



Heide Fasnacht: *Past Imperfect*
November 19 – February 8, 2020

Introduction

Paul M. Nicholson
Director, Martin Art Gallery

Heide Fasnacht's interest in the kinetic extends to the picture plane in *Past Imperfect*. Through works rendered largely in black and white, she combines two traditionally independent practices, photography and painting, to create a succession of double-exposure mixed-media works that explore sites of corporeal engagement.

Working from scanned negatives, she digitally manipulates found photography - and prints the image, which is tiled and collaged over wooden panels. She then applies paint to the surfaces, inexorably tying the two media together.

Loosely recognizable as landscapes, the works include industrial looking equipment interspersed with the occasional figure. Playground and carnival machinery are identifiable among her collaged photographic substrates. The addition of invented structural elements further activates the surfaces along with gestural and lyrical paint flourishes. Dabs and swirling marks obscure whether each scene is in the process of breaking apart or magically reassembling itself.

Our focus alternates between photographic and painted images, allowing for the emergence of improvised spaces of playful engagement. Complicated by their dystopian monochromatic tenor, the obliterated settings have a frenetic Rube Goldbergian feel. Ladders, tightropes, swings, and cats make these dreamscapes a kind of diagram that outlines the machinery of childhood.

Black and white photography sometimes conjures notions of evidence, the idea that a time and place has been captured, documented and preserved. Painting and drawing over the photograph is her way of not only revisiting the past, but expanding the possible future. By manipulating these frozen moments, Fasnacht challenges the nature of truth and the passage of time.



Ronny Quevedo: *Space of Play, Play of Space*
September 18 – November 2, 2019

Introduction
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Space of Play, Play of Space is a multi-site exhibition by Ronny Quevedo that locates the viewer as competitor in an imaginary, negotiated environment. The artist interrogates notions of borders and boundaries to explore our relationship to nationalisms, territories, and migrations to create a metaphor for shifting global landscapes.

Quevedo's exhibition is divided into two parts. A gallery exhibition hosts an array of works that enact an investigation of the self through the games we play. The artist employs autobiographical elements, which are mixed with invented cultural sites resembling jumbled athletic fields and arenas.

Using the visual vocabulary of games and sports, Quevedo employs lines and varied indices of demarcation to investigate rules and boundaries. In a way, he's talking about fundamental fairness, but more so he's manipulating and bending the guidelines to radically re-imagine new paradigms. This idea of multiple fields and multiple sets of rules all at once overlapping, disagreeing, coinciding, and conflicting means Quevedo is less a coach drawing up a specific play than a game maker designing a new game. In this way, he is talking about not just finding ways to be more effective within a broken system, he's talking about developing entirely new models for engagement.

The gallery portion of *Space of Play, Play of Space* is complemented by a field-sized drawing titled *Medio Tiempo (synthesis quotient)* [Rust Oleum on grass, 175 x 125']. This dynamic work is viewable from sidewalks, streets, and windows nearby. A lawn sign greets visitors, who are encouraged to directly engage with and experience the work by walking on, over, and through the drawing.

While his work is about play, it's a valid question to ask whether it's playful? The answer is both yes and no. It's certainly critical in nature, but his mingling of cultural practices with physical engagement with space through sport makes the work accessible, despite its abstract nature. While somber at times, Quevedo's work is not pessimistic. It's forward looking because it speaks to the possibility for adaptation - his idea that the rules of the game should not only be malleable but can change for the better through iteration.



Laura Beth Reese: *Thank you for the flowers*
August 26 – October 20, 2019

In *Thank you for the flowers*, Laura Beth Reese explores a community that she almost, but didn't, grow up in. Shortly after birth, Reese was put up for adoption, growing up in a quaint New Jersey suburb, the daughter of two loving adoptive parents. Her biological parents eventually married, raising three children somewhere in Iowa.

Using her personal history as a point of departure, Reese takes aim at an imagined Iowa. Introspection undergirds the work, as images of everyday Iowans are employed in service of a fictional autobiography. Alternating between narrative and conceptual frameworks, Reese's portrayal is of a place she longs to know. This plays out through hyper-saturated images that approach magical realism, contrasted by washed out dystopian or dream-like vignettes.

