



A R T
SLANT
PRIZE
2015



Shortlist Exhibition
Aqua Art Miami | Dec. 2 - 6, 2015

First Place | **Theresa Ganz**

Second Place | **Tina Tahir**

Third Place | **Rachel Garrard**

Student Prize | **Bryan Volta**

Honorable Mention | **Helena Parriott**

The ArtSlant Prize is a juried cash and exhibition award given to emerging artists within the ArtSlant Community who critically engage with contemporary culture.

ArtSlant would like to thank all participants, jurors and partners who helped make the 2015 prize possible.

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The ArtSlant Prize Shortlist Exhibition was produced by Joel Kuennen, Andrea Alessi, and Charlotte Jansen.



Glory and the Complex Body: *Theresa Ganz*

By Zachary Cahill

What happens to the figure-ground relation in the absence of a figure? Or if it lacks a representation of a body? Can a body be represented sans figure? Is there more than one way to formulate a body and depict it in a less iconic modality? Which is to say, can the body in all its complexity be represented at all, let alone be set against a “ground”?

The work of Theresa Ganz answers these questions in the affirmative. Hers is an art practice that deals with the complex body. Which might be understood as a body that is consubstantial with its background—the ground is the body and vice versa. In this sense Theresa Ganz is an environmental artist. Or: she is a landscape artist for the 21st century. A century where we now know empirically that human life is intricately woven into its environment. There is no standing out from the ground or apart from the environment. No creature feels this more acutely or is more symbolic of this situation than the ice-deprived polar bear whose physiognomy is rapidly changing due to the radical change in its environment. Animals all, we too are tied to the earth, and the figure-ground relation seems to have turned out to be something like an illusion in the face of global climate change.

If these observations echo certain strains of New Age Environmentalism they share an affinity with Ganz’s own stated interest in thinking about sacred space. In recent works Ganz takes the Ellora Cave temples in India as primary source material to generate her complexly layered photo-collages. Rather than focusing on the impressive temple structures at the holy



site, the artist chooses to examine the carved-out walls and the traces of handiwork that went into demarcating the human investment into the caves to create the sacred space. Ganz too is invested in creating something like sacred space, to dizzying effect, through her complex and compositionally rich photo-collages. The compositions make the word “photo-collage” seem like a wild misnomer when encountering the works themselves, which in their phenomenological scope and hyper-attention to detail could more rightly be understood as environments. The art, then, is not simply about picturing space but instead making the picture spatial.

This is no doubt an abstract circuit I am trying to describe. Put simply, it is the idea that an image makes a world and the world could be found in an image. With Theresa Ganz’s work there is always a shuttling back and forth between these two conceptions of space. This is the investment that constitutes what I’m calling the *complex body* and another way of articulating the breakdown of the figure-ground binary that recurs throughout the artist’s oeuvre.

Investment. A loaded term, to be sure, whenever we are discussing art, religion, or space. No doubt the Ellora temples required an astronomical investment. They are not simply temples but temples carved out of a mountain. It is almost impossible to imagine that level of an investment in labor and devotion. It is incalculable really. Incalculable. Investment is our contemporary secular equivalent for the divine. Something that surpasses our earthly ability to comprehend and defies human expression.

In his magisterial book *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben traces the relationship between the economy, the state, and the church’s use of ritual and proclamations by examining the incalculable phenomena of glory. Agamben proposes that glory is something like a tool

that makes use of divine power and describes the almost circular relationship between glory and glorification as it pertains to god and worshippers. Describing this operation Agamben writes:

the impossibility of increasing the inner glory of God translates into an unlimited expansion of external glorification by men...What cannot be increased—glory in the first sense of the term—demands an infinite increase of glory in the exterior and subjective sense.¹

In Agamben’s examination of the church/governmental apparatus of power we see that the figure-ground relationship in the concept of glory is likewise confused: god is glory but glory requires glorification by human subjects. Glorification creates excess in its striving to attain glory. This is the Baroque in its most basic articulation.

