

Engineering Creativity: Creating a Student Art Exhibit at Olin

Tim Raymond

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AHSE 4190 Capstone Project

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Executive Summary

When I first set out to do this project, I wanted to provide a means of connecting student artists to students and faculty on campus. The goal of the project was to provide both a way for Olin community members to learn about artists on campus and to provide a means for artists to get feedback on their work. In order to do so, I curated a show of student work and had an opening for the entire Olin community. Throughout the process I learned a great deal, about the logistical side of assembling a show as well as the overall impressions people have on campus of art and the student artists we have here. Setting up an art exhibit at Olin isn't necessarily difficult, but it requires knowing who to ask about certain things as well as how to put together individual works to form a cohesive show. The result of this project was a show of student work which was hung in the 3rd floor of the Academic Center for two weeks, and received very positive feedback from students and faculty alike. If I were to do this project again, I would try to create a more permanent space to display art, as I believe that would be very well received by the community. The vast majority of feedback received on the show related to the lack of permanent art space at Olin, and I believe that area is something which could be explored by a future capstone project.

Project Goals and Inspirations

When I first thought of my project, I meant for it to be a means of showing off what I had learned through 3 years of visual art classes. However, I quickly realized I had an opportunity to do something more interesting with my project, and potentially make an impact on the Olin community as a whole. In order to do so, I began with the following five goals:

1. To gain experience in acquiring and assembling artwork in a manner which conveys meaning.
2. To learn what considerations go into the curating of a display of visual art.
3. To raise awareness of student artists among their peers and other members of the Olin community.
4. To provide a forum for student artists to display and gather feedback on their work.
5. To inspire other students to express their creativity through their work and through other means.

The first two goals relate to the work done as a curator of the exhibit. In order to assemble a successful exhibit, I had to do some research into what considerations I should make when selecting pieces for the show. The first goal is very specific to assembling the artwork in a manner which doesn't seem random, but instead seems cohesive and intentional. In order to do so, I spent a great deal of time talking to my mentor as well as doing research and just arranging the pieces in various groupings. This helped me determine the ways in which the pieces related to and contrasted with one another, and ultimately allowed me to put together a more cohesive exhibit. The second goal is less specific and more about just learning everything that goes into setting up an exhibit. I spent the semester struggling through a variety of problems which I believe have given me a much greater understanding of what it takes to put together an art exhibit, from actually compiling the works to advertising for the show and planning an opening.

The last three goals I have listed all relate to the impact the show could have on the community. While goals three and four both relate to the exhibit itself, the last goal involves a cultural shift in how Olin community members see art. Because my show was comprised entirely of student art, the third goal was very achievable, because anyone who came to the show would have instant exposure into what student artists on campus were working on. During the opening, I noticed many students discussing the various pieces with the artists themselves, and giving them their impressions of the work. It is this kind of discussion that I was hoping to foster when I originally set out on the project, and this directly relates to my fourth goal listed above. While I hope to have achieved the final goal listed above, I don't have a good metric for determining if the project was successful in that regards or not.

Process

Soliciting Student Work

I first began soliciting student submissions back in December of the previous semester. I knew most students would be heading home during winter break, and I thought that would be a perfect time for them to think about some of the prompts for my show, and maybe create some work in response to the show. Even though I started the process early, it was still very long and drawn out. I began by sending out a survey to students asking a number of questions, such as “What is Art?” as well as asking them if they would be interested in submitting any work they’ve made. The response to that initial survey was good, with over 30 students responding and more than 10 indicating that they’d like to submit work.

From there, I emailed each of the artists individually, in order to determine what works they wanted to submit. After a brief description of the work each artist did, I had them send me copies of everything they wanted to submit to the show. I began by asking for digital copies or photographs of the works, in order to begin thinking of groupings of pieces. These seventeen artists submitted over one hundred pieces, which I then had to go through in order to make a cohesive show.

Composition

Once I had digital copies of each piece that had been submitted for the show, I began sorting them into groups and eliminating pieces from the show. Because I am much better at manipulating physical objects than objects on the computer, I printed out a thumbnail of each submission and cut them up, then sorted out the pieces into works I would like to put in the show, and works I didn’t think belonged. From there, I began making groupings out of the pile of pieces I thought should go in the show. I chose to make three independent groupings, in order to look at what I had in a variety of different ways.

I grouped the works by a number of different means, including themes and aesthetics. I began by grouping them purely aesthetically, looking for similar color palettes, shapes, lighting, composition, and features. I also looked at lines in each work, in order to also take into consideration how the eyes of an observer would travel across the piece. Once these groupings were made, I began to eliminate outliers and pieces that didn’t necessarily fit with the others as well.

