WE TELL OURSELVES STORIES IN ORDER TO LIVE

Museum of Contemporary Craft
in partnership with Pacific Northwest College of Art
The Ford Family Foundation is pleased to share the news that, in 2013, we expanded our family of Hallie Ford Fellows in the Visual Arts with the selection of Mike Bray, Cynthia Lahti and D.E. May. Like our nine previous Hallie Ford Fellows (Sang-ah Choi, Bruce Conkle, Daniel Duford, David Eckard, Stephen Hayes, Ellen Lesperance, Akihiko Miyoshi, Michelle Ross and Heidi Schwegler), these three artists were selected after an in-depth review conducted by a jury of regional and national arts professionals.

In addition to providing fellowship support directly to Oregon, mid-career, visual artists, we also aim to increase the opportunity for others to learn about and appreciate the work of these artists. Therefore, in 2013, the Foundation co-sponsored (in partnership with other supporters) the launch of a traveling exhibition of the work of the Hallie Ford Fellows, curated by independent curator Cassandra Coblentz and organized by the Museum of Contemporary Craft, Oregon. The exhibition, *We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live*, originated with the Museum of Contemporary Craft and has traveled both in- and out-of-state to venues in diverse communities. The exhibition is accompanied by a beautiful and richly descriptive catalogue and two supplemental brochures featuring the artists and their work.

Upon the selection of our 2013 Fellows, Cassandra Coblentz conducted studio visits with each of the new Fellows to identify some of their pieces to incorporate into the existing exhibition as it travels to more venues through December 2014.

This supplement to the original catalogue captures the 2013 Fellows through their works and their words. We hope you enjoy seeing all of the Fellows’ work in person and that you appreciate reading about what inspires their creativity. Each has a distinctive voice. Each has a personal vision of the world around them. Yet all are driven to communicate their essential truths using the visual form.

We are pleased with the progress to date of our Visual Arts Program, established in 2010, and are honored to be associated with these twelve excellent artists. We remain committed to helping to advance the efforts and exposure of Oregon’s mid-career visual artists who are actively producing new work in the fields of fine art and contemporary craft.

**Anne C. Kubisch**
President, The Ford Family Foundation
IN CONVERSATION WITH THE CURATOR

CASSANDRA COBLENZ: Do you consider storytelling and narrative in your work? If so, how do you think about it?

MIKE BRAY: The starting point for my work is always something cinematic. So, the narrative inherently is embedded in some of the sources that I’m responding to. I’ll pick a narrative or a film like Blowup, Jaws, or The Shining, or a film that comes with a narrative and history and a set of ideas. I then dissect and take apart that narrative to understand how it’s constructed. The deconstruction of the narrative, perhaps, is how I use it most.

CC: Is it important to you that the narrative is something that people recognize? This idea of a narrative being recognizable and perhaps relatable plays into one of the topics that I’ve been looking at for the exhibition: questions around the idiosyncratic versus the universal. How do these ideas play out for you?

MB: When I make my work, there are occasions when I pick a source that’s extremely well known so that the audience can tap into that starting point and understand what they know of that cinematic moment and then they can respond to films I’ve made. But at the same time, I try to make my work operate formally... formally and outside of the narrative elements, because I want the work to operate on one level as formal moments and on another level that captures those narrative references, and add something else to what I’m constructing.

I lead the audience in with titling and other hints. I think of it as universal themes, such as our relationship with the spectacle and our ability to fall into and believe in cinema. I’m interested in ideas like how DeBeers used How to Marry a Millionaire to connect love to the size or the scale of the diamond. I think cinema is an amazing vessel that has taught us how to have relationships and experiences. It’s a universal relationship, but the pieces that I make don’t always tap into the really well-known narratives, but the narratives or the ideas that are happening in them are teasing out some of the ideas that are just under the surface of what I’ve made.

CC: Questions around reality and fiction are a key theme in this exhibition. How do you challenge viewers’ perceptions of what is real or true or what is not in your work, and is this important for you?

