



CURATORIAL ESSAY

Historically, the word curate means to care-take. Curating an exhibition of work by an emerging group of artists as they transition from student to the next phase of their lives is less about caretaking and curating than it is about giving them their first experience working with a curator. In this case, students experienced visits from two curators – one established, and one emerging – further extending the project into a learning experience. Moving towards the culmination of their BFA degrees, studios were filled with projects-in-progress, and a limited number of partially completed works. Curation, in such moments, is less about selecting work to exemplify the young artist's work than about asking questions to help them learn to discuss their work, to explain where they are heading with their projects, and to articulate their installation needs. FULCRUM is a pivotal moment. It is the only time this group of students will exhibit collectively in their careers. There may be various permutations connecting them in future years – but this is a singular moment that merits attention. What the exhibition on view signals is as much about the past as it is about the future. FULCRUM reveals the possibilities of craft.

Evidence of engagement with a wide variety of materials, processes, and tools shows itself with each project; nearly every medium is employed, from paint to clay, plastic to wood, paper to textiles, film and photography. The work is evidence of thinking through a vast range of processes – printmaking to 3D printing and painting, handbuilding to weaving, fabrication to casting, hand raising to machine stitching. But it is in their facility with tools, specifically their ability to demonstrate how any tool is an extension of the body and mind, that this graduating class exemplifies what a craft-based education offers. Whether the work has been created solely by hand, with the aid of hand tools, with the assistance of digital fabrication or all of the above – discussions with each

student reveal an aptitude and flexibility that pushes hard against long-standing perceptions of a divide in craft between the hand and technology. The future of craft in the hands of this group of artists may not perpetuate this rift – and this is perhaps their biggest strength as they enter their professional lives in a post-disciplinary and materially sensitive art arena.

As they move out from the close community and idyllic campus of the Oregon College of Art and Craft into the broader world, this set of graduates is equipped to work conceptually and critically as well as materially. Their work connects the personal to the public, and addresses a wide range of themes through craft-based making, including: communication and nostalgia, survival of sexual assault, race, family, the place of women in society, global heritage and materiality through built forms, to narratives that engage personal relationships, spirituality, and refuse, to bringing the outdoors inside our urban environments. Merging material and concept through making - this is what Portland is known for, and the legacy the students take forward.

It has been a pleasure working with the students and their teachers, Ryan Burghard and Leslie Vigeant in particular, to help this group of students pivot from OCAC to beyond. Whether they remain in Portland or move anywhere in the world, their knowledge and ability to transform materials and ideas into physical form tethers them to OCAC, to each other, to a city known for a long history of craft-based making, and between the artists of the past and the future they will bring into being.

*~ Namita Gupta Wiggers
and Lauren Sinner*