



card design by Carol Anne McChrystal

curated by Sarrita Hunn

# SNAP, CRACKLE, POP

curated by Sarrita Hunn

*March 30th - April 12th*

*Opening reception: March 30, 6–9 p.m.*

exhibition work by:

Stacey Beach

Susan Chen

James Chronister

Sally Elesby

Linda Geary

Jennifer Mattson

Carol Anne McChrystal

Mitzi Pederson

Dan Reneau

Laurel Voss

Liz Walsh

catalog essays by:

Michael Bianco

Zoe Taleporos

Nancy Zastudil

**PLAySPACE**

**California College of the Arts**

**1111 8th Street SF, CA 94107**

## Introduction

This show was curated by gathering artists who I have been part of a common conversation with at CCA over the past few years. My primary motivation was to highlight an ongoing dialogue about painting that has been invaluable to my own practice (and many others) that has not previously been presented.

In general, I believe that one can talk about any artwork that has a relationship to the history of painting, as painting, but proclaiming painting's simultaneous death and triumph actually speaks more to its inherent self-awareness, if not flat-out self-criticality, and consequentially its continuous reinvention. These artists engage the idea that there is something specific about painting that is related to, but no longer framed purely by its materiality. Their works present a range of those possibilities, pushing both materially and conceptually what can be considered as painting. These works are both aware of themselves as objects and conscious of their relationship to the viewer, and here these artists explore the possibility of redefining the physical, representational, and conceptual space between the two. Whether real or psychological space, an imagined world, or through manipulating physical space, each of these artists uses the mode of painting to explore a specific spatial frontier.

**Stacey Beach** uses the empty canvas to imply vast spaces and intricate patterns to break that space back up into layers. **Susan Chen's** video projections are multi layered surrealistic worlds manifesting from the collective unconscious myths which dwell in our inner psyche. **James Chronister** presents the world as it is presented to us through commercial imagery, then folded back on itself through the process of representation. **Sally Elesby** cuts space with wires and displays it in all its colorful glory. **Linda Geary's** fantastical abstract worlds defy scale and question our relationship to it. **Jennifer Mattson** uses paint as a material to form objects in the round. **Carol Anne McChrystal** glides between object and surface, forcing us to consider every side of each piece as a whole. **Mitzi Pederson** plays with our perception, warping everyday materials to reveal their subtle aesthetic qualities. **Dan Reneau's** graphic explosions reflect our world and locate our place within it. **Laurel Voss** intricately draws out imagined worlds and the creatures that inhabit them. **Liz Walsh** creates environments that we can interact with through sight and sound.

For these artists, painting is a strategy through which these varied worlds can be navigated, not through a set of medium specific or formal qualities, but as a shared method to explore and exploit these realizations and representations. However, I do not wish to overly prescribe here 'what it all means' or 'what might happen', but wish to see what questions and insights arise when the works are allowed to speak for themselves.

-Sarrita Hunn



## Stacey Beach

Originally from the antiquated countryside of upstate New York, Beach has migrated to San Francisco where she melds materials and forms to create her contemporary patterned landscapes. Her studio is located between the Mission and Potrero Hill in a small house encrusted with a Victorian façade. Ironically, the decoration and location of her studio is accurately descriptive of her paintings as well. Located some-

where between “high art” and fashion design, Beach’s work is emblematic of a new era in contemporary painting where pastiche is primary.

She appropriates and augments organic based patterns that she collects from sources that range from Vogue magazine to Art Nouveau illustrations. She then translates the designs into stencils, and applies them to her canvas with paint, ink, and galkyd. In the void of a traditional landscape are the essential figures for focus: the pattern. For Beach, pattern is “comfort, excess, void, emptiness, and promise all at the same time” and exists not only as decoration, but as Beach’s perception of landscape as well. Like Richard Diebenkorn’s Ocean Park series where geometry and color are employed to create a landscape of feeling over form, Beach utilizes the palette and design of fashion to create her landscapes of serenity.

