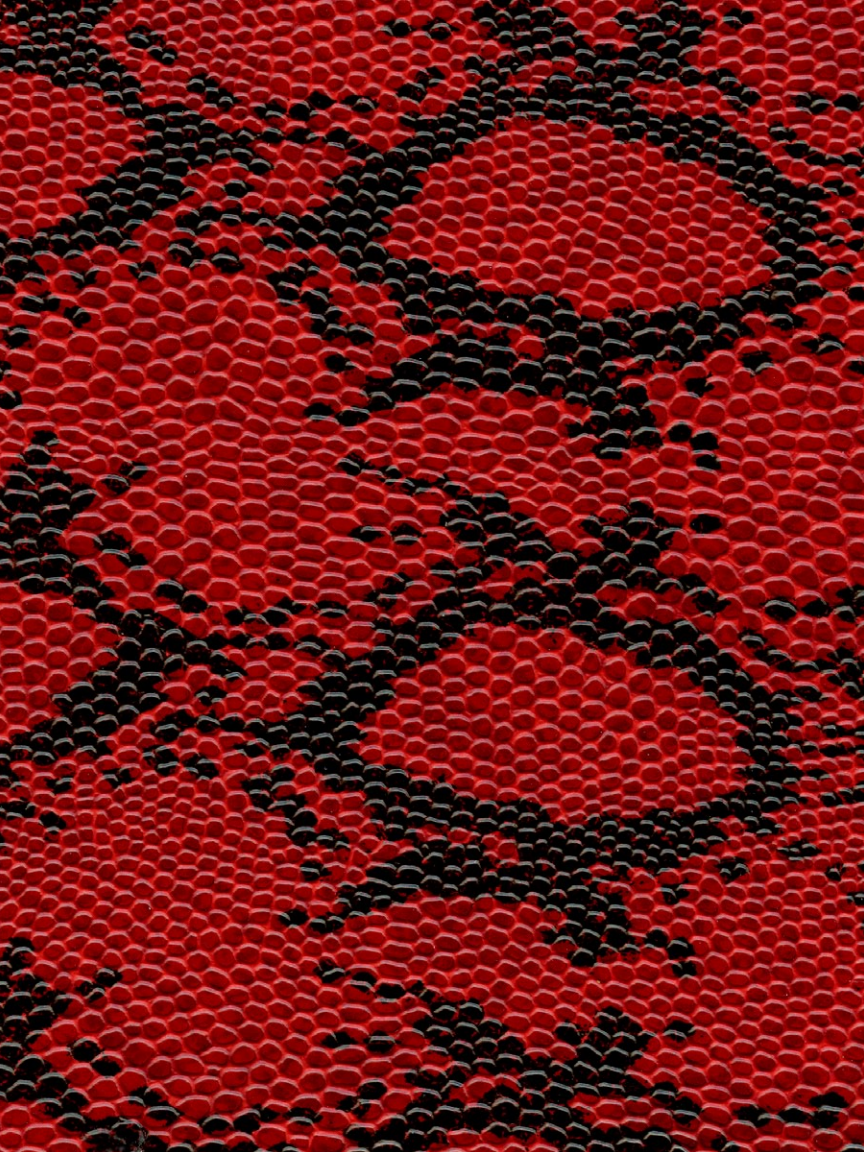

GROUP SHOW OF 2009 RISD MFA SCULPTURE GRADUATES
WORK GALLERY

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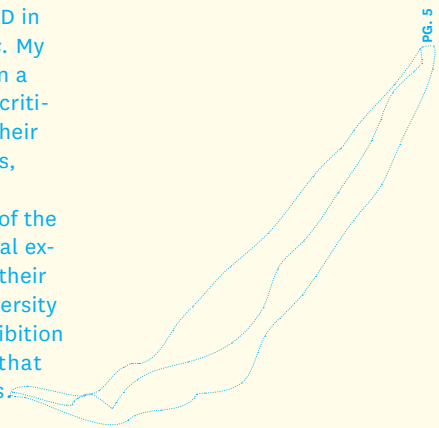
I began to work with the MFA Sculpture students at RISD in Fall 2007 during a course I taught called *Critical Issues*. My concept for the course was to work with the students in a collaborative manner that would allow them to form a critical and open dialogue with their contemporaries. For their final project, I asked them to form artist/director teams, trading roles in order to create a documentary on each other's work. This year, the students, in their last year of the program, approached me to write an essay for their final exhibition catalogue. I asked them to send me images of their work over an extended period of months. Given the diversity of work, it seemed appropriate that the title of the exhibition they settled on would be called *FREE RANGE*. With that idea in mind, I organized the project in three parts.



