

FOUR LETTERS

SOUNDS LIKE...



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Chris Barsanti  
Kalie Garrett  
Yixue Ge  
Shawn Gessay  
Sarah Gray

Laura McCauley  
Melissa Smith  
Caroline Stephenson  
Lauren Sullivan  
Tingxiao Zhang

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THE TROUT GALLERY, Dickinson College



# Introduction

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The Senior Studio Seminar is a yearlong creative journey where students immerse themselves in the studio to develop their own work. The evolutionary nature of art making is central to the seminar experience. Students encounter first hand the trials and tribulations of invention. It becomes a learning experience steeped in emotive discovery, risk taking, skill development, and a courageous response to unfolding work. Developing a discerning eye requires one to look closely at evolving efforts, and acquiring the discipline and skills for translating ideas into physical form, as well as embracing the constant demands of reshaping fresh ideas.

At the start of the discovery process there are no scripted assignments or formal directives. Familiar classroom methodologies absorbing the work of others are overturned when students “draw” and “build” their own texts. Visual language acquisition at the center of the creative process is never easy. At first, students must manage the fits and starts of compositional impasses, and learn to forge ahead despite the unfamiliar terrain that demands their undivided attention. As students strike out on their own, they begin commanding their work. They learn to embrace the excitement of experimentation; when they are floundering on the edge of a question or starting over to correct a weakness in their work, they can plunge into the composition; they have learned how to set their new goals and points of action.

The confidence of their vision emerges full circle in this exhibition, revealing both the fruit of their labor, and an exhaustive engagement in the studio along the way. Reflected as well in the year’s work is a broad spectrum of media, from painterly abstraction to striking three-dimensional constructions. The study of art, the manipulation of matter, and its interpretation are tools which the students have used masterfully in this exhibition to create intriguing visual perspectives that demand attention.

Barbara Diduk  
Professor of Art

# Chris Barsanti

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My childhood was filled with long summer days of stress-free living, riding bikes, building forts, and playing in creeks. It never quite mattered where we were, we would always let our minds create the fun. I think this joy of play has never left my mind. These recollections seem unconnected to my art making—just another memory. Yet when I ask myself “Why do I make my work?” or, “Why do I enjoy what I make?”, I look at finished pieces, searching for recurring patterns or a cohesiveness of thought in the work, and I notice I like to change my mind, creating an all together different pattern or perspective, sometimes even unrelated to the first one.

Realizing this has made me ask different questions to understand my creative intentions and that drives my work and motivates me. I’ve grown to realize my enthusiasm in the studio goes back to my childhood and the simple joy of playing. Now when I create a new piece in the studio I encounter the same carefree feelings I had when I was a child.

This process of play is reflected in the variety of subject matter and the many techniques and materials I use in the studio. I enjoy the physicality of art making and the process of laboring over something. Involving my actual body in the process generates connections between my own efforts and deepens my involvement in the work, which always forges new ideas. Instead of mastering a specific process through careful study and immersion, I approach all materials in different ways. My

focus is deeply invested in the process of making. The outcome is shaped by the compositional experience of experimentation.

My art making focuses on the physical process of shaping ideas and explains my being less interested in the end product as a whole. I am invested in the steps I use to create each piece and having my hands evident in the work is essential. Exploring material limitations also inspires me to cross boundaries between two- and three-dimensional space and allows me to more accurately and quickly generate my ideas in drawings, and finally investigate these skills to make sculptural works.



Opposite page, top:  
*Transparent Guardedness*, 2012  
Foam core, fiberglass cloth,  
polyester resin  
40 x 24 inches

Opposite page, bottom:  
*Deranged Containment*, 2013  
Foam, copper  
24 x 20 x 5 inches

Above:  
*Changed Parallels*, 2013  
Wood, fleece fabric  
31 x 7 x 3 inches





# Kalie Garrett

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I have never been able to work in one medium for long because I often become restless. I fantasize about what other techniques I could use to keep myself engaged.

When I work three-dimensionally I begin with a hollow shape. Then I incorporate another material, fastening it to the surface of the structure, using repetition to build a volume. I never begin a project with a formal plan because my pieces evolve spontaneously as I slowly work the materials onto their frames. As a shape emerges, I edit and refine the form until I have reached a point where the structure and surface are perfectly balanced.

