It was very awakening to graduate with a high degree and not be immediately welcomed into the art community for my body art. Recognizing the economics and politics that exist in the art world, as in many other industries, equipped me to survive as my own representation until others caught wind of my work.

What is your suggestion for a new initiative in the current program at CMU?

**GIUNTA** I would initiate a new program called “Creative Entrepreneurship 101,” based on the idea that artworks, like any other finished products, become part of an economic exchange that the artist must recognize. I believe it is the artist’s responsibility to be aware of contracts, protective rights, and competitive price structures that apply to any artist’s work. We must shake the traditional idea that artists exist at the fringe of culture. Rather, they influence it. Possessing the ability to manipulate imagery is one of the strongest cultural commodities one could possess, and artists should be aware of the asset that they possess. In Spring ’08, Assistant Professor of Art, Melissa Ragona offered a new class to undergraduates titled Art as Business/Business as Art.

The School of Art is proud of the achievements of its alumni. Relay intends to feature alumni stories in every issue, please keep in touch and keep us informed.

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**ALTERNATE ROUTES**

**ALUMNI**

[Embedded link] www.art.cfa.cmu.edu/people/alumni

Brooke Singer (MFA ’02) and Justin Giunta (BFA ’01) have pursued creative careers since graduating from Carnegie Mellon. Singer is a digital media artist who uses Wi-Fi, digital cameras, and RFID technologies in her work. Giunta, on the other hand, has pursued painting, fashion, industrial design, and jewelry-making. Both alumni have faced challenges in their careers and have shared their experiences with Relay. Singer suggests a new initiative to bring alumni back to CMU for residencies, while Giunta advocates for a program on creative entrepreneurship. The School of Art encourages alumni to keep in touch and share their expertise.

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**LINKS**

- http://www.bsing.net
- http://pm-sar.net/AIR_PR
- http://www.justingiunta.com
- http://www.subversivejewelry.com

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After graduating from Carnegie Mellon, Jacob Feige (BFA ’02) worked as an art handler in Pittsburgh and New York. He earned an MFA in painting at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, then returned to New York, where he got a job as a registrar for an art consultant. William Kofmehl (BFA ’02) was awarded an additional year as a Fifth Year Scholar. He earned an MFA in sculpture at Yale University and has taught in both Pittsburgh and Pont-Aven, France. He recently purchased an old synagogue in Pittsburgh to use as a studio. Feige and Kofmehl are both represented by Lombard-Freid Projects, where they show work both collaboratively and individually.

What has been the most useful experience from CMU/School of Art that is relevant to your current daily life?

FEIGE - Unlike many art schools, the School of Art is a bit of a material and intellectual free-for-all, in the best sense possible. I’ve noticed that art students who are on the creative straight and narrow often have a tough time finding a creative place afterwards, no matter how hard they worked in school. All students who go through the School of Art are given lots of support and almost overwhelming possibilities, as far as media and ideas are concerned. No one is held to a particular path. Negotiating that freedom has helped me make choices outside the academic context on my own terms.

If you were to support a new initiative or current program at CMU, what would it be?

KOFMEHL - The best way to explore art’s historical past in all its wretchedness, splendor and complexity is the reading of biographies. Whether you are preparing for Graduate School, residencies, grant writing, nomadic wandering, or complete financial independence while riding the wave of a trust fund, artists need to comprehend the historicity of their contemporaries. This particular forum, in which Jacob and I are highlighted, functions in a similar way.

What sights/sounds/smells/situations remind you of CMU and why?

FEIGE - Homasote wall paneling, lithographic ink, old digital video cameras, gobs of oil paint, flat white wall paint, and any place that looks like the fourth sub-basement of Doherty Hall remind me of Carnegie Mellon. That’s what the School of Art was made of, circa 2000.

KOFMEHL - The Rites of Spring party. Blood drawn, fried and eaten. And the Halloween pig roast when the tail was saved for a certain cowboy.

How has your collaborative work developed and continued outside of school?

