Curated by
Joshua Reiman & Susanne Slavick

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Reception: January 22, 6 - 8pm
Gallery Hours: Tuesday - Sunday, 12-6pm
bit.ly/MaxMinExhibit

Miller Gallery
at Carnegie Mellon University
Purnell Center for the Arts
5000 Forbes Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
www.cmu.edu/millergallery
MAXIMUM MINIMUM IN UNUM features artists whose work eludes maximalist or minimalist classification — who explore the reversed equations of “More is Less.” and “Less is more.” They probe or collapse extremes, whether ideological or aesthetic. Multiple dualities run parallel or intersect in their practices.

In considering artists for the show, we wondered if there were such a thing as exuberant austerity or tempered profusion. The selected artists explore such possibilities through rejecting the either/or paradigm or choosing to have it both ways. In some cases, the expansive meets the reductive, indulgence embraces restraint, and seemingly opposing qualities coalesce.

Joshua Reiman and Susanne Slavick

Participating artists, all alumni of the Carnegie Mellon School of Art:

- Ben Bigelow
- Felipe Castelblanco
- Peter Coffin
- Ron Desmett
- Maggie Haas
- Institute for New Feeling (Scott Andrew, Agnes Bolt, and Nina Sarnelle)
- Laleh Mehran
- Shana Moulton
- Zak Prekop
- Paul Roupail
- Diane Samuels
- Carrie Schneider
- Jina Valentine
- Rebecca Vaughan
- Gregory Witt
Max Visions

MAXIMUM MINIMUM IN UNUM shares two works by each artist across two floors of the Miller Gallery—one on the maximum floor and the other on the minimum floor. In tandem, the expansive practices of these dynamic artists are revealed. The concept for the exhibition developed from an extensive look at Carnegie Mellon School of Art alumni over the last forty-five years with fellow artist and friend Susanne Slavick. Our selection became a celebration of the many talented and incredible artists that have been shaped by this school. In our review, we began to see how their bodies of work could embrace opposing or diverging styles, aesthetics, and concepts, so much so that you might not realize some works were made by the same artist. MAXIMUM MINIMUM IN UNUM emerged as a platform for and describes this curatorial concept.

So what constitutes a maximum work? Properties might include being over the top, maximal, excessive, repetitious, fulsome, indulgent, abundant, or even possessing a keen and absorbing sense of materiality. Such pieces often beg the viewer to explore “the long view,” demanding extended watching or looking. These visual tactics are often deployed through over-exaggeration, ironic gestures, mechanical obsolescence, laborious processes, and shifting perspectives.

In the text that follows, I hope to shed some light on the maximum works within the show that are housed on first and second floors of the gallery. The third floor features the minimum works, discussed in the following essay by Susanne Slavick. Works on all floors have been made within the last five years, some specifically for this exhibition. They reflect what is on the minds of artists working today, veering between, and sometimes merging, maximal and minimal tendencies.
Peter Coffin’s *Untitled(ribbons)* (2012) is a massive wall sculpture with closely packed ribbons in vivid candy colors creating optical effects in a whimsically lush and silky display. This surplus of ribbon, a material often used to dress a present or accent a garment, is mounted on a giant rack, inviting us to roam in its swirling color field. The piece makes me think of Joseph Albers arranging the ribbon aisle at Hobby Lobby, or a Technicolor abacus of dreamy lines bundled and full of potential. Excessive and smart, Peter Coffin’s work makes us question the art of display and sales, color and light, perception and play. This is a monumental sculptural painting that is physical and demands attention.

Maggie Haas’ *Tumbling Blocks* (2010) also plays with color. It is a sculpture of simulated architectural elements; the ends of its raw stacked wood are pigmented with watercolor and ink. Elongated building blocks cradled on a staircase wait to be put together in some domestic space. Laid out before us, the work challenges our notions of play and puzzle. The units are stacked and equally distributed, hard and soft woods co-mingling, young and old building blocks. I could imagine Sol LeWitt as a child playing with this artwork.

Ron Desmett’s magical glass sculpture *Persephone’s Garden* (2015) consists of ritualistic organic shapes extending from and nestling around an open-ended hollow tube. Given the title, this mysterious display suggests a table centerpiece for a dinner party with Hades, with plants that might have been grown in the garden of Hell. Displayed as a cornucopia on a cold steel table, the dull lifeless sheen of the species entices, celebrating a dark world—a translation of a bountiful ever-blooming garden of poppies that Persephone grew in the mythical underworld. Desmett makes us look at glass through new eyes as the matte black and semi-translucent forms allude to unknown materiality that assumes a striking sculptural presence.

Zak Prekop’s *Transparency with Drawing* (2014) is a canvas of layered shapes and gestures that challenges our vision and depth perception. Pale blue ovoid shapes and calligraphic black smears act as characters floating on and behind the surface of the fabric. Their visual grammar is akin to Robert Motherwell’s, with larger black passages seemingly hidden within plain sight. Prekop’s seemingly effortless execution is deceptive as his manipulation of space invites us into a vast world framed and veiled by transparencies, where dark forms recede into a non-physical realm.

Diane Samuels’ compact sculpture *Metamorphoses, Ovid* (2014) is an obsessive masterpiece. A wrapped sphere of text, it holds Ovid’s entire poem *Metamorphoses* that chronicles the history of the text by hand onto a single “thread” of paper that, if unraveled from its 28-inch diameter sphere, would stretch out to roughly 1 kilometer long (3280.84 feet). It is a labor-intensive work with expansive content. In the poem’s opening lines, Ovid is explicit about his ambitions: *In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora* (“I intend to speak of forms changed into new entities”). The line seems to have offered explicit directions to Samuels, whose interest and commitment to literature fuels her artistic practice. She finds joy in her exacting and exhaustive process that is infused with both reverence and research, a process that amazes her viewers with its loving care.

