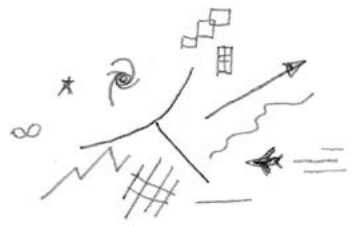


MYSTICAL ABSOLUTES

THE UCSB DEPARTMENT OF ART
2015 MFA THESIS EXHIBITION



HARDER STADIUM

Travis Diehl

Those thousands of fans crowding UC Santa Barbara's Harder Stadium to see their Gauchos play soccer are likely unaware of what happens under their seats. On game nights or, more often, during team runs, the steel ceiling of the stadium's east wing reverberates with the pitter-patter of dozens of soccer cleats and tennis shoes above a warren of artist studios, where work the eight graduates of UC-SB's MFA in art—not practitioners, as it were, of the beautiful game, but no less dedicated to the game of beauty.

In a corner of his corner studio on the second floor, the roof slanted beneath the stadium stairs, Jeff Page records a stop-motion peel of insults written in masking tape—one for each of his 37 years. The brightly painted strips bunch in a pile like so much shredded self-esteem. Indeed, Page delves deep into the abject, in hopes of reclaiming slurs meant to be shameful—"girly voice," "affectation," "grower not shower." Still, Page confronts the pain with a playful sense of motion, holding out hope for an equally wry, more confident future. A short piece of heavy chain, painted with a glittery pink gradient, sits on the studio floor beside a pink and green weight bench.

Jenalee Harmon's latest body of work explores the photograph as a form of simple magic—in turn depicting banal amusements like candy-colored smoke bombs effervescing above a yellow plinth; gunpowder and dry ice; or, more recently, soap. This material, to Harmon, represents a spectrum of material states: solid, liquid, gas (bubbles); something both visually and physically "slippery." But the basis of physics is a side note to the more mundane trickery of bright colors and lo-fi magician-ship in the lineage of nineteenth-century spirit photography.

With a Smithsonian approach—in the sense of both the museum and the artist—Patrick Gilbert investigates what might otherwise pass for the naturalized grammar of parks and playgrounds. One piece, for instance, uses burgundy mulch made from shredded tires, which break apart, naturalistically, in a way resembling woodgrain. In his studio is a copy of a Burro-brand sawhorse, made using rare striped hardwoods. Both are examples of a dramatic shift in material that nonetheless maintains the original usefulness of the concept—ground cover, woodworking support—while debunking its normalcy. Sprinkled into sharp ed-

-dies, Gilbert's found mulch takes on the role of nonsite, pointing toward playgrounds and gardens, trees and old tires—a nexus of potentially far-flung associations.

Megan Mueller's latest work reveals an interest in the redneck aesthetics of chipboard and photorealistic camo. Both are materials meant to disappear; yet when Mueller dips small frames in hydrographic film, wrapping them with realistic leaf and tree patterns meant to camouflage your hunting gear, and hangs them on a white gallery wall, the works are painfully exposed; non-functioning. On the other hand, the orange and red bungee cables Mueller incorporates into some pieces still operate—are still, emphatically, highly visible. Her compression of found patterns into fine-art forms wrenches them from context: an isolation which both renders these "finds" vulnerable to scrutiny, and brings out something of their violent, fragmented appeal.

Leaning on one wall of Matthew Usinowicz's studio are two beefy pieces of lumber, almost John McCracken-like; but rather than resin-coated, they will become the handle of a comically large steel knife, reducing the viewer to the proportion of a cartoon Jerry. This and other props rest against jagged, sanded paintings in a So-Cal palette of sunset orange and ocean teal. Usinowicz, an accomplished butcher, allies the travails of painting with more blue-collar

types of labor. Nearby is a stack of concrete casts of the inside of yellow mop buckets, fitted with casters; their negative volumes recall solid yellow water—the literal "concreteness" of a task meant to go unseen: the expunging of dirt, after hours.

Using an app designed to identify paint colors in graffiti, Matt Allison pulls a map of hues from nearby Mission Creek. His installations, which include photographs, tape, stickers, and found objects, accent the arbitrary symbology of color codes. Fire engine red, caution yellow, water blue, are notched, generalized; but this handful of colors, perhaps, might sustain a huge number of overcodings. Near one artwork leans a black and blue nylon pushbroom, whose colors recall police uniforms; or the nearby paint chips for two proprietary blues: "Privileged Elite" and "Secret Society." Other pieces incorporate maps blown up until abstracted into CMYK Ben-Day spots; color again serves as the tenuous common bond between nature and a proliferation of seemingly unrelated signs.

