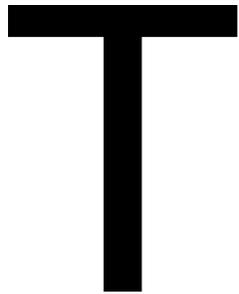


Mario Trejo

charged alchemy



he elegance of Mario Trejo's work emerges through the simplicity of the creative equation: one gesture to one mark, over

and over, until out of the void of bounded two-dimensional space a system emerges. The force that drives his mark making imperative is neither compulsion nor *horror vacui*, rather, it is

the ecstasy found in realizing the power of accumulation. The transference of energy from neuron to muscle to joint to tool to surface harnesses the moment of the mark's creation in a way that could be described as multi-dimensionally static. Though the marks themselves remain unmoving after the initial release of energy that jolts them into existence, their accumulation into masses evokes a charged field infused with the electricity of friction.

It is a power of both micro and macrocosmic proportions, and Trejo's rigorous vigor marries kinetic exertion with painstaking precision in a valiant and utterly human effort to

describe and attain an epic moment. The inevitable fallibility that is built in to this practice, of which the artist is fully aware, acknowledges the beauty of imperfection and the universal urge to make meaning from chaos. Thus, it is a vindication of the transformative power of the mortal hand in our age of mechanical and digital regimes of post-human exactitude. This is what drives the experientiality of the work, which opens itself to visual

**Trejo's
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precision**

interpretation without fear of scrutiny. There are few things in this world that reveal their origins and process in such a transparent way, and to view Trejo's

work is to renew the realization of the parts' relationship to the whole. The formal becomes conceptual when it is manifested as presence, absence, tension, space, and size, allowing for the activation of perceptive multiplicity to undeniable interconnectedness.

It is an encounter similar those with the scientist who offers the microscope or telescope and implores us to look, to witness, to marvel at the teeming complexity of the universe, or with the child whose rush of buoyant exuberance at the generative acts of which they are capable is not yet tainted by the cynicism bred by failure. The product of Trejo's tireless and meticulous hand is an earnest and unfettered self-cosmology.

It is a gestalt of idiosyncratic binaries. It is utterly self-evident.

—Hannah Piper Burns, 2009

TRANSFORMATIONS

This space has seen dramatic change over the past week, from mechanic's garage to white-walled and well-lit artistic vessel. The energy expended in this process is not subverted by the work that now fills the room. Neither is the work stagnant, acting as precipitate in the reaction between emerging, motivated makers and raw square footage. In Transformations, the power of the artist's vision to mutate, remake and animate reality intersects with the tension between the natural and the constructed, and the result is a collection of landscapes, objects, and environments that harness and channel the dynamism of change. Alberto Giacometti once said, "The object of art is not to reproduce reality, but to create a reality of the same intensity", and that intensity is undeniably present here.

It is present in the landscape work of Paul Mitchell, whose large-scale photographs poeticize the realities of urban evolution and entropy, both in their subject and in the evidence of weathering and decay built into the artist's process. The creasing and fraying seem to belong to these images, as if the sites themselves are in flux, about to peel away and reveal the next incarnation. Nicholas Bohac's collage, by contrast, shows the meticulous buildup of materials that parallel the Earth's movements through geologic time, in recognizable forms that nonetheless mystify in their unfamiliar assemblage. Other two-dimensional work in Transformations likewise displaces the viewer's sense of familiarity in the landscape: Donna J Wan's photographs and Brett Goodroad's paintings pay unexpected compliment to each other as sweeping vistas where sky and sea meet and open into vast space, positioning the viewer at a vantage point without weight, and filling the frame with motion and sublime power.

While these images force a negotiation with the human role and scale in perceptions and mutations of the landscape, the sculptural elements in the show deal with the concept of transformation in its more gestural and immediate definition. Familiar, functional materials and objects shift form and significance under human tools and ingenuity. Barry Beach's elegant swoop of structure occupies the space between constructed foundation and natural form, and Jesse Walton's symmetrical, scorched wood sculpture transforms mass, gravity, and surface to make the wood gain levity and weight simultaneously. Laura Boles Faw and Peter Max Lawrence repurpose readymades both functional and decorative, respectively, layering existing contexts and unexpected combinations. Faw's desk drawers act as a collection of interactive environments, each its own variation on the form and function of the drawer itself.

