



Checklist of the exhibition - **bold** titles pictured

Wayne Bertola (Chicago, IL)

Untitled (3), cut & paste paper collage, 14 x 11 in.
Untitled (5), cut & paste paper collage, 14 x 11 in.

Gabriella Boros (Skokie, IL)

Failure: Burden of Regret, acrylic on wood panel, 28.5 x 16 in.
Morrigan Flies, acrylic on wood panel, 24 x 16 in.



Gabriella Boros

Bridgette Broughman (Alexandria, VA)

Specimen 13, archival pigment print, 32 x 24 in.
Specimen 9, archival pigment print, 24 x 32 in.
Specimen 1, archival pigment print, 32 x 24 in.

Kathy Bruce (New York, NY)

Horse Meat, mixed media collage, 9 x 7 in.



Kathy Bruce

Maria DiFranco (Columbus, OH)

Despair of the Solitary King, oil on birch wood, 12 x 24 in.
Legend of the Wild Dog, oil, etching, watercolor on canvas board, 18 x 24 in.

James Dykes (Seattle, WA)

Turnersicle, photography & digital altering, 12 x 9 in.

Kristen Gallerneaux (San Diego, CA)

Sentinels (Plaster Hounds), plaster, dirt from sites of alleged poltergeist cases, 1 x 3 x 1 ft.

Christopher Gideon (Royal Oak, MI)

Disconnecting Flight, acrylic on birch panel, 34 x 34 in.

Sean Gill (Brooklyn, NY)

Do You Want to Go to the Circus?, video, 3:17 (still)
Makin' a Martini, video, 2:37

Kelsey Hall (Oconomowoc, WI)

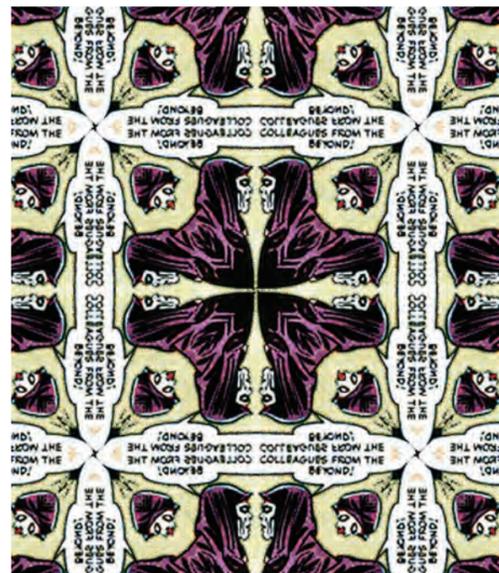
Hear (Here) No, oil, acrylic, graphite, canvas, 48 x 36 in.



Marina Kuchinski

William Harroff (Edwardsville, IL)

Colleagues from the Beyond, digital print on canvas, 18 x 18 in. (detail)
Careers are Meant for Men, digital print on canvas, 18 x 18 in.
I Don't Want to Grow Old, I Won't, digital print on canvas, 18 x 18 in.



William Harroff

Michael Hecht (New Bedford, MA)

Nocturnal Revenge, acrylic & oil on linen, 12 x 24 in.

Marina Kuchinski (Wheaton, IL)

Meeting the Criteria, earthenware and crocheted hat, 47 x 10 x 7 in.

Fred Lisaius (Newcastle, WA)

Amber with Firefly, cast resin and found objects, 16 x 12.5 x 4.4 in.
Amber with Beetle, cast resin and found objects, 14 x 12 x 4.2 in.
Amber with Spider, cast resin and found objects, 14.8 x 12.6 x 4.2 in.

Joshua Myers (Mishawaka, IN)

untitled, photography, 24 x 16 in.
untitled, photography, 24 x 16 in.

Amber Prouty (Missoula, MT)

Preacher's Wife, Drummond, MT, photo, 5 x 7 in.
To Have & To Hold, photo, 5 x 7 in.
The Captain's Wife, photo, 5 x 7 in.