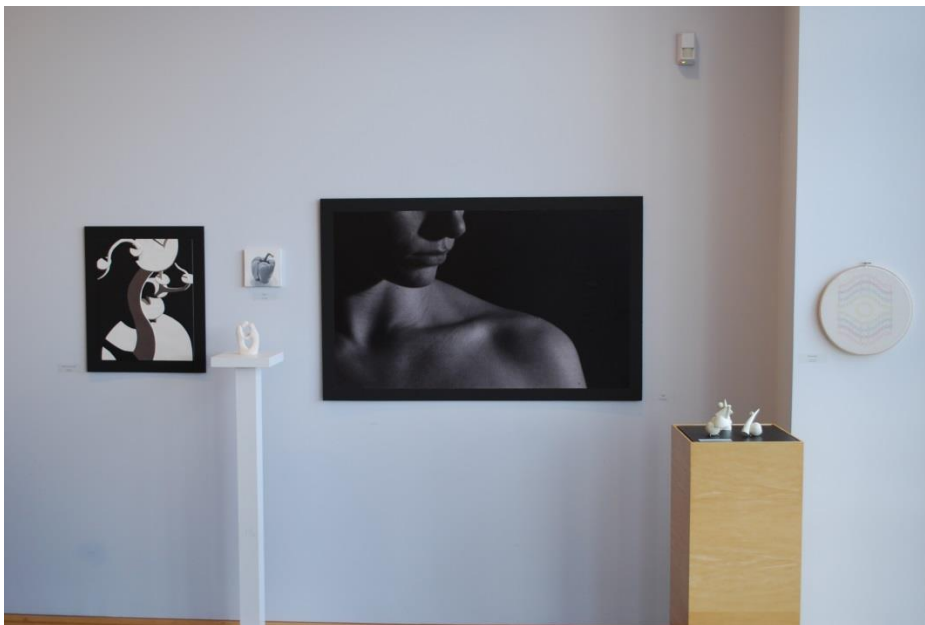
I also tried grouping the pieces by theme or subject matter, which to me was much more challenging. In order to match pieces by theme, the theme must first be determined, which introduces some personal bias. However, I enjoyed taking the liberty of reading into the pieces, and grouping them together in a way which spoke to me as the curator.

Ultimately, I settled on a set of works which accomplished several things. For starters, every student who submitted work and expressed serious interest had at least one piece of artwork in the show. This was important to me, as I wanted to show off a wide variety of student works grouped with works from other students, and not just make a show of one or two student’s works. Secondly, the groupings were made by both thematic and aesthetic sorting, which allowed the pieces to inform and complement one another while adding new meaning and unique ways to read the works. Finally, I felt as though the number of pieces in the groups I laid out was a manageable number for the space I would be hanging in.



For example, one of the groupings consisted of two photographs and a digital composition, shown in the image on the left. These three were primarily grouped by aesthetics, given that they have very similar color palettes. Each piece also features strong lines, directionality, and contrast, making them relate to and support each other as part of a

group. Each image also contains themes of natural and created beauty, and I believe that each of them indicate the ability of the artist to see beauty in what others may see as mundane or common. The leftmost piece is slightly different in that it is an image of a forest overlaid with a more abstract scene, but I do feel as though the strong lines and natural themes of the forest backdrop ties it in nicely with the other pieces. For me, these three were a natural grouping, and it was easy to put them together in a way which clearly conveys meaning and shows similarity.



The grouping shown in the image on the left was more heavily influenced by content and conceptual theme than aesthetics. These works were grouped based on the individual studies of form that occurs in each piece, as well as similarities in overall composition. In this grouping, each piece is a study of an abstract form, and each captures the inherent

beauty of form. While these were primarily grouped together because the forms in each relate to one another, each has a very strong contrast and a primarily black and white color palette, making them aesthetically similar as well as thematically. This grouping was very compelling to me, as it shows how

different artists see form and play with composition to make beautiful pieces using a strong sense of positive and negative spaces.

Because I wanted the show to explore the impression engineers have of art, I also wanted to work with the responses to my “What is art?” prompt sent out with the submission survey. I was very interested in the responses I received, both from artists who had submitted works and from other students who had filled out the survey but not wanted to submit any work. I chose to print out the responses to this prompt and distribute them around the show, in order to encourage observers to consider their both their own opinions and the opinions of others. Some of the responses were incredibly compelling, such as one response which discussed the fundamental purpose of art as the student saw it. “Art is the medium by which people make evident the beauty of some aspect or implication of existence. In other words, it conveys truth”. This is a very interesting idea to me, as it relates directly to what I saw in many of the pieces in the show, namely the capturing and reframing of some beauty in the world around us. This response suggests that art is a means of looking at something which shows what it truly is. This response was interesting to me because that suggests a very realist viewpoint on art, which agreed with most of the pieces submitted to the show in that most pieces were some manifestation of something real and tangible.

I ended up printing the responses on clear label sheets and sticking them up in the windows of the show. During the day, sunlight cast the shadows of the responses onto the floor of the show, making for a very interesting effect on the space. I was very happy with how that part of the show came out, although I wish I had a greater number of responses to display.

Advertising

In order to get the word out about my show, I went the route of email rather than putting up signs and passing out flyers. I began by emailing the entire student body about submitting to the show, getting the word out early in the semester. Per the request of my advisor, I also made a postcard type advertisement, and emailed that out to the entire student body, staff, and faculty, along with an iCal to remind people the day of. While the advertising did bring some students and faculty in for the opening, it wasn't nearly as effective as I would have liked, as many people don't pay close attention to emails sent out to the entire community.

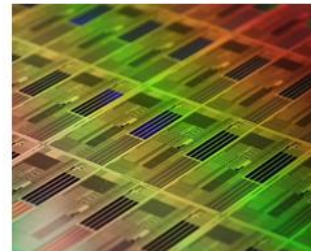
How do you Define Art?

Engineering Creativity at Olin College

An Exhibition of Mixed Media Student Artwork

You're cordially invited to the opening of Engineering Creativity, an exhibition meant to explore how engineers regard art and design, featuring student artwork.

Thursday April 11th, 5PM-7PM
Academic Center Floor 3, Overlooking Lot A
Refreshments Provided



Printing and Dry Mounting

Because Olin allows us to use the color poster printers for free, I chose to do all the printing in the computer lab. This was done by making a very large PDF and arranging the works to fit on it, and then printing them all at once. I used the paper cutter and an Exacto knife to trim the pieces by hand, which was necessary due to the large size of most of the pieces.

