

Blair Murphy

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Social Construction

May 10 – June 9, 2013

Wyatt Gallery, Arlington Arts Center, Arlington, VA

Curated by Blair Murphy

Participating Artists: Si Jae Byun, Lee Gainer, Hedieh Ilchi, Becca Kallem, Bridget Sue Lambert, Megan Mueller, Pam Rogers, Rachel Schmidt, Matthew Smith, Katie Lynch Thibault, Jessica Van Brakle, and Alice Whealin

Curatorial Statement

Working alone, together, the resident artists at AAC cultivate a sociable professional environment. While their work represents a wide range of media and an equally expansive field of conceptual concerns, they share work space and gallery space, interacting daily with one another, providing feedback, support, and camaraderie. The diversity of the work being created in AAC's studios was both the greatest pleasure and the most daunting challenge of curating this small selection of recent work by AAC's resident artists. I strove to recognize recurring threads and themes, without flattening out the immense variation seen amongst these twelve artists. Of the various strands running through their work, I kept returning to a focus on structures - both actual physical forms and the conceptual frameworks that structure our expectations.

Falling into the latter category, Matthew Smith, Becca Kallem, and Hedieh Ilchi, investigate, through widely different strategies, the structures of painting itself. Approaching the subject obliquely, through the use of fabric and quilting techniques, Smith's work evokes the connections between modernist painting and more traditional craft, subtly critiquing the values system that delineates strictly between them. Meanwhile, Becca Kallem begins her X Series paintings with an aggressive rejection. Created on handkerchiefs, torn up tote bags, and rugs, often exceeding the normal boundaries of the canvas, these works challenge our basic expectations of painting from the ground up, refusing even the medium's traditional base.

Hedieh Ilchi's exactly detailed pattern work and beautiful surfaces share Kallem and Smith's subversive spirit. Ilchi marries the pattern work of Tazhib, a traditional Persian art form, with elements drawn from modernist abstraction. In these works, the contents exceed their traditional boundaries, as if the multitudes of historical influences - their mixing and clashing - were erupting out of the frame.

In *My need to deliver is fighting my desire to show you that I can be messy (and by you I mean me)*, Megan Mueller also pushes the boundaries of the traditional canvas, piling and layering strips onto a small 8" x 8" panel. The small work transforms the two-dimensional canvas, creating a feeling of spaciousness and depth. It is the scale itself that is the challenge in this work. While Mueller often creates large-scale installations out of structural materials, the scale of this piece forces her to work small, interpreting her spatial practice into the restriction of the 8" x 8" square.

While the structures of art making concern some of the artists in the group, others focus on physical structures in the world. Jessica van Brakle is most well known for her drawings and paintings of cranes, construction sites, and other industrial equipment. Here, she exhibits photographs of construction equipment at night. The work's scale feels intimate, even as the lighting of the images transforms the equipment into something otherworldly, even alien.

Bridget Sue Lambert's carefully constructed interiors utilize domestic spaces and material objects to explore social relationships. Shot tightly, as though the viewer were peering in through a window, these new works verge on abstraction. The private nature of the space in the images invites intimacy, yet the tight cropping prevents the viewer from fully entering into the situation at hand.

Bridging the gap between human construction and natural phenomenon, Si Jae Byun's compositions perfectly balance the organic and the man-made. In *The Wind in the Construction Green Site* and *The Wind*

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in the Construction Blue Site, organic shapes form the foundation for rectangular forms evoking cityscapes, hinting at the interconnectedness between the natural world and our increasingly urbanized landscape. This interdependence is further evoked in Rachel Schmidt's *Sneaking*, featuring a cityscape that seems to be growing and spreading organically, colonizing more and more space. At the same time, animal legs, barely visible beneath the metastasizing skyline, support these ever expanding, even threatening structures.

The inextricable link between our man-made environment and the natural world reappears in the work of Pam Rogers. Rogers' finely crafted, delicate depictions of natural objects in various states of blossom and decay draw the viewer in, at which point they may notice the man-made objects scattered throughout her depictions. The use of cardboard in *Packing Materials* is a departure for the artist, but relates back to her interest in the combination of the natural and the man-made.

Using images from vacation destinations and spaces of leisure, Lee Gainer creates intricate overlapping compositions that are digitally combined and then transferred by the artist's hand on to panel. The shapes hint at palm trees, buildings, and structures but the overall effect is built up to the point of abstraction, evoking the layering of memories and the way our past experiences, whether pleasurable or painful, slowly recede in our memory, mixing, mingling, disappearing, and overlapping.

Structure plays a different role in the work of Katie Lynch Thibault and Alice Whealin, who both use pattern and repetition to construct meaning and form. In *Evening Realm*, Alice Whealin's detailed, repetitious pattern of dark black ink gives a spaciousness to the two dimensional piece. Ink on Mylar is transformed into a luscious environment the viewer feels they could sink into. Kathryn Thibault, meanwhile, uses repetition to create tightly structured installations that hint at a system of meaning just beyond the viewer's grasp. Evoking units of measurement, forms of communication, and organizational structures, the piece draws the viewer in with its attention to detail and order and invites them to make meanings from the hypnotic repetition.