Exploring Reality

Schneider Museum of Art
January 15 through March 19, 2016
We are pleased to announce the Schneider Museum of Art’s winter exhibition, *Exploring Reality*, curated by guest curator Shane McAdams and myself. For the past six years the Southern Oregon University Center for the Humanities has hosted a campus-wide theme that states, “The goal is for the campus and our larger community to engage in rigorous intellectual conversations about this challenging subject, informed by the latest research, scholarship, and insights from a wide variety of perspectives.” This year the theme is exploring reality. We quickly recognized the opportunity to integrate our programs into the University-wide concept by creating an exhibition. This will be the first time that the Schneider Museum of Art will participate in this engaging event.

We acknowledge the boundless talent that Oregon has amongst its contemporary art scene and we have made note of the need to expose others beyond the borders of Oregon to this talent. A vital component of this exhibition includes an outside curator and a spotlight on Oregon artists. We chose Shane McAdams, a New York/Wisconsin based artist who also holds the title of curator and accomplished arts writer under his belt. McAdams is represented by a Portland based gallery and rarely has the opportunity to connect with Oregon artists during his exhibitions here.

After many conversations with Shane, his bags were packed and we were visiting artist’s studios and galleries. We settled on eight artists from Ashland, Eugene, Springfield and Portland. The work of Shane McAdams rounds the exhibition roster off at nine. The work spans from the abstract to representational, from full gallery installations to pedestal pieces. Some examples are deeply personal, and others play on puns. The mediums are as diverse as the concepts. We hope this exhibition gives our audiences some insights into artistic perspectives of *Exploring Reality*.

Scott Malbaurn
Director
Exploring Reality?

The proposition seems broad enough to include almost anyone who has their feet on the ground and their head in the air. From any discipline, science, politics, philosophy would all claim to be actively interested in pursuing reality at some level. Indeed, many commuters stuck in traffic and part-time poets stuck on barstools might claim the same. Still, despite its breadth, this rhetorical catchall, as we’ve taken it on in this exhibition, provides the latitude to both contemplate the idea of reality from the specific perspective of contemporary visual art and to use as a lens with which to peer into the tumbling, churning, maddening reality that defines our contemporary moment.

The arts are obviously unique in relation to the sciences in that their goals are not simply descriptive, but normative and interpretive. Additionally, those interpretations are often delivered in metaphorical terms that allow for a level of nuance, that can help investigate the world from unique points of view; perspectives that disturb the more reductive accounts of reality we often see simplified in media, politics, and popular commercial culture.

Like those other spheres, art has formally and categorically fractured over the past half century. The degree to which this fragmentation is a reflection of social diversity or, a cause of it, is debatable. Art is simultaneously the agent of change and a general symptom of it. In any case, art has offered one of the most reliable ongoing snapshots of our society as it evolved. We can all relate the experience of entering the postwar wing of an art museum, from the Abstract Expressionist paintings of Jackson Pollock to contemporary social practice projects offered in vitrines, and being left with a lack of closure or concrete meaning. To some this subjectivity represents art’s failure to make a clear point, and to others it represents the chance to see and experience reality from unexpected angles. To those in this camp, art is the compound eye that allows us to triangulate meaning and see reality in the round, reserving it as one of the final unaffiliated, and unbiased, disinterested vigilantes of everything.

Pablo Picasso presciently summed up the case when he said, “Art is a lie that helps us understand the truth.” I begin the contemporary art course I teach with this quote and an image of an orange, urging students to dispute the proposition that what they see is in fact “an orange.” They usually fumble for a few moments until someone inevitably utters, “it’s a picture of an orange!” And this opens the mental floodgates: “it’s a slide,” “an object,” “a noun,” “a trick question.”

And the answer is always the same: “yes.”

The point of this exercise is obvious: that truth and reality heavily depend on language and context. But it’s a lesson that often vaporizes outside the abstract precincts of the classroom or the art gallery, when a world intent on manufacturing and consolidating our consent takes over. It’s difficult enough to sustain critical vigilance with that world when we’re not taking breaks to manage other aspects of our lives. It’s nearly impossible when we are distracted.