FEIGE - Collaboration is one aspect of our work as artists. I like it because it takes me out of my comfort zone, and I can’t take ideas and materials for granted the way I can when I’m alone painting in my studio. Our collaborations started as a natural part of William’s work as an undergraduate, which almost always involved other artists contributing aspects of performances. The origins of our current body of work date to our BFA degree show at Carnegie Mellon in 2002, when we conceived of our pieces in the show as a pair: a painting I made framed a basketball hoop and a performative tableau that William developed. What distinguishes our more recent collaboration from our separate bodies of work is its narrow focus on one particular subject—most often a nearly obsolete, traditional occupation. Our most recent collaborations have dealt with whaling, chimney sweeps, hobos, and migrant carnival workers. For these projects, most of the characters and sculptural elements stem from those themes, even if they are seemingly unrelated. For instance, in our collaboration “At the End of the Day, We’re All Sooty,” shamrocks, horseshoes, smoking pipes, and incense pervaded the imagery, which are all traditionally associated with chimney sweeps. At times in that performance, William and I danced as our chimney sweep characters to the 1967 Gene Pitney #5 UK hit, “Something’s Gotten Hold of My Heart,” just to be sure that our theme didn’t become too, too literal.
Why is it important for young artists to learn about making art outside the typical gallery/museum axis?

Rachel Stewart (BFA ’07)

Our school has long recognized that many artists are working in new ways that hybridize historical art practices with cultural trends outside of fine arts that never existed in the past. Students come into art schools ready to create work in dynamic forms like YouTube, graffiti, DIY clothing and music, computer hacking and zines/comics. It seems a bit retrograde just to limit the students to only historical models of artmaking. We are now the first art school in the country to offer contextual practice as an undergraduate area where students can take a full range of classes that provide them with ongoing off-campus opportunities to research and produce works in the public sphere and developing new venues and audiences for art. We want to critically engage the students in the production of art that recognizes and responds to the social, physical and cultural dynamics of a given place and audience and through our unique interdisciplinary curriculum and immersion in socially-engaged processes we challenge students to create work that has a direct, conscious and often catalytic relationship to the place it exists in and the audience it relates to.
**Tent Show**

"Yeah, Tent Show operates as a mobile institution/classroom, relocating each semester to a different vacant storefront or unused space in the City of Pittsburgh. This year we were on the South Side, in a great old storefront across the street from a busy new shopping mall. Many of the students’ projects played against the concept of the mall in some way.

**Break Even Coffee**

Initiated by BFA student Brittany Wine, transformed the storefront into a legitimate coffee shop for a semester. However, coffee was sold coffee at the exact amount we paid for it, which turned out to be six cents a cup. Being directly across the street from two fancy (meaning expensive) coffee shops, this project positioned us as the anti-Starbucks, which usually moves across from locally-owned shops in order to siphon off their clientele. In a similar vein, the Museum of Modern Failure, initiated by BHA student Rachel Brown, has been transformed from the storefront’s history of failed businesses. Our museum was dedicated to the continual documentation of human failure (big and small, catastrophic and personal), and anyone who visited the space could contribute their or her failure to our collection. Visitors also had the chance to purchase the item for sale from the Museum’s gift shop. The item for sale was curated from the Goodwill next door and replaced by a new item from the Goodwill upon its purchase. It’s very rare to have an art school within such a prestigious research university, and contextual practice courses are able to generate new contexts for interdisciplinary practice. We want to continue expanding the number of courses co-presented with other CMU departments like Design, Architecture, Business, and the Humanities. The other goal is to create more contextual practice offerings within the School of Art, like your contextual practice courses. This is a perfect example. Your biographical and graphic novel classes are especially interesting, since it is so close to your own practice as an artist. How does it fit within your teaching philosophy?

