INTERDISCIPLINARY VISUAL ARTS
Si "Miffy" Shen introduces the Interdisciplinary Visual Arts Honors and Juried Exhibition.

The annual IVA program exhibition in the Jacob Lawrence Gallery showcases work by the four graduating Honors track students and juried artwork by nine students who were selected from an open call. Kemi Adeyemi, Assistant Professor of Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies, was the special guest juror of this year’s show.

“What is IVA?”

To be honest, if someone asks me this question, I need time to figure out the answer. The official statement of IVA is “the Interdisciplinary Visual Arts (IVA) program develops skills and knowledge in the visual arts through completion of selected courses in studio art (ceramics, glass, painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, installation, and photography), art history, and related experiential courses.”

For me, IVA seems more like an opportunity for students to explore their interests in different forms of visual arts and to prepare for their future career in art-related fields. But I still have difficulty explaining it clearly. In the words of art historian, Suzanne Beal, “Visual art is often more expansive than the words that try to contain it.” In a few words, IVA helps students to become interdisciplinary thinkers and makers who will shape the future of creative practice. Moreover, as an IVA student, I do not only learn the skills from various courses, but also gain the ability to observe my surroundings and consider ideas in a more creative way.

For example, when I was in a drawing class, I developed a habit to take more notice of light and shade contrast while observing objects or scenery. Now when I see a tree, I see the movement from the lightest to the darkest part. In addition, when I studied fabric-dying and printmaking, I was surprised by a blue dye and its variations in color that were very beautiful. I had seen this type of artwork before but, in this class, I realized that I could make it too. This moment refreshed my mind and I noticed that I could become the art maker. Through the various experiences that the interdisciplinary program offers, I came to understand that art can be made in many mediums, in many forms, and connects to every aspect of our daily life.

Besides traditional forms of art such as print and sculpture, the juried portion of the show also includes various mediums and artworks involved with technology, installations, participatory and performance works, an interview-styled video, a digital collage, and virtual reality. Jessica Capó’s performance of cutting paper and WanNa Huang’s felted wool both indicate the artist’s engagement with the making process through the hours of repetitive labor invested in the resulting piece. Lauren Sifferman’s meticulous wood sculpture also shows the artist’s attention to her medium.
Many artists bring up questions of identity in their work. Huiqing Wang’s Marionette is poised in a state of suspension. Huang’s wearable sculpture *Ba-na-na* explores her alter-egos in a playful and humorous way, while Amy Hsuan Chiu’s fabric design about cells refers more to a biological view of what we are made of. The video by Isaiah Khan draws inspiration from current social issues related to discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, or identity. Ji Huang uses the most recent technology, virtual reality, as a “direct comment on artist’s role throughout human history to overtake the power of god through the power of representation.”

While Vivian Chuang’s collage takes us back to an older version of the desktop computer, Jennifer LaScala’s monoprint is actually made by a technology that existed before computers for the distribution of visual and textual information.

I invite you to explore the artworks in the show with an openness similar to how all of us, interdisciplinary art students, explore the various possibilities of form and meaning, develop craft through practice, and engage with a wide range of ideas that matter in the present and will continue to matter in the future.
WanNa Huang
*Ba-na-na*
Felted Wool
Lauren Sifferman
Size 150 Knitting
Pine Wood
Isaiah Khan

*Interview of Tomorrow*

Video
Ji huang, Grant Shogren

I’m virtually a big deal
Virtual Reality
Vivian Chuang
*Computer Dad*
Handcut Collage,
Digital Post-Process
Huiqing Wang
*Marionette*
Ceramics

Jennifer LaScala
*Relinquished*
Monoprint
Welcome to Yi-Chun Sun’s world. Yi-Chun Sun is an artist from Taipei, Taiwan who values cultural differences, natural resources, historical influences, and social perspectives. She is keenly aware of her identity as she begins her adventure in self-exploration, while also paying attention to international politics. With a background and living experience in both the United States and Taiwan, Yi-Chun Sun faces a national identity crisis as well as a cultural conflict within herself. As an artist and a person, she empathizes with painful events in history and she is passionate about how society changes over time.

