astatic

February 1 – March 5, 2011
Sandra & David Bakalar Gallery

Hours: Monday-Saturday 12pm – 6pm, Wednesday 12pm – 8pm
Contact: MassArt.edu | galleryinfo@massart.edu | 617.879.7333

Introduction

This information packet is designed to be an educational resource that encourages connections between *astatic* and your classes. Animation is ubiquitous—in films, commercials, sitcoms, advertising, and now contemporary art. With the popularity of Wallace and Gromit, anime, and the work of filmmaker Michel Gondry, techniques such as claymation, hand drawn cels, and modeled frames are in our visual vernacular. The artists in this exhibition continue the dialogue surrounding the role of animation in contemporary art practice. These works, all created since 2003, reference popular culture, redefine traditional narratives, and appropriate artistic methods.

This packet contains biographical and stylistic overviews of each animator in the exhibition. By giving you background information about the artists, we hope to enrich your experience of the exhibition, which provokes many interesting questions about the use of movement, time, and space in art.

In addition, we would love feedback about the quality and value of the information in this packet so that we can make improvements for later exhibitions. Do you have unanswered questions? Would you have liked us to add something? We want to know from students and faculty at MassArt and beyond how best to connect your studies and disciplines with our gallery exhibitions.

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Written and designed
by Allison Weigel

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Nathalie Djurberg

Nathalie Djurberg creates short animated films that use both seriousness and black humor to tell stories about the underbelly of the human soul—disturbing storylines of war, sadism, exploitation, violence, murder, and cruel impulses. Her use of the typically cute and child-friendly medium of claymation lends a deliberate grotesque irony to her work, as does her cast of innocent princesses, naughty girls, and wild animals that get torn apart or caught up in orgies.

Camels Drink Water, 2007

Hans Berg creates the music for Djurberg's short films. Some also include sparse dialogue written on pieces of paper in the background. But for the most part, her stories are told through images and music alone. Djurberg's most recent exhibitions also include sculptural and video installations that lend an even greater surrealism to her work.

Djurberg's films have much in common with traditional folktales and fairy tales. They begin with archetypal themes of the good, the bad, and the kind helper. Animals speak, humans fly, and trees walk around in this magical world where the rules of reality do not apply. Then, like many traditional fairy tales, the story takes a gruesome turn, but in a style all her own, Djurberg leaves the viewer without an inkling of moral lesson, but more often with a clear vision of the inner conflict and moral tension that defines her idea of the human condition.

After winning the Silver Lion Award at the 2009 Venice Biennale, Djurberg's animations began to recieve even greater attention. In an interview with *FlashArt Magazine* she explained,

The Experiment (Cave), 2009

"It's the strong sense of guilt that is really interesting; it's a clash of the desire to do bad things and being terrified of being evil."

For More Info:
• Article in *Vogue:* Kazanjian, Dodie. "Wicked Fairy Tales," *Vogue* November 2008: 308-311, 345-346. [http://zachfeuer.com/artists/nathalie-djurberg/?press=1]
• Interview Subotnick, Ali. "Nathalie Djurberg: Naughty by Nature." *Flash Art International* New York, November / December 2006: 82-84.
• Overview of her artistic style [http://artnews.org/artist.php?i=1211]

Flip Johnson

Flip Johnson's work incorporates many animation techniques – drawn and painted imagery, go-motion (comprised of images in which the object moves slightly within each frame, reducing the jerky feeling of stop-motion movement), stop-motion, and

Recessed Lighting, 2011

collage to name a few. He has done freelance animation work for companies like MTV, Showtime, the Discovery Channel, and ESPN. He left the commercial business almost a decade ago, however, to teach animation at MassArt.

