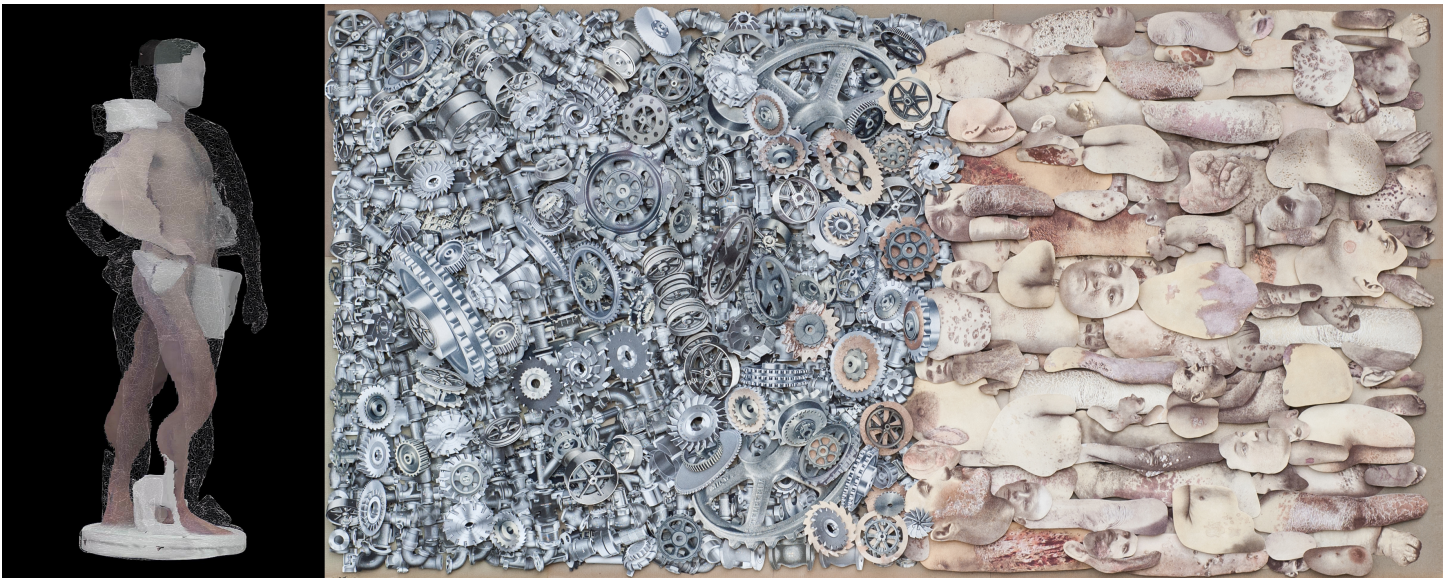


PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE

January 29 – February 22, 2019

Curated by Aaron Wilder



Darrin Martin
Contrapposto, 2016
Looped HD Video, 16:00

Hope Kroll
The Devolution of Man, 2017
Cut Out Assemblage, 27 x 53"

San José, California – December 17, 2018 - A little newer, a little better, a little faster. Like the eager anticipation of the newest smartphone, compulsive human motion and consumption ultimately lead to the hastening of our physical, cultural, and social deterioration. *Planned Obsolescence* is a group exhibition at the Natalie and James Thompson Art Gallery displaying works by artists of the greater Bay Area: Sebastian Alvarez, Ebitenyefa Baralaye, Terry Berlier, Ilana Crispi, Woody De Othello, Hope Kroll, Izidora Leber LETHE, Diana Li, Darrin Martin, Daniel McClain, Lucy Puls, and Lauren Jade Szabo.

Wrapped up in the capitalist essence that seems to saturate every facet of contemporary culture, the term “planned obsolescence” refers to a practice of consumer goods manufacturing companies to engineer rapid consumption through frequent changes in design, termination of spare part inventory, and use of nondurable materials in their products. While this term was originally coined by economists to describe the practice of consumer goods manufacturers (particularly in the automobile industry), the term is now more commonly applied to practices of the technology industry. Since the majority of these companies are here in Silicon Valley, the Natalie and James Thompson Art Gallery has invited artists from the greater Bay Area with a diversity of perspectives to present work reflecting on contemporary notions of “planned obsolescence.”

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Like the upgrades of hardware and the updates of software we scramble to keep pace with, the term “planned obsolescence” is equally an apt description of the human experience. While our individual lives are unique to our own perspectives on reality, components of experiences within our lifespan are partially relatable to and replicated by future generations after we have passed away. Each artificially limited, useful life contains flaws, weaknesses, and limitations we continuously seek to replace quicker, shortening the replacement cycle of our world, paradigm, and relations more and more. This exhibition applies the ever-shortening lifespan of technological products to what it means to be human. The artists question erasure of identity through commodification and the effect of materialism and waste on objects, traditions, and the environment.