The final form of Israeli-born Oree Holban's project, appropriately, is a play—like gender, a performance—for which he has built a colorful airplane-shaped stage, crowned by a neon sign. The artist imagines a transgender airline, a metaphor which posits the queer journey as something like a "trans"atlantic flight, an expatria-

-tion of sorts, perpetually airborne somewhere between M and F. The artist's presentation is cheerful, colorful, yet tempered by a dazed knack for irony. Seemingly playful objects, after all, couch the suggestion of ratcheted roles: boy, girl. Holban's toy plane, in the end—as appears in a couple of brisk, brushy paintings—makes a crash landing. Still, something about the work's electric energy makes even this dark conclusion seem inconclusive.

Emily C. Thomas has produced a two-channel detective movie, overwhelmed by fades and overlays, witty montage, and swirling colors that are nothing short of psychedelic. Stick with the transcendental gumshoe, if you can. In one scene, a robed figure with a Queen Elizabeth mask comped over her head watches a cargo ship off the California coast: the English queen defeating the Spanish armada. Thomas's interest in female power-tropes and nunsplotation films led to her latest sculpture: a monumental spiral of bare-breasted clergywomen. Her installation includes more quietly crafted pieces as well, including a twin-orbed fertility lamp and a nearly minimalist yellow dollhouse—objects possessed with disorienting feminist verve.

Meanwhile, out on the field, historic drought or no, the grass keeps

growing. The parallels between art and soccer may be few; but safe to say, both are games you play with your head; and both are best practiced, while skillfully, without taking life too seriously. Here in the proverbial locker room of Harder Stadium's grad studios, echoing with aphorisms—"Try Harder;" or, "It's too Hard;" or, "The Harder they fall..."—this latest team of MFAs might recall their two long periods of game-time with bitter-sweet pride, knowing they leave better prepared to keep kicking around whatever the world throws their way.

MATT ALLISON

PATRICK GILBERT

JENALEE HARMON

OREE HOLBAN

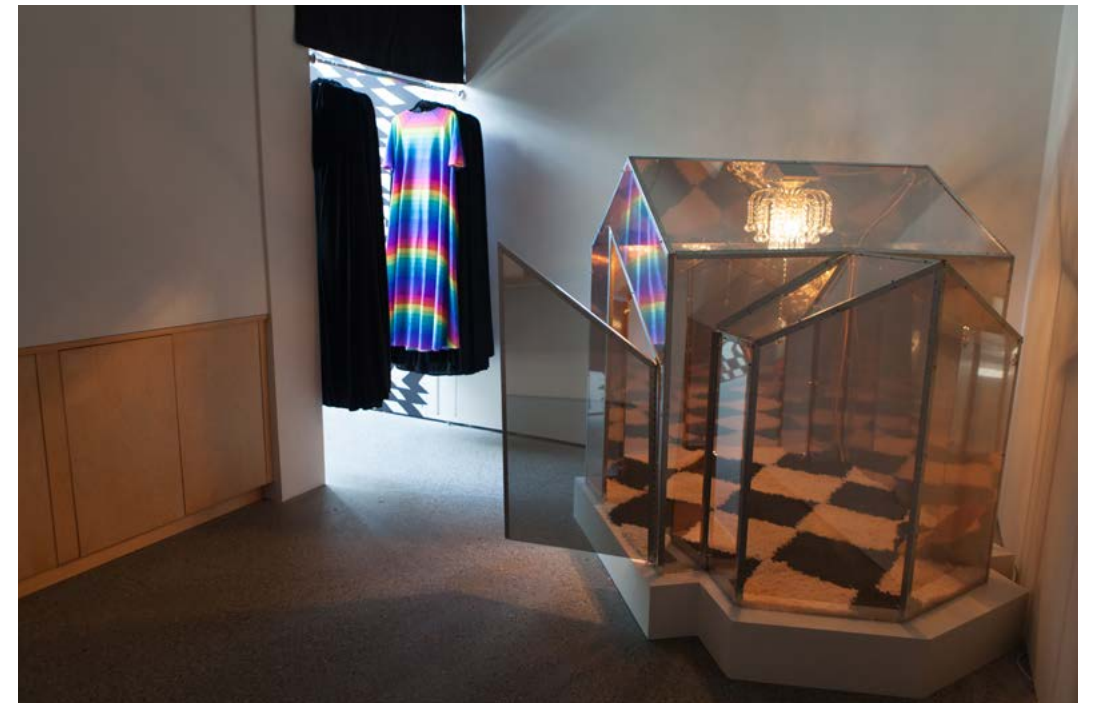
MEGAN MUELLER

JEFF PAGE

EMILY C. THOMAS

MATTHEW USINOWICZ





MATT ALLISON

Apophenia (ap·o·phe·nia) noun. the tendency to perceive a connection or meaningful pattern between unrelated or random things (such as objects or ideas).