In order to save costs over framing, and because of the large scale of most of the work submitted, I chose to dry mount the pieces on black foam core. While this still protects the pieces and provides a solid backing for them, it costs significantly less than framing. I chose to go with a 2" border around each piece, in order to make the works have a similar look to framed pieces, and because I felt like the border made the works look clean cut and professional.

Since my mom works at a frame shop nearby, I was able to get a steep discount on the materials and do all of the labor myself. This was an experience in and of itself, as it took the better part of six hours just to cut foam core and mount each piece. However, when all was said and done, I was very happy with how the pieces looked, and I was happy to have them all have a standardized border.

Hanging the Show

Once I had all the pieces printed out and dry mounted, I then began the process of hanging the show. Once I had space secured, it was just a matter of determining where things would go in the space and how I would display the pieces that couldn't be hung on the wall. Given that the space I was allowed to have the show in contained a large display case, I was able to set up a number of pieces inside the case which wouldn't have been able to be hung on the walls. However, I didn't want to group all of the 3D pieces together, so I borrowed three stands from the art room in order to display pieces around the space. Before I even began to physically hang the show, I made a 3D representation of the space in Solidworks, and imported pictures of the works in order to play with the arrangement and location of each piece. This 3D model of the show allowed me to make decisions about what I wanted to include and where I thought it would belong before even printing the pieces out or cleaning up the space.



The image to the left was one of the first arrangements I made in CAD of the show. While the groupings changed slightly during the hanging process, this advanced layout allowed me to hang the show rapidly once I was actually hanging the physical pieces. Once I made something I was happy with in Solidworks, I printed and mounted the work, and then brought all of the pieces to the space. At this point, I laid out the show as I had originally intended, and made a number of changes

to the groupings and locations of groupings in response to how pieces looked once they were physically in the space. I began this process by putting the pictures on the floor in front of their respective hanging locations, and tweaking the arrangement until I was happy with the overall feel and aesthetics of the grouping. I chose to stick with the show being comprised of a number of groupings of pieces because I enjoyed the freedom the groups had from one another, while still relating to the overall theme of the show.

Once my mentor and I finished laying out the pieces in a way which we were happy with, I began actually hanging the works. I chose to use 3M adhesive strips which used Velcro-like material to hang the pieces on the wall, in order to minimize damage to the space. These strips allowed the pieces to be adjusted while on the wall, in order to arrange them exactly as I wanted. I then marked out where each piece should be mounted, and sticking to a 58" height (to the center of pieces), I began to hang the

pieces. After I had hung all of the 2D works, I then arranged stands to hold the 3D pieces. In order to go along with the aesthetic of the black foam core backing, each stand had a top which was painted black for display purposes. Finally, I hung the responses to “What is Art?” on the windows of the space, in a mostly random arrangement.

I chose to separate the artist statements from the works, in order to leave as much up to the observer as possible on first examination of each piece. Instead of hanging the artist statement with the work, I hung the title, artist name, and graduating class on a small mailing label transparency next to each piece, and printed out the artist statements together, sorted by artist. These statements were put in a binder, which was then available to visitors to browse through. I am very happy I chose to do this, as I was much more interested in individual responses to the pieces which were not colored by the written intent of the artist. Instead, each piece was left up to the observer to interpret, which I felt went along with the overall theme and goal of the show.

Results

Gallery Statement

When I originally began thinking about this project, I intended the show to be a means of connecting artists on campus to other students and faculty with similar interests. I was aware that there were a number of students enrolled in art classes, and even more who regularly turned to some form of visual art for a change of pace from everyday life at an engineering school. After some thought and reflection, the show began to take on a different purpose, as I became more and more interested in how engineers and specifically Olin students viewed art and design.

I began by collecting verbal responses to the prompt “What is Art?” from the student body. The wide variety of responses collected revealed that art is something that is special and unique to each individual. “Art is anything that no two people would do the same” wrote one student, emphasizing the personal influence on an individual’s perception of art. Art is not something dictated by visual aesthetics, but rather by the response of the viewer. To the artist, art is something deeply personal, reflecting their thoughts and feelings as well as the physical world. To the viewer, art is something which they can connect to or draw from, or in the opinion of another student, “Art makes you feel something”. Far and above the most prevalent theme in these responses was that art was an expression of life and being. As another student wrote, “Art is the human expression of life itself”.

Overall, I believe the exhibit reveals that while Olin students do seem to share an interest in a specific style of art, ultimately art is personal, and no two people look at or define art in the same way. Art is defined by the viewer, so a given piece will influence each person in a different way.

After collecting pieces for the show, another theme became rather obvious, this time to do not with how Olin students see art, but rather how they make it. Themes of directionality, structure, composition, and symmetry are shared across many of the pieces submitted to the show. This wasn’t surprising, given the technical mindedness of engineers, but it was even more pronounced than I had anticipated. The artists in this show seemed to mostly focus on capturing the world as they see it, embodying the physical world with strong composition, structure, and attention to technical detail.

