fluence
Exhibition Catalogue
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Beginning a final year of an undergraduate arts degree stirs up many different emotions, expectations, and questions. Students devote three or more years of their lives to intense study and focus; as a result, many other concerns in their lives take a back seat. But, where do students take their first steps in building a new life outside of school and finding a career doing something they love?

The 2013/14 school year began with these questions, prompted by the looming prospects of graduation and independence. Considering this, we have noticed a void in our otherwise full and challenging educational careers: a previously unbridged gap between the students in the Visual Arts and the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture (HADVC) programs in the Faculty of Art and Design, here at the University of Alberta. We decided this disconnect needed to be rectified, and so the idea for Fluence was conceived.

Emerging artists need to build a professional reputation, supported by quality work that engages both with people and contemporary issues. Likewise, emerging art historians must engage with the local, bourgeoning contemporary artistic community; find opportunities to continue their research; and seek vehicles through which they can contribute to the critical discourse on contemporary art.

The Visual Arts Students Association (VASA) has partnered with the Rutherford Library—with particular gratitude to Michael May—to provide the space and other resources necessary to host Fluence in the atrium of Rutherford South. Brittany Snellen, Julie-Ann Mercer, and Michael Woolley—fourth year HADVC majors—have collaborated with the artists in the final year of their BFA degrees to curate an exhibition of their selected works and develop an accompanying catalogue featuring essays relating to the themes of the show.

Fluence aims to showcase the diversity of the artistic practice of current University of Alberta students. The essays and artworks in this exhibition examine the experiences that inform artistic production and discourse, and reflect the impact these practices hope to have on today’s society. The ideas discussed establish grounds for our future practices as well as begin a tradition of future collaboration between students in these divisions. It is our hope that Fluence will engage the public, inviting them into conversations with the art pieces guided by the critical writing in the essays, and ignite positive thought and further engagement in the artistic practice of this city.
Miranda Mewhort (left page - top)
Prolongation

Emmanuel Osahor (left page - bottom)
Things that bind us still

Lauren Huot
How to be here

Xu Yuan
Fall
Renee Perrott
Senior Country Man

Alyson Davies
Peace Country
Influence

Brittany Snellen

From the time we are born, we are molded and impacted by those who surround us; our knowledge of love, family, morals, and values—or lack thereof—as well as the way we relate to both the world and the people in it, are a result of these established factors. Influence, however, is not only limited to those things that shape us as human beings, but also how we carry what we have integrated into ourselves forward, thus influencing our environment and the people we interact with. The artists working under the theme of Influence address issues that deal with our impact on the environment, family, morals, interrelationships, memories, and how each of those things also impacted us.

To the artists influence is interpreted as: a state of flux, a trace left by experience, an underlying quality created by interactions with an object or thing. It is a question. It is a ball and chain. Influence can be a positive thing that has enabled us to view the world in a particular way, or it can be an anvil, weighing down on us, a thing that we are trying to escape from. Influence can be a person, an object, a feeling or a thing to be under. Ultimately influence is what we have decoded it to be.

Influence as an artistic expression is unique: it contains a personal subjectivity from the artist that can at the same time convey an objective meaning for the viewer. Using disparate media (e.g., video installation, painting, print) the artists demonstrate the diverse ways visual products are created from a conceptual experience. As a result, the artist’s choice of one medium over another impacts the influence of their work on the viewer. What is significant about the visual representation of what has influenced us in our life is the ability to use that representation as a tool to encourage contemplation in those who interact with the artwork. Just as words hold power of influence, so too the image serves as a powerful illustration that resonates beyond literal comprehension.

