



BEHIND THE SCENES

PREPARATORS AND THEIR ART

ALPER INITIATIVE FOR WASHINGTON ART



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American University Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center

Washington, DC

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Photography by Dylan Singleton.

FOREWORD

Art is a highly collaborative human endeavor. An object or action only becomes art when it is experienced and interpreted by an audience prepared to engage with the work physically, intellectually, and emotionally. We like to believe the romantic myth of solitary artists working alone in their garrets, but the process of making a work and getting it in front of engaged viewers is collaborative in every important aspect.

As sociologist Howard S. Becker observed in his 1982 book *Art Worlds*:

*Painters... depend on manufacturers for canvas, stretchers, paint, and brushes; on dealers, collectors, and museum curators for exhibition space and financial support; on critics and aestheticians for the rationale for what they do; on the state for the patronage or even the advantageous tax laws which persuade collectors to buy works and donate them to the public; on members of the public to respond to the work emotionally; and on the other painters, contemporary and past, who created the tradition which makes the backdrop against which their work makes sense.*¹

In this excerpt, Becker overlooked some of the most important collaborators in the process of actualizing artwork—the preparators (or art handlers, as they are more prosaically named). They pack, transport, and unpack the work as it moves to and from studio, gallery, museum, or private collection. They play essential roles in creating the conditions under which works of art may be experienced: designing, installing, and lighting the exhibition space, and placing labels and text panels to help contextualize the work.

It is no secret the best preparators are artists themselves, and the American University Museum and its Alper Initiative for Washington Art have been fortunate

to work with the gifted artists whose work is exhibited here in *Behind the Scenes: Preparators and their Art*. The exhibition highlights their dual functions as both artists and collaborators.

I am grateful to them, and to the untold hundreds of other collaborators who enable the Alper Initiative and the American University Museum to perform its mission. Just as key to the successful presentation of artworks are the members of our museum team who carry out crucial registrarial duties, prepare public relations and publications materials, and perform visitor, financial, administrative, curatorial, and fundraising services. They are supported in turn by our graduate fellows, volunteer docents, and the students, faculty, staff, university board members, and the larger surrounding community and art world who help us accomplish our mission. In this way, our museum team plays its small part in an industrial-strength, multibillion-dollar complex dedicated to bringing art to you.

Most especially, I am thankful to the Alper Family Foundation for its continued commitment to our research into the history and present of Washington's art and artists. The exhibitions that result from this enlightened philanthropy are further enhanced by the Wolpoff Family Foundation's support of printed catalogs that extend the impact of these exhibitions—connecting commentary and images to the viewer in a different but equally potent actualization.

Jack Rasmussen
Director and Curator
American University Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center
Washington, DC

¹ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 13.

All of my works come from a narrative of mythology and memory and personal experience. In *Transformation 54* (2020) there is a fragment of nostalgia about different things in

my childhood. The imagery is a reference to a Chinese demi-god found in the ancient mythological text, *Journey to the West* (16th c.). The Monkey King was born out of a tear from a goddess from the heavens. One of her tear shards fell to Earth and crystallized and created this demi-god who is a monkey and also kind of like a human. A smarter monkey. He goes on a rampage when he is tricked by one of the underworld gods into believing his monkey family has been killed. He tries to destroy the heavens in his revenge, only to find out he was lied to. As punishment for his misplaced revenge, the Buddha imprisons him for 500 years under a great mountain. He is finally freed by a monk who takes him on a journey to retrieve the last scriptures of the Buddha from India.

I was thinking of different ways to tap into the very untamed nature that children have as artists, the very intuitive feelings. I was introduced to the Monkey at a very early age by a friend of mine who had just come from China. Just recently, that memory was rekindled, and I tapped into what the Monkey King was and its relation to the mystical and spiritual in my own time.

In a way, this character is so familiar to me but at the same time there is this barrier due to my not having grown up within Chinese culture and not understanding the Chinese language. So there is a kind of distortion. The little symbols on the black area are hieroglyphs that I made up, and I was thinking about the relationship with history and how it is so hard to decode sometimes. We only get parts of it but we don't really understand because of time, language, culture, all these things. The teardrop in the painting is a reference to the birth of the Monkey King, but also to the sadness he has carried because he was lied to, and because of the terribly misguided actions that ensued. There are these sad truths in the world.

ERICK ANTONIO BENITEZ

Something that I've really appreciated about working as a preparator is the knowledge gained from just seeing something as an object. As a Preparator, you basically remove yourself

from what the art means, and you see it more as an object. I also work on a lot of sculpture installations that are not installed in the most orthodox of ways. So I am thinking about new ways of installing all the time. I think for me that's the biggest benefit, problem solving and understanding how something will be presented and thinking about new ways to install work, and becoming familiar with different tools as I find them.

Artists in general are very opinionated people and I think one of the challenges is that when everyone works together and we're trying to solve a problem, it can be like too many chefs in the kitchen. But I enjoy it because everybody who's an artist comes with a different background in their practice and each contributes. Everybody has their strengths, and I think that is what can make a team very unique. Everybody knows their part, where they fit.

Erick Antonio Benitez (b.1988, Bronx, NY) is a Salvadorian-American multidisciplinary artist, musician, and curator based in Baltimore and Washington, DC. He received his BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art and has exhibited work at Connersmith Gallery (DC), The Baltimore Museum of Art (MD), Greenpoint Gallery (NY), Real Milk Studios (GA), Gaddis Geeslin Gallery (TX), Strange Fire Collective (CO), Metàfora Studio Arts (Barcelona, ES) and Simultan Festival (Timișoara, RO). His work has been reviewed in *The Washington Post*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *Baltimore Magazine*, *B'moreArt*, and *The American Scholar*. He is the recipient of the Municipal Art Society of Baltimore City Artist Travel Prize and the Janet and Walter Sondheim Award, and is represented in private collections around the Mid-Atlantic region and abroad. In 2018, Benitez was in residence at The Studios, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA.



Erick Antonio Benitez, *Things I Imagined*, 2019. Acrylic, airbrush, charcoal and ink in wooden panel, 60 x 48 in.



Erick Antonio Benitez, *Transformation 54*, 2020. Acrylic, airbrush, and ink on wooden panel, 12 x 12 in. On Loan: Jeffrey Kent Collection.

