

Current Tendencies Ten Artists from Wisconsin

Jennifer Angus

Peter Bardy

Anne Kingsbury

Colin Matthes

Shana McCaw & Brent Budsberg

T. L. Solien

Sonja Thomsen

George Williams, Jr.

Xiaohong Zhang

March 12 – June 14, 2009

Current Tendencies: Ten Artists from Wisconsin is an opportunity for the museum to weigh in on what artists in the state are currently thinking. These artists, chosen on their own merit rather than a prescribed curatorial treatise, bring to the discussion a variety of timely perspectives on issues including race, politics, gender and environmental awareness. The museum is configured so that each participant is given a discreet space, allowing one to think of the exhibition as a series of solo outings rather than an amalgam of parts. Cross-pollination is inevitable, but maybe that's part of the fun in a show like this. The diversity of approaches suggests that Wisconsin art defies any singular point of view or subject that is easily categorized. Hopefully the artists and works in the exhibition act as a point of departure for further appreciation of the talents within our region. The rhythm of visual thinking is ever-evolving, we have chosen to take that pulse and share it today, and we will again in the future.

Jennifer Angus (b. 1961, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)
Jennifer Angus creates unique room installations consisting of real insects pinned onto hand-designed and printed wallpaper. The artist's patterns are always varied. Some suggest eighteenth-century French *toile* while others are like the layers of a forest floor covered with years of fallen leaves and debris. Using insects from around the world, Angus creates rich decorative rooms that feature miniature scenes or randomly placed frames. For *A Worm's Eye View*, the artist invites viewers to see what is held within each of the circular frames through a teledoscope. Tension is created by the contrast between the beauty one observes through the lens and the apprehension people feel toward insects. Although her specimens typically come from the rain forest, the insects used by the artist are not endangered. The majority of species on the endangered list are there due to loss of habitat, not because of over-collection. The insects in this project are a renewable resource farmed, or collected by local indigenous people. Jennifer Angus is an associate professor of textile design at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She lives in Madison.



Detail from *A Worm's Eye View*, 2009
Installation
Mixed media
Courtesy of the artist

Peter Bardy (1943 – 2008, Milwaukee, WI)
Peter Bardy was born in Milwaukee in 1943. He resided in downtown Milwaukee during his childhood years and on the City's west side as an adult. Bardy received a degree in business administration from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1967. He served in the U.S. Army from 1967-1969, where he was stationed in Korea. He did not receive formal art training and did not pursue a career as an artist but he was a voracious reader of art theory and a regular visitor to museums and galleries.

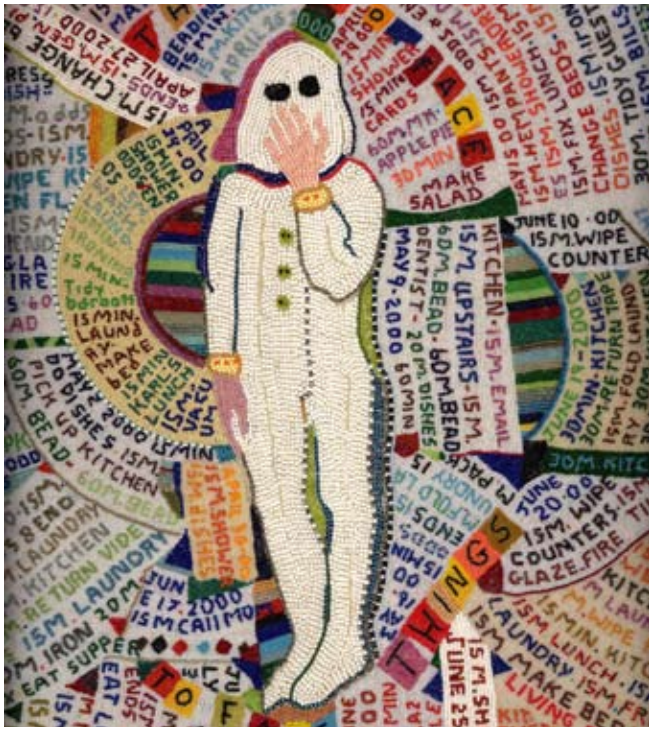
Bardy worked exclusively with found objects; in particular, stones and boulders found along the lake shore and stainless steel pieces taken from the junk yard. From 1990-2000, Bardy transformed his Arts and Crafts home into a minimalist art environment. He removed all the nonessential utilitarian objects and frilly decorative elements to focus attention, instead, on the architectural structure of the house and the way natural light interacts with reflective surfaces. The living room carpet was replaced with a metal conveyor belt. The etched glass plates of the dining room light fixture were taken out, leaving behind the visible bulbs and empty brass arms. The dark cavern of the fireplace was obscured by a simple square of stainless steel. Everything in the house was precisely placed and carefully arranged from the miniature exhibition of stones and utensils in the kitchen drawer to the tableau of sunglasses and dominoes on the bedroom dresser to the full blown gallery in the basement. As Bardy's brother Alex reflected, "There's a sense of belonging throughout the entire house. One piece is here, not twenty, but one, beautiful work of art."