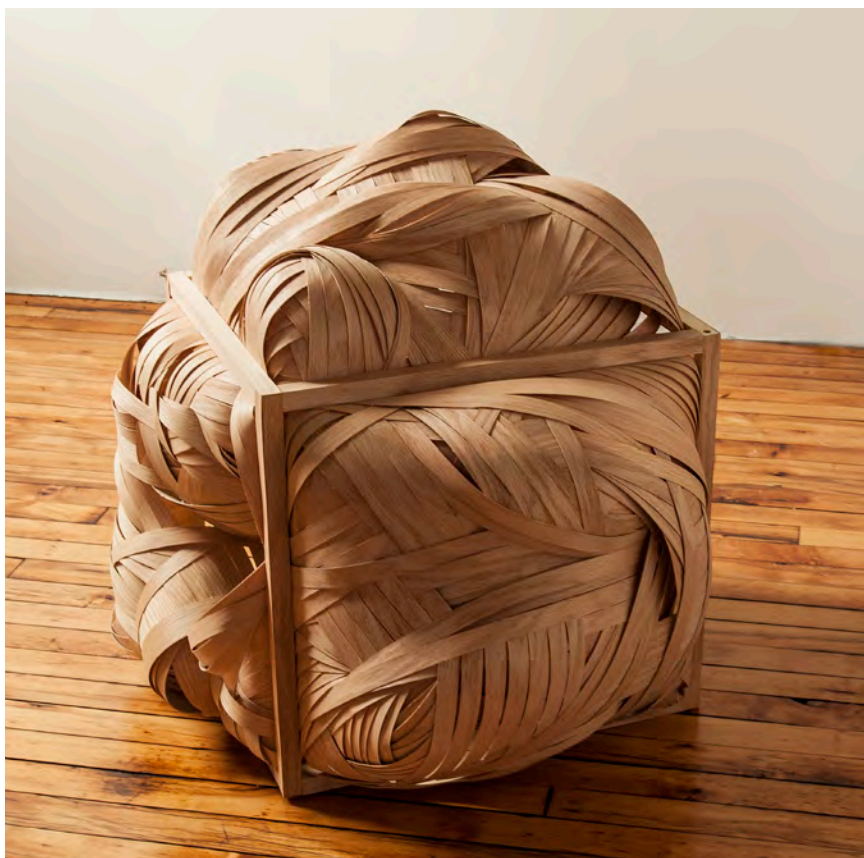
I use found objects to construct my pieces and I select materials based on their potential to be transformed. I want to integrate aesthetics and design in my work and create pieces that can stand on their own and are not entirely reliant upon their context. My objective is to create sculptures that showcase the unexpected beauty of raw materials.







Top right:  
*Study #2*, 2013  
 Sisal twine on wood  
 30 x 30 inches



Right:  
*Study #4*, 2013  
 Red oak edge banding on wood  
 19½ x 17 inches

Opposite page:  
*Study #5*, 2013  
 Eraser on plaster  
 13 x 13 inches

# Yixue Ge

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As a Chinese student studying in the United States, witnessing radical social change and experiencing American culture first hand, I feel moved in my work to comment on these very different cultures. However, unlike many well-known Chinese contemporary artists, I have chosen to steer away from controversial politics focusing instead on traditional topics examining beauty in nature and human emotions, and combining the subjects with contemporary pop culture. I believe aesthetics is primarily culturally inherited and informed by cross-cultural influences.

Specifically, I am redefining traditional Chinese paintings using digital drawing tools and other non-traditional media. There is merit in saying traditional Chinese ink painting reveals one's true state of mind. With black ink on a backdrop of canvas, cardboard, or paper, the process of art making requires extreme attention to details and having the confidence to successfully control what I am creating. While the way I work is very time consuming and sometimes a frustrating adventure, I have discovered innovative ways of developing my imagery. In fact, the process of working slowly gradually becomes a personal meditation through which my mind moves from panic to exhaustion. This is borrowed from traditional Chinese painting, which creates peaceful states associated with nature. Beyond that, I meld traditional imagery with Western cultural elements as I draw attention to the impact the West has on Chinese traditions. My art is an exploration of process and self-observation reflecting my state of mind and my own cross-cultural experiences.



Above:

*Dandelion, 2013*

Chromogenic print

20 x 16 inches

Opposite page:

*Once Upon a Cat, 2013*

Color etching on old book paper

5½ x 8 inches (each)





# Shawn Gessay

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I am fascinated with the idea that portraying a human likeness begins with using basic geometric shapes to build up the figure. I have discovered that it is not until the very end of rendering a drawing, that the subtle intricacies identifying an individual begin to emerge, and the image finally assumes its own identity.