I got started in professional music production doing track work and tuning for record labels in Nashville. All the songs that I create

involve taking samples, mostly from '60s records. First, I isolate vocal tracks and then run them through Auto-Tune to re-pitch them, changing the singer's melody to fit what I wrote. So, take other peoples' ideas and co-opt them, seeing how far I can stretch the meaning.

Having studied art history, I always thought that you first have the idea and then the art follows. Once I moved into a museum environment, I realized just how much art is not about original vision as much as it is about perseverance in dealing with finicky materials and the little questions of how something presents to the public. My music has grown out of that experience and the decision to make music for myself, as opposed to an audience. After making music professionally for others for so long, it took a couple years to figure out: what do I even like?

Sampling was initially a way to start with someone else's idea and try to build something from it. Maybe it's an artist's job is to see what's out there and discern broader emotional strains from all that noise? I have music software that allows me to utilize more instruments than I would ever know what to do with, and so I sit down at my keyboard and start plunking it out. I write all of the music and then layer sampled vocals over the top of it. This approach carries over to the video aspect. Most often, I work with found video, although both of these videos have footage that I shot myself.

PAUL BLAKESLEE

After I left music production in Nashville, I moved to Dallas and became an art handler. It turns out there are a lot of overlapping concepts

behind making other people's music and hanging artists' work, in terms of cultivating technical knowledge and honing the craft of it. The saying goes that if you're an art handler, you're either an artist or you're a musician. The artists you work with are always encouraged when they find out you make stuff, as well. There is also a sense of camaraderie with the other art handlers—at the end of the day, everyone is making their own work.

Paul Blakeslee (b. 1990, Alexandria, VA) wasn't raised in a treehouse isolated from the rest of society but he wishes he was. Instead, he grew up surrounded by the nondescript pallor of brutalist architecture and the shallow, power hungry bureaucrats of Washington, DC. His environs taught him at a young age that everything is a lie and everyone is out to make a buck, no matter the cost. Disillusioned with modern civilization, Blakeslee escaped to the hills of Tennessee for college where he first began to experiment with video art. Later, he became a music producer in Nashville before eventually moving to Dallas to pursue art handling. Now, Blakeslee combines his artistic past-lives with his roots in the nation's capital, exploring the demise of capitalism-by-theft amidst an emotionally vacant landscape. He also holds a master's degree in art history from American University.



From top: Paul Blakeslee, *Another Casualty of the Seduction of Art* (still), 2020. Color and black & white video with original music, 2 min. 44 sec.; *I Get Petrified* (still), 2020. Color and black & white video with original music, 3 min. 33 sec.

All three of my works deal with the topics that I generally work around, which are time, place, and storytelling. A lot of the sculptures come from the material world. *Surveillance*

Gate (2019) came from found objects that I discovered in places that you could say were left behind or were vacant and rendered useless. The point of the piece was to create some type of object that felt like it was monitoring or surveilling or having some type of other eyes focused on you. It's more playful thing; parts are from kids' toys, there's a cassette tape, a little light bulb, a little steering wheel from a car. It has a childlike, playful element, but it still relates to the feeling we have in living in the present world where everything is documented, everything is traceable, everything is looked after. I wanted to create that feeling out of a place that didn't have that, a place harder to find nowadays.

My paintings in general deal with this element of place and time and the lapse of time. They're usually pretty long-winded paintings, a lot of layering and working back and forth and discovering the imagery along the way instead of a direct A to B translation. I think this relates to the sculpture as well.

Club Feet (2019) is based around this figure moving through space, carrying this clunky, slow, and dilapidated feeling.. It's my representation of where we are now as humans, kind of walking through life and through this connection to the constructed world versus the natural world. I wanted to have this representation of a person or a being moving through space, looking around and seeing the world falling apart or coming together.

The paintings and the sculptures welcome chance and they welcome discovery along the way. That shows up in the ideas and materials I gather, whether it's memories of a feeling that needed to be revisited

JACK COYLE

or an actual piece of physical material. In Baltimore, there's a lot of refuse, there are a lot of things rendered kind of pointless. Part of my practice is for me to find a way to bring value back

into otherwise valueless objects or ideas.

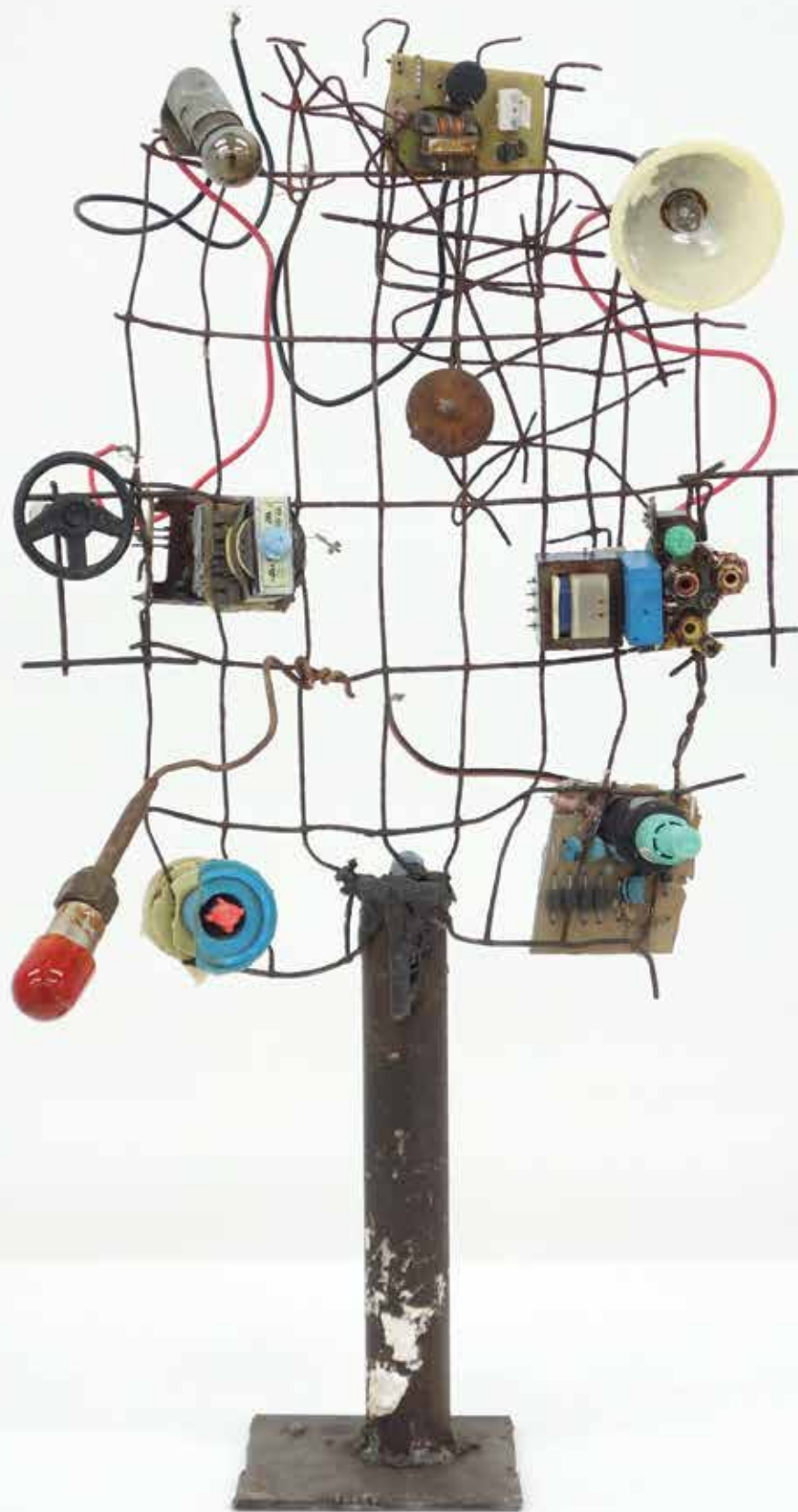
Working at the American University Museum has been my first job as a preparator. I didn't realize, especially with this group, that every single one of us is an active artist. It helps with the job, having a background in making. Problem solving becomes a lot more doable. We speak the language of art in addition to understanding the technical and physical sides of art handling. Also, being around different shows being installed is a learning experience for me. I'm always coming home each day with a different set of topics or different set of ideas from the work in the museum that I otherwise would probably not be thinking about. Working with a crew that has a personal connection to art just makes the environment a lot easier and the job a more creative process.