As consumers we tend to be gullible when it comes to the simplified choices offered by those market-driven forces. We are naturally biased in favor of clarity. We have, after all, evolved as a species to navigate the reality that unfolds in front of us with impulsive certitude. And for the majority of our time as a species that has involved avoiding viruses more than avoiding viral marketing campaigns. Thus, we have become good at simplifying reality for the sake of survival. Don’t mess with the bright red snake. Do eat...
the big round succulent fruit. Essentially, the left-brained answer is the one we favor, the generalized truth. We are predisposed to select the stereotype over the open-ended and multiple.

In her masterpiece, To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf confronts this issue with even greater metaphorical flair than Picasso. The struggling artist Lily Briscoe ponders:

“What is the meaning of life? That was all—a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years, the great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead, there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark…”

Though Woolf’s astounding insight is given to us through literature, her imagery is exceedingly and exactly visual. One might imagine her metaphorical image of a lit match as an actual installation: a darkened room with occasional bursts of revelatory light. At the risk of embellishing her wonderfully crafted image and taking it into a realm in which it was never meant to exist, visualizing it encapsulates both the difficulty and benefit of moving from the literal and analytical and into a purely metaphorical or visual language.

The artists in the exhibition Exploring Reality, at the Schneider Museum of Art, were selected based on their oblique, metaphorical relation to that eponymous notion; that one of art's obligations is to take on aspects of reality from metaphorical angles, and to do so through unique, non-objective, irreverent, eccentric perspectives that the proprieties and sanctions of other disciplinary objectives can't oblige.

The work that is in Exploring Reality is formally diverse, but linked by its abiding interest in that basic premise. Malia Jensen’s sculptures are viscerally constructed parables that she hopes will be deconstructed intellectually by the viewer. Her piece, Sock Fight, presents the capacity of two individuals or nations fighting over the impractical or foolish notions. Ellen Lesperance’s coded works on paper capture the spirit of political activism and individual acts of resistance. In her raucous and eclectic prints, Charlene Liu seeks an ambivalent visual pastiche that reflects her personal experience of acculturation. Tia Factor’s paintings are similarly concerned with how rich personal histories translate into visual objects, however her magically naturalist paintings take root in the accounts of utopian settlers who have in one way or another abandoned traditional society.

Ryan Pierce considers the hypothetical over the historical implications of humans colliding with nature in his apocalyptic paintings of mutant flora and fauna. The interaction of culture and nature also inspire the work of Laura Vandenburgh, however she pans out on the idea, bringing to it a more sociological and cartographical sensibility. Her installations and delicate works on paper suggest everything from cellular networks, emergent systems, social mapping exercises, and topographical maps. Laurel Bustamante’s work zooms back into nature in her delicate gaucho paintings inspired by her direct and personal relationship to the land. Her exquisite compositions begin from chance events with fluid media, which she reacts to and brings to life. Robin Strangfeld’s ceramics consider how the parameters of a given context shape our understanding of difference and value. And my own work, an oak tree sliced into segments finished with streaks of ballpoint pen ink and resin, question whether processes, materials, or representations are the most reliable measure of what is real.

I'm sometimes concerned that celebrating art’s open-ended diversity distracts some from its agency and social solvency, and possibly reinforces the call for legibility that some will always expect. One hopes that diversity of form and content alone won't discourage engagement. Instead we should see that art in general, and the work in this exhibition specifically, is embraced as a metaphorical reflection of reality, in all its kaleidoscopic majesty.

Still, many can relate to the experience of being overwhelmed by art’s wealth of forms, content, and textual supplements. But anyone personally interested in teaching through art, as I am, understands that our society’s prevailing desire for objectivity remains only a symptom of the tidiness we’ve been force-fed, without the caveats and perspectival adjustments that art brings with it. Art continuously reminds us that resolute truths are extremely rare in our contemporary reality, and to the degree that they exist, are like matches struck in the dark: immediate, unexpected, and fleeting, but no less electrifying or illuminating.