Gregory Witt makes kinetic work that seems logical, as the mechanics must be expertly calibrated to function, yet are dependent on a mixture of fragile and unreliable materials. *Orbiter* (2015) was made specifically for this exhibition. It is a planetary machine that integrates transient packaging and construction material with precision machined aluminum and plastics. All of Witt’s work exudes tacit knowledge, John Dewey’s “knowing by doing” that allows him to magically fabricate objects that confound us.
Humble detritus becomes precious machinery; garbage, 
the excess of commerce, becomes intricate and integrated 
within a system. Perhaps *Orbiter* reveals the exorbitant 
and integrated waste that holds together our larger and globalized 
economic system.

In Ben Bigelow’s new video and sculptural installation *Unnecessary Mountain* (2015) worlds collide in an 
absurdist soul-searching meditation. Multiple camera 
lenses are at work—the camera filming a scene of the 
filming of a scene, which is being filmed. Filmmakers, 
actors, and a reemerging narrator are all searching and 
looking through lenses—lenses used for burning, for 
exerting the body, and for looking into the body. In the 
end, we see the three protagonists of the story (all played 
by Bigelow) as different drivers piloting a singular drone 
(a symbol of our life) over a mountain range—up the hill 
in a “life’s pursuit,” driven by different iterations of the 
self. This seemingly strange video offers large lessons for 
those who stick it out to watch and decode. In his essay, 
*Appearance, Memory, and Influence* (1986), video artist 
Tom Sherman says: “Real changes occur in individuals first, 
and artists working with a powerful technology like video 
are literally in possession of a super weapon of perceptual 
transformation.” *Unnecessary Mountain* deploys this 
technology as the connective tissue between indulgent ego 
and excessive, perhaps profound thought, blurring a fine 
line between madness and conceptual art.

Jina Valentine’s *Explication de texte: ... SHOT MY 
SON* (2015) consists of 1000 4-page black and white 
newspapers inspired by “my inability to empathize with 
mothers who’ve lost their young, black sons to police 
violence; I cannot imagine losing my son, nor can I conjure 
the language to explain these deaths to him.” This is the 
current state we are in. We cannot move on. The work 
refuses to allow us to forget the sickening number of 
deaths of young black men killed over the past few years 
by American civilians and police, spawning the Black 
Lives Matter movement. Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, 
Tamir Rice and Freddie Gray were all somebody’s sons. 
Valentine says “I photographed the phrase “[...] shot 
my son,” as it appeared in the New York Times under a 
confocal microscope at 20x magnification. The final image 
is composed of hundreds of microscope scans, pieced 
together again, and printed in its native format.” This 
insistent repetition reflects the compounded mess our society is in, where life and death depend on the color of 
one’s skin. The work is a searing prod to remember and 
hopefully act.

Laleh Mehran’s *Entropic System* (2015) is an XY axis 
machine that draws in black sand (coal) with a gorgeous 
golden pendulum. The work is a mesmerizing take on 
information theory and its uncertainty. The inscribed 
design relies on gravity, information and computation 
delivering mechanical accuracy; however, the granular 
nature and weight of sand causes the design to be less 
exact and more poetic. The strictures of ideology are 
apparent in art, madness, and philosophy; yet these 
varied modes of expression may serve as the most telling 
critiques of ideological systems.” Mehran says that the 
resulting “landscapes are symbolic of power structures 
continuously reshaped and in flux,” referring specifically 
to the current political climates in the Middle East.” 
The new pendulum refers to an “explosive lens” similar 
to those used in nuclear weapons. *Entropic System* has 
many layers, from Middle East politics to temporal design 
and mechanics; its complexity requires time to unpack, 
experience and absorb.

Rebecca Vaughan’s *Lead Pipe Cinch* (2011) is a playful 
sculptural installation made from silver lamé fabric, a 
movie marquee sign, cast resin, and an oscillating fan. Her 
work explores gender and domesticity, costume and dress, 
glamour and its meaning. The meaning of “cinch” is to
tie-up or that the task at hand will be easy. In older plumbing, a lead-pipe cinch is considered a secure joint, as lead is malleable and easily joined by cinching or soldering. Is Vaughan describing Hollywood through these ruffles of glam fabric blowing in a simulated wind as an easy sell? You must decide, but what is so compelling about Vaughan's work is her lush and synthetic material palette. Like Marilyn Monroe's white ivory cocktail dress blowing up over a subway vent in the 1955 film The Seven Year Itch, the fluttering silver fabric is a tease, inviting our gendered minds to imagine what's underneath Vaughan's conceptual dress.

Paul Rouphail's massive painting No Problemo (2015) shows an urban environment where development is rampant. It is a visual narrative typical of most thriving mega-cities where population growth and municipal expectations ride real estate speculation, where investment is “No Problemo.” Rouphail's superb technique luxuriates over details of large cranes in the background, depicting unstoppable commercial progress. In the foreground a building is masked by a large tarp painted as a façade itself. This trompe l'oeil simulation holds in suspension the networks internal to the image: the illusionistic painted surface, and the articulation of speculative space. In the foreground a neon sign reads “No Problemo”, a pseudo-Spanish term used to claim that everything is fine. Rouphail's painting is not just a visually lush and exquisitely painted canvas. Given the massive immigrant labor force that propels development and makes this growth economically possible in the United States, it is a politically charged critique of our relationship to the economic and labor rights issues we ignore or deny as they literally shape the American landscape that is conspicuously built around us.

Burning House (2013) by Carrie Schneider is a striking video of a house that burns throughout the seasons. This never-ending fire is entrancing and meditative. The destruction of combustion can be transformative, leading to rebirth or rising from the ashes. Looping and repetitive cycles are common stratagems in the aesthetics of excess. Schneider's video makes us want to watch. Looking at a burning building through shifting light and atmospheric conditions provides both constancy and change—a loop that rewards us over and over again. The video sound component by Cecilia Lopez also mesmerizes. Schneider's approach corresponds with the Norwegian 'slow television' movement in which people watch a fire for hours or ride across the country in its entirety by train. There are few artworks that can sustain such fascination, especially when the outcome is known.