Like the sculptures in Transformations, John K. Melvin's installation of suspended industrial fencing also makes use of re-imagined materials and space, using light and movement to animate the forms and riff on their colors and shadows. This piece also translates into a proposal for a public art project, much like Dori Latman's lemonade-stand installation, which will remain in the Clara Street Projects gallery for the duration of all three exhibitions, and activates the gallery by injecting it with a catalyst for viewer interaction and community-building. That the scope of Transformations is wide enough to allow such a variety of dialogues between works to thrive in the same space is a testament to the richness of vision that exists among these emerging artists. It is a fitting inaugural show for a gallery that represents a space between ruin and renovation, between industrial and polished, between the emerging artist and the art world at large.

Hannah Piper Burns

1. **Barry Beach**
Transitions #1 (Roof), 2008.
\$1500.00
barry@barrybeach.com
2. **Nicholas Bohac**
Fifteen Minutes, 2008
Please contact artist directly for pricing.
nicholasbohac@gmail.com
3. **Ben Echeverria**
Ghost
(Untitled 1), 2008, \$250.00
(Untitled 2), 2008, \$200.00
(Untitled 3), 2008, \$65.00
benecha@gmail.com
4. **Laura Boles Faw**
Inside Out
Please contact artist directly for pricing.
laura@laurabolesfaw.com
5. **Brett Goodroad**
After- Rainy Season in the Tropics, 2008
Please contact artist directly for pricing.
bggoodroad@hotmail.com
6. **Jennifer Kaufman**
Cantilevered Concertina
Please contact artist directly for pricing.
kaufman.jennifer@gmail.com
7. **Dori Latman**
Lemonade
Boozy Lemonade- \$3.00
Virgin Lemonade-\$2.00
dori_latman@yahoo.com
8. **Peter Max Lawrence**
Venus Under the Cup, 2007.
\$1200.00
Mouse-Head, 2007,
\$1200.00
Little Boy Blue Burned, 200.
\$1200.00
petermaxlawrence@gmail.com
9. **John K. Melvin**
Cubic Scrim, Dimensions variable.
Please contact artist directly for pricing.
jkm@johnkmelvin.com
10. **Paul Mitchell:**
Images of Neglect/Neglected Images #1, 2008 (Edition of 5)
\$800 Mounted on aluminum. \$500 Print only.
Images of Neglect/Neglected Images #2, 2008 (Edition of 5)
\$800 Mounted on aluminum. \$500 Print only.
pmitch503@gmail.com
11. **Jesse Walton**
Thirteen Plus Edges on Edge, 55" x 50" x 50"
Douglas Fir and Polyurethane, \$1000
jesse@jessewalton.com (510) 229-7253
12. **Donna J.Wan**
Untitled (Peace Island)
\$2650
Untitled (South SF), 50" x 40",
\$2650
donnaivan@yahoo.com

Art for Artist's Sake: Ways and Means and Clara Street Projects

by Hannah Piper Burns

“How do emerging artists...emerge?”

-Paul Kyle, Ways and Means publicity meeting, early 2008

Well that about gets to the heart of the matter. This question could not have carried the weight of transitional anxiety more perfectly and poetically in its wording and delivery, even if it was asked too late. The answer was, “Like this, right now.” With a catalog in the works and a mission sorely in need of a statement, the time for justifying our endeavor by any means other than its own sake had passed. It was a month before the opening of Ways and Means, an independent group exhibition strategy that has continued to evolve over the past year. It was two months before graduation. Emergence, like spring, was in the air, and yet there we were, still trying to ascertain and harness the best way to go about such a thing.

