

SCHOOL DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

For 14 years, the USF Contemporary Art Museum has hosted the Master of Fine Arts Graduation (Thesis) Exhibition. And for 14 years, year after year, I have tweaked my original Director's Statement for this brochure. I have congratulated our notably talented graduating students. I have extolled the virtues of our program. I have thanked our Faculty and Staff for their support and critical engagement with these students during a particularly rigorous three-years of art studio practice. And I have always expressed appreciation to the entire crew at the Contemporary Art Museum (CAM).

But of course, this year is different. This year the exhibition could have been cancelled as was the case at many other universities and art schools. This year could have been wasted. But it was not wasted. The exhibition was not cancelled.

This year Everyone took up the challenge. The disappointment among the students has been palpable. For our faculty and staff, it has been heartbreaking to work so closely with creative learners and then, suddenly, the big prize at the end has been snatched away from them. But—in the past two to three weeks—every student made a significant statement. Our students made artworks as if these might be their last ones, ever.

And this all happened because of the very unique relationship between the Contemporary Art Museum and the School of Art and Art History. CAM leadership and staff immediately decided that the show would most definitely go on! And after that, everything else fell into place. From sanitizing the venue spaces to requiring social distancing, our students were permitted to enter the Museum and install their works under professional guidance by CAM staff. And, while there will not be a gala exhibition reception this year, the Museum has resourcefully developed online artist profiles and virtual exhibition tours utilizing social media available to the public. Yes, the Museum will remain closed but the show can be accessed from anywhere in the world. CAM saved the day—and all of us in the School are absolutely blown away with appreciation and gratitude!

These next weeks and months are likely to profoundly transform all of our lives—globally. A threshold will be crossed to something else. This tragic crisis will eventually pass and artists will again exhibit their creative output to audiences—live. These graduating MFA students—these emerging artists will be forever changed. While this shift was never part of the reason to attend graduate school—the change will propel these creators for the rest of their lives.

Be safe. Be well.

Wallace Wilson, Director and Professor
USF School of Art and Art History



Jon Notwick, *MacDill AFB*, 2019

Kyle Timberman, *BUT AT WHAT COSTS*, 2019



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The USF Contemporary Art Museum is proud to present *Battin' A Hundred*, the 14th MFA Graduation Exhibition to take place in its galleries. The ten artists in the 2020 class have brought fresh perspectives and ambitious horizons to their exhibition, the culmination of their research in the three-year Master of Fine Arts program of the USF School of Art and Art History.

These words, written several weeks ago before the COVID-19 pandemic shut the world down, are still true; but the context has radically changed. The exhibition is installed and it is one of the best in the history of CAM's collaboration with the School of Art and Art History (SAAH). However, it is unfolding in the silence of the shuttered museum. The normal hubbub of a joyous opening celebration, the artists' serious intellectual back and forth conversations in oral defenses with their faculty committees, the insightful moderated panel discussion for the public, and daily visits from classes, parents and the public, are not possible this year. All of us, the students and faculty of the SAAH, and the museum staff, are very disappointed.

However, while the museum is silent and shuttered, the exhibition lives in virtual space and is accessible via various platforms thanks to the work of many. The students have installed their works on a staggered schedule, according to social distancing requirements, and oral defenses will be held remotely via videoconferencing. Both the SAAH and CAM are preparing virtual celebrations on the evening of April 3, which was to be both the opening reception of the exhibition and the SAAH's ArtHouse, which are very anticipated and popular yearly events. CAM staff is preparing special Instagram and Facebook posts about each of the MFA students and their work, to be released during the run of the show. We will be recording a virtual walk-through of the exhibition for posting on the CAM website. Each installation is being photographed by a professional photographer as well; good documentation of this show is more urgent than ever.

We have to thank the artists for overcoming great odds in nevertheless creating stellar installations that showcase both their talent and learning, and the skill of the teaching faculty. CAM is a platform for the artist's voice, and we are honored to work diligently with the students to provide them with all of the assistance they require to best achieve their artistic visions, and to equip them with tools to navigate their futures. By conceptualizing, planning, mounting and interpreting their installations, the students acquire valuable practical skills and an introduction to museum best practices and standards, which will serve them well in their professional careers. Their work tends to be very energetic, highly experimental and risk-taking, and it is very rewarding to witness the exciting results of their three years of intensive artistic research and practice.

The opportunity to exhibit their work in an accredited art museum is just one of the many ways in which CAM contributes to the students' learning experience over the course of their studies. Our exhibition program brings outstanding contemporary artists, curators and works of art from all over the world to campus and to the Tampa Bay area. Along with lectures, symposia, talks, publications and other related educational events presented to illuminate and expand the meanings of the exhibitions, the museum provides opportunities for research in its permanent collection, graduate assistantships and internships.