MB: Yes, absolutely. That’s actually a crux of my work. In it, I jump from 2D to 3D, from one media to a moving image, or sometimes to a place in between. I use loops, for instance, a lot. I think of a loop not quite as a video but more like a long photograph. Showing the repetition, you can see everything that happens, but it still moves in a cinematic way. The reason I jump through those mediums started with me thinking about trust and how you can trust those things. Everyone understands a photograph and how it can be manipulated. Film, too. Lights are involved and sound. All the elements
are involved. But an object is something we inherently trust. If there’s a chair, you know you can sit on it and it’s going to hold you. You know how it operates and it’s real. So, I do, on occasion, like to take some of these objects from something. Maybe it’s from a photograph or from a narrative cinema and something that we might not trust, but when I take it and make it into an object, I change the relationship with that object. I like to play with these ideas of what’s real and what we can trust, what could be manipulated in a way, and bring an honesty to it. Sometimes that honesty can be a failure. Because you’re starting off with something dishonest, I think, or at least I’m starting off with something constructed. So even though I’m trying to deconstruct or take that apart to reconstruct it in an honest way, it’s starting off in a place that is always going to have a bit of failure to it. I think I enjoy that failure to be real when you’re trying to make it more so.

CC: It seems like you come at this idea of failure from a very open-minded place.

Another question I’ve been asking is about this relationship between skepticism and optimism. It’s not a jaded sense of failure, but perhaps one that relates more to how you described that failure as honest. I’m curious how you might interpret this dynamic and how you think about it.

MB: I enjoy failure. I like the idea of something failing or not working. My work is really research-driven, and when work is research-driven, sometimes it becomes tight in a way. Sometimes it’s time limits—for instance, when I have 24 hours to make a piece, it’ll never be fully realized as I want it to be.

CC: Is that a self-imposed restriction?

MB: Yes. Sometimes it’s lighting the piece on fire or smashing the piece. There’s just going to moments where I don’t have that control.

CC: I was just thinking about this notion of failure relative to the dynamic between optimism and skepticism, which aren’t necessarily opposites, but I’m pitting them against each other in this context.

MB: I’m pessimistic about the role of cinema and how it has constructed us. I’m interested in the idea that we watch things—that maybe what I look for in a relationship, maybe I learned that. Maybe that how I act in a relationship is something I’ve been taught, which I think is kind of a bit disturbing. I think that I’m taking from the film, from the cinematic. I love some films. So there’s the idea that the honesty of trying to come from a point of view of someone who, even though maybe doesn’t trust things or wants to understand how it worked...

CC: Just the fact that it’s a constructed reality?

MB: Yes. Trying to reconstruct something can still be an honest moment, which I think maybe I’m optimistic about, even if it’s janky or it doesn’t work and it’s a failure. Those failures can be where that honest moment happens.

CC: Maybe the failure leads you to that honesty a little bit.

MB: Yes, definitely.
CC: That’s interesting. You’ve talked a little bit about your process. I don’t know if you think of it as a craftsmanship, but how do you consider ideas about craftsmanship relative to your work?

MB: I’m interested in craft; the process of making can be where thinking happens for me, during the repetition of making. Like failure in some ways, when I’m re-creating something that’s coming from a cinematic moment, it’s usually perfect and glossy, and it’s something that you desire. Sometimes the hand or those failure moments are more of a craft response to this highly produced cinematic moment. For instance, I’ll construct things that work perfectly from one perspective, but from the other perspective, it falls apart, and you can see the construction and how shallow it is.

CC: I was thinking about the photograph of the videotape, which somehow by accident, has this form and this object even though it’s meant to be fugitive as a material, and the contradiction between something that has a solid form.
That seems to be a theme in your work—solid forms that have potential to disintegrate or fall apart.