Sun challenges herself to work with different mediums like rice paper and steel wire. The tree project, *Shared Origin*, includes both. Sun did the research on the wraps and demonstrates the flexibility of the rice paper in her art. The rice paper (春捲皮) is commonly known as the spring roll wrap. The origin of the spring roll is from the Eastern Zhou Period (770–255 BC) and it has always been an important dish for family gatherings. It has a unique texture as it hardens and holds its shape when it dries. In addition, the wrap is made of flour, water, and salt. Therefore, the paper is edible when it gets wet with water. The choice of this medium is influenced by the artist’s own culture, study of history, and knowledge of Chinese Han tradition.

When asked where her inspiration for the tree project comes from, she gladly tells her stories of driving to the beach alone. In the time she spent by herself in nature, she felt the connection between nature and human beings. Not only did Sun collect small pieces of driftwood and charred wood from the beach, but she also captured these in her mind and brought the visual memories back to her studio. Then, she put the elements of nature into her tree projects, sharing her thoughts with more audiences.

“Each one of us is like the floating wood, coming from the same branch of tree,” Sun said to me during one of our conversations. “The woods were once grown on a tree and now they’re by themselves, going to different directions.” Sun sees the connection between the trees and every individual. Perhaps the wood that is made of rice paper symbolizes the potential within each of us, changing our state when facing different situations.

Sun’s artworks are not just objects, they are also serene experiences. The size of her tree is large enough for a person to fit inside. This allows each viewer to reflect on themselves, reminding one how essential nature is to life.
Sun’s second piece of the show is a self-portrait. This work, built from layers of transparent foil that have been embroidered with words in both Chinese and English, records political events, names of specific places in Taiwan, and Chinese characters written to evoke her memories and her association with history. The relationship between China and Taiwan is often a sensitive issue, causing pain historically and in the present. As a global citizen, Sun does not look at the world from one perspective, but has a holistic view which the audiences can enter into.

The self-portrait is a record for Yi-Chun Sun. The upper part includes her perception of the past including the word, “white terror” a suppression of political dissidents from 1949 to 1987 in Taiwan. The lower part is her view on the current state of the time she lives in, including the words “international” and her last name “Sun.”

Through different layers of the work, Sun’s self-portrait emphasizes the importance of seeing one record through multiple perspectives. There is always more than what appears on the surface. Sun invites the viewers to see her work from various angles. Through her work, one can resonate with the other through the layered building of history and realize that all of us are human beings who experience pain and memories. In the end, we are similar yet different through historical temporalities.

Yi-Chun Sun
Shared Origin
Rice paper, chiffon, wood, and video projection
Andrea Buenbrazo in response to Naveen Khan

How is a person shaped?

We are influenced by our experiences, the people around us, and the images we see. Can something as simple as the words we read or hear change us?

Naveen Khan’s installation explores the impact of words. Khan was born in the second most populous city of Pakistan, Lahore. She is a Seattle based artist, working with mixed media. Khan enjoys creating spaces in which people can experience her artwork. Rather than taking pictures of her work, she wants each person to take away with them the memory of his or her interaction with the piece. Her previous artworks illustrate this sentiment; Khan’s pieces transform the space into an area where her audience can momentarily explore an environment and culture new to them. Khan shows the audience Pakistan, a country which gained its independence from Britain in 1947. However, the country needed time to build its own identity. The Pakistan Movement occurred during the 1940’s. It was a time in which many leaders in various fields of work shaped the outlook of Pakistan’s society and its views of itself as an independent nation and culture. Her recreation of one of the most traditional means of transportation in Lahore, the rickshaw, invites the audience to step inside. It emulates two ways to experience a drive or ride through Pakistan’s streets and history: as a driver or as a passenger.

Khan’s current piece uses verses from Allama Iqbal’s poetry to create a lived experience for her viewer. Muhammed Iqbal, remembered as one of the inspiring leaders of the Pakistan Movement, was a poet, philosopher and politician. He was one of the great minds which helped push this movement forward, later being called Allama, meaning intellectual. His verses reached out to the people of Pakistan in order to elevate their feelings of self-worth and encouraged them to be proud of where they came from. His teachings became the foundation that the spirit of the Pakistan Movement was built on.