I am very attracted to this notion that unseen, underlying elements exist in all of my portraits. This observation made me aware of the connections between my drawings and human biology. Also, my background in Neuroscience contributes to my curiosity in understanding how humans function.

The linkage between my academic and studio studies has made me aware of the inextricable relationship between art and science and it is why I want my work to incorporate elements of both. In my drawings I aim to create a synthesis between art and science that is both accessible and meaningful to the viewer.



Above:

*John*, 2012

Graphite on paper

9 x 12 inches

Opposite page:

Top left:

*Flo*, 2012

Graphite on paper

9 x 12 inches

Top right:

*Mug*, 2012

Graphite on paper

9 x 12 inches

Bottom left:

*Nathalie*, 2012

Graphite on paper

11 x 14 inches

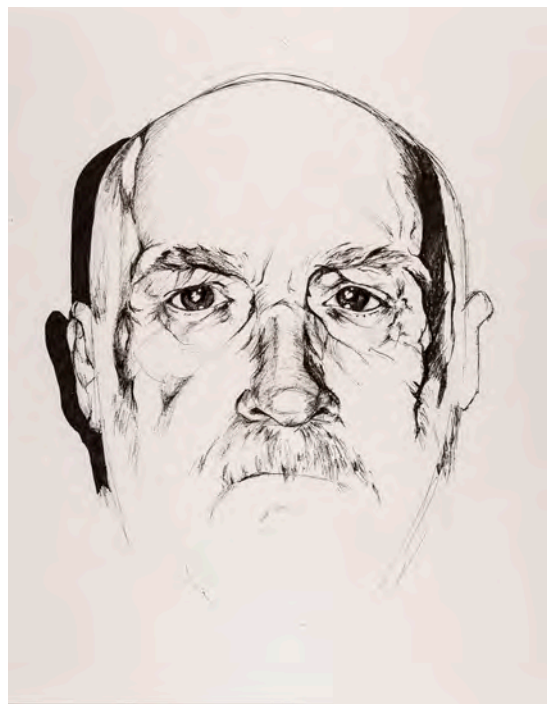
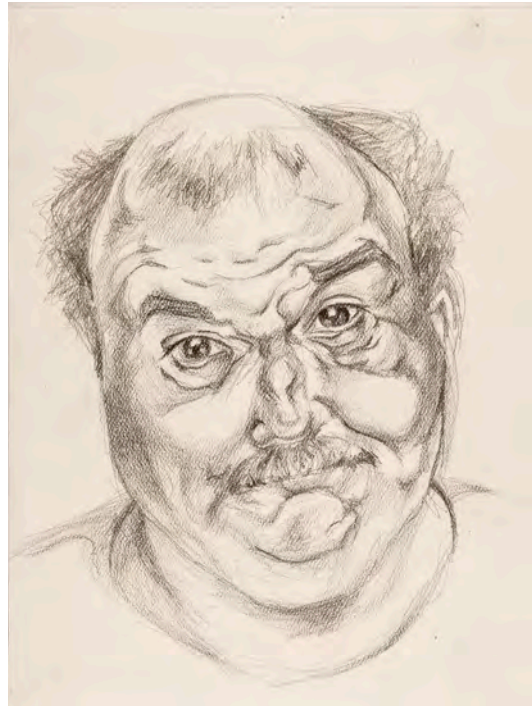
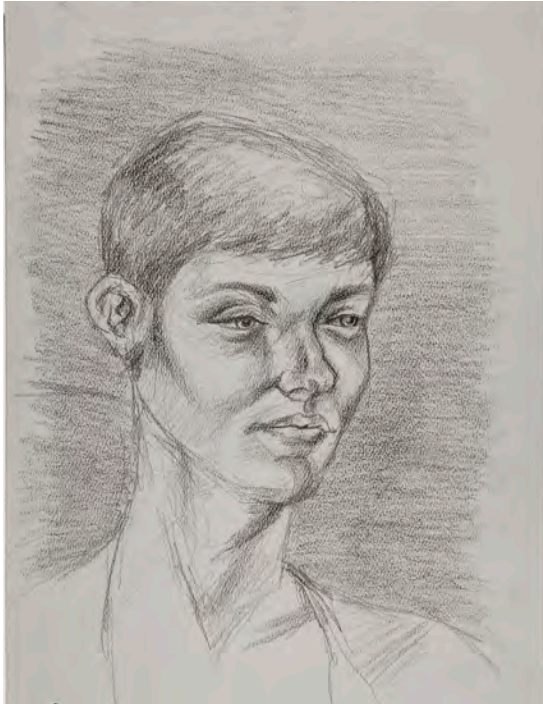
Bottom right:

*Modern Manson*, 2013

Ink on paper

14 x 17 inches





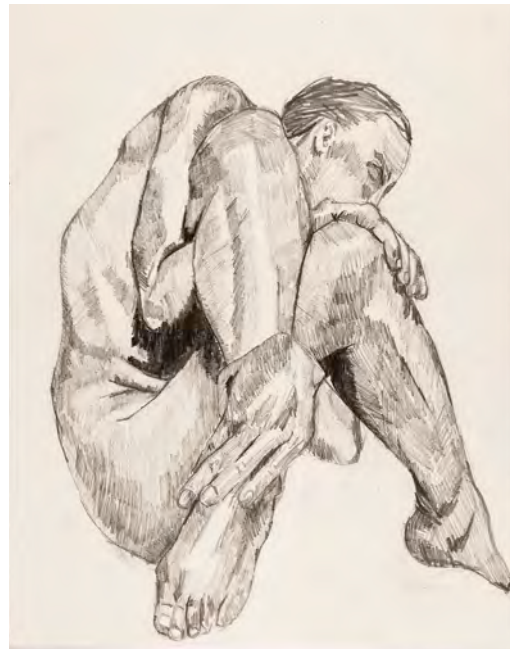
# Sarah Gray

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The figure has always been the central element in my work. I find interpretation of the human form to be very conceptually intriguing. The female figure especially interests me in art because it has such a long tradition, having been objectified and approached as a cliché, and yet to me it still remains a graceful, elegant, and beautiful subject. In my latest work I treat the figure quite non-traditionally, abstracting the subject using layers of paper and paint, distorting the familiar. I want to create a dichotomy between the classical nude female subject and this “new” woman, who is engulfed in fragments of newspaper, discarded snippets of paper, and cardboard. She is depicted sliding through layers of confused imagery and muddled textures allowing the figure to fade in and out of spaces, becoming part of a tangled aesthetic. I want to distort and alter the human form while layering imagery with text and color. This disassociates the figurative image from its original identity, creating new realities of line and color.

Uncertainty is an important part of my working process. When I begin a drawing or painting, I am not always certain where I might end up. Until there is always compositional closure in a piece, I take a “work in process” approach in the studio. Forever experimenting with multiple palettes that veer towards earth tones and added bursts of bright color, I incorporate collage elements using newsprint and magazines and bits and pieces of text, that function as subliminal marks and hidden messages. Trying on ideas as I mix and match, and experiment with broad ranging materials, allows

me to take the work through multiple transformations. As I experiment with each composition and consider the spatially relevant scale of individual works, the end result I look for is an organized clutter. My most successful work I think is about the fluidity and play of materials and its physical interaction with the figures in my paintings.



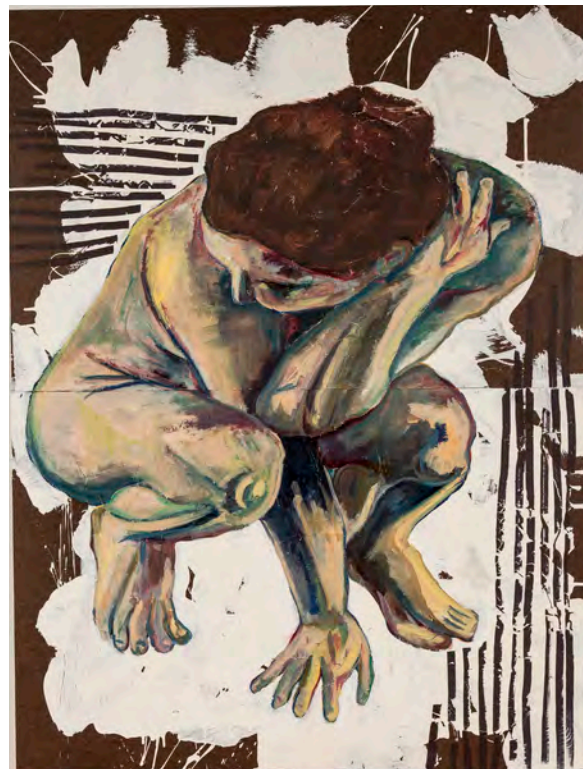




Above left:  
*Split Series 3*, 2013  
 Oil paint, sharpie, and acrylic gesso on Masonite  
 27 x 41 inches



