

SURFACE SUBLIME

February 3-March 5, 2006

Stephen HOUGH

Carianne MACK

Gregg PERKINS

Rick PFLIEGER

Yumi Janairo ROTH

Stan SHELLABARGER

Opening reception: February 3, 6:00-9:00 pm

Gallery talk with guest curator Nicholas Frank begins at 6:30 pm

Inova Gallery One

Vogel Hall, 3253 N. Downer Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211

Hours: Wednesday-Sunday, 12 noon-5 pm

arts.uwm.edu/inova

THE PAGES OF A BOOK CAN'T SEE THEIR COVER by Nicholas Frank

Language is in a constant process of evolution. The meanings of words shift and change over time, sometimes even coming to mean their opposites. To William Blake, the word "awesome" would have meant something far different from "way cool, dude." Likewise, the word "terrible" was once employed not for headaches but to describe tyrants who would end the lives of thousands without a pang of conscience. We've come to rely on modifiers to make what was once simply "despicable" truly despicable. With the diffusion and dilution of these meanings, we have lost the ability to adequately describe the truly incredible, the deeply disturbing, and the utterly sublime experiences of our times.

As a medium of expression, art has suffered a similar fate. Paintings once depicted the awesome power of gods and ancient heroes, but today the far more visceral media of television and film work the wonder of making the unreal seem real. Images come at us rather than us to them: IMAX movies can churn the stomach nearly as effectively as a roller coaster. But more may be going on beneath the surface of quiet, still objects than people are able to see easily, accustomed as they are to vivid images of explosions, mass death, and the unknowable phenomena of the cosmos.

Rick Pflieger's small sculptures were once dismissed by an arts granting board as countless examples of basic industrial design. While these sculptures are resolute in their highly reflective, auto-paint clearcoated curves and angles, the grantors failed to consider why these pieces might have been so painstakingly constructed and finished by the artist. Sure, some artwork can be stubborn, but sometimes it must be in order to give the viewer enough of a pause for deeper considerations to kick in. The sculptures aren't clear. They aren't meant to be. But a patient and considerate viewer might notice something at least vaguely mandibular about them, their sizes and shapes conform to the curves and lines of the human head. The titles reveal an emotional content far removed from the calculated world of industrial design: these pieces are all made "For You" or "With You" or in "Appreciation of You;" the "You" in each case is someone we can only guess at but is obviously someone important to the artist. The emotion in Pflieger's art is not immediately visible in the surfaces of his works because people are their subject, and people are mysterious.

Like Pflieger's sculptures, Stephen Hough's plastic paintings present hard, shiny surfaces. Viewers are as likely to be drawn into illusionistic depths afforded by the carved ripples and "Chromalusion" auto paint as to be bothered by their own reflections in the glossy clearcoat. This relationship between reality and irrealty is deliberate. Hough's simulated sublime will not allow a viewer to rest with the notion that these are simple representations of natural phenomena; his light is cathode-ray artificial, and the bubbles on his surfaces will not break so easily as those fragile ones afloat on the surface of real water. Narcissus had a similar problem with his silvery-surfaced pond; he couldn't tell what part of love was real and what was imagined.

Both Yumi Janairo Roth and Stan Shellabarger see common daily experiences and repetitions as entryways into existential considerations. Roth's playful approach exaggerates commercial attempts to make the mundane meaningful, as in her "Livingware" floor sculpture of 2001, a compendium of large-scale reproductions of the floral designs on Corelleware dishes. The circular, dish-shaped arrangement of the pieces encloses only a vacuous feast; Shellabarger also examines the deeper meanings of the quotidian, but through the medium of his own body. His walking platforms record the faint traces of his steps,

sandpaper on his shoes to assist in wearing away the surface coats of acrylic paint. Underlayers are revealed gradually through the same kind of repetition anyone who walks performs daily, one foot in front of the other, to where, nobody knows.