Khan uses Iqbal’s words beginning from the wall as colorful writing and has them emerge into three-dimensional space, forming a kaleidoscope room, allowing audiences to explore. The expression of oneself can create a contagious energy. Khan’s work highlights the power of positive words which can have a liberating effect on a person and encourages them to seek out themselves and find truth. One line Khan uses from Allama Iqbal’s poetry translates to—

“When you sing, the spirit of the falcon will arise / Find the highest perching spot”

This verse was a call to action to the people of Pakistan to express themselves and stand proud of the culture which they exemplify. In a nod back to the celebration of her culture, which is present in Allama Iqbal’s poetry, Khan adheres strictly to the tradition of which Urdu is written in. She has selected fonts that follow specific dimensions for each letter in a word. In this, she celebrates the artistry of her written language as well as pays respect to its roots in using text that follows the rule of writing.

Naveen Khan
The Eastern Feminists
Photographs, marker
Khan’s piece is reminiscent of Shirin Neshat’s black and white photograph series, The Book of Kings, which presents portraits of various individuals with poetry. Both Khan’s work and Neshat’s work explore ideas of how words shape a person’s identity and heart. Neshat’s piece gives each person a character to play based on which part of the story is written on them. However, rather than explicitly assigning an identity for the people within her work, Khan’s presentation differs by first boiling down the piece into only words. By not giving the words of poetry a face or image to connect to, this leaves the role of story and identity of the speaker more ambiguous and to be imagined by the viewer. In a sense, it draws Khan’s viewer to have a more intimate experience with the words from Allama Iqbal’s poetry. This presents her audience with the choice of how these words will then on affect who they are or what choices they make in life.

Naveen Khan
*Epistles from the East*
Acrylic sheets, ink, yupo paper, polycarbonate paper

Khan’s work holds an empowering message to be proud of one’s heritage regardless of ethnic origin or social class. The text’s bright colors reflect a joyous celebration, leaving the viewers to behold in a spectacle of the beauty of words.
McKinley Smith’s work screams America, but why?

Smith’s work borrows from the nuances of everyday machinery and architecture, the hardware and industrial aesthetic, to highlight a group in American society that is often forgotten and usually under appreciated—the blue-collar worker.

In just three metal-framed motorcycle prints and a wall of used shop rags, Smith is able to showcase the beauty of manual and skilled labor that we often take for granted since we see these items so often in our daily lives. Whether it’s the sewer grate next to the bus stop, the worn woodwork of your furniture, or the dusty old bike sitting in the garage, Smith wants us to notice the intricacies and time-consuming manner of their construction.

By showcasing the beauty of these handcrafted and worn objects, Smith’s work aims to disprove an increasingly common perception that blue-collar workers hold less value in society because they have not followed the pressures to pursue degrees in higher education. Smith himself has delved into the opposing spectrums of both blue-collar labor and upper education. Like our current political conversation which has highlighted the concerns of blue-collar workers, Smith’s art shines a spotlight on their value.

Over the past few decades, American society has devalued hard, physical labor in exchange for expensive university degrees. By placing art crafted through this same hard labor within a university gallery space, Smith’s work creates a unique paradox. What happens when these two worlds collide? It seems as though we are able to see a conflict in the artist’s own eyes.

For Smith, an interest in art and handiwork emerged out of a curiosity with his last name. A twelve-year-old Smith, emboldened by his metalworking title, ambitiously began experimenting with pewter casting, creating his own coins. Years later, he landed a job performing fabrication for the U.S. Air Force, where he was able to learn extensive welding and machining techniques.

Smith’s history is rich in both creativity and the hard labor of a blue-collar worker, yet he finds himself studying at a university. As a student and a former tradesman, Smith has frustrations with both roles. His time working for the Air Force created a deep connection with the blue-collar worker, but he wasn’t able to gain the regard or opportunities that a university graduate would hold. Now, he is a student who has gained valuable artistic skills, a respectable degree, and the supposed opportunities that go along with one, but he is bogged down by loans and the stress of finding a career in our current economic climate. So which title is better?
There might not be a clear answer to that, but recently, there has been a political uprising spurred by the unrest of the forgotten blue-collar worker. In a way, Smith’s art can be seen as an analogy for this unexpected shift in power and the political struggle that has come as a result. Smith’s title has shifted from the blue-collar worker to the university intellectual and much like the two opposing political factions that dominate our country, there exists two separate worlds in Smith’s art—the homage to industrial aesthetics and processes versus the underlying presence of university opportunities. Just like in today’s political climate, in Smith’s art, the blue-collar worker has gained the greatest voice. His three industrial monoprints and gritty rags hang on the clean walls of a university gallery space. The artwork is the center of everyone’s attention.

It demands conversation.