Shane McAdams
Exhibition co-curator and participating artist, Exploring Reality
Shane McAdams (b. 1972, Kansas) is a writer, curator, artist, and professor splitting his time between studios in Cedarburg, Wisconsin and Brooklyn, New York. He is a three-time Creative Capital, Andy Warhol Writer’s Grant finalist, and his work has appeared regularly in the Brooklyn Rail since 2002. “Thoughts from Across the Cultural Divide,” his series of writings about bi-coastal commuting appeared regularly in Bad at Sports, and was a source of inspiration for the exhibition High/Low/Middle at the Museum of Wisconsin Art. He is currently a contributor at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and a curatorial advisor at the Selma Sadoff Center for the Arts. His artwork has been exhibited at Allegra LaViola Gallery, Marlborough, Chelsea, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Storefront, Bushwick, Scream London, among others, and he has been reviewed in the Vogue Magazine, The New York Times, The New York Observer and The Village Voice. He has taught at the Rhode Island School of Design and Marian University. His latest work, Splayed Oak was on view at the Haggerty Museum of Art at Marquette University before coming to the Schneider.

ABOVE:
Shane McAdams, Holy Sea, 2015, Ballpoint pen, oil and resin on panel, 48 x 48 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery

Shane McAdams, Horizontal Gravity (Purple), 2015, Ballpoint pen and resin on panel, 48 x 48 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery
Shane McAdams, *Splayed Oak*, 2015, Ballpoint pen, resin, and single oak tree, Dimensions vary, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery
Malia Jensen (b. 1966, Hawaii) received a BFA in painting from the Pacific Northwest College of Art in 1989. Jensen is known primarily for her work in sculpture but also works frequently in photography and video. Her work has been exhibited widely in the Northwest and nationally. She recently returned to Portland after more than ten years in New York where she was represented by the Cristin Tierney Gallery. Jensen has been awarded residencies at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in Captiva, FL, the Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito, CA and the Ucross Foundation, Wyoming. She has been a visiting artist at The Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA, and The Pacific Northwest College of Art. Her work has been publicly commissioned multiple times by the Regional Arts and Culture Council in Oregon and she was awarded a Bonnie Bronson Fellowship in 2002. Her work has been reviewed in publications including Art Forum, Modern Painters, Plazm Magazine and Sculpture Magazine. Jensen is represented by Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland OR and by Richard Gray Gallery in Chicago IL.

ABOVE:
Malia Jensen, *Small Pile*, 2010, Cast bronze, 10 x 6¼ x 5 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery

Malia Jensen, *Fly Mobile*, Bronze, silver, powder-coated aluminum, electric motor, 38 x 40 x 40 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery
Malia Jensen, *Sock Fight*, 2011, Bronze, 30 x 45 x 29½ inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery

Malia Jensen, *Lupe*, 2015, Bronze, 14 x 20 x 22 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery
Ellen Lesperance (b. 1971, Minneapolis) lives and works in Portland, Oregon. Her work has been exhibited widely, most recently at the Drawing Center, New York, NY; Seattle Art Museum, WA; Schneider Museum of Art, Ashland, OR; Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, OR; the Dahl Arts Center, Rapid City, SD; Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ; and the Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford, PA. Her work is represented in the following public collections: the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, the Brooklyn Museum; the Museum of Art and Design, the Portland Art Museum, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Kadist Art Foundation. The artist has received grants and awards from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Art Matters, Pollock-Krasner Foundation, the Regional Arts & Culture Council and The Ford Family Foundation.

