

# Making It Together

August 12 - September 2, 2006

Exhibition Curated by:

Andy Campbell

Ashley Schmiedekamp

Erika Cole

Rachel Mohl

Featuring Work by:

Sterling Allen & Anna Krachey

Jarrod Beck & Ali Fitzgerald

Roberto Bellini & David Woody

Erin Cunningham

Erin Curtis & Stephanie Wagner

Christa Mares & Scot Proctor

Jill Pangallo

Karri Paul & Laura Turner

# Curator's Statement

Making it together, with a partner, as a duo, with the rest of the world, having lunch and talking over your plans, interviewing, building models, building a home together, taking a vacation, putting it onto film and taking snapshots, healing the world one person at a time, drawing, painting, firing up the kiln, staring at the keyboard, hugs, fists, missed phone calls and a few stressed out emails, "I'm never working with him again," "never with her again," one collective vision, many fractured visions, making the deadline, moving the deadline, moving it again, leading to the party, opening the doors, letting the viewer in. We made this together.

In *Making It Together* we have tried to stretch the conventional definition of collaboration. Every summer show starts as a collaboration between the Studio Art and the Art History Departments. Each year a group of volunteer art historians put out a call to artists who may be interested in exhibiting their works in the summer shows. The challenge of this collaboration is how to cobble together these sometimes disparate groups of people and objects to find new threads of meaning. This year we hope to present an exhibition that is not only a collaboration between two departments but also between artists as well.

Some of the artists in *Making It Together* have chosen to create a new work together. Others feel their individual work speaks directly to the work of another artist. In other cases artists have found their collaborators in you the viewer; they challenge you to step up, not just look, but to interact as well.

These catalogues are a product of collaboration as well. Writers drew inspiration from the artists with whom they were paired. Writers, editors, and designers then worked to present an integrated vision of *Making It Together*.

The first of the summer exhibitions, *Making It Alone*, presented artwork within a conventional gallery context. Back in April when we conducted studio visits there were artists who felt that their work should stand alone. These artists became the backbone of our first exhibition. Other artists found the idea of collaboration intriguing and decided to pursue making work within this context. These artists have contributed to this exhibition. Together the shows present individuals in dialogue with themselves and others. In the end we are all making it together.

We hope you will experience the many ways that we are collaborating.

We consider you our greatest collaborators.

These exhibitions would not have happened without the generosity and support of the following people: Hana Hillerova, John Yancey, Bernadette Ashman, Marc Silva, Jimmy Luu, Kelly Green, Johnny Cisneros, Alex Codlin, Laura Lindenberger, the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Texas at Austin, the writers, the artists, friends, and family.

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# Sterling Allen & Anna Krachey



Sterling Allen

Anna Krachey likes found objects and often includes them in her photographs. She enjoys the mystery of the objects and uses them as clues into the private life of their previous owners. Krachey found her collaborator for *Making It Together* much like she would find one of the objects that she features in her work. Each time she visited the office of her graduate advisor, she was drawn to a stark black and white drawing hanging on the wall. Krachey found out that the artist was Sterling Allen, a 2002 graduate from UT and a member of the artist collective behind the East Austin space Okay Mountain. She emailed Allen and

asked whether he would be interested in collaborating. Not only did he say yes, but quite serendipitously, Allen also has a passion for found objects.

When her stepmother was about to throw away her father's collection of eye glasses from the past forty years, Krachey intervened and took possession of the glasses. The collection not only chronicles past fashions and styles but also represents her dad's identity through one of his most recognizable attributes. Instead of stashing the glasses in a shoebox and forgetting about them, Krachey wore a pair of these old glasses in a self-portrait. Printed in rich sepia tones to imitate the look of an old photo, the image becomes a reactive performance that merges Krachey's identity with that of her father's through the presence of his glasses.

Krachey recently went through the personal items of her deceased grandmother looking for mementos and found a faded photograph, a double print of the front of a 1950s home. To compliment this image of her friend's house, Krachey's grandmother had also hand drawn a map of the house's interior with each room, door, and window carefully marked. Krachey paired the photo and the drawing together to provide insight not only into her grandmother's attempt to chronicle her friend's house but also to map the gap between the public space of the exterior and the private interior of the house into which the viewer can spy.

Krachey elaborates on her grandmother's rendering of public versus private spaces in her portrait series of different homeowners' yards. In these lawns, Krachey focuses her camera lens on the perimeters of people's properties and on the disruption between the lovingly tended lawns and the neglected areas of land just beyond the property line. Her photographs reveal a liminal space in which people define themselves through the appearance of their personal property. Krachey took many of these images during the gray winter months, which only highlight the melancholic difference between the care given to the private spaces of the yards and the unkempt, adjacent public areas.

While Krachey's found objects often come from family members or the lawns she encounters walking around her hometown, Allen collects photographs of strangers that he buys at estate and garage sales or those left behind by customers at the photo lab where he once worked. The images that he finds at estate sales are usually a chronicle of a person's life and memories, and there is a certain sadness about the sale of these Kodak moments to a public who doesn't know the person represented or the reason why they are suddenly up for sale. Allen once found multiple images of a man that captured different moments and events over the years and thus acted as a visual timeline of his life. He re-shot the photographs using similar poses, costumes, and backgrounds, and he inserted himself into the place of the mystery man with his family and friends as the supporting cast. Similar to Krachey wearing her dad's glasses, Allen's images reanimate the captured moments in this man's life that would otherwise be discarded and forgotten.

Allen bases his drawings, like the one Krachey first saw, on found photographs, often times the rejected images left behind by customers at the photo lab. These are duds, the photos that are out of focus or capture the sitter in an unflattering pose. While these may be insignificant to the owner who abandoned them, Allen highlights through his drawing process the often bizarre nature of these images, especially to an outsider who can only guess at the context in which the original photo was taken. His drawings do not

# Jarrold Beck & Ali Fitzgerald

crop the original image; rather, they render it in simple black outlines for which the viewer has to fill in the blanks.