**MB:** Yes. Even videos that I make, I think a video has a craft-like quality to it. It’s making, and it shows an understanding of the material. I let things happen in video, where maybe the light that I’m using to light things will fall into the frame or the picture. It might be similar to a ceramic piece that has a thumbprint or has some kind of moment in which you see the making. Or when you can see the brushstroke of a painting and understand how the painter perhaps used their hand. I’m interested in that idea.

**CC:** Is that about pushing the technology for you, or questioning the technology?

**MB:** I think it’s questioning the technology, because I’m not trying to be an expert in it. In fact, I try not to know everything about it, so that it doesn’t come across as expertise. I like there to be a bit of imperfection in the making.

**CC:** My last question is about a slightly different topic. Can you talk about how receiving the Hallie Ford Fellowship has affected your work or your practice or how you anticipate it might do so?

**MB:** I think it’s an amazing opportunity. If I have an idea, I have to make it, regardless of if it’s an economically good decision. So I think this will let me keep doing that and take big risks and make mistakes and grow from there. I’m very appreciative of it, just in that. Jumping from mediums like I do, it’s a resource hog, in a way. It’s amazing to get this opportunity to have a research fund, which I haven’t had. On top of that, I’m very excited about the community I’ve now become part of.

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**MIKE BRAY** (b. 1973, Chicago, IL) is an artist working in installation, sculpture, photography, and video, whose most recent work addresses the concepts of spectacle and self as they are articulated by cinematic space. Bray received his BA in English from the University of Illinois in 1997 and completed his MFA in 2008 at the University of Oregon where he currently teaches. Bray’s work has been shown internationally, and he has been the recipient of numerous awards including an Oregon Arts Commission Individual Fellowship in 2012, a Joan Shipley Award, and he was a finalist for the Betty Bowen Award granted by Seattle Art Museum (2012). Bray is founder and co-director of artist-run studio Ditch Projects in Springfield, OR, as well as co-director of the Coast Time Artist Residency in Lincoln City, OR.
IN CONVERSATION WITH THE CURATOR

CASSANDRA COBLENTZ: How does storytelling or narrative relate to your work?
CYNTHIA LAHTI: My work has always suggested stories or different narratives but I want viewers to come up with their own stories to the pieces. People often think that I’m trying to talk about a specific narrative, but usually, they’re universal feeling and not narratives at all. They may be very specific, but I think they speak to the general.
CC: That’s interesting, because it gets to my next question: Do you see this motive to narrate or tell a story as related to ideas about the idiosyncratic versus the universal?
CL: I believe in what the photographer Lisette Model said: “The more specific you get in your art, the more general you’ll be.” It seems like that shouldn’t be true but it is. I pick specific gestures and specific kinds of people in my work, with specific relationships. For example they might be looking at each other, or not looking at each other. I feel that the more specific I get the more universally understood it will be.
CC: An either or.
CL: I’m not sure why it works but it does. Perhaps it opens the door to the viewer being able to do whatever they want with it. Which is what I want. I’ve never have a specific idea that I’m going for. I just work: I choose images that are evocative and I know they will be effective. It’s like a balancing act. I’m juggling, and if I do it well, then it does work. So the specific choices lead to that.
CL: I never want people to think that there is a correct interpretation of the work. As long as they want to interpret it, I feel like it’s a successful piece. If people are engaged enough with the piece that they care about it, that they believe in the piece and it somehow speaks to them about some part of their life. That goes back to the universal because I do think there are universal clues—colors, for instance. Black invokes a specific sort of emotion and artists use it for that reason. Success comes from choosing the right visual elements and combining them into one piece.
CC: You said something that made me think about the idea of belief and people trusting their own interpretation. One of the themes I have been thinking about for this exhibition has to do with optimism and skepticism—that duality. I used the phrase “skepticism tinged with optimism” when I was writing about the show. Does that strike a chord with you?
CL: Yes, I remember my artist statement written in art school in which I talked about how I used the beautiful contrasted with the grotesque, an idea that continues to dominate my artwork. I feel like that’s a little bit like what you’re doing. You want to be skeptical but it’s also the combination of the two things that explodes. I love that, it’s what I look for in visual experiences, not just art but in anything. Because I find it so interesting when the two
come up against each other.

