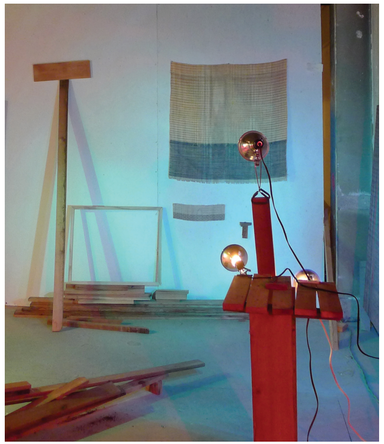


Erika Lynne Hanson, *Illuminant set:* 3, 2012. Ice, halogen lamps, woven linen, cedar, size variable.

DOING THINGS WRONG: MIKE ERICKSON, ERIKA LYNNE HANSON, PAUL ANTHONY SMITH

Producing artwork during a time when the concern over genre-specific modes of making have largely been abandoned by artists seeking to render uncommon visions of global life, the three artists included within 2013's Charlotte Street Foundation Visual Artist Awards Exhibition participate in the grand tradition of visionary artists, put quite simply, doing things wrong. By "wrong" I mean to imply the perpetual need, felt by many artists, to buck traditional wisdom in order to push their mediums further than ever before: hybridizing their primary medium with other ways of making, allowing the influences of time and historical perspective to infiltrate the present, and quite literally destroying the surface of material work to reveal a glimpse of something new. Mike Erickson, Erika Lynne Hanson, and Paul Anthony Smith respectively do so, producing artwork simultaneously able to speak to the concerns and sensibilities of the ever-unfolding "now" while complicating many of the genre conventions they've inherited.

This is to say that all artwork is time-based, or that time is an ever present factor in the myriad ways by which artwork is produced, viewed and written about. Yet, lucky for us, we're able to tell time not simply by the tick-tock of a clock or the rising and setting of a sun, but by how we spend it. More specifically, we can tell time by how we interface with the materials we encounter, invent, and transform during the constant passing of time.

Within all of our individual expenditures of time are choices made, and it is my belief that these three exceptional artists are choosing to spend their time *strangely*. In fact, most artists do spend time strangely. Most artists break with the rhythm of daily life, of the sleep-work-sleep-again organization of time we've all inherited, to observe, experiment, wander, and wonder about what other usages of time are possible.

At some point in time, Mike Erickson felt it necessary to travel beyond the confines of his own painting studio to that of the Ceramic Cafe, a commercial paint-your-own-pottery studio in Leawood, Ks, where he produced *Urns for the Remnants and Remembrance of Decisions Made and the Individual that Made Them, Green and Orange* (2013). Two pre-made, generic ceramic jars the artist purchased and then personalized, Erickson's resulting urns, yes, contain material things. Yet, as his title helps make obvious, the urns are equally a container for the immaterial memory of choices. Urns may just be the perfect entryway into Erickson's practice more broadly, which situates itself in knowing, self-conscious relationship to art history and the institutionalization, organization, and categorization of art practices via museums. Like Erickson's urns, museums contain memories and choices made over time. It is as indisputably simple, and clever, as that.

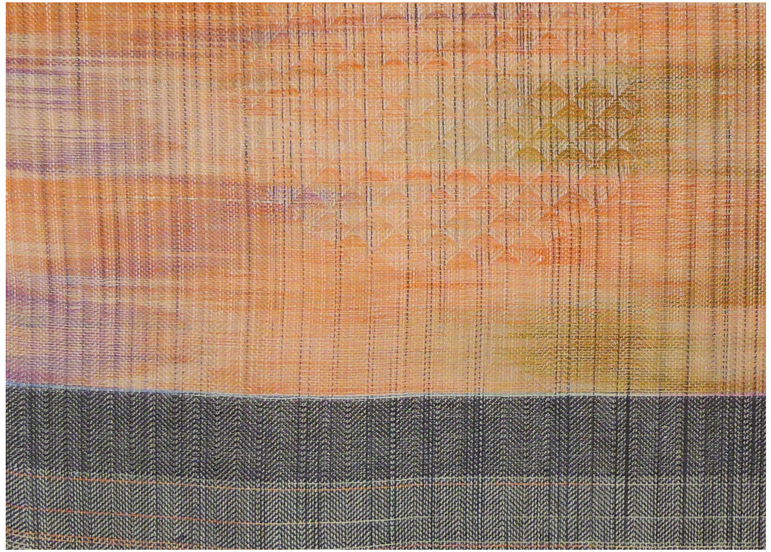
Erickson is an art lover. He loves art. He recreates around art. He re-creates art. He might think about art all the time. He probably thinks about art too much. He currently operates an art gallery out of his hybrid home and art studio in Kansas City, Mo. He calls his art gallery 1522 Saint Louis. He gave his gallery that title because it is also his address. He wants you to come over.