Johnson has created a total of seven films, which have been screened at film festivals around the world and received dozens of awards. The idea came to him when he was doing some electrical and carpe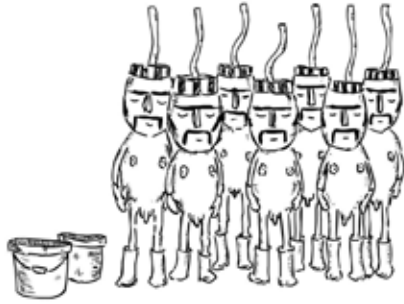ntry work on his house. His animation does not tell a story or contain a plot like many of his other works, but Johnson hopes it will give viewers the opportunity to look at a common, everyday activity like wiring a house in a new light—to see the world in a different way.
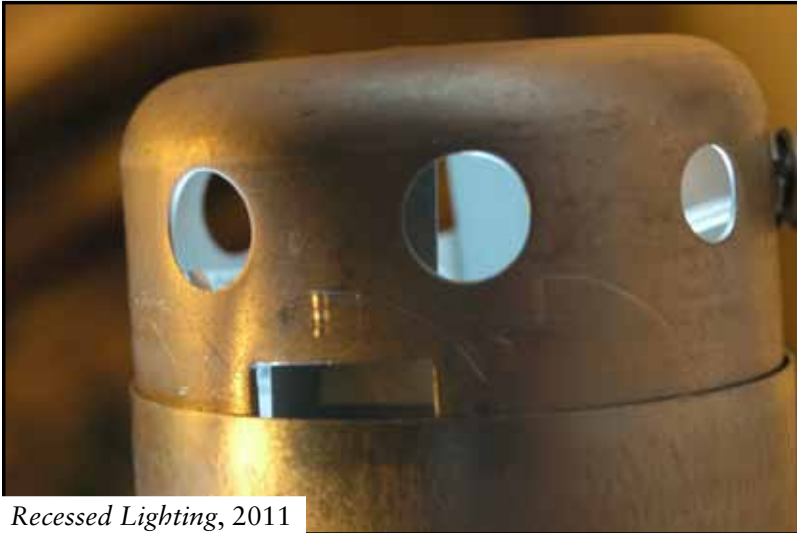
Recessed Lighting, 2011

Self-Portrait, 2007

Atsushi Kaga

Atsushi Kaga is a Japanese artist based in Dublin. In a style heavily influenced by Japanese anime and manga, he works in drawing, painting, sculpture and animation, addressing themes of twenty-first century life with playfulness and satire. His work is as philosophically and psychologically dense as it is intentionally whimsical and deceptive in its simplicity. It all takes place in a world where the main character, a bunny named Usacchi, serves as a trickster alter ego for the artist. The cast of roguish characters that Usacchi interacts with in this world includes, among others, a brooding and contemplative legless bear, a tearfully melancholy panda head, and Michael Jackson's skull. Through these characters' exploits, Kaga explores ideas of sexuality, death, money, and the drama of everyday life and social relationships.

Self-Portrait, 2007

For More Info:
• Atsushi's website [www.atsushikaga.com]
• Irish Museum of Modern Art review of his work [http://www.modernart.ie/en/page_212204.htm]

Cat Moshimoshi, 2008

Yui Kugimiya

Yui Kagimiya (BFA '04) creates stop-motion animation shorts by slathering layers of oil paint on canvas, painting one frame at a time over the top of another on the same canvas—similar to William Kentridge's animated films made with drawings and erasures. Kugimiya's films are lighthearted, populated with cats and birds. But her works also explore wider questions of artistic authorship and the finality of painting. She brings her paintings to life in her animations, yet the viewer never sees her brush manipulate the image; the final product – a painting – of her films can be exhibited and hung on the wall, but it only represents a piece of the whole. "The animation contradicts and takes away the promise of eternal being," she says in an ArtInfo article.[1]

For More Info:
1. *Art Info* overview of her work [http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/32398/yui-kugimiya/]
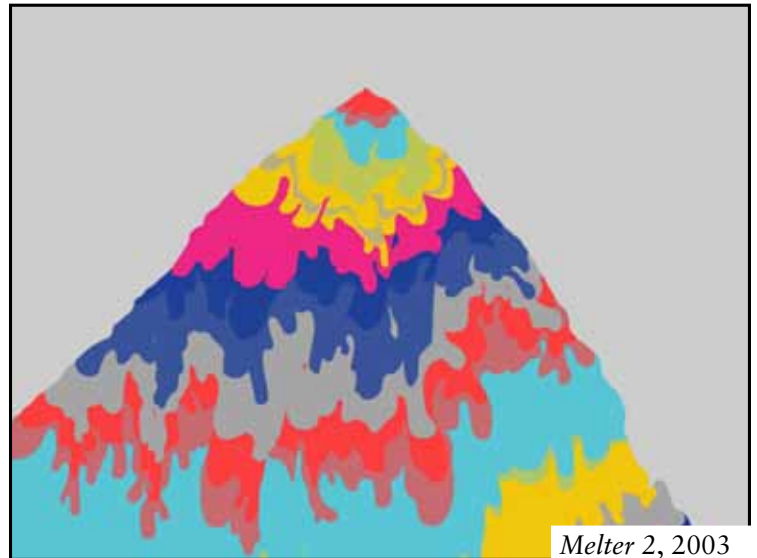• Watch some of her work [http://www.yuikugimiya.com/work]

I, Popeye, 2010

Takeshi Murata

Takeshi Murata's psychedelically absurd and playful work deals with the dysfunction of technology and its "generally underwhelming visual capabilities." [1] His latest animations, created using a mouse and drawing software, range from fluid Rorschach ink blots, undulating color fields, and broken waves of rainbows to a sad epilogue tale of Popeye's life after Olive Oyl. Taking on the role of something akin to a visual disc jockey, Murata also creates new animations by manipulating the way a computer reads a DVD and piecing together pixilated color-distorted samples, loops, and mashups of images.