CC: And finding that spark.

CL: And there's a sweet spot where you feel like everything—laughter and tears—are close. When you can combine the two it can produce really powerful work. I love that. It's when I recognize a beautiful painting, but the subject is so strange. It confuses me, it's surprising. For me, the combination of skepticism and optimism relates to the next question. How can you be an artist? I'm optimistic, I feel like the act of making art is extremely optimistic. To be able to be an artist for so long and continue to believe that making things is a good idea. To do that with your life requires a lot of optimism and there's a kind of joy that comes when I'm making art that I find is also inspiring optimism. But then, at the same time, the skepticism comes about because, of course, I'm constantly critical of myself. So there's a balance between those two things.

CC: Which you need to have in order to be a successful artist.

CL: Yes, exactly. That is what I've always loved and done. I feel comfortable with it in my own work and seek it out in the artwork that influences me.

CC: This leads to another question about your relationship to making and your hand in the artwork. Can you talk about how craftsmanship relates conceptually to your work?

CL: Yes, it's an element, whether it's crafted well. It's definitely a part of the piece. If the piece is well crafted, that's a decision I've made, and if it's not well crafted, that's also a decision I've made. I think that both can be effective. I always want it to be obvious that I know what I'm doing, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's well crafted. So maybe it's just the craftsmanship of making the right decisions for each artwork.

CC: That's all relative anyway...

CL: Right.

CC: That's interesting. It gets at this other question about reality and fiction a little bit, or at least subjective truth—the fact that you made it beautiful in your mind, is what the piece is.

CL: Right.

CC: Which is a certain fiction, too.

CL: Yes.

CC: Do you think about those terms in your work at all? Reality and fiction?

CL: Yes, because I use real images, my work... it's representational, although sometimes I do stuff that I think is extremely conceptually abstract.

CC: I would agree.

CL: It's funny because I like realism, but then the images I tend to choose all seem fictional and evoke drama. I am interested in a very specific gesture. So it's almost like it goes back to the combination and maybe a balance between the two things. But I don't think about my work in those terms, really.

CC: You were describing viewers bringing their own interpretations to your work. The
other part of that question is how you play with viewers’ interpretations and their expectations.

CL: Yes, they’re going to bring their own reality. People have responded very strongly to my work. It affects them... I have developed a way to make things that can do that. Whether I am conscious of it or it just happens, either way it works.

For instance, I know when a piece is over the top, amazing, crazy good, and that it’s going to be really effective. I think, “Wow. That’s the one.” And then people respond deeply to it. I think it’s very general, to go back to the general versus specific. I’ll have many images and intuitively I pick one.

CC: Does it have to be a certain amount of improvisation?
CL: Yes, I think so.

CC: The last question veers in a slightly different direction: What is the impact of receiving the Hallie Ford Fellowship for you?
CL: It’s just amazing... I think part of it was that most of the jurors were from out-of-state. It’s a great opportunity for me. As an artist, you work so hard and it’s so rare that you get any sort of compliment or validation for what you’re doing. And it couldn’t have come at a better time for me. I’ve been making work my whole life. It’s affected me more than anything. It also helps me know that I won’t be forgotten, which is sort of strange because you don’t know that you are thinking that until you get something that makes you realize you’re not going to be forgotten. Getting praise like that is really amazing and it was also amazing to see how the community responded. It felt really wonderful. People seem genuinely happy that I got it, which made me feel really great.

CC: That has come up often when we ask this question.
CL: There’s a point where the artwork goes out into the world and winning the award changes a lot of how I think, how I feel about being an artist in the world. It’s really, really different since I’ve got it. I’m always happy about it.

