

ART

Art School Confidential

UNDERGRADUATE ART EDUCATION IS NOT ALL CONCEPTUAL TINKERING AND PRETENTIOUS POSTURING
BY BRET MCCABE

JURIED UNDERGRADUATE SHOW

Through Oct. 29 in the Decker and Meyerhoff galleries at the Maryland Institute College of Art

YOUNG WRITERS DON'T COME OUT OF

college or high school fully formed, even if the marketplace loves the idea of a hot unknown young undergraduate with a book contract. And just as every writer has some 10,000 words to get out of his or her system before he or she is writing anything worth a damn—no, really, you do—young visual artists crawl, stumble, trip, and fall before they can run, jump, or pirouette. The Maryland Institute College of Art's Juried Undergraduate Show fills the walls of the Fox Building's Meyerhoff and Decker galleries with young minds still feeling their way not only with what they want to say but how they want to say it. This year's two jurors—tireless local arts workhorse and artist himself Gary Kachadourian and MICA alum and School 33 exhibitions coordinator Jan Razauskas—organized a strong showing of young work, some of which belies its creators still gestating vocabularies.

Admittedly, some of the show's strong suits could be a golden-egg idea pulled off with sublime brio. No idea what Christopher M. Tate's silent one-channel video piece "Triangular Aspirations" is about—a loop of three people in medium-close trying extremely hard to cry, spontaneously combust, activate their wonder-twin powers, poo, or something—but even in its short running time this bewildering document of some physical-qua-psychic effort becomes rather transfixing. Ditto Evie Falci's "Untitled 6," a black and white abstraction transmogrified into deadpan preciousness. On black felt Falci has affixed a myriad of those variously sized plastic googly eyes found on stuffed animals.

It's a silly concept that Falci pushes beyond its silliness into something obsessively inchoate, creating a dense morass of the eyes in a round center that slowly frays at its edges, yielding something akin to a diffuse nebula—an astrophysics image created with kindergarten tools.

Eric Brachwitz achieves something far more unseemly and arresting with his "Future History (In Hair)." Brachwitz uses borderline absurd materials—canvas, hair, and protein hair gel, which you can assume he turned to as a medium/sealant/fixing agent—to organize a large vertical rectangle that, at first, looks like your bathroom sink after your younger sister and her professional basketball team dancer friends spent four hours getting ready to go out. It's a swirling road map of long hairs, some knotted into fur balls, some looking hair-sprayed into submission and stuck like dried glue to the mirror. It's only after spending a handful of minutes with the piece that you realize you start to read the hair less as discarded dead cells and more as curves, and soon you start to make out actual shapes—is that a reclining figure in the foreground left? And that looks like a disembodied head to its right—in the hair whorls that make "Future History" feel more like an inspired riff on the worn amber pages of an old sketchbook.

Other works are just straight-ahead solid pieces of idea and technique. Annie Song's "Smile—Korean Dress Series #3" takes a simple white satiny two-strap dress and integrates a rainbow of primary red, blue, yellow, and black strips into its skirt below the Empire waist, turning the traditionally conservative style into a robust fruit-salad plumage at the floor. Will Koffman's "Post-Nuclear Family" is a deceptively simple illustration. Four figures strike Pompeian poses—legs curling, arms bent and covering the face—in which Koffman inscribes Rube Goldbergian systems of works and channels, part anatomical and part mechanical. And Frances Quinlan's three-panel "Untitled" oil painting captures a bizarre phantasmagoria of birds collecting items for their nests—only, it's a wide variety of different birds species building their own urban skyscraper, gathering telephones, claw-foot bathtubs, ovens, radiators, and



HOME ALONE: KATIE MILLER'S "CHILDREN WATCHING TV."

other such enormous items as if they were worker ants capable of transporting 10 and 20 and 100 times their own body weight.

And still other young artists include such glimpses of maturity that you're dying to see what else they've got brewing in their studios. Anabelle Pang's mixed-media installation "Virile" would be ready-made for some new boho boutique clothing line if it weren't so understatedly sarcastic. Pang has hand-embroidered five pairs of boxers and wrapped them in branding and packaging of her own design, the titular "Virile." The display includes an unmannered glossy catalog of young men in her boxers, which sits next to a small pile of Virile brand-name military dog tags. Her caustic play on soft but tough masculinity is wonderfully downplayed in her pitch-perfect ad line: COMFORT MADE FOR A MAN. Place these bad boys in a Hampden boutique and you could expect clueless boys in no-ass-having skinny jeans to be wearing them unironically by the holidays.

And Katie Miller's "Children Watching TV"

is probably the most catholic item on view, but it's also the one that stays with you the longest. This oil-on-canvas painting almost looks like a suburban snapshot: Two tow-heads sit on a brown leather couch watching television on a sunny afternoon. You can tell they're well-off because this room is well-apportioned; out the back window you can see into a nicely wooded backyard, a corner of a patio table's umbrella poking into view. And yet they sit there, bathed in a cathode-ray blue that dusts their fair skin with stillborn ash, with the look of abject horror at what they're seeing. It's a moment of quiet revulsion, like something out of the roiling worlds of Nic Nicosia or Gregory Crewdson, where the most benignly numb settings harbor the most visceral of ills. You have no idea what these two kids are watching—and yet you leave the painting with the brain turning cartwheels trying to imagine what could possibly cause such disquieting looks to be frozen on such young faces.

Reception Oct. 26 5-7 P.M.

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