



Material World

**Sherill Anne Gross • Michael Janis • J. T. Kirkland
Matthew Langley • Katherine Mann • Marie Ringwald**

**March 12 - April 3, 2011
artdc Gallery**





Installation Views



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Art Supplies in the Twenty-first Century

Throughout history, artists have worked to master their materials. Aesthetic judgments have largely been based on the level of proficiency shown by a given artist in their work. While Paleolithic cave paintings were produced with similar pigments derived from locally available minerals, there is more attention given to the caves of Lascaux and Altamira executed in the Upper Paleolithic than earlier examples. Is this due to the greater level of sophistication they display?

With each advance, from fresco painting to tempera and to oil painting, artists continually sought to improve their technique to produce works that would astound their audience by increasingly depicting man and nature in a more realistic manner. The invention of oil paint in tubes further revolutionized painting by allowing artists to move outside the studio and paint *en plein air*.

With the advent of photography, many artists in the later half of the nineteenth century felt less of a need to depict so naturalistically and began to experiment with new techniques, leading to looser styles. This culture of experimentation, one of the hallmarks of modernism, led to the cubist collages (Picasso, Braque) and poured and spattered household paints (Pollock and other New York School artists). Duchamp's ready-mades or the combine paintings of Rauschenberg broke down any remaining barriers to what could be legitimately used in creating works of art. By the 1960s it appeared as though "anything goes" in the art world as photography, film, sound, text and even light became "art materials." The hardware store began to replace the art supply store for many practitioners.

If the modern era was about experimentation, the postmodern could be said to be primarily concerned with synthesis. Today we can say, "It has all been done before," eliminating the need to find the next new thing. Contemporary artists are free to pick and choose from the past, incorporate new technologies and use whatever it takes to produce their work. Painting on canvas with oils is just as valid as using industrial paints on die-cut aluminum or placing rocks in a circle.

How do we make aesthetic judgments when there are no rules? Ultimately these judgments become much more subjective. For most viewers, this will be based on an emotional response to the work. Initially, this may appear to be in reaction to imagery or color, but the artist's choice of material and its use will have a great deal of influence in forming our opinions of art works. The best works strike a balance, where the subject matter/content, materials/techniques and composition/structure are all working together.

Anselm Kiefer's works produced with lead help to illustrate this point. [The large paintings](#) are more successful with the use of the lead better integrated into the overall piece. The use of lead can be read as many things such as an allusion to

alchemy or the weightiness of the Earth. Since no one element sticks out, the viewer will interact with the work in a deeper way. These works resonate, asking you to revisit them. There is always more to be revealed. In contrast, [Kiefer's lead sculptures](#) don't always achieve this balance; the different elements do not seem to work in concert. This disharmony is interesting but the work is forgotten much sooner once the viewer walks away: You focus on how it was made, not why it was made. Once you are satisfied with your assessment of its construction, you are done. Again, this is subjective and some may find that his paintings are overtaken by the lead and the sculptures are in perfect balance. The material and how it is used will affect each viewer's response.

The painter Philip Guston once remarked to composer Morton Feldman that "once I know how a painting was made I get bored with it." The works included in this show are made using a variety of materials and techniques. Each artist has a commitment to their materials that shows in their mastery of their chosen techniques. These are not about experimentation. Since the materials or techniques used are not necessarily standard ones, it is impossible not to recognize the technical prowess each artist displays, but it is obvious these works are not simply about material. The material is integral to making of the work, reinforcing the structure and content of each piece.

Of the six artists selected, Marie Ringwald, Matthew Langley and Katherine Mann work with more traditional materials but each has developed methods of working with their chosen media that is integral to their work.

Ringwald refers to herself as a minimalist but most viewers would not readily characterize her work that way. There are clear associations to architectural structures, primarily warehouses and barns. These are the types of buildings she would see on frequent train trips, and they continue to fascinate many years later. For Ringwald, developing in the 60s and 70s, minimalist abstraction seemed the most natural way of making art. After years of working in this manner she realized she was incorporating these architectural elements into her abstract works and began asking, "Why not bring them out in to the open? Why not incorporate the actual materials used in the construction of these structures?" She has a large collection of found materials on hand and has even used the lathing material from the walls of the Civil War era townhouse where her studio is located. These works speak of function but also decay, and how beauty can be found in both.



*Marie Ringwald: Chunky
Patchwork Shed #4
Courtesy Longview Gallery*



Matthew Langley: *Base Camp*
 Courtesy Susan Calloway Fine Arts

Marrying elements of the Washington Color School with the physicality of Neoexpressionist/Transavantgarde artists of the 80s, Langley's grid paintings appear to be completely devoid of any representational elements. The physical building and scraping away layers of paint becomes the content. Langley uses his evocative titles to provide viewers with a starting point from which the viewer can begin to make their own associations. Langley is an avid fan of music and many of his paintings take their titles from musical sources. Langley's paintings may be experienced in the same manner as the Ambient Music of Brian Eno. In works such as *Thursday Afternoon*, *Discreet Music* and *Music for Airports*, Eno creates systems and patterns using a limited number of notes and sounds. These are very long pieces designed to blend with ambient sounds, allowing the listener to engage on

whatever level they wish or to ignore the music all together. Like Eno's music, Langley's work enhances its environment by just being there but if one pays closer attention, there is a deeper, more rewarding experience waiting.