Above right:  
*Split Series 2*, 2013  
 Oil paint, sharpie, and acrylic gesso on Masonite  
 27 x 41 inches



Right:  
*Split Series 1*, 2013  
 Oil paint, sharpie, and acrylic gesso on Masonite  
 27 x 41 inches

Opposite page:  
 Untitled, 2013  
 Graphite pencil on paper  
 8 x 10 inches



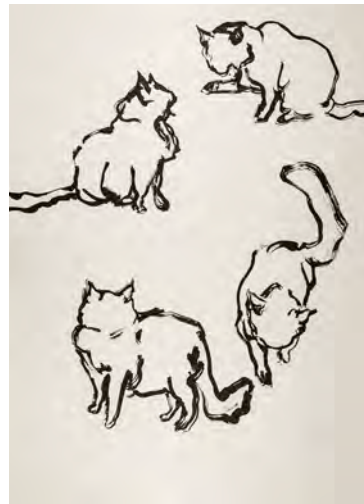
# Laura McCauley

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My current body of work is a personal exploration of line and the figure and focuses on recreating the things I see and how I envision them.

I have chosen to focus on the form of the cat not only for its personal interest to me, but the beautiful form it embodies. Using ink painting, I explore how the cats come alive as floating, falling, and intertwined images. I present them as a jumble of figures that convey a sense of character, capturing their tactile fluid movements across and through space. They are creatures meant to evoke a feeling in the viewer, instead of being merely illustrative of the animals themselves.

I use the sheer number of cats I portray as tumbling forms wrestling within wide-open spaces. I work spontaneously with the brush painting, carefully positioning and locating the individual shapes within the picture plane, trying to make sense of the juxtaposition of the figures. The individual creatures originate from my personal photography. I use these images as references so I can create an accurate sense of shape and characterization that seems real and relational. I also spend time studying the cats to understand how they move and how they interact with one another. The loose gestural painting becomes an extension and continuation of the actual movements of the cats. Furthermore, the exaggerated brushstrokes emerging from the process of observation capture the qualities of the cats and are archived in the drawings.



Above top:  
*Cecil 1*, 2013  
Sumi-e ink on paper  
18 x 24 inches

Below:  
*Cecil 2*, 2013  
Sumi-e ink on paper  
18 x 24 inches

Opposite page:  
*Snowdrift*, 2013  
Sumi-e ink on cloth  
3 x 9 feet



# Melissa Smith

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I am interested in working with mixed media to create abstract sculptural paintings. In my latest works on wood, I transform and manipulate surfaces exposing the painterly and sculptural qualities of the material. My textural experiments illustrate the wide range of surface possibilities found in the familiar material. Working across media allows me to explore elements of depth and space generated by my working process.

Ultimately, I want the viewer to respond to the physical experimentation reflected in the abstractions. As I look beyond the purely visual dimensions in the work, I am drawn to narrative possibilities in the latest pieces. I emphasize the similarities and differences between textures and explore the dual themes of absence and presence. The removal of material is redemptive as it simultaneously uncovers and reveals what is hidden beneath. I use abstraction as my dynamic language to capture the mysterious beauty that emerges as I carve through the surface of the wood. My works are not about the disfigured consequences of chipped and torn surfaces, but about the moment after that transformation when another physicality is amplified and beauty emerges in its place.







Left:  
*Redemption*, 2013  
 Wood and mixed media  
 21 x 42 x 2 inches

Opposite page:  
*Breathing Under Water*, 2012–2013  
 Wood and mixed media  
 19½ x 40 x 2½ inches

Above:  
*Solving Algebra Equations with  
 Bubble Gum*, 2012–2013  
 Wood and mixed media  
 70 x 37 x 3 inches

# Caroline Stephenson

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My work relies on human curiosity and the desire to discover, uncover, and otherwise interact with what is usually considered “off-limits.” My intent with respect to the small opening in the boxes is to introduce something that openly provokes the viewer. The videos encased in the boxes are studies of neurotic and repetitive actions that help humans cope with a range of human feeling. In that sense, these actions are both helpful and harmful.

