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CODES OF INTERACTION

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

TIMOTHY MICHAEL MARTIN

Master of Fine Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2005
Bachelor of Fine Art, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2002

Director: PETER BALDES

PROFESSOR OF PAINTING, PAINTING AND PRINTMAKING DEPARTMENT

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May 2005

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my friends and family, especially my parents Tim and Sherry, who have supported me in everyway throughout my life. I would also like to thank all of the faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University Painting and Printmaking Department, my graduate committee members, Peter Baldes, Richard Roth and Morris Yarowsky and the visiting artists and critics, Bonnie Collura, Pamela Fraser, Joe Fyfe, Mark Harris, Virgil Marti and Gregory Volk, for their knowledge and encouragement. Your guidance will always be remembered. Thank you again for your unforgettable support.

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Abstract

CODES OF INTERACTION

Timothy Michael Martin, Master of Fine Art

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2005

Major Director: Peter Baldes
Associate Professor, Painting and Printmaking Department

The ideas within this thesis are meant to clarify my explorations, research and painting practice during my studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. I expand on my general statements about being fascinated by advancing technologies and concerned about the after effects of these advancements. The writing explores my curiosity about the internal, skeletal structure of things and how they operate.

I explain how the paintings are idiosyncratic hybrids that evoke animation, imaginary scientific propositions, blueprints, maps, and advancing technologies. The work combines these interests with my observations of day-to-day experiences. Isolated events provide found compositions which I then manipulate: a seemingly mundane bike ride gets mapped into a well-ordered schematic of social interaction.

Introductory Ideas Emerging From My Surroundings:

Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Oak Ridge, Tennessee, a city erected in 1942, existed for seven years as a secret government facility with a mission to end World War II. This city was not shown on any printed maps and did not allow any visitors without special approval. Military guards were posted at all entrances and exits to the city and all residents were required to wear identification badges when they were outside of their homes. Before 1942 there were only a few farms in the rural area that was to become the research facility of Oak Ridge. During World War II the area became a small government secret city and a key player in The Manhattan Project, a military mission to produce an atomic bomb. Jay Searcy, a child at the time, wrote an article in 1992 that stated:

“At night I could see the yellow glare from the secret plants where my parents worked, tucked mysteriously behind a ridge far off in the distance. The plants, surrounded by layers of great fences, were built well away from the town, and from one another, guarded and patrolled and hidden from the world in what was once remote Tennessee farm land. They were huge, windowless, silent block buildings that never shut down. Everything about them was top secret.” (Searcy 1992)

This once remote area in Tennessee was developed for wartime experimentation and atomic research, the families were removed and the government moved in to create three large laboratories. Within two years the town of Oak Ridge was using twenty percent more electricity than New York City and emerged as the fifth largest city in Tennessee with the sixth largest bus system in the United States.

Scientists were repositioned to the area of Oak Ridge during this time to produce uranium (U-235), weapons-grade uranium, and plutonium (Pu-238), which could also be used in an atomic weapon. The government built three laboratories, one for each method known to extract the isotope U-235. One of the labs is where the first nuclear reactor was built and still exists. It was the first facility to ever create plutonium, which fueled the test bomb in New Mexico and the bombs detonated over both Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan that ended World War II.

One can only imagine the captivating stories and urban legend type myths that surrounded the area while I was growing up. I was regularly told not to swim in certain areas of the river, and not to eat the fish in certain ponds due to the barrels of toxic sludge that had been hidden in the depths of the waters. Stories of frogs that would glow-in-the-dark throughout the forest that was close to the laboratories. There have been more recent stories about the construction of new businesses that were halted due to the excavation of toxic burial grounds. The recent newspaper headlines about the delivery trucks that fluid release valves were not tightened properly and leaked toxic fluids onto the roads dissolving the pavement. I did not know then and am still not certain which stories were true and which ones were fictions.

The workers in Oak Ridge were sworn to secrecy during and after their work in the laboratories. Only speculations exist as to what actually happened and continues to happen in the classified areas. The facilities are currently known as Oak Ridge National Laboratories and provide grounds for extensive research in multiple areas for the advancing of technologies. The laboratories are still restricted and heavily guarded in

2005. The various stories have always been fascinating to me, yet concerns about what mysterious activity might be going on over the mountain and in the hidden valley's secret areas of Oak Ridges exist to this day.