During her high schools years, Katherine Mann would spend part of her summers in Taiwan studying traditional sumi ink painting. Elements of that training combine with contemporary western art practices in her large-scale works on paper. The paintings begin with ink poured on the large sheets of paper that have been nailed to the ground. The ink is allowed to dry over a period of time, aided by fans, sometimes causing additional spatters to occur, looking somewhat like a Jackson Pollock drawing. Patterns and shapes are then added in layers suggesting organic

growth with repeated foliage and, more recently, traditional adornments for women such tassels and ribbons that might be seen in Chinese Opera costumes. This layering to create spatial dimension also recalls sumi landscape painting where perspective is implied by order, not a naturalist appearance. The objective is to depict the essence of the subject not a realistic likeness.



Katherine Mann: *Calcite*
 Courtesy Hamiltonian Gallery

The remaining artists in this show have chosen to use alternative materials including wood, glass and cut paper, which are often more associated with craft. The question of when craft becomes art has been debated for decades but it is fair to say craft becomes art when it transcends the functional. Experiencing the work on its own merits trumps the viewer's curiosity about how it was made.

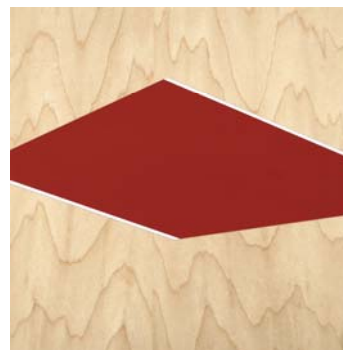


Michael Janis: *In the Evening Twilight*
Courtesy Maurine Littleton Gallery

When viewers see images of Michael Janis' work, they may not immediately recognize it as glass art. When most people think of glass art, they typically think of blown glass (or hot glass) vessels like those of Dale Chihuly. Janis works in the warm glass method that fuses glass elements together into one piece by layering multiple glass sheets together. Each panel has pictorial elements formed by manipulating sifted glass powder on each glass surface. These panels are then fired separately in a kiln. From these plates, Janis is able to arrange and layer images before fusing the pieces together to create the final object. The virtuosity of Janis' technique supports his

imagery, which is often tinged with a nostalgia for days where innocence reigned and magic seemed possible. Janis is not simply naïve, for there is a darker undercurrent to these works that speaks to the loss of this sense of wonder.

Unless operating in a sculptural manner, wood is not a typical media for art. Obviously, many great works have been created on wood panels but a simple explanation of J.T. Kirkland's work may conjure up associations of a junior high wood shop class. Kirkland has gained notoriety for his *Holes* series in which drilled patterns of holes in wood panels to create his compositions. Works in this show include suites from his more recent *Polyclear* and *Subspaces* series. The *Polyclear* works involve wood panels stained in vertical and horizontal patterns. Stripes of glossy and matte clear coat varnish add extra layers of complexity to these works. There is a quiet but obsessive nature to these pieces, which recall the paintings of Agnes Martin. Kirkland ups the ante with the *Subspaces* series, incorporating color forms over the surface. Kirkland is a master of subtlety whose work rewards the attentive viewer.



J.T. Kirkland: *Subspace 024*



Sherill Anne Gross: *Water*

To say Sherill Anne Gross is obsessed with paper is an understatement. When the local Pearl art supply store went out of business, Gross purchased all of her favorite papers and many others to build quite a stock of materials. She is not only obsessive about her materials but also about her technique. Though her working methods have been honed to perfection, she relishes the challenge of trying something new with her chosen media always pushing the envelope to produce strong works where the media is secondary to the work itself.

The work in this show is diverse, reflecting the metro DC art scene. Artists were chosen in an attempt to show the wealth of talent in the region, from established artists to up-and-coming ones. This is not an easy feat given the intimate space the artdc Gallery affords. There are many other artists that could have easily been included but the space concerns necessitated a small number of artists that are deeply committed to their materials.

Stephen Boocks
March 2011

Sherill Anne Gross

Lives and Works in Greenbelt, MD

Artist's Statement:

My artwork is made only with paper, glue, and patience.

