This senior thesis exhibit represents the culminating work of twelve Bachelor of Fine Arts candidates. The range of work showcases a diversity of processes and innovation in ceramics, digital art, drawing, painting, printmaking, photography, and sculpture.
Zeitgeist of the BFA, USM, USA

The [public university] funding issue raises many troubling questions which would not arise if fostering independent thought and inquiry were regarded as a public good having intrinsic value… --Noam Chomsky

Who are the job creators? Jobs and all the other “stuff” with which we create a society is a collective enterprise where individual visions are perpetually communicated, received, and in turn generate new ideas. Universities have traditionally been great incubators for the practicing of and gaining confidence in the articulation of visions, as well as the skills to realize them. Its no coincidence that what the economists describe as the “Golden Years” of America as a rising economy and world power from post-WWII to the early 1970’s was also the period of rising affordable public higher education, university research and upward class mobility. While public universities foster an individual’s vision, it starts with a kernel of intention.

The most influential artist of the 20th century, Marcel Duchamp, showed us the crucial importance of an artist’s intention. Here we are introducing the intentions and art of twelve USM Bachelor of Fine Arts students, studio art majors emerging from years of intense engagement with the discourse of art and the fashioning of ideas into form. Though their materials may be video data bits, this endeavor is as old as -in fact defining of- humanity. Ancient traditions, the latest theories in physics, and even Facebook confirm on many levels that there is no isolated, private self. Every act we do has a collective effect, such as declaring a BFA major.

By taking this step, Amanda, Amy, Bethany, Christina, Kathleen, Mark, Melissa, Nathan, Nicholas, Milo, Ryan, and Willow are subscribing to values of independent thought and artistic inquiry. They are going out in the world as free agents engaging in many arenas including commerce, whether that may be selling art and/or starting an art related business and/or working in an arts profession and/or applying a creative vision to other fields. By doing so, they are continuing to circulate expansive notions of free agency in society, occupying grounds of permission from which creative intentions spring.

The fostering of the freedom to dream is at stake given the current forces of privatization-the transfer of ownership or control from the public to the private sector. Advertising agencies and pharmaceutical companies pursuing short-term gains have their place. But what biological discoveries and wondrous art will be lost if university biologists have their sights limited to developing the next profitable drug and art departments become wings of ad agencies?

While I faced the same uncertainty of making a living as a BFA major, I had access to an affordable public university education so didn’t have the financial hardships and risks. What is it like now to stand at such a threshold? Nathan Fogg, a gallery work-study student, BFA exhibitor, and English minor has queried his fellow exhibitors and unfurls for us the spirit or zeitgeist of their moment. The BFA Senoir Seminar professor, Rose Marasco, then responds to the questions Nate raises.

Carolyn Eyler
Director of Exhibitions and Programs
University of Southern Maine Art Gallery
Now What?

This essay considers what the BFA show and Senior Seminar mean to the candidates involved and why we have chosen to pursue a degree in which the next step can seem at times to be rather undefined. The biggest commonality I find between the very different artists represented in this show is an inability to separate their work from their life. I have seen many students (including myself) taking materials they knew wouldn’t be missed from their respective day jobs, like Styrofoam cups or party balloons and bringing them into the studio, repurposing them well into the night, transforming them into something beautiful. For most of us art isn’t a job from which you can take a vacation. An artist is anyone who cannot not make art and by pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts we have all come to the conclusion that we want a life for ourselves in which we live to work not just work to live.

In many cases these artists told me that pursuing a BFA was an impulse they fought against, opting out of degrees or careers that may have appeared more practical and safe. Instead they chose to pursue a degree that would fulfill them on a deeper level. As one student put it to me when I asked whether he considered his future financial security when he made the decision to become a BFA candidate, he responded, “This is America, there is no such thing as financial security.” There is however, such a thing as turning a dream, an idea or a vision into a reality, but it takes intention, self-motivation, and hard work. I don’t think any of us would be here if we weren’t up to that challenge. It was because we all share a love of art, in all its forms that we took this risk.