Jack Coyle (b. 1995, Nashville, TN) is a painter and sculptor, with a bachelor's degree from the Maryland Institute College of Art. Before attending MICA, Jack completed several large-scale murals in Nashville and continues to work on mural projects today, most recently for the City of Baltimore in the Johnson Square area. Jack has participated in several residencies including the Yale Norfolk Fellowship in 2018 and the Institut für Alles Mögliche in Berlin in 2019. In addition to working as a preparator, Jack keeps an active studio practice and exhibits his work in solo and group shows on the east coast at spaces like Resort Gallery (Baltimore, MD) and Terrault Contemporary (Baltimore, MD). Jack currently works out of a studio in Baltimore in the Crown Industrial complex in Highland Town.



Jack Coyle, *Club Feet*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 18 in.

Page 10: Jack Coyle, *Surveillance Gate*, 2019. Mixed media, 18 x 12 in.; Page 11: Jack Coyle, *Cannon*, 2019. Mixed media, 22 x 15 x 15 in.





These works are part of an ongoing series titled *Variations on Listening*. They span sculpture and drawing as a means of fielding questions about close lis-

tening. The ear became this motif to reflect on the act of listening. To make the ears I use a rubber push mold, into which I put a little ball of polymer clay. Then I pop them out and bake them in the oven. I found the process of making them to be meditative and a tool for reflection.

Variations on Listening #1 (2017) is the first work I made in the series, and it's a lot more chaotic than the later pieces. In later works the ear formations become geometric and organized. In the first work I was considering the interaction of crowds and mentality. Later I began to contemplate more on how individuals relate and listen to each other. The black thread becomes a device to connect the left and right ears, creating different narratives of how they relate to each other.

Music is a big influence on my work, and an accessible form of communication. I think being inspired by music and the act of playing the alto saxophone in marching band got me focused on the form of the ear since that's how we process sound.

Musical instruments often hold a strong presence in my work. When I went to college I fell in love with sculpture and I started making sculptural objects inspired by musical instruments. Then that evolved into using the objects I made in performances, and then incorporating video to document the performances. Now I also incorporate some robotics using sensors to take data from the body, like a heartbeat, and incorporate it into the performance. It's this whole kind of multimedia mix that my practice has become.

I was introduced to preparator work when I was at the Maryland Institute College of Art. I worked

SARA DITTRICH

part time in the exhibitions department for my work study job. Especially when I started becoming more interested in sculpture and installation, I found it was a

helpful professional practice to learn how to install my own work. When I go to museums, I always love peeking around to see if I can find out how the pieces were hung or try to analyze how it was installed to give me new ideas for installing my own pieces. Now working at the AU Museum, it's nice to be part of a team with coworkers and fellow art handlers who are also artists. Once I graduated from art school it became harder to stay connected to an artistic community, but I have found art handling provides a nice built-in solution to this problem.

Sara Dittrich (b. 1991, Cincinnati, OH) is an interdisciplinary sculpture artist based in Baltimore, Maryland. She creates objects, installations, and performances highlighting the dynamic rhythms of the body and the interconnected patterns residing in everyday life. She received her BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, and has exhibited her work at the Baltimore Museum of Art (Baltimore, MD); Washington Project for the Arts, (Washington, DC); and Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, (Grand Rapids, MI). Dittrich has also shown internationally in the Czech Republic where she studied at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague in the sculpture studio headed by Dominik Lang. She is the recipient of a 2017 Mary Sawyers Baker Artist Award and a 2013 Beers Contemporary Award for Emerging Art. Residencies include the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, (Omaha, NE); the Vermont Studio Center Fellowship, (Johnson, VT); Sculpture Space, (Utica, NY); and the Fine Arts Work Center Fellowship, (Provincetown, MA).

Opposite: Sara Dittrich, *Variations on Listening #11* (detail), 2018. Polymer clay, thread, acrylic paint on panel, 48 x 48 x 2 in.







Sara Dittrich, *Variations on Listening #1*, 2017. Polymer clay, embroidery hoop, fabric, thread, 25 x 23 x 1.5 in.

Opposite: *Variations on Listening #1* (detail), 2017. Polymer clay, embroidery hoop, fabric, thread, 25 x 23 x 1.5 in.

