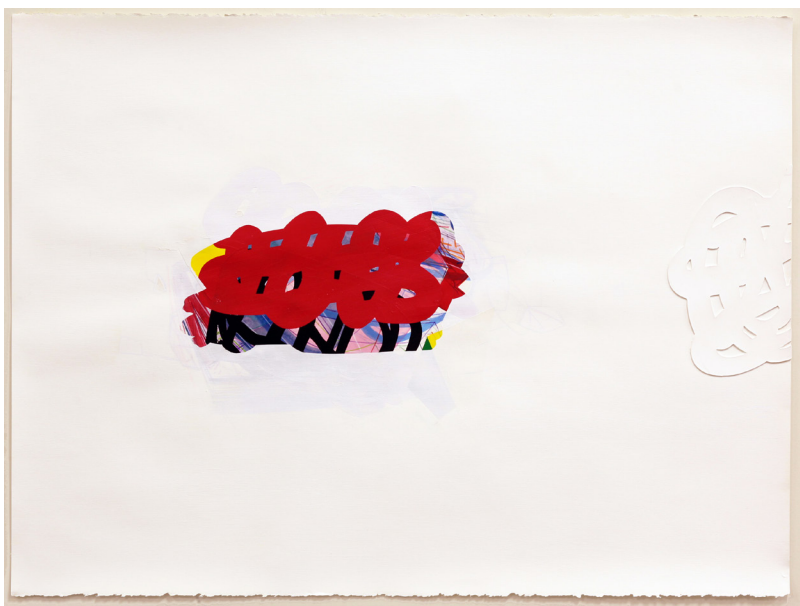


CHARLOTTE STREET FOUNDATION
VISUAL ARTIST AWARDS EXHIBITION

ARI FISH
SONIÉ RUFFIN
CALEB TAYLOR

Celebrating its thirteenth year, having granted nearly half a million dollars in unrestricted cash awards to 70 artists living and working in the Kansas City Metro, the 2010 Charlotte Street Visual Artist Awards Exhibition honors three artists: Ari Fish, Sonié Ruffin, and Caleb Taylor. Additionally, the Charlotte Street Foundation has awarded \$25,000 to local performance artists through their Generative Performing Artist Awards begun in 2008. The Charlotte Street Foundation Visual Artist Awards are given in recognition of artistic merit; nominated artists demonstrate outstanding individual practices as established in Kansas City's arts community. Annually, the CSF Visual Artist Awards Exhibition is a chance to honor and celebrate artists working in different media, with different artistic practices and concerns.

This year's recipients, Ari Fish, Sonié Ruffin and Caleb Taylor, were chosen from the largest selection of artist nominees in the history of the award. Selecting this year's CSF Visual Award winners was a panel of five arts professionals who considered these artists' strengths within their individual practices, within the local community and within the larger cultural zeitgeist reflected in the contemporary art world. In addition to the Charlotte Street Foundation's annual awards, its Urban Culture Project focuses on incubating artistic vitality in the urban core of Kansas City. Grand Arts occasionally co-presents events, lectures and visiting artist projects with Charlotte Street Foundation/Urban Culture Project, and is pleased to host this year's Awards Exhibition. We hope you will join us in proudly celebrating the work of Fish, Ruffin and Taylor, and in encouraging the artistic development of these individuals within the Kansas City arts community and beyond.



Caleb Taylor, *White Window VIV (A quick motion; a deliberate gesture)*, 2010. Acrylic, gouache, collage, pencil on paper, 22"x30".

The work of Ari Fish spans many mediums and disciplines from drawing to conceptual and intuitive lifestyle and costume consultation, to surreal sets for fashion shoots and spontaneous performances, to collaboratively staged events with a wide range of performers, bands and artists. Fish's installation at Grand Arts, *speak and spell, show and tell* is a sensorial environment that explores the silent expression of Qigong through multi-channel videos projected onto a series of white silk banners with a sound track by Fish and J. Ashley Miller. The Qigong is a Chinese martial art of energy transference through synchronized movement and breathing — Fish asks how we might experience this exercise cloaked in fashion. Entering the installation, viewers navigate the piece from various perspectives and are invited to move through and around the projections, thereby becoming indirect collaborators in the work.