First, I asked them to email me a single question. Then, I asked them to meet me anywhere in New York for at least 60–90 minutes at a place I had either never been to before or that would be new in some way without putting anyone's life in danger. Finally, I asked each student to send me somewhere in New York and to do something I had never done before, alone. I wanted them to have FREE RANGE in terms of how they understood their own work and themselves, regardless of my point of view as critic, essayist and curator of the events that occur in the process of teaching and learning. It was mutually important that this dialogue, both visual and written, would go into the world through these acts of adventure. It has been a pleasure to work with them and to watch how they have used their time at RISD.

KELLY GOFF → THE ART OF MALPRACTICE

Repair or the lack of it figures large in Kelly Goff's work. Goff has spent a lot of his time at RISD taking advantage of material defects such as those found in 2 x4 lumber from Home Depot, seeking out those small milling errors others might simply overlook or reject. Interestingly, what's most noticeable in his sculpture is the artist's unflinching perfection. *Lo_Res 4x4,* cut, rotated, and laminated slices of a 4x4, measures 84" x 5", 2007, speaks to a classic Minimalist aesthetic, though the work's spare quality belies its more complicated terms. On a formal level, Goff's work, chiefly executed in wood, speaks to the history of an artist like Ursula Von Rydingsvard who is known for her imposing wood forms. Where Von Rydingsvard inflicts wounds into the wood, then rubs the surface with graphite to connect a physical invasion with an emotional one, like her early childhood in German DP camps, Goff identifies and works with pre-existing flaws and impediments in the material to allow the chasms to break or subvert visual progress.

His enormous sense of craft and formal integrity is so pronounced that in these postconceptual times, it's necessary to ask why sculptural form is so important to him. As he reveals: "I'm a builder before I'm an artist." He adds: "I wanted to be a doctor, I was more interested in orthopedic surgery which is hammers, chisels and rasps and a caulking gun to apply bone cement. They're the carpenters of the medical world." Goff, who grew up in Curacao, an island off the coast of Venezuela

speaking Dutch, Spanish, Papiamento, and English, admits: "All of my work is in some way an attempt to repair that which is broken." Given the idyllic landscape he emanated from, it's hard to imagine what exactly was broken. Goff's father, who was "a Jimmy Buffet-esque ex-patriot found a lazy island existence. He was a rich kid from Philadelphia who didn't understand the value of money who led his adult life as a vagabond guy." When I asked Goff to describe the house he grew up in, it turns out that the literal roof over his head was constantly in a state of massive disrepair. As a young boy, Goff would attempt to fix things, though he lacked both the experience and the tools to do the job properly. Biography makes sense of Goff's attraction to the flaw. It allows us to see how negligence circumnavigated and then informed his sculpture. "I'm interested in that which is rejected because the reasons things get rejected are arbitrary." Goff asked me: "What's the difference between repairing a broken thing and repairing a thing you broke?" I'd say that in the first case, someone else has done the damage and inadvertently or covertly makes you responsible for fixing the problem; in the second case, you take the responsibility for the improvement. In his recent work, Goff has been making a series of bollards — short posts originally meant for a ship or a wharf to secure a ship's rope. It's an interesting object for Goff to work on, he first casts paper and then the forms are broken and reconfigured to create a new form. The bollards, used by Homeland Security as measures to protect against trucks and cars carrying explosives, now stand architecturally as false protectors.

Lo_res 4x4. 2007. *Cut, rotated, and laminated slices of a 4" x 4" x 8".*

Lo_res 4x4. 2007. *Detail.*

MAYEN ALACANTARA → FLIGHT PATTERN

After being x-rayed and searched, we have successfully moved from the outside of the United Nations to the grounds of the world's troubled international peace-keeping headquarters. Sitting on a bench overlooking the East River, Mayen Alcantara, a former Civil Engineer is about to board a plane to India. Alcantara is a keen observer of physical and social codes. She is interested in the precarious relationship between the natural world and the built world. Recently, she spent several hours in her car in the dead of winter trying to record flight patterns of birds in Seekonk, MA. But then, as birds do, they flew away.

Much of Alcantara's work is rooted in an unusual intersection between linguistics and visual representation. Focusing on the process of behavior, movement and observation, an initial project called Alternative Kiosk provided key directions in the Providence Place Mall based on the behavior of bees. At RISD, Alcantara asked a Korean student to create a series of homophonic translations of English. "I'm using Korean because it lends itself well to graphical representation. I'm using words that approximate the English sound but don't have the same meaning. For example, Humpty Dumpty would become "un petite, un petite…" Alcantara's collaboration speaks to a highly analytical process that unexpectedly transforms itself to sculpture. In 2008, Alcantara collaborated with Yuka Otani (RISD 08) for a project called *Multi-Purpose Shelter: Personal Waterfall* (plexiglass, wood, pump, video) performed at UCLA. We see Alcantara in head to toe rain-gear passing through a downpour

— a clothed version of the Chinese practice of public showers featured in the Chinese film, *The Shower.* (1999) *Personal Waterfall* is both comical and utilitarian.