Introductory Ideas Emerging From My Surroundings: Norris, Tennessee

The precursor to the atomic energy producing secret city of Oak Ridge was the Tennessee Valley Authority's town of Norris, Tennessee. This town was built in 1933 in order to construct a large electricity-producing dam. Construction on the dam began that same year, which was the first of several dams to be erected on the path of the Clinch River. The inhabitants living around the banks of the Clinch River, just like the peoples occupying the rural area in Oak Ridge, were forced to relocate from their homes and farms. The Tennessee Valley Authority, which had only been in existence for a few months before the start of the construction, had a plan to block the Clinch River with a dam that would in turn flood this area known as the Norris Basin. Norris Dam was originally designed to produce more than enough electricity, with its two hydroelectric generators, to supply the demand that was needed to produce explosives for the war effort, but World War I had ended before the facilities could be used. (This powerful source of electricity was later sought after during the rush to research and harness atomic energy by the government's secret city of Oak Ridge, Tennessee in 1942.)

The Tennessee Valley Authority had also strategized for the inhabitants of the Norris Basin to move to a preplanned site that was to become the community of Norris, Tennessee. This community also served as temporary housing for the workers who came to build the dam. The town of Norris "was originally intended to be a showcase for rural electrification, decentralized industry, and town planning. In this way it was similar to other planned communities of the New Deal. Many thought that the town would be an ideal home for the displaced rural people of the Norris Basin." (Brimberg 2003) Author Morgan, an original founder of Norris, was interested in

community planning and imagined an “independent, self-sustaining community of citizens involved in small cooperative industries.” (Brimberg 2003) Some of the earliest cooperative businesses in the town were canneries, creameries, and those that raised poultry. A public school was built in the center of the community that provided classes for children and adults of the town and also for the farming families in the surrounding communities.

Morgan had good intentions, but “living in Norris was often like living in a company town. The Tennessee Valley Authority operated practically everything in Norris, including the town’s auto repair shop and cafeteria. Even the town’s gasoline station was owned and operated by TVA.” (Brimberg 2003) The utopian ideas embedded in the planning of a thriving, self-sustaining community located in Norris, Tennessee seemed to be hindered by the ever present control of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The dam was completed in 1936 and the reservoir was completely filled in early 1937. Most of workers who built the dam left Norris. Some of the contractors who worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority and professionals in the closest city, Knoxville, Tennessee, saw the town as an attractive alternative to city living. The planned community of Norris gradually turned into a white-collar suburb of Knoxville over the next few years. As the population became more affluent, and traveling to jobs located outside of Norris became more readily available, the cooperative groups and many of the community-sponsored activities disappeared. In 1948 the federal government sold the town to a private corporation. This private corporation then resold the individual lots to the residents of Norris.

Introductory Ideas Emerging From My Surroundings: The Construction Industry

My background in the industry of construction, specifically the trade of plumbing, activated my interest in diagrams, schematics, maps and mechanical drawings. My father is a self-employed plumbing contractor that concentrates his business in the new construction of custom homes. Through his plumbing experience, I was introduced to blueprints, diagrams and the skeletal structure of architecture from a young age. My father would let me tag along as a child when he went to work. I would try to assist him, but most of the time my mind was entertained with the wonderment of the complexity of lines and forms on the various job sites.

I would see the raw materials in the plumbing trade- copper, PVC, and cPVC conduits- go from their beginning stages when picked up at the warehouse to a completed path inside a home. I would observe how these conduits would bring the water into a structure, take it out and all the twists and turns in between.

As I got older I began to work in the construction business with my father, usually as a temporary job when I was on summer vacation from school. Working first hand with the materials that were fascinating to me when I was younger, I began to realize how plumbing systems really worked. After understanding how these systems worked the metaphors started to expand the rationality of my art works. By discovering that

abstraction is “not confined to high-art practice but rather extend to all aspects of our culture” and is found no less in common place forms, I saw that the copper and PVC conduits used in the homes and businesses created linear paths meandering throughout the rooms and spaces within the structures. (Halley 28) The plumbing replaced the natural rains, lakes, and ponds once used for the same purposes. Peter Halley observed this by stating that, “We enter a world where technology becomes autonomous from nature, and our environment becomes predominately abstract, both visually and physically.” (Halley 31) The lines produced by the construction materials connect each room, or space, to one another like lines of communication. I began to relate these ideas of human interaction and communication in the construction materials to the abstracted linear formations in my drawings and paintings.

In retrospect, working with my father and being around blueprints and skeletal architectures, I activated the relationship of the structural lines of the construction environment to the linear and line quality in drawing, painting and picture making in general. As a painter, I seem to have formally translated this linear path of materials into a two-dimensional line and at times transforming these ideas into sculptural works.