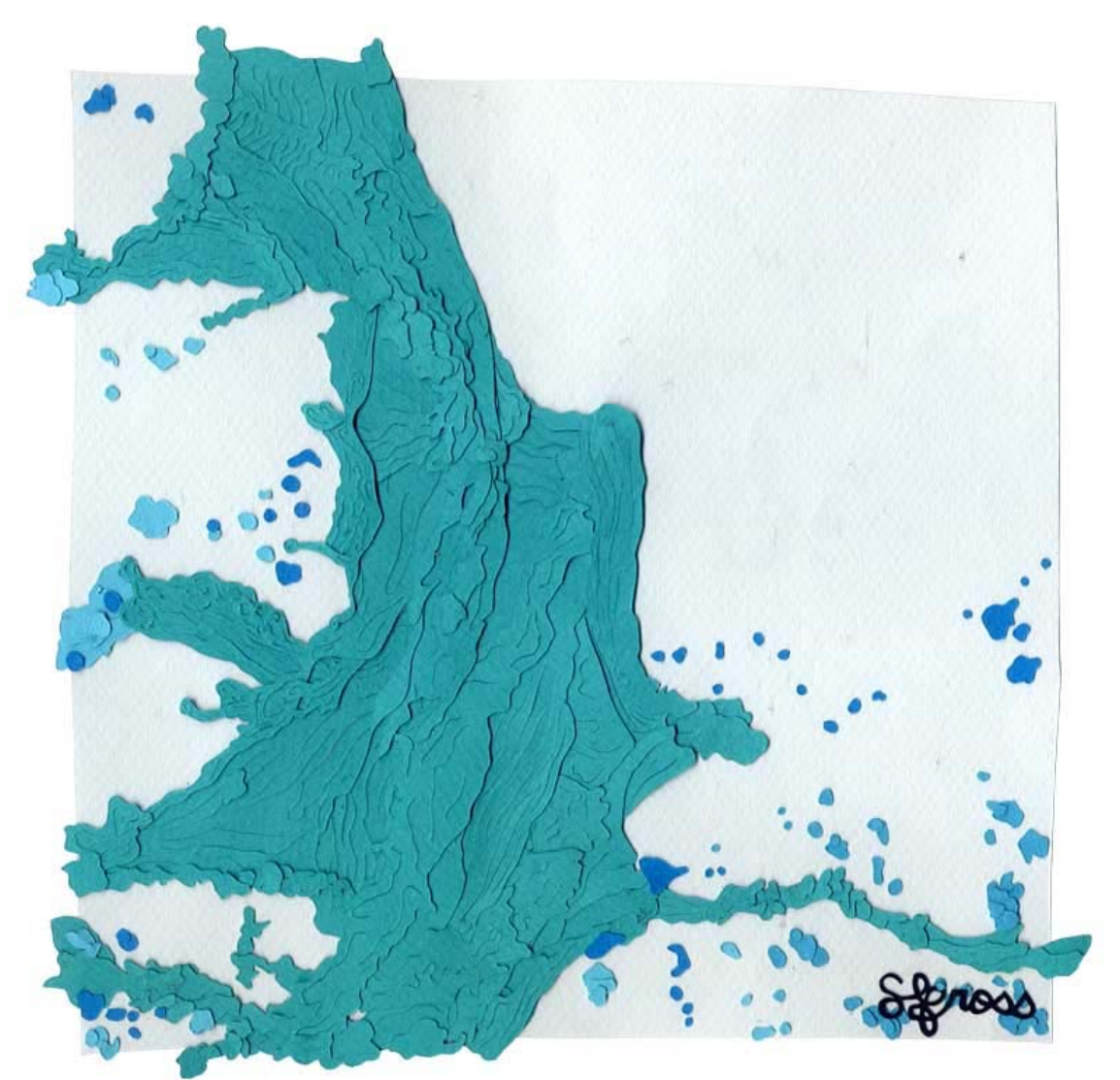
Every part of my art is made only using cut paper; even the signature. The non-straight lines and imperfect circles that are created are layered upon each other to reveal a final realistic image. All of the work is done by hand — no stencils are used.

I started paper cutting exclusively seven years ago. While in school pursuing my BFA in Studio Art, I fell in love with collage and printmaking. After graduating I continued experimenting with different collage techniques while trying to incorporate my love of printmaking into the works. Eventually I started to experiment solely using paper. I was very happy with the results and continue to work in this medium. With my background in graphic design and knack for color theory I find cut paper a wonderful way to combine all of my passions. The challenge of taking a finite color palette of flat square papers and transforming them into realistic final images is an exciting concept each time I approach a new piece.