Her interest in how language and social systems mimic and re-invent meaning gives the viewer alternate visual routes rather than the standard practice of sculpture as an object. In looking at "how two places might converge as well as systems of migration," Alcantara is also looking at "what prompts people to go on a pilgrimage." The artist, born in Quezon City near Manila, grew up in Pasadena, though the family left the Philippines soon after Martial Law was declared in 1972 by Ferdinand Marcos. That line between immigration and expulsion speaks to the underlying volatility of Alcantara's seemingly even-keeled and always analytically-based projects. The artist Inigo Manglano-Ovalle has also focused many of his projects on weather patterns and migration. His sculpture, "The Storm" located at the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services Building in Chicago reveals how "historically all immigration to the U.S. has been a storm."

In talking about a trip with her grandmother to the Philippines, Alcantara told me: "I was traveling with my grandmother to these plazas and she'd point out these gaboya tiles (in ceramic and marble) manufactured by her father. Many churches used these tiles. After my great grandfather died, my grandfather took over the business and made substructures under ground, so their work was no longer seen above ground — there's no longer that visual evidence."

Multipurpose Shelter: Personal Waterfall. 2008. Performance, sculpture, and video. Dimensions variable.

Handwritten account under conditions of extended darkness. 2009. Paper, latex paint. 13" X 20".

ERIN PERRY → NOT SO INVISIBLE DRAGONS

Performance art has a history of extreme pain, just think about Chris Burden having himself shot or Tehching Hsieh's year-long imprisonment in his studio: no books, no paper, though food was delivered. So when Erin Perry used her own body as the site of a performance, she was, in a way, just following art protocol. I sat with her the next day at the Museum of Natural History, overlooking Central Park, more concerned about how she was feeling physically after completing *Sweet Dreams, Ophelia, Performance with Leeches, 2008*. Perry showed me her stomach: slightly swollen and marked by the place where several leeches crawled their way out of a bowl under her shirt. Bloodletting, an ancient cure for all that ailed, has often had disastrous results, though technically speaking, it was meant to rid "the body of the bad humours." The leech, however, would not have caused physical pain, despite its 300 teeth, and, as Noga Arikha wrote in *Passions and Tempers,* leeches "inject an anesthetic into the skin."

Leeches have been used before in contemporary art, namely by photographer Justine Kurland in a 1999 exhibition, *Another Girl, Another Planet,* curated by her former Yale professor, Gregory Crewdson. Her photograph, titled *Poison Ivy,* depicted several girls playing with fake leeches set in a pastoral scene that resulted in the girls being sent to the emergency room for poison ivy. What both Perry's and Kurland's work have in common is the pursuit of play and the idyll by way of the melancholic. Melancholia is not about sadness, but a way to demobilize social interaction and to force the viewer to experience an extreme isolation or to peak at a state of termination or extinction.

Perry's sculpture frequently invokes a defunct state; her work has used or referenced bears, sharks (*Shark Attack,* Ink on paper, 25' x 5' x 10, 2008) and skeletal structures. Perry works at the Nature Lab at RISD and "has frequent access to creatures and bones." She's also worked with her dad who makes "butterfly farms that are tourist attractions in Aruba, St.Thomas and St.Martin's that are constantly faced by destruction from hurricanes." In invoking a "dying present" — a place where both a mental and physical extinction becomes the focus, Perry shifts the terms of viewing away from the audience and back into the work itself.

A recent project, manifested as both sculpture and a play, titled *Genuine Essences {Subject to Change}*, concerns itself with the German physician Daniel Gottlieb Moritz Shreber, (1808-1861), who created a perverse pedagogy that involved tying children to chairs to correct their posture and "to tame the wildness out of them." He also leased land and called it *Schrebergarten*. Perry recreates the chair in her sculpture, nailing a measuring tape to a chair and has placed a broken-off prosthesis in front of it. The work offers a strange signal to viewers, simultaneously inviting them to enter a wounded history and run for their lives.