Emergence in an etymological sense connotes not outward, but upward motion, specifically “rising from a liquid.” To contextualize emergence from an institutional standpoint, then, a fine arts degree is an investment in buoyancy. This buoyancy, in theory, carries us out of the incubatory fluid of the institution and into the line of vision of those who make careers, movements, decisions, and connections in the larger art world. Simultaneously and counterintuitively, the shackles of significant debt and the baggage from years of subjective scrutiny reach their peak of intensity in this transitional moment. The cognitive dissonance does not go unnoticed. Comparing the statistics between how many Masters of Fine Arts graduates still make art after five or ten years to how many college basketball players make it to the NBA starts to elucidate this conflict.

I had a professor once tell me to imagine that all of my peers and I were drowning in open water and that all of the gallerists, curators, dealers, grant foundations, and critics were on land holding life preservers. In this thought exercise, emergence is determined by who can set themselves apart from a mass of white churning water and flailing limbs, on who can be heard most clearly over the din of splashing and yelling. I suppose in its own way this metaphor is a good motivator. It's also a nightmare, albeit one that cultivates a hustle. But worst of all, it's a scenario in which the line between ingenuity, desperation, and dumb luck begins to blur. It assumes that the playing field is at least somewhat level, and it assumes that we makers have nothing better to do than flail.

Ways and Means was conceived as an alternative to that scenario, an opportunity to “interject the authentic voice of the emerging artist into the historical and contemporary trajectory of art.” Metaphorically this is the equivalent of knowing how to swim. Practically that meant creating and executing as independently from institutional support as possible an exhibition from the ground up, while, at the same time (for most involved, at least), preparing for a more conventional thesis exhibition under the auspices and reputation of our academic program. Call it a contingency plan, but the project came about as a way of defeating the aforementioned transitional anxiety by accelerating a confrontation with the extra-academic cultural milieu without the chaperone-protector-gatekeeper of a curator, dealer, or dean. Ways and Means' successor, Clara Street Projects, came forth out of this mostly successful experiment and with the luxury of perspective both on the graduate fine arts experience and the aftermath. Both endeavors represent a framework for emergence that privileges the artist as both catalyst and precipitate. In other words, the artist creates a methodology that cuts out the middleman between communities of makers and receivers. While this methodology was the essential element, the conditions created, consciously or otherwise, by its process and implementation became powerful influences on the evolution of the framework as a whole.

“We become what we behold, We shape our tools and then our tools shape us.”

-Marshall McLuhan

To reflect on the characteristics and significance of an exhibition like Ways and Means requires a like reflection on the environment out of which it was born: An academically institutionalized art practice. This is the first in a series of social contracts that an artist enters into wherein they relinquish some measure of control over their trajectory in order to be made stronger, or at least better prepared, for the many other institutions that they will face in their career. The product and culmination of this first social contract is the thesis exhibition, a sponsored debut that presents a peer group united by a joint investment in their own cultural capital. The structure of the exhibition is determined by the venue, in this case the Herbst Pavilion, and each student creates and designs a micro-exhibition for his or her rationed dimensions of emergence space. Out of this tapestry of media, philosophy, and aesthetics, tension emerges between the part and the whole, the

individual artist and the community that has shaped them.

Ways and Means took its form and function directly from this model, restaging it on a smaller scale and inverting its structure and therefore its value system. As the thesis exhibition parallels the academic art process of solitary studio practice punctuated by collective problem solving, Ways and Means began in the collective mindset with individual ambition as the latent influence. A group exhibition, especially a large-scale, non-curated, art-fair-styled effort like the thesis show on which Ways and Means was based, functions like the microcosm that shapes it: A loosely defined alliance of philosophies, methods, and priorities related in sometimes rather opaque ways. All that the concept of Ways and Means did for this system was remove the safety net of the existing institutional covenant in order to form a new one.

Interestingly, an institution of artists forms according to those artists' day jobs more than anything else. The success of the project depended on achieving the right balance of skill sets and personalities, and the roster of artists involved developed organically and, much like any other function of the art world, based on pre-existing connections, recommendations, and reputations. The level of artistic merit that any one member brought to the table was secondary to their practical utility to the group as a whole, which allowed a level of trust and cooperative momentum to develop that was crucial to the process and wholly unlike the trust within a classroom critique environment.

