

HYPERALLERGIC

The Latest Hunter MFA Thesis Exhibition Highlights Collectivity

Monica Castillo

December 20, 2019



Installation view of *laissez faire et laissez passer*, featuring Andy Ralph, “...A Placebo, an Embryo, a Mosquito, My Libido” (2019) [front]; [from left to right] Brian Yihurn Byun, “Ha-Yeo-Ga” (2019); Judy Koo, “What Plants Says” (2019), “Born with Fair Hair” (2018); Andy Ralph, “Untitled” (2019); Judy Koo, “I am Coming to a Close” (2019) (all images by the author for Hyperallergic)

laissez faire et laissez passer, on view at 205 Hudson Gallery, mirrors the community of the program, demonstrating the ways in which students often act as their own advocates.

To cap off the year with art, the gallery space at 205 Hudson Street is now filled with the work of graduate students in Hunter College’s MFA program. In their thesis show, *laissez faire et laissez passer*, the group represents a hopeful future of art that challenges and connects with its viewers. Each artist brings a different story to the space and different concepts to abstraction. The works span a range of mediums, practices and styles, the culmination of several years’ work in and out of Hunter’s program.

Looking to shake up the traditional mash-up of graduate thesis shows, curator Nicole Kaack sought to arrange the pieces in a way that seemed like they fit together. “Curating a thesis show is a very difficult thing,” she said. “Everyone comes in with such diverse projects that they’ve been working on for years. You can’t necessarily pull a theme out of that.”



Installation view of works by Judy Koo, Brian Yihurn Byun, and Hannah Beerman (all 2019)

Kaack eventually did find a through-line for the exhibition *laissez faire et laissez passer*. “It’s important to remember that Hunter is a working-class school. It’s more accessible than many other schools,” she said. “The program forces and facilitates that collectivity based around working together. I think it’s very unique to the Hunter program.” She said it was the student’s idea to enlist a curator to organize their thesis works so that “the show could be more of a fluid experience, and less the different shows within a show.”

“When I was putting together the kind of language around the exhibition, I remembered our first meeting and I discovered around that time how involved the students have to be both in

fighting for themselves inside the institution of Hunter and creating opportunities for themselves,” said Kaack. “In many ways, they’re their own advocates, and that’s very different than from other MFA programs, especially in the city.”

Using a guide and a free zine from the entrance, you can navigate through the two-story gallery and the ideas the graduate students have spent years wrestling with. Most notably, near the entrance is the work “Not Much Δ ” by Patrick Carlin Mohundro. Using noisy canister vacuums, acrylic on red Delta blankets you would find on a flight and cough syrup mixed with ballistic gelatin, the work explores the notion of the toxicity of caregiving. Across the hall to the right in what looks like a sparse apartment — complete with a pile of mail and jackets on hooks — is an unassuming refrigerator door full of photos and magnets. Open it, and you’ll have a Narnia-like experience of moving into a cavernous space that leads to the street and the chilly air, which gives Emily Janowick’s work its name, “Fear not the Harsh Winter.”



Brian Yihurn Byun, "Milky Way" and "Fish Eye" (both 2019)

Between these pieces sits a trio of large sunny paintings by Jordan Stohl. Up a short flight of stairs, you'll find the fleshy leatherwork of Elizabeth Harney, whose works deal with the military experience. Andy Ralph's playfully chaotic mix of copper wire, batteries, and a mosaic tile bath full of water and plastic sits in front of colorful paintings by Judy Koo and Brian Yihurn Byun. That playful energy can also be found in the works of Hannah Beerman, whose loose and colorful works can be seen on both floors. Enter a curtained-off space for Jessica Mensch's intricate trio of video installations, involving the Greek goddess Hecate, optical illusions, a live feed camera and a humidifier. *laissez faire et laissez passer (Hunter MFA Thesis Exhibition Part 2) continues at Hunter's 205 Hudson Gallery (205 Hudson Street, Tribeca) through January 4, 2020.*