In one drawing, a man wearing glasses nervously peers out at the viewer from his bed as if he wants to pull the sheets up over his head. Who knows why this image was taken, but Allen's drawing lends a sinister tone to the scene and implicates the viewer in potentially harming the man. Other drawings are so macabre that they become humorous such as the image of what the viewer presumes to be a mother and son portrait. The mom hugs her son who wears a ski mask and holds a rifle in his left arm with a handgun holstered to his waist. Despite the mom's toothy grin, the assumed normalcy of the represented scene is unsettling to the viewer, especially one whose family outings don't include heavy firearms. Such a drawing makes the viewer wonder what her life would look like through her own rejected images.

In a world where digital photography erases the potential for dud images and renders prints virtually obsolete, Krachey and Allen's use of the found object and image celebrates the mundane aspects of everyday life to which most of us don't pay attention or discard without thought. Their work in *Making It Together* forces the viewer to rethink her relationship with the objects around her and to ponder what clues she is leaving in the world for the artists to find.

Alex Codlin

In 2003 Republicans in the Texas Legislature redrew the district boundaries of our state. After a couple of clever walkouts by Democrats, Travis County and the neighboring districts were broken up into seven pieces, the most contentious of these being a congressional district that winds its way from Central Texas down to the Rio Grande Valley. This was done, presumably, to put more Republicans in Congress and to deny equal representation for what is one of the largest liberal populations in Texas. Division of space is power.

This is not news to Texans. But why is this in an art catalogue?

We love to parse out space. The Texas redistricting is a particularly resonant example. We are divided into states, regions and districts. There are zoning laws for commercial, residential, and industrial sites. We have created two hour and thirty minute parking meters. You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here. We pay taxes based upon the square-footage and desirability of our homes. We have seen the creation and implementation of "free speech zones."

This land is your land, this land is my land.

And yet, dear reader, if this makes you feel powerless, if the prospects look grim, remember that there are still some spaces of resistance. Spaces where, if even for a brief period of time, function overpowers architectural intent. Bleachers provide a good example. While bleachers accomplish the goal of holding and leveling a viewing public, they also provide a space of resistance. Underneath the bleachers people can fight and make out, deal and eat, shit and think. They do anything but watch the action on the field. I take bleachers as an example because the space of resistance is built-in. Many queer scholars have commented that the spaces of bath-houses or of closets function in similar ways; as spaces, they comply and resist social codes of behavior. I also mention bleachers because a certain pair of artists are thinking of constructing and playing with bleachers in their installation for *Making It Together*.

Looking and loving have never been so close. And so, after a lengthy introduction, and with an exuberant heart I present to you the work of Ali Fitzgerald and Jarrod Beck.

I will confess that their collaboration was born of curatorial pandering. Although they have worked together before, I strongly suggested that they work together for this show. At that point it was not clear whether or not there would be enough artists in *Making It Together* (too much empty space?). Luckily, both agreed. As a curator, I was desperate. So, why these two? What can these two accomplish together that they could not do individually?

In some respects you could not ask for two artists who are more dissimilar. Fitzgerald is a master of weaving and then jolting a narrative. Her paintings are drippy representational things. She has done research on Wild West mythology, women's tennis, donkey shows, and, most recently, Dick Tracey. Fitzgerald focuses on these seemingly complete organisms of cultural myth, takes them apart, and then reassembles them, often maintaining the illusion of a grand narrative. She utilizes camp and kitsch, my favorite "c" and "k" words, while always keeping her own subjectivity in focus. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Fitzgerald is able to create what is at once a pleasurable and critical experience.

Jarrold Beck, formally enrolled as an MFA student in printmaking, builds and bends the spaces he works in. Beck uses 2" x 4"s alongside florescent lights and string. Dyed black bandages and packing paper have been known to appear in his large-scale installations. Those nooks and crannies I spoke of before, the under the bleacher spaces, the closets and bath houses - he makes these spaces. But, what has always impressed me about Beck's work is that these spaces have always existed, even within the gallery setting. He never really brings these spaces into the gallery but rather he pulls them out of it.

So how do Fitzgerald and Beck fit together? To be honest, I am not quite sure. Both are deft at destabilizing the foundations with which we as viewers are intimately familiar. It appears to be very simple; find a foundation, and work to subvert it. But I think this may be more complex than it seems. I am depending upon Beck and Fitzgerald to prove me wrong.

As writers we deal in foundations and space as well. We must create arcs, large portals under which arguments can exist but also be contained. We are supposed to make our connections clear, like city builders are meant to finish their bridges - how can one get from here to there without it? Everyone depends upon it. I have yet to see Fitzgerald and Beck's installation, they plan to create it organically in situ. It is difficult for me to set up the specific artwork appearing in *Making It Together* for you, the reader. Instead, I want to speak to the parameters of their art production. For me, their collaboration demands this kind of writing.

So, let me begin to build a bridge. I refuse to finish it because this is your job. The spaces we inhabit, cultural and architectural, are political spaces. They are places and homes for communities. They are also divided by borders, most of which are sharply defined, and oftentimes these borders are policed (sometimes with six thousand more men and women than what may be necessary). We live with the aggression of space, the aggregated wealth and parity of space. There is nothing nicer than a clean room, right? A room cleared of all clothing items, cleared of all books and papers, cleared of all bodies and empty lubricant bottles. Beck and Fitzgerald give us these spaces in all their complexity and grandeur. They make us ask not only "why?" but also "how?" They are interesting questions, but unfortunately there is not enough space here for an answer.

I have reached my word limit, my boundary - one thousand words.