Sonié Ruffin has been steeped in the fiber and fashion traditions for as long as she can remember. Her sophisticated artistic voice and original visual narratives shift the story-telling tradition of quilt making from the home to the gallery. Ruffin composes texts based on individual and collective memories to accompany each quilted work. In addition, she leads workshops and has written books which compile documentation of her work, instructional guides, and background on her original fabric designs. Ruffin's books serve as a kind of archive: part autobiography, part American history, and part contemporary quilt design workbook. They are intended to give readers the tools to share their own stories through art, fabric and the quilt. Ruffin is active in many spheres. As a contemporary artist and educator who remains connected to traditional quilting communities across the country, Ruffin draws from African textile traditions and symbolism, passed on through example by members of her family. Ruffin is also an advocate for women's issues, and is deeply engaged in preserving the legacies of Negro League Baseball and Jazz in Kansas City. Ruffin's local and dispersed communities of family, faith, friends, art and politics lay the foundation for her work.

Caleb Taylor works in a variety of media including sculpture, ceramics, painting, drawing and installation. His work combines a strong design sensibility and dedication to formal concerns with an interest in the postmodern gleaning of cultural detritus

as content. Taylor's concepts are rooted in his process, which is playful, prolific and responsive to the particulars of a given medium. In the studio, Taylor is a quick problem solver and is constantly making adjustments in media, scale, gesture, and the level of representation as he strives to maintain critical distance and a generative process. Rendering moments of architecture in flux or collapse, Taylor visually juxtaposes geometric forms with gestural mixed media application in the background layer. These expressive elements are then cropped with a concealing foreground layer or stencil that reveals just a portion of the background. This push-pull of abstraction against a solid color surface suggests alternate planes where positive and negative space rub up against each other, morphing or fracturing into other possible realities.

ARI FISH

Ari Fish listens to the muses. Walking down 18th Street in Kansas City a few years ago, I was transfixed by two oversized, overstuffed handbags in a shop window. These muscle bags, as I called them, were puffy, quilted, bulbous forms; one black and one red, they both incorporated what I now recognize to be Fish's characteristic grid motif, with confident lines and hems, in places double or quadruple stitched. I was covetous of these woven sacks of hyper-stylized sinews, and I had a feeling of strange, resonant beauty that was also deeply familiar. I know now that this is exactly what Fish seeks to achieve in her work. She's not so much interested in the high art object or fashion piece — rather, she wants to create a visceral experience and open a door to a psychic place of reckoning. This, Fish argues, is not to be found in the static or fixed. As she says, "It's all meta," whether her work is placed on a clothing rack, displayed in a glass case, or — ideally for Fish — worn on the body. Wearing one of her garments is like recognizing oneself in a photo — at once familiar and strange. As she said during one of our studio visits, "I want my clothes to remind you of how it felt to wear your favorite shirt when you were five."

Fish tailors her clothing to the determined or intuited conceptual needs of a project or collaboration. Whether Fish is designing clothes to reflect the narrative of Peaches' "I Feel Cream" 2009 Tour, or the extemporaneous stage choreography of Cody Critcheloe in a SSION concert, the garb is intended to reflect the movement and feeling

Ari Fish, *speak and spell* performance, 2010. Velvet and nylon, video still.



Ari Fish, *true loved collection*, 2009. Cotton, feathers, man-made materials.

of the wearer. Fish's style borrows and extrapolates from feminist design a la Lucy Orta, Rei Kawakubo's "like some boys" a.k.a. Comme des Garçons designs and guerrilla store antics, and Yoko Ono's Fluxus games; punk and DIY culture recalling David Bowie's evolutions of persona and Kim Gordon's oscillations between music, fashion and art; occult symbolism and ritual garb evocative of the Tarot and the Knights Templar; Alejandro Jodorowsky's *Holy Mountain* surrealist players; and *The Labyrinth*'s Muppeted cast. As part of the collective Carnal Torpor, Fish has constructed sensorial art provocations and experiences based on manifestoes and cultural diagrams; installations with taste, smell, and touch; and costumes and accoutrement for conjuring ritualistic experience. In Fish's revelry, designing a space for feeling is a multi-dimensional operation; a spiritual service; the work of making one's life habitable and aesthetic, yet perceptive and challenging.

Fish's Native America and Warrior Wear collections offer modular outfits that are adaptable and androgynous. Earlier this year, Fish created an intimate two-person robe for an exhibition in Brooklyn, NY called *speak and spell* of which her CSF exhibition piece is a continuation. Participants share a silk veil that drapes between their foreheads as they sit facing each other. When showing this piece, Fish occupies one half of the robe, assuming the role of designer and Tarot Reader, and an audience member/querent joins her in the other half. Together they wear the garment as equals — an entry into a sacred space within a gallery setting. Works such as this flout the model of assembly line, ready-to-wear attire, emphasizing instead a personal environment conducive to focus



Sonié Ruffin, *Home Run*, 2009. Quilted with Pima cotton, fabric designed by the artist, 53" x 53".

and feeling. Fish designs experiential situations with clothing and costume intended to inspire a change in perspective. Using fashion as a form of self-expression and psychological reorientation, Fish hopes to offer her audience the conditions for channeling one's energy and a chance for empowerment.