As a subject, landscape has been a personal and emotional connection in my work. Growing up in Tennes-

see, in Appalachia, I noticed a lot of juxtapositions between land use and preservation. That push and pull—between national parks, mining, or logging—has been something that has stuck with me over the years. I intentionally try to make the work aestheticized or beautiful because I am talking about detrimental subjects, but I don't want it to be ugly or hopeless, so I try to bring out the potential of wasted materials.

These pieces are made from laser cut layered tar paper. Each of them incorporates forms that began as a 3D model, ran through a program to laser cut each layer, and then I manually adhered them together—so they're very process-based. The forms are meant to be topographical, like a landscape or a planetscape, but it's left a little ambiguous. A lot of my work plays with a tension between technology, industry, and landscape.

Art handling has really influenced my art practice, especially in the sense of giving me a better awareness of the presentation of my work and how much

CAROLINE HATFIELD

that can change and strengthen the content. It's definitely something I'm much more conscious of after working in gal-

leries and museums. I enjoy the sense of community working with fellow artists brings and it is always exciting to get to meet or see the work of an artist you respect a lot or who has been influential for my own work.

Caroline Hatfield (b. 1991, Augusta, GA) works with sculpture, installation, photography, and drawing to explore themes of landscape and science fiction. After completing a BFA in Sculpture at the University of Tennessee, she earned an MFA in Interdisciplinary Studio Art from Towson University. Hatfield has exhibited nationally at venues such as The Mint Museum (Charlotte, NC) and The Delaware Contemporary Art Museum (Wilmington, DE). Recent solo exhibitions include *Land and Water* at 500 X Gallery (Dallas, TX) and *Unearthing* at Target Gallery (Alexandria, VA). Hatfield is the 2018 recipient of the Trawick Contemporary Art Prize. She lives and works now in eastern Tennessee, where she teaches at Lincoln Memorial University.



Caroline Hatfield, *Terraform 001*, *Terraform 002*, *Terraform 003*, 2018. Laser cut layered tar paper, charcoal on panel, 15 x 15 x 2.5 in. (each).

These works are landscapes to me, not in the usual sense of *en plein air*, but layered dimensions through two-dimensional draw-

ing, different materials, and negative and positive spaces made by cutting out material and adding to the material. At the time I created these works, I was focused on world building and the concept of creating your environment. There are three subsets of world building: world as you know it (current world), culture (as in who inhabits it), and new world. That's where the world building comes in, in creating the new. Creating the new has three subsets: new inhabitants, new environment, and new community. But when you're creating the world you can only depict a part of it, you can never depict the whole.

I'm very interested in world building because as a millennial I realize that a big theme that my generation is interested in is escapism, and that's apparent in the type of entertainment we consume through our movies, our music, video games, books. The current world is something to get away from. I comment on that by using materials that are already known to us. For example, I use the Amazon box with its logo printed on the cardboard. Cardboard is a material that is everywhere, and everyone is used to it. With world building it's also important to understand that you cannot create something from nothing—you are inevitably influenced by things, even if you are trying

NIEKO MCDANIEL

to create something original.

Working as a preparator, I know I am part of a larger community. I am not a single man putting

up three floors of artwork myself. We are divided up into certain jobs that we have more expertise in. Some people might hang paintings and do all the measurements, somebody may be fabricating the pedestals, someone might be doing lighting. You eventually get into a flow with each other. In the art world, you understand that you are part of a team, a collective. You are part of a community with specialized knowledge and skills.

Nieko McDaniel (b. 1995, San Dimas, CA) was influenced by graffiti, street art, hip hop, rap, and an urban lifestyle while growing up in Southern California. Interested in the environment around him and creating new ones, McDaniel makes work about world building which he relates to escapism and attributes to the type of entertainment the generation he grew up in prefers. Within the past year McDaniel opened his solo exhibition, *Growing Unhindered Production*, at Tri-Chromatic Gallery (Modesto, CA). Recently, McDaniel earned the Helene Herzbrun Scholarship and Serge Sacknoff Sculpture Scholarship and received an Honorable Mention for his work in the Small Works Show at Main Streets Art in Clifton Springs, New York.



Nieko McDaniel, *Untitled Landscape #6*, 2019. Archival pen, cardboard, graphite, Sharpie, white oil pencil, 12 x 7.5 x 2 in.



Nieko McDaniel, *Untitled Landscape #9*, 2019. Archival pen, cardboard, graphite, Sharpie, white oil pencil, 11.5 x 6 x 3.5 in.



Nieko McDaniel, *Untitled Landscape #7*, 2019. Archival pen, cardboard, graphite, Sharpie, white oil pencil, 11.25 x 9 x 1.5 in.

TERENCE NICHOLSON

The backstory of this piece was there was a woman cleaning the apartment building where I live. I watched her for years. One day in summer I guess school had let out and her daughter was cleaning with her, and it reminded me of my mother, who was a nurse. The question it brought back to me was I've watched her all year, caring for the building and its maintenance, and I wondered how much time she had to care for herself. She brought her daughter in and I thought about my mother and how she worked two jobs. As I got older, I wondered how much time she had to take care of herself. *Our Lady of Perpetual Servitude* (2018) is a reflection on caretakers and domestic workers and the amount of energy and effort that goes into that kind of work, and the amount of self care these individuals can engage in.

I was brought up Catholic. Images of the Virgin Mary and other things associated may creep into my work. I don't try to dodge it. I walk around in life and things stick to me, and they wind up in my work. So the nipples, the blanket, the rubber insulation materials around it, remind me of keeping safe, keeping warm, keeping protected, being fed. My work often uses repurposed material. I like to think I am in dialogue with my materials. They tell me what they will and won't do.

I thought of sewing together fabric to make a blanket for the figure. Then I found a packing blanket, the kind we art handlers use to protect artwork. It was just the right color. There is a relationship between my own artwork and how I support myself. When I am installing an exhibition, I almost feel like I'm

babysitting other artists' work. Sometimes I deal directly with an artist and really get to know them and their work. I've been very fortunate to work with other artists by day and do my own work at

other times. They play off each other. I've learned basic things about exhibition processes and all the problem-solving involved, and from the exhibiting artists I got their approach to artmaking, and from my co-workers I got all the different talents they bring to the job. I kind of feel, on most days, like a student. This happens to be a season when I can learn from everybody around me. I leave my job, sometimes, just feeling smart, because of the situations we were in and the problem-solving we had to do.