Andy Campbell



Jarrold Beck

# Roberto Bellini & David Woody

*In that moment, the world dissolved, blanketed in the intensity of the light against the black sky. It is not the vast darkness that creates a dialogue between Roberto Bellini's film and Dave Woody's photographs but rather silvery threads of light. It is not the dark screen or the darkroom but the flickers that cut across the black to reveal images, elusive figures that suddenly emerge from shadow only to vanish again. Flashes. It was cold and quiet, three o'clock on a winter morning. The ground was blanketed in a thin layer of powdery snow, and the moon had risen high over the horizon. The crystals of snow glistened in the light, intensifying the moonbeams. We stood outside my house, paralyzed by the beauty of the night, by the cloudless sky full of stars, and by the cold as it bit our faces.*

Even in the earliest stages of their creative process, Bellini and Woody were interested in using film and video to explore the conceptual and technical parallels of their work. *I inhaled the scent of light and dark braided together.* They struggled, however, in their search for a viable collaborative project. "One idea," Roberto said as Woody sifted through a pile of portraits in the photography studio, "is to have a subject sit in front of Dave's camera and in front of my lens at the same time. We're not sure if it will work, but I think it would be really interesting if it would be possible to capture some kind of transformation on film...at the moment that the portrait is taken, as the subject's self-consciousness melts away." *And I thought of you, the way you stared, intoxicated by the slices of light cutting into black.*

"I'm not sure that there would be any visible change," Woody said doubtfully as he looked up from his photographs. He thought for a moment. "But we also talked about using the video to turn the still camera into the subject."

"That's another idea that could work," Bellini agreed. "I like the idea of using video to document an artistic process. I could film Dave as he works with the subject to create a portrait."

"We also thought of the possibility of creating a film out of stills," Woody said. "But I think our best bet so far may be to work separately. We are both really interested in the natural world, and we were thinking that we might come up with an interesting project if we go out into the same landscape at the same time and approach common subject matter in our own way. We would essentially create two very different works that are joined by time and place." *When I was lonely, Mama used to tell me look up, baby, look up. We all see the same moon.*

Although these projects never came to fruition, their interest in exploring distinct visions of the same subject matter merged with their ideas about pushing the boundaries between the technical media of film and photography to become the underlying concept of their piece for the *Making It Together* exhibition. *Your eyesight could be blurred by hours of unfamiliar raindrops where dry earth and salty water don't merge. There is no lightning here.* Bellini and Woody worked independently—in the thick darkness that divides us, I can't find your gaze, your brooding eyes—but they are intertwined both in practice and in concept. Bellini's film depends on the techniques of still photography, and Woody's photographs, created weeks later and miles away, emulate the mood of the video. *That night there were nerves wrapping around the holes in the air transmitting sparks in my open eyes at 3 AM.*

Bellini shot his video footage in darkness intermittently interrupted by the flash of a still camera. *And one night, the sky exploded in a flash of lightning, filling the sky with electricity and the low rumble of thunder.* "The idea was interesting to us," Bellini said, "because Woody used the same flash mechanism to produce his pictures." Even as the photographic medium served as the technical foundation of Bellini's video, the images in his film became a conceptual framework for Woody's photographs. "I like the idea that the boundaries of what I photograph are inspired by what Roberto has videoed," Woody added, "and that I'm taking those snippets of subject matter, that aesthetic look, and trying to find something analogous for myself." Although the enigmatic silhouettes in his photographs are thought provoking in their own right, they appear as if they could be frames of Bellini's film, by-products of the illuminated screen. *I felt like plastic, bending and twisting, casting black shadows against black walls.*

Although the work is comparable in tone and subject matter, the film and the photographs are temporally and spatially detached. Bellini's film, created in Brazil, predates Woody's images by nearly a month. *I don't believe in hierarchies and you define your world by them. We are. The same.* "What interests me is the fact that the core conceit is work done by Roberto in video in a certain time and place that gets translated by me in another time and place," Woody said of his Texas-made prints. *That night in San Francisco, the water was hidden through layers of darkness except for the specks of moonlight that rippled through the waves, milky white against the black.*

The relationship between Bellini's video and Woody's still photographs is challenging and multifaceted because their works are at once interdependent and independent. Guided by parallels in subject matter and ambiance, the viewer may assume that the pieces were created simultaneously even as she senses the disconnection between them, their disparate relationships to time and place. *Hours before dawn, the white snow and the full moon lit the world as if it were the middle of the day.* Ultimately, the artistic collaboration between Bellini and Woody is a contrast of light and dark, an exploration of opposition. In dark spaces, each artist worked alone to create images that are unified through flashes. Together, their work explores the isolation of darkness, the connective capacity of light, and the ambiguity of the shadows in between. *The silence that infiltrates narrow space at the beginning and the end of each cyclical gasp, the hairline fracture between the mechanics of respiration and remembering why.*

Tara Kohn



Roberto Bellini/David Woody

## Erin Cunningham

*Making It Together*. These three words are simultaneously the title of the CRL exhibition and the only guidelines given to the artists. Their art must somehow represent or demonstrate the notion of making it together. Many artists chose to collaborate; hence, making artwork becomes a collaborative effort between two artists. After a visit to Erin Cunningham's studio, I walked out realizing that she was entering the show solo. A bit startled at my own oversight I asked myself, why is Erin Cunningham's work in a show entitled *Making It Together*? Who or what is the other factor in this equation?

Cunningham primarily worked with bronze in the past. Her sculptures consisted of sections of the body that she cast from herself and friends. One series entitled "Love Handles" contained a series of cast love handles attached to actual handles that the models picked out of a home repair catalogue. Joining the wax hips to the wax handles, she then created a negative mold to pour the bronze into. Hanging these contraptions from the ceiling, the work takes on an interactive quality—the artist desires for the viewer to try to them on and to see how they fit as compared with their own bodies. In another series, Cunningham created small vanities and placed cast bronze body parts on them. They included torsos, hips, and women's breasts. Cunningham set up the vanities across the gallery and each came equipped with various belts and straps. She attempted to create an inviting setting for the viewers to place the bronze sculpture on themselves and then to compare, to touch, to interact.