**Spring Tent Show**

This spring, Tent Show was co-ordinated for the first time through the Schools of Art and Design, which provided an awesome opportunity for collaboration. The students took off with the storefront’s identity, coined goods & services, developing everything from its visual identity to programming. We functioned as a quasi-business offering products and services like weekly soups based on unusual ancient historical recipes; a service that offered the creation of one-minute video biographies; a movie theater that played reenactments of Pittsburgh history according to locals; a constantly changing curated sidewalk sale; an ongoing series of impromptu parades made up of people crossing the intersection on foot and on bicycles. A weekly publication that sought out conversations within a different community of South Side “regulars” collected in a single visit to their hangouts. Additionally, we collaborated with a curatorial group from Chicago called INCURATE to host projects by artists from New York and Chicago that explored issues of alternative economies. Tent Show is becoming even more mobile, with the creation of the suntrailer a re-purposed ’50’s camper lined with full-spectrum light panels. During the gloomy winter and spring months, the bike-powered environment traveled around Pittsburgh inviting people to step inside, feel brighter and engage in conversations about coping with the extended winter. The suntrailer is the first of many reincarnations for this camper. Going forward, anyone from the school will be able to borrow it for projects that will be considered “mini-residencies”, so the possibilities of where and how it will appear in the city again are almost endless. Who knows, maybe next semester it will be a traveling billboard.

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Jon Rubin is an Assistant Professor of Art and Chair of Contextual Practice Program.

www.jonrubin.net  Christopher Sperandio was recently a Visiting Assistant Professor of Art from 2005-8 and Chair of the Painting, Drawing, Printmaking and Photography Studio area.

www.kartoonkings.com
Carnegie Mellon’s approach to art making is expansive and inclusive, combining the advantages of a renowned and innovative professional studio program with the interdisciplinary resources of a top-tier University. The BFA program offers a distinctive and progressive curriculum that examines, in practical and visionary terms, the role of the artist in society.

We embrace new and established technologies and media. We encourage experimentation, crossing boundaries, and hybrid processes, as well as engaging the histories and traditions of art. Our three interdisciplinary degrees (BHA, BSA, and BCSA) offer students the opportunity to explore and contribute to the intersection of the arts and the humanities, natural sciences, and computer science.

Our students engage with local and international communities through projects, events, courses, and study abroad. We cultivate and celebrate diversity in educating artists for and of the future.

WWW.ART.CFA.CMU.EDU/ACADEMIC/PROGRAMS/BFA

BFA  »  Bachelor of Fine Arts

BHA  »  Bachelor of Humanities and Arts

BSA  »  Bachelor of Science and Arts

BCSA  »  Bachelor of Computer Science and Arts

ADMISSIONS  »  WWW.CMU.EDU/ADMISSIONS
AT THE END OF THEIR FOUR YEARS, STUDENTS FROM BFA, BHA, BSA, AND BCASA PROGRAMS COME TOGETHER TO DESIGN, CURATE AND EXHIBIT THEIR WORK.

2008 SENIOR EXHIBITION  THE MILLER GALLERY  WWW.CMU.EDU/MILLERGALLERY

CELEBRATION + CHAOS
MAY 2-18, 2008

FOR MANY, THE SENIOR SHOW SIGNALS THEIR BREAK INTO THE OUTSIDE WORLD WHERE THEY MUST MAKE IT ON THEIR OWN. THIS CLASS OF 2008 WAS OUT OF THE GATE LONG BEFORE THEIR SENIOR SHOW—CURATING PERFORMANCES, TAKING OVER GALLERIES, FORMING ART COLLECTIVES—TRANSFORMING PITTSBURGH’S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE.

GRADUATING SENIOR CLASS 2008  BHA  BACHELOR OF HUMANITIES & ARTS  CLAIRE BOCH  REBECCA LANG  JULIA STEIN  MICHAEL MCPARLANE  DANIELLE SAUDINO  CONNOR SITES-BOWEN  BSA  BACHELOR OF SCIENCE & ARTS  ALISON MARGOLSKEE  VICTORIA SPINDEL  BFA  BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS  EYE SING AN  JUlia DAEZ  EMILY BELLINGHAM  EMILY BERZON  BEN BIGELOW  DAN BUCHANAN  YVONNE CHAN  THERESA CHEN  LUCINDA CHO  AMY CONROY  JAKE COX  EMILIA EDWARDS  CAROLINE ENGELAND  DIANA CARMIND  AMY JOHNSON  NICOLETTA PAVELAS  GENE LIM  ELIN LENNIX  SPENCER LONGO  MICHAEL LALLIS  JON MAY  LAURA MILLER  MICHAEL LISANO  AMY LISCHKE  ANDREW SHEDD  AUDREY SZETO
Towards A New Place In Nature