The work on display here is the result of thousands of failed experiments and creative and critical decisions made when we were discovering and honing our individual skill sets, finding the intrinsic value of our work in the process. For some, that endeavor may seem like a scary prospect (at the very least a risky one) but paradoxically a common feeling I get from this group of artists is a sense of optimism and genuine excitement about what comes next for us.

One needn’t look any further than Portland, Maine to see how the culture industry can be an integral part of the economic health and quality of life for any community. Even in this small city the outlets for creative thinkers are numerous and varied. Here I am going to posit an axiom: culture drives positive community growth, gentrification, tourism, and the bottom line for local economies. However the reason I suspect we all chose to pursue a BFA in the beginning had nothing to do with such logical goals so clearly realized. Pursuing a career in Art is less like walking down a path than it is like finding you way through a dark tunnel. As you continually grow and learn throughout your working life as an artist you gain the confidence in yourself that your work will lead you to the light... Somewhere more creatively rewarding than any of the other professions you have spent the last however many years avoiding.

Nathan Fogg
BFA Student Exhibitor
Begin again…

The BFA exhibition is the culminating experience for the art department students who are majoring in this professional degree. It is a studio intensive degree, recognized as such globally, and we at USM have been a leader in the University of Maine system. Our program has a sense of community and expansiveness regarding the creative process that encourages individualized growth, a respect for historical and contemporary knowledge, and does not promote a style over the discoveries made from one’s commitment to their own creative process.

In Nathan Fogg’s essay he asks, Now What?

My answer: we begin again. We reflect, identify what we did, inform ourselves with feedback and knowledge, and begin again to resolve our ideas, beliefs, passions, and interests into a visual form that others may experience.

As artists, we are the seeds of everything from real estate expansion to consumer advertising. Just as public policy is often driven from the groundswell of the individual and then communalized efforts, so too is the zeitgeist led by creative individuals pursuing their life goals, looking low and aiming high.

I would like to thank and congratulate the students for their commitment to their creative process; and to each of our respected full and part time faculty I thank you for your efforts in assisting each of these twelve emerging artists. It has been my pleasure to assist each student in formatting their path, and encourage you to look ahead and take the next step.

Rose Marasco
Senior Seminar Instructor
Distinguished Professor of Art
University of Southern Maine
My work meets at the juncture between the old currents of art making and what is left of them after the deconstructions of modernism and the ever widening sphere of post-modern thought. As a figurative artist, I appropriate images from the old masters, such as Caravaggio, to photographs of violence in our current age to engage with the spirit of the human figure. Charcoal allows my figures to be rendered in a visceral manner, their spirits seemingly tearing away from their physical bodies. I work on a large scale so that viewers relate to the near life-like size of my figures.
My work challenges the perceptions we have of ourselves as we might experience them while standing outside our bodies. Taking a look from a different vantage point as we move through life, I am attempting to capture a surreal experience using the association of sound with visual elements. In this way, I seek to deconstruct the internal processes we formulate. I want to open up the visual dialog to questions rather than completeness. This is a journey of expansion and the investigation into an ineffable realm.
We live in a society that is accustomed to throwing away objects. Traditionally, by many East-Asian cultures, teapots are considered to be vessels of vitality and become more beautiful as they age. On teapots being life-bearing vessels, my teapots often take on a destructive bomb-like form through the use of everyday objects. By referencing mundane objects that we normally throw away and recontextualizing their beauty by casting them in multiples and arranging them on the body of a teapot; I am challenging the idea of disposability and destruction.
There is a kinetic energy that I access through my processes. The creation of this work demands a great deal of control and finesse due to the fluidity of the materials I work with. They can be stretched, dripped, controlled and mixed in a way that depends on consistency, balance and timing. I choose materials that are at first familiar but are transformed into something foreign. The techniques I use while working these materials helps the pieces to grow organically and minimizes the evidence of the human hand. These pieces reference binaries such as inside vs. outside, fertile vs. infertile, and private vs. public.
Art is the process through which I attempt to articulate and understand my environment. I am a mixed media artist in terms of both how I use raw materials and technology. I chase imagery and use the mediums or processes that will best serve the aesthetic and conceptual aims of the work. When I conceptualize a piece I choose materials based on their function, formal qualities and the symbolic associations inherent in the materials themselves.
I am a poor wayfaring stranger
travelling through this world of woe.
There is no sickness, toil or danger
in that bright world to which I go.