Artist Statements

Jeff Hart

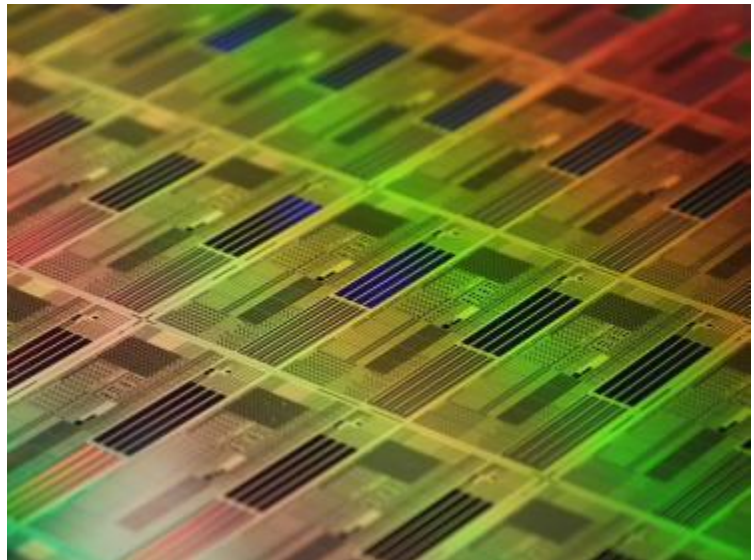
Summer at Snowmass:

This photograph, taken shortly before sunset at Snowmass ski resort, highlights the majestic scenery of the Rocky Mountains in summer while providing a reminder of the winter fun that awaits at the mountain.



Fin-FET Chips:

This close-up photograph of a silicon wafer arrayed with nano-scale Fin-FET devices highlights the rarely seen beauty of one of the most ubiquitous man-made devices on the planet: the transistor.



Kendall Pletcher

I want to eat your cancer (2010), Ceramic

I intended to make a flower bowl for Mother's Day when I made this statue. Halfway through, I realized that the petals had come out more aggressive than originally planned, so I scrapped the gift idea and just made what felt right. Art is often a form of meditation for me, a way of getting out my feelings and finding peace. This sculpture was made while I was struggling with coming to terms with the mortality of a favorite aunt of mine who was (and is) struggling with cancer. I think that the aggression depicted in this flower bowl reflects the anger and powerlessness I felt then.



Rage (2012), Ink and colored pencil on paper

This drawing illustrates the quote "I have love in me the likes of which you cannot imagine and rage the likes of which you would not believe." spoken by the monster from Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. I encountered the quote in another book by chance, completely taken out of the context in which it is said and the words spoke to me, not as a monster whose humanity is doubted, but as a human whose body sometimes doesn't seem enough to express the emotions it contains. This drawing attempts to express the feeling of being so full of emotion that your skin can't hold it anymore and you have to rip it out yourself.



Rage (2012) - Ink and Colored Pencil on Paper (Quote from Mary Shelley)

Us (2010), Ceramic

I made this sculpture when I first started dating my boyfriend. The figures are extremely different, despite being carved out of the same block of clay, but they fit together. Their eyes don't meet, but their hands do, forming a message to the viewer which hints at some of the emotions involved.



Ambika Goel

Feather Earrings

I love color. I incorporate it into every aspect of my life: my room décor, presentations, music, clothes, and jewelry. It provides excitement and interest to life. I try to make jewelry that is colorful and exciting, but it must be wearable, simple, and not overbearing. For this reason, this is by far my favorite piece. I love the color combination and simplicity.



Stephanie Northway

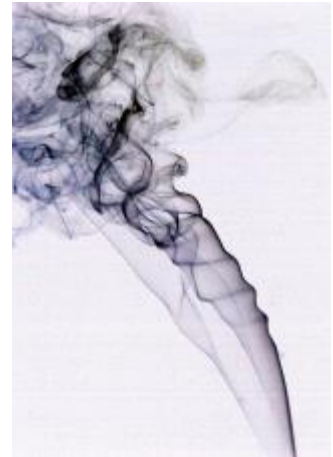
Body

This photo was an experiment in texture, negative space, and eyeless self-portraiture. It highlights bone structure and subtle skin textures, giving a sense of “nakedness” that goes beyond simple sexual connotations.



Smoke:

I've always been fascinated by the ephemeral looks of smoke, flame, mist, and other airy substances. The idea behind this photo was to impose focus and solidity on the otherwise formless.



Sunrise:

Each morning at dawn, hundreds of tourists jockey for position atop Mt. Haleakala to get photos of its famous sunrise. The way their silhouettes seamlessly blend with the mountain's in this photo is meant to give the impression that the tourists have become part of the mountain's terrain.



Tanner Reid

Cityscape

6" x 4" Oil on Acrylic, Graphite on Paper Often torn between worlds - my home in Mississippi, and the engineering world of Olin - I struggle to find ways for them to collide. This painting depicts the realization that they need not collide, that no matter where I'm taken, my family will always be behind it all - a warm foundation. The oils of the city may be dirty and unclear, but the family is pure, simple, clear, and grounding.



Pepper

I painted the pepper in a spotlight: an ordinary, temporary thing made focal.



Lake

60" x 40" Oil on Canvas

My passion for photography formed this work, which uses two highly contrasting styles of painting - a more traditional Flemish glazing method, and a more impressionistic impasto - to contrast the sky as seen directly, and as seen reflecting on the surface of a lake. The post-postmodern painting, for me, was an investigation of symmetry and painting styles to represent perceptions gained from a photograph.



Chelsea

Many of my photographs are architectural, and this one represents the life we never see in such architecturally grand places. Life is obvious below, where cars are darting around with a purpose, but in a city like this, it's only a small percent of what's happening above - a thought that consumes me with curiosity.