In *Making it Together*, Erin again uses casts of female torsos. This time, however, she intends to play with the material. Using iron, white plastic, urethanes, and other materials, each torso communicates a drastically different message. The iron denotes a hard, industrious function. Cunningham described iron as a material evocative of history, something that indicates endurance and durability over time. The white plastic, on the other hand, is far more modern and a colorless material. It displays coolness and becomes isolated from its surroundings. Other materials emit a more detached, modern feeling, capitalizing on a pristine, clean look.

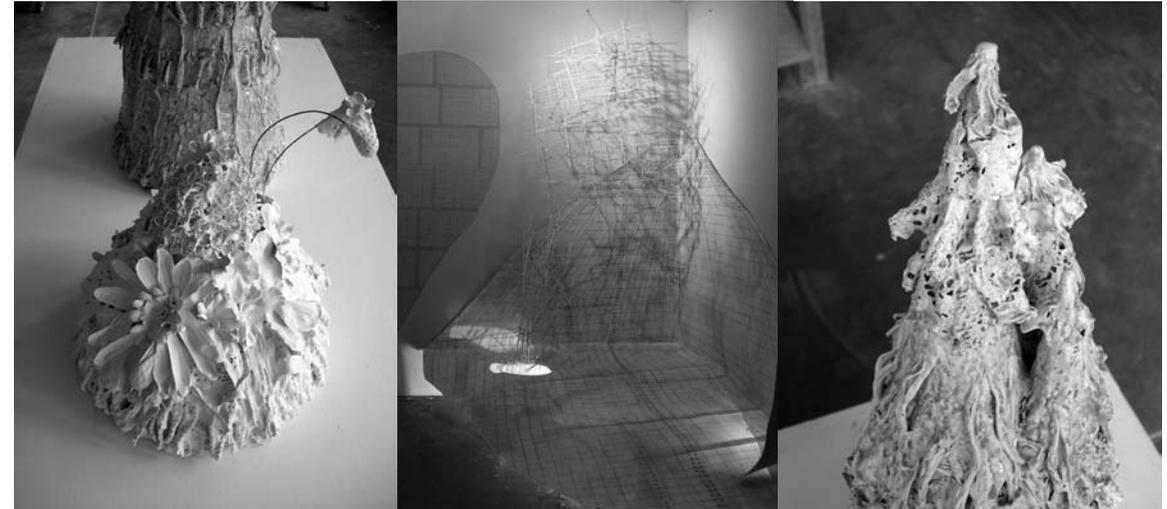
# Erin Curtis & Stephanie Wagner

Suspended from the ceiling, the torsos are accentuated by the mirrors hanging on adjacent walls. The mirrors make visible not only the objects but also the viewer interacting with the objects. Desiring to bridge the gap between viewer and object, the artist wants you to touch; she wants the viewer to interact. A far cry from the bold “Do Not Touch” signs traditionally seen in galleries and museums, Cunningham’s biggest obstacle seems to be how to bring the viewer out of their comfort zone and encourage them to interact with the work.

Through this personal interaction with the work, another factor comes into play: the issue of public and private spaces. These naked hanging torsos seem acceptable when viewed from afar. Nude bodies have been, after all, part of the canon of art throughout history. However, when one is asked to place these torsos onto one’s own body, it conjures up a state of one’s own nakedness, a very private act, and even a cause for embarrassment in a very public space, the gallery. A completely different awareness takes place—knowingly interacting with other people’s bodies while others watch you. This disparity between public and private brings about a changing and interesting dynamic between the viewer as participant and the art. This intimacy makes the viewer consider the work on a personal level. It brings to mind one’s own body shape.

This encouraged interaction with the work and the almost uncomfortable recognition of one’s body reveals the other person integral to Cunningham. It is you, the viewer. You are required to finish the art; it is your interaction, your consideration, and your reaction that the piece requires. While there is a tradition of artists who blur the line between art and life or rather between fine art and the everyday, Cunningham’s work plays with these concepts in a different way. She does not simply suggest a collision between public and private; she requires it. Asking the viewer to participate is still surprising in an art form that prompts viewer participation yet shuns the hand-on interaction with it. The new materials let her experiment with a different texture, a different affect. These materials begin to represent different aspects of the human body instead of simply depicting it. And, most importantly, Cunningham’s work makes the viewer aware. You cannot quickly pass by it and simply glance at it. You are required to connect and interact with the work in order to fully consider its function, its aesthetic, and its meaning.

Katja Rivera



Stephanie Wagner/Erin Curtis

Everyone I know dreams about vacations—vacations of the past, vacations of the future, vacations that have become tradition, and impossible vacations that will never be. In their first joint venture, Stephanie Wagner and Erin Curtis decided to use the theme “Vacation Dreams” as the connection between their respective artistic contributions. Both artists are creating work based on this theme and for the Making It: Together show. Wagner and Curtis are utilizing the concept of the show and this proposed topic in order to create fresh pieces that rely on the combination of inspiration from new subject matter and the further development of themes they have previously addressed in their art.

As I write this essay, both Wagner and Curtis are finishing their pieces for the show. Consequently, I can only hope to record or capture the general essence and direction of their current work-in-progress. I hope to reveal what I can of the inspirations and artistic inclinations of these two artists, both for this specific project and in their broader artistic careers. Wagner and Curtis chose this theme because everyone can relate to dreaming about vacation. And yet, while it is a broad theme that concerns almost all people, each person’s experience is unique, which allows these artists to develop this theme in their own distinctive manner. One thing is certain of this shared theme; both Wagner and Curtis are taking concrete, specific types of vacations, such as beach vacations or trips to the mountains, as the subject matter and framework

for their explorations. These investigations then delve into the aspirations, inspirations, memories, temporality, and timelessness behind the “Dream” part of their topic.