Programming on the entry level of the Miller Gallery departs from distinguishing between the maximal and minimal that occurs on the two floors above. It houses three rotating exhibitions by recent graduates of Carnegie Mellon School of Art's MFA program. Their works incorporate or fuse maximal and minimal aesthetic tendencies within single projects.

For the opening and first segment of this rotation, the Institute for New Feeling (Scott Andrew, Agnes Bolt, and Nina Sarnelle) have created Furthering Cream (2016). It blends installation, video, and performance, using a skin lotion product as a vehicle for commentary on spirituality (avatars), the commodification of art, and self help. Furthering Cream seems to be a pseudonym for excessive behavior in real life and the art that imitates it. The cream that accelerates aging contradicts its packaging that constitutes a visual model of infinity. Alluding to mega commerce and consumer trends through the IfNF's power props, performance and video animation refer to how accessible spa culture has become. "The eroticized body is once again, as it was at the origins of art, the thematic foundation of ontology, of aesthetics. Through confusion, a
montage, of genres and styles, we approach the plenitude
of presence, which is the mark of utopia, a return of
knowledge to its corporeal source." The body becomes
metaphorical in the conjuring of spa culture, presented as
a transformative discourse or as a critique of luxury and
spiritualism, whether authentic or superficial.

In Felipe Castelblanco's installation The Wrong Place:
Free(Get a Life) (2013-ongoing) an American flag t-shirt
is hoisted and blown around the gallery by an oscillating
fan. There is constant sound of clips of the American
anthem sung at sporting events as interpreted by female
pop singers such as Christina Aguilera, Whitney Houston,
Mariah Carey and Beyoncé among others. Alongside this
kinetic piece is White Noise (2014) in which opposing
turntables play vinyl records attached to an illuminated
sign that says, “Flush.” These works describe our
relationship to citizenship, trans-nationalism, and ideals
of belonging. In describing ideas of excess and their place
in society, Georges Bataille writes: “Violence, excess,
delirium, madness characterize heterogeneous elements
to varying degrees: active, as persons or mobs, they
result from breaking the laws of social homogeneity.”

Castelblanco's work mirrors the shifting currents of
individual citizenships and cultural identities within global
economic and political contexts. How fitting and strange
it is to be confronted with an American body that is hollow
and hanging, blown around for a while, hoisted again to be
blown around some more, repeat.... Like a nation without a
unified body surrounded, deafened or distracted by white
noise.

Shana Moulton's videos The Undiscovered Drawer (2013)
and Restless Leg Saga (2012) are the last works in the
sequence of first floor projects. They are awkwardly
beautiful and neurotically genius—hallucinations brought
on by the bombardment of pharmaculture combined with
fantastical social commentary. Their appeal arises from
the captivity of long hours spent in front of moving images,
in full or half-waking states. Guy DeBord alludes to this in
his work The Society of the Spectacle, “The spectacle is
not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship
between people that is mediated by images.” These videos
challenge the status quo in our brains, our understanding
of this social relationship and pre-established social
values. Moulton's ever-expanding drawers and portals lead
to psychological release. Both of these works are potently
emblematic of Maximum Minimum In Unum.

As educators, our hopes are that every student we work
with will become thoughtful explorers of life, especially
once they have moved on from their formal education.
These artists are driven to create, excelling at what they
love to do. Their works challenge us to look at, think about,
and feel the world differently while probing and exposing
our emotional attachments to the world we live in.

Joshua Reiman
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2. Tom Sherman, Before and After the I-Bomb, (Canada: Banff Center Press.
4. Weiss, p.154-155
5. Georges Bataille, Visions of Excess, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota
Less Is More (or wanting for nothing)

More is less. Less is more. The first of these reversed equations by Ad Reinhardt begins to make sense if more simply means extra, excess, and extraneous. In his 12 Rules for a New Academy, Reinhardt insists that “The more uses, relations and ‘additions’ a painting has, the less pure it is. The more stuff in it, the busier the work of art, the worse it is. ‘More is less.’” His implied corollary is that less means essential or pure. Condemning and shedding the superfluous, Reinhardt insisted: “The laying bare of oneself is obscene. Art begins with the getting rid of nature.”

‘Less is more’ is emblematic of a minimalist sensibility that has existed across centuries, from the reductive Cycladic sculptures of Neolithic times to the geometric modernism of the Bauhaus, De Stijl and Russian Constructivist movements in the 20th century. The modernist embrace of geometric abstraction, pure form and spare composition suggested reality stripped to the essential; it typically avoided the subjective and excluded the pictorial, illusionistic and fictive. Such characteristics permeated Minimalism, a movement that arose in the early 1960s with proponents and critics in conflict over its definition. Some artists associated with the movement distanced themselves from its label, dubious about its emphasis on the literal as a critique of the sublime and the ideal in art. ‘Less is more’ can be aligned with the material or the ethereal—or both.

“Less is more” means something else in Robert Browning’s dramatic monologue Andrea del Sarto, that imagines an integration of body and soul in art. The Renaissance painter del Sarto is portrayed as possessing techne alone, praising his own faultless paintings while acknowledging their lack of vitality and spirit. He wistfully claims that the technique of his peer Michelangelo is inferior, but that
Michelangelo surpasses him in soulfulness. He admits that less, technically, is more, spiritually. Conveyed through the eyes of del Sarto, an accomplished artist who knew his limitations, Browning’s poem is an account of self-recognition.

Agnes Martin, an abstract painter whom many consider a minimalist, spoke of the process of self-recognition. Working and living alone for over four decades, she observed “We all have the same inner life. The difference lies in the recognition ... You see, the artist lives by perception. So that what we make, is what we feel. The making of something is not just construction. It’s all about feeling ... everything, everything is about feeling ... feeling and recognition!”

Like Reinhardt, Martin speaks of an abstract art rid of nature, “free of environmental elements and even relationship to the environment. ...”; but, in contradiction, she also describes her horizontal line in relation to a particular landscape – the expansiveness of Oklahoma plains. She departs from Reinhardt, however, by refusing to eliminate the self.

