

President's Remarks at Senior Art Reception

Dr. Margaret L. Drugovich, President

May 20, 2022

Thank you for inviting me to celebrate with you today.

Senior Art and Art History majors, Congratulations.

In the years that you have been at Hartwick you have received a great education. We will celebrate that education tomorrow when we present you with your degree.

Today, I would like to reflect on how you have developed your craft.

I was thinking earlier this week about what a challenge it has become to assure that people both listen to, and hear, what is said by others. How channeled our communications have become and how those channels define and reinforce the ideas we are already aligned with; and how, it seems, that the spoken word can really get in the way of human communication.

Then I came to this gallery to review your installations. Your work breaks through these communication barriers.

What I see in this gallery are works that help us to determine where we are in the world. You return to and poke at some fundamental questions about our relationship to one another.

In many ways, Covid has left us untethered. Your work – all art done *well* – helps us to find a new mooring. There is no way to create an algorithm that can determine our sense of place – the fullness of our humanity cannot be reduced to an equation. But the issues you raise in your work – relationships, truth, reason, and the power of reflection - makes us think again about how we belong.

I would like to share a few specific thoughts I had when considering your work.

Elizabeth Posey: your aesthetic strikes a soothing chord in this time in our human journey. Your pallet is calming and wholesome – wheat like, mocha-like – reminiscent of the earth, but not gritty. Even the name “cloud” is the perfect antidote to an edgy time. I wanted to read what you had presented because it was so welcoming. The repetition does make it easier to access all that you offer – in our striving for efficiency we have a tendency to forget that people do not read the way we write, and do not digest every word. Your reflexive approach to design

thinking when developing a website is so important to capturing what is dynamic for your client and their clients. Our desire to make messaging simple belies the complexity of the modern consumer and their approach to discovery. It seemed right that your work was displayed in the upper gallery – away from the “noise” of the other displays.

Armando Velazquez: you have created a perfect antidote to Middle School bullying in your Valiente, a mystical crime fighting folk musician. I don't think I've ever seen a mariachi used as a super hero and I think it's great because you need more principles and intelligence and wisdom to fight ignorance and hate than you need green skin, big eyes, or a latex suit. Your superhero is so much more accessible. I loved the transformation of your character into a tall, clean cut, well-groomed, and in-command Mariachi. Your production was clean and interesting and well composed – perhaps my greatest compliment to you is that I wanted to see more of the trailer. I can also see why this production is a love letter to your family and your culture. Thank you for sharing the richness of your life experience with us through this installation.

Natalie Harkonen: These images were so complex, Natalie. I talked earlier about the barriers of language – there are barriers in images as well if you do not know what the iconography means as Armando pointed this out in his treatment of the Valienti. I was not sure how to enter your pieces and that forced me to find a way to separate the figure-ground. And then I saw it – game controller, serpent, flowers, water, and cattails. I had to look hard to see the second layer, the third layer – and the effort was worth it. Like looking through a window – you can choose to only see the window or look through and beyond it. You bridged the structural communication gap by giving me a way – the cattails, the water, the serpent – to enter. I have never used a Nintendo so it was interesting that I was able to recognize the circles as being part of this unit. Somewhat like the Nike swish, it has become recognizable as part of our human experience. You write that these pieces are a self-portrait reflecting a time when this digital console was so influential for you. It is a reminder that just because we live through a time together – as you and I have - there can be a vast separation in our experience of that time. Context is so important – your work helped me to appreciate your context. Your pieces are interesting and complex and I appreciate that you gave me a way to access the less familiar through the ideas that I recognized.

Aidan Wholihan – Dalita – poor, indigent. Recently I went to Washington DC and by an entrance to the Rock Creek Park I noticed the tents to shelter the homeless that were set up across the park. I have been to New York City many times and I have seen people like those you describe in your graphic novel, with dogs, on the sidewalk, just as you show it here. Your work is a very painful reminder of how we can distance ourselves from others – a lonely humanity where we are in the company of others but proximate only, never quite touching. The fact that a second human embraced and took the dog but left the person alone is a stinging rebuke.

