

Elijah Gowin, *Treading1*, 2006, inkjet print

2006 Charlotte Street Foundation Awards
September 9 – October 14, 2006

Anthony Baab
Deanna Dikeman
Justin Gainan
Elijah Gowin
Aaron Wrinkle

H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute
www.kcai.edu/artspace



Justin Gainan, *Dot Portraiture*, 2004-5, graphite and vellum

The Charlotte Street Foundation Award was established in 1997 to recognize outstanding work by visual artists in Kansas City. Since the awards were established, the Charlotte Street Foundation has recognized 56 local visual artists with a total of \$312,500 in unrestricted funds to further their studio practice. Besides this cash award, each year's winning artists are brought together for an annual award exhibition.

Rather than using this year's *Charlotte Street Foundation Awards* exhibition as a "retrospective" to summarize the careers that led to the honor of their being chosen, all the 2006 recipients—Anthony Baab, Deanna Dikeman, Justin Gainan, Elijah Gowin, and Aaron Wrinkle—opted instead to debut very recent works and series. As a curator, I encouraged this decision, as it not only afforded me but every artist in the exhibition the opportunity to consider and speak to the work of each participant as it was in progress. As a result, I believe that this year's *Charlotte Street Foundation Awards* exhibition is a particularly dynamic one, in which all its artists—whether emerging or mid-career—have put new images and ideas on the line. As audiences move through the gallery, they will discover myriad dialogues and debates between the artists' work, reflecting those that emerged in the course of planning the exhibition itself.

The resulting process and effect of this year's exhibition struck me as very much in keeping with the spirit of the Charlotte Street Foundation Awards, which not only rewards local artists with records of excellence, but also provides them with both the moral and financial support to take new risks. I believe that the

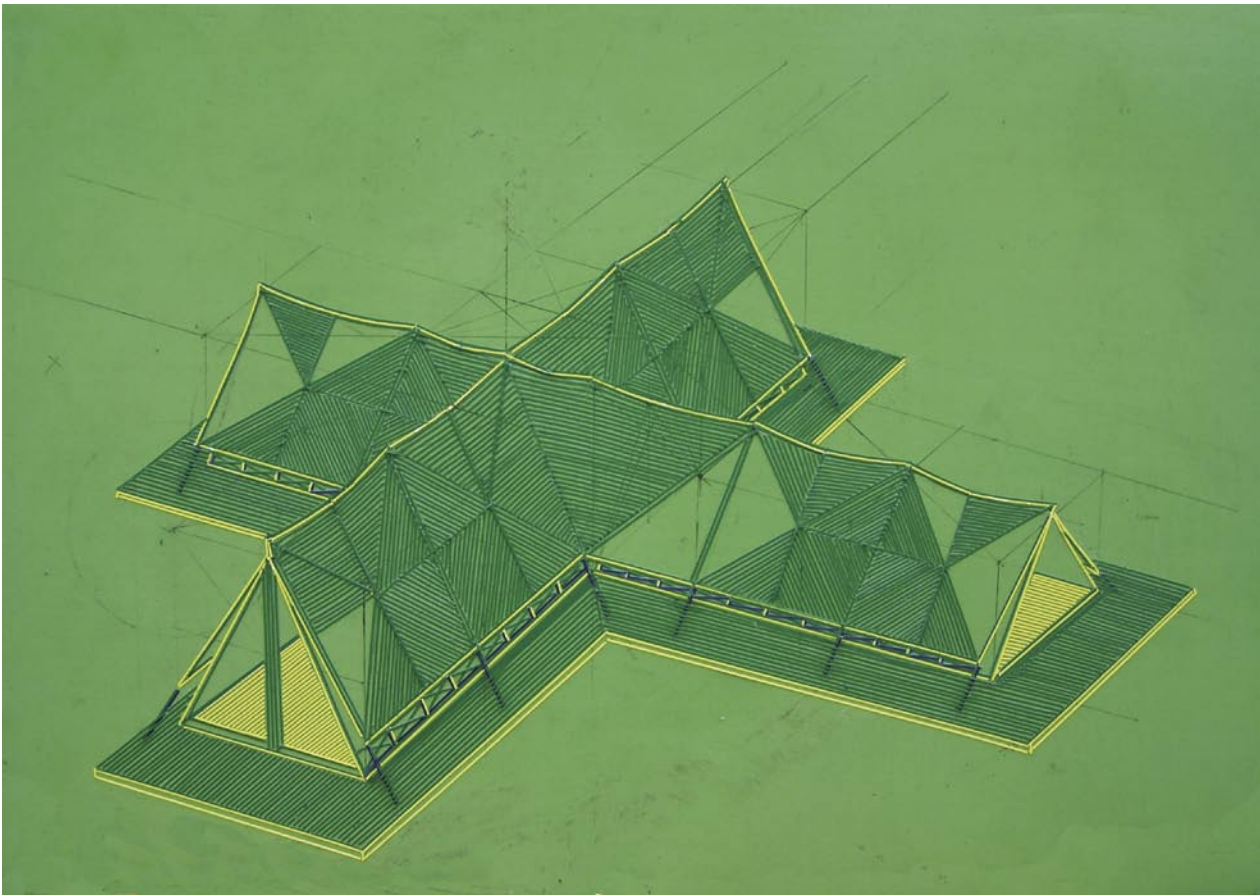


Deanna Dikeman, *Cutting rhubarb leaves 6/06*, 2006, silver gelatin print

thoughtful, challenging work of the 2006 Charlotte Street Foundation Award winners will join that of their predecessors in setting new standards for the risk-taking of awards recipients to come.