Amber Prouty



Joshua Myers

Reagan D. Pufall (San Francisco, CA)

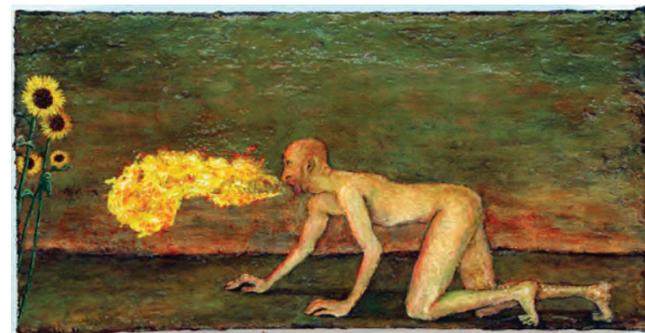
Indian Flower Mantis, giclee from digital photo, 30 x 20 in.
Malaysian Orchid Mantis, giclee from digital photo, 20 x 30 in.
Cryptic Mantis, giclee from digital photo, 30 x 20 in.

Jake Reller (Bellingham, WA)

Eidolon, stone lithography, 40 x 28 in.

Lindsay Taylor (Brooklyn, NY)

Ladies, oil on canvas, 65 x 65 in.
Up Down, Right Up, oil on unstretched canvas, 60 x 60 in.



Michael Hecht

Jave Yoshimoto (Alva, OK)

Vultures of fragments past, gouache on paper, 26 x 40 in.
Harbinger of Late Winter Day's Dusk, gouache on paper, 30 x 41 in.



Maria DiFranco

BFSO selections were made from nation-wide submissions by Elizabeth K. Mix, Associate Professor of Art History at Butler University, Indianapolis, IN; Tess Cortés, Coordinator of the Robert & Elaine Stein Galleries at Wright State University, Dayton OH; and Craig Martin, Director of Purdue University Galleries.



Wayne Bertola

PURDUE UNIVERSITY GALLERIES

Robert L. Ringel Gallery, Stewart Center
 October 21 through December 8, 2013

BIG FAT SCARY DEAL

“Humor is an almost physiological response to fear” – Kurt Vonnegut

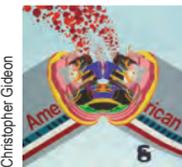
Why are our screams at scary films inevitably followed by laughter? Sigmund Freud believed that laughter was a way of both controlling fear and showing dominance over whatever was laughed at. Much earlier Charles Darwin recognized that fear is part of a survival mechanism triggered in the brain, and much later Mikhail Bakhtin studied terror and the grotesque turned comic in the work of Rabelais.

Artists are in a unique position to help us appreciate and understand our fears and experience the shift from fear to laughter. As Geoffrey Harpham put it, “the grotesque must begin with, or contain within it, certain aesthetic conventions which the reader feels are representative of reality as he knows it.” **Sean Gill**’s video *Do You Want to Go to The Circus* brilliantly demonstrates the shift from fear to fun, but other works in the exhibition are meant to first cause visual delight and then



Sean Gill

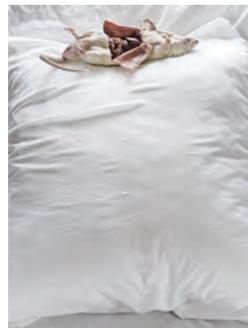
horror. Visitors will likely find that the works most rooted in reality are the most frightening, irrespective of the visual vocabulary employed. For instance, the bright colors employed of **Christopher Gideon**’s *Disconnecting Flight* temporarily provide a distraction from the subject matter, which a viewer might connect equally to a fear of flying, the terror of an airplane crash, the economic situation in America or even the escalating price of air travel.



Christopher Gideon

For this exhibition works were sought that blended the aesthetic and the conceptual, allowing the viewer to respond equally to their formal qualities and their potentially frightening content, ranging from specific phobias to more general anxieties about society, technology or the environment. **Bridgette Broughman**’s *Specimens* in her *Via Gaze and Scalpel* series epitomize the ability of artwork to be simultaneously appealing and disturbing. Broughman mixes references to science and domesticity deftly, perching a dissected white rat against a starched pillow and presenting skin as a framed work of art, to remind us of the corporeality that so many of us use technology to disguise or avoid.