In Beach’s own words, the employment of humor in her titles is important to “not let any of my work be read as Painting with a capital P.” Beach is not interested in the hierarchy of artistic distinction, but rather the effect of her work on the viewer’s experience. Beach is at the forefront of a new movement in landscape painting, and like many of her west coast contemporaries in the “post-mortem” era of painting, she is dedicated to an artistic practice of producing beauty and joy over somber commodity.

-Michael Bianco



## Susan Chen

Susan Chen’s paintings are intimidating in their process yet intimate in their presentation. Her small dioramas, coupled with a painted background, contain handmade objects or curious trinkets gathered from thrift stores; these often reference haunting romanticism, fantastic horror, and science fiction. Chen further complicates the already engaging visual landscapes of her built environments by exploring them with a digital video camera. The viewer accompanies her while she literally “works” her way through an investigation of a sublime visual frontier, thus encouraging a tension between the real and the imagined, the lavish and the desolate.

-Nancy Zastudil



### James Chronister

Painting as a primary medium has reached a key state of flux wherein the act itself becomes self-critical. As a form, painting has to take on conceptual modes in order to deem itself valid in an art world that favors other practices. Resulting is often a re-examining of the material itself, a focus on the application of paint to canvas and a basic analysis of building upon a surface. Thus, the idea of surface as it

relates to imagery opens itself to a myriad of definitions raging from the literal to the metaphorical.

The pictures James Chronister chooses to render comment on our culture's fascination with kitsch imagery. Whether searching the record store for the most ridiculous record cover of a 1980s hair band or thumbing through sentimental calendar photos of angelic kittens, Chronister finds the images most devoid of high art depth. Often using a monochromatic palette, the paintings are created through a process of layering to create tonality. The idea of the facade and the superficial thus become central in lending the images depth in both the physical and metaphorical sense.

Throughout the progression of Chronister's work is the theme of the 'surface' represented thematically as well as in practical execution. The paintings lend themselves to exposure of process; the technique and labor involved in actualizing the work is made consciously apparent. A photorealistic painting of a forest is bared of the grid used to render it, making the viewer aware of the artist's tricks to realize such illusion of space. In doing so, Chronister is no longer positing the image of the forest as the work, but rather the dual critique of both the image and the technique used in its creation.

-Zoe Taleporos



### Sally Elesby

Sally Elesby makes paintings out of fragile painted wire. She explores attitudes of inherent form with these painted configurations, and each wire piece stretches and twists to illustrate possible contorted results of decoration. Her commitment to and celebration of painting is evident in her exploration of color and material as adornments. Even in these seemingly delicate works, she is directly presenting the actuality and physicality of paint and object. Elesby's work demands an attention beyond its scale by maintaining a direct rather than coy position, thus pointing to larger concerns and implications of representation.

-Nancy Zastudil



**Linda Geary**

Linda Geary currently takes inspiration from the Sieneese palette, using a combination of acrylic, watercolor, and airbrush. She continues to investigate color relationships and orientations that lend themselves to suggestions of landscape. While certain elements compose the “background” of the painting, they also serve as a backdrop for where she stands in her art practice: incorporating larger painting surfaces and playing with perceptual tension between large and small scale abstract imagery. Geary welcomes the viewer into her work, offering the painted field as a familiar yet abstracted space to enter and traverse.

-Nancy Zastudil



**Jennifer Mattson**

At the foundation of Mattson’s work is one of the distinctive questions of modernist painting: What is the structure, both physical and contextual, that need be present for a painting to exist, and to distinguish itself from sculpture? Ironically, Mattson’s seemingly sculptural works exist more about the material and less about space, and therefore hyper-painterly.

Her process begins by pouring pools of acrylic paint onto a large glass slab to dry. She then adds gestures and designs in additional layers of paint until she is left with a solid sheet of malleable acrylic. At this point in her process Mattson takes the modernist moment of the “drip and pour” on the surface of the painting and unites them into the surface and painting as one. She takes her large patterned sheets of plastic and physically wraps them around stretcher bars, or drapes them over rods protruding from the wall. In both instances the material presents its physicality in its struggle against gravity and control, a layer of presentation that can only be suggested in the gesticulation of a brush.