"Panorama"

Around midnight, I went to sleep on the steel deck of the R/V Tommy Munro, wedged between the handrails at the very front of the bow, as we were short on beds for that particular excursion. I awoke about five hours later to light drops of water dripping off of the off-shore oil rig towering over my head. Standing underneath the city-like structure, already overwhelmed by my sense of smallness, I looked into the distance to see an approaching storm in the sunrise. I've never been so humbled by the vastness of anything like this open expanse of living ocean.



"Nemo"

This is evidence of what I hope to be my last involuntary New England winter of my life. It might be beautiful here, but I was built for the heat, and I'd prefer to appreciate it from a distance. My photos keep the good memories alive!



Andrew Carmedelle

Raider

Lightning. Acceleration. Front Runner. This ship was designed to be a corsair, swift and devastating. Manned by one to two raiders, this ship would move fast, pillage, and escape before anything could be done. Inspiration taken from corsair ships, Viking galleys, swallows, composite materials, dragonflies, jet engines, and space. This piece was designed using Maya.



Three Block Composition #5-7

Balance and Composition. Dominant, Subdominant, and Subordinate. Sharp lines portray speed. Unstable orientations suggest tension and movement. Grounded mass keeps the piece stationary, while raised mass creates action. Piece interaction keeps the eye from shooting into space, instead curving around the design in 3D space. Modeling clay, toothpicks.



Justin Poh

In All its Glory

To be honest, I wasn't really thinking of art when I took this photo. I simply framed the shot and snapped. It was only upon reviewing it that I realized the editing potential it had. The shot was edited with Color Efex Pro from Nik Software and Aperture from Apple.



Alex Spies

Squid

This piece is a whimsical depiction of a squid. I attempted to capture a squid in motion and I wanted to create the sense that the sculpture is gliding through its environment. I really focused on the fluidity of the form. After experimenting with different surface treatments and colors, I was deeply set on layering a multitude of techniques and creating a depiction that had extensive depth in color and texture. I set out to create a sculpture that was aesthetically pleasing and whimsical in its rendering of a real world creature.



Ari Chae

Rippled Reflection

This photograph was taken during a late afternoon walk in Boston. While many of the fine architectural details of the building remain intact, a ripple across the water as well as the translucency of the clouds gives away the fact that the picture is not of the actual building, but instead of its reflection in the water. The blue-grey colors and unique perspective are meant to introduce a feeling of calm and highlight the value of seeing things from a different point of view.



Sixlets

This photograph came to be by chance during a Veronica Mars marathon. I dropped one of the candy coated chocolates (called sixlets) onto my laptop keyboard en route to my mouth, found that it fit perfectly in between the keys, and immediately proceeded to line up as many of them on the keyboard as I could before taking a picture. A delicious and colorful way to procrastinate homework!



Playing with Water

As a human being, I do not enjoy children very much because they cry a lot and cause trouble. As a photographer, however, I have found that children are the perfect candidates for taking beautifully spontaneous pictures. This photograph was taken in the backyard during a picnic – just a little boy discovering how to stay cool on a hot summer day.



Blair Emanuel

Space Whales

Somehow the random suggestion of “space whales” turned into a painting of an ancient race of whale-alien, slowly turning and swimming amongst a vast galaxy.



Sarah Seko

Peninsula Sunset

Building on my prior experience with watercolor painting, I explored the medium of oil paints in this piece. The subject is one of my favorite scenes from home: a sunset over the coastal cliffs of Rancho Palos Verdes, CA. I was especially drawn to the beauty of the sunset's fading light, which is reflected in both the ocean waves and rocks. (Painted from a photograph by Logan Fox)



Celeste Maisel

Connections

I think that using traditionally feminine arts such as embroidery to depict non-traditional designs allows artists to reclaim “handicrafts” as a legitimate and broadly applicable art form. Flipping through *Original Designs* by Spyros Horemis at my family’s house in Cupertino, this design in particular caught my eye. I liked how the simplicity of the circles connected by lines combine to form a larger, more complex image.

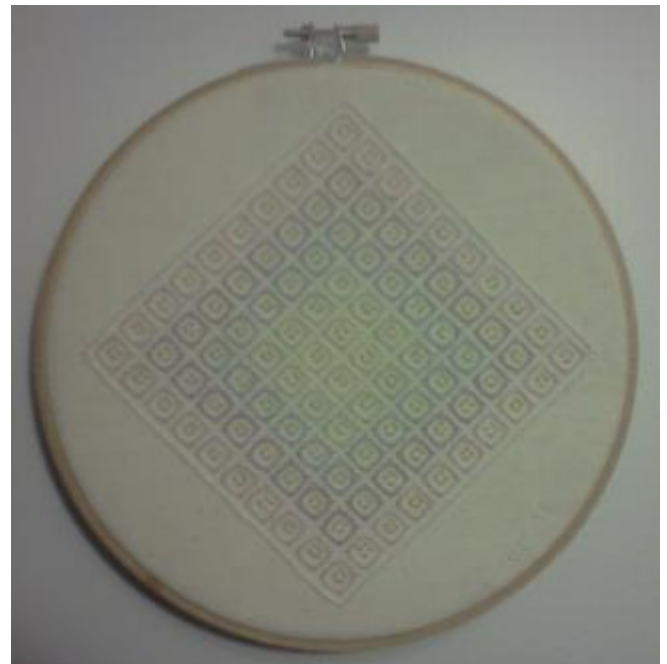


This is the first piece of a five-part series, *Inner Actions*.