Photograph of the lower level of Peter Bardy's home

Anne Kingsbury (b. 1943, Oakpark, IL)
Anne Kingsbury expands the idea of traditional handicrafts by utilizing a variety of processes and mediums in her work. She combines leather and fabric with beads, glazed ceramic tiles, lace, embroidery and quilting to create mixed-media works that are whimsical and autobiographical. Her work ranges from beaded quilts and leather dolls to printed journal pages. While she may begin with a children's fable, her work becomes a personal narrative which tells a new story. For Kingsbury, animals are often surrogates for the many roles she has played throughout her career including artist, administrator and homemaker.

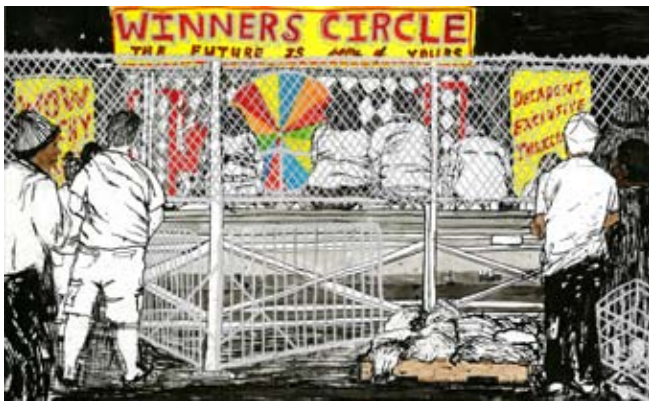
In the mid 1970s, Kingsbury began listing her daily activities in the form of journal pages with illustrations. Confined in this pursuit by a kitchen timer, she recorded the time it took her to accomplish various tasks. According to the artist, they are "not a series of 'to-dos' or a record of exciting events, these are a testament of ordinary things – the small repetitious acts that form our daily lives." The culmination of this series is *Beaded Deer Hide*, an intricately beaded and copiously scripted work reflecting the artist's daily activities. Anne Kingsbury co-founded Woodland Pattern, a book center with the largest collection of small press titles in the country. She lives in Milwaukee.



Beaded Journal Page (detail), 2000
Leather and beads
16 x 12"
Collection of the artist

Colin Matthes (b. 1978, Milwaukee, WI)

One of Colin Matthes' recent works is entitled *War Fair*, a play on words that acknowledges the militarism within our society. Matthes' experience of encountering a military recruitment booth alongside the usual carnival games at a county fair is the impetus for *Winners Circle*. This work, according to the artist, "uses the familiar language of carnival games as a means to think about the opportunities and exclusions that exist on the local level and beyond." Like many of his installations, *Winners Circle* can be read in any number of personal or political contexts and represents one scene in a larger viewer-completed narrative. Colin Matthes teaches at the Milwaukee Institute of Art of Design. He lives in Milwaukee.



Proposal for *Winners Circle*, 2009
Ink and paint on paper
Courtesy of the artist

Shana McCaw and Brent Budsberg

(b. 1974, Dubuque, IA and b. 1976, Wausau, WI)
Shana McCaw and Brent Budsberg have collaborated for the past seven years constructing site-specific sculptural installations and performances. In their recent work, they focus on creating dramatic narratives using architectural miniatures. *Lost in Transit* transforms the entryway of the Haggerty Museum of Art into the scene of a delivery truck accident. The glass of the vestibule is reinterpreted as a cross-section of deep water. From below, viewers see a sinking truck and its spilled

contents "floating" on the entryway ceiling. Far above, a bridge and a broken guardrail are fragments of a tragic narrative. From outside the entryway, it becomes clear that perspective has been manipulated; the bridge is disproportionately small and the packages floating furthest from the truck appear too large to fit inside. This forced perspective heightens our awareness of the initial tragedy, yet we soon realize that this seemingly solitary incident has generated a chain of events represented both physically and metaphorically by the drifting packages which are later reported as "lost in transit." Shana McCaw teaches at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design and Cardinal Stritch University. Brent Budsberg is a 3-D lab supervisor at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. McCaw and Budsberg live in Milwaukee.