My first exposure to the theme “Vacation Dreams” occurred as I met with Stephanie Wagner in the ceramics studio, amidst the various pieces she is preparing for the show. Hand built structures stood in various stages of completion—one was already glazed, one fired, a few at different levels of dryness, and others stood as the still-wet, undefined and unadorned shapes of newly formed pieces.

Wagner’s clay pieces have an undeniable tropical beach motif running through them. The most finished piece I saw is a pointed, yellowish-tan glazed structure that Wagner intends to be reminiscent of a sand castle. Next to that stood a not-yet glazed piece that strongly resembles the shape of a sunbonnet. Flowers and other organic shapes sprout off of the central piece on wire, creating a miniature landscape of palm trees.

Wagner informed me that this piece, like many of the others already started, is simply the top. She plans to create round, columnar bases for many of these—some taller than others, some situated on plate like surfaces, all eventually adorned with her never-ending supply of craft store inspired details. And it is in these bases, and the decorative techniques Wagner applies to them, that I got a glimpse of Wagner’s deeper influences for “Vacation Dreams.”

Stephanie Wagner’s art from the last year or so has explored issues of domesticity, particularly the frustration and entrapment women feel in their household positions. She incorporates this theme in her ceramic art for “Vacation Dreams.” Much of the decoration and texture on each piece comes from the lace, fringe, silk flowers, and other craft store paraphernalia that Wagner dips in clay slip and then applies to the surface of these pieces. She incorporates many of these materials into the work because of their relation to vacations, such as flowers from a lei and strands from a grass hula skirt. Overall, her choice of decorative material speaks of the limited self-expression available to housewives. These details serve to represent the often restricted artistic and creative outlets available in the domestic sphere. Here women are confined to attempts of self-articulation through household decorations such as curtains, tablecloths, centerpieces, and creations from the kitchen.

Indeed, I could clearly see Wagner intends for her ceramic fabrications to recall table centerpieces and carefully decorated cakes. Domestic feelings of futility and confinement are masterfully conveyed through the fragile appearance of some of the decorations, which emit a feeling of forgotten efforts as flower petals threaten to crack off. These formal attributes lend to the type of “dreams” that Wagner’s art refers to. Wagner points out how domestic women carefully express their desires, their “Vacation Dreams,” through the methods available to them, such as household crafts. Her art also indicates how the hopes and memories embedded in these domestic creations often remain unacknowledged or forgotten by everyone else. But, for the housewife at least, these creations represent opportunities, whether real or imagined, to escape to another place.

In contrast to Stephanie Wagner’s three-dimensional structures Erin Curtis creates large two-dimensional, collaged paintings. Although she plans to continue to work this way for her piece for “Vacation Dreams,” it will be interesting to see how her current surroundings affect the outcome of her art. Curtis is presently in

Vermont, where she is a part of an artist residency program. But, she is no stranger to the northeast. Curtis grew up in the small town of Saratoga Springs, New York, and she openly admits that this environment continues to play a great role in how she perceives the world and in how she creates art.

Curtis acknowledges that because she spent her childhood in the Hudson Valley, the Hudson River School has influenced past projects. These artists influence Curtis not only because of their shared geographical location, but also because, for her, the Hudson River School represents the first paintings of white man’s patriotic, idealized, and propagandistic America. She will potentially reference this artistic tradition and the manner in which it represented the country in her art for this show. In keeping with her past interests, Curtis will try to capture the contradictions found in varying representations and ideologies of what America is, was, and should be. An examination of the incongruities between different people’s memories and hopes will unquestionably come through in her employment of the “Vacation Dreams” theme. At this point, Curtis plans to depict a family vacation of tension and awkwardness. This idea is on par with her previous experiments concerning the fractured and layered nature of memories and her formal ventures into creating spaces that are simultaneously cohesive and threatening to fall apart. In a statement about her art, Curtis claims that she does not want the pieces that she creates to seem “seamless or rational.” Rather, her scenes, which waver between chaos and order, are, for Curtis, more representative of contemporary society.

The “Vacation Dreams” theme will certainly present Curtis with an opportunity to explore subject matter and formal issues that intrigue her. Vacations often vacillate between harmony and chaos. People often have such great expectations for vacations, and the slightest unplanned incident or detail can wreck the entire vacation in the mind of the vacationer. All of these vacation hopes and memories are a part of the multifaceted and layered experiences that Curtis investigates and attempts to capture in her art.

By choosing the theme “Vacation Dreams” for their cooperative effort, Stephanie Wagner and Erin Curtis will exhibit art that not only speaks of their own personal and artistic interests, but that also presents pieces that speak of a theme familiar to all people. They explore these different facets, and this in turn imparts fresh concerns for them to play with and address in their art. “Vacation Dreams” offers both artists a fun and carefree theme in which to explore and expand upon both new and old themes and styles. And, as a viewer, I in turn bring my own “Vacation Dreams,” both past memories and future hopes, to their art.

Erika Morawski



Christa Mares

## Christa Mares & Scot Proctor

Christa Mares and Scot Proctor are both MFA students in Ceramics at UT-Austin. We had the following conversation early in June, when they had just begun work on their collaboration for *Making it Together*.

**Amanda Douberley:** *During our conversation yesterday, Scot mentioned that it is proving difficult to transition between his own work and the collaboration. Are the simultaneous processes of “making it alone” and “making it together” feeding into the collaboration? Is working with each other pushing your individual work in new directions?*

**Scot Proctor:** It is difficult shifting between my own work and the collaboration. I try to invest myself mentally as much as I can into a specific idea, and I try to focus completely on that. It almost seems as if I have been allowing myself only half the thought in each direction and coming to a standstill. Though difficult, however, it has already been a positive experience. Christa gives me lots of fresh ideas for my own work, and, through watching her, I have approached my work in a different way or have tried things I hadn't tried before.