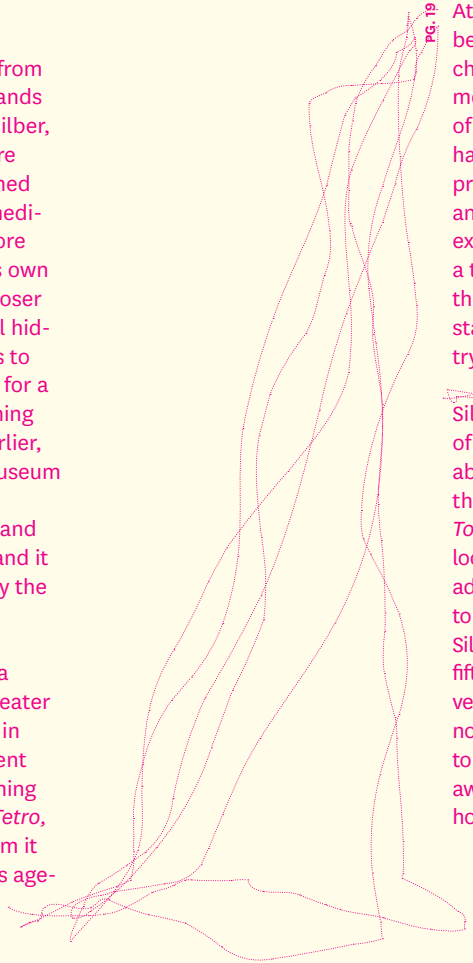
Sweet Dreams, Ophelia. 2008. Performance with Leeches, cement block, song.

Shark Attack. 2008. Ink on paper. 25' x 10' crumpled.

STEVE SILBER → SOCIAL CLIMBING

About a year ago, Steve Silber was hanging upside down from the ceiling of his studio at RISD. Painted in dark brown, hands dangling, his breath was even and disturbingly present. Silber, an ex-Marine, having served in Iraq and Afghanistan before entering graduate school, has, quite obviously, been trained for such work. Nonetheless, I asked him to get down immediately and drink a glass of water. Life, after all, comes before art. Silber has spent much of his time at RISD creating his own version of shock therapy; his intent has, at times, been closer to group therapy, often sending his colleagues into virtual hiding. At other times his need to shock is so conspicuous as to risk its effect entirely. When we met in the dead of winter for a nature walk through the paths of Central Park, the only thing I expected was an attempt at the forbidden. Moments earlier, Silber had nearly been arrested by a guard outside the Museum of Natural History because he had mounted James Earle Fraser's 10-foot tall bronze statue of Theodore Roosevelt and his horse. Apparently, there was only room for one rider and it wasn't Steve. Alexander Calder may have been inspired by the Circus, but Silber clearly could have joined it.

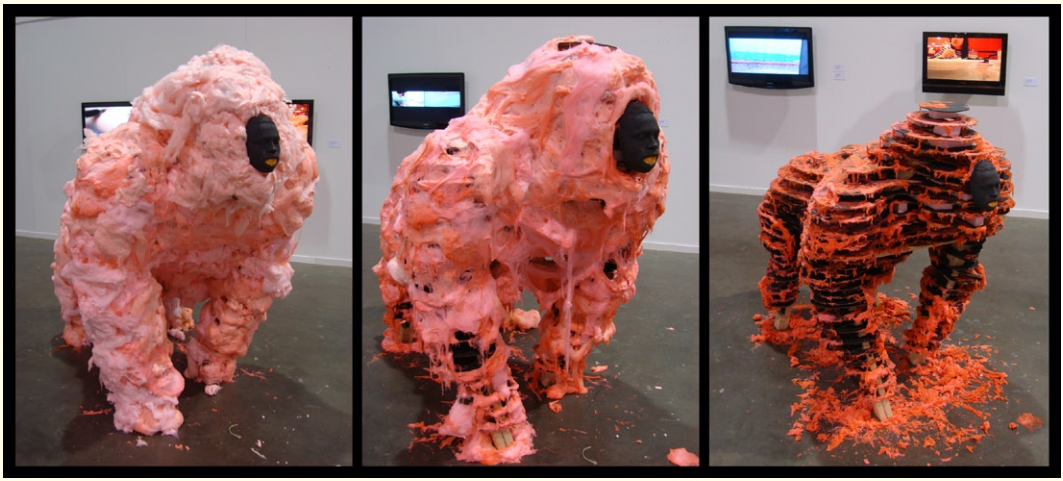
When we arrived at the top of Belvedere Castle, which is a functioning weather station overlooking the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, Silber began to describe a recent project in his studio. At a time when public display is a common event and *You Tube* the choice for everything from Qi Gong training to Francis Ford Coppola's home video promo for his film *Tetro,* little is left to the imagination, making art in whatever form it takes an ever more critical and difficult task. In a way, this age-old question about art is at the heart of Silber's practice.



