



The Williams Gallery staff would like to express our thanks to the artists who showcased their work in "The Natural World: A Postmodern Perspective." The gallery staff would also like to extend special thanks to Mount St. Mary's University Provost David Rehm, the Office of Alumni Relations, the Office of University Communications, the University Honors Program and the George Henry Miles Honor Society for their support of the Department of Visual and Performing Arts throughout the execution of this juried show. The staff also offers a very warm thank you to the wonderful Michelle Venzin and Dr. Caroline Eick.



The Thomas H. & Mary K. Williams Art Gallery  
The Delaplaine Fine Arts Center  
Mount St. Mary's University  
16300 Old Emmitsburg Road  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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## A POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

JANUARY 22 - FEBRUARY 22, 2013

The intellectual and spiritual understanding of the natural world has progressed with time. The ebb and flow of nature's tidal forces has been ever-present. In the current age, when the cycles of nature are threatened, it becomes all the more important to step back and acknowledge the timeless beauty of our planet. We cannot survive without creation, whether biological or artistic. This exhibit seeks to celebrate these essentials and map the nodes of human need that necessitate the presentation of such creative work in the first place.

The works presented in this exhibition stand as points in the geologic and creative process upon which each life is built. Participating in the postmodern dialogue, the thematic elements explore the value of perception and discovery. The works contribute to the overall conception of the natural world, rather than a strict definition of it. The works discuss new paradigms and artistic approaches to the rapid technological advances in contemporary society. In essence, what we know is culturally and linguistically constructed. What we see then are theories written by many living beings. Likewise, this show is a collection of multiple artists, each with different though complementary perspectives.

These artists could not exist without the interrelation teeming in the natural world. Just like them, we are dependent on all natural processes; inasmuch as these works are a product of the earth's cycles, they are also representations of human existence on the earth. Various technologies accompany the rise of human populations and we acknowledge the resulting diversity of life and of artistic styles. We in turn see parts of a greater whole. Yet, this greater whole consists of positives and negatives. We also see the development of human civilization

through technological advances, but the same innovations that move us forward are also the cause of grave environmental exploitation. The artistic diversity between the works in this show is symbolic of the biological diversity within the natural world itself and, as such, addresses the multitude of dilemmas this system faces in the present and future.

The exhibit begins with Marc Leone's *Crater #1001*. Structural and infinite, it is the burst of a new galaxy, the mutation of a cell into a new form of life, the twisted tales of an ancient tree long fossilized. His work is the building block of all we know: its simplicity forms the basis for increasing complexity. In fact, without human technology we would be unaware of cellular and stellar formation at all. Although the work is denoted by crater classification numbers, the abstraction of the composition permits a link between the cosmic and the microscopic. The telescope and microscope, both inorganic, parallel our understanding of the earth: at once so close, yet hearts away from true understanding in the current paradigm of consumption and exploitation. The scale of the works highlights the intricacies that would be missed by the naked eye, intricacies that make up larger parts of an even greater organic whole.

Next, Megan Weikel's work becomes an homage to archival and archaeological findings of early human creators. Juxtaposed with printed text, her found objects, dusty and weatherworn, are testaments to the longevity of geology. Paper fades, but in our present cultural memory it is just as real as the rocks beneath our feet. Technology is ever-shifting and contextual, but our ancestral history, our bond with earth's most primal offerings, is forever tied to us, regardless of language or culture. We are along for the ride—like pieces of paper tied to a rock, we are footprints treading the unpredictable soil of the galaxy. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* series represents Zen-like

stepping stones of human knowledge advancing through the ages.

Taking a step further toward constructivism, Erin Harmon's *Candy Jar II* takes a whimsical approach to ecology. Containment, whether by a bell jar or trellis, is the prominent theme. The acidic colors denote a woodland world, separate from, yet reflective of, our own. The shapes and patterns spatially render the natural world at a terrarium-sized perspective. The decontextualization of the collage depicts the natural world as a specimen. Compositional isolation—samples from a small world glued to a monochrome slide—compares to the sometimes exploitative ambitions of laboratory discovery. The lush thriving of these perfect ecosystems is fantastical, but also deeply foreboding. Nature's vibrancy is like a warning, thorny and toxic. Can human discovery even keep up? Harmon's work is a tapestry that celebrates the elements of growth, darkness and organic geometry that resist classification. While we expect such elements to be utopian, in reality they present challenges and complexities that humanity staggers to control or overcome. The static compositions deepen the contrast between basic natural forms and the overlooked ecological complexities that abound in human life.