Terence Nicholson (b. 1968, Washington, DC) is a long-time resident of Anacostia. A graduate of the Corcoran School of Art, he was a recipient of the Rosenbaum Memorial Scholarship Award. Terence has exhibited in three East of the River Art Exhibitions, and his solo exhibit, *Intro-Circumspective* at Willow Street Gallery in DC received critical acclaim. He has served as Curator for Honfleur Gallery and Art Director of Anacostia Arts Center, and currently works as an Exhibit Specialist at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden as well as the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center. Terence has recorded and toured worldwide as a composer, producer, and improvisational lyricist, and served as a Cultural Envoy for the US State Department in 2005 and 2006 for the American Music Abroad program in Asia, Suriname, Egypt and the Middle East. Presently, Terence fronts a rock band called Thaylobleu.



Terence Nicholson, *Our Lady of Perpetual Servitude*, 2018. Mixed media, 96 x 64 in.

CORYNNE OSTERMANN

This painting is about the romantic industrial complex, and specifically the wedding industry and hallmark holidays and what that means to millennial women while they're on the internet, being advertised to. A lot of this imagery was advertised to me. I photoshopped the images into a collage structure that then became the sketch I used for my painting. It's specifically found imagery that would be marketed towards women my age because that's what I'm seeing on the internet.

I am preoccupied with weddings because of my previous work in the wedding industry. It's been six years and I've been freelancing for the past three. I just do the florals but I'm also usually reading all the paperwork that comes with the wedding planners and especially if they're lower budget weddings, I am the planner. There's been a couple of instances where I've gotten there, done the flowers, and had to teach the bridesmaids how to walk down the aisle. I've done way too many weddings and seen so many bridezillas. I also learned how to trigger people into spending an extra five or ten thousand dollars. I was very good at that. That was my job. It was like extra-neous dumb crap, like monogrammed napkins or a specifically weird flower arrangement for one area of the bar that didn't need any of that. It's always stuff that you never need. I'm interested in that excess, the excess of late capitalism, and also specifically a feminine kind of late capitalism. I remember there was literally one ad that just said, "Get Married." I remember seeing that and I screenshot it and made a painting about it because it was just so overt. I was like, you guys need to chill out.

The wedding industry was the only industry that grew during the recession in 2008. It was the only recession-proof industry. Even haircuts fell in 2008. People are always going to get married, but you don't necessarily have to have all this stuff. That being said, I love the imagery of it and I also do love the play of it in creating a fantasy for people. So, I'm torn. I also like to paint it, too. Balloons are fun to paint!

Art handling has been hugely, hugely important to me because I'm able to see these pieces close up and how they were constructed from the back. Oh my god! There are so many things I will not do

anymore after seeing how some of these canvases can be built. I'm like, no, no, no, I'm doing this the dumb way. I also get to have a personal relationship with the work. When you're installing the work, you are completely responsible for it. It is your charge.

I have a lot of that collaborative artmaking itch already scratched by being a musician, but it's amazing to get to work at the AU Museum with other artists who understand materiality, because musicians don't, and having a community of people who do is amazing. That was something that I desperately missed from undergraduate school. In the past five months since I've been here, I've learned more in terms of intelligent ways to ship a painting and pack it in a way that will drive museum people less crazy, which is the goal. It's wonderful to get to work with such talented artists. It's not necessarily medium-specific either; it's great to get to hear from people who are doing digital collage, photography, sculpture, you name it. I would argue it's the smartest thing I've ever done for my painting career.

All the flowers I've selected are for meaning as well as aesthetic purposes because I have worked in the industry and also am also familiar with Victorian meaning. There's a reason that there's a columbine as well as a hellebore in there. Everything is selected carefully. It's fun to have an added layer of meaning as well as a playfulness.

Corynne Ostermann (b. 1990, Chicago, IL) is an artist/musician and performer based in Baltimore, MD. She produces paintings, collages, drawings, films, and the occasional three-dimensional object. Ostermann graduated Summa Cum Laude from Maryland Institute College of Art in 2013.



Corynne Ostermann, *The Lovers*, 2020. Latex and oil on canvas, 60 x 78 in.

When I graduated from MICA I was making work based in my interest in textiles, which was more about an interest in

patterns in general, visually and compositionally as well as phenomenologically and in nature. When I started making a lot more clothing in my senior year, my paintings and my drawings started really reflecting the types of garments and patterns that I was attracted to. Now most of my compositions stem from patterns which are rooted in abstract expressionism but in a very graphic way because I use markers rather than paint. They're like these puzzles that I try to solve. To create the layers, I have to understand what the final image will look like before I've made any of the steps along the way. It all has to be figured out ahead of time.

I recently took a road trip with Juansebastián Serano, another preparator in this show. I had never driven across the country and seen the landscape shift and the colors shift as I drove. You go from this very, very dense green to this barren red and then back into this green that's just filled with so many other colors and where the light feels so different. But also, along the way, we were traveling towards forest fires, towards the smoke, and driving past forest fires on the side of the freeway. We were headed towards Paradise and Los Angeles and there was literally a forest fire in Paradise at the time. Juanse was going out there for the next step in his journey. He was my friend through all of school so it was the end of a time in our lives and a new beginning for his life and the beginning of a new time in my life. The beauty and the sadness are tied in how these images came out. It's like a birth of something and a death of something simultaneously, the beauty of destruction.

Being a preparator has made me consider finishing and framing work, of having a final say over what it is going to look like when it is displayed. The final product never really mattered as much to me before.

SAM RIETENBACH

I was more interested in the process. But understanding what goes into putting the final steps into a show, hanging an art show

and making it a full show and not just individual pieces of art, really changed how I finish each work, and the amount of consideration that goes into how it will be hung, or the order in which it will be displayed, or if they're hung on the wall in a series. It definitely changed how I view the amount of effort and foresight that goes into planning the final display and how that can change how the work is viewed.

The frame is part of the work. It becomes a part of the art as an object. I'm also very attached to the materials that I use—the paper that I use is really specific. I don't cut paper. I enjoy the way it looks when paper has been creased and torn—all of my work is on Rives because it's thick and it's got this body that's kind of an object in itself. It's the consideration of the whole thing as an object. When I was in school that was a concept I was taught, but I didn't understand it until I started working with other peoples' art and learned to let go of my own personal taste. I had to try to anticipate what the artists were trying to do with their work and install it accordingly.

