Carnegie Mellon 2015 MFA Thesis Exhibition
Organized by the School of Art
March 28 - April 12, 2015
“In this exhibition you are invited to contemplate the metaphysical propositions of an aesthete philosopher, consider the analytical observance of conditioned human behavior and response, witness explorations of interrelationships between natural and mechanical systems, marvel at a playfully incisive commentary on economic collapse, share the fantastical emotionally layered life journey of an onion, and reflect on an investigation of futures past and what life might hold beyond an MFA education.

In their various ways these young artists are examining and commenting on the distance between human aspiration and experienced contemporary reality.

The work in this exhibition demonstrates how art can resist conformity, present critical viewpoints, and communicate alternative values. Art can counter prevailing commercial and ideological imperatives and provide a broader consideration of what is important in our lives.

Whatever Dakotah, Elizabeth, Isla, Jae Wook, Lucia, and Rafael do in the wider world beyond their Carnegie Mellon MFA experience, I hope they do it with the conviction and daring which they have demonstrated in their time here. I have high hopes for their futures and I look forward to learning of their impact in the years ahead.”

- John Carson, Regina and Marlin Miller Professor, Head of the School of Art
Looking into myself and outwards toward the social/cultural, my interaction with contexts, spaces and publics is focused on exploring, revealing and redefining human relations. My attempt to explore myself and others is an attempt to explore a certain humanness. How can we think about the physiological history of our genetic chain? When and how do we “become” human? Can we unlearn humanness?

Artist Bio

Through an open-ended approach to art, I explore issues of language, behavior and identity, with focus on systems, the body and space. I’ve exhibited and taught throughout the US, since 2001, at the age of 16. I went on to graduate with a BFA in New Genres from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2008. Since then, I have worked with organizations such as Creative Capital, PFPCA, Franklin Furnace, Queens Museum of Art (New New Yorkers), Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Halka Art Project, Sprout Fund, Root Division, Oakland Unified School District, New York Department of Education, and Pittsburgh Public Schools.

My work is deeply tied to my own body, and being. Conviviality and my personal experiences are a source of curiosity which I explore/investigate in a wide range of traditional and non-traditional media. While I often employ the vernacular of performance, video, photography, public intervention amongst other artistic languages, my body of work is better described as the evidence and product of a myriad of concurrent and intertwining explorations into the themes of the body, the individual and the group, social behavior, language and representation—amongst others.

Methods of observation and documentation have become a current in my body of work, largely through the lens of portraiture. Through photography and video alike, I have found close allies in the video portraits of Candice Breitz, the contextual photo-portraiture of Zoe Strauss, as well as the public video interventions of Krzysztof Wodiczko. Through “Out of Control”, “A Tired City” and “Eye Contact”, I aim to add a sense of diversity, intensity and vulnerability to this rich dialogue.

Image credits (pgs 5-6): Rafael Abreu-Canedo, Out of Control, 2013; Devotion, 2014.
Elizabeth Buschmann

Elizabeth’s interdisciplinary approach carries a broad spectrum of formative influences that require her to operate within a theoretical rational. Through her process she tests the effects of media on individual subjects and presents them in site-specific contexts. The intent is to provoke discussion by connecting disparate histories through processes of direct and indirect engagement. She is interested in the articulation of self, required both of herself and of her subjects in the process of creating a narrative experience.

This project is the latest in a concise body of work produced at Carnegie Mellon University. It began as an attempt to more effectively capture socially engaged and immersive actions that were the byproduct of existential inquiry into cultural mythology. It became a way of interrogating the location and presentation of [an] image, including her own.

Her current work obliges her to take the role of the artist, allowing her to become physically and emotionally involved with a distant subject. Awkward presentation lends the work a poignant quality, contradicting the vanity inherent in most portraiture, as well as eschewing the technical virtuosity, which affords art its social status.

Image credits (pgs 9-10): A Life on Facebook, 2015, oil paint, IKEA frames, Miele Gallery. Photo Credit: Ørin Pierson
Isla Hansen  
www.islathemovie.com

Isla’s work reenacts forms of popular media, play, and systems of production, recreating ways in which bodies connect to technologies in the world around us. Her work sets in motion new and sometimes crude means of image-making in order to break down or convolute processes of technological mediation. Recently, Isla has focused on the ways in which camera and robotic systems in the gaming, medicine, food, and sports industries have developed by tracking and positioning the human body as analogue. These absurd systems reinterpret and complicate the relationship between the human body and technological progress.

The Lachrymator

The Lachrymator is a system that recreates the narrative structure of a dramatic film by a means of a process of food preparation. Taking the onion as protagonist, the piece moves this character and its audience through a simulated industrial environment that slowly reveals the hero’s story “from farm to table.” The installation draws parallels between two systems of mediation — narrative cinema and industrial food processing—to compare the emotional power of mediated image to the chemical defense mechanism of an organism, the lachrymatory factor of onions. Can cinematic effect produce an empathetic reaction as potent as nature’s?
I tinker. My work as an artist imitates invention as I investigate interrelated systems through kinetic sculpture. As I build, I concentrate on the tenuous balance of parts in an orchestrated cascade of cause and effect. These systems set up symbiotic relationships with contradicting master-slave moments. This poetic suggestion reveals truths of the world around us. I often combine order and error in simple repetitive human/mechanical gestures that are subject to surrounding influences. Tensions between nature and technology become the focus in order to reposition our connection with them. I choose salvaged materials based on the practicality of their newly assigned function. Repurposing these objects allows me to playfully exploit their prior function to form new vocabularies.
My works reflect and speculate deeply on the human mind and something-other-than-human as I consider myself an operant among all other human and non-human operants on the Earth. I explore the relationship between things themselves and the way that our mind projects meanings onto things. I take objects back in question, revealing their irreducible qualities beyond our comprehension. I consider the Earth as a living organism that has passions, emotions, and agencies—a dynamic entity in a constant state of flux. Borrowing from Bruno Latour, my practice tunes to the idea of “Gaia”—our relationship with other things on Terra. I often present man-made objects, natural objects, scientific experiments, and poems together.

ARTIST BIO
JaeWook Lee is an artist, writer, amateur scientist, semi-philosopher, and sometime curator. Lee’s work has been exhibited internationally at museums, galleries and art institutions, including Museo Juan Manuel Blanes, Montevideo (2014), Chelsea Art Museum, New York (2011), SPACE*C Coreana Museum, Seoul (2006), and in biennials and festivals such as the 4th Post-Global Mediation, San Diego (2014), the 4th Hotel de Inmigrates, Montevideo (2014), MANIFESTA 9 official parallel event, Hassalt (2012) among others. He has received grants from 4th SINAP: Sindoh Artist Support Program, Arts Council Korea, International Exhibition Grant (2011), and Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture, Exhibition Grant (2008).
I am interested in the counter-monument as a material and conceptual strategy of political subversion. Born and raised in Zimbabwe, I draw on my own evolving experience of citizenship as one of the main influences in my work. The counter-monument becomes a way to anchor myself in the places and issues that are of importance to me, without becoming completely disillusioned. My thesis project *Free Fall* chronicles the trajectory of the Zimbabwe Dollar, a currency spectacular in its demise and in its afterlife as a profitable collectors item. It is an investigation of what the currency and the threat of its return have come to symbolize within a transnational web of current affairs, financial systems and personal narratives.
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Gallery accessible
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Info: 412.268.3618 • miller-gallery@andrew.cmu.edu
Hours: Tues.-Sun., 12-6pm. Check our calendar for exhibition dates.
Admission: Free + open to the public

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