The fact of the matter is that there are many art worlds, and every effective artist understands which one they belong to and tailors their agenda accordingly. This is a tendency that a graduate program, with its imperative to push the student farther and farther into an awareness of their place in the continuum of art history and theory, only solidifies. Sometimes these agendas conflict, and, in a subjectively evaluative scenario like a critique, juried exhibition, or competition, this can and often does undermine the social contract between artists. This is especially true when it seems like there are life preservers at stake.

By contrast, an institution of artists shares an agenda that temporarily subsumes individual ambition through mutual dependence. It's no coincidence that the word "collaboration" has historically connoted helping the enemy, and that those in oppositional positions can often discover more common ground than conflict. Ways and Means succeeded not only because every member invested as much as they could into the process, but also because every member believed that the others could match their investment. It began as a gesture to show the art community at large a commitment to lifelong practice that did not depend on existing structures, but, in the end, it created a new structure of artists comfortable and successful enough with collaboration to continue to invest in each other once they reached open water.

Would this have happened in a more gradual way after graduation as the newly dispersed community began to take stock of its remaining members and forge utilitarian alliances? Probably. But the fact that Ways and Means was planned and carried out during a moment of intense anxiety, pressure, expectation, and uncertainty for the majority of its members expedited that process as well as identified an efficient schema of leadership and expertise beyond artistic production. Clara Street Projects was both the logical implementation of this schema and a revision of the model as a whole.

It was also the product of a more focused, albeit still shared, agenda. Because Ways and Means had a catalog before it had a venue, the specific characteristics of that venue were ultimately less important than its actual existence and functionality. The fact that the Ways and Means gallery was made possible only through demolishing and completely rebuilding an abandoned office suite was more stressful than inspiring and spoke more to necessity than purpose. Clara Street Projects, with the luxury of perspective, examined the potential of that site and used those characteristics—liminal, repurposed, urban, industrial, temporary—as organizing concepts for a series of exhibitions in a similar space. A curatorial eye entered the model, and shows were organized around common themes rather than simply a shared ambition. The administrators of the show decreased considerably in number from that of Ways and Means, and the roster of exhibitors expanded into and beyond the academic community from which they originated. In the end, Clara Street Projects' organizational and conceptual models fell more closely in line with those of a gallery or museum, the system that immediately replaces the thesis exhibition as a vehicle for emergence. Despite this shift, the core values of these two projects remain aligned through a shared focus on the artist as the instrument of dialogue rather than simply the vessel for it.

"To create one's own world in any of the arts takes courage."

-Georgia O'Keefe

Looking back on Ways and Means and Clara Street Projects, where is the voice of the emerging artist, and what authenticates it? Clearly, it begins with the commitment by makers to and for their peers as much as themselves, but that commitment in turn comes from the ability to, at least tenuously, reconcile the tension between the part and the whole. In other words, to return to that wonderful and all-reducing metaphor for the art world, it begins when artists stop flailing and start listening to each other. As the academic model of institutionalized art practice has shown, peer influence strengthens, tones, teaches, and fuels. This is not only a far more productive use of energy, it is a means to level the power dynamics between shore and shoreless. Because when artists invest in each other, they echo the pre-existing systems that invest in artists, and this likeness creates the foundation for bridging the distance between them.

SITE AND SITUATION

Our personal belief systems and thoughts, our innermost lives, function not unlike one of the most external manifestations of human expression: the city. Constantly under construction and in flux, the city evolves almost organically. Re-visit a neighborhood after five years of absence and the observation of drastic change is inevitable. Likewise, we ourselves are in a constant process of re-contextualization and growth, the elements that make up our personalities in perpetual reaction with the events and ideas that surround us. Hence the importance of the cognitive remnant: the souvenir of our personal journey, the moment between moments. Site and Situation is a collection of works that captures the cognitive remnant as epiphany, manifesto, self-portrait, and postulate. These works are evidence of the self-awareness so essential to the human condition and a testament to the power of the inner self to poetically contextualize its external influences.

