

A Few Words From Down Under

Editor's Note: Judith McGrath contributed her writings about exhibits and events taking place in Western Australia to *Carolina Arts* for about a decade. Although she was writing about events taking place thousands and thousands of miles away, they seemed relevant to what was going on here in the Carolinas. Her contributions were very popular when we first ran them and continue to be popular on our website's archives. We've decided to revisit them from time to time.

A Few Words from Down Under Where Do All the Art Students Go?

by Judith McGrath, first run in our May 2003 issue

Our State Gallery hosts an annual exhibition of work by high school graduates who have studied visual arts with the same vigour their contemporaries pursued in science or maths. These aspiring artists have learned various creative methods for translating a set theme or personal idea into well crafted objects with a high level of proficiency. The Year 12 Perspective Exhibition is always well received by the public and much appreciated by the informed art viewer.

Although most of these graduates seek higher education in more practical areas, many go on to study visual art in college or university. And that is where they undergo a strange metamorphous. When the student emerges from art school, with either a Diploma in Art and Design or a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, his or her ability to make art has regressed to the level of a pre-school tot. The only difference is they no longer need someone else to write a translation of their efforts at the top of the page. They do that themselves, with lots of big words in their artist statement.

It all became clear after viewing the fantastic Year 12 Perspective Exhibition then attending the opening of a sculpture exhibition by final year students from three art schools, two of them degree granting universities and one a diploma awarding college. This annual sculpture survey consists of site-specific works the participating students had eight weeks to devise and install in situ throughout the grounds. Of the thirty-five exhibits only three can be judged well planned and constructed works of art. The other thirty-two presentations include such wonders as; leaves picked from one tree and hung on a wire stretched between two other trees, a boy's bike leaning against a low wall, and a collection of snap-lock sandwich bags filled with small stones placed on the lawn. When I came upon the cluster of unfired clumps of clay entitled *Untitled I* gave up and went home.

Why is it when artistically inclined students enter post-secondary art school, they come out not knowing how to draw so much as a conclusion? Where do their ideas go and why are they prevented from perfecting their skills? Why do art schools accept only students with a certain level of talent and artistic potential then, instead of helping them identify that talent or understand their potential, give lessons in identifying old art theories and understanding new art vocabulary?

The answer to the above questions can only be that college and university art courses are not so much about making art as making Artists. For example, the syllabus of one particular university's Fine Art course offers core units in Art Theory, 20th Century Art History, Critical Dialogue, with electives in Gallery Management, Curatorial Practices and a workshop in Writing Grant Applications. During the semester, one day a week is

allotted for 'studio time' where the student practices their artform under the watchful eyes of different practicing artists. Most students find this interaction beneficial as they get to network real artists. However they are often expected to emulate each professional's style, not pursue their own, and marked accordingly. Meanwhile a prestigious college of Art and Design's syllabus is more practical but that's slowly changing. Library records show how twenty years ago art students had to attend fourteen hours of drawing instruction a week, today that's been reduced to six. The extra hours are now spent in new core units; Visual Communication, Art Studio & Business Practices and the elective Exhibition Procedures.

When bright young high school art students, like Leah who loved to paint and produced some thought provoking images, enter post secondary art school they are institutionally dulled down. In her first semester at a university art school Leah was told if she wanted to paint pictures she could go elsewhere, here she would learn to be an artist! A couple of years ago, as a final year student, Leah (a painter) exhibited in the above mentioned sculpture show. Her work involved a video camera on a tripod pointed at a wooden box packed with frilly dresses, parts of which peeked out from under the nailed-on lid. It referenced 1970's feminist theory, I think, and we could view the video alongside the original. The funny thing is, as a savvy seventeen-year-old high school student Leah could have made a potent comment on the topic with a well-executed painting instead of a silly installation few people stopped to consider. The sad thing is today at twenty-five Leah, like many of her fellow art school graduates, no longer makes art. She has a real job. Her experience at university convinced Leah that her paintings were mute and since she couldn't make a creative connection with the video camera and didn't like installations, she assumed she wasn't really an artist.

I've seen so many energetic and creative young people run into the wet sponge held up by art school lecturers that it raises different questions. Why do they do it? Do lecturers resent the energy or fear the talent owned by the student? Is it because installations composed of found objects make little demands on the lecturer's time and the school budget? Is an old bike left unattended a work of Art in a post Dada world? Could government awards of electronic equipment to schools be the reason for a glut of bad computer art? Is it Art to program a computer to change colour or pattern on a screen when the space bar on a keyboard is pressed? Is Leah just a good painter but not an artist? Is an artist someone who knows what 'synchronistic neo-avant gardism' really means? Or is an artist someone who can manipulate a medium with skill and creativity to communicate an idea to, or evoke a response from, the viewer?

I don't have the answers but still hold to the belief that art schools can and should inspire students to think outside the square and take lateral steps in creativity, all the while holding onto their personal artistic anchor. It is a valid learning experience. And I so want to believe that one day Leah will paint again.

Judith McGrath lives in Kalamunda, Western Australia, 25 minutes east of Perth. She received a BA in Fine Art and History from the University of Western Australia. McGrath lectured in Art History and Visual Literacy at various colleges around the Perth area, and was an art reviewer for *The Sunday Times* and *The Western Review* both published in the Perth area. McGrath was also a freelance

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writer and reviewer for various art magazines in Australia. She also co-ordinated the web site *Art Seen in Western Australia*

found at (<http://www.artseeninwa.com>). McGrath is currently enjoying retirement.