There is in all of us a deep longing for home, a searching for place. We long for a fixed point in time and space, but home is an illusion, a beautiful delusion. The Wandering works are grounded in my search for home and reflect the elusive nature of place. Using an intuitive line drawing I enter into a dialogue with the surface using mixed media. Out of that conversation imaginary places emerge. The images give the viewer only the journey – not home.
I’ve always been fascinated in the way the mind’s eye works to imagine and create form from a single drawn line. I’ve worked this way since I was just a little kid. I’d start with a simple scribble of a line and then make something out of it. Since then, the lines I draw tend to curve and loop their way into figures and objects. I try striking a unique balance with my images that are composed while they are drawn. These doodles form the basis for the final silkscreened product.
I use photography as a means to capture identity. Being an identical twin I am sensitive to how objects, like people are unique. Entryways have good and bad qualities, like people and in these unique characteristics I find beauty. Some have intricate purposeful detail while others have chipped paint and broken glass. Doors are often overlooked in passing as ordinary, yet when I stop and am aware every detail becomes extraordinary. These photographs have been printed on a large scale to bring the viewer in close to appreciate these often overlooked intricacies.
The photographs in this body of work explore the relationship between the generic order we live within in society and the personal spaces we create for ourselves. This series was photographed and printed digitally, and formatted as a square to give a more intimate and intentional view of the subject. The generic spaces were printed in color and larger because they are open, public areas, whereas the personal areas were printed in black & white and smaller with the intention of drawing the viewer closer into these intimate spaces.
The term ‘logical imagination’ accurately describes the theme of my work. I initially use a very precise and mathematical process which sets the stage for imagination and intuition to take place. After composing somewhat logical forms, I can begin to play with their interactions with one another. I essentially invent objects that function under their own rules: that is, how their surface colors and design may relate, how they may cast shadows, and how they may be constructed and deconstructed. I enjoy creating playful internal rules that could not exist in the external world, as well as creating instances in which these rules are broken.
Willow Ross

Adjust and Adapt, mixed media, 8” x 10” x 4”

I want my sculptures to be viewed as snippets of our surroundings, environments and experiences frozen in time and space, much like a memory. The inclusions for this exhibit should show and isolate the interaction between humans and nature. My goal is not for my audience to understand the personal connections that I have to my art but to allow them to take a closer look at these issues, by scaling down our real world thus making it easier to digest the totality of my intension.
The notion that space and time are one, and that time is not a constant, presents a monumental and provocative abstraction that seemingly stands in violation of how we perceive the world. It is this abstraction that I aim to decipher through my series. By presenting the fourth dimension on a two-dimensional plane, with multiple consecutive moments sharing one visual environment, I hope to create a kind of theoretical distillation. That is, I hope to establish a space in which an idea as nebulous and ephemeral as time can be processed by the viewer in a different way.
The University of Southern Maine Art Department

The University of Southern Maine BFA degree in Studio Arts has Concentrations in Ceramics; Digital Art; Drawing; Painting; Printmaking; Photography; and Sculpture. Additional degrees: BFA with a Concentration in Art Education; BA in Art; BA in Art with a Concentration in Art and Entrepreneurial Studies; BA in Art with a Concentration in Art History.

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