This love of art could explain why the security bars over a skylight inspiring Erickson's acrylic on canvas painting *A Beautiful Thing to Stare Through While Weighing Heavy Thoughts. Rise Up Rise Up. I Want My Own Tarot Deck. This Is Hard Work.* (2012) appear to almost, but not quite, resemble flat and abstract minimalist canvases from the '40s and '50s by the likes of Barnett Newman and Frank Stella. Domestic, everyday window treatments filtered through Erickson's art-obsessed mind come to resemble something almost elevated, while remaining entirely and gorgeously common.

Erickson's relationship to art is not solely based upon his study of the things we call art, but is instead inflected by his experiences as a laborer within the broader industry of art. As a preparator, archivist, and a steward of high-end artist print reproduction services, Erickson has worked multiple jobs relating to how we as a society have situated, prized, and even disregarded certain art within museum collections and private collections. This suggests that, perhaps, Erickson's series of paintings that seem to freely draw from epochal and stylistic influences at random, may not be random at all. Instead, they may be informed by how and where most physical artwork in the world actually resides: deep storage.

At first glance, the vessel at the center of Erickson's acrylic on canvas painting—take a deep breath—*A 5th Century Greek Vase with a Depiction of a Visit I Made, to Consult the Oracle at Delphi, About My Nagging Doubts Regarding the Official Story Behind the Boston Marathon Bombing, This Is An Ongoing Issue In My Lives* (2013), seems to appear out-of-time. It suggests strange temporality. The vase he depicts, just passable enough to be considered fifth century, is posited in his title as potentially having some metaphysical or guiding ability upon Erickson's own anxiety regarding the bombing of the 2013 Boston Marathon.

Mike Erickson, *Tempestuous Landscape With Mercenary and Refugette – After Giorgione and Bob Thompson – We're All Normal and We Just Want Our Freedoms. Freedom,* 2013. Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 80 x 86 inches. Photo by E.G. Schempf.



Erika Lynne Hanson, *potential future views from the past; apparently smog has something to do with it:* 3, 2013. Woven linen, 22 x 25 inches.

How could an ancient archeological site a continent away offer any guidance for coping with the violent tragedy that occurred in Boston just this past year? It can't, and it won't. What it might do, however, is offer a psychic destination for this strange thought experiment of Erickson's. A thought experiment, a wandering and a wondering, as though through a museum, into the murky terrain we call "the past"—both recent and ancient.

The recent government shutdown starkly highlighted how every inch of our National Parks is subject to sharp administrative control. Despite the ultimate inability of man to assert complete authority over nature and wildlife, what man *is* capable of producing are carceral situations of surveillance and containment. Erika Lynne Hanson recently encountered the state's total administrative force over our supposedly public parks when attempting to virtually visit such places via internet-accessible webcams surveilling these parks established and maintained by the U.S. National Park Service. She has been "going" to these parks virtually for quite some time. Yes, Hanson virtually wanders these parks. No, she does not move. Her wandering is immobile. Her wandering is, instead, stationary and durational.

As a mediator of digital information, Hanson mitigates the distance separating her and the parks she surveils through the translative process of craft-making. Weaving and beading, for Hanson, have offered the most parallel of means by which to render the natural beauty, colors, and textures of our National Parks over the course of the day within the confines of discrete, pixel-by-pixel, bit-by-bit, image production. This is to say that it is not solely the landscape itself that inspires her work, since her process is equally informed by the virtual flow of one piece of digital information after another, of one bead after another, of one interlaced unit of woven fabric after another.

Weaving and beading take a damn long time. They require of Hanson the same stationary and durational obedience of the webcam itself. Sure, a rhythm may emerge within the process of weaving and beading that mysteriously passes the time quickly, but there is no way around it: Hanson spends an enormous amount of time staring at surveillance webcams and recording that time via fiber practice. Lucky for her, and for us, the results are gorgeous.

Recalling the Modernist, geometric textiles of Anni Albers, much of the artwork Hanson produces makes obvious certain proximities textile design has *always* had to developments in technology, perception, and image production. After all, Albers herself was a Bauhaus trained German expat that would later come to teach at the revolutionary Black Mountain College in North Carolina throughout the transformative '40s. Only open for 24 years and situated within the exact kind of lush mountain scenery that fascinates Hanson, Black Mountain College employed Albers alongside such enduring experimental artists and thinkers as Buckminster Fuller, Merce Cunningham and John Cage, and hosted the likes of Robert Rauschenberg, Allen Kaprow, and Elaine de Kooning, to name a few.

I can't help but wonder if this is what Hanson is actually searching for in her own craft-oriented conceptual art practice: an intellectual and experimental paradise lost, an art world that does not segregate, classify, or contain the discipline of one artist from that of another. In the assembling of her own artificial and makeshift landscapes, which she then digitally photographs or records, Hanson's desire to invent an alternative world can be observed, and felt.

Sitting within an uncertain space between the artificial and the natural, Hanson does not only record traces of the natural-ish. She instead broadens her concerns to include how nature outsmarts us and undoes the pristine cleanliness of the photographic apparatuses by which we attempt to record it.

In video works, the wavelike sounds of microphone feedback are important, and the glitchy low-resolution of digital imagery is indicative of our failures to capture nature completely or effectively. Nature may just require something much more of us than that, something much more experimental. The apparatuses of image production, as Hanson's work suggests, are no better at translating some distant place for us than the sustained interpretive labor of someone stationary, watching and weaving, over a duration all her own.