“...the piece was a new place in nature.” So said Philip Leider in 1970 when he first set eyes upon Michael Heizer’s Double Negative, a massive piece of Land Art located in Mormon Mesa, Nevada. Begun in 1969 and completed a year later, Double Negative consists of two immense incisions in the earth, some 1,500 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 50 feet deep each. Leider recognized the radical nature of Heizer’s proposition. On one hand, he understood that Double Negative was essentially a form made of negative space rather than tangible matter. On the other, he must have perceived that Heizer, by leaving these two indelible cuts in the earth, was reformulating the irrevocable link between culture and nature, or between the man-made, built environment and pure natural growth: for as long as man has been around, one has not existed without the other. — Switching gears from the monumental to the liminal, Kim Beck’s practice centers on a desire to understand and then manifest this uniquely personal relationship of an individual to her surroundings. She works in a range of media, including etch, cardboard, and paper, as well as a variety of techniques, such as cut-out formations, sculptural appropriations on the floor or wall, multi-part installations, and silkscreened or charcoal drawings on paper. Though operating on a nearly opposite scale to Heizer, Beck’s work is similarly engaged with in-between spaces, theoretically exploring interconnectively between the built and natural environment and how this is manifested in the landscape. Her subject matter consists of quiet, overlooked spaces and objects: weeds, telephone poles, fences, commercial signage, cracks, and subtle irregularities in the architecture and landscape around her. Bending an interest in architecture and the landscape with a deep ambivalence toward indescribable, man-made constructions, her work reflects a disdain for the inevitable progress of commercialization as well as an appreciation for the fines and awkwardness of these same spaces and objects. — In his eloquent, historical-cultural travel narrative Landscape and Memory, Simon Schama identifies this mutually intertwined—and at times fraught—relationship between the man-made and natural environment: “Objectively, of course, the various ecosystems that sustain life on the planet proceed independently of human agency, just as they operated before the hectic ascendency of Homo sapiens. But it is also true that it is difficult to think of a single such natural system that has not, for better or for worse, been substantially modified by human culture. Nor is this simply the work of the industrial centuries. It has been happening since the days of ancient Mesopotamia. It is coeval with writing, with the entirety of our social existence. And it is this irreversibly modified world, from the polar caps to the equatorial forests, that is all the nature we have.” — We can infer from Schama’s passage that nature and culture are not only symbiotic entities but symbolic constructions of identity; landscape reflects the people around it, and vice versa. The ways in which individuals interpret their built environment vary but such divergent perceptions contribute to those same individuals’ definition of self-identity. Heizer and his ancient Egyptian or pre-Columbian predecessors undoubtedly understood this. Their monuments were as much structures built for civilization as testaments to their own particular relationship and sensibility to the world around them. — Accepting that landscape and personal identity are linked, Beck’s current focus can be connected to her conception of the environment in which she grew up. Born in Riverside, New Jersey, Beck discusses a pivotal moment in her history when, as a toddler, her parents packed up the family and moved to Denver, Colorado. Recalling a modern day version of the pioneering American West, Beck’s family left behind her Jewish east coast roots and family members for the large-scale, anonymous open plains and mountains of the Midwest to “start afresh.” Though she was too young when she moved to have remembered New Jersey, the decision by her parents to leave their roots behind left an indelible impression on her. Gradually, as Beck grew up, the telephone poles on long stretches of Colorado highway, the weeds in tree-less parking lots, the strangely uniform houses of the Denver suburbs, and the “blank faces” of wooden fences became meaningful markers for this lost or hidden identity. — Beck literally mines the imagery of such fences as subject matter for her most recent work, Perforated: Building Site, 2007, an installation consisting of silkscreened color images of fences overlaid on found corrugated cardboard with cut-out portions of the chain-link holes. Referencing both generic suburban fences and uniform enclosures found at construction sites, the artist has said the piece emerged from her philosophical questioning revolving around the simple but immensely provocative concept of a barrier: “Which side is in? Which is out?” Stacked against one another and leaning against the wall, the works function formally as part sculpture, part landscape, part painting, while philosophically they question the potential contradictory interpretations of a single man-made object in the landscape. In conversation, she revealed that her favorite part of the fence was a small irregularity: a cell-like blp in the symmetrical holes of the links, indicating a small damaged spot perhaps where perhaps a piece of machinery poked through. One has the sense that Beck looked at the fence, engaged by it, until the precise nature of her fascination emerged. Returning to the text Landscape and Memory, Schama wrote the following: A curious excavator of traditions stumbles over something protruding above the surface of the commonplace of contemporary life. He scratches away, discovering bits and pieces of a cultural design that seems to elude coherent reconstruction but which leads him deeper into the past. Each of the chapters that follow might be thought of as an excavation, beginning with the familiar, digging down through layers of memories and representations toward the primary bedrock, laid down centuries or even millennia ago, and then working up again toward the light of contemporary recognition. — Heizer, building on a grand scale, scratched away deep into the earth. Kim engages in visual “digging”— closely observing elements of the landscape until something previously unseen emerges, often in the smallest of details or the most generic of spaces. This is Kim’s process, leading her towards the discovery of a new place in nature.
A Field Guide To Weeds by Kim Beck

