

ORAL FIXATIONS: DRAWINGS BY JULIA RANDALL

Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University • Middletown, CT • wesleyan.edu/dac • Through May 25, 2014

Beauty is an uneasy thing. It can enchant and frighten in equal measure, and Julia Randall's drawings are replete with both effects. The puzzle here is that their nominal subjects should render them harmless. Like the 18th-century Chardin painting of a bubble blower, these inflated pieces of gum, with all their charm of virtuoso technique, might be expected to provoke only the quiet laughter of recognition.

Yet there is no escaping the unnerving paradox of these works. Although they have none of the literally grotesque that attaches to Géricault's studies from the morgue, or Soutine's dead stingray,



Julia Randall, *Strawberry*, 2012, colored pencil on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

there is still a hint of dissection about them, with their textures resembling the sheath of the heart, a placental sac or a womb. Several of these forms are shown pinned, as if for display in a museum of bizarre anatomical specimens, while others are stretched and partially severed by bright metal dental probes.

Yet these unsettling associations are accompanied by the splendor of what is really a catalogue of breathing, with each exhalation a memorial object that

is not limited to the last one taken. Rather, the drawings collectively register the wonder of

every breath from the first on, as if respiration had an illustrated calendar.

This same insight becomes animated in the artist's video entitled *Sticky*, shown here. In it, bubbles emerge out of the dark, expanding and contracting like tiny antique respirators or eyeless, ephemeral puppets whose operators' hands desperately clutch at words. That same desperation haunts the literal mouths taken from the drawing series, "Lures." Here, the breath's avenue is also the word's exit, in a mute, comic gasping for something to say. Within these tongue-filled interiors, the voice is not audible, but tactile.

In several of these drawings mouth bubbles glisten with transcendent spit, curving across the surface like one of Vermeer's convex mirrors. In the small nooks of skin, penciled details reveal lace and pearls of saliva. All of them are remarkable, yet one that especially stands out is *Dandelion*, where the bubble is a globe inside which all creation sits, and we, in the words of a medieval German mystic, are like "a feather on the breath of God." —Stephen Vincent Kobasa

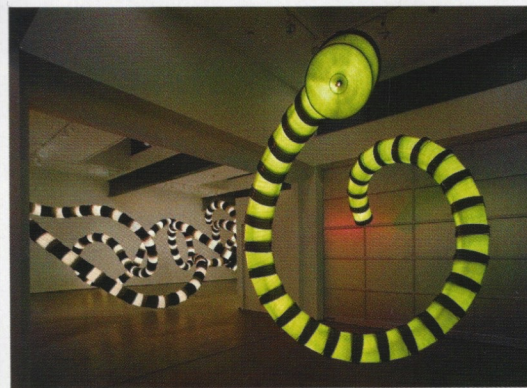
JASON PETERS: REFRACTION

Thomas J. Walsh Art Gallery, Fairfield University • New Haven, CT • fairfield.edu/arts/thomasjwalshartgallery • Through June 27, 2014

As aptly named, *Jason Peters: Refraction* is not only a literal change in direction of vision but a phenomenological experience that invites the viewer to reconsider larger issues of commercial detritus and its antithesis, sustainability. Peters is known for building oversized installations out of everyday manufactured objects and societal cast-offs—chairs, buckets, fluorescent light bulbs and the like. He revives this practice to create a formal spatial dialogue with objects, while making connections to the locations where they were found.

For this exhibition, Peters has created three new site-specific installations, including a larger gesture made out of materials that have a recognizable, tangible relationship to the local Fairfield community. His process organically teases out spatial issues as he works *in situ* with his chosen components a few days leading to the exhibition. Very much in and of the moment, Peters's youthful artistic spontaneity ironically echoes the way a plethora of stuff may mushroom overnight into an environment, like a pile of discarded tires in an alley.

Peters does not mask the materials he re-contextualizes, so that his new forms and dimensions challenge us to think of commercial manufacturing and detritus encroaching in the environment. His energetic assemblages actively pursue the dynamic between positive and negative space, adeptly alternating tight and open pathways that encourage viewers to look at the work a bit more precariously. How close can we get to these self-sustaining constructions, can we maneuver through and around them safely or will they topple over us? Will we eventually have to navigate fully away from them as they infringe upon our livable space? This is not to say Peters's work is



Jason Peters, installation view of gallery, 2008, White Flag Projects, Saint Louis, MO. Courtesy of the artist.

filled with foreboding; quite the contrary. The experience is as much a visual and formal one, accentuated playfully by the 200-bucket piece that snakes curvaceously in the space like a small roller coaster.

Very close by on the campus, the Bellarmine Museum of Art is showcasing a lovely selection of

Venetian Filigrana vases, evocative forms that share Peters's motifs of light and saturated bright color as rendered in his bucket assemblage. The connection is not a literal one to be sure, but it is worth viewing the exhibitions in tandem, as there is an unexpected expressive dialogue between their intimate light and spiritual glow.

—Rachael Palacios