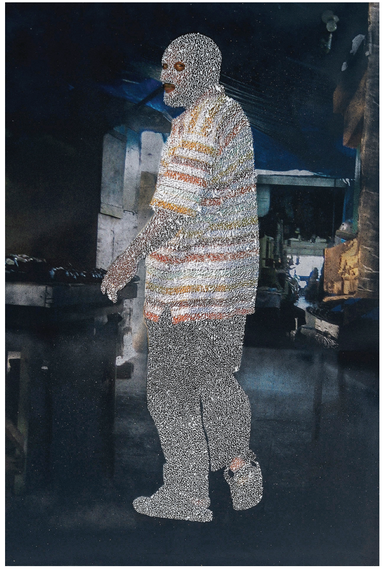
Paul Anthony Smith bases much of his artistic activity in the world around the concentrated and purposeful practice of watching. Smith sees the world his way and wants to share those visions with us. Including painting, video, and documentary photography transformed into what Smith has termed *picotage*, much of his artwork represents exercises in anonymity and (ex)change.

Photographs of pedestrians are all too readily labeled as having to do with "everyday life" in some polite, often patronizing, and precious sense of the phrase. We like to pretend we know what everyday life entails. We like to pretend that everyday life can be contained like a darling pet. We often apply some kind of vague authenticity to the simple actions of those we see circulating about town in street photography, as though the lives of the most innocuous-seeming individuals couldn't also be filled with intrigue, mystery, and danger. We want to consider ourselves at a remove from the fishbowl lives of these commoners, who ignorantly dwell in a world much less complicated than our own fast-paced and cosmopolitan lives. Focusing his lens on the people of his native Jamaica, Smith certainly knows better and seems to generously suggest that perhaps something much richer than the ordinary is almost always already going on.

Drama can be quiet. Negotiations of danger happen everyday. Training his video camera on a single-lane commuter bridge in front of the house where he grew up in Port Antonio, Jamaica, Smith simply captures a day in the life of use of that bridge. Simple enough. Yet, this is no serene Claude Monet of a bridge over an impressionistic moat of cutesy waterlillies: this is a bridge people need to use often and expediently. This is an unmonitored single-lane bridge without traffic lights to warn you of oncoming cars. This is a bridge that connects locals to and from the airport and work, and the rest is probably none of our business.

Framing the video as he does, disallowing the viewer any sense of when cars could be coming from behind or when a car may appear from beyond the far side of the bridge, Smith relays the ever-present possibility of catastrophe and how we, as humans, rely on one another in our attempts to avoid just that. The same vigilant style of driving the bridge requires of its users, Smith requires from us as watchers. The video is thrilling, still, and mundane, often boring and punctuated by moments of local children randomly setting off fireworks in the road—the suddenness of their bursts enough to remind us that rupture is possible at any and all times.

The disrupted body, the body undone. These are just two of the many ways by which we could describe what Smith is doing to the figures of those pictured in his picotage works. Personally, I consider them to be exercises in decorative decay. Simultaneously destroying the image and rendering it more luscious, Smith's technique speaks to traditions of scarification and other forms of body modification practiced by distinct cultures the world over. Therefore, it would seem inconsistent to suggest that Smith's interest is in



Paul Anthony Smith, *Port Antonio Market* #5, 2013. Unique picotage on C-print with spray paint, 30 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and ZieherSmith, New York, NY. Photo by E.G. Schempf.

voiding out detail or rendering the everyday people at the center of these picotage works as more anonymous. Instead, it seems much more the case that Smith's desire is to render them more porous, penetrable, vulnerable, and knowable. After all, it is Smith with his ceramic pick-tool in hand, laboring over the image, picking it apart, rupturing the body, producing the detail, and spending the time. Strangely.

Danny Orendorff
Curator-in-Residence
Charlotte Street Foundation
October 2013

Paul Anthony Smith, *Untitled,* 2013. Video stills courtesy of the artist and ZieherSmith, New York, NY.

CHARLOTTE STREET FOUNDATION VISUAL AWARDS

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Charlotte Street's mission is to challenge, nurture, and empower artists of exceptional vision. Charlotte Street – with our community of artists – strives to be a primary catalyst in making Kansas City a vibrant, creative metropolis, alive with collaboration, passion, ideas, and surprise.

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Each of this year's Visual Artist Awards fellows received a $10,000 cash award for their unrestricted use. Since 1997, Charlotte Street Foundation has granted $617,500 to 91 visual and generative performing artists. Awards are granted annually to artists living in the greater Kansas City area who are actively creating work. Award recipients are chosen on the merits of their artwork, in the judgment of the advisors to the foundation.

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Mike Erickson, A 5th Century Greek Vase with a Depiction of a Visit I Made, to Consult the Oracle at Delphi, About My Nagging Doubts Regarding the Official Story Behind the Boston Marathon Bombing, This Is An Ongoing Issue In My Lives, 2013. Acrylic on canvas, 40 x 30 inches. Photo by E.G. Schempf.

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