There are no fears so profound as those inspired by our immediate and collective present. **Fred Lisaius**’s modern fossils made from garbage found in the U.S. and Europe are based on his concerns about the environment. He observes, “Baltic amber is 50 million years old and a perfect ‘snap shot’ of the environment from then. What if we had amber producing trees today? What would it tell future generations about our environment?” The point is driven home especially in *Amber with Spider* where the artificial insect is complemented with a background scene of a woman pushing a baby pram.



Bridgette Broughman

Jave Yoshimoto’s works reveal their inspiration in the eighteenth-century woodblock prints of Hiroshige and Hokusai easily, but



Fred Lisaius

rather than bucolic scenes focus on the terror of the 9.0 magnitude earthquake that struck Japan on March 11, 2011. *Harbinger of late winter’s day dusk* features fires that were precipitated by the quake, the resulting tsunami coming ashore, and the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Featured in the composition is the crane, symbol of longevity and luck,

and the koi, symbol of the ability to survive in adverse conditions, but most prominent

perhaps is the appearance of Godzilla, which the artist uses as a personal symbol, but is also relevant here because of the monster’s birth from the toxic circumstances of the Hiroshima bomb – a condition replicated with Fukushima Daiichi. *Narration on the Tsunami Debris from Japan washing up on the NW shore of U.S.* moves the narrative of destruction to Seattle, whose skyline and famous Mount Rainer, ferry, and local symbolic animals the orca (or “killer whale,” the subject of sightseeing trips in Puget Sound) and the osprey (or “Seahawk,” as it is called) are featured as equivalents to the koi and crane in the first work. Godzilla can be found in the waves as if he is coming ashore with the debris. Yoshimoto states that it’s not just the natural disaster that creates the terror, it’s how “each tragedy in the news cycle is swept away by the wave of information that floods the media” creating a “social amnesia” that is as scary as the disaster.



Jave Yoshimoto

Some of the work in the exhibition is profoundly personal, even though it may not present itself as such at first glance. **Gabriella Boros**’s *Failure* and *Morrigan Flies* might initially suggest updated versions of fairy tales, but they are born from an imagination shaped by personal terrors. A child of “Holocaust survivors whose bedtime stories depicted a world poised to eliminate us,” she also huddled in a crawlspace during the Six Day War of 1967 (the third of the Arab-Israeli wars). **Kelsey Hall**’s *Hear (Here) No* is influenced by the artist’s struggle with an eating disorder and the shame and secrecy that accompanied it. It is depicted in such a way to be both accurate but also open to interpretation, so that the audience might see “their own unique psychological spaces reflected in [the] work.” **Amber Prouty**’s photos *Preacher’s Wife*, *Drummond, MT*, *To Have & To Hold*, and *The Captain’s Wife* are the result of reflection on her mother’s struggles with alcohol and domestic abuse and the artist’s current service work



Kelsey Hall

with families in similar situations. In his self-imaged works, **Michael Hecht** explores “the ever-elusive self lost in the void of existence” and the effects of “various extreme emotional states such as anguish, joy, ecstasy, sorrow, desire.”

Fairy tales read to us as children were designed to teach us that fear was necessary and useful and to show us how to conquer fear through a combination of courage and ingenuity, like Hansel and Gretel, abandoned by their mother in the woods, triumphing over a cannibalistic witch. Several works in the exhibition have an aesthetic reminiscent of traditional cautionary

tales meant both to frighten and empower. **Maria Kuchinski** juxtaposes a whimsical knitted child’s hat with snarling animal in *Meeting the Criteria* – the absence of the child is intended to create anxiety within the viewer. Similar stories are found across cultures and time periods. In *Despair of the Solitary King* and *Legend of the Wild Dog*, **Maria DiFranco** uses folkloric animals to symbolize contemporary cultural and scientific concerns.



Jake Reller

The ordinary can be transformed into the frightening through materials or composition. **Kristen Gallerneaux**’s plaster dogs were made with dirt and debris from sites supposedly the locations of poltergeist activity: the 1830-40 Baldoon Mystery in Ontario, Canada, and the Jackie Hernandez case from the late 1980’s in San Pedro, California. The plaster

Sentinels are complemented and countered with “spiritual supplies.”