But, don’t you see, the minimalists are idealists ... they're non-subjective. They want to minimalize themselves in favor of the ideal. Well, I just can’t. The minimalists clear their minds of their personal problems ... they don't even leave themselves there! They prefer being absolutely pure, which is a very valid expression of involvement with reality. But I just can’t.

Sharing the motives of predecessors like the suprematist Kazimir Malevich, Martin’s pursuit of pure feeling leads “away from the world of form toward an emptiness experienced as mystical.” The grid so dominant in her work does not exist in nature and yet it becomes another kind of nature, encompassing everything. Working with extreme, self-imposed limits, her paintings exude immanence and open into infinity.

This yearning for less as more has engendered visions both awkward and elegant, mundane and metaphysical, manifesting itself in the work of artists with allegiances to multiple sensibilities. Maggie Haas’ Little Headspace (2014) embodies these dualities, in affinity with Agnes Martin. Haas’ ink and graphite drawing presents a gridded monochrome with subtle inflections of tone and edge. Her graphed structure is frontal, too, but does not fill the frame and leans diagonally, shifting from the rectilinear to the trapezoidal. An irregular break in the grid interrupts and punctures its flatness and inexplicably introduces organic curves. It is a cryptic rupture suggesting an entrance or passageway, a momentary escape from the hum of the grid, a delicate warp that simultaneously compresses and expands time and space.

There is also an hermetic quality to Ron Desmett’s monolithic Lidded Trunk Vessel: Pinnacle (2009) that consists of black glass blown into the hollow core of a rotting tree trunk. By filling the void, the work suspends time and mortality, albeit on a modest scale, grounded in nature. The matte opacity and organic form of this functionless vessel subverts the most common attributes of glass – hardness, brittleness, transparency and reflectivity. Its surface and form is impenetrable but aspiration is not to be denied. A sphere rests at its pinnacle – representing an elusive goal or crowning accomplishment. Its singular perfection alludes to “having gone to the mountaintop” and reaching lofty heights.

That loftiness can assume biblical proportions in other narratives where monolithic tablets play a role. Such a tablet features prominently in Unnecessary Mountain (2015) by Ben Bigelow, perhaps mocking quests for
profound or easy answers. Multiple video, sculptural and utilitarian components establish an absurd narrative about losing oneself in the search for and making of meaning, and the isolation, confusion and solipsism involved in the act of creation. In form and content, it consists of loops of technology and self-imaging. Its sculptural component, however, reduces these expansive searches to an empty chamber, a minimalist cube of two-way mirrored plexiglass. The cube fills periodically and temporarily with fog generated from a lower floor in the gallery, conveyed through umbilical tubing. The vapors can only be seen when the cube is lit within. When darkened, its surfaces revert to mirrors. This basic geometric solid alternates between transparency and invisibility, containing nothing or reflecting everything around it. A security camera flanks the cube, piercing one of its walls. Its lens can only record the immaterial, which appears as an amorphous blur elsewhere on another screen – resisting recognition. To scale Bigelow’s *Unnecessary Mountain*, we must decipher mixed messages of tongue-in-cheek resignation or mystical allure, joining in the artist’s existential groping.

The emptiness of Peter Coffin’s *Surrealist Frame* (2007) is far from atmospheric. It is a hard, opaque and blank white wall, enclosed by an irregular and eccentrically shaped frame. Its vacancy is bisected by a nail and hanging wire, matter-of-factly exposed. All the elements form boundaries and direct the eye arbitrarily. The area within is no different from the area surrounding it; and yet, the nail’s point of suspension creates a center within the void, a fulcrum for asymmetry. It anchors a gilded molding that typically and precisely frames representations or reflections, but here there is nothing represented or reflected. It confronts with a comic kind of existentialism. There is no prime mover or divine hand at play—just us, invisible to ourselves.

Concentric patterns in Laleh Mehran’s video *Dominant Policy* (2013) frame each other infinitely. At first glance, they might appear as a hypnotic cosmological diagram in flux. In kaleidoscopic fashion, everything emanates from or collapses into the center, sometimes simultaneously. The center and the sphere usually have benign associations of unity and oneness – of belonging to a whole. In this case, the patterns are derived from currency designs from across time and around the world. All units, denominations, and values become equivalent, regardless of exchange rates, degrees of sociopolitical power, current validity, obsolescence or collector status. All of the physical attributes of complex printing and security technologies that ensure authenticity, and even its typical hand-to-hand exchange, become increasingly irrelevant in a world of electronic transfers reduced to a binary code of zeros and ones. Mehran’s use of video as a digital medium to animate fixed intricate designs collapses all monetary value into a single aesthetic and egalitarian plane—one that optically never holds still.

The plane as a single site of intersection and inflection, collapse or conflation pervades the minimalist sensibility. In Zak Prekop’s *Transparency with Four Colors* (2015), shapes of cut paper and oil paint are applied to the backside of a gauzy muslin plane that mutes color and clarity. Modes of perception are confused. Foreground and background, presence and absence are seen alternately or simultaneously as the viewer deciphers and recognizes an evolution of decisions and processes. Form and atmosphere paradoxically compress to a surface, reminding us of Plato’s Cave where shadows dancing on a wall are mistaken for reality. It is the philosopher (and perhaps the artist) who is freed from such an illusion and able to perceive (and maybe create) true form. Prekop unifies such divergent perceptual experiences. He maintains: “When looking at paintings, an awareness
of material reality coincides with the perception of an interior, pictorial space, so a painting is looked both at and through.”

Paul Rouphail’s Maria (2014) provides another screen for the liminal. It consists of repeated and layered rectangles of wood trim surrounding a Venetian blind backlit and pierced by horizontal slivers of yellow light. The bisected window frame asserts itself by blocking the light, resembling stretchers bars that support the canvases of paintings. The light that manages to penetrate the louvers dissolves any perception of a solid plane, whether glass, paper or canvas. The blinds cast minute segmented shadows, creating only a shallow recess. Ultimately, the entire composition fuses inner, outer and in-between space into a single plane. Lowered blinds as a common domestic scene and action appear mundane – blocking out the world and assuring privacy and interiority; but Maria, in its frontal formality and emanating light, can also appear as a dematerialized monolith, assuming a more expansive mystical stance.