In her latest suite of works for Aqua Art Miami, Theresa Ganz turns her attention to the Baroque and glorification found in the palaces, castles, and estates located throughout Europe via the Google Cultural Institute. It is a street view tool that allows people, in something like three dimensions, to remotely and virtually walk through famed cultural institutions. The ornamentation present at places like Versailles, the Château de Fontainebleau, and the Schönbrunn Palace taps into glory or glorification. In these locales the focus of glorification has obviously been moved away from the church and turned towards imperial power and dynastic wealth. In this new body of work Ganz performs something like a *détournement* on the halls of power by rendering them kaleidoscopically abstract. By using the Google Cultural Institute as material and the keyboard as a tool for collage she is able to wrest the glory from its pro-

¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Governance (Homo Sacer II,2)*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). 216

cess of glorification. There is something democratic in the use of the Google technology. Today anyone can visit these sites virtually if they have access to a computer. But it's complicated, as Google is yet another kind of Rex—the most dominant search engine on the planet in the age of information.

Is Ganz's latest work a political gesture or commentary? Perhaps, but it feels more like wonder at the art and artisans that made the glorification possible. The artist's wonder finds its form in the re-articulation of these Baroque interiors. Where windows and walls become pure color and molding becomes lines in a vortex of abstraction. Figures get confused with grounds. Glory is uncoupled from glorification. A bright body emerges. Something that is at once angelic and demonic. The complex body, it turns out, is art.

Theresa Ganz was born in New York City in 1980. She earned her BA from Vassar College in Film and her MFA from San Francisco Art Institute in Photography. She works in photo-based collage and installation. Her work has shown nationally and internationally at, among others, The Datz Museum of Art in Korea, the Museum of Craft and Design in San Francisco, The Bell Gallery at Brown University and The John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Wisconsin and at various commercial spaces in New York and San Francisco. Her work has also been featured in print publications including *Mousse Magazine*, *Outpost Journal* and *Magazine Gitz*. She is a founding member and director at Regina Rex in Brooklyn. She currently resides in Providence, RI, where she is faculty at Brown University.



Images: Cover – *Panorama I*, 2015. Inkjet on Tyvek, 96" x 105" | P. 2-3 – *Museo Lázaro Galdiano I*, 2015. Archival pigment print, 14" x 14", Ed. 5 | P. 5 – *Serpentine III*, 2015. Archival pigment print 20" x 16", Ed. 5 | P. 9 – *Serpentine I*, 2015. Archival pigment print, 20" x 16", Ed. 5



Insecurity Over Permanence: Tina Tahir

By Stephanie Cristello

The rug is a sort of garden that can move across space.

—Michel Foucault

While the invention of the garden was a product of the Orient, its form is now widely replicated, adapted, and distributed across cultures. The forms it takes can be beautiful, or benign—from Japanese *karesansui* and perfectly manicured English courts to sterile pre-fabricated suburban lots, with conventional evergreens growing against cement paths.

The first carpet was invented in an attempt to recreate the garden. In its earliest iterations, the rug transposed the idea of outdoor perfection into a domestic and utilitarian object—the traditional Persian design capitalized on its representation of sacred elements, with fountains and flora depicted in harmonious and symmetrical flourishes. The carpet was a visual essay containing the perfection of the world within a rectangle.

The aspirations of the carpet were not far off from the goals of modernist painting. The difference lies in the motivations between symbolism and optics, respectively; where the Oriental rug represented icons through illustration, the modernists relied on the responsive eye. For Foucault, this may have been seen as a similar practice to achieving “other spaces”—heterotopias each defined by their own set of expectations, reflecting the world back to the viewer in parallel ways.

The work of Tina Tahir falls somewhere in between these two processes, picturing the slippage of representation through

gorgeous and ornate stencil installations made out of precarious materials. Often installed directly onto the floor, Tahir's tapestry-like drawings trace patterns out of spices, glitter, gold dust, and powdered toxic leaves. In an exhibition context, the fragility of the drawings is evident in the slight imperfections of the tracings that collect over time, the smudges and flaws acting as minor invasions on the otherwise perfectly outlined surface of the work.

In many ways, the precariousness of the final pattern—a formal design as stable as a wisp of smoke—secularizes the origins of the Oriental rug, foregrounding a very material awareness to an otherwise symbolic object. Yet, there is something magical that remains of the experience of Tahir's installations. Though architectural, their placement directly on the ground never quite feels *part* of the architecture, but instead hovers in space. Is this the residual image of the magic carpet promoted by exoticism? Or, perhaps, is the suspension of the image achieved through its all-over treatment, more of a modernist trick of optics? Tahir's practice straddles these boundaries, between Romantic and Modern theologies, never quite taking sides. While the pieces can be seen as coming from decorative origins, this association becomes thinner the more one attempts to equate pattern with mere ornamental dealings. The means may belong to a decorative sensibility, yet the inherent misuse of form in Tahir's work—which favors an insecure installation over permanence—promotes a sort of anxiety, which seeps into what could be perceived as an otherwise certain narrative—that of representation.