Matt Allison maps the stuff¹ that create places. He walks as a way to understand; collects as a way to remember; then (re)arranges as a way to forget. His discursive installations invite the viewer to make their own connections between individual components; essentially restarting the place-making process within the space of the exhibition

¹*Stuff* may include color, localized time and space, geography, agriculture, food, personal and collective memory, the internet, sub-cultural codes, overlooked poetics, repurposing, humor, politics, subversion, representation, the relationship between the individual to the collective, and that of the collective to the individual.





PATRICK GILBERT

Deeply seated in issues of craft and industry, Patrick Gilbert's working practice finds a nexus between architecture, natural materials, and synthetic atmospheres. The situation of these fabricated environments to the organic landscape which frames them suggests a switch; shifting the context through which these elements should be thought through. The attitude towards these materials and situations allows craft to be utilized as a transformative and progressive gesture rather than another force of consumption. With his background in cabinetry, he examines how craftsmanship can be used to imbue value even when applied to awkward, unconventional, or banal contexts. This conceptual tension of art and craft creates for itself a looped framework - pointing outward to objects and situations of familiarity while allowing for endless possibilities of transformation. His highly calculated material fabrications offer us alternative perspectives amidst commonplace surroundings. It is, then, within the acts of making that his practice fabricates objects, places, landscapes, and situations that seek to present a multi-faceted image of our culture of production, all the while focusing intensely on the importance of the aesthetic.





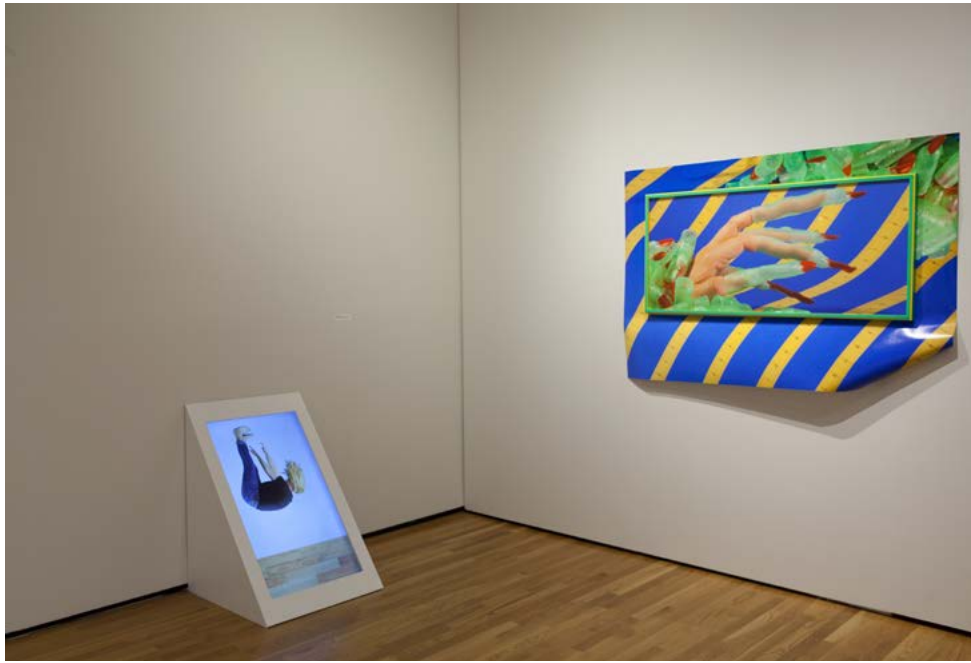
JENALEE HARMON

Within our highly digitized world, artistic focus has shifted from external statements about the world, towards centering on the fluidity of materializing the fragmented synapses of our consciousness. Our understanding of the self and it's situation within the world, has become disembodied through technology, behavioral policing, access to alternate personas, and a rise of 'streaming' time.

Jenlaee Harmon's practice centers on establishing altered states of awareness through misdirections, while creating a working language of inverted perception. Her works focus on the experience of discovery and revelation within an artwork, and the misplaced trust of art as universal truth. With the use of decay, humor, ego, paraphilia, language and phenomenology, her work dissolves the mythos between artist and object and instead re-contextualizes expectations of an artwork.