Some Exhibits That Are Still On View

Our policy at *Carolina Arts* is to present a press release about an exhibit only once and then go on, but many major exhibits are on view for months. This is our effort to remind you of some of them.

The Columbia Museum of Art in Columbia, SC, will present the exhibit, *The Art of Seating: 200 Years of American Design*, which presents a reflection on American design history, on view from Apr. 28 through Aug. 26, 2012.

"This is the first comprehensive exhibition of American chair design in the history of the Museum and we are delighted to have it on view," Karen Brosius, executive director, said. "This is such a rare opportunity to see iconic American chairs in a variety of styles."

For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Museum at 803/799-2810 or visit (www.columbia-museum.org).

The Bechtler Museum of Modern Art in Charlotte, NC, is presenting the exhibit, *Mid-Century Modernism: 1957 and the Bechtler Collection*, on view through Aug. 27, 2012. The exhibition features works in all media drawn exclusively from the museum's permanent collection that focus on 1957, the height of the Bechtler family's art acquisitions.



Jean-Paul Riopelle, *Composition*, 1956, oil on canvas, 28 1/2 in x 39 1/4 inches, Bechtler Museum of Modern Art. ©2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SODRAC, Montreal - April 2012

The exhibition takes one moment and reveals and celebrates the diversity of style and approach by 28 artists. It also reveals the breadth and depth of taste when it came to the Bechtler family as collectors. There are works by figures whose careers were significant and profoundly influential and there are works by artists who never attained popular attention or success in the marketplace. But all of the works were important to the Bechtler family and many were created by artists with whom the Bechtler family had personal relationships, in some instances for decades.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Museum at 704/353-9200 or visit (www.bechtler.org).



José Lerma, *Untitled #1*, 2007, AP2 from 20 + 2AP Lithography, woodcut on Rives BFK and handmade paper - May 2012

CAM Raleigh in Raleigh, NC, will present the exhibit, *The Credentialist*, featuring a Museum premiere of newly commissioned works by José Lerma, on view from May 19 through Sept. 2, 2012.

Lerma currently lives and works in New York and Chicago, where he is a faculty member at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Lerma creates intricate installations that combine painting and

non-traditional materials such as reflective fabrics and commercial carpet, relying on a compendium of mediums, references, and elements that combine his personal history and extensive academic accolades with his awareness of social history.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings, call the gallery at 919/513-0946 or visit (<http://camraleigh.org/>).

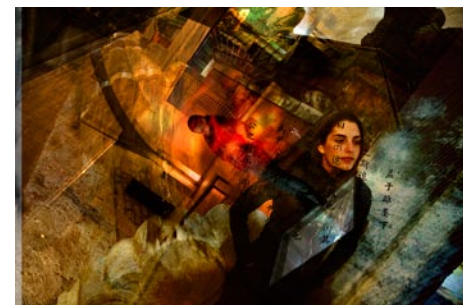
The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) in Winston-Salem, NC, is presenting *paperless*, on view through Sept. 16, 2012.

The medium of paper is a fragile vehicle – carrying the weight of written thought, but acutely vulnerable to travel, climate, and time. This endangered status accelerates in an increasingly digitized and environmentally conscious society, where the "paperless economy" is turning paper into antiquity. Yet even as paper struggles against its purportedly imminent extinction, artists around the world are paying homage to its precarious empire. *paperless* celebrates 15 international artists who create theatrical elegies to the pariah of so-called "progress."

Exhibiting artists include: Natasha Bowdoin, Peter Callesen, Doug Coupland, Simryn Gill, Katie Holten, Kiel Johnson, Maskull Lasserre, Nava Lubelski, Oscar Santillan, Karen Sargsayn, Jude Tallichet, Yuku Teruya, Oscar Tuazon, Johannes VanDerBeek, and Xu Bing.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Center at 336/725-1904 or visit (www.secca.org).

The FedEx Global Education Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, is presenting the exhibit, *Beijing Impressions: Portraits of a Shifting Landscape*, featuring photographs by Barbara Tyroler, on view through Sept. 18, 2012. A reception is planned for the Fall.



Work by Barbara Tyroler - May 2012

Tyroler's abstract photography is a visual response to the poetic interpretation of Chinese writer Lin Bai's personal memoirs, developed by Tyroler's daughter Samm Tyroler-Cooper.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings or call the Center at 919/962-2435.

The Reynolda House Museum of American Art in Winston-Salem, NC, is presenting the exhibit, *Affinities: Pairings from the Collection*, on view in the West Bedroom Gallery through Dec. 2, 2012.

This small focused assemblage of works from the museum's collection will invite the viewer to look at two very distinct works side by side and consider their differences and their similarities.

Placing two entirely unique works next to each other illuminates significant and revealing stylistic, iconographic, contextual, and compositional elements that help to build an interpretation of each piece. Viewers will be asked to contemplate three pairs of artworks in different media. Works by artists such as Charles Willson Peale, Grant Wood, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Julie Moos will create unexpected juxtapositions for the visitor to compare and contrast and to enjoy.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Museum at 336/758-5150 or visit (www.reynolda-house.org).

The deadline each month to submit articles, photos and ads is the 24th of the month prior to the next issue. This will be Aug. 24th for the September 2012 issue and Sept. 24 for the October 2012 issue. Don't put it off. Get your info to us - soon.