Each piece selected for the theme Influence maintains its own personal testimony of the artist, but also invites the viewer to participate in a conversation. It is in this dialogue between artwork and viewer that one can extract meaning, whether it relates to the artist’s intended message or not. Each work remains open to interpretation. What might provoke a feeling of alienation for one viewer might resonate as nostalgia for another. Each individual’s reaction—a result of their own personal experiences—open channels of communication, not only between a specific work, but between all of the works placed in conversation with it. Thus, the visual context in which the viewers place themselves becomes a time portal, relevant to both past and present, and consequently impacting the future interpretations.
Alyson Davies
*Peace Country*
(Dimensions Variable)
Video installation

In her video installation, *Peace Country*, Alyson Davies projects a map of the sour gas wells in the Peace River area upon her body in a technological “artist-becomes-canvas” process. Each spot cast upon her skin represents the alien invasion of humans into the environment, demonstrating the harsh impact of human consumption and resource exploitation on the world around us, a dominant theme in Davies’ body of work. For the duration of her film, Davies scrapes at her skin in a futile attempt to remove the spots—her efforts are denied and moreover, leave further marks on the planes of her body that she tries to clear. This thwarted attempt is reflective of the scars that human kind leaves upon the earth and that while we advocate for people to reduce, reuse, and recycle, the damage inflicted is never truly reversible. Ultimately, Davies’ use of her own body demonstrates how the damage incurred on the environment inevitably becomes damage imposed on our selves.

Lauren Huot
*How to be here*
(approximately 24”x18”)
Photo lithography, Screenprint, Chine colle

In her artist book, *How to be Here*, Lauren Huot creates a narrative that calls into question the interactions and relationships constructed between animals and humans. Using a hunting camera, Huot documents animals, domestic and wild, in an out of context setting. She utilizes the lack of control over the photos taken by the hunting camera to reflect on the reality of our own lack of control over both the animal, whether in a domestic setting or not, and ourselves. Having been raised in a rural setting, her relationships with animals greatly impacted her, instilling her with a desire to insert herself into a position of the ‘Other’ and explore the way in which humanness extends itself into non-human context. Huot’s work, influenced by the unnatural displacement of humans and creatures into each other’s realms, serves as a “How-to”, which reminds the viewer not only how to be here in relation to the animal world around us, but also where both animals and humans come from.

Miranda Mewhort
*Prolongation*
12”x12”
Oil and acrylic on masonite

Prolongation, a concoction of beautiful and expressive brushstrokes with disconcerting colors, confronts the viewer with the scientific reality. This reality is one that influenced artist Miranda Mewhort to integrate subjects, such as this frog in a jar, into her art. Mewhort, having been raised by a biology technician, was confronted from an early age with issues of ethics and euthanasia in laboratory animals. The moral dilemma of creatures in confinement, a concern derived from having spent sufficient time in these laboratories, has provoked her to revisit these experiences and deconstruct the notion of how we
interact with the animal world. What was once a childhood normalcy for the artist now becomes a grotesque actuality for the viewer. The viewer is pulled in by an ambiguous form, veiled by a cataract-like film, only to realize that what they are looking at is the remains of an animal. It is an unexpected subject, yet critically relevant to a world in which the displacement of animals from their natural setting into a clinical one is a normal occurrence. It is uncomfortable only for the fact that what usually remains hidden in a laboratory is now forwardly confronting the viewer.

Emmanuel Osahor
*Things that bind us still*
6' x 5'
Oil on canvas

Typically when a painting depicts specific individuals, the viewer’s personal access to that work is denied on the account of un-relatability. The context, narrative, or character in the painting may not be something familiar, and, therefore, becomes a barrier between viewer and image. Emmanuel Osahor, on the otherhand, in his painting, *Things that Bind us Still*, creates an image that portrays his own personal narrative, yet leaves open areas for the viewer, so that one might place his or her self within the context of the painting. The painting serves to demonstrate how we reconstruct our memories based on past influences in our lives. Dominating the center of the image, two developed figures, a toddler and a young woman, physically engage with one another. They are compressed between the surface of the painting and the two bold bands behind them, emphasizing their significance to the artist. The other two figures, disengaged from the central characters, are represented only as outlines; this provides a physical space for the viewer to enter the painting as one of the characters. What appear to be the remains of a birthday party becomes the memory of a moment of alienation, disassociation, or a feeling of “Otherness”. Osahor paints an image that is relatable for both insider and outsider alike.