At the top of the Belvedere Castle, and without flinching, Silber began to talk about how he slaughtered and then butchered a chicken in his studio. What should have been a horrifying moment, became one that seemed pathetic and drained, literally, of its value. The act, a commonplace one in a supermarket, had gained little by its shift of venue. In fact, much of Silber's practice has been an attempt to undermine social convention and to up the ante of a giant dare. As we walked towards the exit of the Park, Silber had a sudden need to climb to the top of a tree. Before I knew it, he was at least 12 stories in the air and then back on the ground in no time. It's as if he is in a constant state of wagering a bet with himself, teasing out the next trick, trying as he does to undermine social conventions.

Silber's understanding of sculpture is about poking at a system of inclusion and exclusion. The premise of his work is as much about the impossibility of virtuoso achievement as it is about the very concept of winning at all costs. In *Keeping It All Together, 2009,* Silber has assembled a base structure that looks more like a teepee. It's a precarious unit that Silber mounts, adding 2 x 4s like pick-up-sticks. Each stick allows him to scale to the next height, eventually permitting him to reach the ceiling. Silber created a practice piece that collapsed at eight, ten and fifteen feet as he scaled the structure's heights. Maybe this is his version of Superman or maybe he's just interested in going where no sculptor has gone before. In either case, he is one step closer to climbing away from the more obvious practice of shock and awe, and maybe, one day soon, won't feel the need to slip into old houses in Providence for a late night visit.

Eat Me: We are Animal. 2008. Pink Cotton Candy, Armature, Cast of artists face with orange slice in mouth. 84" tall.

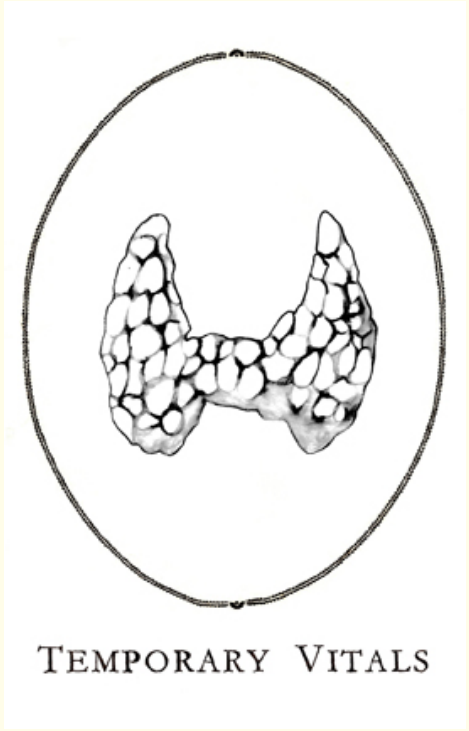


Minor Acts of Dissonance. 2008. Performance.

BOWIE ZUNINO → PUBLIC HEALTH

On a cold day, walking along 60th Street with millions of other shoppers, only two people knew what I had in a large white bag. I felt like the sound had gone out of New York. The mission: go to *Bits + Pieces* near Lincoln Center and pick up a package for Bowie Zunino and bring it downtown. Zunino has been fighting thyroid cancer and is now in her third round of the disease. While her treatment has never involved chemotherapy. Zunino decided that for her final projects at RISD, she would integrate hair from cancer patients into her work. Of course, the underbelly of any sculpture project is figuring out where the material will come from, especially when you need large quantities. From the street I could see the second story shop window and a glamorous display of wigs and hats; entering the shop, rows of white wooden booths with high walls appeared like confessionals. While waiting for the bag, I asked the receptionist how the patients felt coming there. First mistake: everyone is a client. Instead of going through the trauma of hair loss, the hair is actually shaved and the client then decides on a wig or hat or nothing at all. The bag I received was organized by color in plastic packages: blond, brunette, strawberry/blond. As I walked, people brushed against the bag, so I pulled it closer, feeling torn between the simple task of a delivery and the memory of how Nazis stock-piled the hair of concentration camp prisoners before exterminating them.