Sam Rietenbach (b. 1994, Columbus, OH) is a Baltimore-based graduate of the Maryland Institute College of Art (BFA '16) in his 8th year living in the city. His work comes in many different forms. Small marker drawings he makes while commuting to work in DC as well as on his recent travels throughout the country. His paintings on canvas integrate his interests in texture, pattern, and layering. Garments made by collaging thrift store finds into new one-of-a-kind pieces. He works on community-based murals, in collaboration with community organizers and youth outreach programs like The Choice Program at UMBC.



Sam Rietenbach, *Trouble*, 2019. Marker on Rives BFK, 10 x 8 in.



Sam Rietenbach, *In*, 2019. Marker on Rives BFK, 10 x 8 in.



Sam Rietenbach, *Paradise*, 2019. Marker on Rives BFK, 10 x 8 in.

These three pieces are inspired by video game levels. I took a lot of inspiration from a magazine called *Nintendo Power*. The magazine

is kind of a strategy guide that helps you navigate through the video game world. I wanted to create my own level allowing the viewer to be introduced to the world. The map accompanied by the level is meant to show the viewer how to navigate through it. The artworks are pieces of all kinds of different images, digitally cut and put together to create one final image. I do like a lot of color and I like seeing how many things I can combine to make a brand new image. Since I am translating a video into a still image, my work is like a snapshot that allows the viewer to get the whole worldview at once.

I like the idea of weightlessness, so each image takes on a surrealism type of look and feel. As with weightlessness, it's a sense of no limitations... It makes me feel like I can shape the world any way I want to, like the image in my head, no matter how bizarre, can be created. I just sit down and begin with a theme and it just develops on its own. It's a very freeing experience.

It's great being able to bounce around ideas off of other people on the crew. Crawford, another preparator, who also makes frames for the Katzen, really brought my designs for the frames to life. I just went up to him and said, "hey, I have an idea." He sketched

HILLARY ROCHON

it out and we talked about it and I think it really worked out. I was proud of the outcome. Since he's a framer and we're both art handlers

we were able to work together to make the artwork successful. I feel like I can elevate my pieces even more because I have this installation background. It's nice to see other artists, see their work, see what people are doing, and see that they're striving.

Hillary Rochon (b. 1992, Dallas, TX) is a recent graduate from George Washington University with a Master of Arts in Exhibition Design. Her graduate work explored the concept that exhibition design and technology could be an artistic medium. She participated in a student exhibition, *Next*, where she displayed a 3D model of the structure she designed to house one of her art installations as part of her Master's thesis. In March 2019, she participated in a group show, *Transcendence*, at International Arts & Artists, Hillyer Place, followed by another group show in May 2019, SAMASAMA Art Show and Gathering at Shopkeepers. Her first solo exhibition was held at Baked and Wired in Georgetown, Washington, DC. Her interest in creating an alternate reality through her artwork started with her undergraduate study at Savannah College of Art and Design, where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography.



Hillary Rochon, *Swan*, 2019. Digital collage, 25 x 16 in.



Hillary Rochon, *Into Forever*, 2019. Digital collage, 30 x 16 in.



Hillary Rochon, *Final Boss*, 2019. Digital collage, 30 x 16 in.

Growing up, I was not around my family. Being geographically separated from my family is the catalyst for my work; it is why I see what I see.

Still, family inspires and influences me to be who I am. I am Puerto Rican but I was born in the States. I lived a short time in Philadelphia until my parents decided to move away from the inner city to give my sister and myself a better environment to grow up in. From that time until now my friends have filled that void of missing family or not having family constantly around me.

This time had a transformative influence on my personality and how I value those around me. I might not be around family but things that might remind me of them are things that I notice in other people. My project *Void* is made up of images of these moments that stand out to me, when I'm hanging out with my friends and I don't understand why in certain moments I feel the way I do. During my edit process I start to think about why I took a certain image and then discover there is some distant connection to what things I've learned from my family. These are the things that influence me to take a photograph and the signs I am constantly on the lookout for, my family and sense of connection shown through the lens of my present life and friends.

My job as a preparator is multifaceted, it is very analytical yet also labor intensive. We perform a lot of arithmetic, measuring, lifting, and problem

MICHAELANGELO RODRIGUEZ

solving. I think art handling is more like a performance; it stands in as a practice for many different things. Learning how to look at work, learning how to discuss

work, learning how to treat work, and understanding value of work. This all is a result of working with artist, curators, and the install crew. It informs me as an artist in my own practice, and comparable to art school in the ways of learning. It's being a part of something that I can say I believe in, showing art and keeping art in public view. Being behind the scenes is so much a part of the scene. We're all moving together. I think it's very important to highlight the people that are behind the scenes, because we're a part of that structure.

MichaelAngelo Rodriguez (b. 1991, Meadowbrook, PA) received a BFA in Photography in 2018 from The Corcoran School of the Arts and Design at George Washington University. He received an A.A. Degree from Tidewater Community College in Photography in 2016. In 2017 he was invited by Mel Chin to be a studio assistant intern during the preparation for his 2018 show *All Over the Place* at the Queens Museum, Queens, NY. He has participated in regional group shows in venues such as Push Gallery in Asheville, NC and The George Washington University's Gallery 102. Formerly a resident of Norfolk, VA, he currently lives in the DMV.



MichaelAngelo Rodriguez, *I woke up in the chicken coop yesterday*, 2017. Archival pigment print, 13 x 19 in.



MichaelAngelo Rodriguez, *Careful with the big painting*, 2019. Archival pigment print, 13 x 19 in.



MichaelAngelo Rodriguez, *The moment he turned it upside down*, 2019. Archival pigment print, 19 x 13 in.



MichaelAngelo Rodriguez, *Getting together to create*, 2019. Archival pigment print, 19 x 13 in.



MichaelAngelo Rodriguez, *Can you cook eel in the microwave*, 2018. Archival pigment print, 13 x 19 in.

KEVIN MICHAEL RUNYON

My paintings are often in conversation with both the gestural and linear qualities of abstract expressionism and flirting with the lighter elements of abstract illusionism. They play with pattern and illusory spaces and often feature bright, bold colors, but I've also recently been playing with smaller pieces that are black and white with minimal color. Because I had a background in graphic design I was interested in this brighter digital screen-style color and I was utilizing that to play with color theory and to see how the human eye reacted to color in a physical space. I'm colorblind, so that has certainly influenced my way of seeing and making color choices.

Being a preparator has taught me how best to push, and also pull back, and rope things in scale-wise. The budget, the facility, and of course the people that work there and handle the work, are always considerations. I always make sure my own art arrives ready to pop up on the wall.

