

A Moratorium on Make-Believe

Miller Gallery showcases works by MFA students

A Moratorium on Make-Believe is a final thesis exhibition put on by six graduating MFA students: Chris Beauregard, Michelle Fried, Ben Kinsley, Eileen Maxson, John Peña, and Ally Reeves. Showcasing various angles of unfamiliar reality, from fake YouTube videos with distorted sound to artifacts that may be real or made-up, the exhibit offers a unique and creative perspective in each of its works. *A Moratorium on Make-Believe* opened at the Regina Gouger Miller Gallery on March 21 and ends this Sunday, April 20.

The first floor showcases the work of Kinsley. Elaborating on the main focus of his work, Kinsley said, “A lot of the work that I do is juxtaposing two things that don’t make sense together, or finding a scenario that I’m in and imagining something that could happen there but that would not normally happen.”

On opening day, Kinsley got a high school marching band to come in and play for the audience on the first floor. Similar to a normal high school marching band performance, he set up bleachers for them to stand on and arranged for a backdrop. But soon after they started playing, half the band rose, marched into the elevator, and rode it up to the third floor, playing the whole time. After the other half of the band had followed, the entire band marched through the exhibit on the third floor. They then marched into the stairwell and through the other floors. This continued through the entire night. To help people track the progress of the band and understand what was causing all the noise, the feed from the security cameras was projected on a wall on the first floor. The exhibit still has the white bleachers in the corner, and visitors can watch the recording of the marching band projected on the wall as it wanders through the different floors of the gallery.

The second floor features the work of Fried, Maxson, and Beauregard. One of the most distinct elements in this portion of the exhibit is a video projection that features a talking stomach. This video is the work of Fried and tells the story of a woman who has stomach trouble and is seeking the help of a doctor. The characters and locations in the video are all dark and unsanitary, giving the viewer an unsettling and unclear feeling.

Maxson also explores the medium of video. She expresses her feelings against television and YouTube through a fake YouTube video that she created. The sound is distorted throughout the video, making it difficult to tell what is going on. The setting looks like a news broadcast but has flashes of other images in between. It is up to the audience to interpret what the situation is.

Adjacent to her video, Maxson has a square of space in which she has left a rope dangling from the ceiling. The setting has a theatrical air to it, and gives the onlooker a feeling of suspense along with the nagging urge to pull the rope. The rope is actually connected to a large net that contains hundreds of red and white balloons. Pulling the rope causes the net to give way and all the balloons to fall to the floor. According to Kinsley, this part of the exhibit was kind of an experiment, as Maxson was unsure whether anyone would end up pulling the rope, but on opening day, someone did and visitors immediately began stomping on the balloons. Currently, the rope has a note on it that states: “By pulling this rope you will buy this artwork. The cost is \$500. If you ask me it’s a bargain.”

Beauregard, the third artist on this floor, explores the world of horror films and the idea of fake violence. The entrance to his exhibit is a blue police barricade that is unnaturally bent, as if meant to be crossed over. All of his pieces resemble props from the sets of horror movies, like a wall that says “shit just got real” in fake blood, a black crow, a severed hand, and axes made out of solidified blood. The exhibit is complete with a video made of fragmented images of rooms and a man chopping wood, giving the viewer the same eerie feeling that horror movies achieve.

One of the most interesting and intriguing parts of the exhibit is Peña’s work, displayed on the third floor. For the last five years, Peña has been in communication with the Pacific Ocean, sending letters every day addressed to “The Ocean.” Most of these letters have been returned to the sender, but many of them have not made it back, giving hope that they really did reach their destination. The exhibit shows all of Peña’s returned letters against a wall, and this dramatic

display instills a sense of awe in the onlooker, combined with a feeling of wistful curiosity about the content of the letters.

Continuing the theme of letters is a large white mailbox, complete with an upturned red flag, that stands before the wall of letters. Peña promises that within his lifetime, he will deliver all the letters that are placed in this mailbox to their recipients.

Peña also captures the viewer’s attention and admiration by displaying pages from his written work. These pages are entirely hand-drawn with charcoal, making them captivating to behold. Apart from the beautifully drawn illustrations that accompany the story, even the text is a work of art, with a unique font drawn by Peña himself.

Reeves displays two interesting pieces in her exhibit, the Look-See Tree and the Mobile Museum. The Look-See Tree is a horizontal tree trunk connected to a bicycle. The trunk is inhabited by robotic birds and animals that seem to have built their nests and homes in it. Using creative social commentary, Reeves shows how the animals have adapted to industrial life by using garbage to build their living spaces. The contraption has a crank-operated generator that powers the cells and distance sensors in the tree; as a viewer approaches, the robotic bird and animals move and make sounds.

Reeves also has a Mobile Museum, a display case with bicycle wheels on either sides, containing many curious artifacts that are either “found or fake,” meaning that the story behind these objects is either true or made-up; it is up to the audience to decide and vote which are which.

The exhibit, on a whole, is very interesting and brings together talented artists that have their own unique ideas and ways of expression. Even though these artists are diverse, they still strangely fit together, creating an intriguing and worthwhile experience.

Shweta Suresh | Assistant Pillbox Editor



Michelle Liu | Photo Staff

Left: Reeves’ Look-See Tree is on display in front of Peña’s wall of letters to the ocean.

Right: Artifacts that are either “found or fake” are showcased in Reeves’ Mobile Museum.