McKinley Smith
_Twin Tryptic // CB 360_
Charcoal, Graphite,
Monotype, Paper Lithography and
Paint on Paper and Aluminum.

McKinley Smith
_Skill // No Skill_
Soiled Shop Rags
and Nails
Holliday has a specific interest in window display and designs that involve viewer’s interaction. Her experience as a designer of store installations for companies like Anthropologie inspired her two pieces for this exhibition. Her projects are mostly focused on creating a visual illusion and on the relationship between positive and negative space. In her pieces for the show, Holliday extends the idea of the visual display to open up a possibility for viewers to interact. The first one, a two-dimensional piece on the wall made of transparent plastic sheets with black stripes, is activated by the viewer. The base of this has multiple cut-out sheets in geometric shapes in different orientations that overlap each other. When the viewer moves the top layer, the changing pattern of intersecting lines creates a sense of movement. One can also see new shapes when the stripes overlap horizontally, vertically, and diagonally. This piece, Slide, recalls Op Art—Optical Art, an art style that uses optical illusion to represent the three-dimensional world onto a two-dimensional surface. Artists of the Op Art movement (1965–1970) discovered a new way to utilize color theory and the theory of visual perception to challenge our visual sensation with a system of illusion that creates an impression of space, of depth and of movement. Op Art was greatly influenced by the Bauhaus with its study of geometric forms and kinetic art. The way Holliday uses repetition of pattern and line, in high contrast black and white, is similar to Op Artists creating the illusion of movement. It is a non-representational piece due to its geometrically-based nature. In terms of the optical effects, these works refer to the physiological and psychological process of vision, the study of the interaction between the eye and the brain to perceive color, depth, perspective, and motion. Holliday’s work is generated between how the eye’s retina sees patterns and how the brain interprets patterns.

Her Little Boxes, also suggests the idea of confusion between positive and negative space caused by a repetitive three-dimensional pattern. Strong visual stimuli can sometimes cause confusion between these two organs, therefore creating the perception of irrational optical phenomena. With her Op Art and the Bauhaus influences, Holliday focuses on geometric patterns and simplicity of abstraction.

In contrast to black and white lines, Seattle is a colorful and playful piece. It is made of my favorite candies as well—gummy bears! The real, edible Gummy Bears! This piece is a large-scale installation hanging from the ceiling. Each string holds multiple gummy bears in a color-coordinated sequence—all the strings with various lengths together creates a unique space. Holliday’s idea is to generate a space in the center surrounded by longer strings; the center space is meant for viewers to walk in. Walking into the installation welcomes me with the strong smell of candies, raising my appetite and bringing the sense of sweetness. Using food as the subject and an art material is unexpected; I would immediately want to have a closer look at what it does and how it works since food as art attracts attention visually and intrigues conceptually. It also makes me wonder how the artist would solve the problem of the ephemerality of food. There are artists such as Kara Walker who used sugar in her installation The Marvelous Sugar Baby or Janine Antoni, who did sculptures with ephemeral materials like chocolate.
and soap that eventually got eaten and washed off by her. As time passes, sugar begins to melt and distort the original work because it is not permanent. It might be the artist’s intention to use food as a symbol of a changeable subject. There are also many artists that make faux food for its appearance and permanency. Gummy Bear is a brand name that serves a representational purpose among candies. The colorfulness of this candy draws me to memories of joyful childhood days, full of happiness when receiving such sweet treats.

One of the most important things for being an artist is to learn the nature of materials through the process of art making. For instance, the difficulty of attaching the candy to the string led Holliday to invent new solutions in her work such as to melt the candies first then allows them to harden on the attached string. Holliday highly values finding new solutions through art making. Artist Frank Auerbach also valued the process itself as the most interesting part of art. He is the master of exploring possibilities of art materials like oil paint. Auerbach makes a painting one day then comes back the next day to scrape off the paint. He takes off and applies more paint over and over, day after day, experimenting with new outcomes, inventorying change. He also does painting plein air at the same spot everyday repeatedly with a different color palette.

To redo an artwork does not necessarily mean that it will get better. It might get worse. But the purpose is the exploration and experimentation of what can happen to the material; we never know the result unless we put it in practice. Just as Holliday herself does in her art pieces, in which she learns by making and interpreting art, I think that exploring any unexpected outcomes and possibilities will enrich our own understanding of the world.
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