Joshua Myers’s untitled works show trees from perspectives and in lighting that is unexpected, resulting in potentially frightening and even anthropomorphic visions. **Reagan Pufall**’s mantises, “tiny unthinking monsters of the world,” are both enchanting and extra scary in her series of entomological portraits because they are presented as much larger than life, with incredible mandibular detail, against carefully-chosen colored backgrounds. Sean Gill’s video *Makin’ a Martini* utilizes a classical soundtrack, period fashion and extreme camera angles to increase the discomfort of what would usually be an ordinary activity. **Wayne Bertola**’s untitled works juxtapose nostalgic fashion with unusual headgear while simultaneously removing their powers of speech (3) or sight (5) through his compositional choices.

Jake Reller uses scale and contrast to heighten the frightening effect

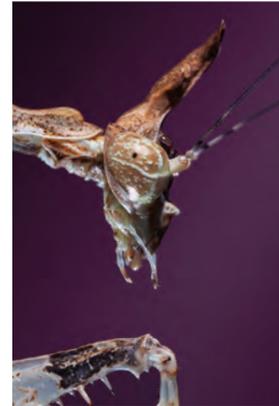
of a ram, a rock pile and a moth in *Eidolon* (apparition) - ordinary objects can appear extraordinary when surrounded by darkness, something viewers might recall from their childhoods.

Other works address fears stemming from insecurities in a more overtly comedic manner. **William Harroff**’s works seem from a distance to be comprised of brightly patterned wallpaper, viewed more closely the patterns, inspired by 1950s comic books, reveal frightening visions: *Colleagues from the Beyond* features a shrouded death-like figure; *Careers are Meant for Men* merges laughing male mouths into an imposing tooth-rimmed void; while in *I don’t want to Grow Old, I Won’t*, a bulging deformed head is created in the pattern. In each work, the title is featured in a cartoon word balloon woven into the pattern, presented forwards and backwards like some type of distorted mantra. **Lindsay Taylor**’s *Ladies* present a repeated but increasingly psychotic smile that the artist intends to represent the “uncomfortable vulnerability that lies underneath our conscious thought.”



Lindsay Taylor

Mixing the frightening with the grotesque and/or comic, **Kathy Bruce** uses “moment(s) of hybridization” in which animal and human nature merges with images of prosthetic devices, crutches, and mechanized machine parts “to convey the perversity of psychological



Reagan D. Pufall



James Dykes

damage, dislocation and manifest destiny within humanity,” while **James Dykes** transforms the death mask of the romantic British painter J.M.W. Turner into an extremely disturbing creamsicle. Dykes use of Turner’s death mask, on long term loan to the Tata Modern in London and attributed to the pre-Raphaelite artist Thomas Woolner, is significant. The preservation of the features of a recently-deceased important person in plaster was eventually replaced by photography, and it is the ability of digital photography to be manipulated and distorted that fosters the creepy/funny vision Dykes presents to us. A “head on a stick” is inherently violent imagery that might be a real warning or a metaphorical reference to evil, as in William Golden’s *Lord of the Flies*. But Dykes’s cartoonish representation and his care to label the stick with his subject’s name might

make it more likely that we think instead of the phenomenon of “everything on a stick” at State Fairs around the country. Part of the humor is dependent on the knowledge that J.M.W. Turner famously stuck his head out the side of a moving train (a new invention in his time) to experience the rush of wind and had himself lashed to the mast of a ship during a hurricane so he could more accurately depict those forces in his artwork. Were he alive today it’s entirely possible that his thrill seeking could include an intentional “brain freeze.”

In his study of the carnivalesque world of Rabelais, Mikhail Bakhtin connected masks to the grotesque, pointing out that in carnival culture fear existed “only as represented by comic monsters that were defeated by laughter.”² This need for fear to stimulate laughter is a staple in our contemporary culture, epitomized by the *Scream* movie franchise. We should not feel guilty when we laugh, though, for our laughter is “an involuntary response to situations which cannot be handled any other way, regardless of the sophistication of the audience.”³

Dr. Elizabeth K. Mix
Butler University

Note: the artists’ quotes in this essay are from statements submitted for the exhibition with the exception of Jave Yoshimoto, which was found at: <https://jyoshimo.expressions.syr.edu/about/artists-statement/>
¹ Geoffrey Harpham, “The Grotesque: First Principles,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34 (1974), p. 462.
² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, Translated by Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 39
³ Harpham, 463-64.



Kristen Gallerneaux