

MILLS

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MILLS COLLEGE ART MUSEUM**

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***Young Americans:
Mills College MFA Exhibition***

Exhibition Dates: May 3-31, 2009

Opening Reception: May 2, 7:00-9:00pm

Artists: Andrew Witrak, Annie Vought, Brian Caraway, Esther Traugot, Gina Tuzzi, Joseph Berryhill, Kate Pszotka, Leigh Merrill, Modesto Covarrubias, Stuart Pittman

The Mills College Art Museum is proud to present *Young Americans*, featuring works by the 2009 Master of Fine Arts degree recipients. This exhibition provides an opportunity to see works in all media created by a promising group of emerging artists eager to share what they have been developing during their graduate program with a broader audience. This year's exhibition is curated by Terri Cohn, Bay Area writer, independent curator, and faculty member at the San Francisco Art Institute.

In the brochure accompanying the exhibition, Cohn observes that the ten artists who will receive their MFA degrees this year are unusual in their choice to name their MFA show *Young Americans*. The title situates them as citizens emerging within a national context, and suggests that in addition to their collective experiences as youthful Americans—with the burden of history this implies, this identity also affords them an intrinsic right to personal freedom. A desire for a sense of security—articulated in various metaphoric and formal ways—is one fundamental concern expressed through their work.

Kate Pszotka's fascination with the idea of home and stability has motivated her consideration of family members, which she represents iconographically with everyday objects, realized as paper cut out line drawings. **Gina Tuzzi's** seemingly simple, naïve structures—houses, barns, huts—stacked on trucks to become rolling homes, or represented as drawings, underscore a sense of safety and comfort in the mythic past of coastal California.

In related ways, **Esther Traugot's** knitted tree sweaters and forest of trunks with projected flower pattern coverings suggest the utopian potential of the natural world, as well as her desire to protect and preserve it. By contrast, **Leigh Merrill's** large-scale photographs explore the relationship between fantasy and reality in our constructed environments, blending urban and suburban architecture and landscape styles, or cut and artificial flowers. **Modesto Covarrubias** has spent much time creating rooms and shelters as means to define and express his fears, insecurities, and sense of vulnerability, while **Andrew Witrak's** sculptures pose slightly ridiculous

solutions to the question of what can provide some fleeting impression of safety or exit: lifejackets sewn together; a beeswax boarding pass. **Annie Vought** translates found handwritten letters to wall-mounted versions created with cutout text, fragile portraits of each author that are reminiscent of silhouettes.

Joseph Berryhill's paintings express a tension between order and chaos, proposing ways that animate experience can be distilled into visual experience. **Steuart Pittman's** abstract paintings reflect what he calls a "longing for quiet beauty in a chaotic, high-speed age," while **Brian Caraway** creates tools and rules to implement his mixed media works, relating his process-based investigations through texture as they change over time.

As artists who have come of age in the extraordinarily volatile circumstances of the 21st century, these individuals focus on singular modes of expression as a way to make sense of and stake a claim in their separate and collective futures. Their works express a sense of hope and possibility, going forward into their lives as young Americans.

In addition to an essay by Cohn, the illustrated catalog for *Young Americans* contains an essay by critic Glen Helfand. This publication will be available in the gallery during the course of the exhibition.

The Mills College Art Museum, founded in 1925, is a dynamic center for art that focuses on the creative work of women as artists and curators. The museum strives to engage and inspire the diverse and distinctive cultures of the Bay Area by presenting innovative exhibitions by emerging and established national and international artists. Exhibitions are designed to challenge and invite reflection upon the profound complexities of contemporary culture.

Museum Hours are Tuesday-Sunday 11:00-4:00pm and Wednesday 11:00-7:30pm. Admission is free for all exhibitions and programs. For more information: 510.430.2164 or <http://www.mills.edu/museum/>

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