Ellen Lesperance, Oh, Sometimes It Causes Me to Tremble, Tremble, Tremble, 2015, Gouache and graphite on tea-stained paper, 22 x 29½ inches, Courtesy of Adams and Ollman Gallery

ABOVE:
Ellen Lesperance, Prop For a Turkish Bath, 2015, Gouache and graphite on tea-stained paper, 42 x 29½ inches, Courtesy of Adams and Ollman Gallery

This work was acquired with the assistance of The Ford Family Foundation through a special grant program managed by the Oregon Arts Commission.
Charlene Liu (b. 1975, Kaoshiung, Taiwan) has exhibited her work at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, OR; Shaheen Modern & Contemporary in Cleveland, OH; Galeria Il Capricorno in Venice, Italy; and Andrea Rosen Gallery 2 in New York. Her work has been reviewed in The Los Angeles Times, The Huffington Post, New American Paintings, The New York Times, and FlashArt International and is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the New Museum (New York), and the Tacoma Art Museum. Liu received her MFA from Columbia University in 2003 and a BA from Brandeis University in 1997. She is an Associate Professor and the Printmaking Coordinator in the Department of Art at the University of Oregon, Eugene.

ALL IMAGES:
Charlene Liu, Untitled, 2015, Acrylic screen-print on aluminum panel, 23 x 30 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery
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Charlene Liu, Untitled, 2015, Acrylic screen-print on aluminum panel, 23 x 30 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery
Laura Vandenburgh (b. 1963, California) Laura’s drawing-based work has been exhibited in New York, Toronto, Portland, Seattle, Syracuse, Chicago, Montreal, including shows at the Susan Hobbs Gallery; the Portland Art Museum; the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art; the Everson Museum; Upfor Gallery; the James Harris Gallery; the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire; Hunter College; Lawrence University and Syracuse University. Recent exhibitions include *Wolkenschauen*, a traveling group exhibition in Germany, the solo show *Thick Drawings* at Ditch Projects in Springfield, Oregon and *Constructs*, a three person show at Disjecta in Portland. Her studio practice has been supported by awards from the Oregon Arts Commission, The Ford Family Foundation, the Ucross Foundation, the Ragdale Foundation, the Saltonstall Foundation and the University of Oregon.

Vandenburgh received her MFA from Hunter College in New York, following DVM and BS degrees from the University of California, Davis. She lives and works in Springfield, OR and teaches at the University of Oregon.

**ALL IMAGES:**

Made possible through *Southern Oregon Site Project*. This project, funded in part by The Ford Family Foundation, Roseburg, designed to support the development and presentation of new art by Oregon artists.
Laurel Bustamante

Laurel Bustamante (b. 1956, California) studied painting and drawing in the San Francisco Bay Area and received her BFA from Southern Oregon University in 1999. Her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums in the US and abroad. She was awarded the Artist on Location Project residency in Curacao, Netherlands Antilles in 2000 and the Crater Lake National Park Artist Residency in 2001. In 2013, she was a finalist for the Portland Art Museum’s Contemporary Northwest Art Awards. She is currently represented in the Los Angeles area by the Lora Schlesinger Gallery and by Augen Gallery in Portland, Oregon.

ABOVE:
Laurel Bustamante, *Flowers from Mars*, 2015, Gouache on wood panel, 10 x 8 inches, Courtesy of the artist

Laurel Bustamante, *Dusk & Dawn*, 2015, Gouache on wood panel, 10 x 8 inches, Courtesy of the artist
Laurel Bustamante, *Lost Garden #6*, 2015, Gouache and acrylic paint on wood panel, 10 x 8 inches, Courtesy of the artist

Laurel Bustamante, *Elegy: Blue Milk and Honeythorn*, 2015, Gouache and acrylic paint on wood panel, 10 x 8 inches, Courtesy of the artist
Robin Strangfeld (b. 1977, Ohio) is an Oregon based artist with a BFA from New York State College of Ceramics – Alfred University and a MFA from Rhode Island School of Design. Strangfeld has exhibited her work nationally and internationally in such places as Red Lodge Clay Center, Pottery Northwest, Wayne State University, K Space Contemporary, and Taipei County Yingge Ceramics Museum in Taiwan. Most recently, she has been a collaborator in Romantic Robots. Strangfeld is an Associate Professor of Art at Southern Oregon University.