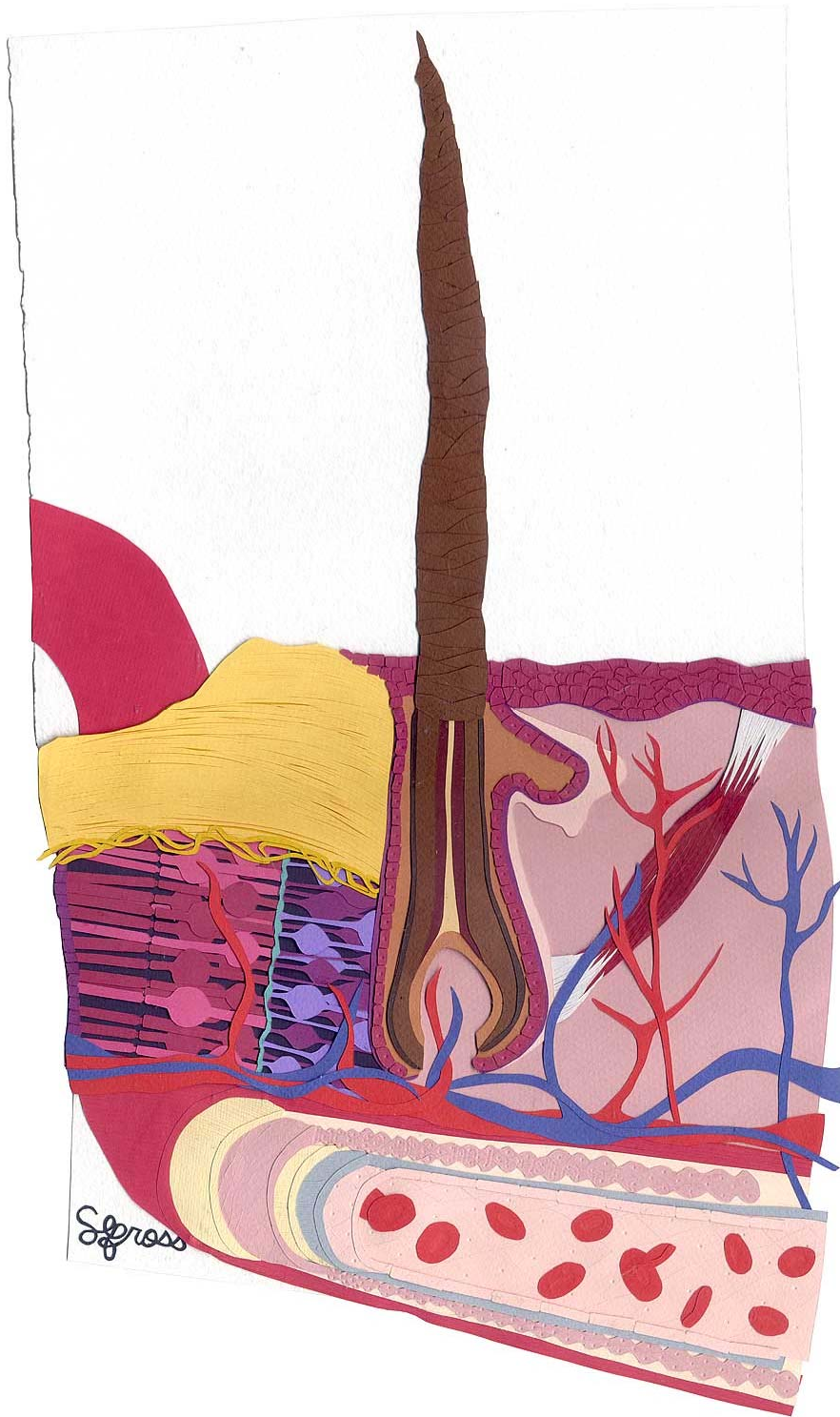
Each work provides a new puzzle that needs to be solved. Although my repertoire of techniques has grown considerably over the years, I still try to approach each work with a new method of working the paper to see how this will add to the finished art. In 2007 I committed myself to completing a new work every weekday. The resulting one-a-(week)day project saw the creation of 209 new works. Working on such a fixed schedule forced me to develop new ways of approaching subject, technique, and the paper itself. I completed that year having learnt a lot about my work and myself.

Currently, I am working on a series of images based on classic PinUp. I am working with a Baltimore area photographer on this project. One of my recent works, PinUp, is the most ambitious project I have undertaken to date. A primary challenge in this piece was rendering the shag carpeting that makes up the background. Ultimately I constructed it using 6,375 pieces of paper layered upon each other to give the final work the depth suitable to an actual rug.

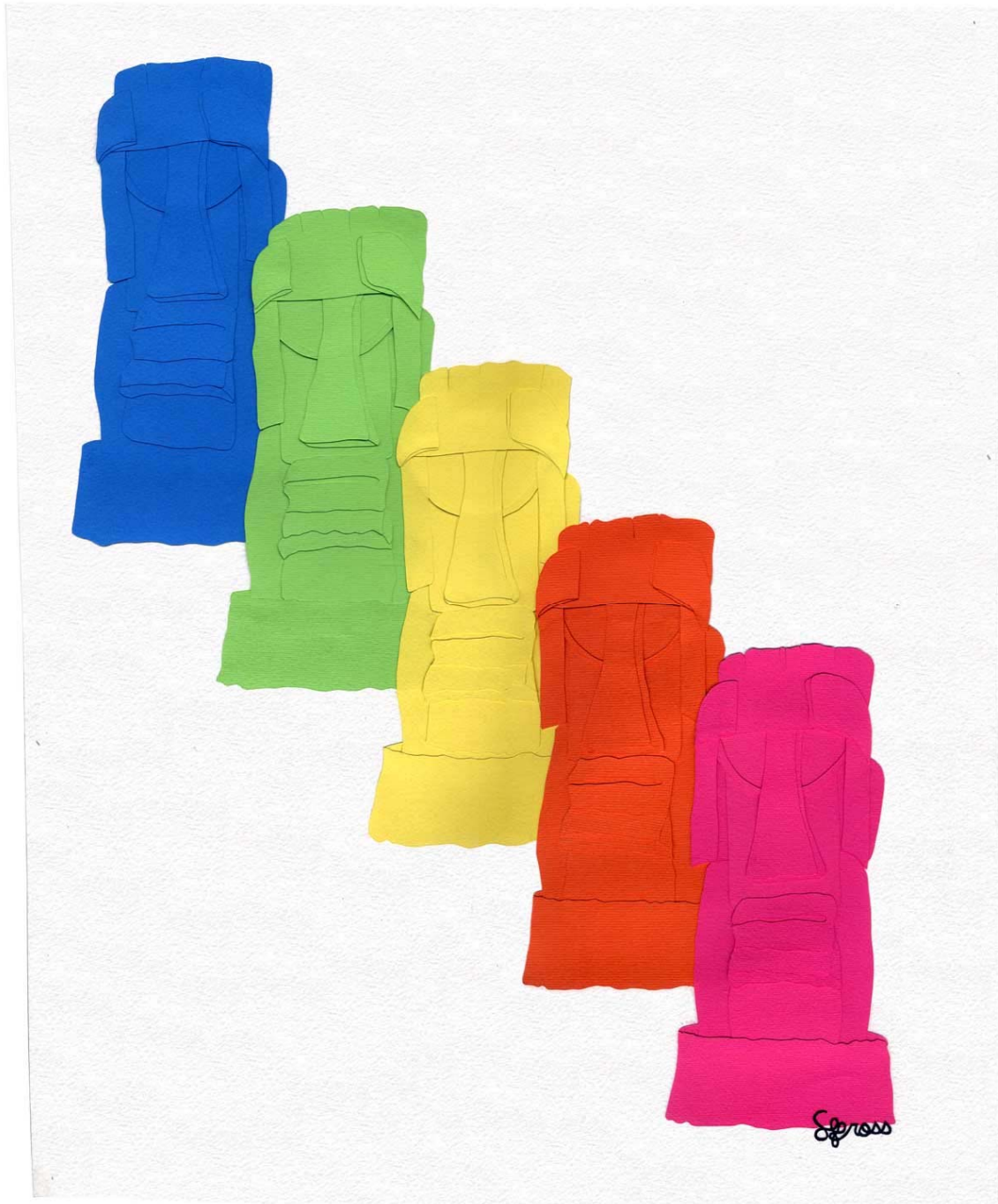
My artwork is what happens when you run with scissors.