Codes of Interaction

I dismantled my toys as a child, reconfiguring the pieces or combining them with other toys. A curiosity about the internal, skeletal structure of things and how they operate still exists to this day. My interest in diagrams, schematics, maps and mechanical drawings comes from my background in working construction. My father is a self-employed plumbing contractor that concentrates his business in the new construction of custom homes. I have been around blueprints and the skeletal structure of architecture from a young age.

My paintings and installations meld geometric abstraction with personal representation. The result is an idiosyncratic hybrid that evokes animation, imaginary scientific propositions, blueprints, maps, and advancing technologies. The work combines these interests with the prosaic interactions of my daily experience. Isolated events provide found compositions which I then begin to manipulate: a seemingly mundane bike ride gets mapped into a well-ordered schematic of social interaction.

Vision, perception, and looking are all abundantly present in the works. A palette of optically vibrant hues animates the elements of each painting. Provoking sight at the initial stage of perception in order to captivate the viewer. This abundance of color activates my invented systems and simultaneously undermines the perception of complex technologies as dry and esoteric. The works aim to depict an idea that is composed with the focus on internal structures and forms. They are based on general principles or theories rather than on specific instances. Line, shape, surface, color, shifts in scale, and

disjunctive perspectives emerge as a symbolic language that conveys the complexity of human experience.

My painting process examines and comments on a vision of reality. This vision reveals that reality is made up of systems that document how things operate. Maps, for example, are a symbolic and graphic display of a location and can communicate to a person how to navigate from one place to another within specific constraints. A schematic that displays the internal workings and components of an electronic device perform in a similar way. I make works that are statements, questions and explorations about how these symbolic languages are underlying the world as we experience it- coding our movements, actions and interactions.

Charts, diagrams, graphs, tables, instructions, directories, blueprints, guides, schematics, mechanical drawings and maps are comprised of an enormous accumulation of diverse types of information. These explanatory and symbolic drawings display this abundance of information in a variety of ways. In his book, *An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Michel Foucault speaks of this in terms of the conscious and unconscious realizations of orders in science and language. In his writing, he states that:

“The fundamental codes of culture- those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices- establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home. At the other extremity of thought, there are the scientific theories or philosophical interpretations which explain why order exists in general, what universal law it obeys, what principle can account for it, and why this particular order has been established and not some other.” (Foucault xx)

The recording of this information creates a coding system that describes and communicates through a series of graphics and symbols how our lives, and everything we

encounter, function. I believe that within this information lies the coding of our contemporary landscape.

I perceive the contemporary landscape to be a very conflicted and fragmented space. We have to question what is real space and determine what is virtual or cyber space. Families sprawl out suburbia stopping urban growth. Virtual and cyber culture experiences replace traditional interactions and communications. We have to constantly question what is authentic. Globalization is eroding cultural divisions and territorial boundaries slowly dissolve. There is a vibrating tension between what is natural and what is artificial, what is reality and what is imagination.

Each day people seem to be more and more unaware of what events can actually occur and which events are fictioned by movies and video games. Each experience is mediated through mass amounts of filters to appeal to our commodity culture. This compounds my view of television and internet entertainment as a collective pop conscious that determines behaviors, interests and –for the most part- the lives of most people. My work focuses on how individuals, mainly myself, navigate through this confusing landscape.

Personal histories are intertwined with current activities and can interact with and extend the language of abstraction. I use a myriad of sources and heterogeneity of influences in my studio practice. The incorporation of separate systems or different representations of ideas, into the same space exists in the art world as collage and has been utilized since Synthetic Cubism and Dadaism. The interpretation associated within the reading of these artworks, more so in relation to the free collage of Synthetic Cubism, is directive, yet there is no completely analogous resolution that the viewer comes away with every time.

I make reference to multiple trades and technologies, sometimes authentic and sometimes fictional, to interpret the world. My belief is that art making either springs from an urge to image, or is a reaction to, the places, spaces and objects we encounter throughout our daily experiences. I find that art is not separate from life, or life that separate from one's imagination. Josef Albers states that, "Art is the sphere which reflects all questions of life- not only formal problems such as proportion and equilibrium, but also particularly intellectual and psychic aspects of philosophy and religion, as well as sociology or economy. And therefore art is an important, inestimable educational factor." (Spies 4)

I find the prosaic day-to-day endlessly fascinating, at most times unexpectedly so, especially when the initiating subject or subjects seem to be humble and ordinary, but change into a rich source and examination of identity. Everyday encounters can turn into surrealities and idiosyncratic myths that create make-believe worlds. I question the significance of ordinary actions. Ordinary actions and events create our individual identities. The postmodern, pluralistic culture in which we now live confuses me, yet clarifies the connections between the insignificant and the significant. The boundaries surrounding what is important and what is not are blurred.