Times such as these challenge relationships. I am pleased to say that the extraordinary collaboration between CAM and the School of Art and Art History in creating this exhibition, that is the key to its success, has proved strong and resilient. My thanks to the faculty and staff of the School of Art and Art History, particularly Wendy Babcox, Associate Professor and Graduate Faculty Advisor; Julie Herrin, Office Manager; Maureen Slossen, Program Specialist and Graduate Advisor; and Wallace Wilson, Director.

The faculty and staff of the Contemporary Art Museum all contribute in vital ways to the exhibition. Tony Palms, Exhibitions Designer and Coordinator, collaborates with the students to create the overall design. Chief Preparator Vincent Kral, Curatorial Associate Eric Jonas, and preparator Jessica Barber work closely with each individual student to develop optimum installation strategies. Shannon Annis, Curator of the Collection and Exhibitions Manager, introduces and maintains best museum standards and practices. New Media Curator Don Fuller and Graphic Designer Marty De la Cruz guide the students in the publication process. Curator of Education Leslie Elsasser provides a forum for the artists' voices. Many thanks to Program Coordinator Amy Allison; Events Coordinator Ashley Jablonski; Chief of Security par excellence David Waterman and security staff Adam Bakst, Gillian Olortegui, Olivia Gasparoni, and Alejandro Gómez; interns Andrew Ryan and Daniel Sulbaran; and volunteer Nicole Otalvaro. Members of the Institute for Research in Art have also contributed to the effort: Director Margaret Miller; Randall West; Sarah Howard; Kristin Soderqvist; and Mark Fredricks. Special thanks to Will Lytch for his meticulous photographic documentation of the exhibition.

Finally, I salute and thank the graduates Mahya Amini, Mohsen Azar, Matthew Campbell, Jenal Dolson, Rhonda Massel Donovan, Jezebeth Roca Gonzalez, Ash Lester, Jon Notwick, Kyle Timberman, and Rachel Underwood for sharing their extraordinary research with us. We wish them every success in their surely bright futures.

Noel Smith, Deputy Director
Institute for Research in Art



Jezebeth Roca Gonzalez, *Bo. Espino (Barrio Espino)*, 2019

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Hours: M–F 10am–5pm, Thurs. 10am–8pm, Sat. 1–4pm
CAM is closed Sundays, USF holidays, and between exhibitions.
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A HUNDRED

MFA 2020

APRIL 3 – MAY 7, 2020 // USF CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM

Mahya Amini // Mohsen Azar // Matthew Campbell // Jenal Dolson // Rhonda Massel Donovan
Jezebeth Roca Gonzalez // Ash Lester // Jon Notwick // Kyle Timberman // Rachel Underwood

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

MAHYA AMINI // TEHRAN, IRAN

B. S. Industrial Economy (2016) Allame Tabatabaee University, Tehran, Iran

I consider my paintings to be very personal. I paint my fears and the things I like or dislike. Almost all my work is figurative. I try to capture how people might look or feel inside. I paint the way I feel I look like instead of drawing my reflection in the mirror as a realistic work.

Questions I ask myself when working are, "Is it just me who feels like this? Am I the only one who sees the world in this way?"

At a younger age, I remember seeing faces everywhere. I have always been able to make human faces out of things like clouds or shadows cast on a wall. I would search for eyes and lips and then make a face, but my friends never saw what I saw and that taught me how people have different perspectives.

Within my work, I try to make sense of the things I don't understand and answer the questions I have been asking myself my entire life with bringing them into the real world.

MOHSEN AZAR // ISFAHAN, IRAN

B. A. Photography (2016) I.A.U., Meshkin Shahr Branch, Ardabil, Iran

What makes pain irrelevant to those who don't suffer it first-hand? Does our proximity to the location of the conflict change our approach to it? Does nationality matter? Does race? What happens to the data of trauma in a digital age and what is its relation to our understanding of pain? What is the artist's role? These questions have driven my thoughts and ideas that initiated during my time at USF. Influenced and constructed by all the conversations and experiences I had in the past two years.

In *Landscapes*, I have removed the dead bodies from the photographs of prominent contemporary world-wide conflicts, events that we all hear about but never want to see. These photographs become more palatable and less disturbing, they become empty. The result is sometimes a vacant room, a barren landscape - void of the human figure - or a strange photo of a corner. This allows us the chance to look at them closely, and upon doing so, to feel this sense of absence and to question the pleasing ephemerality presented in these photographs.