Sherill Anne Gross
Water
2011
Paper
8" x 8"



Sherill Anne Gross
Blood, Sweat and Tears
2011
Paper
18" x 11"



Sherill Anne Gross
Neon Moai
2010
Paper
20" x 16"

Michael Janis

Lives in Washington DC, Works in Mt Rainer, MD

Representation: Maurine Littleton Gallery, Washington, DC

Artist's Statement:

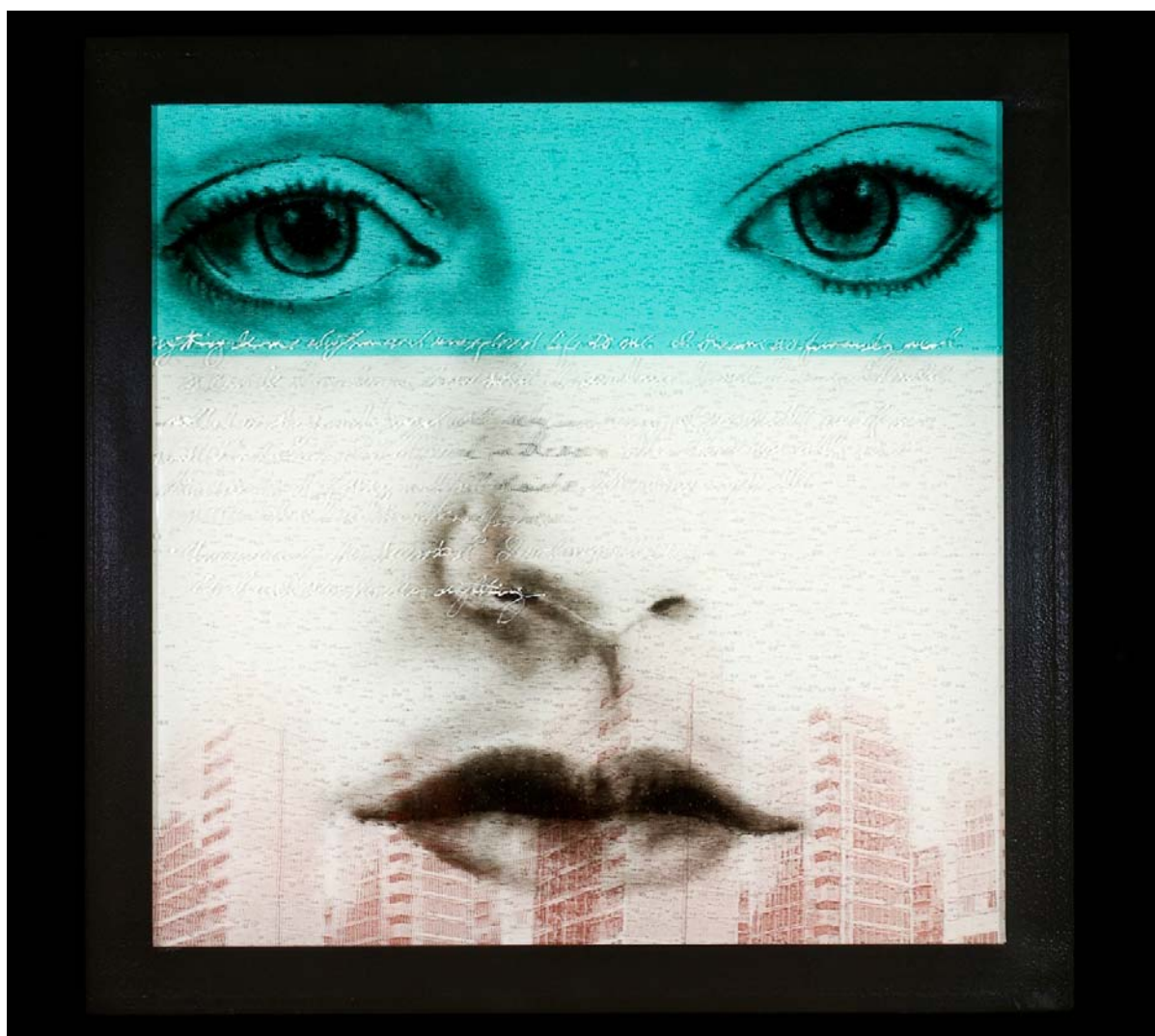
Inspired by ways we transform ourselves, I work at creating creates glass pieces that have both visual and spatial depth. By layering and fusing sheets of glass with overlapping elements, I strive for an interactive commentary using simple forms with intricate glass powder drawings. These works are a continuation of my frit powder drawings that I have been working on for some time now. The layered compositions allow me to make unusual juxtapositions of imagery.