What is it about us that makes us fear strangers while being so willing to befriend the animals of strangers? Is it relative power? Is it that we judge the people to have failed? Is it that we see ourselves in the humans, see our own frailty, and fear a contagion of many forms of human poverty? There is abundant pain in your novel, Aiden, but I also saw a shred of hope in your ability to identify the issue so starkly – there is really no way to look away from the issue you place before us. You are forcing us to come to terms – at least on the highest level – with the truth that the disparity exists and we have a responsibility to face it. Sad, and well done. By the way, what does the last image in your novel – the cup – represent?

Perhaps it is with the shred of hope in mind that **Julie Ginsberg's** work was mounted adjacent to Aiden's. Julie, by your own description the Guiding Eye Program has been a pathway for your personal growth. I love the idea that this program and your relationship to these puppies has provided an opportunity to build your innate strength. Puppies give us love and comfort without judgement. They bridge gaps between us and other humans. They help us to break down the barriers to finding common ground that I mentioned earlier. I love the fact that in your illustration you chose not to provide facial features, rather just the idea of the dog and the idea of the person. This says to me that you are allowing the personality of both to develop as their relationship builds – in your image, it is the potential rather than the personality that each brings to the relationship. A clean slate. How smart. As humans we meet each other as complex people where our personalities loom large – wouldn't it be lovely to be a puppy like blank slate and allow our future selves to be written through the development of our human relationships? If we could do this, it could well be the antidote to Aiden's sad ending. Finally, Julie, I really appreciate the simple beauty of the gray and reddish brown tones that you incorporate into your pieces. Being the owner of a large and constantly ravenous dog the scale of the bowls is just right (I always feel human guilt when I place one scoop of food into Crickett's much larger bowl). Your pieces will be good for the dog and good for the human.

Lindsey Griffith – Lindsey, I considered your imagery carefully before I read your statement. I found it to be a jumble, overwhelming and a bit repelling, especially with your use of what I consider to be the harsh colors of your palette and the image crowding. The repetition made it feel overwrought and reminded me of a garbage pail in which things are only vaguely recognizable. Then I read your artist statement and saw that you had actually caused me to confront the ideas of excess consumerism, and the waste of it all, quite brilliantly. I had seen what you had hoped I would. I did not "like" what I saw but I love your artistic execution because it my response is exactly what you had hoped for. I also appreciate the irony that you are making your point by selling your point – a constant reminder in your "shop" that one mug is quite enough. And by the way, I thought that your large mugs have a beautiful weight and feel; a mug that I would grab for and then be reminded that I have another opportunity to

make the world better by looking at the original art in the museum rather than taking another coffee mug home with me from the museum. Well done.

Shawn Hansen: I gave blood last week, before I saw your installation – I felt crowded by the repeated questions about my sexual behavior. I had to report my behavior to get the Rapid Pass for the donation, and then was asked again – just two hours later – some of the same intrusive questions. I felt myself becoming more and more irritated – and to your point with this display, is this truly necessary? I am very sorry for the way these requirements impact you personally, Shawn, and appreciate how you have shared your personal story so that others will think more carefully about the blood donation screening process. I am, like you, troubled by the fact that men in a monogamous relationship are subjected to this prohibition to donate. Your display and educational piece had the intended effect for me and caused me to go to the WHO, Canadian Blood services, NIH, and American Red Cross to understand why they do this screening. To help everyone assembled here understand, the WHO writes: *While we test every donation using sophisticated and reliable procedures, these tests are not perfect. There are brief periods after infection called ‘window periods’ when current tests cannot detect signs of a virus. Advances in testing technology have reduced but not eliminated these window periods.* The length of the deferral from lifetime to a year to 3 months probably was motivated, as you suggest, Shawn, by a Covid-catalyzed crisis in blood shortage. Crisis often motivates change and it is a positive sign that the FDA is moving a study forward to see if they can identify alternative approaches to assessing and minimizing risk to spreading blood-borne diseases. Maybe that is one good thing that will come from Covid.

As for your art, I found your small vessels to be beautifully done. They are powerful statements about your desire to participate in this process of saving the lives of others, and your frustration that you are precluded from doing so. It is a powerful protest. They immediately reminded me of the chalices used during the Catholic Eucharistic ritual of Transubstantiation by which the whole substance of wine becomes the Blood of Christ. You did not write about it – did you have these chalices in mind when you chose your design?