Golden Heart of Time

This design is based on a design from *Original Designs* by Spyros Horemis. The simple shapes that make a more complex whole lent itself to incorporating multiple colors that add extra dimension to the design.

This piece is part of a five-part series, *Inner Actions*.



Ben Smith

Wind-Whipped

In this piece, I worked to capture the combination of elegant curves and sturdy walls that are East Hall. Contrasted with the supple forms of the landscaping on this windswept day, the piece highlights the dominance and permanence of man's architectural tendencies. This work is also a novice's experimentation with depth and perspective.



Stairway in Four Tones

Stairway in Four Tones began life as a three-dimensional foamcore model of an abstract staircase. The lily pad-inspired "steps" are connected with vine-like arms and highlight a natural system's tendency to expand in repetitive fashion. Originally, I planned to intersperse these forms with standard rectilinear steps to contrast man's design tendencies with nature's. However, concerns of cluttering the model and time constraints prevented this addition.

The stairway was then captured in this collage. My favorite means of two-dimensional rendering, the collage work forced me to critically evaluate the tones of each of the model's shapes. The only bits intentionally misrepresented are the cast shadows, which proved more forceful in deep black.



Geeta Gubba

El Blairo Mecanico

This piece is inspired by the juxtaposition between the harsh darkness and the purity of crystal exemplified by El Blairo, the goddess of robotics. The symmetrical mechanical structure embedded within the elegance of the chandelier form symbolizes the balance between beauty and nature. Are we human, or are we robot?



Alec Radford

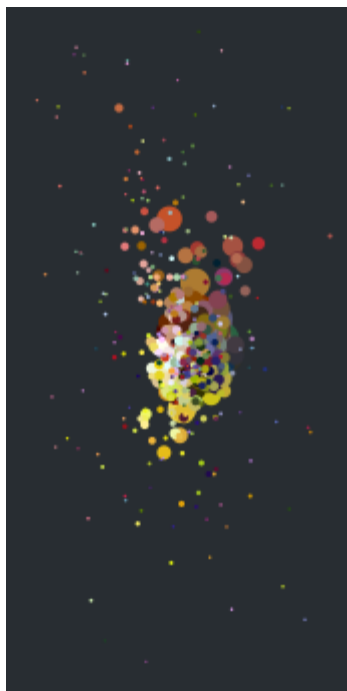
Merger Series #1

With the merger series, I wanted to explore a different way of using photographs as a medium. Similar to collages, each piece is the result of digital merging dozens to hundreds of photos. In some cases, the original aspects and intents of the component photos are lost and something new emerges, whereas in others they are highlighted, intensified or clarified.



Unstruct Series #1-2

With the merger series, I wanted to explore a different way of using photographs as a medium. Similar to collages, each piece is the result of digital merging dozens to hundreds of photos. In some cases, the original aspects and intents of the component photos are lost and something new emerges, whereas in others they are highlighted, intensified or clarified.



Show Photos







Initial Feedback

After the opening, I received a lot of feedback from the artists featured in the show as well as from students who came to see it. The feedback was easily clumped into two main categories, outlined in the following two paragraphs.

The most common theme in the feedback I received was that there is a huge need for this kind of exhibit at Olin. Many students suggested that I try to get the exhibit to be a permanent fixture in the space it's in, while others just commented that they wished there was more of this on campus. Students here seem to really enjoy seeing what their peers are working on, and a permanent exhibit of student artwork seems to be a good way of making that possible. As one student wrote: "I wish we had more displays of art on campus; there is so much talent here, so rarely made public". Everyone who came through the show enjoyed the opportunity to talk to the artists about their work, and really seemed to get a lot out of reading the artist statements. While my project was originally to make a permanent space, and I had to change that to a temporary show, I still feel strongly that we should have a permanent student exhibit on campus, where works can be switched or rotated every semester or year. I would really like to see a space set up permanently for student work, where new works could be rotated in every semester or so. Such an exhibit would give students the opportunity to see the talent we have on campus, and connect with them if they have questions or feedback. This would both help the artists get feedback and publicize their works, and help the students interested in observing work by artists here on campus.

The second major bit of feedback that came up in many responses was that it was really interesting to see how engineers looked at art. While some seemed to agree with my gallery statement, which suggested that engineers see art in a more structural and linear way, others seemed surprised by the abstract and natural works in the show. "The emphasis on nature is refreshing..." wrote one observer. Others were thoroughly impressed with the level of creativity shown in some of the works, and the wide variety of media that students employ. Students also seemed really excited to see what each artist was working on outside of classes.

Overall, the show seemed very well received. Artists seemed to really enjoy seeing their work put together with the work of other students, and students really appreciated the opportunity to see what artwork was being generated by Olin students. While I won't be pursuing a permanent space as a result of my project, I intend to begin the process and lay out as much of it as I can in my final submission, such that another student may be able to pick it up and make a more permanent space available for student artists.

Reflection

Looking back on my project, I feel as though I learned a lot about the process of setting up an art exhibit. I went from never having done anything which required me to assemble independent pieces to having put together a show of over 30 independent pieces from more than 15 artists. Along the way, I made a number of mistakes, but I feel that I learned enough to be able to set up another show with significantly less time and research if another such opportunity arises.

Throughout my process, there were a number of things I could have done better to improve the overall quality of my show, which I touched on briefly in the above process section. However, I will revisit those improvements in order to discuss them in more detail and to provide a segue between what I did and what I would suggest the next student who would like to make an exhibit do.