Installation proposal view of *Lost in Transit*, 2009
Mixed media
Courtesy of the artists

T. L. Solien (b. 1949, Fargo, ND)

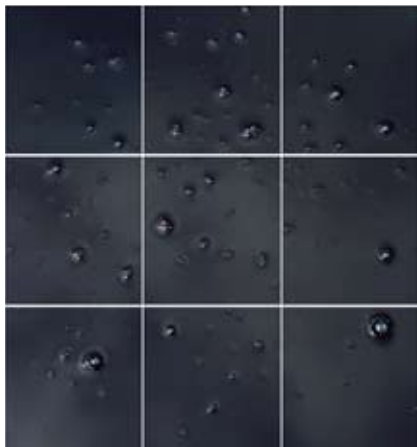
T. L. Solien is best known for his large scale paintings which are colorful, inventive and rich in nuances. For each composition, he draws from a wide variety of sources both appropriated and imagined. In addition to mining his own experiences as an artist and a father, he often integrates cartoon characters or popular images into his paintings while making subtle references to art historical styles such as Cubism and Surrealism. Though his source material includes vintage illustrations, commercial animation and the drawings of children, he describes his paintings as "autobiographic constructions" because of his role in re-contextualizing ideas and images relevant to his personal life. T. L. Solien teaches in the art department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He lives in Madison.



Storm of Imperfections, 2004
Oil on canvas
78 x 96"
Courtesy of T. L. Solien and Tory Folliard Gallery

Sonja Thomsen (b. 1978, Chicago, IL)

As a photographer and installation artist, Sonja Thomsen creates dynamic large-scale work that invites audience participation. In her recent projects, the viewer either sees themselves in the work or can alter the work by removing a picture from a stack of images. Thomsen photographed used motor oil to create *Petroleum*. The assembled grid of prints becomes an oversized mirror reflecting our image. Seeing ourselves in the work implicates us in the politics of energy consumption implied by the subject matter. Looking closely, one can find small self-portraits of the artist with her camera in each print. In *Lacuna*, the viewer is invited to invent their own stories and to participate by peeling away a picture from various stacks. As these diminish, the images fade altering the piece for the next viewer. Thomsen teaches at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. She lives in Milwaukee.



Petroleum, 2008
Fuji Pearl Chromira prints
19½ x 18" each
Edition of 5
Collection of the artist

George Williams, Jr. (b. 1958, El Paso, TX)

George Williams' subject is the Black male. He paints bodies in a variety of stances to challenge existing perceptions of Blacks while introducing new paradigms and possibilities of interpretation. While his large-scale canvases are imposing, the people within them do not confront the viewer directly. Whether a sole figure or a group of figures, Williams' men in this exhibition either have their heads down or obscured by an out-stretched hand. By skewing perspective in paintings like *Mirror, Mirror*, Williams not only challenges the idea of the traditional full-length portrait but introduces a wholly new approach to painting the human body. His goal is not to commemorate or immortalize specific individuals, but to create paintings that are culturally and spiritually charged. Rather than admiring his various groups of figures, the viewer is forced into the role of witness and, or oppressor. Our position becomes that of "commander" forcing individuals either to kneel with their arms behind their heads or stand spread eagle against a wall. By drawing the viewer into his compositions, Williams hopes we will each recognize the need for greater humanity in the world. George Williams, Jr. is an associate professor at Beloit College. He lives in Beloit.



Mirror, Mirror, 2009
Oil on canvas
7 x 7"
Collection of the artist

Xiaohong Zhang (b. 1969, Hubei, China)

Xiaohong Zhang specializes in large-scale northern Chinese style paper cutting. As an artistic tradition, paper cutting dates back to the sixth century making it one of the oldest art forms in China. Zhang started using scissors to cut different symbols and flowers when she was a child and then graduated to working with blades. Zhang, who immigrated to the U.S. in 1997, draws from her experience as a first-generation immigrant, artist, professor and mother. She has created personal narratives while also addressing broader themes such as the impact of war as seen in *We Aren't Safe* and *The Rape of Nanking*. In the latter, the woman represents the survivors of Japanese atrocities, many of whom were forced to speak the invaders' language to survive. Other works reflect on historical and cultural issues from a Chinese perspective. Xiaohong Zhang is an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. She lives in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.



The Rape of Nanking, 2007
Mixed-media digital printing and
paper-cutting
28 x 89"
Collection of the artist

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