Alixandra Johnson: Your place settings are beautiful and functional and I so appreciate your inspiration – using utensils of dining as a tool for crafting and building relationships. How true this is – so many meals throughout our lifetime are shared with those who have shaped who we are and the way we think. Each of your pieces has their distinct personality – in weight, and color, and structure – similar, as with families, but not the same. Unified in their purpose, but still different. Perhaps not perfect in every way, just like the people who inspired them. When I explored them I saw the fingerprints of others who had picked them up and admired them, underscoring the desire for human interaction with your work; this is a wonderful tribute to your artistry. Who would go into a store and feel the desire to pick up a piece of Corelle?

There is something whole and real and magnetic about your work, and touching these pieces was obviously important to me and others who have admired them. Being someone who loves to eat, but cannot cook, presentation is an important part of the dining experience for me as I know it is for others. Well done Alixandra.

And, Alixandra, I found your thesis on [Fear and Entertainment: Asylums in the 18th and 19th Centuries](#)

to speak directly to the issues of human to human struggle that Aidan raised in his challenging work. As you found in your research, humans have always wanted to define what is normal and draw a line around what is not. Maybe the malignant indifference illustrated by Aidan harkens back to Rothman's work about insanity when he wrote that "The barrier between normality and deviancy was low" and that "the manifestations of the disease are so broad that no one who stood on one side of it today could be sure he would not cross it tomorrow." Do we still believe – or fear this – today? As you write: "Society is not, and never has been, accepting to things or people that are different or challenge the idea of "normal."" Your treatment of the Rake's Progress makes clear society's belief that our choices determine our destiny; crossing a certain line in our "progress" can result in a poverty that we have for 100s of years associated with weakness and failure, a poverty of mind and soul that perhaps we still fear 200 years later.

Luke Richards – your pieces are magical. While you may regard them, and rightfully so, as a technical triumph, and useful, they are also beautiful. I admired them while someone else was in the gallery and we both marveled at how the light of the gallery made the fruit bowls appear to be flat rather than concave. With the way the light plays off the glass they are transfixing. Seemingly perfect on the surface, and stunning to look at. I was so inspired by the Reticello technique that I watched a video on how this is actually done. Quite remarkable. I am so pleased for you and impressed that you have developed such mastery in your technique during your studies here. Your contribution to our discussion about the power of human interface with art is obvious – you wanted these to be both functional and beautiful, and they are. Congratulations Luke.

Evan Wesolowski: I walked into the gallery before you had completed your installation and immediately wanted to interact with your pieces. I love the unadorned beauty of the blond wood you chose and the interesting design of the structures themselves. I had never considered mechanomorphic function but now that I see how you have framed it, I don't know why this has never occurred to me. We humans create tools and so they must have some of our qualities – how could they not – and then in a reflexive way they influence that way that our universe operates. What I loved about your pieces is that, just like people who create them, you cannot predict how they will function! And just like the people who create them, a thing of beauty does not always operate with grace. Sometimes machines and people are stiff; there is

tension and counterweight and noise and sometimes a thing of beauty operates in a clunky way. It is also an interesting idea to have a crank made of wood moderate drawing rather than simply have a human hand place pen to paper. You have made the fluid connection between your machines and humans tangible for me and I thoroughly enjoyed thinking about these ideas, Evan.

Alexandra Sarette: your Art History thesis is Confronting Bias: How we Display and Promote the Artistic Doxa Perpetuated by Museums.

You ask important questions about what we should share of an artist's life and what we should keep hidden in order for visitors to have the most educational experience. Should the issues of power and influence, cultural appropriation and gender bias, whitewashing and reinforcing the harsh racial stereotypes by colonizers in order to be accepted – all known in the works of the masters – be revealed to those who view this art? Would it add important context or would this context actually “ruin” the viewers experience of the art that historians so carefully curate? Are we that fragile? Is it sufficient to search for meaning in art through our own lens without considering the positionality of the creator? This seems like a very important decision. Your conclusion is that “We do not eliminate this history purposefully but rather because it has been taught for a long time in a certain way and it has created a system where we continue the legacy set forth by our historian predecessors which were straight, white, cis, men and while things are changing they are moving at a slow pace as all systemic issues do.” Actually this conclusion is consistent with sociological phenomenon found in many highly legitimized professions. It is an age old conundrum – you can’t shape the norms of a profession until you are accepted into that profession and others have written the rules about how you gain that acceptance. There will come a time when you can challenge the status quo. Keep asking the important questions, Alexandra. By doing so you will eventually write the draft of how you will move your profession forward.