**Christa Mares:** Working together is also a refreshing and exciting change for me. I feel in the moments when I'm indecisive or struggling with an idea, Scot is there to bounce ideas off of, or there are moments we both can just sit and stare and not know what to do. I find this to be the same when we are working on our own art. From the beginning, it seems we have always had some kind of dialogue.

**AD:** *It sounds like this collaboration is an extension of the conversations you two have every day since your work spaces in the ceramics lab are right next to each other. Did you have any specific expectations for how the collaboration would work? Are you working on the installation at the same time, or does one make a move and the other react, sort of like a game?*

**SP:** I didn't have any specific expectations for how the collaboration would work. I'm still not sure how it works! We started off with a basic idea of what the piece would look like and what issues we were interested in. Then we found a common ground. The piece has evolved since the original idea and that's great. I think this is a good opportunity to rely on intuition and react to the moves of the other person. Christa and I have different studio hours so often I come into the studio and find what she has done to the piece. I enjoy the surprise.

**CM:** We may discuss a specific part one day to narrow down the possibilities of completing it just so things won't become too chaotic. Other parts or details of the project are very open and happen as we go along.

**AD:** *In your recent individual work, each of you has explored the home as a place charged with memories and, particularly in Scot's case, as an unattainable ideal. The installation you two are building seems very much like a stage, and, in this sense, it connects with your individual practice in different ways: Scot has experimented with performance, which has an obvious relationship with the theatrical; Christa's recent lace covered, object-laden crib references the dollhouse, a kind of stage for children to direct their dolls in different roles. At the same time, the installation is a huge departure for each of you. Christa's work tends towards the miniature, whereas this installation is very large; Scot works with relatively clean and simple forms, but you two are covering everything in sight with decorative crochet-work and foam wrappers. This installation goes to extremes in other ways as well: showing both inside and outside of the house; softening hard elements and floating heavy ones, mixing 2-D and 3-D modes of representation, and incorporating pre-fab and hand-crafted elements. In combination, this intermingling of opposites has a fantastic, or even surreal, effect. Has this project encouraged each of you to go to extremes, perhaps perversely in opposition to your preferred way of making things? How does fantasy function for you both within this installation and within suburbia, which you seem to be referencing?*

**SP:** Rather than this piece taking me to the extreme opposite of what I have been doing, I think the collaboration allows me to do things I previously could not have done on my own. I have always made the massive and the heavy, and Christa often works small and delicate. I think that dichotomy will prove to make this a successful piece.

**CM:** We discussed having a very fantastical kind of feel to the installation. I think we were in agreement that specific objects were almost destined to look or to be positioned in such a way. I don't think it means

# Jill Pangallo



anything specifically, but rather it references more of a fantasy of what a house and the objects of that home could possibly be like. When I envision “our house,” it’s never still. Things are constantly moving and changing. Whether it makes any sense or not, I think it’s okay because for me, change can be confusing. It’s like everything is in the middle of change and doesn’t quite know where to go.

**SP:** The idea of fantasy is huge in my thinking about this piece. I imagine just that, a fantastical surreal world that only lives within our heads. As far as the connection between suburbia and fantasy, I don’t know. Living in Michigan amongst all of the woods makes me think lawn animals are a natural way to try and escape city life. I long for the return to the woods and keep this idea with me with every work I create.

**AD:** *The installation is extremely dramatic and artificial, but at the same time there is a level of earnestness and sincerity, which is one aspect of kitsch. Do you think these notions motivate people who actually decorate their yards in this way? Is kitsch just an ironic gesture, or does it have a serious or heartfelt side that you’re exploiting and/or exploring?*

**CM:** Kitsch is certainly an element in creating our project, though I feel it is more of a heartfelt gesture just because it is something that I tend to gravitate towards. An object in the yard such as a lawn ornament can be very classy or cheesy depending on where it is or what it is. Driving by perhaps a modest home, I almost expect to see a plastic or ceramic animal sitting on the porch or lawn. For those million dollar homes, it is almost guaranteed to see the owner embellishing their yard with bronze animals or even people. I see our attempt at creating “our house” as a way to try and replay our experiences of the home and/or create what we think we’d like it to be. So, we are in both ways exploring and exploiting different aspects and/or ideas of a home.

“I have this urge to transform into other people,” Jill Pangallo answered after a thoughtful pause. “I am interested in what it’s like to spend time in other people’s skin--you know, like the way people try to fit in with different groups in high school.” I nodded, leaning against the back of a plastic chair in front of the blank television screen. As Pangallo spoke about her recent work in video and performance, and more specifically about her film *Natia and the Art Outdoors*, I began to think about the inevitable adolescent search for selfhood, the way we once sifted through personalities as readily as we changed our clothes. Preppies one day and punks the next, we tried on different behavioral patterns out of our pressing need to find a sense of comfort in our own skin, to find an identity that fit. I thought about all of those characters we once played, those simplified fragments that somehow merged in order to form the complex people we grew up to be. Pangallo’s work, in a sense, reverses this process. The natural healer Natia, among other personas, developed as exaggerated, magnified pieces of her own personality.

Pangallo began to craft Natia as a response to her own interest in purifying and cleansing diets and perhaps more immediately as a reaction to the shocking news that a friend had been diagnosed with cancer. She described both her process of coping with the personal hardship and her realization that feelings of helplessness in the face of illness could turn even the most adamant supporters of traditional Western medicine toward quasi-spiritual alternatives. She collected articles of clothing that Natia might wear such as ribbons and scarves inspired by the costumes of liturgical dancers. Pangallo then began to write and create images as the persona. This culminated in designing a website advertising Natia’s movement performance ([www.natiascorner.com](http://www.natiascorner.com)).