Her works arrive to us as transitional sculptures resulting in video and photographic documentation, and installation. Working with detailed but ephemeral sculptural tableaux, her works affix improvised intentionality through 'sleight of hand' displays with familiar materials, metastasizing between real and unreal states. Combining influences from advertising imagery, Vanitas painting, at home science 'tricks', and the freeform analogy of the internet, her works extend to longstanding interest in the illusionistic space of "sculptures" that exist only in the witnessing and documentation.





OREE HOLBAN

Oree Holban is an art player; a performer, a visual artist, a singer-songwriter, a cartoon, and a dreamer. Holban's greatest inspiration hits while in movement, transporting from one place to another--that is, to him, a real home. When on an airplane in the sky, the world becomes a miniature, distances shrink, and like a kid -- everything turns into an invitation to begin the act of playing.

In his work, Holban is immersed in creating alternative, whimsical, "in-between" worlds, that serve the audience with a slow playground/rollercoaster for their bodies and minds: a colorful sanctuary, a space for reflection, as well as a darker realm to experience strange, sometimes scary or difficult sensations. Recurring themes in his work include transportation, celebrity culture, American 1950s music and pop culture, childhood fantasies, gender roles, nostalgia, and spirituality.

Body, gender and identity, are enmeshed and crash into one another in Holban's work. Holban would like to observe our universal ever transitioning nature as a state of "Limbo" -- one which is not just a (sometimes painful) passage but also a destination, a home in itself. More specifically, his work is challenged by finding ways to give visibility to experiences that refuse any definite label, all the while meditating: how to express, acknowledge, as well as legitimize a body which is in constant movement, that never wants to reveal a fixed form or gender, that never wants to commit to an either/or option (male, female, etc.)

As a performer, Holban is interested in exploring the body as a vehicle, as a transient energy, and entertainment as a disservice to the audience. He wonders about authenticity, loss of ego, identity, the roles of celebrities/influential people in our lives, the ability to gain empathy or compassion to one another, and what "being in the moment" can sincerely, experientially mean.