By taking into consideration the undercoding, or mapping of social interaction, I observe and question the set rules and boundaries of culture. The blueprint of a building exists to determine and control the navigation of individuals through a space, just as mystics believe that astrology determines personality or compatibility and the Chinese Calendar accompanies text that plans the positive and negative paths for one's life. I'm not saying that I believe in predestination, I am just fascinated by the coexistence of these

undercurrents and undercodes that exist to map, or seem to map, personal histories, current interactions and futures.

An internal logic begins to emerge as elements inside the paintings are constructed in relationship to the edge of the canvas. Though a series of sketches, the original schematic gets lost, camouflaged, as my additions compound and grow. Some at random, while others are planned through a series of thumbnail sketches. Discordant hues scintillate, vibrating to animate elements and making bordering colors interact. It is known that “in visual perception a color is almost never seen as that which it actually is, i.e. as that which it is physically... (i)n order to use color successfully, one must recognize that color deceives constantly.” (Spies 38)

The starting point for my painting *Guaranteed, But...* was to use elements referring to a type of autobiographical portrait, or abstract self portrait, yet become a more ambiguous exploration on the dissolving boundaries creating a tension between what is natural versus artificial and what is reality versus imagination. I began the painting by researching when and where I was born; I considered this as the initial stage of my presence in the world. By organizing factual, assumed and mystical types of information, I comprised a list of usable items from which to investigate further. I chose imagery from the shape of the county I was born, astrological and astronomical star charts, my birthstone color and my high school's athletic team colors to combine within the painting. Starting with a muted green rectangle, a large expanse of color referring to my minimal, color-field aesthetic, I wanted the hue to dominate the ground and feel as important as the rest of the elements. This muted green was paired with a kelly-green

glitter as a reference to Peridot, my birthstone. This large mass of kelly-green glitter borders the solid tan-yellow shape of Anderson County, my birthplace. The county shape's color optically scintillates, or vibrates against the muted green. The cone shapes are from my high school's colors and are located to the right of the county. These shapes originated from maps as faux perspective triangles that are used to direct one's eye back to the place on the map were an enlarged detail section fit into the overall composition. Located above these shapes is a linear depiction of Leo from star charts for my birth date in August. The stars are connected like a child's connect-the-dots game and appear to be referencing Lascaux cave drawings of a horse more than the actual lion. These blurred areas become very interesting and are what I wanted in the painting. To be more ambiguous than a literal portrait, yet be constructed from specific elements associated with my identity and to create a broken narrative that completes in a myriad of ways.

The elements inside the rectangle are broad and simple and correspond closely to the rectangle at times, and at times compounding, confusing and disrupting the ground, yet the rectangle remains. Perpendicular and parallel shapes, forms and linear elements describe the space inside the boundaries of the support. The compositions react to the edges and the rectangle becomes unified, but the overall shape of the support is not stressed; the parts of the whole are more important, and the relationships of color and form occur among them. In the paintings of Pollock, Rothko, Still, Newman, Reinhardt, Noland and Halley the rectangle is emphasized. I emphasize the rectangle in a similar way by starting on a solid, single colored ground. Establishing the rectangle as a definite form: it is no longer a fairly neutral limit.

Conclusion

“Let us, then, try to define the distinction between subject matter or meaning on the one hand, and form on the other.

“When an acquaintance greets me on the street by removing his hat, what I see from a formal point of view is nothing but the change of certain details within a configuration that forms part of the general pattern of color, lines and volumes which constitutes my world of vision. When I identify, as I automatically do, this as an event (hat removing), I have already overstepped the limits of purely formal perceptions and entered a first sphere of subject matter or meaning...we shall call...the factual meaning.”

-ERWIN PANOFSKY, *Studies in Iconology*, 1939 (Panofsky 3)

I paint what I know, what perplexes me, what I understand and what I don't. For me, it's my world and myself including everything that occurs within this world. I begin a painting by examining my surroundings. Isolating the prosaic events of daily life appeals to me, and that is where I begin to compose each painting.



Figure 1: Guaranteed, But...

