Carnegie Mellon 2016 MFA Thesis Exhibition
Co-organized by the School of Art
March 19 - April 10, 2016

SELF DRIVING CAR
The unpredictability of the MFA program at CMU is one of its strengths and joys. It is a three year journey of exploration led by student curiosity, experiment and adventure. In this final year MFA exhibition, we will experience: a belly aching performance full of gut wrenching bathos; a heartfelt search for identity within and beyond ethnicity; concern with exile, diaspora, displacement and virtuality; the body in extremis, biologically, physically and philosophically; intellectual gamesmanship, exploring the relationship between technology and craft; surprising collisions between human culture and animal behavior; and the interface between personal and technological histories, emotional and artificial intelligence.

All of this with depth and intensity, approached variously with humor and candor, passion and politics, deliberation and determination. This group of young artists has been test driving ideas on a tough course. Students bring ideas, hopes, enthusiasms, expectations and practices which are challenged, examined and developed through intense discussion and debate with faculty and peers.

Having had attentive instructors over the last three years, they have ultimately found their own sense of direction, and are now totally into self-driving mode. I am sure that the road ahead is filled with wonder and discovery, and I look forward to the travellers’ tales, which will come back over the years. Congratulations and bon voyage to the MFA class of 2016.

- John Carson, Regina and Marlin Miller Professor, Head of the School of Art

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Artists: Dan Allende, Zhiwan Cheung, Nima Dehghani, Ada-Scarlett Hopper, Jesse Kauppila, Tucker Marder, and Daniel Pillis

March 18, Fri. 6-8pm: Reception + Performances
March 24, Thurs. 6-9:30pm: Critique with Brian Boucher.
Senior Writer, Artnet
March 31, Thurs. 6-9:30pm: Critique with Eric Shiner.
Executive Director, The Andy Warhol Museum
March 24, 31 + April 7, Thurs. noon: Mask Making and Belly Dancing Workshop with Dan Allende
Come to the gallery to learn how to turn your body into a mask through plaster casting followed by a belly dancing workshop. Duration 1.5 hrs. Please bring clothes that are able to get dirty.

Travellers’ Tales
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Exhibition + events are free and open to the public.
Sometimes I am sitting in my car after pulling out of Wendy’s drive thru, sipping on a cherry coke and munching on a hamburger, when I get a rumbling deep in my belly. In this situation most would typically associate the disturbance with indigestion but, as a frequent visitor to Wendy, I understand it as the beginning of a creative awakening. The belly (gut) is the home of the irrational drive powerful enough to supersede our higher brain function. Harnessing the power of the belly, I started to use it to create; casting ‘dad bods’ into neo-primitive masks and teaching men with similar guts to belly dance. The process gained momentum, establishing the ‘Cult of the Wampe’, a men’s movement for celebrating the male figure and the beer gut as a source of creation. This body of work is an homage to the origins of the movement and to the object of my desire: Wendy... You've always been there for me...

(After Letters to Wendy's by Joe Wenderoth, 1997)

"...My previous statements were made in haste. I was hungry and confused, and I longed for purpose. I wanted to seem like I was in the process of focusing in on something important. I wanted to feel purpose rising like an ancient city from an excavator’s pick and shovel. I wanted this so much that I rushed – I swung my pick wildly, and I brought a great delicate city to the dust it had always verged on." – Joe Wenderoth

Image credits (pgs 3-5): Kult Um Die Wampe, installation view, 2015; What If God Was A Wavelength?, collage, 2015
The intersection of national identity and the personal psyche is complex, not always clear nor fixed; as an artist, I probe the paths and how and where they join and diverge. As an odyssey toward a home that does not exist, a rite of passage with no destination, I use my work to search for a critical understanding of an impossible homecoming. Through sculpture, film, and performance, I focus on the meaning and space between identities, examining the feeling of a liminal displacement. It is a journey guided by an allusive visual language, with a mix of pop cultural, art historical, and aesthetical signals and choices that also guide audiences into finding their own rites of passage.
Nima Dehghani
nimadehghani.com

Nima is a multidisciplinary artist, writer and architect, born in Tehran, Iran in 1986. Humans, communication, individual conflicts and social discriminations, with allusions to politics, have been the subject of most of his works. With a background in architecture and theater, he strives to build the most comprehensible virtual venues to convey his thoughts, to focus on the notion of displacement, home, diaspora and the purest relationship between human and space: Migration.

Nima works predominantly in the medium of performing arts and digital media and his goal is to find the most effective ways to influence the audience using new media. His research revolves around the core of Middle Eastern studies, social behavior in online networks and performativity of social actions.

Decompensation:
Five stages are described through which refugees pass: early arrival, destabilization, exploration and restabilization, return to normal life, and decompensation. They come from a reality, which is not real anymore.