Compulsive actions seem to be physical responses to mental triggers, whether it is nervousness, boredom, emotional duress, or other forms of social and functional impairment. The subjects of each video appear at multiple loci on the obsessive-compulsive spectrum and may register as disturbing for many viewers. I chose to record these subjects because they clearly challenge the expectation that the voyeuristic exterior suggests. My work explores what goes on in our minds. I didn’t want the aesthetic of the boxes to detract from the concept, which is the reason the plywood boxes are unfinished looking. The boxes serve as containers holding the compulsions of individuals and are a symbolic window into the mind.

Larger themes in my work include private vs. public spaces, habitual action, unconscious action, stigmatized action, and impulsive behavior control. I hope to give the viewer a moment to examine their own compulsions and coping mechanisms through witnessing the compulsive action of others. In that sense the work is rhetorical, demanding reactions from the viewer and the impetus to know more.



Above:  
*Surrogates*, 2013  
Poplar wood  
7 x 1½ x 1¼ inches



Below:  
*Son's Up*, 2013  
Poplar and cotton fabric  
3 x 2¾ x 3½ inches



Above:

*Current*, 2012

Plywood, acrylic paint, spray paint

40 x 40 inches

Above right:

*Current*, 2012 (detail)

Right:

*Lichen Simplex*, 2013

Plywood

16 x 14 x 6 inches





# Lauren Sullivan

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I want to capture movement in my drawings and to create a physical space where the viewer's mind can wander across the picture plane. I do not want my work to be read as purely beautiful, but as enticing, inviting the viewer to explore the possibilities of the cursive line drawing. Because the drawings embody organic movement, the eye is forever wandering across the spatial fields of contoured lines, making it difficult to find a resting place for the eyes, and creating a reason for looking further into the work.

The shapes I create are organic and do not refer to identifiable objects. Instead they fall between dual realities: part familiar and part unfamiliar. The push-pull aspect of the work keeps the viewer engaged, guessing where the imagery might lead. It leaves the viewer with the impression of being enticed and rejected at the same time. This duality reflects my working process and creates the sense of movement that lingers in the viewer and demands deeper examination.

I do not like the idea of a line being too simple. I always explore the possibilities of line controlling the placement, size, density, and layers in a composition and the consequences line has on how we perceive a drawing. Charcoal is my preferred rendering material because it allows me to subtract surface areas and create options for manipulating and expanding the drawing process.