When I went to art school, I had just moved to Baltimore and I needed roommates. That's how I met another artist and preparator, Chris Zickefoose, and after we graduated MICA we ended up getting studios together. When I finally moved to DC to work at American University, I lost many of my ties to the Baltimore art community and that was a difficult transition. But sometimes the people you

knew or worked with early on end up being the people that you reach out to later on for shows or are managing their own gallery spaces. They were the ones hanging

the shows, curating the exhibitions, and connecting with emerging artists arriving on the creative scene in Baltimore. It's funny, a lot of those people were also working at the bars and restaurants that all the creative types would go to after an opening. You would see this whole community coming together on both sides of the curtain.

Kevin Michael Runyon (b. 1984, Baltimore, MD) is focused mainly on abstract painting, mark making, and drawing in a variety of mediums. He has served as the Lead Museum Preparator at the American University Museum at the Katzen Art Center since 2015, and is currently pursuing an MFA in Studio Arts. Runyon spent his 20s studying graphic design, film and photography, and writing and performing in an indie rock band. He eventually attended the Maryland Institute College of Art where he earned a BFA in Painting. Prior to joining the staff at the American University Museum, Runyon worked at American Visionary Art Museum and The Walters Art Museum, among other institutions and galleries. Runyon has taken part in numerous group shows and has had two solo exhibitions to date.



Kevin Michael Runyon, *Unripe Rainbows (New Nausea)*, 2020. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 53 x 38 in.



Kevin Michael Runyon, *Dry Wedding (Virgil, What Ring Is This?)*, 2017. Acrylic, enamel, glitter, spray paint, and gloss varnish on canvas, 48 x 42 in.

These works are from a collection called “Troubled Magic,” a body of painting from the last ten years. The paintings illuminate a mythological world, an alternative universe that I’ve created in my imagination.

“Troubled Magic” is a bit southern gothic dystopian future, or past, that has moments of magic and moments for sorrow and dark vibes as well. In the piece *All We Know* (2018-2019) several Troubled Magic characters are running towards each other in a fanatical battle to their doom. In the painting *Look What you Have Become* (2019) is a tragedy painting based on an unwanted physical transformation. I love working with color, but have a lot of goth edge lord feelings to paint out. Being a preparator has influenced my art in a lot of ways, particularly in my attention to detail and abilities. Having so many pieces of art pass through my hands and having conversations with so many different artists, I have more understanding about art experience through handling it than I did learning about it in school. That’s real-world experience versus the academic systems of cast. It is an inspiring thing for an artist to see how different people make their work. Also, understanding there are better and worse ways of solving artwork problems, and then applying that knowledge to my own artwork and the art labor I contribute to my clients.

BONNER SALE

When you’re in a museum as a viewer, you don’t get to see the back of the art, you don’t get to see how it’s made. It’s all in front of the curtain. Whereas being a

preparator and working behind the scenes inside the museum, you really get to see how everything is made and the ability some artists have and lack thereof in other artists. I think sometimes a difficult piece of artwork is going to be more indicative of what I like or dislike than a work of more obvious quality. Difficult art almost makes you talk about theory, craftsmanship, and the soul more than good art does.

Bonner Sale (b. 1982, Washington, DC) is a painter, pursuing a narrative illustration collection achieved in gouache depicting a make-believe world of physical transformation and spiritual conquest called “Troubled Magic.” Bonner received his BFA at Maryland Institute College of Arts in 2005, and his Masters in Studio Arts at American University in 2009. His work has been shown at the Kennedy Center (Washington, DC), College of Southern Maryland, Civilian Art Projects (Washington, DC), and Equilateral Gallery. Bonner Sale currently lives in the marsh of Maryland with his partner and two cats.



Bonner Sale, *Troubled Magic: All We Know*, 2019. Gouache on paper, 22 x 30 in.



Bonner Sale, *Troubled Magic: No Need for Conscience*, 2018. Gouache on paper, 22 x 15 in.



Bonner Sale, *Troubled Magic: Look What you Have Become*, 2019. Gouache on paper, 15 x 11 in.

The diptych *Lluvia Boba* (2019), which means “dumb rain” in Spanish, is symbolic of abstracted Spanish revival interiors that encapsulate certain Latino iconography, but

vis-à-vis my experience of being a Puerto Rican. Hence the little reference to the famous Dürer drawing of two hands praying, *Hands*, in which I mimicked Dürer’s technique of ink and white heightening, only in my case, I used Wite-Out! You see Dürer’s *Hands* frequently on details of peoples’ cars and things like that. The little pillars and columns are referential to that type of revival style as well.

In Puerto Rico, it will rain almost every day around 3pm, especially where I’m from, and it’s called the “dumb rain” because it passes really quickly. In this work, I’m trying to encapsulate that sensation of something ephemeral and quick, so I use a quick pen, acrylic, and Wite-Out. The use of the materials was chosen purely out of the recognition of the same ephemerality as rain. The pen is very quick, a ballpoint pen in particular. You don’t have to be resort back to the use of a palette and dabble on more point. I get immediacy from the use of a blue ballpoint pen. The airbrushed acrylic applied to the canvas is ephemeral in a different sense. It’s way more in tune with what I’m trying to say with the rain because you must be constantly filling up the little cartridge for the airbrush. As a medium, itself, it is airy. The Wite-Out serves to perfect certain lines that didn’t come out the way that I intended.

Art handling had a lot to do with my now going to architecture school at USC. I enjoyed my four years as an art handler in DC and Baltimore. A big realization I had while working with curators was appreciating the

JUANSEBASTIÁN SERRANO

programming that is necessary to create a show, particularly the possibility of conceiving a show using 3D software to simulate the visitor’s experience prior to its installation

in real time and space. That is going to be a very vast field, and I want to be a part of it. Architecture seemed like a good pivot to a more solid career. I’ve always been interested in interior spaces and exterior spaces and that’s something I’ve been depicting for a very long time in my art. So, the transition has seemed kind of seamless.

Art handling gave me a spatial recognition that I think I didn’t appreciate prior to being engulfed in that field. Working with curators, I started understanding spatial principles related to experiencing artwork from far away, from close up, the proximity of works to each other, why things are hung a certain way. That’s completely translatable to our perception of apertures in buildings, or how we decide to place a column that’s not structural. I can see myself, once I’m more established within this new field, going back to some of the things that got me here in the first place. Painting is one of the most important ones.