Days earlier I met Bowie Zunino at the Irish Hunger Memorial. We began to talk about memorials, this one created by sculptor Brian Tolle in 2002. I commented that a memorial is usually done after something is lost. Zunino responded: "It's a way to heal a wound." The wound in Zunino's sculpture and life has played an imposing part. Her project, *Till it Heals,* is described as a segmented bed frame and chemotherapy patient hair. It was created in collaboration with her college friend, Eve Biddle. Unlike her earlier work that more rigidly followed bed-frame structures or dining room furniture, *Till it Heals* is suspended on the wall, appearing more like a flayed animal or a useless quilt. Useless because of its large, open holes. The work sags and as such feels like references humiliation or at least emptiness. Zunino's transition from earlier projects where she created tea-parties to entertain and create a community, is also marked by her need to turn her work into a public event. The initial tea parties were compelling because they were contrived and awkward as well as gracious and genuine. Their selfconsciousness is perhaps the perfect ground work for a series of temporary tattoos of the thyroid designed by Bowie + Eve called *TEMPORARY VITALS* that directly engaged the idea of the burlesque. "The thyroid tattoo looks like a butterfly, but are meant to teach people about the thyroid. " The tattoo also looks like a bowtie. In talking about the famous striptease artist Gypsy Lee Rose, author Rachel Shteir noted: "Gypsy thought of her striptease as a sleight of hand." This implied trickery carries with it the doublemessage of the demure with the bravura of showmanship and giving something away. In Zunino's case, as the artist told me, "the idea of a gift is about public health as a small dispersal of an object into the public." Similarly, Bowie + Eve's *In Honor of The Teddy Bear Skin Flayer,* found rug, segmented teddy bear, creates a trophy rug that mocks status and celebrates something that's been rejected. As we walked through the Irish Hunger Memorial, we looked to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island where immigrants were once inspected before being admitted to America. If they didn't pass, they were returned to their country of origin.



Temporary Vitals: Thyroid. 2008. temporary tattoos: 3" x 2".

Temporary Vitals: Thyroid. 2008. Photos: 30" x 40".

DANA WILLIAMS → TOOLS OF THE TRADE

On a subway car headed uptown, I read Harold Pinter's 1965 play, *The Homecoming*, out loud. Maybe I would have done it anyway, one day, but that day had never quite arrived, until Dana Williams asked me to perform something on the subway. The English playwright had died that day and I had a few pages left to read, so I brought him with me as I sat in a crowded car, risking stares and the unaffectionate comment of the man sitting next to me. After all, people talk on cell phones out loud, but who reads a play out load if you're not up for a role? Pinter's play takes place in a physically neglected house; the swell of family violence ever palpable. Home has always conjured a strange combination of affection and volatility. For Dana Williams, home has been an important part of her art. During her first term at RISD, she obsessively created a literal tool bar filled with re-invented to scale objects, including a tape measure out of a plastic screen, wool and needle work. These replicas represented more than a display of play-size objects, but spoke instead to issues of craft that had been so important in her family. While programs like Martha Stewart or Rosie O'Donnell have encouraged millions of viewers to pick up the glue gun or the needle, the role of craft and visual art has always been something more understood as both bi-product and fundamental skill needed to accomplish a work. Her formal investigations began as she observed her mother and grandmother making blankets and crocheting doorknob holders. "My mom had made all of Barbie's clothes and accessories out of plastic canvas."

Williams next turned her attention to a mouse-trap, where she made a funeral bed for a mouse that couldn't roar. While this project is both morbid and silly, it also spoke to the artist's interest in both the utilitarian and the defunct. Williams grew up in Detroit, both the capital and ghost of the auto industry. A drive through the city's largely art deco architecture easily yields a frightening array of abandoned buildings. As Williams told me: "The train station, Michigan Central Station is gorgeous, but it's abandoned; people live there, they squat there. There's life going on there." These derelict moments are incorporated into the artist's sculpture, especially in a recent work, Digging to China, plexi,dirt,sod,plastic,paper, that displays dismembered parts strung up and also scattered on a broken down table slab. The reference: digging to somewhere you can't get to, as in a destination that aborts itself, comes to us by way of a child's game tinged with either racist or terribly narrow-minded views of China. For Dana Williams, the reference is more likely about a faux destination meant to divert attention away from the fact that the place itself no longer exists. This project recalls the work of Thomas Demand who has spent his career creating secondary environments out of paper and then photographing these locations. In Demand's case, his projects start with recognizable news events: election results; the tunnel where Lady Diana crashed after the paparazzi chase. Her projects also recall the installations of the Kabakovs who have created pseudo-worlds that reference real places fail to progress to a future, like hospital rooms. When Dana and I met at The Cake Shop on Ludlow Street, I was struck by how the café itself seemed stuck in time, except for the glowing screens of laptop computers, itself a form of displaced work. As the artist acknowledged: "I often pretend that whole worlds are happening in my work. I use things from my upbringing. There is something that's defunct."

Digging to China. 2008. Mixed Media. Dimensions vary. 36" x 36".

Sleep Tight. 2008. Mixed media, mouse, mousetrap and fabric. 2" x 5".