# Karri Paul & Laura Turner

“Natia is a healer with...this edge,” Pangallo explained; “she’s easily irritated.” Pangallo’s film documents Natia’s dualistic personality during an experience at a local exposition. Dressed in layers of loose, flowing fabrics, Natia appears in some instances in the film as an embodiment of calming energy with a natural capacity to restore a sense of balance to our chaotic lives. During her moments of frustration, however, Natia’s pale skin darkens into a brilliant red, and her soft, patient voice gives way to loud, irrational tirades. Mirroring the dichotomy between Natia’s soothing presence and sharp temper, the tonal quality of the film is double sided, reflecting the artist’s conflicting attitudes toward alternative healing practices. “There is a part of me that wants to be open to the idea, that wants to believe,” Pangallo said, “but also a part that is judgmental.”

Both celebrating the possibilities of alternative healing and questioning the dangers of feigned or overstated spirituality, the video traces Natia’s conversations with fair-goers and her private reactions to the outdoor festival. “I began to create Natia before I knew what I was going to do with her,” Pangallo explained, “when I learned about the fair, I felt that she would be drawn to its diversity, its wide range of artists and performers.” The “Art Outside” festival, an annual gathering of local craftsmen in the space across from Office Depot on Lamar and Oltorf, became the opportunity for which Pangallo was hoping, a chance to record Natia’s unpredictable interaction with the public. The artist, however, was careful in her portrayal of the eclectic collection of visitors, who were drawn to Natia’s booth by the large poster that dangled off the branch of a tree and the strips of fabric and streamers that fluttered over her “cleansing river.” “I am very conscious in my efforts not to exploit people,” the artist said. “I keep the attention of my films on myself, and I try to make people aware of the camera. My intention is never to make fun of people for what they do honestly.” Despite her sensitivity and open-mindedness to new age culture, however, Pangallo’s film has a satirical edge, an honest skepticism.

Although her background is in graphic design rather than theater, Pangallo’s work, as a whole, is veering toward performance and persona development. “I always wanted to resist the one-woman-show shtick,” she confided, “but it seems to be something I can’t quite get away from. I just try to stay within an art context...you know, to avoid performance venues.” In her future work, Pangallo plans to continue to draw upon her past social and professional experiences to transform herself into different personas that although fictional, emerge from her own perspective, her personal inquiries into the nature of human interaction.

Tara Kohn

In one sense, curators have a very privileged viewpoint for looking at the art included in their own exhibition, and this position is often misunderstood, mishandled, and even misapplied. But in fact, we see art primarily as viewers just as everyone else. Andy and I have chosen to share our conversation about Karri Paul and Laura Turners’ works instead of writing a formal, jargon-y essay in the hopes that we can illuminate the process of collaboration a little further.

**Erika:** Karri and Laura are both working on the concept of the viewer’s place in a landscape. Karri’s drawings are very clearly responses to her summer spent in Italy, and it is easy to see her affection for its beauty in her carefully detailed compositions. At one level, they are memoirs. But, I also see her working with the idea of view point—that where the viewer stands determines both what she sees and what is obstructed from her view. This is one place where her drawings enter into a dialogue with Laura’s photographs, which also seem to be about chance views of the American landscape.

**Andy:** I see a shifting viewpoint in Karri’s landscape drawings as well. A viewer is really able to lose himself in these fractured landscapes, even when they seem to only take up a small sliver of the page. They seem to be constructed as memories of Italy, bits and pieces of the landscape that were ingrained into the artist’s mind. What most interests me about Karri’s drawings, and Laura’s photographs as well, is how negative space is imbued with multiple meanings. I find something very melancholic about the gray drawings that seem to drop off into nothingness at points. Sometimes this blank space, this nothingness, becomes a body of water; sometimes it implies a hurriedness or an unfinished quality. This is not to say I think the drawings are unfinished per se, but rather the spaces left blank imply more than we may at first care to admit.

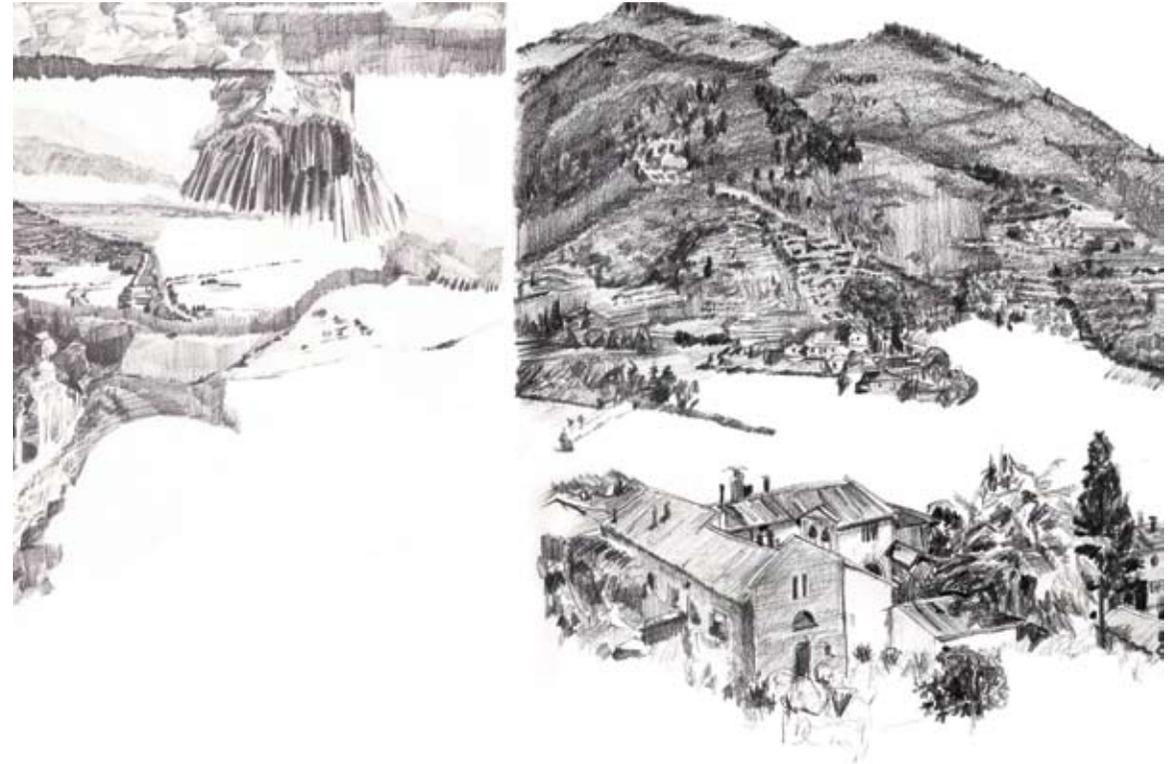
**Erika:** Actually, it’s good to talk about intention with both artists’ work. Karri’s drawings, with their very intentional unfinished or blank spaces, strengthen their identity as memories—as in, “This is what I saw before the bus blocked my view,” or “I don’t remember what was down the hill from that farm,”—but they also invite the viewer to participate in the imaginative act of filling an empty space. With Laura’s photographs, intention serves a different function. She “finds” landscapes that are ambiguous and familiar at the same time. I think her intention is to make the viewer reflect on their own memories, how what they bring psychically to the viewing affects what they see in the picture. What is “left out” of Laura’s photos, then, is the same thing that is “left out” of Karri’s drawings—the viewer’s perspective.