Some works feel like documentation while others are purely ephemeral, and yet each oversized photograph is displayed as if a poster on a teenager's bedroom wall. Posters are often aspirational images for young people - frequently depicting teen-idols or Lamborghinis. Reese employs this presentation strategy to fetishize this nondescript heartland community. Her work blows up suburban banality to heighten simultaneous feelings of familiarity - and distance.

Her combination of varied perspectives, angles, and shooting distances alludes to conflicted thoughts and feelings. Reese was fortunate to have ultimately landed in a loving and secure home. But she communicates her vacillation, by exploring and contrasting the real and imagined pathways her life did take, versus the one it could have taken. When a photographer creates an image, they are telling us something about the subject, but perhaps more so, they are sharing glimpses of their own concerns. In doing so, they tip their hand to allow the outside world to look inward, if only for an instant.

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Director Martin Art Gallery



Claudia Bitran: *Filters with dolphin sounds*
November 28 - February 2, 2019

Muhlenberg College's Martin Art Gallery is pleased to host Claudia Bitran for her solo exhibition: *Filters and Dolphin Sounds* in our main exhibition space, located in our Phillip Johnson-designed Baker Center for the Arts.

In this exhibition Bitran engages in the discussion around our participation in and production of popular imagery. Each painted, drawn, or sculpted object retains the affectations of the artist's hand, which creates a unique intimacy far in excess of the disposable online content that she refers to in her work. She critically highlights the unspoken processes we take for granted in striving toward personal customization, while re-evaluating our ephemeral digital image culture.

Bitran's *Filters* (2018) are a series of abstract colored pencil doodles on plexiglass that are mounted on handmade back-lit light boxes. Each is meant to emulate an Instagram Filter. In doing this, she is extrapolating the essential modification that happens algorithmically, automatically, and invisibly in our personal media landscape. The ultimate result is an examination of authorship, autonomy, and personal expression that is governed by disappointment, detachment, alienation, and humor.

Her DIY animation *Babies and Animals Falling* is another instance of slowing banal virtuality down through a hand-drawn project. The 2 minute work is projected on a loop against a large wall located in the center of the gallery, and uses commonly shared videos of babies and animals falling as its source material. Fundamentally these GIF length clips are easily digestible micro-narratives that privilege novelty and surprise, tinged with more than a discomforting dollop of cute. The evolving animations are made with graphite on a single sheet of paper, allowing past and present to meet as a ghost image from previous frames perseveres through the duration of each clip.

Her interactive mixed media sculpture *Dolphin Sounds* (2018) is a four foot emoji-like stylized dolphin, elaborately adorned with single-use materials. A pair of headphones emerges from a 1/8th inch jack in its snout, which plays a looping set of short excerpts of today's pop hits. What these excerpts have in common is that they identify one very specific effect that uses voice distortions in chorus sections that result in a dolphin-like sound. As one approaches from a distance, the sound is vaguely dolphin-like in its tinny melodic high end distortion.

Cradling these works, the surrounding walls of the gallery feature two dozen of her *Fundamental Parts* (acrylic and latex on MFD, 2018). Each vignette is comprised of one or more irregularly shaped paintings. Like an archipelago extending across the wall, each island is a story cropped from a larger narrative. Bitran explains that each scene is culled from the pages of leading teenage Instagram influencers, focusing on salient gestures paired with not so subtle native advertising.

Paul M. Nicholson
Director Martin Art Gallery



Today You Will Be With Me in Paradise, 2018



And Let Them Have Dominion Over All The Earth, 2018



God loves us no matter what, 2018

Leslie Tucker: *Devotionals*
January 15 – March 15, 2019

Introduction

Tucker creates richly layered digital media collages that explore the seductive visual aspects of consumer culture. Her works are meticulously constructed from her scans and photographs which are cropped and pasted layer by layer resulting in a sort of dystopian ecclesiastical propaganda. With dark humor, her antiquarian arrangements possess a frenetic maximalist aesthetic of a religious mail order catalogue.

The exhibition is comprised of sixteen photographs across two related bodies of work. This includes ten of her *Postulates*, facing off against six of her new *Devotionals*, all focusing on various disposable and consumable products organized into ornate pictorial arrangements. Her most recent works are larger in scale, and dive further into tropes of classical beauty, with stone figures contrasted by faux marble consumer goods. Replete with flowers, her kitsch inclusions expose the conventions of religious iconography resulting in what can only be described as an absurdist artifact.