Juansebastián Serrano (b. 1994, Baltimore, MD) has spent most of his life near San Juan, Puerto Rico. He attended the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) as an undergraduate student, where he graduated with honors (Cum Laude), and is now working towards a Master of Architecture degree at the University of Southern California (USC). While still living in Baltimore, he worked as an Art Handler at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and the American University Museum in Washington, DC.



Juansebastián Serrano, *Lluvia Boba*, 2019. Acrylic, pen, and Wite-Out on canvas, 12 x 12 in. each.

These three pieces came out of a body of work I made while I was living in Baltimore. A friend of mine bought an old

house and was renovating it. He gutted it, tore down the walls, pulled up all the floorboards and the linoleum tiling and everything. We found a lot of artifacts from the former life of the house. He let me pull from the pile. I took all those linoleum pieces and glued them together and made little collages out of them. I named each of these pieces after one of the three Moirai, the Fates of Greek mythology. Clotho, who determined when a person would be born, Lachesis, how long they would live, and Atropos, how they would die. Using found materials in my work, I often find myself contemplating the fates of these objects. There's a history in the material, in the wear of it. It's been lived on, lived with. You may not know exactly the history, but it's inherent.

There are a lot of skills I've learned through art handling that I apply to my work. Mainly it's that

CHRIS ZICKEFOOSE

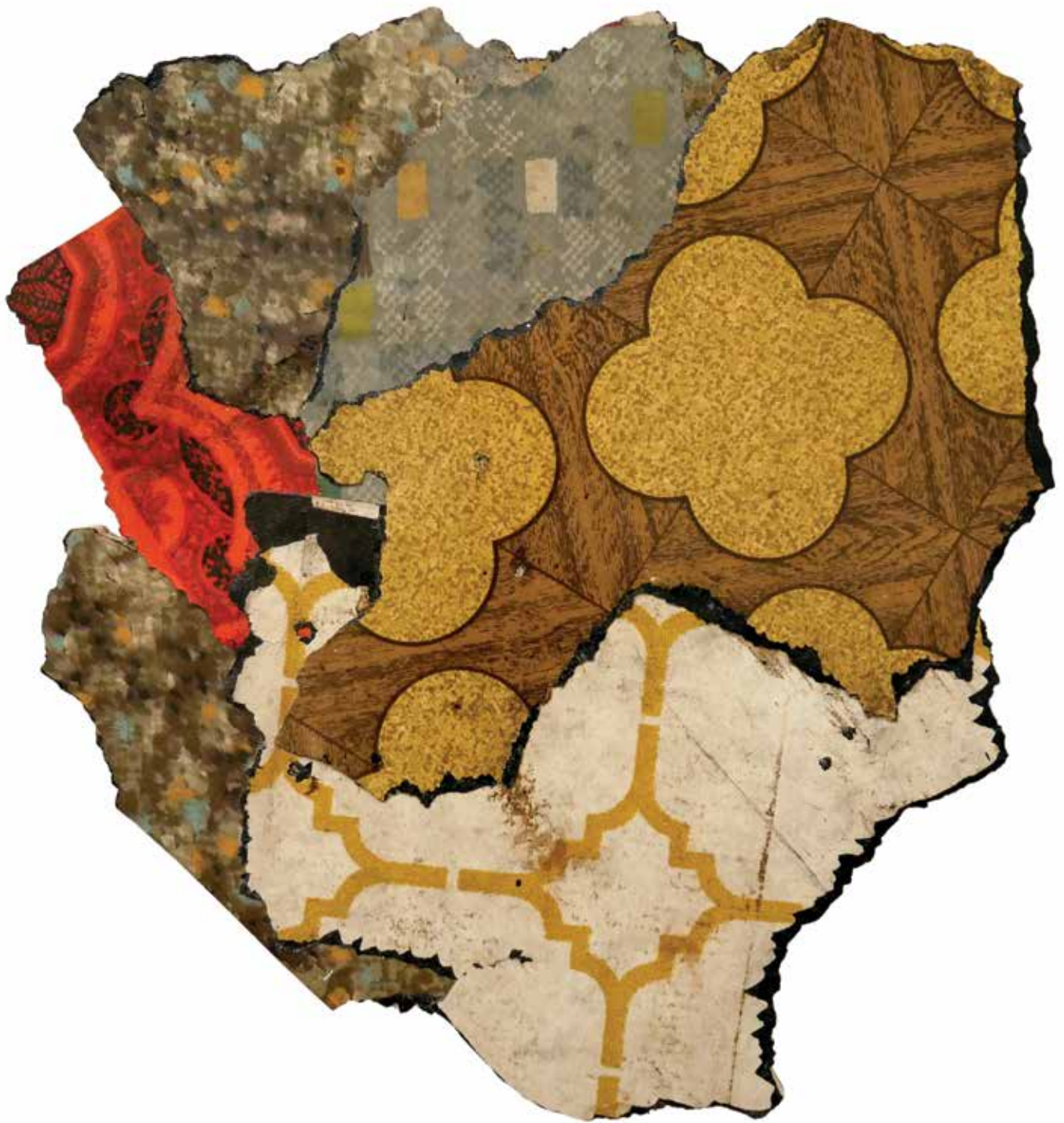
in relation to the human eye, the texture of the wall. In a gallery or museum, all these things require so much attention so that the viewer doesn't notice them, you want it to almost seem natural. That sort of attention to detail is another thing where you don't want people to see the labor. You want it to almost seem natural.

sort of attention to detail to the things that no one will see. The lighting, the spatial proximities, the height of the artwork

Chris Zickefoose (b. 1992, Baltimore, MD) is a sculptor whose work is about the material qualities of urban growth and decay. He graduated from Maryland Institute College of Art in 2014. He has participated in many group and solo exhibitions in the DMV area, most notably in the Strathmore Mansion in DC, and School 33 in Baltimore. He moved to Los Angeles in 2018, after attending an art residency in Joshua Tree.



Chris Zickefoose, *Lachesis*, 2017. Reclaimed laminate flooring on cut plywood, 27 x 20 in.



Chris Zickefoose, *Clotho*, 2017. Reclaimed laminate flooring on cut plywood, 19 x 18 in.



Chris Zickefoose, *Atropos*, 2017. Reclaimed laminate flooring on cut plywood, 22 x 22 in.

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