well, position

Craig Drennen
Brian Christopher Glaser
Vivian Liddell
Robin Mandel
Claudia Valenti

Curated by The Rib

On View: January 17 – February 22, 2020
Opening Reception: January 17, 7-9 PM

Trestle Gallery is pleased to present, well, position, a group exhibition curated by The Rib. This is the first exhibition at Trestle of Artist-Run 2020, a year-long exploration of artist-run projects throughout the country, in collaboration with Tiger Strikes Asteroid. Perspective is informed by identity, and identity informs positionality. Claudia Valenti, Vivian Liddell, Craig Drennen, Brian Christopher Glaser, and Robin Mandel present works in well, position, that meditate on the relationship between positionality and identity. Each artist foregrounds position in their work; they are reactive to implications of social experiences and the effect of both indirect and direct actions of another onto themselves.

Looming and brooding, Claudia Valenti’s paintings own an experiential sense of comfort that teeters on unnerving. An effect of an unwanted action, or inaction of another is both fleeting and everlasting - and she addresses in-the-moment coping mechanisms alongside long term psychological changes and developed as a reaction to such direct person-to-person impact. Her paintings have a youthful playfulness, employing a fragment of a stuffed animal but on a monumental scale that has the character come alive. There is an aura of domestic turmoil in the paint as the artist grapples with the intrinsic or the purposeful fuzziness of memory.

Nodding to a long history of the misogynistic gaze towards an anonymous female muse, and in particular to Willem de Kooning’s 1950’s series of Women, Vivian Liddells series "Men" flips the gender normality of this construct by poignantly depicting nude male figures (much like their counterparts) and are aesthetic deliberate in its expressive abstraction. The man-spreading figures are melting into a couch or in the back of a pickup truck with a beer in their hand, stylized, but true to life. Looking at the construct of masculinity in the American South, she recontextualizes these men in her life and blends canonically feminine attributes to the machismo and pomposity of the peripheral male.

Craig Drennen has organized his studio practice around Shakespeare’s play Timon of Athens, a work that was heavily criticized and never performed during the author’s life, a failure of the author’s in some eyes. Driven by the creative forces of another in this body of work, Drennan strives to make Timon of Athens his own and only his by launching an exhaustive series of work that examines each character in the story. A small part of his decade-long exercise to transform the play for himself, the work presented here is based on the character “Bandit”, who is known for thievery and taking. The artist explains: "Timon of Athens is a corrupted text of indeterminate history, questionable sources, and a dubious relationship to the respected canon. That is to say, it mirrors my own position in the art world perfectly."
In his work, Brian Christopher Glaser examines the idealized, heteronormative male bodies that are reflected to us in popular culture—specifically, print magazines—by decontextualizing and distorting them. In “Little Splinters,” Glaser dissects these romanticized images of “unrestrained masculinity” into their discrete parts, arms, legs, hair, etc., amalgamating these singular elements human-scaled spears. The shape and placement of these spears recall the wooden fencing to which Matthew Shepard was bound when he was assaulted. Deeply affected by the images of Shepard alive and of footage of where he was tied, Glaser’s worldview was shaped by Shepard’s murder. Informed by his identity as a queer man, Glaser’s work contemplates, in his words, “the ways we identify with and develop self-assertive ambition from visual media, the fabrication of identity, sexuality, and self-esteem.” Jumbling the physical, virtual, and imagined self and other into unified forms, he reacts to the way external, societal constructs shape our internal psyches and perceptions of ourselves.

Similarly deconstructing iconic visuals to consider their influence on perception, Robin Mandel’s sculpture challenges normative domestic experiences by destabilizing them. Working perhaps from Eadweard Muybridge’s 1872 discoveries and the inception of motion pictures, Mandel adds tension to everyday objects. In "Anecdote (Relative Strangers #6)”, Mandel presents an infant's milk bottle fastened to an electric motor atop a wooden stool spinning to a full blur at 500rpm. The forced, awkward motion of an otherwise distinguishable combination of objects produces a recognizable tension surrounding unrecognizable, personal forces. The compact work’s presence induces a sense of unease as we watch.

Whether reacting to direct experiences, or responding to cultural or societal interjections, we are looking at five artists who address the impact another has on the self. Separately, each work in well, position expressly reflects the experiences of each of the artists who created them. Considered together, positionality becomes both inherent and critical.