If the woven representation of the garden and the painting on a woven rectangle had the same ambition—to contain a spiritual experience within clearly defined borders—what then exists within Tahir's rectangles? The success of Tahir's project lies in this unanswered question, which does not disavow either the transcendent or physical potentials of visual pattern, but

instead support the concept that—like a garden—the work can possess both a secretive and public quality, all at once.



Tina Tahir is a Chicago-based artist who works in a variety of media. Her work explores the concepts of ephemerality, entropy, and destruction. She has recently received the 2015 Art-Slant juried showcase award in the categories for installation, drawing, and new-media, and was selected for the Banff Artist in Residence (BAiR) New Materiality program. Her group shows include, *Double Cherry* at Threewalls, *A strange house in my voice* at Gallery 400, *Front and Center* at the Hyde Park Art Center, all in Chicago, IL, as well as *How to Disappear* at Paul Watkins Gallery, Winona, MN, *Erasure* at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse, WI, and *Shadows* at SCA Contemporary Art & Artlab, Albuquerque, NM. Tahir received an MFA in Studio Arts from the University of Illinois at Chicago and an MA in Visual and Critical Studies from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Images: P. 10 – 44.048280, -91.644352, 2014. Soil, 6' x 18' | P. 13 – 41.8036°, -87.5869° (*detail*), 2015. Spices and pigments, 40" x 40", 60" x 40"



The Peaks Only I Can See: *Rachel Garrard*

By Himali Singh Soin

The Vitruvian Man looks, on one hand, like an anatomical drawing of weight and balance, and on the other, like a tree, a constellation, a system of before and after, a ladder or a scale. The criss-crossing lines perhaps allude to earthly entanglements and the elusiveness of total symmetry. Like the drawing, its analysis might be equally simple and complex.

It is no wonder then, that Da Vinci is one of Rachel Garrard's influences. In her art, the human body and mind and the unseeable unknown become a microcosm of the universe. Garrard's pigments pulse with the pressure of all of its parts at once. In *Invisible Structures*, she draws a series of ten imaginary cosmologies, geometric diagrams, with gold ink over black and white photographs of her body. The title implies that the drawings are almost inevitable, simply X-ray exposures of what might already exist. The gold acts as the sun, an object and idea of reverence in the Mayan cultures, one of the many sources of her inspiration. The use of her own body, of the female form within the male structures of mathematics, is a formal insistence on multiple perspectives. Garrard says:

They are inspired by the ancient idea that the body contains within its proportions all the geometric and geodesic measures in the universe, and many cultures have depicted maps of the universe inside a human form (often female). My maps are inspired conceptually by these historical references, but entirely made up through my own imagination and intuition.

The artist's influences span Einstein and the Dalai Lama. Garrard quotes Anselm Keifer: "I'm interested in reconstructing symbols. It's about connecting with an older knowledge and

trying to discover continuities in why we search for heaven.” She traveled to Central and South America, collecting rocks and grinding them into powder that became pigment. The result is the opposite of landscape. It comprises the hard corners of human intelligence, geometry overlain in several hues such that the paintings seem to move, to elude, to bear breath of their own.

Her series of eleven paintings, *The Peaks Only I Can See*, utilizes ash from the fire of a Temazcal ceremony in the Yucatán region of Mexico, in which lava rocks are heated inside a dome-shaped Temazcal, or sweat lodge, a kind of holistic curative sauna. The paintings are a series of triangles both in harmony and in opposition to each other. They evoke imagery from ancient cosmological drawings and refer to the avant-garde machines of geometric abstraction and futurism but contain an immediacy that counters any impulse to historicize. Here, everything exists at once. The titles enhance a feeling of movement by providing a sense of narrative: *Follow > Reach > Entrance > Hollow > Nave > Inside > Draw > Ascent > Precipitate*. These words might imply the literal process of traveling from the ceremony to the culmination of the artwork, or might be read as a process of inner upheaval, a re-directioning, a transcendental moment and a re-emergence into a reality as she never knew it.