Renee Perrott
*Senior Country Man*
5' x 4.5'
Computer Printout

In this substantial work, entitled *Senior Country Man*, artist Renee Perrott illustrates the influence of the digital world on daily life. This particular image, from a stranger’s personal ad on Craigslist, resonated with her because of the normalcy of the ad in comparison to the image of the Craigslister dressed in drag. The notion of seeking that has become engrained in the anonymous subculture of online personals and dating has a different resonance when related to this particular image. Rather than reading this as an image of self-exploitation, we view a man expressing an internal desire to be something other than what is socially acceptable to be. This personal ad, while also functioning as an outlet for self-expression, demonstrates the impact of the sense of freedom that comes with posting, incognito, one’s self on the Internet as a mode of seeking interactions. Perrott explores influence through the binary of public and private, challenging the predetermined attitudes that usually accompany this type of circumstance.
Xu Yuan originates from China and found herself affected by “culture shock” as she tried to become accustomed to a new society. This created questions for her about her own cultural identity and where she fit between the two ways of life. Yuan’s art demonstrates the struggle in finding a point of contact between the two aspects of her artistic self. Because she has personally been affected by the challenge of assuming multiple cultures, she seeks to describe that conflict in her work—a conflict that she hopes will in turn create a “common ground”. Her lithograph, Fall, depicts a turbulent cloudy sky and cascading waterfall. The viewer is suspended in the image, lacking solid ground to stand on, which conveys the tension of the artist. There is, however, a disagreement between the tempestuous scene and the feeling of calm perceived by the viewer. Perhaps it is a reflection of the inner disquiet and calm façade of the artist in her search for normalcy.
Megan Gnanasihamany
We Do All Our Own Stunts

Kristi Poole-Adler
I Will Try To Fix You
Brielle Bukieda (left page – top)
Breathless

Marie Winters (left page – bottom)
You Can’t Have Your Cake and Eat It Too

Nil Lasquety
Wickershim 5

Eryn Thorsley
Hold Your Head High
The term fluency denotes the ability to articulate oneself successfully in a particular language. Seven artists explore this term through the narratives within their work: Brielle Bukieda, Megan Gnanasihamany, Nil Lasquety, Kristi Poole-Adler, Tiffany Robertson, Eryn Thorsley, and Marie Winters. These artists are fluent in the visual language they choose to represent their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. They use their fluency in these respective languages to convey a story, which can illustrate a variety of emotions and tones within the course of the narrative. However, they require an audience to engage with in order for the stories to be re-lived in the viewer’s mind. Therefore, the function of Fluency within this exhibition is for artworks to slowly unfold into a story that confronts viewers with a narrative that they can react to and contemplate.

Each participant within the theme of Fluency was chosen due to their interest in the feelings that are attached to stories. Thus, the feelings they explore range from light-hearted and humorous to the deeply affective; they address the uncanny within signifiers of innocence as well as metaphysical ideas that cause us to contemplate our bodily forms and existence. These narrative based works are combined with writing that describes each artist’s story, functioning to inform viewers about the artist’s intent.

Similar to these artists, the writer utilizes words to shape stories and convey their thought processes and opinions. The writer must be able to empathize with the artwork they are studying in order to convey its meaning. This relationship between artist, artwork, and viewer that elicits empathy and understanding is an important attribute that makes art complex and individual. It is up to the viewer to engage with the stories presented and identify with what is before them. Once they do, art is no longer confined to binaries of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ but it is opened up to allow for dialogue and involvement.
Brielle Bukieda  
*Breathless*  
10”x10”  
Copperplate etching

Brielle Bukieda contemplates a moment between life and death in her self-portrait *Breathless*. We see a woman’s face in the center of the image; a heavy textile covers her features and seems to draw them within it as it flows over her face, suffocating her nose, eyes, and mouth within the folds of the fabric. This study allows Bukieda to contemplate her feelings about the last seconds before death. She searches to put this ephemeral sensation into a tactical form in order to work through lingering questions she has about what it is like to take your last breath.

Megan Gnanasihamany’s *We Do All Our Own Stunts* is a collage onto an advertisement the artist found depicting a little girl with her hands assertively placed on two space heaters. The child in the center of the image is a photograph of Gnanasihamany at seven years old, taken for her dentist office’s Smile Club. Behind Gnanasihamany are zigzagged outlines of three bold trees. They outline Gnanasihamany’s form as well as emphasize the shape of two Disney-style birds that are fluttering on both sides of her shoulders. This insertion of nature and animals into the collage creates an unnatural yet utopic wilderness. This is juxtaposed by television sets that are placed under Gnanasihamany’s hands and display images of flowers and hamburgers. By creating a narrative about the strange within the innocent, Gnanasihamany displaces childhood nostalgia and calls into question why we relate to and define ourselves through stories.