Diane Samuels’ monochromatic Sampsonia Imprint (B) (2007) records the texture of another mundane plane, the pavement at her front doorstep. Nothing could be more ordinary or immediate and yet open up the world. Discussing monochromes in terms of Platonic metaphysics, classical scholar and art critic Thomas McEvilley speaks of an “intermediate stage between realistic representational painting which affirms the realm of particulars, and monochrome painting which affirms the ultimate void.” Samuels’ field of cast black paper operates in this in-between stage. It is a field of particulars, capturing every crack and crevice of her street. Its blackness mimics the local color of tar and asphalt. It is a ground and of the ground, but its ebony expanse can become a gateway to infinity, to a pregnant void from which anything can spring forth.

Carrie Schneider’s photograph Recession (2010) presents other planes, a row of storefront windows offering blurred reflections of a nocturnal urban street scene. Semi-translucent sheeting and gauzy curtains shroud whatever is inside, barriers to potential objects of desire. A lone woman in black, burdened with shopping bags, sags against the plate glass, her face awkwardly pressed against its surface. This gesture of longing or exhaustion, consuming or consumption is a deliberate – not accidental – pose. The reverse arch of her back strains in an absurd attempt to merge with, get inside, collapse into or disappear within the looking glass – to recede. The work’s title, Recession may refer to emotional withdrawal and resignation or be taken more literally—as both a moment and period of temporary economic decline, a downturn, a slump. A larger global economy and malaise engulfs her singular situation.

Jina Valentine’s Testimony, Disintegration (2015) also merges the singular and personal with the social and public, addressing loss, negation and disintegration. Researching caustic, paper-eating inks, she arrived at an ancient recipe for iron gall ink, that consists of ferrous sulfate (iron) and gum arabic added to a tannic liquid made from fermented, oak tree galls. Through oxidization of the iron, coupled with cellulose deterioration, the inked areas of the paper eventually disintegrate, leaving holes that perforate. Accelerating a process that usually takes centuries to a span of weeks, Valentine uses the ink to copy newspaper articles by hand – accounts of unarmed black men shot by police and the testimonies of their mothers. Pages of tiny voids of abstract text speak to real physical holes left by bullets and the vast emotional pain of those who mourn the dead. In The Body in Pain, Elaine Scarry describes pain as inexpressible and how it actively destroys language. Valentine speaks of that inability to comprehend or convey traumas real and imagined, how language is emptied of meaning:
I cannot imagine losing my son, nor can I conjure the language to explain these deaths to him. News accounts, testimonies of their grief are incomprehensible. The printed words resist interpretation. They fail to convey the unfathomable. Reaching the limit of what is sayable, the words become pure form.

Valentine’s work corroborates Scarry’s ideas on pain’s ‘unmaking’ of the world and how creative ‘making’ works against that pain and its debased uses. Ultimately, the work displays and deteriorates information that is too toxic to exist in print. Conceptually and technically, Testimony, Disintegration challenges and undermines media texts that are mass-produced and consumed, whether in print or online. Her manually made texts are tactile, inventing a Braille of the disappeared. Each page degrades uniquely, an edition of one.

Rebecca Vaughan’s Ham (2012) presents another kind of oneness. A six-foot metal stepladder leans against the wall. Half its near-human height is obscured and crowned by tiers of ruffled silver lamé. If these found and fabricated elements are associated with human anatomy, the work becomes sexualized, despite the inert nature of its monochromatic shimmer and gleam. It is another humorous union, a reductive version of Marcel Duchamp’s self-described ‘hilarious picture,’ The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass) (1915-23) – a work intended to depict an erotic encounter between a ‘Bride’ and her nine mechanical ‘Bachelors,’ albeit unconsummated. Many parallels have been drawn between Duchamp’s persona and alter ego Rose Sélavy, his interest in androgyny as a psychological state and persistent ideal within many spiritual traditions, and the symbolic operation of alchemy. The alchemist’s endeavor – the archetypal union of opposites – is sometimes called ‘chymical nuptials,’ whether applied to material elements such as lead, silver and gold or to social constructs such as gender.

Through the two elements in Ham, Vaughan unites multiple opposites of decorative and functional, soft and hard, ascent and descent. Ham is a single act that, unlike the meaning of its title, is not excessively theatrical.

Stark opposites coexist in Gregory Witt’s Light Switch (2011), a machine that appears over-engineered to look for a specific moment – the point at which a switch actually flips or hovers between being on and being off. Adopting a DIY aesthetic, with all its functioning parts exposed, its gears tilt a plywood-framed video screen framed up and down, with intermittent pauses. It moves in perfect sync with an identical image of itself on the video screen – going through the same motions in an erratic search for the moment when the electric current connects or breaks. Perhaps this self-referential machine enacts a mechanical and metaphorical onanism. In doing so, the apparatus may share Duchamp’s attraction to the mechanical, to the impersonal operations that embodied his ideal state of indifference. In creating machines, Duchamp considered the separation of “the man who suffers and the mind that creates” a positive one. His conversion of pathos into pleasure and emotion into thought is echoed in Witt’s Light Switch – but Witt avoids Duchamp’s endless short circuiting. Witt’s machine is a dispassionate device that absurdly monitors itself in an endless circuit of self-surveillance.

Three rotating installations in MAXIMUM MINIMUM IN UNUM blend the polarities of expansion and contraction, excess and restraint, surrender of self and self-absorption. Restless Leg Saga (2012) by Shana Moulton and Furthering Cream: An accelerant for the face and body (2015) by Institute for New Feeling (IfNf) involve personal care or self-help products that cater to individualism within a capitalist economy. Felipe Castelblanco’s The Wrong Place (2013 - ongoing) addresses the experience of shifting
individual citizenship and cultural identities within a global economic and political context.