Condensations utilizes quartz and powdered ash to recreate the earthly drama of light and shadow, form and fluid. *Condensations* is also imbued with process: the travel, the collection of minerals, the grinding, the watering down, painting, washing, drying. It is precise and arbitrary, delicate and dangerous. The ash, after all, has emerged from fire, the quartz from silicon. In this subtle symbolism is a reference to inward process, a search for materials, a drawing. Garrard explains, “They convey energy and the dynamic integration of opposites, light and shadow, male and female, manifest and un-manifest.”

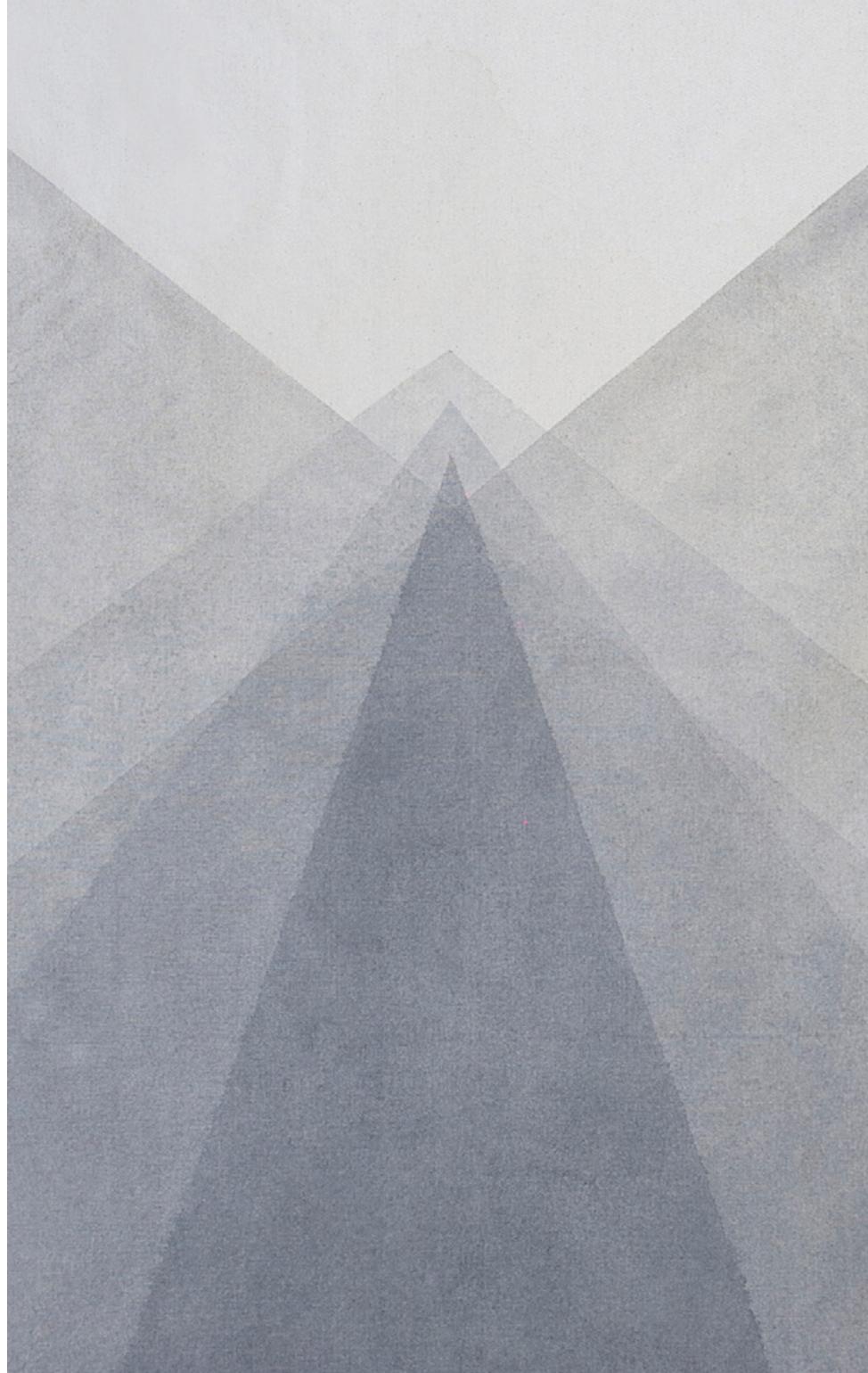
Like *The Peaks Only I Can See*, the works in *Condensations* contain a reference to a spiritual journey of a consciousness trying to navigate the systems and speed of modernity. The titles progress similarly: *Refraction > Inset > Influx > Convergence > Junction > Succession > Solidify > Reflect > Parallax > Cumulate > Pierce*. Here, the easy pattern breaks and the words play between independent phenomena and voluntary action. The titles are waves of hard and soft consonants shoring up against each other, skewing their own perception, altering meaning, accumulating impressions like the idea of parallax itself.