Beck’s project uses the physical form of the book as a metaphor for a crack in the city sidewalk: the common dandelion, pigweed, and poison ivy—the very plants we ignore, step over, dig up, or scrupulously avoid, creep out of the gutter, up pages, and overrun the book.
HEATHER JOINED THE SCHOOL OF ART FOR THE SEMESTER AS THE KRAUS VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ART AND ADJUNCT FACULTY AT ENTERTAINMENT TECHNOLOGY CENTER.
WWW.MOBID.COM

"Lebedev"
ABOUT FOLD

Andrew Johnson, Associate Professor of Art and current Chair of International Programs

About Fold is a series of 28 paired pages of a picture book that responds to the consequences of crises in the Middle East, crises in photography, and crises in representation. The pages are united by a lower band of sand traversed by twisting taffy, a visual metaphor for our inability to extricate ourselves from an intractable conflict we helped to create.

www.ROOTINGFORTHERADICAL.com
A brand new start. How often does that thought or that chance occur. The chance to reassess, to reinvent and to do something new. Right now Pittsburgh is great city for new beginnings, since it is decidedly reinventing itself from its history as the fiery crucible of America’s industrial age to the forging of a bright new future as a melting pot of cultural, educational, ecological, medical and technological innovation. Carnegie Mellon University is a significant contributor to that reinvention. The School of Art continues the great legacy of Andrew Carnegie’s desire to make art and culture available to all.

In my 2 years as Head of the School of Art I have been mightily impressed and excited by the talent, energy and invention of faculty and students. This ‘magazine’ is an attempt to relay that excitement and energy to you. You can visit the website and read the prospectus, but there is a deeper insight to be gained from some more in-depth and particular stories and examples of the thinking, invention and spirit of the individuals who make up the creative community here. In the 2008 US News and World Report national survey, the MFA program at Carnegie Mellon School of Art was ranked number 1 in multi-media and number 7 in the overall category. This is testimony to the high achievement of our faculty, students and alumni and we are determined to stay up there in the top tier of fine art education, by continuing to recruit top class faculty and students, providing a paramount educational experience and by garnering support from appreciative sources. As well as covering traditional artistic disciplines we are constantly seeking to expand our terms of artistic reference. Having established 2 interdisciplinary programs with our Bachelor of Humanities and Art and our Bachelor of Science and Art, we are now offering a Bachelor of Computer Science and Art, for an emergent generation of students who wish to explore and expand the connections between computation, digital technology and the arts. I hope that you enjoy this first issue of Relay. We intend to publish annually and we invite you to share in our endeavors with your comments, criticisms, suggestions and contributions, as we work to maintain and develop the quality of education, debate and artistic production in the School of Art at Carnegie Mellon. Now tell us what you want next...
OSMAN KHAN, VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ART, IS INTERESTED IN USING TECHNOLOGY TO CONSTRUCT ARTIFACTS AND EXPERIENCES FOR SOCIAL CRITICISM AND AESTHETIC EXPRESSION.