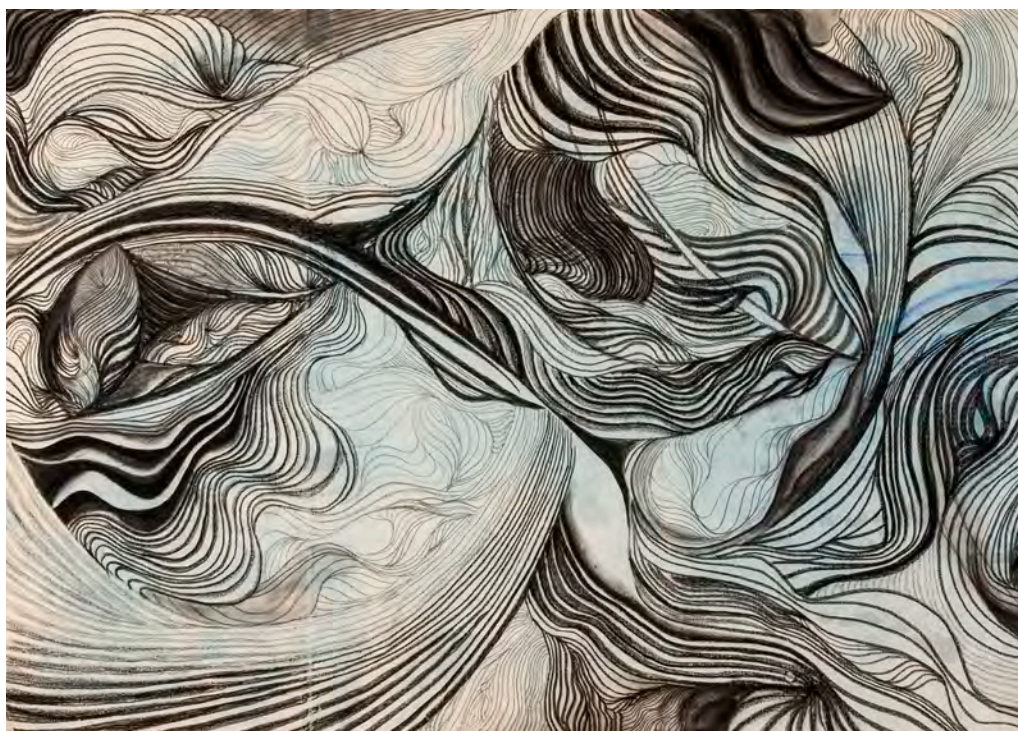


Above:  
Untitled, 2013  
Digital print  
9 x 12 inches

Opposite page top:  
Untitled, 2013  
Charcoal on paper with oil paint wash  
76 x 48 inches

Opposite page bottom:  
Untitled, 2013  
Charcoal on canvas with oil paint wash  
69 x 50 inches







# Tingxiao Zhang

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This group of works is inspired by the most delicate and barely visible inner structure of flowers and flower pedal patterns that occur when looking through a camera lens. I manipulate the original photographic images on the computer in order to dramatize the light and shadow, color hues, and the subtle atmosphere captured by the camera. These paintings are interpretations of this imagery, neither strictly abstract nor representational, but recognizable and yet not quite familiar.

I use small dinner knives to apply the paint to the canvas instead of brushes; because of the rough and manipulated surfaces, using the knives as tools for scraping, I am able to create strong stroke-like gestures. The irregular marks, smudges, and untrimmed edges I introduce into the paintings, the more intriguing the images become. I want the viewer to embrace these deliberate and happy accidents and imperfections, because of their power to draw the viewer in.

Opposite page:

Above:

*Green Eyes*, 2013

Oil paint on canvas

14 x 18 inches

Bottom:

*The Next Season*, 2013

Oil paint on canvas

14 x 18 inches

Above right:

*Red Cliff*, 2013

Oil paint on canvas

18 x 18 inches

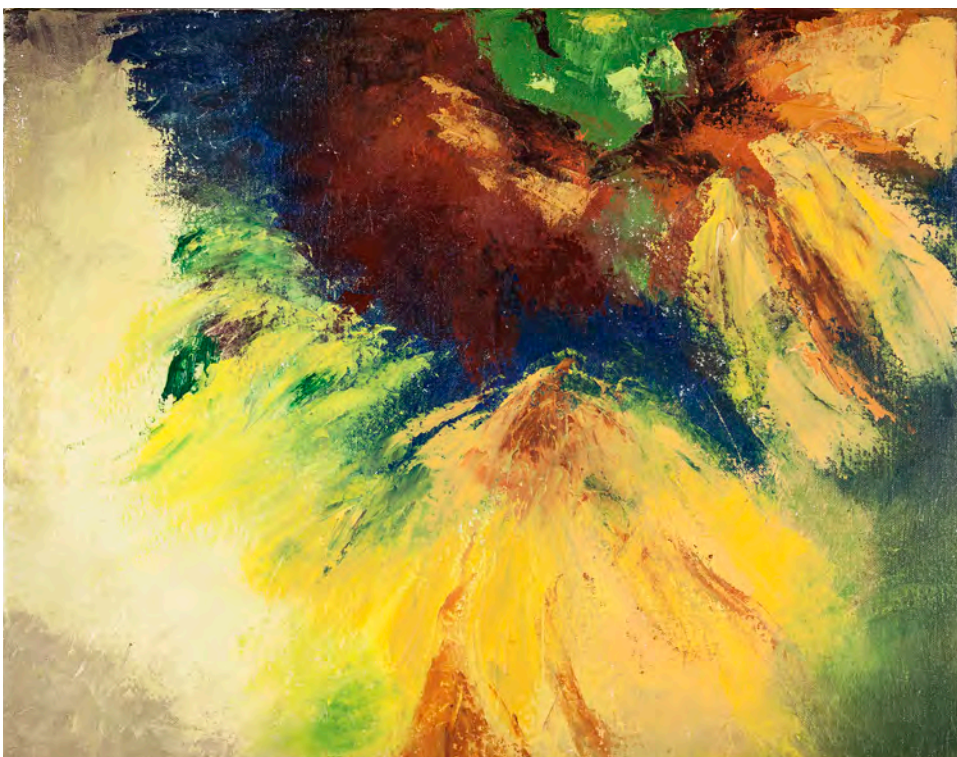
Right:

*Colorful*, 2013

Oil paint on canvas

18 x 24 inches



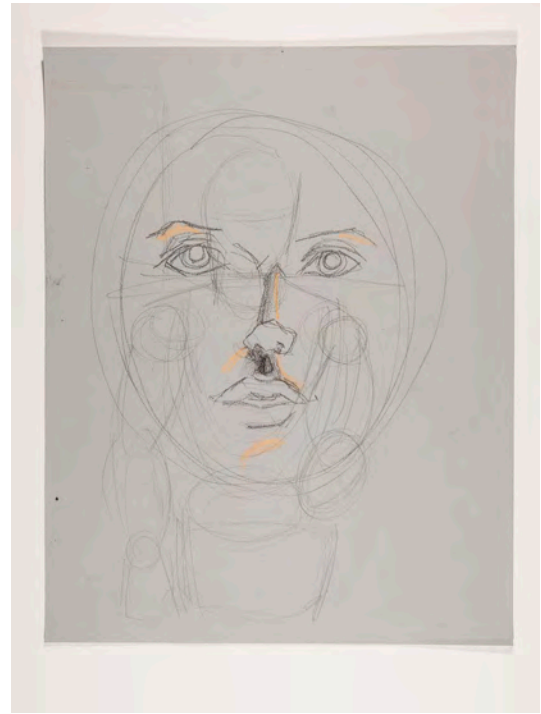




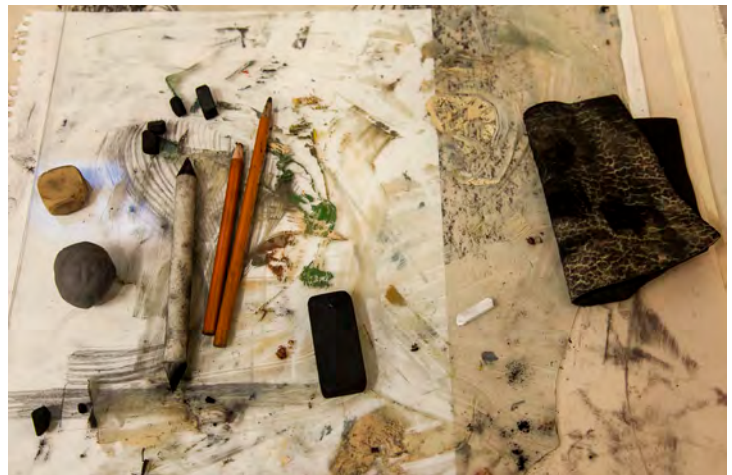
# In the Studio

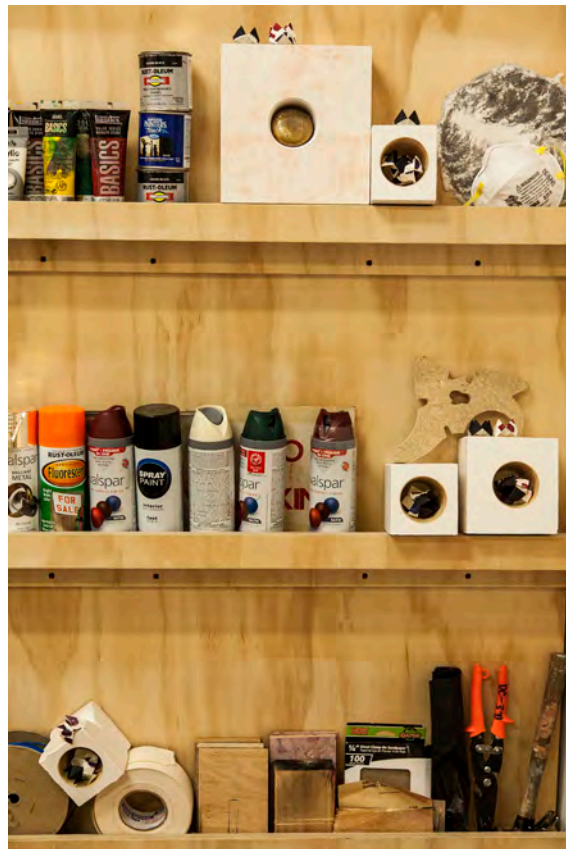
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# Dickinson

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