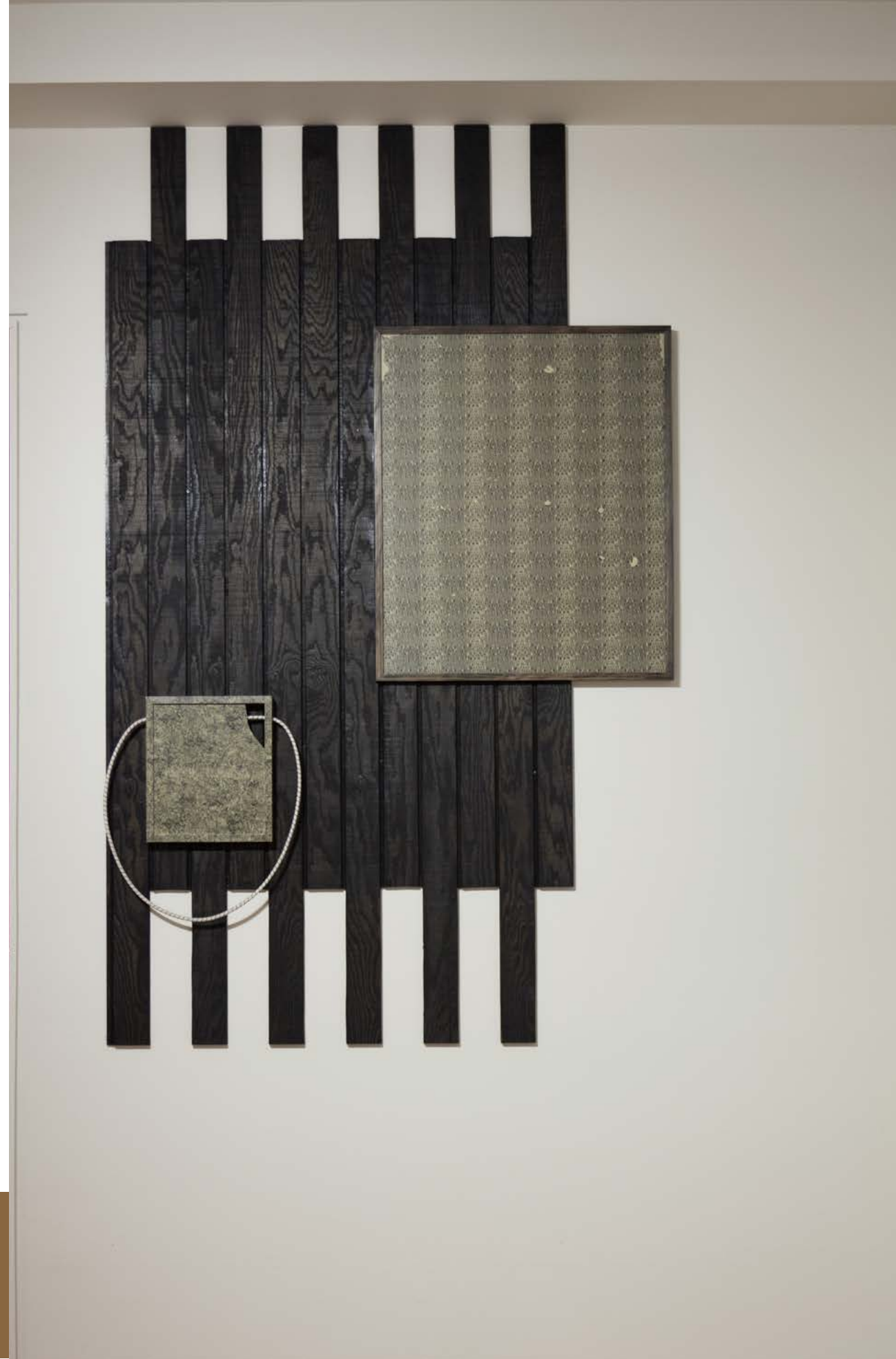


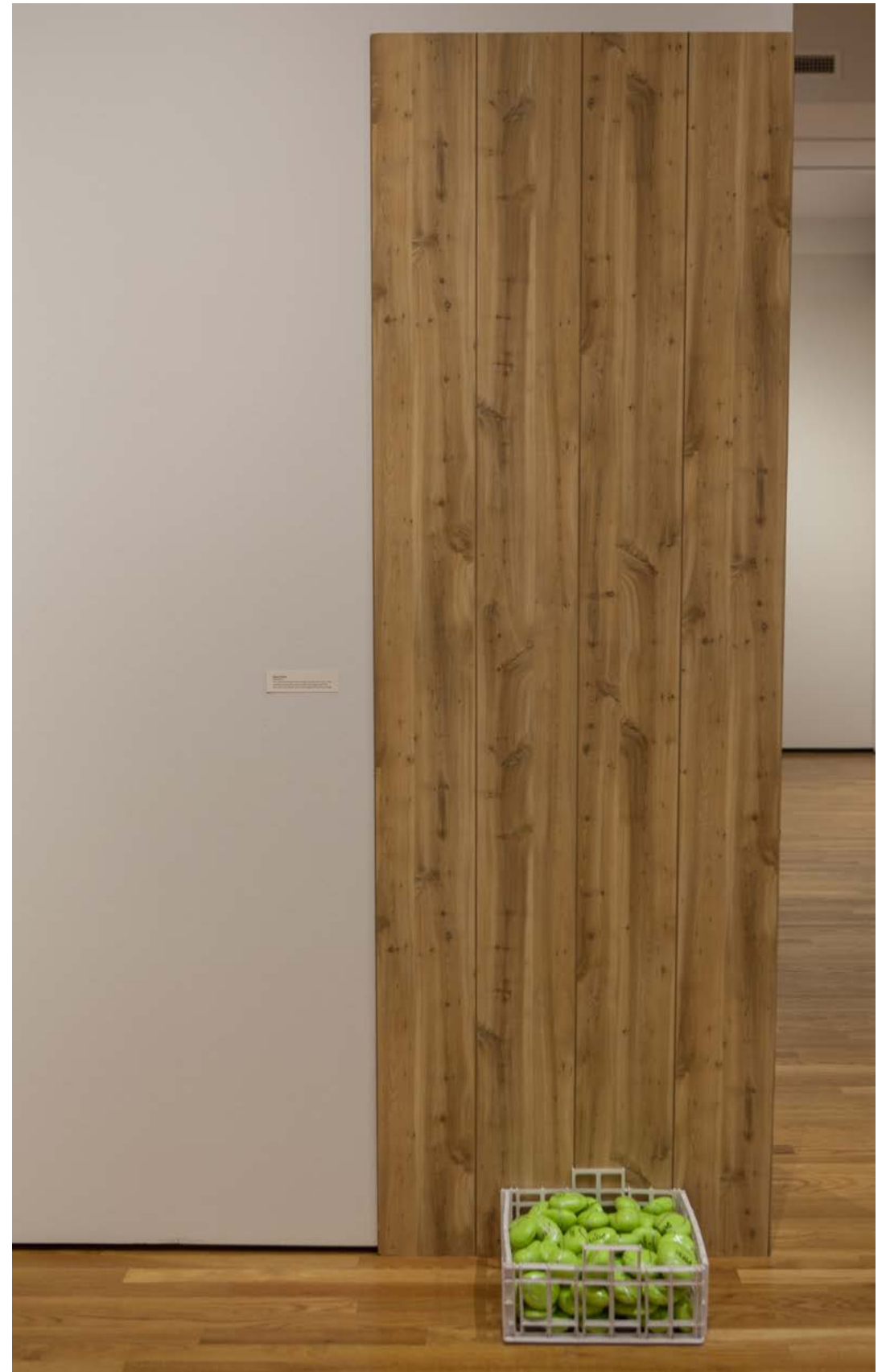
MEGAN MUELLER

Megan Mueller makes art with dirt under the nails on both hands. She lays out a body of work at the end of her graduate studies that is heavy and silly and magnetic. Her decisions are surgically precise and yet completely improvisational, utilizing a vocabulary that collides solidly at the junction of glam Americana billy-hilly and metropolitan fashion designer chic. Cast cement, hydro- printed glass with camouflage veneers and earplugs are just as likely to be used as archival digital prints depicting the fairly unlikely subjects of her latest obsessive cultural research. Mocking the traditions of hierarchal systems and expectations of the field, choosing less obvious behaviors and compositions, as to make the viewer feel they are experiencing a fine concert by a composer who likes fart jokes, camouflaged ephemera articulating rhizomatic landscapes and bungee cords resting in repose or flex, before and after simultaneously. Her practice is the residue of a mad Appalachian scientist/folk artist let loose in a really good hardware store.

She speaks the visual vocabulary of the cross country trucker and the industrial product designer, never far from her well honed skill set as a maker of fine art. Mueller hails from Virginia and she doesn't shy from the perceived roots of the region of her birth. As an artist in a post internet age she emphasizes the visceral connection she maintains with delicate detailed process' and big monstrous glorious unabated daring attempts at trying to change how we the audience feels about ourselves.