Alyssa Cerar, we have seen in the work of your peers how our humanity is shaped by our lived experience. Your thesis entitled Otto Dix: A life Shaped by War provides us with a stark example of how our lived experience changes us. It also is a great example of how one man, Otto Dix, processed the horror of war by sharing that horror starkly with others through his art. He was compelled to tell his story in this way – was it really his choice? Perhaps the only way he could relieve himself of the nightmare was to treat himself as an empty vessel – holding but never accepting ownership of the suffering he witnessed. Were the graphic nature of his depictions truly necessary? I did not know Dix before reading your thesis so I looked at some additional examples of his work and it seems that his clear aim is to make us confront the sharp edges of our humanity. Maybe when we do we will be moved to change what we find

repugnant. Like other artists in this gallery today, he inspires us, but not with beauty. Thank you for sharing his story with us, Alyssa.

Finally, Congratulations Audrey Flour on winning the Outstanding Senior Thesis in Art History Award from the Semenenko Clark Fund for Excellence in Art and Art History. Your thesis on The Division of Race and Mental Illness Through Jacob Lawrence's Hospital Series is a thoughtful, well written work. Your description of Lawrence's initial work that reflected segregation, discrimination, white dominance, and the loss of voice for Black Americans was clear and revealing, and serves as a strong counterpoint to the art he created during and after his self-commitment to a mental hospital in the face of depression anxiety and guilt over his particular success as a Black artist. The center of his work becomes the treatment of all patients, no matter their color. By doing so he makes clear that all members of society can and do suffer discrimination. His shift from hostility to neutrality against white subjects was a potent vehicle for revealing the depth of human suffering in that context. In the mental hospital of his day, skin color was not what created low social standing. It was his disease. As we saw in Alixandra's work on the asylums of the 18th and 19th centuries, mental illness was the lowest common denominator for social standing. And so it seems to continue today....

Congratulations, Audrey. This was an interesting and well done treatment of Lawrence which helped me further explore the central question that I have seen present in most of the works of this years' class: our relationship to one another, and the forces – fear, stigma, bias, experience, context – that determine whether our human edges are razor sharp or soft and worthy of a generous embrace.

Your collective work has caused me to think deeply about our human condition. I am very much encouraged by what you have learned and how you are challenging all of us to continue to learn with you. Thank you for this!

I know that your Faculty in art and art history have made your progress possible. Your parents, families, and friends who have come here to celebrate your success have also made it possible, through their support for your art and study of the arts. The support of your faculty and family is a gift to all of us.

Whether you now make a living practicing art,
or make a living so you can practice art,
you will make our lives better through your work.

Finally - each year I send art and art history graduates off with four final assignments.

- **Assignment 1: keep practicing your art. The sensibilities that you have refined are now a gift to others.** You will help us to be more human by continuing to challenge us to see the world through your eyes. The more you create art the more you force the rest of us to think and talk and write about why your art matters.
- **Assignment #2, take a friend to a museum. Inspire them with art the way you see it.** You can open this world of inspiration to someone who will, in turn, open it to others.
- **Assignment #3, get involved in your local school district.** Wherever you live, and whether or not you have children. When the decision comes about what to cut from the school appropriations budget, decisions that are made every year, someone needs to be a vocal and informed advocate for the arts. When the moment comes, you may be the one to put your thumb on the scale of decision-making in a way that will save these valuable programs for future generations of students.
- **Finally, Assignment #4, step up and volunteer to serve on Boards for arts, civic, and educational organizations.** Boards can make, and they can break, privately funded services to the public that local, state, and federal governments and agencies cannot, or will not, provide. You may feel that you won't have enough money to contribute as a Board member, but no matter – you can begin by contributing your passion for the arts and do so in a way that will inspire others to give. The future of the Hartwick art program and programs like it, the future of museums around the world, the future of our culture rests upon your success in creating an appreciation for art among our children.

It is easy to expect this of you because I can see that you are ready. An unusual sense of grounded self-confidence emanates from your work.

Hartwick is proud of you. I hope that you will always be proud to be a Hartwick College graduate.

Congratulations.