The work I present here explores the institution of seeing, the politics of presentation and the possibilities for representation. Exploring the ways we approach, react and respond to trauma, as a part of a whole and as an individual, I investigate the proposition of pain and protest in imagery.

MATTHEW CAMPBELL // MARTINSBURG, WEST VIRGINIA

B. F. A. (2003) Rochester Institute of Technology, New York
M. Arch. (2008) Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland

Often the matter composing the world around us is classified as either natural or manmade, but I find that distinction problematic. Since humans are natural, it seems to follow that the objects of our



Mahya Amini, *The Boogeyman*, 2017

Mohsen Azar, *Iraqi Landscape No.9*, 2020



production are in a basic way also natural. My investigation as an artist is tied directly to the natural consequences of material existence, to the poetic juxtapositions that follow from one thing existing next to another. I am specifically interested in the contrast between seemingly ordered and seemingly disordered systems of relationships, in the space of uncertainty that lies between the determinate and indeterminate. My process involves creating objects and situations that, while born from a rational process, slip into the realm of the enigmatic.

JENAL DOLSON // KITCHENER, ONTARIO, CANADA

B.A. Honours Fine Arts (2007) University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

I make work that deals with surface, re-presentation, and formal material relationships. I find formal and historical relationships at play in procured fabric, cardboard tubes, chain, hair, and foam that acknowledge surface, texture, line, pattern, gesture, and form. I work between building installations in the studio with these materials that correspond to a series of paintings. Lingering in between real familiarity and stylized allure, the acquired materials become a collection of motifs that interact, referencing cultural and material histories and forging new paths between them. The specificity of space, recognition, and movement that each image holds presents itself in psychic structures and spatial metaphors. I invite the public into scenarios with all of these elements at play to psychologize individual experience. Exerting an architectural vernacular with nods to the Chicago Imagists and the Memphis Group, structures echo the language found in domestic and commercial spaces.

RHONDA MASSEL DONOVAN // NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

B. F. A. (2017) University of South Florida, Tampa

After years of working in illustration and design for the publishing and advertising industry, Rhonda chose to complete her fine art studies, which she had first started at Louisiana State University. Using various materials in

Matthew Campbell, *Trifurcation*, 2019



Jenal Dolson, *bump dream*, 2020

Rhonda Massel Donovan, *Feast*, 2019



Ash Lester, *Betty Beaver*, 2019

the language of drawing and painting, her abstract work maps memories of human interaction and the complexities of resulting outcomes. Rhonda's artworks express the impact of disrepair, which leads the viewer to find possibilities of rebuild. Intentional marks build alongside unexpected results which may appear as deterioration, prompting a mend and scars to be re-presented as beautiful in balance with other formal elements. She hopes to communicate the idea of bringing things together, but also wants to provide a space for each viewer to have their own experience.

JEZABETH ROCA GONZALEZ // AÑASCO, PUERTO RICO

B. F. A. (2017) Pennsylvania College of Art and Design, Lancaster

Jezebeth's practice revolves around the re-examinations of colonial embodiments embedded into our collective identity. In particular, she is interested in Decolonial and Postcolonial theories in relation to Puerto Rico's ongoing colonial status with the United States. The work is socially and politically driven, with a goal of questioning greater ethical concerns by devolving them under our everyday actions.

ASH LESTER // PLATTSBURGH, NEW YORK

B. F. A. (2017) State University of New York, Plattsburgh

The sound of a car lacking a muffler four miles away. The smell of a bottle redemption center. The six degrees, or maybe even three, of being related to everyone in town. My work is created through my use of iconography, symbolism, and material choices from lower class communities such as my hometown. Growing up in rural America, money was something that was always scarce. Therefore, expensive objects were often hand built. If you needed a table for a backyard party, you made one with a warped piece of plywood on top of cinder blocks. If there was no plywood, you took the door off the house. If there were no cinder blocks, you borrowed some stacks of tires from the neighbor. Rural ingenuity and the need to invent is a major thread of my work. The work I create is also a reflection

of, and influenced by, my experience growing up in rural America. I touch on issues and topics such as class, isolation, and stereotypes while simultaneously exposing and celebrating those communities and their often cliché cultures.

JON NOTWICK // LEVITTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

B. A. (2012) Marlboro College, Vermont

Jon Notwick is a photographer from Levittown, Pennsylvania. Jon's work is concerned with the history of weapons testing in the United States and its effect on the American Landscape. His work takes a multifaceted approach to image making. Jon uses both original digital photography and appropriated material, as well as alternative processes and photo sculpture to explore this theme of American arms proliferation. His work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally. In late 2019, Jon opened an international solo exhibition at SpacePlace Gallery in Russia.