Nil Lasquety  
*Wickershim 5*  
Acrylic, and oil paint on masonite

From the left side of *Wickershim 5*, a thin white hand reaches into a room saturated in a red hue, summoning the viewers’ attentions with a motion from its index finger. The alluring hand is reminiscent of the Disney character Mickey Mouse, who symbolizes carefree childhood purity. This symbolism in the hand creates a binary between innocence and sin as it emerges within an eerie, sinister looking room. A boy’s face peers intently towards the hand, with a smug expression turning his lips. This juxtaposition of features plays with ideas on youth and how society influences our choices and experiences when we are young.
Kristi Poole-Adler’s work evokes a sense of *hirwaeth*. This is a Welsh word to describe the homesickness or nostalgia one feels for a place or moment from their past that they cannot return to. Poole-Adler’s paintings convey this nostalgia and absence through the figures she chooses to define and the figures she leaves unfinished. In *I Will Try To Fix You*, Poole-Adler illustrates her sister in a hospital waiting room next to her father, who is faintly portrayed in muted grey tones with the exception of his hands, which are painted in flesh tones and fully represented. Poole-Adler was not yet born when this family moment occurred, but painting it provides an opportunity to work through feelings she has about her sister and her sister’s recent diagnosis with schizophrenia. The image gives Poole-Adler agency to confront a disconnection she feels towards her sister and how this situation resonates mixed feelings in her life.

Tiffany Robertson

*Falling*

Tree, hair, concrete, plaster, thread, paint, wood
43” wide, 50.5” tall, 34” deep

What would it feel like if we didn’t have a body? Tiffany Robertson’s sculpture *Falling* poses this question to viewers through her exploration on structure and form. Using plaster, concrete and a tree, she has created an irregular body structure with black chunks of hair flowing from the tips of its branches. The structure is both humanized by the hair and dehumanized by the form, calling into question society’s ideals on beauty, health, and acceptable modes of appearance. *Falling* deconstructs societal norms to present a spiritual notion of the self, which is free from the constraints of habitual body appearances.

Eryn Thorsley

*Hold Your Head High*

26” x 16”

Digital print; ink on paper

Eryn Thorsley is interested in the process of hunting in contrast with ideas surrounding domesticated animals and vegan culture. In *Hold your Head High*, Thorsley juxtaposes a digital print of a bleeding, dead animal clasped in a hunter’s hand with a print of a rope in knots. This dissimilar imagery is paired compositionally as the weight of the knot and its long, loose bottom loop balances with the digitally enhanced form of the animal. Together, these images present the restraining control of the rope, which is parallel to the last struggle of the animal, slowly heeding to the violent grasp and weapon of the hunter that holds it. This print functions to comment on society’s control over animals, questioning our motivations for keeping them as pets or hunting them as food.
Marie Winters
You Can’t Have Your Cake and Eat It Too
60” by 56”
Oil paint on paper

Marie Winters’s oil painting, You Can’t Have Your Cake and Eat It Too, portrays a family photograph from a birthday party. Winters explores rumination – the process of thinking something through until you have exhausted a subject matter. The topic Winters is fixated on is her self-reflective anxieties over birthdays and illness. Every birthday brings Winters closer to knowing whether she has a genetic disease. Winters is depicted as the figure in the center foreground; her form is characterized by burnt yellow tones, conveying an ambiguous identity in the midst of a stereotypically happy event. This allows viewers to transpose themselves into the scene as this little girl who stares out into the party, as if detached from all the other people in the room. The painting captures the disillusionment of anticipating a happy celebration, but having these feelings overpowered by melancholia and fear.
Sugar Hung (left page - top)
Where Did My Life Go

