

The Grand

Curated by Eun Young Choi



SunTek Chung, *Chapter 43: Heaven and Earth*, C-print, 37" x 54"

Amelie A. Wallace Gallery
February 12 ~ March 19, 2009

Opening Reception and Artists' Gallery Talk:
Thursday, February 12th, 4:30 – 7:30 pm



Ben Grasso, *By the Bulrush II*, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 50"x70"
 Daina Higgins, *Zenobia*, 2006, Spray paint on panel, 18" x 12"

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The Grand is an exhibition organized around the idea of beauty and the sublime in a contemporary context. People often associate beauty and the sublime with eighteenth-century concepts despite their prior histories. However, depiction of grand cathedrals, sublime landscapes, mythical legends, monumental events in history, and heroic portraits are very common themes explored throughout history. Such grand subject matter aim to evoke feelings of pleasant adoration or quiet wonder. According to Kant the sublime can be divided into three kinds: noble, splendid, and terrifying. The artists in *The Grand* explore ideas of the monumental that evoke joy and splendor while toying dangerously close to the idea of sublime terror.

Ben Grasso's paintings depict the impact of frightful natural disasters and man-made destruction in a beautifully executed imagery of exploding wood-frame houses, ships disintegrating in mid air or fiery collisions of molten debris. His exuberantly powerful explosions are anxiety filled apocalypses filled with a profusion of energetic, loose, and colorful abstract brushstrokes. They are reminiscent of action movie stills or video games referencing tragic memories on the one hand and fantasy on the other. Some disaster scenes seem physically impossible, if not absurd, evoking the notion of the inconceivable real. However, when you look beyond the collisions and tornados there is nothing but bursts of color and lines filling the canvas. In *By the Bulrush II* the reality of the house, composed alongside its state of obliteration, provides an uncanny dialogue between conscious and subconscious appearance. It is the maintenance of the façade that perpetuates people's dreams of hope and security, which Grasso repeatedly disrupts.

In contrast, **Daina Higgins** creates intimate black and white cityscapes that are quiet poetic snapshots of the urban environment. Her work captures the urban loneliness and post-industrial decay. Growing up in the Rust Belt Higgins learned to embrace the abandoned factories, rail yards and warehouse districts to see the hard won beauty among their quotidian aspects. Since her move to Brooklyn she has transformed her twelve-year long graffiti practice into a studio practice depicting the streets of industrial and residential inner city neighborhoods, the undersides of bridges and overpasses, auto salvage yards and construction sites. At first glance the broad spectrum of grainy grays resemble a lithograph or the atmospheric graininess of film noir but in reality these photo realistic works are created using thirty to fifty layers of stencils and Rust-Oleum spray paint, a seminal material for a graffiti artist. Instead of creating spray art on buildings, Higgins recreates the seductive beauty of the big city and its buildings onto intimate 8" x 8" and 10" x 12" panels. Higgins' work embodies a poetic awareness of the serene magnificence of urban decay.

Miyeon Lee also gets her inspiration from the urban landscape. Her works are based on the idea that time, space, matter and life are always in transition. From the large spectrum birth of a star to a microscopic division of a single cell and all the random paintings. Much of her material comes from construction sites and urban redevelopment zones. Lee's contemplative and intuitive gestural strokes captures the ephemeral quality of her environment layered with ambiguous energy and traces of life and memory. Her banal subject matters take on a grand meditative quality as she analyzes, distills, and navigates through every visual element that is captured in her photographs. Her slightly abstracted paintings end up capturing a more essential image than the original photographs.

Using decorative domestic patterns as her starting point in an attempt to recreate and redirect the sensation of visual memory **Rita MacDonald** uses common building materials like wall paint and drywall compound to build up a drawing of a pattern directly onto and into the surface of the wall. MacDonald shares her personal experience by exploring patterns taken from wallpaper, curtains and other domestic decorations from her past and re-contextualizes them into a site-specific installation. The images in the drawings vacillate between flat geometric patterns that accentuate the architecture of the wall and the flowing movement of the pattern whose illusion of space, motion, and volume push up against the flatness of the wall. The two convergent readings of the



Miyeon Lee, *Lathers*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 30"x39"



Larry Lee, *And so Master Po asks Grasshopper (the young Kwai Chang Caine) to ponder the true meaning of chinoiserie...* 2005, Wood in black red rub finish and metal, bracket ties, Dimensions variable
 Andrea Loefke, *The squirrels, hedgehogs and rabbits are indeed harmless(detail)*, 2007, Mixed Media Installation, Dimensions variable