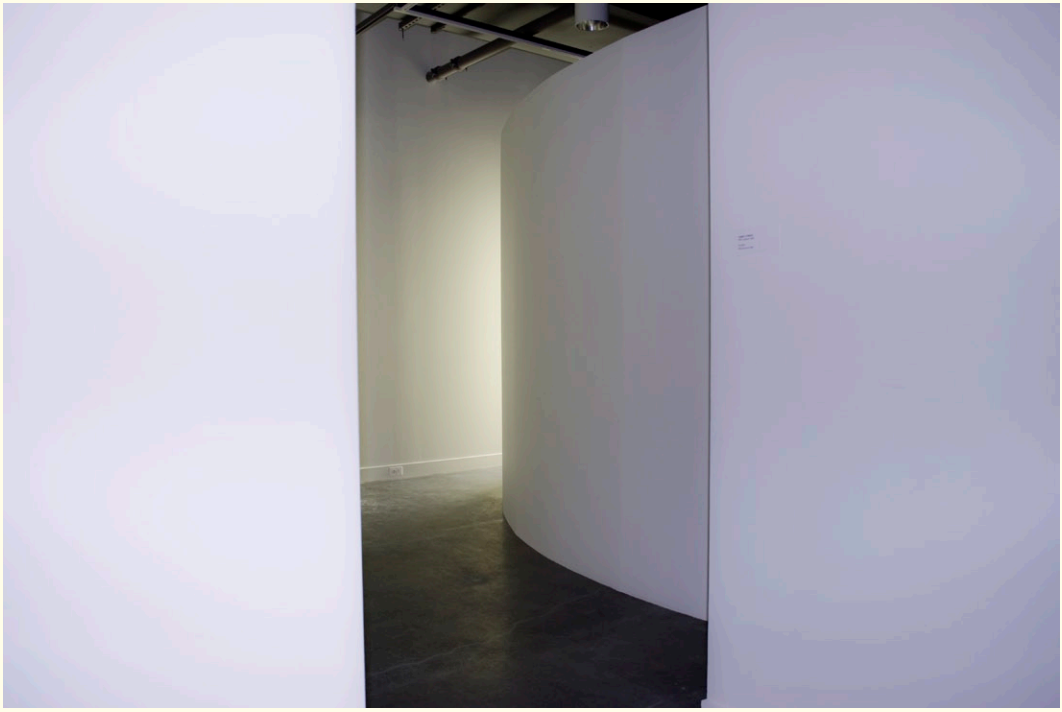
CASEY LYNCH → THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING

When Flash Gordon made his debut on January 7, 1934, no one knew it would eventually lead to the X-Men and the outer limits of phenomenology. And that what seemed to be fantasy would soon become just another way to know more about real life. The work of Casey Lynch follows a pattern somewhat based in science, somewhat based in psychology, partially based in an understanding of the apocalyptic and visually emanating from the work of Minimalism. We met in the Cooking section of Barnes and Nobles, although when he worked there, he was stationed closer to Self Help. Like the installations of James Turrell and Dan Flavin, Lynch's sculpture uses light in a pared down and almost clinical fashion. *An Arc,* 2008 features a 20 foot curved wall and cool white compact fluorescents that, as he admits "doesn't make your skin look good." While Turrell's and Flavin's work is meant to provoke contemplation, Lynch's installation almost has the reverse effect. Oozing out of the wall, "an intense light will burn a vertical line into your retina."

Lynch, who grew up in suburban western Georgia not far from Ft. Bening, organizes his practice like a lab. At times, the effort towards the analytical nearly overpowers his sense to let things unfold on their own. When Stefanie Pender, a RISD MFA glass student created a documentary on Lynch last year, she used the harsh blue light of Lynch's projector as the start of her investigation. At the time, Lynch was primarily creating placebo-like pills and a series of drawings. Lynch used the projector as a way of achieving his drawings. It is interesting to see how the light of the projector has become the center of Lynch's visual expression. Color has also played an important role in Lynch's work. An earlier project found him color-coding trees in a forest, which parallels Roxy Paine's stainless steel tree sculptures that lived in Madison Square Park in New York City in 2007.

As a way to re-calibrate both himself and his work, Lynch created *Meditation On, Nothing* (500GB), a black external hard drive containing a video of the artist practicing Zen Meditation. Don't worry, no need to watch, you can't: the black box is the work. " It tries to get at nothingness — a black box with digital information which is about inaccessibility." In a way, the project is a slap against our ultimate human need to know, especially when disaster strikes and all that is left of a crashed airplane is the black box. In sealing off the information, Lynch strikes back at that need to monitor and be monitored. In embracing minimalist forms, Lynch's portrayal of sculpture reverts back to Donald Judd's original intention to neutralize the viewer's response. But as Lynch adds: "I'd like my view of minimalism to be more approachable."

