

2006 MFA

School of Art and Design

Master of Fine Arts Exhibition

Ross E. Bartels

Andy DuCett

Fabiola Elias

Chelsea Fields

Teresa Gale

Joe Grasso

Josh Ippel

Marlah Anne Johnson

Dan Ma

Mac McMillan

Kacey Morrow

Noah Norton

Chad Stangi

Crystal Truss

Exhibition
& Graduate
Program
Catalogue

“What can I know? What can I ask?” – Immanuel Kant

Attaining a Master of Fine Arts degree is no small task. It represents the culmination of training in visual art and design, the last signpost on the journey from student-in-training to full-fledged professional practice. At UIUC the process is made especially rigorous by the fact that the School of Art+Design is but one tribe within a dynamic, diverse, and much larger intellectual and creative campus community.

The faculty of the School sets the bar exceedingly high for MFA students. Its not enough to exhibit exemplary skills with a given medium or materials. Our Graduate students are expected to also display sophisticated understandings of the conceptual underpinnings of their work; of the social significance of their activities; and of the historical lineage, context, and antecedents of their ideas. Methodology, as practiced by our MFA students, extends beyond the immediate confines of production, and into the realms of research, analysis, and criticism.

Visual culture encompasses far more than pleasing aesthetic experiences. The stakes are much higher than that. Embedded in the objects we make, and the messages that we construct, are entire constellations of belief and bias. Artists and designers manifest through their work explicit understandings of our world and hypotheses for our place within it. Look closely and you will find rants and manifestos, belief systems and user manuals, utopian narratives and proposals for how we should treat one another.

The enduring qualities in art and design are never found on the surface, or in the materials. Its always about the intangible—the ideas. Peel back enough layers, and you will always find Philosophy; which is why the quote above by an 18th century

Enlightenment philosopher is still so pertinent, especially to newly-minted practitioners of visual culture. All of the work in this year's MFA Exhibition in some way incorporates these two fundamental questions. Questions on the tip of mankind's tongue since that mythic time when all speech was song.

Art and design, stripped to its bare essentials, is a system for exploring the world, gathering information, and making meaning. It is a belief system whose coordinates lie somewhere in the large middle space between the historical superpowers: Science and Religion.

This is the world that the MFA class of 2006 now enters, an ongoing cultural conversation that is both timeless and utterly new. While much is (and will remain) the same, new technologies and cultural/economic globalization are changing the world in profound and irreversible ways.

This year's graduating cohort will find many challenges and difficulties, but also incredible potential and limitless possibility. There is mounting evidence that the 20th century's focus on the development of linear, sequential, literal skills is waning. In its place we see a growing recognition that the next generation of leaders will be distinct, and prized, for their ability to think in ways that are metaphorical, aesthetic, contextual, and synthetic. These are exactly the skills that the MFA class of 2006 has spent the past three years developing.

Joseph Squier, MFA Program Coordinator