

THE FARTHEST PLANE: Explorations in Abstraction

Atrium Gallery, School of Art, Ball State University / Aug 25 – Sept 23, 2015

DISSEMBLING THE PLANE / Hannah Barnes & Heidi Jensen

"The farthest plane" is a concept formed by Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll. "It is only visual space that brings with it a horizon, beyond which all objects appear on the same plane, as sun, moon, and stars appear to the untrained human eye equally far away from us, all located in a single field. The farthest plane is the limit of the animal world, the outer wall of the soap-bubble which surrounds all living things, from the level of the cell up. The farthest plane, the limit-horizon, which for humans, Uexküll claims, is around six kilometers, is for a fly maybe half a meter."

This exhibition features work by five artists: Rachel Hellmann, Sage Lewis, Sara Jones, Justin Quinn and Joshua Welker. The title "The Farthest Plane" brings to mind categories of space that are beyond what might be naturally or easily perceived. The farthest plane flattens form, and exists at the very edge of the three-dimensional world we inhabit.

The artists in this show share an occupation with space, perception, planes of space that shift, tilt, torque, fade and rise. Abstract and non-objective languages, for which there is no direct verbal equivalent, no quick identification, are at play in this work. Each artist also shares an interest in disruption as a strategy of inviting acute perceptual awareness. As viewers we are asked to carefully examine and reexamine objects and their conditions.

A controlled hand is present in the works of Sara Jones and Rachel Hellman. Subtle angles are carefully and sensitively placed, lines both painted and physical stretch, divide and demarcate areas. Saturated colors coat shapes and create complex spatial dynamics. Painting is extended into sculpture. Rachel's work emphasizes the plane as a condition of perception. Her shaped panels shift and morph endlessly as the viewer inspects them from different distances and vantage points.

In Jones's work, the plane serves as a reference to both architecture and the conditions of painting. In her paintings on panel, architecture is re-envisioned as space riddled with apertures, gaps, portals, and spatial contradictions. Delicate thread punctures receding planes; artificial veneer is layered alongside raw plywood, playfully pointing toward the strange loops of illusion that characterize painting.

Sage Lewis creates works that bridge drawing and photographic processes. Lewis approaches the photographic lens as something like a prosthesis – a mechanical extension of the body's perceptual limits – and the photographic print as an extension of mark making. Her images reference forms that are residual: shards, fragments, slits, fissures. She employs veiling, both literal and illusionistic, in order to

point toward the fallibility of perception. Lewis shares with Jones a concern for architecture as something unstable and shifting, "an illusion of spatial certainty."

Justin Quinn's drawings and sculptures also allude to themes of architecture and construction. His drawings depict complex structures that result from the accumulation and repetition of material and mark. The letter E, approached as mark, transforms from a unit of language into an abstract structural building block. His paper collages, like architectural elevations, also hint at layering as a process of dissemblance. Bits of once-recognizable imagery and language are fragmented, concealed, and transformed, inviting the viewer to consider spaces and conditions where meaning's certainty breaks down.

In Joshua Welker's work, the plane serves as a substrate for processes of accretion and destruction. Familiar materials such as concrete, marble, and plaster clot together and organize into textured planes that shift and turn in space. Accumulations of material hide and reveal their armatures. In his floor piece, cast concrete sections group together to form a tapered plane that echoes the angular space of the gallery and alludes to fragmentation. Along with Jones's gouache studies of architectural footprints, the concrete piece speaks to the displacement and layering of one space within another.

Elizabeth Grosz explains that "there are no stable objects, equally and always perceived in the same way for all living things; no one sun, moon, or stars, just as there is no single space or field, time or rhythm, no universal within which we can locate all living things." Together, these artists' works offer a diverse investigation of perception's unstable nature, pointing us toward the farthest plane and beyond.