An Arc. 2008. light, mixed media. Installation dimensions vary



Sometimes. 2009. mixed media. 34"x84"x4".

MONICA MARTINEZ → PERIPHERAL VISION

If Monica Martinez could, she would probably carry the world away while the rest of us watched. She is constantly in a state of arriving: scanning and looking as if for the first time, trying to detect what others might see as peripheral. So when I met her at one of the busiest intersections in Chinatown, it only seemed natural that we had no specific destination. We ended up in a back alley: a tiny curving street with barbershops and souvenirs. As we entered a shop filled with gadgets, a middle-aged Chinese man was fast asleep, arms folded, TV full blast. His wife stood behind the counter, demonstrating wind-up toys, small buses and collapsible objects. As Martinez explained: "I'm very interested in the idea of order and disorder. Once I worked in a production line for a company that supplied signs to Disney Land and Sea World. I thought it would be so creative, but they had me cutting out bathroom signs. You have to organize how to work."

Martinez's sculpture often starts or ends with an intrusion, and, in the process addresses the failure of the object in society. "Last year, [as part of my work,] I tried to go into Macy's with a huge dirty cart. They didn't want me there. My sculpture this semester is about products of failure. I took [a copy of a] painting by Pietro Longhi and photoshopped myself into the painting and laser cut the cardboard." Martinez told me: "I'm trying to evade the product. I'm interested in economies that depend on improvisation to sell things." This view of economics may not be so far away from our current global and social economy.

PG. 35

In the installation titled *Interchange*, made from concrete, cardboard and wood, 2008, Martinez creates a schematic view of the world. It recalls the work of sculptor Jack Risley, who, like Martinez, has a keen use of color and touch, combining everyday objects to form a delightful humor. She adds: "It's natural for humans to be social. How we arrange things." Another sculpture, *Jonah's Cabin*, feels everything from a cart to green siding is stuck to the body of a house-like container. Martinez, born in Mexico has been recently based in the USA. She returns frequently to both the concept and presence of the house as the basis for many of her physical structures, whether stationary or portable. " I lived in five houses. My mom had garlic on the wall or colorful paintings, like a huge Jackson Pollock-like red and green sun. If someone came to our house and told my mom how much they liked something, she'd take it off the wall and give it to them." As Martinez further reflects: "Last year, I was testing the landscape, now I'm making my own landscape. I was fighting the studio and the school. This semester, I decided to embrace everything, to put myself on my knees. To be more humble."

Failure of Market Architectures. 2009. Cardboard, Acrylic, Aluminum. 5' x 12' x 10'.

At Macy's. 2007. Recycle Wood, Dolly Card. Archival Inkjet Print.

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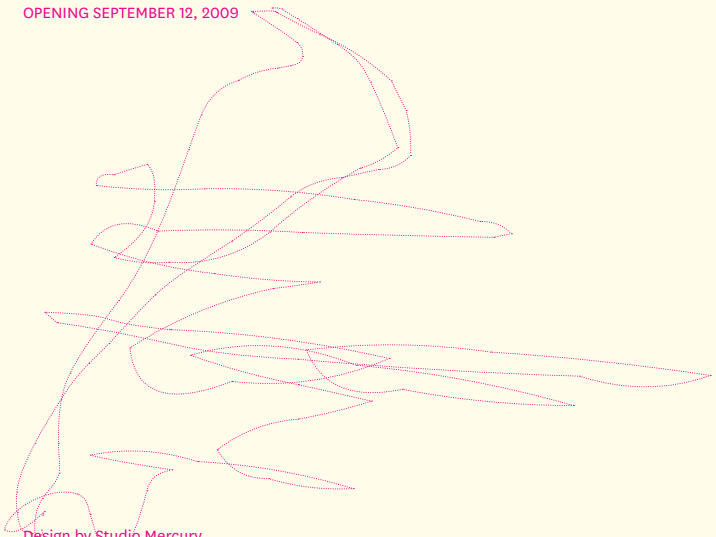

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Essay by Cheryl Kaplan

CHERYL KAPLAN is an artist, producer and critic. She is the founder of red square, an international series of public debates and has written for *Art in America*, *Flash Art*, *Art News*, *MONOPOL*, *ELLE*, *Performing Arts Journal/MIT* and *BOMB*. Kaplan has produced films for Laurie Anderson, Eve Sussman and Rosanne Cash among others. Artist residencies include the MacDowell Colony, the Royal Academy of Arts and the Bogliasco Foundation. Kaplan has recently received the Bogliasco Foundation Special Fellowship in the Visual Arts.