KYLE TIMBERMAN // EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA

B. A. (2017) Millersville University, Millersville, Pennsylvania

Through a combination of construction techniques and materials both found and purposefully sought out, I make work that addresses the structure and stability of the individual, while questioning how tentative this balance can be. Employing an abrasive and cluttered visual language, and contrasting it with delicate points of balance and subtle systematic layouts; the pieces arise as representatives of self preservation in the face of anxiety, imprisonment, and destruction. Through the incorporation of domestic materials and found objects already embedded with a history all their own, the work universally conveys the fear of insufficiency, failure, and rejection, and the extreme efforts we as humans go to in order to avoid them. Addressing the concept of monuments and calling into question the idea of disingenuous representation, the sculptures precariously stand as faltering structures, as if they are in the process of ruin, or frozen in the moment directly before collapse. Tangential support and subsupport systems stem from within and around the pieces allowing them to maintain some sense of stability in the face of an impending and assumed demise. This homes in on the idea of the frantic and desperate efforts put towards self preservation, while presenting the consistent possibility of destruction, and emphasizing the discord and persistence of time between the two.

RACHEL UNDERWOOD // ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

B. F. A. (2012) Towson University, Towson, Maryland

The existential and conceptual problems posed by the Anthropocene are at the heart of humanistic inquiry: what does it mean to be human, to live? Many of these humanistic questions will inevitably be overshadowed by another: How will we survive? After the passing of my step father, I became obsessed with researching death. While this investigation started from a personal experience, it rapidly moved to a much grander, global scale. I found myself becoming more focused on how the human animal's impact on the planet is causing a sixth mass extinction event. While trying to come to terms with a powerful loss in my family, I now understand that there is no way to work on individual emotional distress without first acknowledging the systemic geopolitical and socio-economic issues, and absolute grief that comes along with them. My work explores ideas of death and adaption on both a personal and global scale.

CHECKLIST

All works are courtesy of the artists.

MAHYA AMINI

Dard, 2020

mixed media

16 x 8 x 9 ft.

Untitled, 2020

acrylic and ink on cardboard

32 x 38 x 2 in.

Untitled, 2020

mixed media

33 x 65 x 48 in.

MOSHEN AZAR

Afghan Landscape, 2020

Iraqi Landscape, 2020

Syrian Landscape, 2020

Turkish Landscape, 2020

Yemeni Landscape, 2020

digitally manipulated photographs,

inkjet print on archival paper

30 x 40 in. each

MATTHEW CAMPBELL

Sediments Sentiments, 2020

aircrete and steel

2 5/6 x 38 x 18 ft.

JENAL DOLSON

Bump Dream, 2019

acrylic, latex, and oil on canvas,

wood frame

72 x 72 in.

Soother, 2020

acrylic, latex, and oil on MDF, with

Foamular frame

50 x 50 in.

Whale, 2020

acrylic, latex, and oil on MDF, with

Foamular frame

50 x 50 in.

RHONDA MASSEL DONOVAN

Avanti Avanti Avanti, 2020

acrylic and oil paint, glue, thread,

canvas, drapery fabric

138 x 8 x 60 ft.

Caramel Parachute, 2020

acrylic and oil paint, glue, thread,

canvas, upholstery fabric

102 x 99 in.

The Protective Layer, 2020

acrylic and oil paint, glue, thread,

paper, tarpaulin

112 x 128 in.

You Can't Unsee It, 2020

acrylic and oil paint, glue, thread,

canvas, drapery fabric

114 x 96 in.

JEZABETH ROCA GONZALEZ

Desde la sala se ve la Isla, 2020

plátanos (plantains), Adobe tiles,

parcha (passion Fruit), flat panel

grow lights, pink grow lights

variable dimensions

House Tour, 2019-2020

digital video

51 sec

ASH LESTER

Tit Splits and Night Crawlers,

2020

mixed media

14 x 8 x 60 ft.

JON NOTWICK

Trinity, 2019-2020

mixed media

variable dimensions

KYLE TIMBERMAN

Abomination Machine No. 2,

2020

various woods, steel hardware,

polyurethane, stain, paint, oil, resin

9 x 16 x 9 ft.

Compunction, 2020

ceramic, paper pulp, paint,

polyurethane, wood, brass screw,

altered hammer

27 x 12 x 7 in.

Woody Wastrel, 2020

steel, wood, plaster gauze, resin,

various paints, plexiglass, glass,

clamps

8 x 10 x 7 ft.

RACHEL UNDERWOOD

Virtuous and Vicious, 2020

10 x 21 x 18 ft.

oil paint on canvas



Rachel Underwood, *Funeral Carriage*, 2019