Laura Turner

**Andy:** Right, but I think Laura's photographs are very familiar to those of us who grew up in suburban America. The photograph of the ceramic birds on shelves is one that I respond to strongly because it sets up a relationship between the viewer, the photograph, and the collection being photographed. It's obvious that the homeowners (or perhaps it was the artist) took great care in arranging the birds. This is similar to the way that we arrange our whole houses, inside and out, for the benefit of ourselves, and for others as well. A collection, I think, is just as much for the collector as for the collector's set of friends, family, acquaintances, children, spouses, etc. In each of Laura's photographs she highlights the kind of care we give to our lawns, rooms, and houses. She shows us how we show our spaces.

**Erika:** Andy, you are right on target. Laura has spoken about her work in exactly that context. She hopes the viewer will see the contrasts between private and public space in her photographs, and how we (we as homeowners, curators, interior decorators, landscape architects, housepainters, or whoever) present different kinds of space in different ways. In the three images, I think you can see she has chosen exactly that differential. One photograph shows the arrangement inside a home of a collection of bird curios inside a private residential space. Here Laura has given us a fairly intimate, arranged indoor landscape that hints at the postmodern analysis of kitsch as an expression of the collector's personal identity. Meanwhile, the second image shows a fairly typical but anonymous suburban street, designed for public view but still carefully arranged and affected by its occupants. Utility poles and wires interrupt the view of the sky; the lawn is carefully kept. In some sense, this space must have been carefully manipulated not to express too much identity, to blend in inconspicuously with its neighbors. Both of these spaces have been heavily altered to send messages to the public viewer about their owners. The third photograph is different because it shows a tree and other groundcover growing naturally, in a rural, or even completely wild, setting. This space, which may not have an owner at all, is ironically the most private setting out of the three, and it's only in this image that a human figure appears-taking a private moment, even, with his back turned.



Karri Paul

**Andy:** Yes and I think Karri's drawings accomplish this as well. I understand them as very private landscapes, even though they are wide open spaces populated with villas and houses.

**Erika:** One more thing to consider about Karri and Laura's images is that they have asked us to view them in the context of each other. While the artists didn't collaborate in the creation of one piece of work, the eight images here can be viewed together as one work. If we do so, we are confronted with a huge amount of variety: different kinds of media, different kinds of subject matter, and different levels of both realism and perspective. Whenever this happens in art, the viewer naturally begins to filter out extraneous information and tries to arrive at whatever shapes and ideas seem most prominent or prolific. In these eight works I think the message is about how we as humans affect and are affected by our environment.

# Author Bios

**Andy Campbell** is pursuing a Master's Degree in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Texas at Austin. His thesis work is on queer film fandom.

**Alex Codlin** is an art history graduate student who is currently writing on sadness in Gilbert & George's early sculptures. She is a huge fan of the summer MFA shows having co-organized Threads in 2004 and Fever and Shade in 2005.

**Erika Cole** is a candidate for a master's degree on the religious art of south and southeast Asia. She is particularly interested in the reception of Buddhist imagery into new cultures, in both ancient and modern times. "Imagination is the eye of the soul." -Joseph Joubert

**Amanda Douberley** is a Ph.D. student in Art History at the University of Texas at Austin, as well as a curator and critic. Her recent exhibitions include No Place Like Home, Gallery 3 at the Co-op, Austin and Katherine Bash: Tracing the Wind, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. She is a contributing editor to Glasstire.com.

**Tara Kohn** graduated from Bowdoin College in 2005 and is currently a master's student in Art History at the University of Texas. She studies American art from the first decades of the twentieth century. Her most recent work explores early avant-garde circles in New York.

**Rachel Mohl** is currently pursuing her master's degree at the University of Texas in twentieth-century Latin American Art History. She previously worked for two years in the education department at the Dallas Museum of Art.

**Erica Morawski** is currently working on her M.A. at the University of Texas at Austin. She studies American art, with a focus on the nineteenth-century. Her current research explores the influence of physical culture on American art and society in the late nineteenth century.

**Katja Rivera** is a second year master's student in Art History at the University of Texas at Austin. She focuses on Modern European art.

**Ashley Schmiedekamp** is a Ph.D. student at The University of Texas at Austin. Her research centers on the Surrealists and their interest in astronomy and astrology. She also works as a freelance editor and serves as a consultant at the University's Undergraduate Writing Center.