"I want to create new kinds of space with my animation… to transport the viewer in some way," Murata said in an interview with *Shift* online magazine. He begins with vaguely recognizable forms to give the viewer an initial point of reference, and then shifts the emphasis of the animation towards movement. "It's at this point that I feel most expressive," he adds. [2]

*Melter 2*, 2003

For More Info:
1. Interview with *Rhizome* [http://rhizome.org/editorial/2008/nov/26/from-bell-labs-to-best-buy/]
2. ibid.
• View some of his work [http://www.thecreatorsproject.com/creators/takeshi-murata]
• Interview with *Shift Magazine* [http://www.shift.jp.org/en/archives/2003/12/takeshi_murata.html]

Jennifer Steinkamp

Jennifer Steinkamp's computer is both her paintbrush and canvas. She is an American installation artist who works with video and new media to explore ideas about architectural space, motion, and perception. Her digital animations are designed for specific sites, working to combine the actual and the digital space to create environments in which the distinction between the viewer and the art becomes blurred. Viewers interact with her animations by entering (or interrupting with their shadows) the projected image and by triggering a reaction in the projection with their movement.

Steinkamp's earlier work focused on brightly colored abstract projections. However, since 2003 her work has increasingly focused on natural imagery, often referencing the sublime. Her more recent animations include gnarled, twisting trees, rooms filled with swaying flowers, and images of the changing seasons. She most recently exhibited her artwork as part of the 2010 spring Fashion Week in New York because of the inspiration some of the designers found in her work.
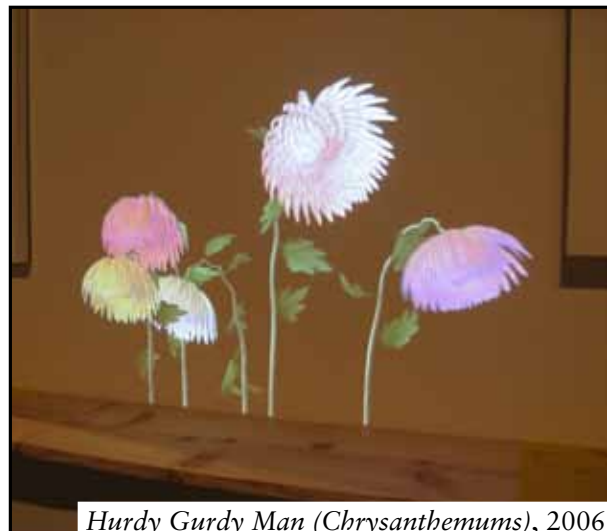
Hurdy Gurdy Man (Chrysanthemums), 2006

For More Info:
• This article gives a good overview of her work as well as explains a bit more about how she uses the technology to make her art. [http://www.lehmannmaupin.com/#/press-artists/jennifer-steinkamp/14/]
• See some stills of her animation art [http://jsteinkamp.com/html/art_documentation.htm]
• Articles about her work for Fashion Week [http://www.lehmannmaupin.com/#/press-artists/jennifer-steinkamp/1/]; and [http://www.lehmannmaupin.com/#/press-artists/jennifer-steinkamp/6/]
• San Jose Museum of Art review, 2006

Eddo Stern

Baby in Christ vs. His Father, 2007

Eddo Stern's interests lie in the disputed borders between technological fantasy and physical reality. Stern is a game art pioneer. He works in various media—computer software & hardware, game design, live performance, digital video, and kinetic sculpture—to explore the uneasy and otherwise unconscious connections between physical existence and electronic simulation. He uses electronic sculpture, machinima (videogame filmmaking), and custom-made gaming equipment and designs to provoke questions about the relationship of modern technology to violence, memory, masculinity, and identification. He believes games can be more influential and poetic than simply entertaining. He uses gaming technology to deal with political issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict (in "Sheik Attack") as well as challenging players physically and psychologically, for example by creating a sensory deprivation game (in "Dark Game"). He is a strong advocate for independent game development and for the inherent potential of game design as a medium for artistic expression and cultural impact.