My kilnformed work takes scenes and suspends them within layers of fused, formed and coldworked sheet glass. Using crushed glass powder to create drawings, I like to play on the elements of light, color and also sequence. The glass powder is sifted onto glass sheets, and by scraping and scratching the sifted black glass dust I craft my artwork. The glass panel is then fired in an electric kiln at temperatures up to 1600°F. This time consuming process facilitates drawn out contemplation of often overlooked imagery.

I work hard to create some kind of meaning out of my artworks — dream-state surrealism using figures, text and common objects, and hint at questions. The artworks suggest meanings but they encourage the viewers to draw their own conclusions. The work has an intrinsic meaning for me, but they remain open to multiple interpretations. I want to encourage the possibility of exploring meanings beyond those I put there — I count on the viewer bringing something to the work.



Michael Janis
In The Evening Twilight
2011
Glass, fused glass powder imagery, steel
12" x 12" x 1"
Courtesy Maurine Littleton Gallery



Michael Janis

Again and Again

2010

Glass, fused glass powder imagery, steel

20" x 20" x 2"

Courtesy Maurine Littleton Gallery



Michael Janis

The Space Between Us

2009

Glass, fused glass powder imagery, steel

12" x 36" x 7"

Courtesy Maurine Littleton Gallery

J. T. Kirkland

Lives and Works in Sterling, VA

Artist's Statement:

I strive to find clarity and resolution in line, color, and form, while challenging viewers' perceptions of surface and space through simple, precise gestures on wood.



Polyclear Series

2010

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Top Row- | (L) Polyclear 20 Walnut and Rosewood, Polyacrylic on Birch Plywood
(R) Polyclear 13- Padauk and Walnut, Polyacrylic on Birch Plywood |
| Middle Row- | (L) Polyclear 12- Purpleheart and Yellowheart, Polyacrylic on Birch Plywood
(R) Polyclear 03- Basswood/Cherry wood, Polyacrylic on Birch Plywood |
| Bottom Row- | (L) Polyclear 01- Walnut wood, Polyacrylic on Birch Plywood
(R) Polyclear 19- Walnut, Polyacrylic on Birch Plywood |

All works 11.75" x 11.75"



Subspace Series

2010

Top Row- (L) Subspace 23- Acrylic paint, polyacrylic on maple plywood
 (R) Subspace 21- Acrylic paint, polyacrylic on maple plywood
 Middle Row- (L) Subspace 24- Acrylic paint, polyacrylic on maple plywood
 (R) Subspace 07- Acrylic paint, polyacrylic on maple plywood
 Bottom Row- (L) Subspace 04- Acrylic paint, polyacrylic on maple plywood
 (R) Subspace 11- Acrylic paint, polyacrylic on maple plywood

All works 12" x 12"

Matthew Langley

Lives and Works in Brooklyn, NY

Representation: Susan Calloway Fine Arts, Washington, DC

Artist's Statement:

On Developing New Images.

The artworks come from a series of divergent strategies. One of building and extending - the other of reducing and minimizing. These disparate approaches are not a way to impose meanings on the work, but can be viewed as a metaphoric crossroads. This crossroads is about extending the relationship of these different approaches, while at the same time allowing the viewer the liberty of time for further reading of the work. The image making that comes from this strategic foundation will be clear, concise and rational, while at the same time allowing for a sense of community and/or contemplation to develop in and around the artworks. The artworks are not linear narratives, this allows the element of time to be stretched or compressed to accommodate the viewer. This flexibility to time as well as environment allows the artwork to reveal itself in slower and calmer ways than an artwork that is based only on the relationship of drama and detail of the forms presented inside of it, while allowing those with a more compressed timeline to react to the base elements of the composition and painterliness of the overall approach.

This open ended approach is central to the artworks I create and allows them to be developed with a non-specific exactness.

On Names.

Titles have become critical to my work. Primarily they re-establish a connection to the visible world and hopefully trigger a series of associations and ideas that are related between the artwork and the connotation in the viewers awareness. I avoid the descriptive and ordered approach (blue, or number 12, etc.) as well as using "untitled". I view titles as an approach to open the viewer to a thought process that may influence the subject at hand. This could be viewed as a shorthanded poetry or similar device that allows further thought in connection to the viewer's experience of the artworks.