Craig Drennen: craigdrennen.com

Craig Drennen is an artist based in Atlanta, GA and a 2018 Guggenheim Fellow. His recent solo exhibition “BANDIT” at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Georgia included a catalog with essay by Diana Nawi. His work has been reviewed in Artforum, Art in America, and The New York Times. He has been a resident artist at Yaddo, MacDowell Colony, and the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture. He teaches at Georgia State University, served as dean of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture for four years, and writes for Art Pulse magazine. Since 2008 he has organized his studio practice around Shakespeare’s Timon of Athens.

Brian Christopher Glaser: brianchristopherglaser.com

Brian Christopher Glaser is an artist whose recent work in sculpture and collage distorts images of idealized bodies, examining the confusion of physical and virtual selfhood, fantasy, and reality that pervades visual popular culture. By queering these highly coded forms and images, he makes work that converges on the concepts of longing; shame; the fabrication of identity, sexuality, and self-esteem; and destructive impulses. Glaser is an instructor in the College of Advanced and Professional Studies and the instructional media specialist for sculpture and digital media in the Art Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston. He is also an instructor in the College of Art and Design at Lesley University and the Adjunct Professor of Grant Writing and Arts Administration for the Visual and Performing Arts Department at Stonehill College. Glaser’s artwork has been exhibited nationally in venues like the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art in New York; 500X Gallery in Dallas, Texas; ArtSpace New Haven in New Haven, Connecticut; and the Mills Gallery at the Boston Center for the Arts in Boston, Massachusetts.
Vivian Liddell: vivianliddell.com

Vivian Liddell is an interdisciplinary artist who works with painting, fiber and craft techniques, sculpture, printmaking, photography and sound. Born in Memphis, Tennessee, she received her M.F.A. in Painting from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and was a New York City Teaching Fellow while earning her M.S. in Teaching at Pace University in Manhattan. Her work has been shown throughout the United States including at the Wiregrass Museum of Art and the Macon Museum of Arts and Sciences with two solo exhibitions of her “Men” series this year. Liddell hosts a podcast (Peachy Keen) as an extension of her art practice, interviewing women on art and the South. She is an Assistant Professor of Painting and Drawing at the University of North Georgia, specializing in feminist theory and criticism in contemporary art and craft media in painting.

Robin Mandel: robinmandel.net

Robin Mandel is an artist working in sculpture, video, and installation. His recent exhibition venues include the Boston Cyberarts Gallery, the List Gallery at Swarthmore College(PA), Currents 2016 in Santa Fe(NM), the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts in Grand Rapids(MI), and the Wassac Project in New York. He has also exhibited in PortlandME, Providence RI, Montreal, Venice, Barcelona, and Jerusalem. He has held residencies at the MacDowell Colony, the Fine Arts Work Center, and Anderson Ranch Arts Center, and has been awarded grants from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and the St. Botolph Club Foundation in Boston. His teaching credits include the Rhode Island School of Design, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Maine College of Art, and Colby College. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He lives in western Massachusetts.

Claudia Valenti: claudiavalenti.com

Claudia Valenti is an interdisciplinary artist who uses painting, sculpture, printmaking and bookbinding to investigate the processing of traumatic memory in domestic spaces. She works from personal history and the therapeutic techniques of modern trauma treatment for domestic violence and chronic childhood abuse to create a psychological space, called The Living Room. It is in this Living Room where the unspeakable is confronted and interrogated by the phenomenal — the wild animals, ghosts, and paranormal phenomena. Valenti received her BFA in Painting & Drawing from Montserrat College of Art, and is a current graduate candidate in Interdisciplinary Art at The Pennsylvania Academy of The Fine Arts. She lives and works in Philadelphia.

The Rib: the-rib.net

The Rib is an online art publication focusing on commentary and criticism in the form of reviews, editorials, interviews, and essays that connect artists, spaces, curators, and advocates working outside of major arts communities in the United States. The Rib was founded by Leah Triplett Harrington, Lindsey Stapleton, and Corey Oberlander in 2017 on the belief that critical coverage leads to dialogue, dialogue leads to a strong network, and connectivity leads to greater social and economic viability.