There is a sense in Rachel Garrard’s work that it is about everything, occurring at the same time, everywhere. It is internal and external, dark and light, it is feminine and masculine, organic and synthetic, large and small, bright and anodyne, personal and universal, invisible and omnipresent. But more than this dance of dualities, is the uninterrupted in-between: the process, the medium, multiplicity. Garrard quotes Buddhist Thinley Norbu: “Any substance that comes into existence is already perishing, all substance is continually beginning and ending within each instance.”

Her art is anatomical and topographical at once. Its analysis is equally simple and complex.

Rachel Garrard was born in 1984 in Devon, England, and currently lives and works in New York. While completing her graduate studies at Central Saint Martins in 2009, she gained recognition for performance-based refracted-video works such as *Circuition* (2009), and *Seven Transmutations* (2010). Garrard was awarded artist residencies at the Atacama Telescope Farm in Chile in 2011, and the Center for the Holographic Arts at Ohio State University in 2012. Her recent work, which has grown to encompass video, performance, drawing, sculpture, painting and printmaking, has been exhibited nationally in curated group exhibitions at venues such as Participant Inc., New York, Eyebeam, New York, Jack Hanley Gallery, New York, Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Los Angeles, the National Academy Museum, New York and Tanja Grunert Gallery, New York. Garrard's work has also been exhibited internationally at the Lille Métropole Musée d'Art Moderne, France, Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City, Yota Space Digital Arts Festival, St Petersburg, Ambika P3, London, Shizaru Gallery, London and Apartment Gallery, Berlin. She has been the subject of solo exhibitions in both New York and Miami.

Images: P. 14 – *Finally*, 2015. Rock powder pigment on linen, 22" x 34" |
P. 19 – *Nave*, 2015. Ash on canvas, 32" x 34"



Chicken Scratching the Surface: Bryan Volta

By James Pepper Kelly

Bryan Volta works hard to undermine the body. His primary tool for getting the job done is a hydraulic breaker attachment, the type construction crews use to quickly demolish large stretches of concrete. Volta's life-size model, unlike the version available from Caterpillar, is entirely plastic, from the extended shaft back to the industrial-scale bolts. Also, spectacularly, it is covered in chicken feet. The resin-based obtrusions flail out in all directions, curled and splayed.

Volta's tool is absurd but not funny. It references the most comically inclined animal and twisted shaming rituals—instead of being feathered it has been “footed”—but judging by the black stain that covers the breaker's first third, it hasn't lost any of its efficacy, despite the mystery of its utilization.

The obvious partner for the breaker is a slumping oil drum, though the point of entry that allowed for the stain remains invisible. Volta has recast the drum as art by firing it in a kiln, a process that has roughened its surface into a damaged patina. Like the “footing,” this is another semi-comic conversion with an understated connection to potential violence. The breaker speaks to a ritual of non-normative shaming, the drum to the chance of a pressure-fueled explosion.

One of Volta's recurrent strategies is to invert the traditional value structure of materials. Underneath the breaker is a metal plinth; the centerpiece, the tool itself, is plastic; the chicken feet, sprouting on all sides, are resin. The flower-like adornments, composed of the “lowest” material, assume the highest