Aaron Wrinkle

Among many other things, in the words of the artist himself, Aaron Wrinkle's work is "art history, it's politics, it's the academic, it's humor, it's process, unfortunately it's irony, it's appropriation, it's sometimes laziness, it's bullshit, it's violence, it's love, it's self-obedience, it's spirituality, it's maybe not even art." And, somehow, this hodge-podge of sources, motivations, and interpretations make perfect sense when one stands before Wrinkle's eclectic work. During his time as a student at the Kansas City Art Institute's Painting Department, Wrinkle developed a reputation as a constantly-searching artist: searching for new media, new meanings, new perspectives to incorporate into his work. Since graduating in 2004, this search has continued even as its focus has grown refined. He has expanded his use of found objects—sometimes pointedly confiscated from other artists' trashcans—which he reconfigures into sculptural installations that draw attention to the sometimes-magical, sometimes-comical recontextualizations that the artist can impose upon the ordinary. Many Kansas Citians may recognize Wrinkle's work from his astounding conversion of the Lynn Foundation, with fellow KCAI alum Burak Duvenci, into a gallery of pirate-themed allegories in the 2005 exhibition *Never Eat Soggy Waffles*. Others who may remember Wrinkle's constantly-changing images and messages from the Dolphin Gallery Billboard (on the corner of 19th/Baltimore),



Anthony Baab, *A Sacred Place is a Transient Space*, 2006, tape and pencil on panel

which was given over to the artist in the fall of 2005, will not be surprised to find that the artist has since become increasingly engaged with politics—be they governmental, academic, or personal. Indeed, his interest in political relationships and systems has led to his most recent interest in museum culture; in particular, the sorting, ranking, and evolution of objects that the exhibitions of both the natural history and art museum share—even if the latter is loath to admit as much.

In his new installation for the *2006 Charlotte Street Awards* exhibition, Wrinkle has created what essentially amounts to a dioramic goodbye to Kansas City, planned and created in the lead-up to the artist's recent departure for the renowned MFA program at the California Institute of the Arts. Symbolic imagery relating to both Kansas City and Los Angeles abounds, as does the recurring motif of the "transmitter," relating to Wrinkle's desire to channel the Midwestern sensibility that nurtured his work to date into his new, storied, and daunting environment at CalArts.

Justin Gainan

A 2004 graduate of KCAI's Fiber Department, there remains something of the stitcher in Justin Gainan's time-intensive work, even as it has consistently traversed boundaries beyond conventional fiber arts and into sculpture, installation, and most recently painting and drawing. His early "drawings" consisted of criss-crossing, irregular stitches of sewing thread piercing sheets of rag paper. At a distance, the effect is that of an abstract ink drawing, but upon

closer inspection, each "line" takes on tremendous texture and depth-of-field as one realizes that this drawing was in fact created by layering deliberate stitch upon stitch onto/into the paper, building up color, shadows, and puncture holes. This interest in using the mark-as-mantra, constructing complex imagery with an almost ascetic simplicity of means is the hallmark of Gainan's work.

In the triptych of recent drawings that Gainan exhibits here, entitled *Which One Am I?*, it is easy to see how the stitcher's meditative, precise accumulation of threads translates into his mark-making—each light, tiny line in Gainan's abstractions has been clearly considered and defined. The minimalist aesthetic of such drawings has, however, most recently given way to experiments in maximalism, seen here in his ink drawing *White Dots*, in which Gainan's dense layering of strokes in the watery medium is punctured with a field of tiny pinholes, creating a kind of "secondary" drawing from which the work's title comes. But while he seeks to explore the many different ways in which "the accumulation of lines builds a field of activity," Gainan's contemplative, cumulative process serves as the electric undercurrent beneath every one of his quiet works.

Elijah Gowin

The new body of work debuted here by University of Missouri-Kansas City Studio Art professor Elijah Gowin springs from his recent series of baptismal photographs. In the earlier *Watering* series, Gowin chose "the backdrop of contemporary Christian baptism to reflect upon the broader human condition at



Aaron Wrinkle, *Various meaningless objects as meaningful objects and imaginary communication devices* (detail), 2006

the turn of the 21st century.” The participants in these baptisms reflect a range of emotions, immersed as they are not just in the cleansing waters, but in what the artist calls “a world that is both nourishing and potentially malevolent.” But this emotional range—of different figures, often within single groups—also reflects the unapparent process by which Gowin created these works. Contrary to the documentary style of the images, which read as hazy frames from a film or video, each is in fact a compilation of landscapes, figures, and events—sometimes shot, sometimes appropriated by the artist—which are then brought together digitally. As such, the fallacious nature of these tremendously sincere, emotional vignettes forces the viewer to recognize the dark currents that potentially lurk beneath their seemingly celebratory scenarios.