For starters, I began the project early, but not early enough. There were a number of students who expressed immediate interest in making something specifically for the show, but in the end none of them were able to do so within the timeframe I needed the works to be submitted in. Despite planning to allow students time over break to work on pieces, I would have liked to have announced the project even sooner in the previous semester, in order to allow some responsive work to be done to include in the show. I am very curious about what work would have been created specifically for the show, but because of the tight deadline I set, I was unable to see any of that come to fruition.

Finding a space was challenging, but ultimately that was the aspect of my project which I thought worked out the best. Despite not getting any of the spaces I inquired about, I was able to get a space which eventually proved to be very fitting for the work that I had collected. Given another opportunity, I would like to have collected the work before finding a space. Rather than tailoring the works to fit a designated space, I feel as though tailoring a space to fit the works is a better way of going about a show where the theme aims to investigate the variety of works submitted. I found myself removing pieces from the show because I didn't feel as though the fit in the space I was given, rather than because I didn't feel as though the fit in the show itself. For example, one student submitted a number of videos of homemade pyrotechnics. While I initially was thrilled by the uniqueness of the submission, I soon had to make the decision to not display the work given the space constraints and lighting in the area I ended up setting the show up in. The space became the driving force behind some of my decisions on which pieces would be in the show, which in my opinion was undesirable.

While I did advertise for the show, I really wish I had done a significantly better job doing so, as overall turnout for the opening was much lower than I had originally anticipated. It's unclear whether there was insufficient interest or insufficient advertising, but I can't imagine more advertising taking away from the show at all. While the works got a great deal of exposure due to their location in the academic center, most of the observers were students rather than professors and staff, as I had hoped for. I really wanted this project to expose members from every demographic in the Olin community to the work that was being done on campus, but beyond students it seems that few people came to the show. I was very disappointed by the lack of faculty support for the show, which I realize may have been my fault for the lack of much publicity. Given another opportunity, I would ask faculty specifically, rather than send an email to the entire community all at once, and explain to them why I felt it was important for my

project to get their impressions of the show and the student pieces in the show. This could have been accomplished with flyers and a greater number of advertisements, but ultimately I was so caught up in preparing the work for hanging that I dropped the ball on most of the advertising work I had originally planned to do.

The opening of the show provided a great opportunity for students and community members to interact with the individual artists, as many of them came to the opening to look at other works and support me. I was very pleased to see them getting involved in discussions with other students about what it was that drove them to make the works they had submitted, and what they felt it was about them that made them something they considered art. Since one of the primary goals of the project was to give students exposure to the work of student artists on campus, I was very satisfied by the discussion I saw going on during the opening. I also was very happy with the feedback students left in the notebook I left out for that purpose. Many of them were reflective on the theme of the show, and while some agreed and some disagreed with my gallery notes, I was really happy to see other students drawing their own connections between the works shown in the exhibit. Art is a very personal experience, so it was refreshing to see so many opinions and thoughts on my work putting the show together.

Overall, I felt as though there were strong themes which many of the pieces shared in the show, but there was also a remarkable amount of variation between pieces, even between pieces done by the same artist. For example, many of the pieces featured very strong senses of form and composition. I noticed that in many pieces, symmetry and repetition seemed to be a huge influence on the work, and many artists seemed to emphasize the structure and order of patterns of objects such as bricks, blades of grass, and even cars. I noticed this theme in a number of pieces, across a wide variety of media. Many of the photographs in the show featured patterns or structure, but these themes also were evident in the collage piece as well as the embroideries. I was impressed by the variety of ways students were able to convey similar themes through all different media in the show.

I learned a great deal about composition and relational aesthetics while putting together groups and hanging the show, which was a skill I was hoping to acquire during the process. Before this show, I had no experience at all with composing multiple pieces into a cohesive unit, and so I started off by doing some research into how certain images play off one another when arranged together. I mostly looked online, as well as through some art books, in order to see some examples of how works could be arranged and why the curator or editor had done so. I think the most important thing I learned through the process is how to see the aesthetic similarities between pieces which I would have previously missed. For example, noting similar color palettes is fairly straightforward, but examining how the viewer's eye is drawn across the piece is something I had only talked about in critiques before the show. I learned during this process that it was possible to make a group feel very cohesive by simply paying close attention to the natural progression of someone's eyes across a piece, by following hard lines and shapes, and arranging pieces in such a way that they seem to flow together. I also feel much more comfortable arranging groups of pieces with similar tones or themes together in order to make a statement or cohesive meaning out of the composition. For example, some pieces in the show gave me a strong sense of conflict, such as the pen and ink of the woman and the panorama of a tropical storm. These two naturally fit together thematically, and I liked having them grouped together.

In closing, I strongly believe that this is something Olin should have as a permanent fixture in the academic center, or any of the buildings really. The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive, and students really enjoyed the opportunity to see other students work. It also took an otherwise unremarkable space and turned it into something enjoyable to be in. One student wrote on their feedback that they now “went out of [their] way to walk through the exhibit on the way to and from classes”. Just a little bit of creativity can go a long way in transforming spaces, and what better than student artwork to improve an otherwise bland and unusable area? Based on the feedback I received, I think a permanent exhibit for student work, where work is rotated every semester to new submissions, would be hugely appreciated at Olin. So, I have tried to compile my thoughts and what I learned this semester into a document which could potentially be used to set up such an exhibit.

How to set up a Student Exhibit at Olin

Having gone through the process of setting up an exhibit of student work at Olin, I feel as though I have a somewhat clear idea of what is necessary in order to put up an exhibit of student work. I've tried to capture that and distill it down into a list of useful information, which could be used to reduce the headaches for a future student trying to set up an exhibit.