Natural elements find their own way into the paintings of Carianne Mack and Gregg Perkins. Taken with phenomena such as frost patterns and tree shadows, Mack brings these images to the surfaces of her canvases. Some painters represent landscape, but Mack wants to see the nature in her paint. Perkins hangs panels in his studio and paints the angled blocks of sunlight that fall upon them at certain times of day. According to Perkins, the moment the panels are moved they are changed forever. The works lose their specific reference, but gain resonance as representations of universal time.

These solid, slick, stubborn surfaces belie complexities that lie beneath, layers of meaning not meant for words, or for easy examination. In the words of William Blake ("The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," 1790):

The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty,
the hands and feet Proportion.

But how complex is the head! The term "sublime" encompasses ideas that are beyond fathoming, eternal things, things too terrible, vast, abyssal, or cosmic in scale to be contemplated by our mere mortal brains. Humanity stands in awe at the wonders of nature, creates and examines Byzantine systems of exploration to make sense of life in the individual, sense and in our billions. Likewise, the word "subliminal" refers to things at work beneath the surface of the mind, which has no literal, material surface. The hard, shiny, thick and mirror-like surfaces of the artwork in *Surface Sublime* offer a reflection of the person looking into them. What is seen there is a vision of the sublime; perhaps our inner lives are what is truly beyond comprehension.

About the Curator

An artist and writer, Nicholas Frank directed the Hermetic Gallery in Milwaukee from 1974 through 2001. Since then, he has curated shows independently for the Foster Gallery at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, the General Store and the Jody Monroe Gallery in Milwaukee and the Pond at the Stray Show in Chicago. Throughout, Frank has engaged artists and the public in dialogue, through workshops, critiques, symposia, lectures, art criticism, newsletter editing, forums, panel discussions and a radio show about visual art for Wisconsin Public Radio.

The Institute of Visual Arts

Since 1996, the Institute of Visual Arts (Inova) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has established an international reputation as a contemporary art research center. The mission of the Institute of Visual Arts is to engage the general and university publics with contemporary art from around the world through exhibitions and programs. The Institute is recognized for the high quality of its programs and for the opportunity it offers artists to experiment in the creation of new work.

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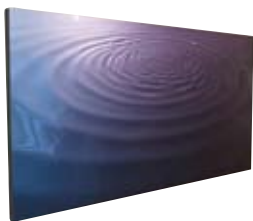
Stephen HOUGH

ARTIST STATEMENT

Using simulated water ripples as a stereotyped motif of serenity, cosmetized with the flawless glamour of car-paint, I meld the seductive mass-appeal of irreverent, generic tranquility with monochromatic tenets of absence and immateriality. Combining elements of Kant's Sublime (*the incomprehension of vastness*), with Baudrillard's Hyperreality (*the real goes through successive generations of simulation to be replaced by its own ideal model*), I blur formal-abstract ambiguities of excess/emptiness, solidity/vacuity and image/objecthood. I am investigating how contemporary myths of transcendence and intangibility relate to consumer fantasies that rely on spectacularly manipulated, referent-free imagery; how, for example, the awe of the IMAX movie Everest displaces the sublimity of an actual Himalayan trek. Since most of us have no original experience to compare to the simulation, it remains self-contained and removed from sublime-interconnectivity, becoming what Eco terms 'authentic fakeness.' My new work examines the postmodern kaleidoscope of delusion and authenticity within the context of a commodity-image saturated 'contemporary sublime.' By using insertions to denote the rabbit-hole qualities of consumerist delusion and to signify the emergence of the figure through the monochromatic picture plane, I substitute a quixotically tangible illusion of the infinite for Fontana's void-like 'slits.' Additionally I echo the LCD viewing panels of consumer electronics, which provide a portal from isolation into the limitless interconnectivity of Gilbert-Rolle's Techno-Sublime, "displacing the vacuity of the natural Sublime with the saturation of digital signals."