Matthew Langley

Base Camp

2011

Oil on Canvas

40" x 30"

Courtesy Susan Calloway Fine Arts



Matthew Langley

Slide Away

2010

Oil on Canvas

24" x 18"

Courtesy Susan Calloway Fine Arts

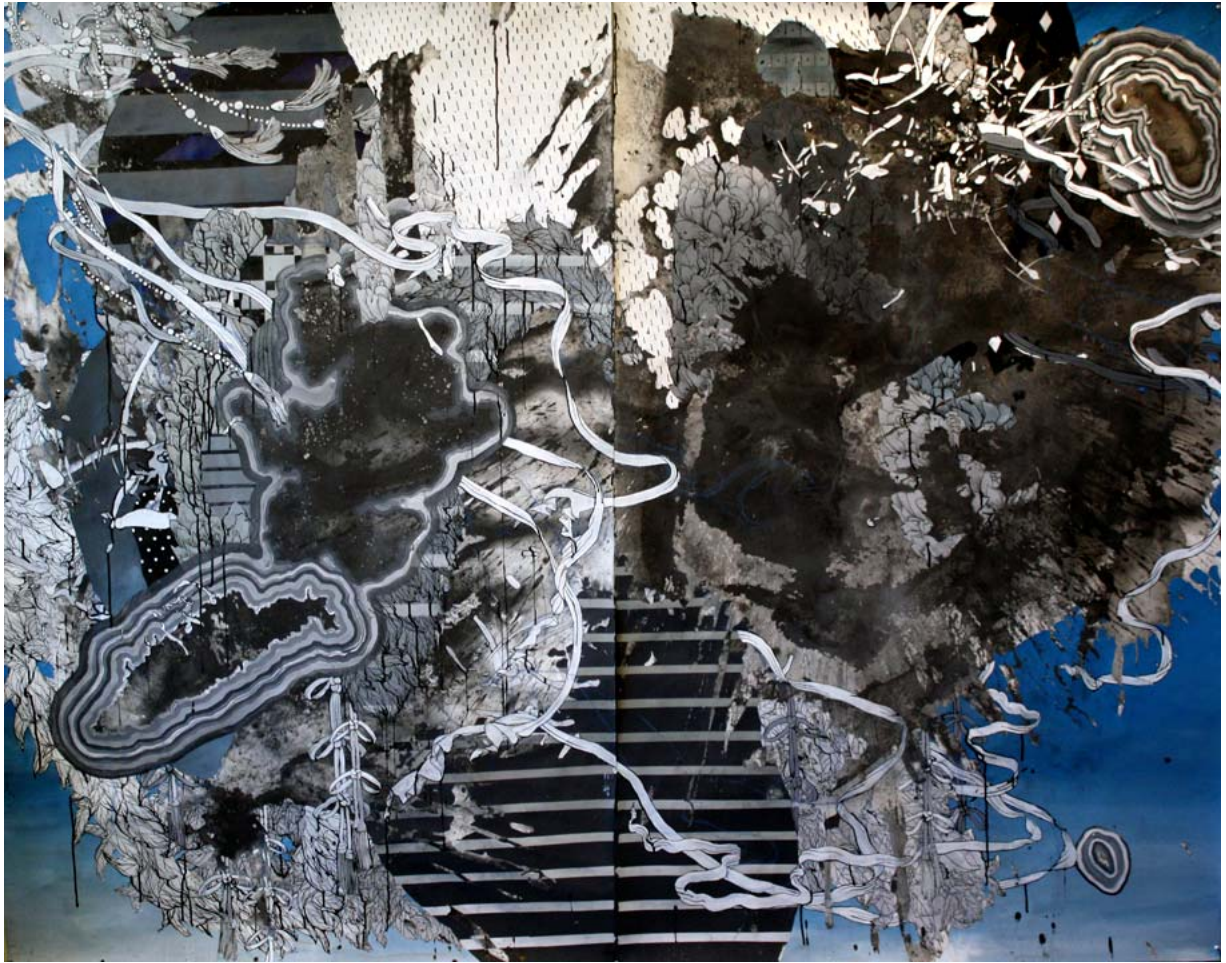
Katherine Mann

Lives and Works in Washington, DC
Hamiltonian Fellow, Washington, DC

Artist's Statement:

My paintings show how patterned, highly-wrought, decorative elements coalesce from the chaos and contingency of an organic environment — and how they dissolve into that environment again. I begin each painting with a stain of color, the product of chance evaporation of ink and water from the paper as it lies on the floor of the studio. From this shape, I nourish the landscape of each painting, coaxing from this organic foundation the development of diverse, decorative forms: braids of hair, details from Beijing opera costuming, lattice-work, sequined patterns. Although founded in adornment, these elements are repeated until they too appear organic, even cancerous... and they at once highlight and suffocate the underlying ink stained foundation. Each of my paintings is tense with the threat of disunity and incoherence as nature and artifice spring from and merge into one another, and as different elements multiply and expand like poisonous growths.