Image credits (pgs 11-13):
Big Fish Eyes, 2015, VR video installation, The Frame Gallery, Pittsburgh;
The soldiers who ran with me, 2013-2016, Digital photography, Online;
HomeTweetHome, 2015, Interactive video performance, Meadville art gallery, Meadville;
Hotel project, 2015, documentary performance, Days inn, Pittsburgh
Ada–Scarlett Hopper

Through various media, most currently those of sculpture, performance, and photography, Ada Hopper uses her diverse background in the study of medicine, practice of dance, and engagement in the visual arts to explore many philosophical issues relevant to understanding the vast spaces that can exist between extremes of what is and what is not.

Ada Hopper’s most current works strive to understand how movement, time, and machines frame our biological and philosophical existence. Primarily creating work in the third and fourth dimensions of respectively space and time, she continues to explore a variety of human experiences and the liminal human forms within which we exist.

Image credits (pgs 15-17):

DisAbility, 2013;
Equilibrium Fractions of the Self ADAm, 2014;
Equilibrium Fractions of the Self Wife, 2014
I love technology, cities, and the modern world, but I grew up in stunning rural Vermont in a family that values craft and education. This experience led me to pursue a career as first a printer, then an art historian, and now an artist. I explore how a variety of technologies and concepts shape our experience of the world. I am currently working with the relationship between abstract thinking and gameplay.

Image credits (pg 19-21):

Checker Brick House, 2015
Brick, Mortar, and Rebar, 5 x 5 x 10 FT
This permanent public art commission in East Deutschtown is a visualization of a checker game played by two local brothers who have moved away.

Fissure and Quake (A.K.A. Fracking for Kids!), 2014
Polycarbonate, Water, Tempered Glass, Blue Coloring, Steel, Plumbing, 9 x 2 x 6 FT
In this interactive exhibition at The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh kids could manipulate the flow of a limited supply of water.

Lace School, 2015
Custom Designed Game, Computer Vision, Knitting Machine, Knitted Lace
This project was an attempt to harness the power of social interaction through gameplay to create a piece of knitted lace. The small doily on the bottom right was created from a game played between Zhiwan Cheung and Dan Allende.
I grew up diving in a salt water creek 100 miles east of New York City. This creek was home to a particularly humorous ecosystem. I observed the pratfalls of Hermit Crabs, nervous Pipe Fish hyperventilating in the crevices and Bay Scallops fluttering awkwardly like armored butterflies. From these early encounters with the natural world, I developed a vocabulary for making art, engaging with the humor of animal behaviors to encourage empathy for the non-human. But the sense of absurdity with which I approach making art about nature derives not just from the animals themselves, but the predicament in which we find them. The area of Long Island where I grew up is known as “The Hamptons”. It is a seasonal vacation retreat for the extremely wealthy. But what is lesser known about “The Hamptons” is the amazing amount of biodiversity that clings to life between the property lines of the mansions. I could show you where the endangered Roseate Tern nests not far from one of the largest homes in North America.

I believe that ecological responsibility is best instilled through exuberance. I have developed an environmental ethic that promotes optimism and engagement rather than depression and paralysis. If people are sensitive to it, nature’s sense of humor can inspire a more symbiotic relationship between humans and the planet.

Image credits (pg 23-25):
Detail of shark bite on thesis work in progress, Raccoon Key, Florida, 2016;
For the Birds (in collaboration with Dan Allende), 2014, Live Bird Show at the National Aviary photo: Ryan Coon;
STAMPEDE!, 2015, 215 crested indian runner ducks, motorized abstract puppets scored by vibraphone, Photo: Phil Lehans.
Daniel Pillis makes work about the history of technology, exploring the overlap and tension between human existence and artificial forms of life. Computer graphics as a concept, archives of human experience, as well as the histories of individuals who have made technological progress are all dominant themes in his installation, animation, and sculptural inquiries.

**Virtual Newell/Simon Simulation:**

In the basement of Dougherty Hall, Mr. Pillis has recreated the offices and archives of the fathers of artificial intelligence, Allen Newell and Herbert Simon. Hundreds of thousands of scanned documents in Carnegie Mellon’s University Archives document their life and work, while the physical originals remain underground inside of a limestone mountain, one of the world’s oldest data management centers, Iron Mountain. In Dougherty Hall, Room C317, visitors are invited to experience a recreation of this office and interact with an “artificially intelligent archive”. Please text 908-902-9559 for more information.

**Ivan Sutherland’s Trojan Cockroach:**

This additional on-campus exhibit tells the story of computer graphics, walking machines, and the origins of the technology underlying modern advances in robots. The protagonist of the exhibit, Ivan Sutherland, is often considered the father of computer graphics. Ivan Sutherland’s Trojan Cockroach will be on display at the Posner Center on Carnegie Mellon campus through early May 2016. Please ask for more information at the desk or via mrpillis@gmail.com

Image credits (pg 27-29):

Herbert Simon & Allen Newell, courtesy University Archives, Carnegie Mellon;
Ivan Sutherland, as an undergraduate at Carnegie Tech and in December 2015
General operating support for the Miller Gallery is provided by Carnegie Mellon University, and the exhibitions and programs are supported in part by a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as well as the CMU College of Fine Arts and the School of Art. Additional support comes from gallery members, patrons, sponsors, and donations.


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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

Gallery accessible  Bus  Bike racks
P  Free parking after 5pm + on weekends

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