The world in Moulton's performative video begins with a single bed, shot from an all-encompassing overhead view. It is the first stage for another episode in the life of her fictive alter ego Cynthia. Cynthia's quest for relief from ailments and anxieties is revealed through a sequence of multiple planes or screens—an abstract blanket rumpled by insomnia, a television screen broadcasting a cure, magazine pages offering health tips, a wall with odd apertures, through which hands enter and retract, performing odd actions, and more. One aperture above Cynthia's head operates as a third eye – that talks. Its mustached mouth recites poetry; one line might encapsulate the entire narrative: “I like my little secret, only hurts myself.” The cure that Cynthia eventually finds unleashes a profusion of legs rotating as an animated mandala, a cosmic diagram representing the entire universe and our relationship to infinity. These appendages emanate from a center, from between Cynthia’s legs, gradually framing the product that cures her. Its logo resembles yet another mystical diagram emanating from a single point. Dream and waking states, the sublime and the absurd unfold and collapse into each other through spoken, musical and visual languages. In Cynthia’s journeys, New Age self-help narcissism alternates with real existential dilemmas; the ego alternates between a hard kernel and total dissolution, between precise points and a vague continuum.

The Institute for New Feeling is a three-person collective committed to the development of new ways of feeling, and ways of feeling new. Furthering Cream is the newest addition to IfNf’s product that includes contact lenses, air fresheners, earplugs, insoles, and travel neck pillows. The cream’s container is a Klein bottle — an immersed, boundary-free, non-orientable, one-sided surface — featured as a sculpture and in a 3D animation by Gary Tyler. Conflating interior and exterior space, its shape is a proposed mathematical model for the shape of the universe and presents a particular challenge for product packaging. Through form and materials, IfNf products fluctuate between nature and artifice, simultaneously shunning and embracing Reinhardt’s edict that art must rid itself of nature. Furthering Cream actually creates its own landscape through an aging agent that slowly drips from 14 public restroom soap dispensers, building up and crystallizing to create cave-like stalagmites. The resulting terrain doubles as a stage for two performers, lying completely still under the dispensers as the cream collects on their bare backs and legs. Representing different stages of life, the performers’ bodies assume the posture of an ouroboros contrasting one human life cycle against an implied and compressed geologic time of eons. Like the Klein bottle, the serpent devouring its own tail appears paradoxically as a closed system with no limits. As the cream drips onto the performers’ bodies, they are embedded, camouflaged and subsumed within an environment, another act of dissolution or convergence. Together, they become an imaginary resource to be harvested for more cream, to satisfy new consumers chasing the passage of time.

Felipe Castelblanco’s The Wrong Place reveals and resists the constraints of nationality. Elements within the work’s sound, video and kinetic sculptural components represent singular nations that cannot remain isolated in an increasingly transnational world. They act upon each other, eroding or confusing identity and autonomy. One mechanized system repeatedly drops a t-shirt emblazoned with an American flag on the floor, a charged treatment that might be considered illegal in some states. The shirt is made in China and sold through Walmart, the American multinational corporation that is the biggest private employer in the world. Meanwhile, two turntables spin
anthems by popular vocalists; their respective needles and arms play the discs opposite to themselves, digging a deeper groove with each rotation and rendering each other unintelligible. The records eventually wear out as one expression of patriotism drowns out another. This mutual destruction occurs in conflicts of all kinds, whether military, economic or cultural. The conditions that launch refugees and migrants range from profound and mortal dangers to simple personal preferences. Displaced and transient people each have their own dilemmas and dreams. The video in *The Wrong Place* presents a handmade raft of dubious durability and a capacity for one passenger. Navigating toward a place to belong, it is a mote on the surface of deep and boundless seas.

What we attend to in the works of these artists—the minute or the massive, the instant or the endlessness of time—depends on our modes of encountering and operating within the world and our conscious and unconscious ways of seeing. Our perception, experience and comprehension of reality is not and cannot always be binary. Our vision can be as inclusive and expansive as the one that pervades William Blake’s *The Auguries of Innocence*, even when focused on a speck:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palms of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.

It is a vision that allows both the measured and the immeasurable, the maximum and the minimum in unum.

Susanne Slavick  
Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Art  
School of Art, Carnegie Mellon University


3. Ibid.


Ben Bigelow

MAXIMUM

MINIMUM

Unnecessary Mountain 2015 (video stills)
single channel video and installation
33:31 min.
Felipe Castelblanco

**MAXIMUM**

White Noise 2014  
turntable, vinyl records, neon sign, sound  
dimensions variable

**MINIMUM**

The Wrong Place with Free (Get a Life) 2014  
kinetic installation  
dimensions variable
Peter Coffin

MAXIMUM

Untitled (Ribbons) 2012
aluminum rack and ribbon
63" x 84" x 6"

Photo: Courtesy of Peter Coffin Studio

MINIMUM

Untitled (Surrealist Frame) 2007
gilded frame
dimensions variable

Photo: Courtesy of Peter Coffin Studio
Ron Desmett

**Persephone's Garden** 2015
blown and cold worked glass and mixed media
12" x 40" x 30"

**Lidded Trunk Vessel #30, Pinnacle** 2009
blown and etched black glass
34" x 18" x 18"
Maggie Haas

**MAXIMUM**

**MINIMUM**

*Tumbling Blocks* 2010
pine, redwood, watercolor and ink
34" x 15.5" x 11.5"

*Little Headspace* 2014
ink and graphite on paper
22.5" x 30"
Institute for New Feeling

**MAXIMUM**

**MINIMUM**

*Furthering Cream* 2016
installation with performance. soap dispensers, paint, cream, wood, HD video animation, papier-mâché, and Klein bottle. dimensions variable

*Pillow* 2014
weighted for use in-flight or at home

*cast cement*
Laleh Mehran

Maximum

Entropic System 2016 (detail)
interactive installation of 2-axis “drawing” machine, and Black Beauty sand
34” x 34” x 39”

Dominant Policy 2013
single channel HD digital video
8:41 min.
Shana Moulton

**MAXIMUM**

**MINIMUM**

*Restless Leg Saga* 2012
single channel video
7:24 min.