Building on the subtle ambiguities of *Watering*, in his latest work Gowin further explores the notion of the “dark current.” In his new series, he continues to seamlessly construct images of figures immersed in water from myriad sources, but in still less certain circumstances. His figures swim in, fall into, and float on waters whose surroundings and colors have been juxtaposed and manipulated by Gowin with a new, dramatic flourish. But, like the Romantic paintings that the artist claims among the influences for these works, the seductive theatricality of the images presents viewers with disturbingly open, complex scenarios. Are these figures diving or dropping? Drowned or drowsy? Do they swim toward or escape from the groups in their midst? And why? The unsettling effect of these images is a reminder of how powerfully, even in our image-saturated, media-savvy age, our desire to “see and believe” compels our interpretation of images—a desire that Gowin’s recent work both exploits and challenges.

Anthony Baab

Anthony Baab seeks to create harmonious relationships between opposites: nature and culture, stability and fragility, monumentality and intimacy. And whether these relationships are explored in his imagery or processes, the inevitable tensions explored in such mergers crackle. Since graduating from KCAI in 2004, Baab’s work has consistently investigated what the artist calls the connections “between the architectures of ancient cathedrals and monuments of the world with the virtues of modern technology, as a way to sanctify human endeavors.”

His “paintings”—whose elaborate linear compositions are in fact built up of meticulously-applied lengths of fine tape on painted panel—and, most recently, sculptural installations conjure fantasy structures and landscapes that manifest his dreams of high-tech green sites matching the scale, aesthetics, and ambition of ancient monuments; what Baab calls contemporary “sacred spaces. . . [that] combine nature with the human hand.” As precise as are his painstakingly-rendered paintings, the scores of notebook drawings from which Baab derives these works are loose and stream-of-consciousness. They collect the daydreams, conversations, and plans that churn in the artist’s imagination before he arrives at the utopian sites of his panels, but are invaluable sources for these majestic and intricate works.

Deanna Dikeman

Deanna Dikeman’s work asks viewers to reconsider the minutiae of everyday life as markers of tremendous meaning. The new work Dikeman exhibits here from her *Relative Moments* series is an excellent case in point. The series originated in 1995, with the artist’s efforts to document her childhood home when her parents put it on the market. However, these images that began as an exercise in nostalgia for her family’s past revealed something different: a very intimate look at the rituals and quiet details of her parents’ lives in the present. On the one hand, their lives abound with the familiar activities, furniture, and kitsch memorabilia of the artist’s memories; on the other hand, as both parents and child have aged, they have all adapted in each others’ absence to new surroundings, habits, and roles. The resulting series represents Dikeman’s discovery that “even though nothing out of the ordinary is happening, extraordinary moments are flying by.”

In the most recent photographs from *Relative Moments* that the artist exhibits here, Dikeman has included her son as an actor in this constantly-evolving family narrative. Whether gardening with her still-active but noticeably-stooped father, or quietly working crossword puzzles with his grandparents, Theron’s presence subtly underscores the artist’s intention for *Relative Moments* to trigger “deeper notions about time, distance, comfort, growth, sorrow, fear, fascination, grace, regret.” Simultaneously replacing and displacing the artist’s younger self, Theron’s sometimes mischievous, sometimes contemplative image alongside Dikeman’s parents and Aunt Evey is a tangible reminder of the profound changes in all our lives—even as so much appears to stay the same.

Maria Elena Buszek
Curator & Assistant Professor of Art History, Kansas City Art Institute

The Charlotte Street Foundation

The Mission

The mission of the Charlotte Street Foundation is to support and recognize outstanding visual artists in Kansas City. The visual arts represent a tremendous cultural strength in Kansas City, and the city benefits from the many artists who choose to live in the area. At a time when awards for individual artists have been eliminated by federal and state agencies, the need for such an effort is particularly warranted. Awards from the foundation are for recognition of outstanding work and represent a small thank you to each artist for his or her creativity and hard work. The name is derived from the Charlotte Street Mission, the former home of John Puscheck - artist, chef, agent provocateur - for the generosity and community he fostered over several decades in the arts community in Kansas City. John passed away unexpectedly in 2005. We miss him dearly.

Awards

Cash awards are for the unrestricted use of the artist. They will be granted annually to artists living in the greater Kansas City area who are actively creating work – based solely on the merits of their work, in the judgment of the curatorial advisors to the foundation. No applications are accepted.

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The Charlotte Street Foundation is a 501(c)3 and a component fund of the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation. Contributions are tax-deductible and may be sent to Box 10263, Kansas City, Missouri 64171; www.charlottestreet.org

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