Stern teaches courses for the Design and Media Arts Department at UCLA covering game design and culture, computer game development, and physical computing in an art context. He is also the founder of the now retired cooperative, C-level, a gaming lab formed to

Best…Flame war…Ever (Leegatten by King of Bards v. Squire Rex), 2007

share physical, social, and technological resources between artists, programmers, writers, designers, agit-propers (creators of agitation propaganda), filmmakers and reverse-engineers. While there, Stern co-produced several physical gaming projects including "Waco Resurrection," "Cockfight Arena," "C-Level Memefest," and "Tekken Torture Tournament," designed to explore the performance and social aspects of gaming. For example, "Tekken Torture Tournament" was an exercise in scrutinizing untapped public aggression—it involved strapping gaming volunteers into a custom made Playstation III console that converted virtual damage to the on-screen Tekken fighters into bracing but non-lethal electric shocks to the physical players in the tournament. The idea was to raise questions about the relationship between virtual gaming violence and physical violence.

For More Info:
•In this interview, Stern discusses his research philosophy and gaming theory interests in the context of his work [http://neditpasmoncoeur.blogspot.com/2008/05/full-transcript-eddo-stern-interview.html].
•See some stills from his work and find several links to interviews and reviews [http://www.eddostern.com/]
•An interview in which Stern discusses his ideas about why people game [http://shortendmagazine.com/content/view/452/101/].
•Here is an FAQ site about machinima, the practice of creating films using real time games. [http://www.machinima.org/machinima-faq.html]
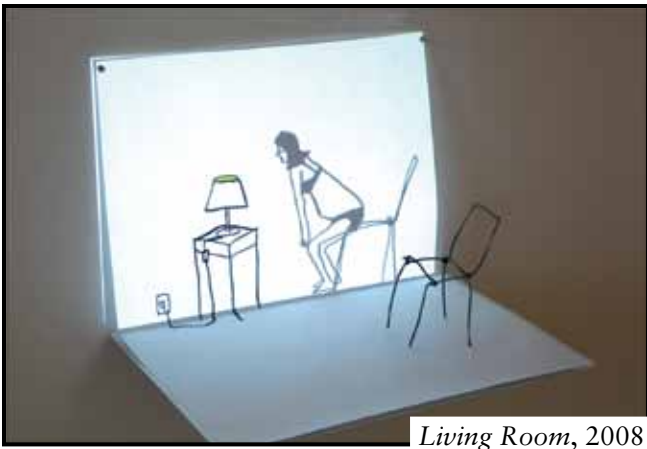
Happy Hour, 2010

Tromarama

Tromarama is a collective that was formed in 2004 by three art students from the Bandung Institute of Technology Indonesia with the common interest in finding ways to insert their work into contemporary urban culture beyond the art scene, especially in their city, Bandung. Its founders, Febie Babyrose, Ruddy Hatumena, and Herbert Hans have backgrounds in design and printmaking, but as a collective they work primarily in stop-motion animation, combining woodcut, photocopy, collage, embroidery, painting, and drawing techniques with materials like charcoal, buttons, sequins, and beads to produce their shorts. They have created music videos for bands like Zsa Zsa Zsu and Serigala Militia.

Zsa Zsa Zsu, 2007

For More Info:
• Watch their Zsa Zsa Zsu video [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifUhB86jFII]
• Watch their Serigala Militia video [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7wuw9MlE4s]
• An interesting look at the Indonesian video art cultural background from which Tromarama sprang up. Also, an explanation of how Tromarama got its name [http://tromarama.blogspot.com/2010/10/how-to-turn-trauma-into-video-art-brief.html]
• Tromarama's blog [http://tromarama.blogspot.com/]

Living Room, 2008

Jeanne Verdoux

A Paris-born graphic designer and artist living in Brooklyn, Jeanne Verdoux's animations are only a small piece of her work. As an artist, she is most interested in drawing, whether that means drawing with light, with ink, in three dimensions, or with blocks of color. The goal of much of her low-tech art and animation is to find the simplest possible way to convey meaning using a form, time, and movement. Her animations are usually accompanied by soundtracks of found sounds—the buzzing blink of a neon sign or the click of boots on a busy city street, for example.

Today's Special, 2007

Walkman, 2008

She has exhibited drawings in both Paris and New York and has done design work for organizations like the French Embassy in New York, the New York Public Library, and *New York Magazine*.

For More Info:
• A list of articles about her work [http://www.jeanneverdoux.com/press.html]
• See some of her work [http://www.jeanneverdoux.com/index.html]