**CYNTHIA LAHTI** (b. 1963, Portland, OR) is a full-time artist recognized for her sculptural work that combines ceramic, drawing, painting, and found objects. Lahti received her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1985 and pursued post-graduate work at the Pilchuck Glass School in Stanwood, Washington. Lahti has exhibited in solo and group shows worldwide. She was a finalist in the Portland Art Museum’s Contemporary Northwest Artists Awards in 2011, and was a nominee for the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation awards in 2009. Her work is held in the public collections of the Boise Art Museum, Reed College, the King County Public Art Collection, and Oregon Health Sciences University.
CASSANDRA COBLENTZ: So Dan, how does storytelling or narrative relate to your work, if at all? Is it something you think about?

D.E. MAY: The only thing I can think of, in terms of storytelling, that has a storyline, is a series I started a long time ago, which was called Ren Boss and Ren Moans. It is a list of abstract names for a network of canals and a series of islands, and there are intersections in these canals, which I call the Four Occupations, which have to do with people making choices in their lives. And it was where anything was possible. So a person’s occupation could, for example, be that he picked locks. If someone was locked out of their house, he got them back into their house, or into their car. And he would be able to make a living that way. The world provided him a living through that art. And money flowed... it was the metaphor of money flowing through the land like blood flows through the body. That's how the canal worked. It opened up the idea for me that a person could make templates, and that they'd make a living making templates. And they didn't have to worry about doing some other kind of occupation that was less satisfying.

CC: Talk a little more about the templates, because they are a foundational element of your own practice.

DM: For whatever reason, I’ve been attracted to templates since I was really young. I’m sure we talked about dress patterns earlier. Dress patterns can be thought of as a little more nostalgic, or maybe a little more decorative, while templates are a tool that does other things that have to do with art, or anything. It can be from a tailor, to a shipbuilder, to templates to...

CC: To a blueprint for a building?

DM: Yes, exactly. They’re everywhere. But for me, it’s the template itself that is the art object.

CC: I was just thinking about this relationship between a template and a narrative story. In a way, do you think of it as a kind of nonlinear narrative? Because there’s not necessarily a beginning and an end?

DM: Exactly. Yes.

CC: It’s an interesting relationship. Another question that I’ve been thinking about with this project is the notion of the idiosyncratic versus the universal. For you, it’s related to a kind of personal or private narrative, maybe in relation to a bigger picture, grand narrative that we all participate in. This question of the universal, I think, is really important in your practice.

DM: Right. I’m going to jump to another thing that has to do with a lot of my work deals with quote-unquote “non-archival materials.” Materials that may—and I’ve said this before—they may deteriorate, but they’ll probably see us out, you know? The world’s based on a lot of stuff and there seems to be a concern about how long it’s going to last and whether it will have a legacy that goes on forever. And I am not trying to sound like, “Oh, let’s live in the
moment,” or anything. But what happens sometimes is that the idea gets sacrificed for archival reasons. And that’s just playing the cruelest of jokes on ourselves, I think. If the idea needs... let’s say, in my case, cardboard that might break down over time, that’s what you have to use, because that’s what the idea dictates.

CC: Before, you were talking about an idea of giving yourself time to let the truth of the piece come through. I am wondering about reality and fiction, and the relationship between your ideas about reality and fiction.

DM: Okay. I was talking about being able to have pieces out to percolate, to just be there, to be able to walk by them and let time do its magic. I don’t know how that works. But all I know is that it does work, at least for me. And I know artists that work really well under pressure, and with great results. But I’m not one of them. I need time for the pieces to run their course, whatever they need to do. And I need to have the patience and restraint to let that happen. I talk about making a true piece. I don’t know how to describe it... it’s a question as old as dirt. So whatever that is for me, I know what it is. I see it at times, but I don’t know how to articulate it. I feel the truth, for the truth to come about, for me, takes letting the work be out. And since I deal with so many different materials, to let those show their own importance in the piece.

CC: What about the idea of the viewer’s perception of what’s real or true, and I’m wondering if that’s important for you?