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Stephen Hough received a B.A. Honours from the Slade School of Fine Art in London in 1996. Since moving to the Milwaukee area his work has been shown in group exhibitions at Zg Gallery, Chicago; Kontainer Gallery, Los Angeles; the Illinois Institute of Art-Chicago; Dust Gallery, Las Vegas; Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, and Art Chicago. Solo exhibitions include Zg Gallery, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay, and Dust Gallery in Las Vegas. Hough received a Greater Milwaukee Foundation Mary L.Nohl Suitcase Export Award in 2004. Upcoming exhibitions include Art San Francisco, Art LA, Dust Gallery in Las Vegas, and the Armory Show in New York.



Steve Hough
Lexus Lotus (2005)



Gregg Perkins
Untitled study (2005)

Gregg PERKINS

ARTIST STATEMENT

The diagonal line paintings derive from a process of observing late afternoon sunlight entering the studio window and striking the surface of unpainted rectangular supports. I began painting the diagonal bands directly onto the supports in order to formalize this otherwise ephemeral and passing phenomenon within the studio. This process of observing and tracing the sunlit bands led me to consider the function of the diagonal by itself. The diagonals cut across, and project through, the gridded structure and system of the support, thereby transgressing both the horizontal and vertical axes of the painting. These diagonals are lines of flight and incursion through a system, converging and diverging within the literal and depicted space of the painting.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Gregg Perkins received his B.F.A. in philosophy in 1993 from the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He spent the following years playing in bands and making films in Minneapolis, returning to UW-Madison to receive his M.F.A. in 2002. Since moving to Chicago, he has co-founded thekit.org (2002) as well as *Coterie*, a broadsheet journal of art criticism (2003). Perkins teaches art at the University of Wisconsin and has exhibited nationally and internationally. His work has been included in Puerto Rico '02, San Juan, PR; Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, MN; the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, WI; and shown in Chicago at NFA Space, the Pond, Bodybuilder & Sportsman, the Suburban, and Western Exhibitions.

Yumi Janairo ROTH

ARTIST STATEMENT

For "Livingware," I appropriated a pattern found on Corelleware dishes. Small, avocado-colored daisies, pansies and ferns decorated the borders of an otherwise mundane, but extremely durable dish—a dish and design intended to add life to nourishing, if unimaginative, meals. Working as an artist-in-residence in the Kohler Arts/Industry factory, I cast, glazed and fired over 150 of the Corelleware flowers in vitreous china, the same material used to make bathroom fixtures.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Yumi Janairo Roth received her B.A. in anthropology from Tufts University and her B.F.A. from the School for the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. After a short stint teaching metalsmithing in Chicago, Roth received her M.F.A. in metals from the State University of New York at New Paltz. Before moving to Boulder to teach sculpture at the University of Colorado, Roth lived in Appleton, WI, a town known more for its cheese factories, local luminaries (Joe McCarthy and Harry Houdini) and paper mills than for its art scene. Roth made the most of her time in Appleton, where she was a professor at Lawrence University, shopping at Home Depot, Menards and the local thrift store for materials and ideas, and creating sculptural wall and floor works that combined construction-grade materials, discarded domestic objects, and fine craftsmanship. She has exhibited her work nationally and internationally, with exhibitions in Chicago, New York, Houston, San Francisco, Manila, Mexico City, and the Czech Republic. Roth explores the details of daily life that we have come to accept through routine living, and through this exploration of objects and materials, she hopes to reveal our complicity with and occasional longing for the everyday.



Yumi Janairo Roth
Livingware (2001)



Stan Shellabarger
Untitled Performance (Winter Solstice 2005)

SURFACE SUBLIME

February 3-March 5, 2006

Carianne MACK

ARTIST STATEMENT

A few years ago while drawing outside, shadows from a tree above me cast themselves onto my sketchbook. Tracing one of the forms started my investigation of the relationship between unpredictable, chaotic occurrences and deliberate ones: unplanned forms from the natural world with intentional marks of my hand. Since this initial collaboration I have been building images based on dynamic structures formed beyond my control or conscious decision: leaf shadow patterns, water reflections, and most recently, gravity-affected phenomena in pooled and poured paint.