*The Undiscovered Drawer* 2014
single channel video
9:19 min.
Zak Prekop

**MAXIMUM**

*Transparency with Drawing* 2014
oil on muslin
30" x 38"

**MINIMUM**

*Transparency with Four Colors* 2015
oil and paper on muslin
58" x 42"
Paul Rouphail

MAXIMUM

No Problemo 2015
oil on canvas
77” x 96”

MINIMUM

Maria 2014
screen print, gouache, graphite on paper
24” x 18”
Diane Samuels

MAXIMUM

MINIMUM

Metamorphoses, Ovid 2014
hand transcription of poem onto a single “thread” of handmade paper
One kilometer of writing in ink, 28” diameter.

Sampsonia Imprint (B) (detail) 2007
black cotton rag paper pulp cast directly onto Sampsonia Way
130” x 45” x 1”
Carrie Schneider

**MAXIMUM**

**MINIMUM**

*Burning House* 2013
HD video projected on loop with sound by Cecilia Lopez
14:00 min.

*Recession* 2010
framed C-print
30” x 36”
Jina Valentine

**MAXIMUM**

*Explication de texte :  ... SHOT MY SON 2015*

1000 +/- 4-page black and white newspapers
22" x 30" each

**MINIMUM**

*Testimony, Disintegration 2015*

found paper, iron gall ink, treated with hydrogen peroxide
8 panels, 24” x 16” each
Rebecca Vaughan

**MAXIMUM**

*Lead Pipe Cinch (small version)* 2011
silver lamé, movie marquee sign, resin, and oscillating fan
96” x 96” x 4”

**MINIMUM**

*Ham* 2012
silver lamé and 6 foot step ladder
26” x 72” x 12”
Gregory Witt

**MAXIMUM**

*Light Switch* 2011
kinetic mixed media sculpture with video
30” x 20” x 15”

**MINIMUM**

*Orbiter* 2016
kinetic mixed media sculpture
approximately 72” x 96” x 24”
Ben Bigelow's work explores the shifting identity of Americana and its relationship to technology through combinations of video, installation, performance, and photography. Venues for past exhibitions include: Kala Art Institute, Berkeley; City Limits Gallery, Oakland; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; and the Harlem Factory Fest in New York City. In 2014, he lectured in the Department of Art & Art History at Stanford University and in 2015 was a faculty member in the SIM Department at the Massachusetts College of Art & Design. He has an MFA from Stanford University and a BFA (2008) from Carnegie Mellon University. Originally from Los Angeles, he currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Felipe Castelblanco is a multidisciplinary artist working at the intersection of socially engaged and new media art. A 2013 MFA alumnus of Carnegie Mellon, he attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2012. International venues for his work have included: the Royal Academy of Arts, London; the San Diego Museum of Art; FAD Festival in Belo Horizonte, Brazil; FIVAC Festival in Camagüey, Cuba; PRACTICE Gallery in Philadelphia; the Valenzuela Klener Gallery in Bogotá, Colombia; and in storefronts and street corners throughout the United States. Castelblanco has been the recipient of the 2013 John Fergus Post MFA Fellowship at The Ohio State University in Columbus, the 2014 Starr Fellowship at the Royal Academy in London, and in 2015 served as a Cultural Emissary in the Philippines with U.S State Department and U.S Embassy in Manila through the American Arts Incubator exchange program.

Peter Coffin has mounted over 30 solo museum and gallery exhibitions internationally at venues such as: the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; the Center d’art Contemporain d’Ivry, France; The Barbican, London; Le Centre d’Art Contemporain de Fribourg, Switzerland; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; the Horticultural Society of New York; and Le Confort Moderne, Poitier. His work has been included in the 2013 John Fergus Post MFA Fellowship at The Ohio State University in Columbus, the 2014 Starr Fellowship at the Royal Academy in London, and in 2015 served as a Cultural Emissary in the Philippines with U.S State Department and U.S Embassy in Manila through the American Arts Incubator exchange program.

Ron Desmett is a contemporary sculptor using molten black glass to disturb the canons of craft. Black glass is his holy grail. Subverting a material known for its sleek beauty and transparency, he creates slumped, dark and earthy forms. Desmett is a descendant of Belgian coal miners relocated in the diaspora of migrants to the mines of Clearfield, Pennsylvania where he was born in 1948. He has received awards from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, including Pennsylvania Artist of the Year 2013-2014. In 2010, he was Artist in Residence at the Tacoma Museum and has also been a resident artist at Artpark in Lewiston, NY, and the Contemporary Art Center at Wheaton Village, Millville, N.J. His works are in the permanent collections of the Renwick Galleries of the Smithsonian Institution, the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Westmoreland Museum, the Tacoma Museum of Glass, the American Museum of Glass at Wheaton Village and the Corning Museum of Glass in New York.

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Laleh Mehran constructs elaborate artworks focused on complex intersections between politics, religion, and science. The progeny of Iranian scientists, Mehran’s relationship to these issues is necessarily complex, even more so given today’s political climate in which certain views can have extreme consequences. Her research, often modeled on and about the very ideas of science and technology, takes advantage of their cultural importance in order to articulate a set of ideas that require precisely these kinds of mediations from both political and religious intolerance. Considerations that shape her work are as veiled as they are explicit, as personal as they are political, and as critical as they are tolerant. Mehran received her MFA in 1997 from Carnegie Mellon. Her work has been shown individually and as part of collectives in venues including: The International Symposium on Electronic Art, United Arab Emirates; National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts; Electronic Language International Festival, Brazil; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art; The Georgia Museum of Art; The Andy Warhol Museum; Denver Art Museum; Biennial of the Americas at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver; 404 International Festival of Art & Technology, Argentina; Next 5 Minutes 4 Tactical Media Festival, Netherlands; and the European Media Arts Festival, Germany. Mehran is an Associate Professor and Graduate Director in Emergent Digital Practices at the University of Denver.