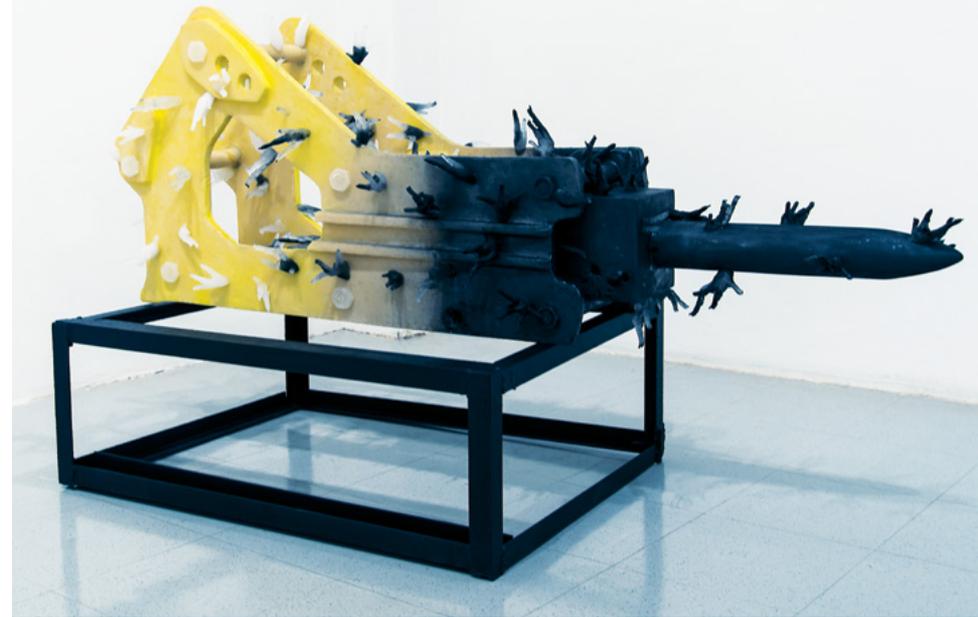


honorific placement. The tool has been decorated, stained, and alienated from its industrial significance. Volta approaches the drum with a similar process, shifting it from a sign of commodity to an art object—a standard contemporary critique—and, more notably, changing it from weighty to comical. The works obtain an indeterminate status between industrial and art objects, between power and slapstick.

This indeterminacy also applies to the gender implications of the works. Alongside the breaker's obvious masculine, phallic nature, the drum acquires a feminine, yonic status (circular, tied to liquid, impenetrably mysterious). Volta's interventions destabilize the imagined ideals of the gender binary without, quite literally, diminishing their ability to perform. They may not look as expected, but they very much get the job done.

It's probably more accurate to say "a" job rather than "the" job, considering the destruction of the objects' symbolic statuses. In a summarizing gesture towards mocking the notion of a classical artistic ideal, Volta has also created a mangled hand. This is a cast of his own hand that has been altered, recast, and altered again. This is another clear destabilization, a challenge to sculptures of bodily ideals, and to the notion of perfect bodies as a whole. It's also a challenge to the stereotype of the Artist, filled with pretensions of masterful control. The works themselves will triumph in the end, intentions be what they may. It's a lesson worth remembering that stretches back to the story of Pygmalion.

Humor in art isn't easy, especially humor that resists one-liner reductionism. Volta's enigmatic constructions exist in a similar category with Salvador Dali's *Lobster Phone*, restoring immediacy to the banal by taking advantage of our unexamined assumptions. The true job of these objects is to break up how we move through the world.



Bryan Volta is currently an MFA candidate at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ, and holds a BFA *Summa Cum Laude* from University of Illinois, Chicago. In 2015, he was awarded the LAUNCH Invitational Residency, UIC Faculty Award for Art, the Kate Neal Kinley Memorial Fellowship, and the Honors College Research Grant. His interest in human psychology stems in part from his career as a sleep technologist conducting research on nocturnal human behavior. His experiences have given him insight into how we connect with both objects and others in a physical and psychological manner. He is fascinated by the way relationships with secondary bodies become distorted perversions of their sources and he creates objects and images that explore the plasticity of reality. His works allude to gruesome acts, death, or pleasure that reflect on the mutability of the senses in both body and mind.

Image: P. 20 – *Harlequin Type*, 2015. Annealed steel, 14.25" x 14.25" x 19" | P. 23 – *Haptic Contingency*, 2015. Plastic, wood, resin, steel, paint, 36" x 30" x 68"

ArtSlant is a multimedia platform committed to providing a social perspective on art. Founded in Los Angeles in 2007 by the late Georgia Fee, ArtSlant aims to bridge the gaps between the art world, its media, and the community. Art is intertwined with our shared human experience and is a fundamental force for galvanizing sincere communal action; for that reason, we believe in supporting art that relates to today's most crucial issues, from racial, social, economic, and gender inequalities to environmental concerns.

We support our network of emerging and mid-career artists with our online magazine, the Georgia Fee Artist | Writer Residency and the ArtSlant Prize.

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