If Harmon's works are single specimens, then John Hancock's interlocking works are an ordered collection of microscopic slides. In *From Below the Ridge*, Hancock's painting contains incomplete representations of nature. Faded landscapes are joined with color-blocked fields. Harmonized by color accents, the trailing scenery is linked back together through lyrical form. Thus, the viewer is presented with a layered reality, a plane wherein color theory and classical landscape are knit together. The plates of color are the simplest representations of nature, evoking the basic associations between earth's processes and the visual

perception of color. Through this interactive approach, Hancock enables the mind to fill in the edges of the remaining images. This lack of visual closure identifies a reality that is never sealed.

The interplay and tension in Hancock's pieces act as a precursor to the thematic elements developed by Nathan Taves. The anthropological subtleties within Taves' work create a compelling mix of what is natural and what is manmade. In *Venus and Driveway*, the surreal swirls of line and color collude a suburban wasteland that, while green and rolling, is nonetheless spidery and phantasmal. The richly organic color and fracturing shapes create an eerie instability. The world seems splintered and darkly poetic, hemmed together with calligraphic lines looming on the horizon. Small accents of cookie-cutter architecture puncture the rippling composition abruptly. Roads and houses become scars, angular and rigid, interrupting a web-like flow. The kaleidoscope, no longer benign and playful, elucidates a world on the edge. It heralds the loss of the familiar to brute natural forces.

This daunting impression is furthered in Kay Knight's work *Accumulation*, which highlights the fear of destruction that preoccupies the human psyche. Her integrative collage work is symbolic of the ambitions that bar us from fully submersing ourselves in the world. As in Taves' work, the inclusion of manmade abstractions and textures creates a space enlivened by organic and industrial strain.

## WE CANNOT SURVIVE WITHOUT CREATION

Her dripping brushwork presents ominous natural forces, those always beyond human resistance. Her natural world has a personality, one that must be accepted in order for humanity to survive. The wallpaper creations, thick barricades in the way of a full view, are startlingly antithetical to the painterly backdrop, much in the way

that war and violence stand opposed to the flourishing of ecological systems. Knight's visceral structures are like scars, insightful as to how raw violence reflects the exploitation of the earth's resources. There is a loss of civility, as if human reason has underestimated its own adaptive abilities. What remains is merely what always has been: the resilience of nature.

These six artists function to illustrate six unique perspectives. Yet, when analyzed collectively, these artists depict a conceptual progression that is ultimately holistic and cyclical. From the graphite works of Marc Leone to the whimsical colorations of Erin Harmon, the works offer thought-provoking and at times confrontational perspectives on an important social issue. From the meticulous intricacy of asteroidal impact to the erasure of human creation, the overarching story is one of life and death, but also of continuance. Despite changes in human capacities, natural biology remains authoritative. The earth, in sum, is no longer a pawn of humanity: it is the source of life.

Postmodernism seeks to give voice to that which has been marginalized, and the earth itself has long been abused for its resources. This phenomenon takes place within a larger modern propensity for commodification. We find ourselves complicit in this progression. The artists here possess outstandingly active voices on behalf of environmental advocacy. This show offers the chance to visually explore creation, adaption, progression, exploitation and preservation. We look for new ways to view the world around us, and these artists present us with a way to begin that meditative and transformative journey. ■

### John Hancock

*Beside the River's Bend*, mixed aqueous media on assembled panels, 23" x 18"

*From Below the Ridge*, mixed aqueous media on assembled panels, 9" x 32"

### Erin Harmon

*Candy Jar II*, gouache on paper, collage, 11" x 15"

*The Land of Lost & Found*, oil on panel, 19" x 29.25"

*Whirlpool*, oil on panel, 9.75" x 7.75"

### Kay Knight

*Accumulation*, vintage wallpaper and oil on wood, 30" x 40"

*Guadalupe*, vintage wallpaper and oil on wood, 40" x 30"

*Washed Away*, oil on wood, 19" x 22"

### Marc Leone

*Crater #1001*, graphite on eroded paper, 36" x 36"

*Crater #1771*, graphite on eroded paper, 36" x 36"

*Crater #2001*, graphite on eroded paper, 36" x 36"

### Nathan Taves

*The Last Exit and the Next One*, oil on panel, 18" x 24" (22" x 28" framed)

*Venus and Driveway*, oil on panel, 24" x 18" (28" x 22" framed) **BEST IN SHOW**

*Where Trees Are Born*, oil on panel, 18" x 24" (22" x 28" framed)

### Megan Weikel

*Archaeology of Knowledge: Fossil*, rock, text and thread, 6" x 19" x 9.5"

*Archaeology of Knowledge: Origin*, rock, text and thread, 6" x 16" x 9.5"

## John Hancock

WAYNESBORO, VA

John Hancock makes image-objects that stem from direct observation. Through editing and overlaying passages, he deftly interrupts realism with expressive abstraction. Each field is a tentative integration of opposites, a structured space where details from nature intersect with partial pastoral views. Near and far, literal and imaginary, the imagery resists closure, and yet it is the harmonics of color and composition that knit the fragments back together. Accordingly, his works disrupt conventions of landscape and portraiture, yet there is an undeniable touch of classicism. He depicts the here and now as a layered reality—past and present, personal and historical. His work is a complex and imperfect poiesis. It is unstable and idiosyncratic, but ultimately essential and intrinsically humane. ■