SONIÉ RUFFIN

Sonié Ruffin lives in stories. Her art and texts tell stories — from the beautiful and redeeming to the oppressive and tragic — which coalesce to preserve oral tradition. Ruffin learned fiber arts by watching her family's quilting, crochet, cutwork and other fabric projects that surrounded and informed her youth. The artist's first designs were in a runway show when she was 14 years old. An exuberant storyteller, Ruffin relayed to me a memory from the 1950s. When she was very young, one of her relatives gave her some fabric brought back from Africa. Elated and then rebuked, Ruffin was prevented from cutting into the imported cloth by her mother who quipped, "These fabrics have a power you must understand before you can use them." Her family took care to preserve and continue some of the traditional African fiber practices and symbolic iconography. Ruffin, a quick and clever study, was soon sitting at the table with her "Queens" (female relatives working around the table), and even now, Ruffin's quilts incorporate some of these traditional African cloths and motifs. They include Kente, a cloth commissioned by Ashanti kings and other royals made by men for men (Ruffin uses this to trim pieces including the diptych *Mammogram*, 2010), and Mud Cloth, made by the whole community, originating in Mali (Mud Cloth inspired Ruffin's original fabric called "Drums of Afrika" which she uses in *Home Run*, 2009).

Ruffin's most elaborate work to date, Wynton Marsalis' *Conversation with Jazz*, is inspired by a chance encounter she had with the musician at the Gem Theater in 2005. On this evening, Ruffin was taking in the view, snapping and swaying to the music, when she had a flashback to the night she first heard jazz music as an eight-year-old girl. Her father had taken her on an errand and instructed her



Sonié Ruffin, *On the Mound with Hilton Smith*, 2009. Quilted with Pima cotton, Kente, 34" x 44".

to wait in the car at his workplace, Mickey Mantle's Holiday Inn in Joplin, MO. While waiting in the car, Ruffin realized there was a jazz show in the hotel that night. The scene held Ruffin in a trance: the women with their sequin dresses, crinoline petticoats and up 'do's and the music pouring out of the venue were like nothing she'd ever seen or heard before. Not wanting to miss out, the young Ruffin let herself in and squirmed through the crowd to see the whole stage. Ruffin's father soon found her in the crowd and the club manager, a family friend, promptly brought the young jazz enthusiast a Shirley Temple. Flashing forward to the Gem concert in 2005, Ruffin watched Wynton Marsalis play his horn and was enlivened by the memory of her first jazz set. So came the inspiration for her dynamic Marsalis triptych. In the first panel the mood is anticipatory, and a locus of colored circles made of hand-dyed fabric form the recess of an abstract horn. Circles/notes and threads of sound stream forth referencing a musical staff. The second and largest panel is called "Syncopation & Strings." Here the composition appears to be cracking open in a sound burst represented by the circular notes exploding across the panel. "Copasetic," the last panel, refers to the cool part of a jazz sequence where the lead musician patiently listens, waiting for his turn for solo improvisation.

Across the country, quilting bees and guilds gather for community and fellowship. In Ruffin's workshops, she encourages fellow quilters and textile artists to open up new modes of working which are less rigidly symmetrical or made from a generic pattern. Her collage-style process is fluid, and most often begins with sketches for composition and pattern. Ruffin encourages workshop participants to experiment with patterns and fabrics beginning with whatever materials they have on hand. Her goal in the workshops is to allow personal experiences and stories to take shape organically. Ruffin draws inspiration from artists such as Romare Bearden, Faith Ringgold, Phoebe Beasley and John T. Scott. Quilt making as artistic self-expression is crucial to Ruffin and the content of her work is shared. As she relayed to me during a studio visit, it is important "to get the stories right so that [people] can touch, feel and hold the stories and patterns and recreate them for themselves."



Ari Fish, *speak and spell, show and tell* project robe, 2010. Cotton, silk, nylon, video still.

CALEB TAYLOR

Caleb Taylor is a self-described process artist. Assessing Taylor’s abstract paintings and drawings as a viewer, it is difficult to discern what is premeditated and what is purely expressionistic. My studio conversations with the artist confirm that it’s some of both. Taylor’s approach vacillates between the deliberately intuitive and the meticulously planned. Working in painting, drawing, and mixed-media collage, Taylor uses expressionistic lines and forms to create fixed moments that vibrate gesturally within a composed frame or window. Forms are rendered spontaneously and then stenciled, cut out or *covered scrupulously* (the latter term is Taylor’s preference). Taylor combines three-dimensional suggestions of architectural forms or skyline sketches, which hum in a background layer, with a flat framing device or obstructive form in the foreground layer. This flat frame hovers between our gaze and the staccato under-painting, revealing only parts of it, and suggesting that the under-painting is the real meat of Taylor’s work. It is this undulating tension between the surface plane and the under-painting that keeps me engaged. When we are in the middle of these layers, literally in between, a relevant or pleasurable transformation of perspective can occur. Moving from chaos to order and back again, we are reminded of how one extreme cannot exist without the other.