-Text by Patrick Melroy, 2015

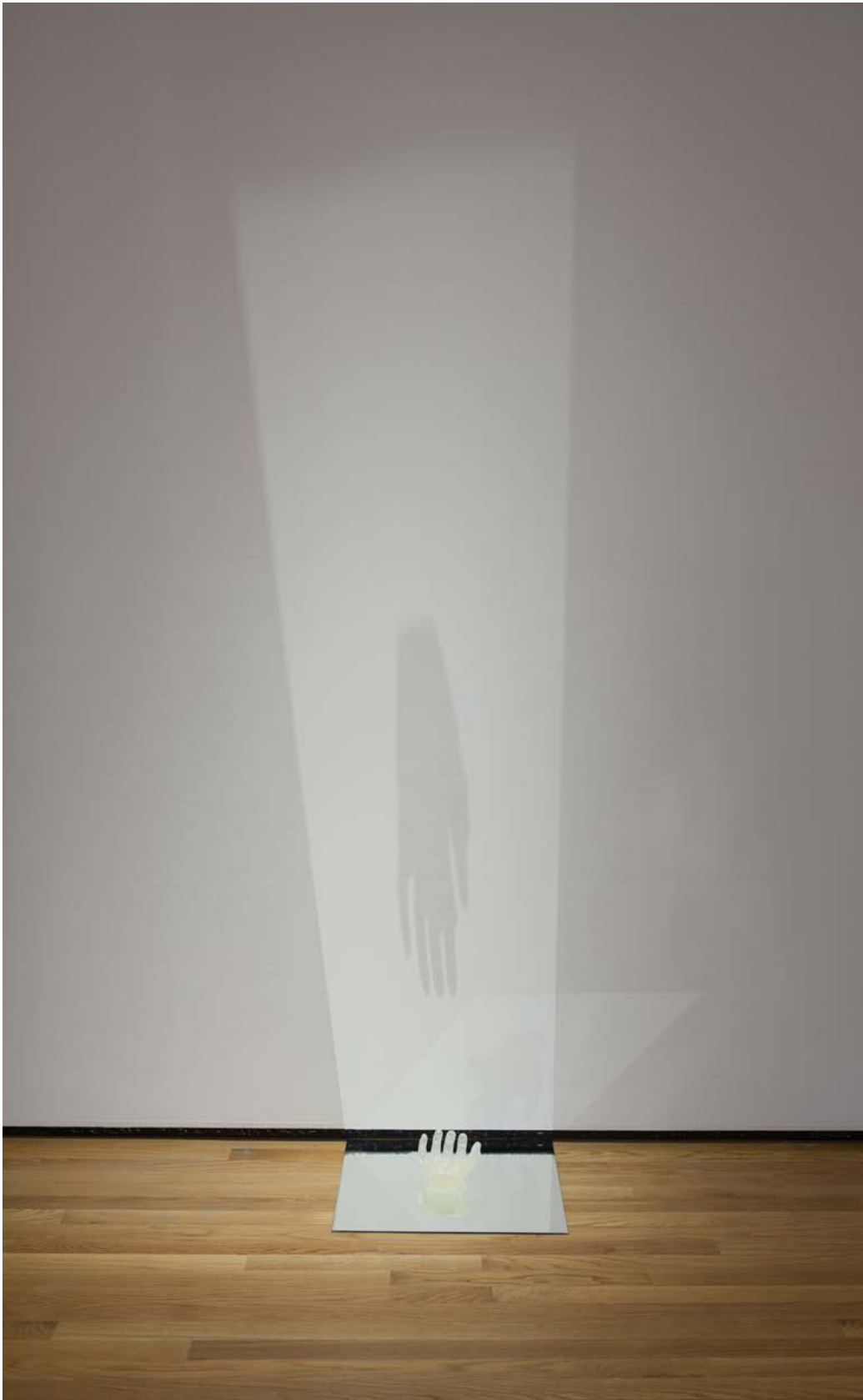




JEFF PAGE

Through a multi-disciplinary approach, Jeff's work mines his self-deprecating humor and advocates for the queered, poetic potential of the affect of shame. Through rigorous material explorations, spatial manipulations and engaging with the pliability of language, his aim is to explore various ways of seeing shame in a different light.





EMILY C. THOMAS

After visiting the Freemason's Grand Lodge in NYC in 2007, Emily C. Thomas experienced a rupture in consciousness resulting from the act of Seeing its interior. Subsequently cultivating a heightened awareness of altered states triggered by the visual phenomenon of the Symbol, she was propelled into a nearly decade long quest into the relationship of the image to the body-mind consciousness of the visual receiver.

Determining that the visual is indeed a powerful carrier of extrasensory knowledge, occupying a transpersonal, post anthropocentric space, and with the realization that within this realm the image has the potential to catalyze a great amount of healing, reflection, and laughter, she seeks out methods in her practice which aid in liberating the logos of her unconscious in order to renew the collective field of mind and matter.

Her artistic practice relies upon psycho-spiritual development through vigorous implementation of self-experimental techniques, such as, meditation, astrology, fasting, nature walks, vision quests, health-food, self-help, hypnosis, bi-yearly personality testing, alchemy, crystal-gazing, astral travel, yoga, tarot, massage and much more. Often Miss Thomas receives images during the intellectual peak of orgasm. She then works to materialize the visionary state within an installation through animation, film, sculpture, painting, photography, and sound within the fabrication of a total, self-reflecting world of initiatory experience.

A native Tennessean, after moving to California in 2011, she became fascinated with New Age principles of manifesting reality in dialogue with 19th century American Manifest Destiny, in which the indigenous belief systems of the country were routinely driven out, as imperialist ideologies of a new America swept westward on the feet of prospectors in search of precious land and human resources. Thomas' current artistic inspiration involves navigating the evolution of spiritual beliefs within contemporary subcultures of California in relationship to this not too distant past and the worldwide historical tragedy of the erasure of the ancient deity of Mother Nature from public education.