By inserting her own image into the pose of Mantegna's "Dead Christ", Stephanie Inagaki renders a self-portrait in visceral charcoal that forces a bodily negotiation with both the canon of art history and the iconography of Western religious tradition, a gesture that hovers between epitomization and transcendence of identity and otherness. Osama Dawod also explores the psychological terrain of the foreigner, to more playful ends. His "Toilet Seat Cover" and accompanying interview is both a send-up of culturally imposed hygiene rituals and a portrait, of sorts, of a stranger in a strange land, able to breathe new life, conceptual weight, and absurd hilarity into an often discarded and disregarded object.

In fact, Site and Situation is largely populated by props used in our everyday lives, re-imagined and re-staged to be seen with new eyes. Kristen van Diggelen's "Forks" are infused with a haptic, nearly erotic glow, and Colleen Mulvey's elegantly peeled and posed mixed-media chair and rubbed and drawn doors subvert dimensionality and functionality as well as . Dori Latman's lemonade stand, which remains in the Clara Street Projects gallery throughout all of its exhibitions, is an adult take on the youthful entrepreneurial spirit, blending nostalgia with vice and desire. The banality of the objects and actions in Seth Lower's photographs is showcased to the point of unexpected profundity, each image the equivalent of a haiku.

By contrast, Ryan Verzaal and Robyn Engel both display exuberant gestalts that gracefully and energetically engage optics and textures while mixing signifiers to form exciting new recipes. Verzaal's grid interconnects outpourings of expressionist psychic residue, and Engel's collages radiate against the picture plane with gorgeous intensity. "Jesus Loves You", a video projection by Renetta Sitoy, is minimal in comparison, but employs sound and language in a similar gestalt pattern that disrupts the mental flow of oral truisms and rituals.

Jesse Walton and Jesse Hensel bookend the gallery with sculptures that comfort even as they confront. In Hensel's case, his life-size and fully operational "Man Cradle" appeals to the innate and universal desire for soothing and protection, and Walton's "CONTINUOUSLY FLYING BAG" acts as an endless, obsessive loop of generic gratitude, referencing both a skipping record and a dryer spin cycle. The rocking and spinning of each sculpture, respectively, recalls vaguely (or perhaps not so vaguely) Freudian impulses.

To plumb the depths of the interior self is to encounter a system of meaning that is complex and ever-changing. The artists of Site and Situation represent the spectrum of psychological investigation through creation, and this exhibition acts as a cross-section of private processes made manifest in a space that is itself a landmark of the human imperative for reconstruction and ingenuity.

Hannah Piper Burns

1. **Osama Dawood**
Toilet Seat Cover and Interview with Kalu Eichen
from *My United States Early Memories*, 2008
Please contact artist for pricing
osama@osamadawood.com
2. **Robyn Engel**
Mute is Not an Option, 2008
White (10), 2008
\$950 each
robynengel@gmail.com
3. **Kelly Falzone**
Welcome, 2005
\$1,350
kfalzone@earthlink.net
4. **Jesse Hensel**
Man Cradle, 2008
\$1,199
jesse.hensel@gmail.com
5. **Stephanie Inagaki**
Untitled (Mantegna), 2008
Please contact artist for pricing
sinagaki@gmail.com
6. **Dori Latman**
Lemonade
Boozy Lemonade- \$3.00
Virgin Lemonade-\$2.00
dori_latman@yahoo.com
7. **Seth Lower**
Vent, 2007.
World on a String, 2007.
Underpants, 2008.
Pissing in the Wind (Tracer Fire), 2008
\$400. each
sethlower@gmail.com
8. **Jody Medich**
4375 Bishop, 2008
Please contact artist for pricing
jmedich@gmail.com
9. **Colleen Mulvey**
Struggle, 2008
Secure, 2007
Please contact artist for pricing
cdmulvey@gmail.com
10. **Renetta Sitoy**
Jesus Loves You, 2008
Please contact artist for pricing
rsitoy2000@yahoo.com
11. **Kirsten Van Digglen**
Forks, 2007
\$4,250.00
(925) 785-8728
12. **Ryan Verzaal**
Untitled, 2008
Please contact artist for price
ryanverzaal@gmail.com
12. **Jesse Walton**
CONTINUOUSLY FLYING BAG, 2007
\$1000
jesse@jessewalton.com