My paintings are utter hybrids; man-sized fields punctuated by moments of absurdity, poetry, mutation, growth and decay that I find both suffocating and fabulous. They glory in the sensuous and the rambling, but intersperse the chaos with moments of neurotic control. They explore the potentialities of growth, but also of overabundance. I think of my work as baroque abstract: a celebration of the abundance of connections and clashes that can be found in the disparate mess of matter in the world.



Katherine Mann
Calcite
2010
Acrylic and Ink on Paper
70" x 90"
Courtesy Hamiltonian Gallery

Marie Ringwald

Lives and Works in Washington, DC

Representation: Longview Gallery, Washington, DC

Artist's Statement:

When I studied art in college, I was drawn to the minimalist art of the mid 60s and early 70s. I fell in love with pattern, placement, subtle color shifts and proportion. My work was non-objective through my early years in Washington, DC when I was making silkscreen prints, drawings and then sculptures.

However, I was constantly looking at architecture - buildings, doors & windows, fences, even beach furniture, lattices and old-fashioned amusement park architecture. In the mid 70s I started making art about the things I loved to look at. I'm fascinated with utilitarian buildings — warehouses, factories, Quonset huts, and all kinds of farm buildings - buildings for working in and for holding materials, animals and goods. For me these buildings embody hopefulness, possibilities, history and sometimes even mystery. I appreciate the elegant design elements, as well as the poetic and emotional associations, of simple vernacular architecture. I like that these utilitarian buildings are made with everyday materials that get wonderfully worn by time and weather, and are sometimes patched like a quilt. My sculptures are constructed and collaged with wood (painted, oiled or stained), rubber, glass and sheet metal - the same materials that make up the buildings that inspire me. I pick and choose appropriate materials — both new and used — and paint, stain, patina and work the surfaces. Some sculptures are based on specific buildings while others come from playing with forms or combinations of materials. Pieces range from fairly representational to abstract. Most are wall mounted while others are free standing.

I sketch and photograph during travels and when close to home. Images from photographs (some given to me by friends) and films also play a part in my art. I start by remembering a place and then abstracting the essentials. I believe these types of buildings conjure universal as well as personal associations. I aim to capture these associations in my work.

Born, raised and educated in the Bronx, New York, I earned a BFA from Hunter College, City University of New York in 1970. I then spent a year of graduate studies at Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia PA. In 1971 I moved to Washington, DC where I started working and showing with a loosely organized group of women artists. In 1976 I began teaching at the Corcoran College of Art + Design. In addition to teaching, I served as Chairman of the Foundation Department from 1986 to 1989 and 1996 to 2003. I was awarded full professorship in 1992. After taking a leave of absence for the 2003-2004 academic year, I resigned in order to work full time in my studio.

Since 1977 my studio has been in a post civil war brick building in Washington DC, a town house most likely originally designed to be a boarding house.



Marie Ringwald

Patchwork Barn: orange + green with a copper door + steel roof

2010

Painted and stained wood, copper, steel and nails

22.5" x 28" x 2"

Courtesy Longview Gallery



Marie Ringwald

Patchwork Warehouse in Black + Silver

Painted wood, metal (aluminum + steel) tar paper (corrugated + varnished)

15" x 38" x 2"

Courtesy Longview Gallery



Marie Ringwald
Chunky Patchwork Shed # 4; wood with a copper roof
 2011
 Painted wood, tar paper, copper + nails
 7" x 6" x 5.5"
 Courtesy Longview Gallery



Marie Ringwald
Chunky Patchwork Shed #8 (blue + green shed with a pink roof)
 2011
 Painted + stained wood, copper + nails
 7" x 6" x 5.5"
 Courtesy Longview Gallery



Marie Ringwald
Chunky Patchwork Shed #6 (corrugated lead + tar paper)
 2011
 Rubber, lead, steel, painted wood
 7" x 6" x 5.5"
 Courtesy Longview Gallery



Marie Ringwald
Chunky Patchwork Shed #5 (orange/ochre roof)
 2011
 Copper, steel, tar paper + painted wood
 7" x 6" x 5.5"
 Courtesy Longview Gallery

Stephen Boocks

Lives and Works in Germantown, MD

Boocks studied at the Corcoran School of Art and received his BFA from Old Dominion University. As a painter he frequently exhibited in solo and group shows in southern Virginia from the mid-80s through the early 90s. He has recently returned to painting, participating in a number of group shows in the area over the past two years.

In the early 90s, Boocks founded the Praha Gallery in downtown Norfolk with the painter Lori Anne Foster (now Boocks). Serving as the curator for the gallery, Boocks mounted two impressive surveys *Fresh* and *Solid*. The first show, *Fresh* presented works by then current graduate students and recent graduates while *Solid* included works by many of the area's top educators. These shows perfectly illustrate Boocks' curatorial philosophy of bringing together quality works showcasing diverse artists who demonstrate a commitment to their materials and techniques. Boocks finds that clever or trendy themes are not necessary to make an exhibition compelling... though he doesn't rule out using them in the future.

Acknowledgments:

Stephen Boocks would like to thank all of the artists participating in the show and Jesse Cohen of Fine Arts Ventures and artdc gallery along with Longview Gallery, Maurine Littleton Gallery, Susan Calloway Fine Arts and Hamiltonian Gallery. He also appreciates the support of his family, especially his wife Lori Anne for her help with proofing and editing.