Vanessa Mastronardi (left page - bottom)
Gem

Jonathan Sherrer
November 1st, 00:00, 2013 –
November 30th, 23:00, 2013

Morgan Melenka
Paratext
Adam Whitford
*Home Video (Dad I)*

Patrycja Zatonski
*Expanses of Time*
Confluence
Michael Woolley

Confluence describes the flowing together of two or more rivers, or the point of juncture between such rivers. It connotes intermingling and recombination; a whole, constituted by previously disparate elements, assimilated and reconciled into something greater than their sum. The confluence of ideas can take many forms, and is articulated in a variety of ways. As an act of artistic expression, confluence elucidates the various modes by which works of art can come into being. No piece materializes in a vacuum; each is in conversation with a multitude of other works, both past and present, as well as the theories and concepts in which they are grounded. Whether done as a conscious act of will, or simply by virtue of the creative process, artists necessarily engage in modes of inquiry whereby they examine important ideas through the creation of their work. Process is not merely a means, nor is a work an end in and of itself. A work is not completed when the final stroke is laid, or the last chunk of marble is hewn from it form. It is neither a thesis nor a grand theory. It is a chapter; a test of a hypothesis; a single voice in a multivalent, ongoing conversation.

Nor is a work completed when it is placed in the gallery. Sites of reception, where viewers engage with a work of art in whatever form it may take, represent a further instance of confluence. Engaging with a work means engaging with an ongoing conversation. The audience’s understanding or appreciation of an artist’s work is contingent neither on the understanding of his or her process nor on particular knowledge of said process. How a piece is interpreted or received by an audience is resultant of a synthesis between the artistic vision of its creator and the particular knowledges and literacies, prejudices and preconceptions inherent to the audience receiving it. Artistic intent is valid insofar as the artist is capable of communicating it to the viewer of a work.

While all work is emergent from a multitude of confluences, the artists featured in this portion of Fluence represent those for whom consideration, examination, and deconstruction of their process is intrinsic to that process. Each employs a disparate mode of artistic investigation and manifests particular inquiries through the media of his or her choice. Ultimately, each work is constituted not by formal and aesthetic choices alone, but by the manifold artistic, theoretical, conceptual, and personal sources of knowledge unique to the individual artists.
Suzi Barlow combines performative research practice and printmaking methodologies to produce imagery that seeks to address the complex relationships between mankind and the environment. Everyday life is a form of research for her work, an ongoing, ever changing living inquiry into the world around her. By approaching her work as a form of visual and performance-based inquiry, Barlow is able to inhabit that which she seeks to understand, and convey deep-seated ideas in ways otherwise inaccessible. Defying reductive labels like “tree-hugger,” her work seeks to bridge her intrinsic love of nature and the wilderness with her creative impulse and a moral imperative to explore humanity’s deep connection to the environment.

Barlow’s work is visually cryptic. Its rich tones, thick atmosphere, and larger-than-life scale intrigue the senses as the viewer is left to contemplate, through Barlow as proxy, his or her own relationship to nature.

Sugar Hung’s work is the result of a process through she comes to terms with the particularities of her media. She experiments with the materiality of oil and acrylic paint, while also addressing the contradictory nature of the picture plane. Hung paints like an artist-scientist, each work emerging from one experiment or another. She explores the notions fundamental to her craft, coming to understand them better with each successive attempt. What one artist might consider a failed attempt, Hung will draw upon and incorporate into her continually developing style and technique. Her tools, techniques, and materials are specific to whatever problem she addresses at any particular moment, and are often evident in the final work.

Hung’s work challenges the flatness of the picture plane, and conventional notions about figure and ground. The emergent properties of oil and acrylic paint used in tandem lend it a unique aesthetic.

Vanessa Mastronardi

Gem
32” x 25” x 25”
Intermedia
Vanessa Mastronardi allows her work to inform her process, even as it is coming into being. While some artists approach a new work with a clear end-goal in mind, Mastronardi prefers to discover what a work’s final form will be through the course of its creation. Working with a combination of found and sculpted objects, she interrogates the unexpected, asking what if? of the unpredictable and capricious. Her pieces come together according to the strange logic inherent to their constituent elements in conversation with Mastronardi’s particular artist vision. In the end, viewers are welcome to apply their own ideas when interpreting Mastronardi’s work; ultimately, however, their initial gut reaction is probably more telling than copious application of Marxist, feminist, or Lacanian psychoanalytic theories.