Hundreds of interwoven images with broadly even lighting result in a flatness that preserves its foundation in the visual language of advertising. Each otherworldly image is printed on metallic chromogenic paper, and seems to create an alternate cultural universe where the fetishization of the past is the cultural capital of the future.

Paul M. Nicholson
Director, Martin Art Gallery



Katya Grokhovskiy: *System Failure*
February 14 – April 10, 2018

Spring 2018 Artist in Residence: Katya Grokhovskiy

As Martin Art Gallery's first artist in residence, Katya Grokhovskiy has challenged and engaged students, faculty, and the wider community, leaving an enduring mark through ephemeral work. Weaving lateral threads through her many projects, she integrates objects, sculptures, and other materials from previous installations into new works, thereby rearranging concepts and revising ideas. This iterative way of working asks us to see this installation not as a polished final project, but in a state that is a snapshot of her current thinking. Grokhovskiy's ambitious and inclusive spirit also transcends the confines of the gallery to include two public performances involving a dozen students, as both participants and collaborators.

Intuitive decisions are a hallmark of Katya's creative practice. Her spontaneity and improvisation result in work that is playful and fresh, yet withstands critical scrutiny. Resistant to being branded a performer, painter, or sculptor, she is all of these things at once. Transcending boundaries, her installations are the aftermath of an unseen, unknowable performance of creativity.

Shades of the artist's autobiography and experiences -- a feminist artist who escaped a failed communist state -- bleed into her art and lead to disturbing implications. Paint poured over consumer goods (toys, dolls, mannequins) might hint at the disillusionment with the failed promise of a market economy, or perhaps the overwhelming unspoken obligations of capitalism heaped upon women, in particular. However, a playful curiosity also emerges in her many combinations, such as a plaster cat mask looking past a stack of human-sized plush teddy bears, a pinup girl draped over a mannequin's knee (observed by a boy with a yellow, paint-covered noodle for a body), suggesting the presence of uncorrupted elements remaining within the system she critiques. Frenetically arranged, and then bound together, *System Failure* reveals what happens when fetish culture is pitted against impossible expectations for femininity.

Paul M. Nicholson is the Director of Martin Art Gallery



Peter d'Agostino: *COLD / HOT - Walks, Wars & Climate Change*
August 27 - November 3, 2018

Foreword

Martin Art Gallery is pleased to present Peter d'Agostino's **Cold / Hot - Walks, Wars & Climate Change** at Muhlenberg College. D'Agostino's decades-long, international career traverses varied political movements and regimes, while ultimately maintaining an intensely personal vision. Coming of age in the fractured 60's and 70's instilled his awareness of social and political crises - a distressing common-place today - and a passionate concern for the health of the environment. Global vision, ardor for social justice, and environmentalism inform his works, yet his art circumvents overt polemics and advocacy.

Employing a range of conceptual approaches and time-based media, d'Agostino's *World-Wide Walks* embody his unique form of video 'documentation/performances', immersing viewers within multiple points of view. By including himself in this work, he seems to anticipate not so much the status quo "selfie" culture, but artists' increasing desire to situate us more visibly within their practice. While the digital world is rife with images of people sharing their social activities and achievements, such as a triumph on a mountain top, his *Walks* simply and poetically acknowledge a human presence as he spatially navigates both natural and political spaces. Expansive images contrast with close ups; images are both full-frame and gridded or split, echoing our splintered attention spans. Thus, the natural and cultural often intersect, not only in time signature and pacing, but in vantage point, framing, and focus. Other works, such as *VR/RV: a Recreational Vehicle in Virtual Reality*, are firmly situated in digitally constructed environments.

The fundamental significance of Peter d'Agostino's work is that we understand the artist as part of the fabric of mortals, acutely aware of our limited time on an increasingly crowded and damaged planet. While he is necessarily crossing both actual and virtual political boundaries, his primary concern is immersing himself and viewers in natural and cultural ecologies, which steers the conversation toward the fragility of place. D'Agostino's prescient projects employ still and moving images as screens, frames, windows, and portals. His first-person viewpoint allows us to project ourselves into this journey of outward and inward exploration. We are taken on a spiritual expedition in the manner of the American naturalist John Muir, which at times conjures the romantic sublime, and at others, a jarring dystopia.

Paul M. Nicholson, Director, Martin Art Gallery