Start Looking for Submissions Early

The earlier you start, the more time people have to collect their works or make something new just for the show. Even though it doesn't seem like it would take long for people to collect their works and submit them, people are busy and forgetful, and having tight deadlines just limits submissions. By looking for submissions early, you also begin to raise awareness for the show long before you're ready to formally advertise. I would suggest starting in the middle of the semester before the show will be hung, which should allow plenty of time both during the semester and over break to generate work. I began looking at the end of the previous semester, and this proved to be too late for some people.

Individually talk to each Artist

Take the time to sit down or at least email each artist who wants to submit work. Find out what they think of the work they're submitting, what they want to convey with the work, and how they see their piece fitting in with the overall theme of the show. I discovered a great deal while doing so, and by sitting down individually with artists, they became more comfortable with the idea of the show, and I actually received more submissions after the first round of meeting with people. It's also just a really interesting opportunity to talk to artists one on one about their work.

Work with Physical Copies of the Pieces

When working through what pieces work together, print out small versions and move them around. It's much easier to get an idea of how different aspects will relate when you can move around physical pieces in order to rapidly switch between arrangements to compare. It also really helps get used to the scale of objects, so long as you print them to scale.

Select Pieces, then Select a Space

Don't let the space dictate which submissions can and can't fit in your show. Instead, figure out what you want in the show, and then look for a space that will support what you've got. This is harder than just finding any old space, but ultimately the show will be more cohesive if you are able to include everything you would like to.

Talk Directly to the Head of Facilities

When working to find a space, talk directly to the head of facilities. They know the spaces at Olin better than anyone else, and I found them nothing but helpful. Also, facilities can provide assistance clearing a space or a display case, and can even get temporary walls or other supporting structures. Working closely with facilities will make it easy to hang the show when the time comes.

Make sure you get Permission and talk to anyone who will be affected

I know people often like to try the ask for forgiveness later method, but in this case, talk directly to whoever is in charge of art exhibits at Olin, as well as someone with final say over the space, such as the provost. Get written permission from everyone who uses that space for design reviews, etc.

Pay attention to composition

One of the most interesting aspects of my project was learning how to compose multiple pieces of art together to form art in and of itself. I chose to go the route of several distinct groupings, but no matter how you choose to organize the show, pay attention to how pieces relate to one another. Look for the simple connections (color palettes, similar subject, etc.) as well as the more complicated or less obvious connections (themes, patterns, lines, etc.), and balance them in order to make the most cohesive show out of the work you have, no matter how diverse the submissions are.

Look at other sources

I'd highly encourage you to look at art books, other exhibits, and anything else that contains intentional arrangements of artwork. It helps to build up knowledge of how pieces can be arranged, and it also helps to try and determine why the curator/editor arranged the works as they are. A lot can be learned just by looking at other exhibits and thinking critically about the arrangement of the pieces within.

Use 3M products

They work very well. The number one concern I heard from administration about my show was concern about damaging the walls. Adhesive strips can be very damaging, or they can work well, depending on the product. Test one to make sure it doesn't rip paint off with it, and do so in an inconspicuous location. I found that the adhesive strips which had something similar to Velcro worked best, where one strip would adhere to the piece, one to the wall, and the two strips would fit together to hold the piece on the wall.

Have an opening and encourage the artists to be there for the duration

My project was most successful (in my opinion) during the opening, when I saw artists and interested students discussing the works and their definitions of art while looking around at various pieces. Having the artists at the opening was hugely successful at my show, as it allowed them time to discuss their works with an audience in order to get feedback and explain their intent. Also, an opening is a great way to attract people who may not otherwise come to the exhibit.

Schedule a long period of time for your exhibit to be up

It takes a lot of effort and work to put together an exhibit, so plan on a long period of time for the show to be hanging. I originally scheduled for just half a week or so, but ended up extending it out to nearly 3 weeks. It isn't worth putting an exhibit together for such a short duration. Try to work out a significant period of time for the exhibit to be in place, in order to give community members sufficient time to see the exhibit.

Document everything you do

It really helps you remember why certain things were done and what decisions were made about specific pieces or arrangements. Also, when the process is over, it helps to document what happened and what could have been made better, in order to make the next time easier.

Advertise well

People don't necessarily read emails, so advertise with flyers. Don't be afraid to individually invite professors or staff members. You want to show off the work you've done, so don't be shy, or you'll be disappointed by the turnout. I didn't end up using social media to advertise for the show at all, which I believe would have helped generate interest in coming to the show. Social media is an easy way to get the word out about an event, and I wish I had utilized it to advertise for the exhibit. Given another chance, I would have made a Facebook event as well as put information up about it on the plasma screens in the dining hall.

Explore alternatives to framing work

Framing can be expensive, and requires strong supports for hanging. Look into alternate methods of protecting and presenting the work, such as dry mounting, matting, and simple clip frames. When putting together a collection of student work, it's important for the budget to be low in order to facilitate additional pieces or rotating pieces for the exhibit.

Actively seek feedback

People's reactions to my show were far more interesting (in my opinion) than the show itself. You should seek feedback from artists and observers alike on the show, as well as the individual pieces within the show. I am happy that I left a guestbook asking for feedback, as a number of people filled it out, but I wish I had gotten even more responses to the show. In order to know how people feel about the show and what you could do differently, you need to solicit responses to the show from as many people as possible.