DM: It is important to me, and I don’t know... it’s hard to talk about how much that kind of stuff means to me. I’ll stand on a street corner and watch the cars go by, and there’s not one car that’s interesting to me. And I know that’s a really obvious statement, but again, the truth of that scares the crap out of me.

CC: What is uninteresting to you?

DM: Just the fact that everything, from the style of the car to the fact that it’s hard to tell the difference between cars...

CC: The homogeneity of it?

DM: It’s hard to tell the difference between a Jaguar and a Ford Probe now. I mean, that’s how ridiculous it’s gotten. That’s a little bit of an exaggeration, but not much. And it’s that I walk everywhere, and have to be so careful, because people are so unaware. And they’re not even in their car. They’re on their phones in their car. And so even if they had a cool car, and had a beautiful dashboard, they’re on their phone and they don’t even notice. They probably don’t even see the toggle switches that are gorgeous on their dash. I mean, I’m assuming a lot here, and that’s probably maybe not being fair to that individual. But man, it scares me. That stuff scares me... It’s related to me making art. I couldn’t possibly put in a paragraph why that’s connected, but I just know that it is. And I hope that’s as political as I get about my work, you know?

CC: Yes. So are you hoping that your viewer comes away from their own, insular world,
with their own technology and whatever else distracts them from what’s physical in front of them, and has some kind of experience that is more present, if you will, with your work in front of them?

**DM:** You know, I actually do hope that. I may not like to talk about that, except I’m doing it now, because otherwise, we’re just going to have silence.

**CC:** I think most artists want that.

**DM:** Yes.

**CC:** That’s why you make art, and you continue to do what you do. Which leads to an interesting next question... I’ve talked about the relationship between skepticism and optimism. And many of the artists to whom I’ve asked this question talk about artistic practice, and their own work, and their own decision to have a life as an artist having to be an optimistic endeavor in the first place, that you have to be somewhat of an optimist to choose this life.

**DM:** Yes, I guess that’s true.

**CC:** How else might you think about those ideas? For yourself as an artist, but also in how it might get played out in your work. In writing about this project, I used this phrase: “skepticism tinged with optimism.” Does that strike a chord with you? Or perhaps it’s the other way around, “Optimism tinged with skepticism”?

**DM:** Well, actually... I think making art, for me, is very optimistic. Participating in the art world, or the world just in general... that’s where skepticism comes in.

**CC:** That’s interesting. And I think it has an interesting relationship to what you described... your own perception of standing on the corner and watching the cars go by, that there might be a certain skepticism of the way people are living in the world today, but you need that skepticism in order to make the work that you make.

**DM:** Probably, and there are subtler things than what I stated about the cars going by that are much more true, but I can’t think of them right now. Because hopefully the work’s subtle at times, and it’s the subtle stuff that’s really the most potent. And the obvious things, because they’re obvious, they’re sometimes just let go of... They don’t keep that power.

**CC:** They don’t have the same gravitas or significance.

**DM:** Yes, staying power.

**CC:** Let’s shift gears a bit and talk about your relationship to making, to the material craftsmanship of your work. How do you think about craftsmanship, relative to some of the conceptual concerns that you think about?

**DM:** Well, craftsmanship is really interesting because people do talk about the craftsmanship in my work. And I’m always surprised by that, because the work I do is exactly what I want to do. And fortunately, it’s work in which two things happen. One, I’m dealing with materials that don’t have to be crafted very well. Cardboard is very forgivable. It’s not like I’m dealing with hardwood that has to be handled with incredible precision. I’m not. I’m not that kind of an artist. I’m not a craftsman. I mean, if any of that stuff has to
be done, I’m going to staff it out. The second thing is that, conceptually, my work is about flaws. A lot of my work is about flaws. In fact, I welcome a piece, especially the small wall pieces, which you’ll get to see at the gallery. If, say, one of those were damaged. I mean, to repair it—and obviously repair it—would become part of the piece. And that’s when I’d probably say, “Oh, man, I should’ve damaged it a long time ago.” I mean, I really…

And chance is an important thing, I mean, all of that stuff is important. And I’m not going to sit up at night and write a manifesto about it. It’s just something that is going on, you know?