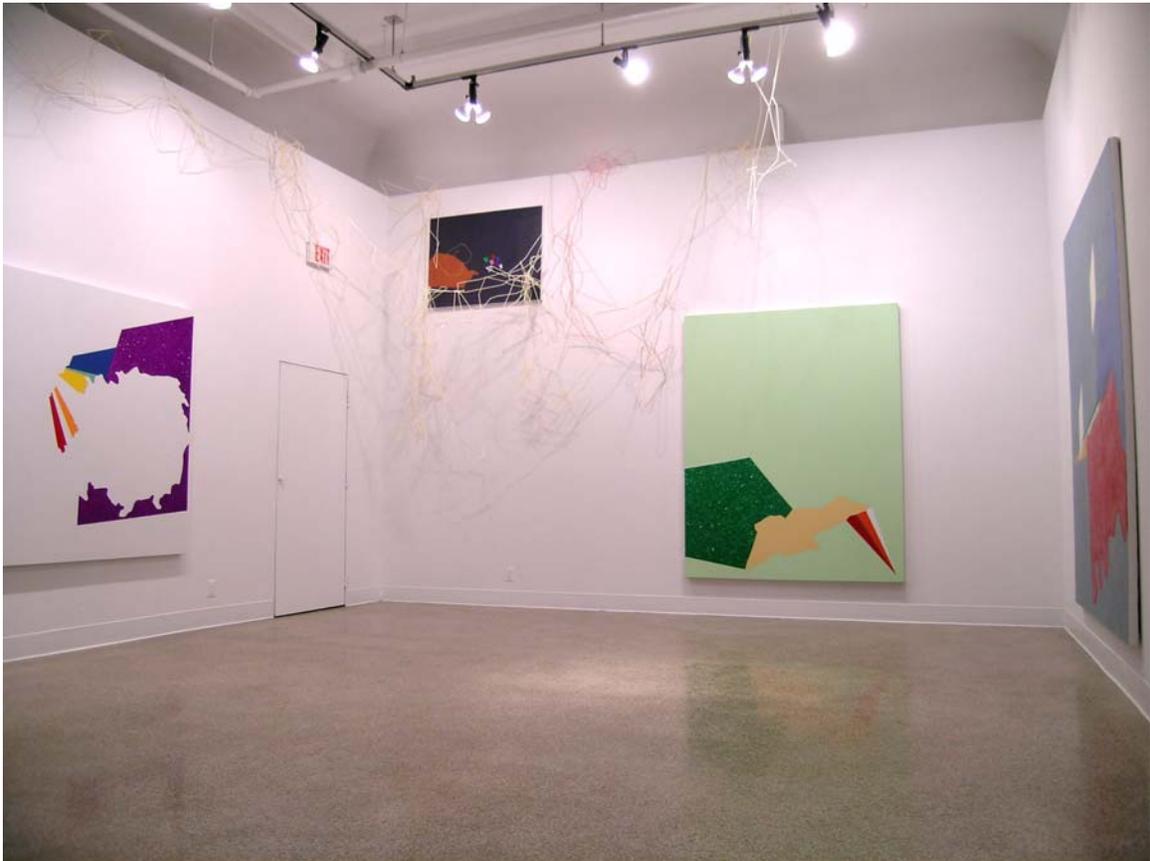


Figure 2: MFA Thesis Exhibition, Installation View



Figure 3: MFA Thesis Exhibition, Installation View: Left Wall



Figure 4: MFA Thesis Exhibition, Installation View: Center Wall



Figure 5: MFA Thesis Exhibition, Installation View: Right Wall

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Vita

Timothy Michael Martin was born in Oak Ridge, Tennessee on August 2, 1978. Upon graduating from Clinton High School in 1996, he attended Pellissippi State Technical Community College between 1996 and 1998. He studied Fine Arts, Art History and Communication Graphics Technology while attending Pellissippi State Technical Community College. After making a commitment to further his education in the Fine Arts he transferred to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, School of Art where, in 2002, he completed a Bachelor's degree with Cum Laude Honors in Fine Arts with a concentration in painting and drawing.