## Erin Harmon

MEMPHIS, TN

Erin Harmon was raised in the suburbs of Southern California where the desert is sated by miles of aqueducts to produce obsessively groomed lawns. She later moved to fecund Tennessee where kudzu and coal sludge swallowed everything in

their path. To Harmon, neither of these environments was natural. Products of her travels, her works are the embodiment of psychic environments. Her worlds are meditative, extravagant and at times aggressive. Colors, marks, forms and decorative surfaces produce a lineage of imagined botanical fragments that allude to psychological landscape. Circumventing traditional techniques, tense and exuberant accumulations of strange flora are arranged into Edenic backdrops that connote desire, anxiety and a search for authenticity. Her visionary work avoids taking a literal view of nature while remaining exquisitely composed and detailed. Her work is visually influenced by psychedelic black light posters, Victorian valentines and American Folk Art. ■

## Kay Knight

SHOREWOOD, WI

Kay Knight's mixed media works comment on society's collective fear of defeat. In her paintings, dwellings are left standing and still salvageable; wooden structures expose wallpapered spaces, which encourage the viewer to interpret the private fantasies and social status of the tenant's previous life. In other paintings, houses are destroyed beyond rescue. What remains are structural and dystopian fragments. These parts are residue of the past as well as faceted patterns of light reflecting a brighter future. Rebuilding is still possible, even after evidence of earth's



*From Below the Ridge*, John Hancock



Candy Jar II, Erin Harmon ▼

▲ Accumulation, Kay Knight

## Marc Leone

CINCINNATI, OH

Marc Leone's work explores geologic sources as metaphors and symbols. Within interdisciplinary formalism, he combines painting, drawing and sculptural techniques. He renders crustal layers upon which he thrusts mark-making to unearth strata. Further, he uses elemental carbon and mineral graphite at each pass to strengthen the connection to geologic origins. Many of the marks left on the paint come from his use of power equipment. His control and, at times, lack of control, provide the mechanical means to erode, cut, dig, buff, sand and pock the surface and sub-surface paint in ways that are essentially reminiscent of a host of natural and manmade processes. Evocative of other artists like Terry Winters, Leone explores the sublime through literally working with the same materials that he symbolizes. ■



catastrophes. Taking cues from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Jim Crace's *The Pesthouse*; her work finds hope in the midst of savage beauty. This optimism lies in the acceptance of the landscape itself. ■

## Nathan Taves

COLUMBIA CITY, IN

Nathan Taves' works are largely inspired by physical science, which tells us that space is not rigid, uniform or static. Space is dynamic and can be bent, compressed and curled. Likewise, Taves unhinges the dimensions of common suburban landscapes to demonstrate the effects of cosmic science on a commonplace and small scale. He avoids standard rules of perspective and typical conceptual mapping. Without acting as a scientific illustrator or draftsman, his work recomposes recognizable spaces into organizations more lyrical and poetic. His work is cartographic at a subatomic level, molding perceptual conventions into disorienting reassemblies. Wayne Thiebaud and Grant Wood stand out as inspirations to this contemporary pastoral work. ■

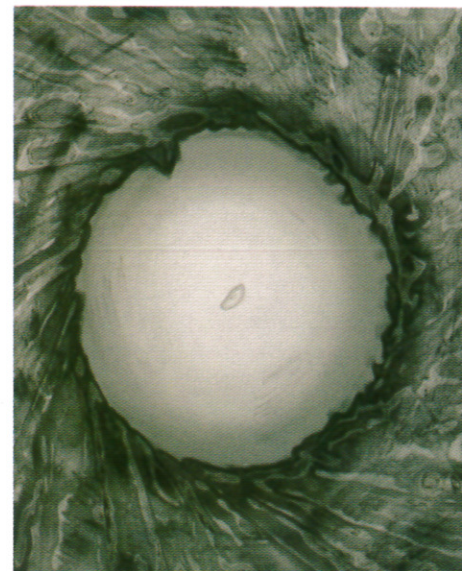


*Venus and Driveway*, Nathan Taves knowledge. Posing questions about the relationship between word and image, she addresses the dualistic authority of one over the other. Subtly lamenting, she explores the growing dependency on technology to create and explicate personal worlds. These divisions are delineated with minimalistic delicacy. Found objects and materials are transformed into powerful testaments to human archaeology and the survival of tradition. ■

## Megan Weikel

GETTYSBURG, PA

Megan Weikel's work explores contrasting ways of constructing and defining



Crater #1001,  
Marc Leone



Archaeology of Knowledge: Fossil,  
Megan Weikel