lalehmehran.com

Shana Moulton creates evocative and oblique narratives in video and performance works. Combining an unsettling, wry humor with a low-tech, Pop sensibility, she plays a character whose interactions with the everyday world are both mundane and surreal, in a domestic sphere just slightly askew. As her protagonist navigates the enigmatic and possibly magical properties of her home decor, Moulton initiates relationships with objects and consumer products that are at once banal and uncanny. Shana Moulton was born in 1976. She studied at the University of California, Berkeley and Carnegie Mellon University where she received her MFA in 2004. Moulton has also attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine and studied at De Ateliers in Amsterdam. Her video work has been screened and exhibited at international venues including: Art in General, New York; Migros Museum, Zurich; Contemporary Museum of Art, Uppsala; Rencontres internationales Paris/Berlin; Aurora, Edinburgh; Dark Light Festival, Dublin; Impakt Festival, Utrecht; Internationale Kurzfilmtage, Oberhausen; Broadway 1602, New York; and Gimpel Fils, London. Moulton has performed at venues including The Kitchen, Electronic Arts Intermix, PERFORMA 09 and Socrates Sculpture Park in New York; Aurora Picture Show, Houston; and The Bluecoat, Liverpool, among others. Moulton lives and works in Brooklyn, New York and teaches at Kunstakademie in Muenster, Germany.

shanamoulton.info

Paul Rouphail is a painter who fuses architectural history, American pop iconography, and linguistic turns of phrase. His works have been exhibited at the The Gelman Gallery at the Rhode Island School of Design, Microscope Gallery in Brooklyn and The Chautauqua Institution, among others. Rouphail’s work has been reviewed online and in print, including in New American Paintings (Issue 122), The Chautauqua Daily (Howard Halle), and Gestalten Press’ Imagine Architecture (Lukas Feireiss and Robert Klanten). Rouphail is currently an MFA candidate at the Rhode Island School of Design.

paulrouphail.com

Zak Prekop was born in 1979 in Chicago and currently lives and works in Brooklyn. He has shown his work in solo exhibitions at: Essex Street, New York; Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago; Thomas Duncan Gallery, Los Angeles; Hagiwara Projects, Tokyo; Galeria Agustina Ferreyra, San Juan; Galeria Marta Cervera, Madrid; and in Art Statements at Art Basel with Harris Lieberman Gallery. His work was included in the group exhibitions Painter Painter at The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; The Pittsburgh Biennial at the Carnegie Museum of Art; The Prague Biennial, and Greater New York 2010 at MoMA PS1, New York. His work is in the permanent collections of the Walker Art Center and the Carnegie Museum of Art.

thomasduncangallery.com/index.php?/project/zak-prekop/

Diane Samuels is a visual artist with studio and public art practices. She is also co-founder of City of Asylum Pittsburgh that provides sanctuary to writers in exile. Her exhibitions include those at: the Andy Warhol Museum, the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Mattress Factory Museum in Pittsburgh; the Leo Baeck Institute and the Center for Book Arts, New York; the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Connecticut; the Contemporary Arts Center of Cincinnati; the Municipal Museum of Art in Gyor, Hungary; the Synagogue Center in Trnava, Slovakia; the Bernheimer Realschule in Buttenhausen, Germany; and the Czech Museum of Fine Arts. In 2013 she was recipient of a Rockefeller Bellagio Residency in Italy and an American Academy in Jerusalem Fellowship. Samuels holds both BFA and MFA degrees from Carnegie Mellon University, a diploma from the Institute in Arts Administration at Harvard University and has received honorary doctorates from Seton Hill University and Chatham University.

dianesamuels.net
Carrie Schneider was born in Chicago in 1979 and is currently a Brooklyn-based artist working in photography, film and video installation. Her work has been shown widely at international arts institutions, including: the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki; Gallery 44, Toronto; Fotogalleriet, Oslo; the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh; Trondheim Academy of Fine Art, Norway; The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; The Kitchen, New York; Galeria Alberto Sendoros, Buenos Aires; and the California Museum of Photography, Riverside. She received a Jerome Foundation NYC Film, Video, and Digital Production Grant, a residency fellowship from the Joan Mitchell Foundation, and a 2015 Creative Capital Award. She has also participated in residencies with the artist Rineke Dijkstra and with her longtime collaborator, choreographer Kyle Abraham. Schneider earned her BHA in Fine Arts and Psychology in 2001 from Carnegie Mellon University and her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

carrieschneider.net

Jina Valentine is an Assistant Professor of Art at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She received her MFA from Stanford University and a BFA in 2001 from Carnegie Mellon University. Her work has been exhibited widely at venues including: The Drawing Center, Marlborough Gallery, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, all in New York. She has been an artist in residence at The Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Finnish Kuvataideakatemia (Academy of Fine Arts), Helsinki, as a Fulbright Fellow, and the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program.

jinavalentine.com

Rebecca Vaughan received her BFA cum laude in Sculpture at the University of Colorado, Boulder and an MFA in 2001 at Carnegie Mellon. She is currently the Program Director at the Art Students League of Denver and former Chair of Fine Arts and Head of Sculpture at the Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design. She held a residency as a Resource Artist at Redline Denver from 2011-2013. Prior positions included: working as project manager for Ann Hamilton's 2008 Circles of O performance; assisting in other projects in Dialog: City, a city-wide arts event for the Democratic National Convention in Denver; serving as an Artist-Teacher for the Vermont College of Fine Art; and teaching as a visiting instructor at Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

rebeccavaghan.com

Gregory Witt grew up in Indiana, where he completed a BFA in Sculpture at Indiana University in 2005. Since 2006, he has been living and making art in Pittsburgh, where he earned his MFA from Carnegie Mellon University in 2009. He has exhibited nationally, most recently at Brown University's Bell Gallery and the University of West Virginia's Mesaros Gallery.

gregorywitt.com

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We dedicate this show to all current and former Carnegie Mellon School of Art students, with pride and respect.