CC: My last question has to do with the impact of receiving the Hallie Ford Fellowship. What has that been for you, and how has it affected your work and your practice?

DM: I thought about this a long time ago, if it would ever happen. And it was hard to think about, actually, because I didn’t really think it would happen. And so, I don’t have a lot of clarity, but I had clarity about this one. To be able to not have to think about other things in daily life, like paying the bills. We’ll just put that simply. I don’t have to even consider that, and all that it takes out of the daily life to pay that bill, and all the energy, all the physical activity. That’s gone now. And so I can stay in that zone of resolving the work. And that is a true luxury. This is really cool.

I’m really looking forward to getting a batch of work done… and if some of it needs a presentation that I would not have been able to afford to do, I can have that done. And that’s just gold. And I also have a good feeling. It’s a solid feeling… that this is going to open up things so that I’m able to keep making art on a level that I’ve been wanting to for a long time.

CC: That’s exciting.
DM: It’s just cooler than hell, you know?

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D.E. MAY (b. 1952, Salem, OR) is a full-time artist based in Salem, Oregon. In the mid-1970s, May studied with Larry Stobie at Oregon College of Education, and he went on to own several galleries in Salem. Since transitioning to a full-time artist, May has participated in solo and group exhibitions nationwide. He was a finalist for the Contemporary Northwest Art Awards at Portland Art Museum in 2008, and has received an Oregon Biennial Juror’s Award and an Art Matters Grant. May’s work is represented in public collections including the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Boise Art Museum, Portland Art Museum, Tacoma Art Museum, University of Alaska Museum of the North, and Seattle Art Museum, in addition to being collected extensively by private individuals and foundations.
In his photography, video, and sculpture, Mike Bray deftly chips away at the constructed nature of reality. His work speaks to the illusory surface of our media saturated culture, calling into question how we experience the world and our consciousness of how we perceive its presentation.

*Lead and Glass* and *Fade Away* are part of a body of work in which Bray deconstructs the acclaimed 1970 film, *Gimme Shelter*, which documents the Rolling Stones’s performance at the infamous Altamont Free Concert in 1969. In subsequent years, Altamont has come to signify the beginning of the end of the naive hippie optimism of the era. With a nod to this mythology, Bray’s work offers a contemporary lens with which to look back on this moment in American cultural history.

*Fade Away* reveals the notion of doubling or mirroring as an important theme recurrent in Bray’s work. The two-way mirror held between two slightly mismatched skulls represents the fourth wall separating performers from audience that collapsed at Altamont when unexpected violence ensued. *Lead and Glass* documents Bray’s restaging of a photograph he discovered of the Altamont stage set under construction. The photograph revealed four enlarged panels featuring the cover art of the Stones’s album, *Beggars Banquet*. Bray’s four-paneled *Lead and Glass* mimics the formation of the panels in the found photograph, the artwork becoming a multi-layered mirroring of the Altamont stage that is reflected literally in silhouetted pairs of backline equipment. *Lead and Glass* puts the viewer at a removed distance from its source image, offering a meaningful view of this highly constructed and reproduced environment.

Past and present, humor and cynicism, hubris and humility, all find their way into Cynthia Lahti’s gracefully composed sculptural work. She carefully weaves together art historical references with elements of popular culture to produce uncanny forms that evoke a timelessness and poignancy that feel at once unified and disjointed. Lahti embraces this discrepancy, seeking to call attention to the inherent contradictions that are experienced universally.