In 2003 he was accepted into the Master of Fine Art program at Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Art, Painting and Printmaking Department. In May 2005 he completed the Master of Fine Art degree with a concentration in painting. While obtaining his Master of Fine Art degree he was a teaching assistant for Professor Reni Gower's Basic Painting courses and during the fall semester of 2004 he taught Basic Painting as an Adjunct Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Mr. Martin was a Dedalus Foundation Master of Fine Arts Fellowship Nominee and a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant Nominee both nominations made by the Painting and Printmaking faculty. During his enrollment at Virginia Commonwealth University Timothy Michael Martin had also shown works in exhibitions in Richmond, VA, Atlanta, GA, Valencia, CA and Brooklyn, NY as well as having his works published in *New American Paintings (Mid-Atlantic Region, #51)* a juried exhibition-in-print with an international release.

Timothy Michael Martin

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E d u c a t i o n

- 2005 MFA, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2002 BFA, Cum Laude, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

S o l o / T w o P e r s o n E x h i b i t i o n s

- 2006 "T. M. Martin New Works," Krause Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- 2005 "Codes of Interaction," MFA Thesis Exhibition, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA
"New American Painters," ADA Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2004 "Color Theory," ADA Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2003 "Schematic Relations," FBJ, Knoxville, TN
- 2002 "Mitch and Mike Collaborative Installation," Gallery 1010, Knoxville, TN

S e l e c t G r o u p E x h i b i t i o n s

- 2005 "Strictly Painting V," McLean Project For The Arts, Juried by Jonathan Binstick, McLean, VA
"Combined Talents," FSU Museum of Fine Arts, Tallahassee, FL
"Double Chin," Stefan Stux Gallery, New York, NY
"12 by 12," ADA Gallery, Richmond, VA
"Gallery Artist's Portraits," Krause Gallery, Atlanta, GA
"Sweet Substitute," Stephenson Blanche Gallery, Valencia, CA
"Open Studios," Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2004 "Rack Room," ADA Gallery, Richmond, VA
"Studio Art," Krause Gallery, Atlanta, GA
"Top Shelf," The Barrel Factory, Curated by Lisa Schroeder, Richmond, VA
"November Reign," Locker 50B Gallery, Richmond, VA
"Grand Opening Group Exhibition," Krause Gallery, Atlanta, GA
"The Apollonian Style," Bruno Marina Gallery, Curated by Joe Fyfe, Brooklyn, NY
"Candid," Plant Zero, Richmond, VA
"S.F.A. Exhibition," Anderson Gallery, Juried by Ashley Kistler, Richmond, VA
"New American Paintings Juried Exhibition-in-Print Vol. 51," Mid-Atlantic Region
"Casserole," Art Works, Curated by Ray Kass, Richmond, VA
"Curb Your Enthusiasm," ADA Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2003 "LEMONS," FAB Gallery, Curated by Kristin Beal, Richmond, VA
"Open Studios," Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2002 "Senior Honors Exhibition," Ewing Gallery, Knoxville, TN
"UTK Senior Painting," Atrium, Knoxville, TN
- 2000 "The Collaborative Drawing Project," Gallery 1010,
Hosted by Artist-in-Residence Elisabeth Condon, Knoxville, TN
- 1998-96 "Rotunda," J.L. Goins Building, PSTCC, Knoxville, TN

Professional Experience

- 2005 Artist-in-Residence, ARTCROFT Residency Program, Carlisle, KY
- 2005-04 Teaching Assistant, Reni Gower, Basic Painting, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2005-03 Graduate Artist Association, Member, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2004 Adjunct Professor, Basic Painting, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2003 Teaching Assistant, Ron Johnson, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2002-01 The Artist Group, Member, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

Awards/Grants

- 2005 Joan Mitchell Foundation Master of Fine Arts Grant Nominee
Deborah S. Ferguson Memorial Fund Scholarship
- 2005-03 Teaching Assistantship, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 2005-03 Commonwealth Art Award, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 2004 Dedalus Foundation Master of Fine Arts Fellowship Nominee
Adjunct Teaching, Virginia Commonwealth University
Graduate School Thesis Assistantship Nominee, Virginia Commonwealth University
Travel Grant for the Arts, Brooklyn, NY, Virginia Commonwealth University
Travel Grant for the Arts, Atlanta, GA, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 2003 Art Scholarship, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 2002 Graduated with Cum Laude Honors, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Senior Painting Atrium Show Award, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Student Show Award, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
- 2002-01 Materials Award, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Collections

- Capital One, Inc. Richmond, VA
- School of Engineering, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- Waite, Private Collection
- DeFord, Private Collection
- Ewing Gallery, Knoxville, TN

Bibliography

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MFA Thesis Show Catalogue, essay written by Eleanor Heartney, Anderson Gallery, May 2005
- 2004 *Style Weekly*, p.39 May 19, 2004, Richmond, VA
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