Filices of frost on a windowpane, the Fibonacci sequence on the bottom of a celery stalk, ripples in a happenstance mound of laundry—my brushstrokes strive to arrive at the order of these intricate accidents through coexistence, camouflage, and mimicry. I think of my work as representational rather than abstract, and ultimately I'm interested in how meaning and metaphor arise through process.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Carianne Mack received a B.F.A. in painting and sculpture from Alfred University in 1998 and an M.F.A. in painting and drawing from the University of Iowa in 2002. She also studied at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica in Venice, Italy. Exhibitions include Lo River Arts Gallery in Beacon, NY; Los Medanos College in Pittsburg, CA; A.I.R. Gallery in NYC; Wendy Cooper Gallery in Madison, WI and an upcoming installation at ArtLab in the University of Memphis Museum of Art, Memphis, TN. Mack has taught at the Universities of Iowa, Northern Iowa, and Connecticut and currently teaches at Tunxis Community College in Farmington, CT.



Carianne Mack
Realizing the Delicate (2004)



Rick Pflieger
Appreciation of You (2001)

Rick PFLIEGER

ARTIST STATEMENT

My abstract sculptures objectify muscle sensations I feel in my face. I am interested in studying mood and emotion and I believe that these muscle sensations change with my mood. The sensation provides an abstract pattern or three-dimensional relationship that I then transform: I visualize the pattern as if it were a mass-produced plastic part, floating in space, and then I visualize a solid body to hold it.

The pieces look functional because I am interested in the identity of mass-produced objects. Things that are injection-molded or stamped or otherwise produced in mass quantities from molds and dies share some common features that result from the process itself. These features include rounded corners or drafted sides that allow things to pop from molds and dies; parting lines that remain when the molds separate; and the visible wall thickness of a part. Many mass-produced objects are symmetrical and have forms with large, regular flows. I think in terms of these features; the muscle sensation offers the pattern to organize them; and that pattern corresponds to the mood I am experiencing and want to examine.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rick Pflieger received a degree in sculpture from the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design in 1987. Since then, his work as an industrial designer has shaped his artwork, which has been displayed at MIAD (2001) and at the General Store in Milwaukee (2004). An early public sculpture of Pflieger's, installed upon his graduation, is still visible in the Menomonee Valley.

Stan SHELLABARGER

ARTIST STATEMENT

My process-oriented performance work focuses on physiological activities. In my performance pieces, I consider the residual visual marks of the process undertaken. Any activity leaves a minute mark that records discrete units of time and space which are then amplified by the repetitive nature of my work. The repetition of activity is necessary so that the extremely subtle marks left by these activities emerge as clearly visible artistic interventions. Recent works suggest that activities such as breathing and walking are processes that merit attention in themselves. The necessity of repetition leads me to continue my mark making to the limits of endurance. Despite their laborious process of transcription, the marks left by my performances are, like the body itself, ephemeral and transient in nature.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Stan Shellabarger, a Chicago-based performance, book and installation artist, received an M.F.A. from the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1996 and his B.F.A. from Illinois State University in Normal in 1991. In 1996 he received the Blockstein Emerging Artist Award from the Madison Art Center in conjunction with his inclusion in the Wisconsin Triennial exhibition. Shellabarger's shows and performances include walking performances in Chicago's Humboldt Park (2003, 2005); a crocheting performance with Dutes Miller at the Suburban as well as Art Chicago in the Park; an installation and breathing performance at Chicago's Suitable Gallery; and a performance and installation in "Here and Now," a survey of emerging Chicago artists at the Chicago Cultural Center in the fall of 2002. His solo show at Western Exhibitions in 2004 featured a survey of artist books and a performance. His most recent solo show was at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago as part of the *12 x 12 New Artists/New Work* series. As part of that show, Shellabarger completed his 2005 Solstice walking performances by walking in an 'X' shape from sunrise to sunset on December 21 in the MCA sculpture garden. Shellabarger currently resides in Chicago.