One can’t help but think of the array of vibrant hues and metallic folds in the sculpture of John Chamberlain when looking at Mattson’s work. But where Chamberlain’s work seems more like paint on sculpture, Mattson unites the two into a plastic array of color. The chaotic psycho-geographic nature of her paintings suggests a landscape where neither sculpture nor painting exist autonomously from each other, but coexist harmoniously.

-Michael Bianco



## Carol Anne McChrystal

Influenced by the polar juxtaposition of teen pulp imagery and modernist ideology, the work of Carol Anne McChrystal induces intricate readings as well as indulgent consumption. Employing dichotomies of painting versus sculpture, high art versus low, the viewer is at once made aware of the problematic contradictions and seduced by them. A constant layering both in physical and conceptual forms cre-

ates a hypertext, a back-story to investigate, and an incentive to discover the cultural influences behind the work. 1970s science fiction films like *Barbarella* or *Logan's Run* and teen pulp novel covers are effortlessly blended with modernist concepts to form a highly sophisticated body of work that is also refreshingly fun to view.

The orientation of the viewer to the work further plays with the concepts of dimensionality. Conventions of looking at an object or painting are exploited by challenging the viewer to consider the work's simultaneous contingency and autonomy to the gallery's walls and structure. The work invites examination from several visual points creating a tension within distance and spatial surroundings. McChrystal's large Styrofoam images lean against the wall encouraging one to explore not only the surface but also the structure that supports it. This arrangement conjures up the traditional conceptual argument that the work is neither painting nor sculpture since it is not hanging or free standing. However, there is a duality in this reading of the work. By physically distancing oneself from the image and considering it close up, a critical evaluation of the image itself occurs and comments on the need to separate from the glossy exterior of popular imagery in order to enable deconstruction.

The materials and how McChrystal uses them are integral to the meaning of the work. Crafty pink Styrofoam and glittery felts held up by hatpins all draw attention to the methods of a fragile construction. The labor involved in piecing things together or carving them out is made evident to illuminate the concept of an image or object as a surface. It is in this way that McChrystal's work can be considered in the realm of painting. However, the nature of the work defies such classification as it strives towards an ambiguity in dialectical matters.

-Zoe Taleporos



## Mitzi Pederson

In a hyperactive age of digital mediation one is often lost in the virtual world, and disengaged with the intricacies of daily life. The textures of the urban landscape become secondary to the fabric of cyberspace, and the delicate splendor of the modest becomes ignored and routine. It is in this moment that Mitzi Pederson finds the phenomenology of the mundane and the celebration of the incidental.

Pederson's work ranges from photocopies to cinderblock constructions, and while she is utilizing the materials of the industrial world, she is in fact finding the organic forms that can occur within them. Juxtaposition of material is fundamental to Pederson's work. Torn plywood, severed cinderblocks, and violent gestures of spilled and sprayed color on paper are all adorned with the twinkle of glitter. Pederson sees a glimmer of beauty in the rips and blurs found in our manufactured landscape, and highlights them for us with various shades of glistening sparkles. Her work oscillates between dimensions, finding the balance of drawing in various states of space. Landscapes, Rorschachs, and Spin-Tees all come to mind when looking at Pederson's work, and in this trilogy of synonyms one can perhaps find the beauty, complexity, and playful qualities that occur in her practice.

Like the concrete cubes of her sculpture, Peterson is the next building block in a lineage of post-minimalist artist. Resembling those who came before her, like Richard Tuttle and Tony Feher, Peterson reminds us that art and beauty need not only be found in the tranquility of the gallery space, but in the utter disarray of a demolition site as well.

-Michael Bianco



**Dan Reneau**

Dan Reneau's work materializes in either painting or sculpture, or in a combination of the two. Pre-set Pantone colors used in design software programs determine his palette while conversation bubbles, starbursts, and directional signs influence his form. He is interested in the mass uniformity perpetuated by the use of these supposed individual choices. Reneau repositions these modes of expression and subverts their quick and easy methods by translating them into the labor and language of painting. Combining influences from recent art historical context as well as current modes of digital visual production, his work offers a selective presentation of what color, form, and media can do.