Mastronardi’s work invokes surrealist sensibilities, absurdly juxtaposing the commonplace with the bizarre. It is simultaneously disquieting, intriguing, and alluring.

Jonathan Sherrer
November 1st, 00:00, 2013 - November 30th, 23:00, 2013
44.8” x 42”
Digital Photographs

Jonathan Sherrer utilizes digital media and performance methodologies to explore time and routine, commodification and objectification. Inspired by, and drawing upon the works and theories of such artists as Tehching Hsieh, Sherrer exploits the simultaneously prescriptive and descriptive nature of the document: even as it imposes a semi-rigid structure, that which it records pushes back with the erratic nature of daily existence. Subject becomes object, and personal subjectivity is called into question by the ostensible objectivity of the documentary process. Sherrer compels the viewer to consider the ramifications and implications of the omnipresent, disembodied eye of surveillance, and seeks to instill notions or feelings that otherwise prove to be illusive.

Sherrer’s work dissects and distills his daily life, presenting it in serial for the consumption and analysis of the viewer. Patterns emerge, while expectations are challenged; the mundane is called into question and presented for scrutiny.

Morgan Melenka

Paratext
36” x 36”
Acrylic on Glass

Morgan Melenka confronts the multivalent ways of seeing engendered by modern-day urban landscapes: simultaneously looking at, through, and beyond; behind and ahead; in spite of and because of. She investigates what it means to live in a world where we are constantly bombarded by, and eventually inoculated against a reflected image of the world. Melenka collapses spatial relationships, and explores what happens when modes of perception and representa-
Adam Whitford
*Home Video (Dad I)*
36” x 24”
Oil and Acrylic on Masonite

Adam Whitford manipulates an assortment of media, purposely confusing the distinctions between the static and the animate, the abstract and the figurative, the record and the recorded. Investigating the distinction between failures of representation and representing such failures, Whitford focuses on the interstitial. Moments of time—all too quickly ignored—become sites of inquiry: removed from the instantaneous, they are reconstituted in formal abstractions. The ephemeral is fixed, its peculiarities extended indefinitely in time for the sake of examination and contemplation by the viewer.

Whitford’s work employs vibrant colour and execution of painterly technique that is simultaneously illusionistic and approaching the non-representational. Despite being entirely sessile, it very nearly flickers before the eye and threatens to coalesce into full motion.

Patrycja Zatonski
*Expanses of Time*
34.75” x 23”
Photo Lithography

Patrycja Zatonski draws upon numerous sources—from psychological and neurological theory, to literature, as well as her own lived experiences—to produce works that engage viewers on a sub-lingual level, and challenge them to assert their own interpretations. What starts out as a simple idea, question, or fragmentary notion for the artist is dissected, extrapolated, researched, and formed into an expression of her own understanding. Dealing with notions fundamental to the human psyche, Zatonski necessarily imbricates her own subjective experience with the postulates of other interdisciplinarians. Producing work as a gesture of research-through-practice accrues bifid meaning for her: not only is the artist’s process an expression of inquiry; it also springs forth from thorough examination before the shutter is ever released, or plate etched.

Zatonski’s work evokes the concurrently familiar and strange in an exploration of memory. It’s murky depth and unfixed sense of time and space evoke an uncanny sense of *jamais vu* in the viewer.
Credits

Curatorial Team
Julie-Ann Mercer, Emmanuel Osahor, Tiffany Robertson, Brittany Snellen and Michael Woolley

Designer
Charles Yu Hiu Poon

Essays Written by
Julie-Ann Mercer, Emmanuel Osahor, Tiffany Robertson, Brittany Snellen and Michael Woolley.

Artists
Susanna Barlow, Brielle Bukieda, Alyson Davies, Megan Gnanasihamy, Siu Ka Ka Hung, Lauren Huot, Nil Lasquety, Vanessa Mastronardi, Morgan Melerka, Miranda Mewhort, Emmanuel Osahor, Renee Perratt, Kristi Poole-Adler, Tiffany Robertson, Jonathan Snerrr, Eryn Thorsley, Adam Whitford, Marie Winters, Yuan Xu, and Patrycja Zatonski

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