Taylor is always conscious of this paradoxical play between moments of action and repose in his work. He navigates from a lineage that includes Ellsworth Kelly’s early grid paintings turned wall sculptures and Al Held’s transitional works, such as *The Big N* from 1964. Taylor’s larger, life-size paintings have a figurative/anatomical subtext, however, that serves to further underscore the theme of bodies at rest and in motion. While the surface plane covers most of the under-painting with voluptuously curved edges, the oil on canvas build-up in these substantial strokes also mimics the artist’s body in real space as it bends and stretches over and again to create a smooth, regular surface. These covered works recall, as Taylor says, “the skinning over of paint,” as on a discarded palette.

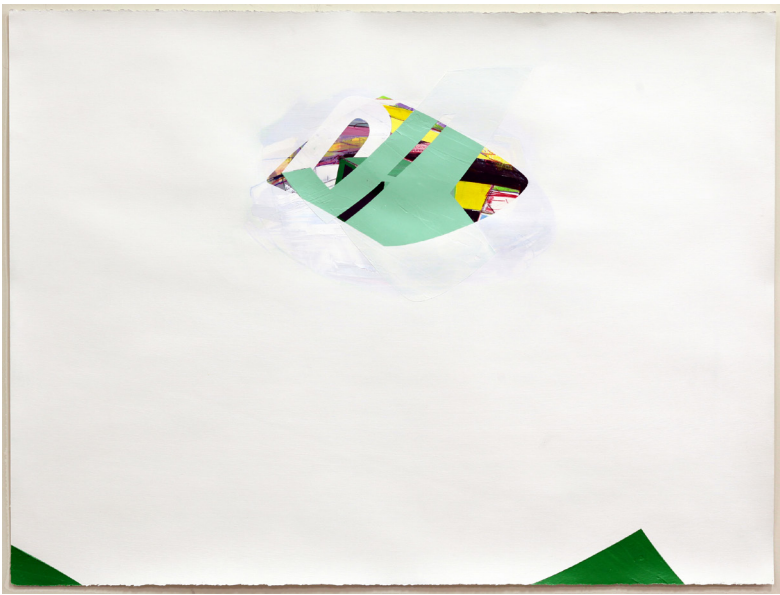


Caleb Taylor, *Gesture Knot I*, 2010. Acrylic, gouache, collage, pencil on paper, 15"x17".

Scanning Taylor’s studio, I am particularly attracted to his collage works on paper and to his carefully arranged piles of source materials. I am drawn to cut bits of paper, found antiqued prints, storybooks, and coloring book pages because I know they will likely find their way into a collage or other work—and sooner rather than later, since Taylor progresses so quickly from one phase to another. It is a challenge to keep up with Taylor’s evolving practice, as it is to follow his formal twists and turns. Recently, Taylor has been researching local companies to consult about how to turn the formal elements of his paintings into something more sculptural. He plans to incorporate one of these initial explorations in his installation at Grand Arts.

In his ongoing *Gesture* series, begun earlier this year, Taylor traces and cuts what appears to be a knotted line out of paper. These drawn knots could be paths, strings, streams of more or less consciousness, roads, trails, entrails, end trails. Indeed, these pieces have guts and here again it is Taylor’s persistence toward the tension of abstract forms breaking and peeking through a controlled surface plane that sticks.

Lacey Wozny
Assistant Director
Grand Arts
July 2010



Caleb Taylor, *White Window VIII*, 2010. Acrylic, gouache, pencil on paper, 22"x30".



Awards Circle

Special thanks to our 2010 Gold Awards Circle: Dallas + Scott Pioli, David Hughes, Sr., Margaret Silva; and 2009 Bronze Awards Circle: J. Scott Francis; Nancy + Rick Green; Julie + Mike Kirk, Susan + Jim Moore, Jeanne + Charlie Sosland, Meg + Bill Zahner – for their special individual support of our Visual + Generative Performing Artist Awards and Art Omi. Extra special thanks to the Hall Family Foundation for its support of our Visual Artist Awards.

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COVER IMAGE:

Sonié Ruffin, *Wynton Marsalis' Conversation with Jazz*, 2007. Triptych, quilted with Pima cotton, hand-dyed fabric, 8' x 7'.

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