-Nancy Zastudil



**Laurel Voss**

For Laurel Voss, the methodology of Victorian design is at the conceptual foundation of her artistic practice. As a graduate student, Voss found inspiration for her work in David Spalding's book *The Artificial Kingdom*, a text that helped her reframe the classical uses of embellished pattern as a means for her contemporary production.

In Voss's work pattern is utilized to inspire feelings of nature, but of the bowel and not the botanical. Her works on canvas are cluttered assemblages of subdued tones and protruding synthetic leaflets that congeal into a formal use of layer and pattern strategically employed to overwhelm the viewer. These works in turn inform her sculptural practice, which fluctuates between the wall and the floor, painting and sculpture. Here, poured and peeled paint is used as a sculptural base, and mycological forms seem to magically emerge from its synthetic surface. It is from this symbiotic relationship of space and surface that Voss creates her most compelling work of large-scale wall pieces. Similar to her intention to overwhelm the viewer with pattern, Voss aims to dominate architecture with large organic forms that inhabit her wall paintings. Her murals create a claustrophobic and surreal scene of corporal inner space. She instinctually creates forms that resemble plush mitochondrion, latex arteries, and puffy micro-biotic parasites to inhabit the simulated space. These large landscapes of pink and purple intestinal forms evoke the haptic sensation of squirming inside a grotesquely erotic carcass.

Like the inevitable decay of her flesh, Voss encourages the deterioration of her work as well. By using non-archival materials, Voss intends to create worlds that not only evoke an uncomfortable inner landscape of the viewer's body, but the undeniable mortality of it as well.

-Michael Bianco



## Liz Walsh

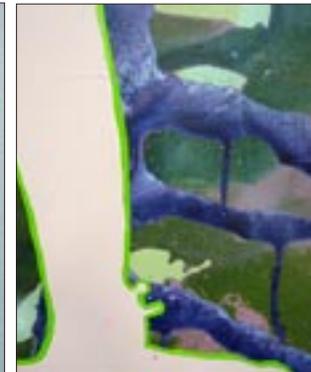
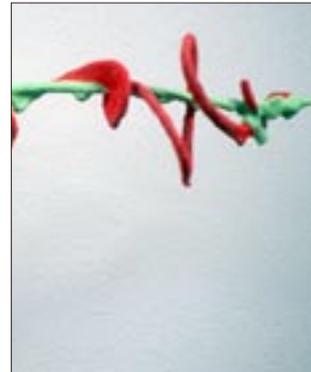
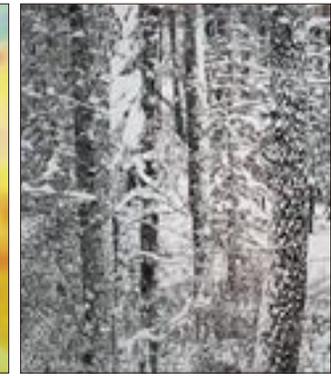
When presented with an image, one is able to construct a narrative that is entirely unique to a personal imagination. Classically, painting offers images connected with stories and through the act of viewing we are able to immerse ourselves in other worlds. The work of Liz Walsh takes this concept to another level wherein the viewer is integral to the formation of the work by becoming part of it entirely. There

is no longer a separation between the constructed and the real as the viewer's existence becomes the narrative.

Working with a variety of mediums ranging from sound, video, painting, sculpture and installation, Walsh creates environments reminiscent of landscapes that call for participant intervention. Microphones on architectural constructions invite the viewer to create the soundtrack to a video. Mirrors partially covered with loosely dripped paint slyly refer to the convention of painting while presenting a pictorial surface that is in constant flux.

Constantly referring to the material of paint, Walsh explores the boundaries between three dimensional painting and sculpture. Paint is simultaneously used for its material qualities and color, yet the intention behind the work often relates to a

-Zoe Taleporos



Many thanks  
to everyone who  
made this project  
possible!

-Sarrita