The notion of collage is an important aesthetic and conceptual driving force for Lahti’s practice. She works intuitively, allowing her sensitivity to the physical
properties of her media guide their juxtapositions. Her choice of materials allows for formal improvisation. Drawing on an interest in Dada and Surrealist collage traditions, Lahti mines sources ranging from fashion magazines to the aging pages of art history texts. She sets the fragility of paper in opposition to the stability of ceramics and wood. Influenced by the forms of classical antiquity, her ceramics are at times life-like and at other times deliberately crude and childlike. Much like her treatment of paper, Lahti celebrates the material properties of ceramics by preserving the mark of her own hand in the clay or by incorporating broken pieces of earlier failed works into new sculptures. These elements come together with seemingly subtle intervention—almost naturally—to relay the haunting sense that at any moment the form might come to life.

D.E. May
Yures
2013
Found papers and materials, cardboard, plaster of Paris, acrylic, watercolor, ink and graphite
2 ½ x 4 ½ x 7/8 inches
Collection of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Maribeth Collins Art Acquisition Fund, 2013.038.002

D.E. May
Tinder
2013
Found papers, cardboard, plaster of Paris, acrylic, watercolor and ink
3 ⅛ x 5 ⅛ x ¾ inches
Collection of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Maribeth Collins Art Acquisition Fund, 2013.038.001

D.E. May
Untitled
2012
colored pencil, graphite on paper
16 x 20 inches unframed
18¾ x 22 ¼ inches framed
Courtesy of the artist and PDX Contemporary Art

D.E. May
Severance (Grid Sketchbook Study)
2013
Graphite, pastels and acrylic on paper
24 x 48 inches
Courtesy of the artist and PDX Contemporary Art

D.E. May
Haavisto
2012
Colored pencil, graphite on paper
14 x 17 inches unframed 16 ¾ x 19 ¾ inches framed
Courtesy of the artist and PDX Contemporary Art

D.E. May strives to uncover order and coherence in the world around us. Time plays a key role in May’s artistic process. His work comes into being slowly and meticulously. First and foremost: he simply looks. May seems to see more than most of us do, his eye uncovering subtle relationships between line and form in all manner of things, from uniform sharpened pencils in a box, to scraps of wood or plastic. Rather than imposing any kind of forced order, he seeks to draw from within objects to uncover inherent commonalities in structure and form. His artworks can be thought of as transpositions of these commonalities. May offers his audience subtle and meditative works that gently nudge us to look more carefully.

Art making holds a power that May does not take lightly. With each mark and artistic gesture, May seeks to strike the perfect compositional balance. The works here take three different forms: Templates, Grid Drawings, and Miniatures. While each of these modes of work might hint at the architectural, for May, they more aptly refer to universal representations of line, space, form, and volume.

The Templates have long been central to May’s practice—he is fascinated by the process by which this abstract platform can give structure and shape to something concrete. The works also call attention to perceptual conditions that come into play for the viewer, such as the plane of the wall supporting a piece on which it is hung, the position of the viewer’s body in front of a piece, and the scale of the object itself relative to the viewer and, in absentia, its maker’s body.
We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live

Guest Curated By:
Cassandra Coblentz
January 24—April 27, 2013

We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live is organized by Museum of Contemporary Craft in partnership with Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland, OR.

September 6 – November 22: 2013, Mary Elizabeth Dee Shaw Gallery, Weber State University, Ogden, UT
January 18 – March 16, 2014: Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR*
July 1 – September 15, 2014: Sheppard Contemporary, University of Reno, NV*
October 1 - November 15, 2014: Pendleton Center for the Arts, Pendleton, OR*

*Selected works by the 2013 Hallie Ford Fellows in the Visual Arts will be on view in additional to selections from the original exhibition, organized by Museum of Contemporary Craft in partnership with Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland, OR.

A checklist of works included in the original exhibition is available with an exhibition catalogue featuring an essay by Guest Curator Cassandra Coblentz and interviews with participating artists at each exhibiting venue, or online at www.MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org


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Project Manager: Isaac B Watson
Publication Design: Briar Levit
Photography: Matthew Miller

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