ALL IMAGES:
Robin Strangfeld, Untitled, 2015, Ceramic, Dimensions vary, Courtesy of the Artist
Ryan Pierce (b. 1979, California) works in painting, sculpture, text, and participatory journeys. He has exhibited internationally and his work has been recognized by grants from the Joan Mitchell and San Francisco Foundations, the Regional Arts and Culture Council, as well as by reviews in Art in America, Art Papers, and The Oregonian. Pierce has been an Artist-in-Residence at Ucross Foundation, Caldera, and Lademoen Kunstnerverksteder in Norway, and a fellow at the Jordan Schnitzer Printmaking Residency at Sitka Center for Art & Ecology. He received an Individual Artist Fellowship from the Oregon Arts Commission in 2012 and has twice been a finalist for the Northwest Contemporary Art Awards at the Portland Art Museum. He is represented by Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, OR. Pierce is the co-founder, with activist Amy Harwood, of Signal Fire, a group that facilitates wilderness residencies and retreats for artists of all disciplines.

ABOVE:
Ryan Pierce, Sun Scorched, 2011, Flashe and soot on canvas over panel, 47 x 34 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery

Ryan Pierce, Portrait of the Viewer as Lope de Aguirre, 2014, Ink, flashe and mylar on canvas over panel, 60 x 47 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery
Ryan Pierce, *Sunda Strait*, 2011, Acrylic, ink, flashe and charcoal on canvas, 72 x 96 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery

Ryan Pierce, *Easter Island*, 2009, Acrylic on canvas over panel, 72 x 94 inches, Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery
Tia Factor (b. 1971, California) received her BFA from the California College of the Arts (CCA) in 1997 and her MFA from the University of California at Berkeley in 2001. Her work has appeared in solo and group exhibitions from Oregon to Denmark, Chicago to Tasmania, and exhibited in such notable venues as the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (CA), Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, Berkeley Art Museum, Richmond Art Center (CA), Oliver Art Center (CA), Southern Exposure (CA), Pacific Northwest College of Art, Mary Elizabeth Dee Shaw Gallery (UT), Torrance Art Museum (CA), and Swarm Gallery (CA). Factor’s work is currently featured at The Center for Contemporary Arts (Santa Fe) and in the forthcoming exhibit Nowhere Everywhere at the Thompson Gallery, Cambridge School (Weston, MA). Factor has been featured in art magazines and on-line publications including Bear Deluxe, Stretcher, Artweek, New American Paintings, NAU NUA (Spain), art ltd., and in No Place, a catalog made possible by a Regional Arts and Culture Council Professional Development Grant. She is a full-time professor of Painting at the School of Art + Design at Portland State University.

ABOVE:
Tia Factor, Retreat, 2015, Oil and acrylic ink on wood panel, 5 x 7 inches, Courtesy of the artist

Tia Factor, Grotto, 2014, Oil and acrylic ink on wood panel, 6 x 6 inches, Courtesy of the artist
The Schneider Museum of Art, part of the Oregon Center for the Arts at Southern Oregon University, is a vital force in the intellectual life of Southern Oregon University that promotes an understanding of the visual arts within a liberal arts education. Serving both an academic and community audience, it builds a challenging environment that engages with the visual arts through exhibitions and programs supporting interdisciplinary study, research, and discourse.

We would like to thank all of the artists in this exhibition, Shane McAdams for his generous time and thoughtful essay, Dr. David Humphrey, the Director of the Oregon Center for the Arts and Provost Sue Walsh and President Roy Saigo for their continued support. We would also like to thank our valuable members, volunteers and students working within the museum. A heart-felt thanks goes to Pyle-DeForest Charitable Foundation, supporting the arts of Southern Oregon, who helped make this catalog possible. To The Ford Family Foundation, Roseburg, OR and The Oregon Arts Commission, who both provide vital and far-reaching support of the visual arts in Oregon, we thank you.

Open Monday through Saturday, 10:00am to 4:00pm
Museum: 541-552-6245
Fax: 541-552-8241
Email: sma@sou.edu
Web: sma.sou.edu
Facebook: SchneiderMuseumofArt
Twitter:@SchneiderMofArt
Instagram: SchneiderMuseumofArt/
Tumblr: SchneiderMuseumofArt/

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