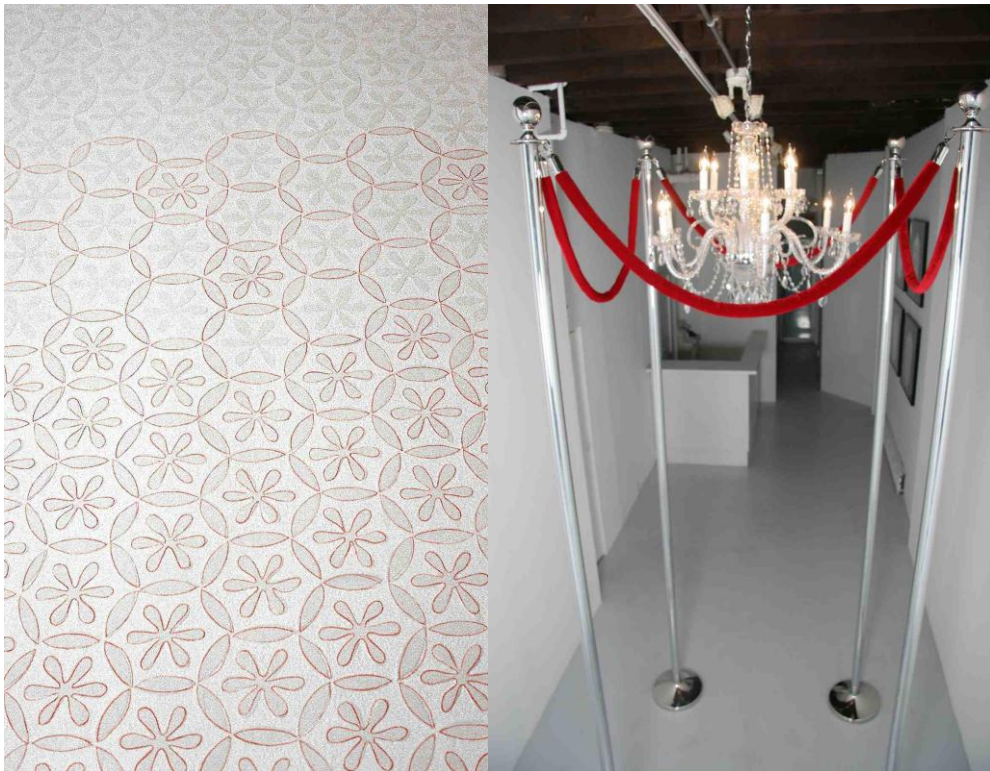
pattern can be disorienting, heightening the experience of both sight and place. The usually intimate domestic patterns are transformed into larger than life environments that engulf the viewer, becoming a direct part of the viewer's experience of a new space.

Andrea Loefke also constructs large multifaceted site-specific installations that transform the space. She works with a plethora of materials, from kitschy decorative supplies to everyday objects found at home. Loefke visually enchants the viewer with curious narratives by building environments that are whimsical, fanciful, and humorous incorporating various colorful objects and textures that explore both material and form. Her work provides pathways for the viewer to follow which leads to interlocking micro and macro worlds filled with sensations, associations and memories. Loefke's large-scale installations are like a splendid visual journey filled with surprise, wonder and delight.

For this exhibition **Larry Lee** presents *Whistling the Colonel Bogey March at the behest of Sessue Hayakawa*, a noble sculptural form consisting of an open structure that is bolted together to resemble an oversized Tinkertoy that references the iconic tower supports from the David Lean epic, "Bridge on the River Kwai." Lee's work explores the notion that the boundaries between private recollection and public perception become blurred because of the presence of many and divergent perspectives. His duplicative process mimics a type of palimpsest through which the copy degenerates, invalidating the primacy of the original. The original idea or work gradually loses its identity and subsequently its meaning by being remade. By utilizing an existing work as an infrastructure to renovate into a "newer" or updated version Lee imposes a new politics of representation on its original reading and thereby questioning the Modernist idea of equating originality to creativity. Lee's work challenges the notion of a singular public collective memory about an existing work that has become a part of the larger cultural landscape.

Alejandro Almanza Pereda similarly re-contextualizes symbolically charged objects to create tantalizing but vulnerable emotional states. He uses commercial items to create iconoclastic sculptural assemblages that are both elegant and dangerous. His balancing acts often challenge structural integrity engaging the viewer to question his or her concepts of stability, risk and danger. In *It is for our own safety*, Pereda both accentuates and spoofs the cachet and elitism of red velvet ropes by making the metal stanchions ten feet tall and out of the viewers reach. The seductive velvet ropes confine (protect) a sparkling chandelier far above the viewer's head. The immediate appeal of smooth red velvet, shiny silver poles, and luminous crystals evoke notions of class and exclusivity. Yet a feeling of rejection, insecurity, and smallness falls on the viewer as he or she walks under and around the chandelier. Pereda's work is loaded with arresting contradictions and can be at once visceral, absurd, and humorous.

Humor is also an important element in **SunTek Chung's** elaborate and brilliantly staged photographs that utilize classic Asian and Western stereotypes and signifiers to confront cultural ownership. He builds pseudo-epic scenarios that toy with cultural ambiguity while challenging cultural clichés. By combining the characters Huck Finn and Jim with Bruce Lee and Kareem Abdul Jabbar from the movie "Game of Death" Chung is able to simultaneously cross reference cultural stereotypes as well as free them of their cultural associations allowing them to fly away towards an unknown but brighter future. In "Ick r us" he portrays the Greek mythological characters Icarus and Daedalus with elaborate wings constructed out of an assortment of household fans and mini propellers. Icarus' gesture as he reaches out to Daedalus just before he falls towards his demise brings to mind *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo. By portraying himself as this almost god like mythical figure, Chung is able to undermine the canon of Western art. He explores the space in-between stereotypes to create a new visual culture while simultaneously undermining those stereotypes.



Rita MacDonald, *Hurry Up and Wait (detail)*, 2005 plaster + colored pencil on wall, Dimensions variable
 Alejandro Almanza Pereda, *It is for our own safety*, 2008, Chandelier, velvet rope and stanchion poles



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Director: Hyewon Yi
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Gallery Hours:
Monday – Thursday, 12:00 – 5:00 PM
and by appointment

Location: Amelie A. Wallace Gallery
Campus Center, Main Level
SUNY College at Old Westbury
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