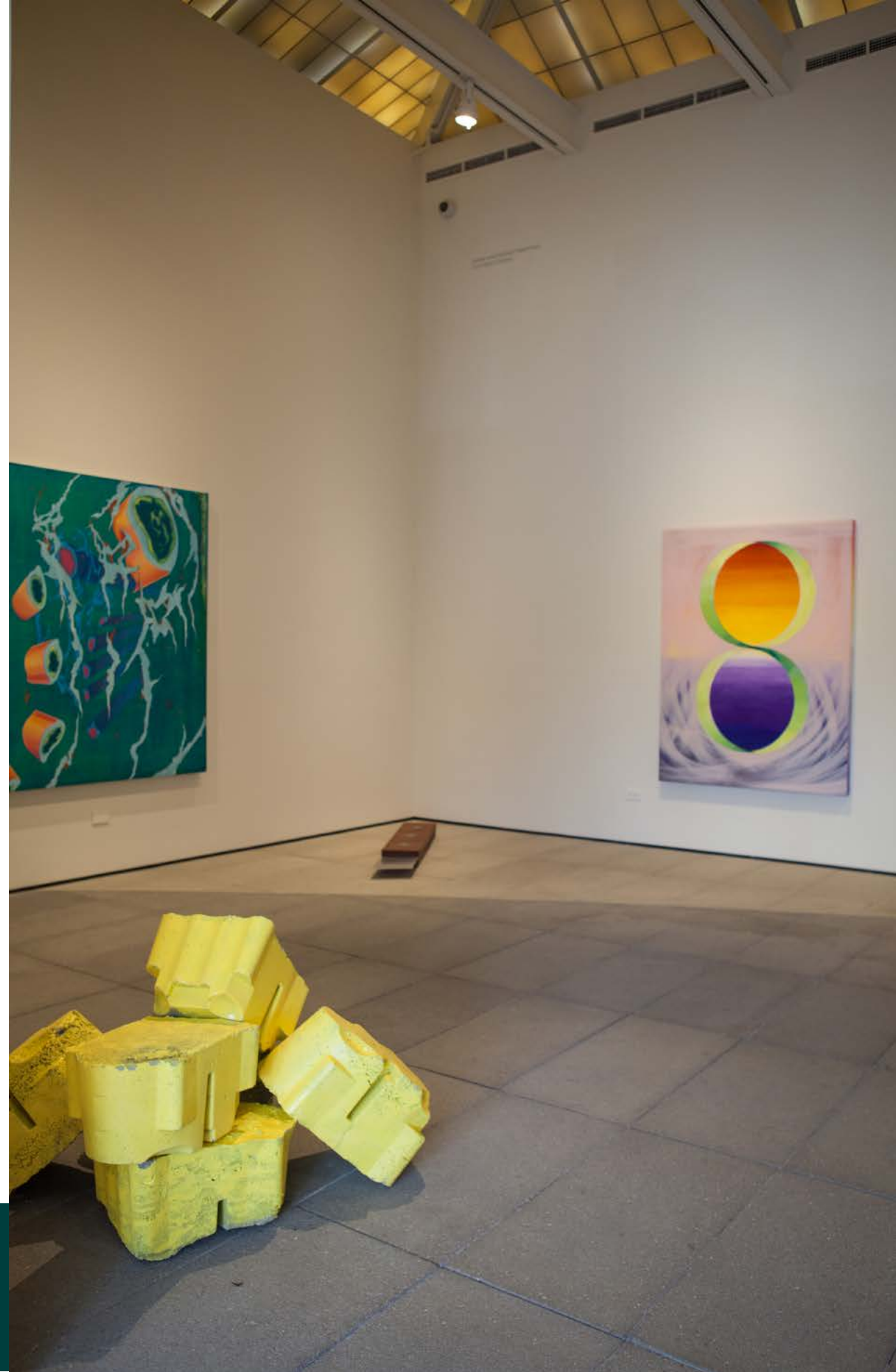




MATTHEW USINOWICZ

The current works of Matthew Usinowicz examine his experiences with American capitalist ideologies, specifically the relationship between human and commodity. Rooted in the American working class, Matthew grew up as a paperboy, butcher, and US Navy sailor. As a result his work reflects the political and conceptual outlook of these experiences.

As serious as this sounds Matthew keeps it humorous. An interwoven process involving chaotic processes of graffiti, tattooing, painting, drawing, three dimensional studies, lots of cooking, and everyday city living – somehow these all twirl around internally and art is the result.









SHOUT-OUTS

This exhibition could not have happened without the generous, collective support of the UCSB Department of Art Faculty and Staff. The following individuals deserve a specific shout-out of gratitude: Colin Gardner, Department Chair; Carol Talley, Graduate Advisor; Trela Cowan, Undergraduate Advisor; Michael Schmitt, Woodshop Technician; Ken Yokota, Sculpture Technician; Marko Peljhan, Thesis Exhibition Advisor and any other advocate for this adventurous, inspired class of UCSB MFA students.

Also, a very special thanks goes to the staff of the Art, Design and Architecture Museum: Bruce Robertson, Director; Elyse A. Gonzales, Curator of Exhibitions; Mehmet Dogu, Designer; Todd Anderson, Assistant Exhibition Designer; Susan Lucke, Registrar; Sam Scharf, Preparator.

Go Gauchos.



Catalogue Design: Jeff Page
Photography: Jenalee Harmon
Photography for Emily C. Thomas' work: Emily C. Thomas