Born and raised in Lima, Peru, interdisciplinary artist **Sebastian Alvarez** maintains a research-based practice where his work manifests itself in a variety of mediums including, but not limited to film, infographics, performative lectures, sonic compositions, and walks. Alvarez participates in a performance collective at San Quentin State Prison in collaboration with incarcerated artists and is producing a sci-fi documentary about the imaginative and material processes of building utopian communities in Brazil’s capital, Brasilia. Conceptually, Alvarez sees himself as a collection of different individuals and locations contained in a singular body. Journeying as an exploration of the unknown, acknowledgment of ignorance, and transformation are points that guide and organize his understanding of what he does as an artist. Alvarez’s exhibited work relates the history of telecommunications technologies to the natural world. About this piece Alvarez has said “Our current industry takes advantage of high-technological processes to extract and use earth elements, leaving behind an excess of by-products in the process: nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, and sulfur dioxide. Thousands of years from now, many of these elements will remain, long after our media and smartphones have been forgotten... Perhaps, the deeper we dig the shallower and more toxic our interactions become.”

Sculptor, mixed media artist, and designer **Ebitenyefa Baralaye** draws upon his narrative of migration from Nigeria to the Caribbean to the United States using form as a unifying language to mediate engagement and displacement toward society, home, and faith. Baralaye believes his life as well as those of his generation dwell in the negotiation of fragmented and transitional presence where they have become increasingly accustomed to juggling multiple understandings of origin, presence, and destination simultaneously. His work explores dualities in cultural, spiritual, and psychological symbolism interpreted through a diasporic lens. About this Baralaye has said “I am interested in the psychological agency of objects that project manifestations of identity and desire: shrines, statues, monuments, urns, etc. I am also drawn to the poetics of domesticity and utility, positioning design and function as ways of feeling within ways of ordering.” His exhibited work utilizes materiality and proximity as means through which to consider notions of intimacy, utility, and ephemerality with regard to human existence.

Interdisciplinary artist **Terry Berlier** investigates the evolution of human interaction with the natural world, queerness, and ecologies. Her work has used trash or obsolete detritus of consumer consumption as points of departure and sets in motion dialogue concerning wellbeing, human relationships, consumption, and survival. She emphasizes the essential roles played by history, cultural memories, and environmental conditions in the creation of our identities. About the areas of inquiry her work explores she has said “As innovations alter how we perceive and interact with the world, are we coming closer to or farther from understanding each other and the world around us? In continually mining this question I find the memory of time and history

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preserved in the natural environment surrounding us as a major theme in my practice. The traces and clues discovered in this investigation reveal quasi-cyclical patterns of the past and remind us at the same time to question how we might use this evidence to ethically move forward.” Her exhibited work focuses on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the 6-million-square-mile gyre of plastic debris that floats in the North Pacific Ocean and questions the impact human consumption has on this planet we rely upon for our survival. In this work and others Berlier acts as an archeologist excavating material objects to challenge our understanding of human progress.

Using ceramics, fiber, and traditional craft with contemporary technologies and junk materials, **Ilana Crispi** creates excessively crafted objects and environments. Crispi, who is originally from Los Angeles, looks at perspective and examines the way we see a landscape or a history or a social exchange. This mix of life experience from both Los Angeles and the Bay Area is evident in the fragments of narrative she builds by incorporating bits of stories through audio, video, clay, and familiar forms into unfamiliar situations. Crispi’s work often bridges gallery space to public environments that lead to unexpected encounters. Recently, she has been working on a project that involves inviting the public to sit on, drink from, and eat out of urban dirt, particularly from San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood, transformed into ceramic vessels and furniture. About an iteration of this project in San Francisco’s Mission neighborhood, Crispi has said “I am testing the land – firing it, mixing it, and questioning its meaning and ownership.” Crispi’s work exhibited in *Planned Obsolescence* is, in some ways, the opposite of that as it depicts nature invading and completely taking over a contemporary human work environment almost as if nature itself was taking revenge for hundreds of years of exploitation at the hands of humans.

Woody De Othello is a sculptor working primarily with ceramics. Originally from Florida, he came to the Bay Area inspired by Mission School painters such as Barry McGee as well as the area’s history of innovative ceramicists. “The Bay Area has had somewhat of a magnetic pull on me,” De Othello has said, “primarily because of my interest in ceramics and figurative works, the historic draw weighs heavy. Artists such as Rob Arneson, Viola Frey, and Peter Voulkos helped to formulate my early understanding of the potential of what clay could become, and opened my eyes to the various approaches and applications of the medium.” Indeed, his ceramic sculptures exemplify this combined 2D and 3D influence. Many of De Othello’s pieces are anthropomorphized household objects that seem to shift and sag as a result of outside pressures and/or exhaustion, or perhaps even internal vacuity. About his adopted home De Othello has said “The breadth of discourse here and openness to engagement from different perspectives is what I can attest to. There is a strong social engagement in the work and exhibitions being produced, which is tied to the radical legacy of the Bay Area. It’s political, it’s progressive, and it’s queer.” His own work, often characterized as lumpy, cryptic, and absurd, can be described this way, albeit in a quite subtle, yet disquieting way. De Othello is creating brand new work for the exhibition that reflects a meditation on the theme of “planned obsolescence” applied to the human experience. In fact, the high gloss, almost reflective glaze he uses will be an invitation to the viewer to see themselves in these new pieces.

Combining the printed element of collage with the three dimensionality of assemblage, **Hope Kroll** inventively layers imagery culled from a wide array of antique books including old encyclopedias, medical texts, children’s books, popular science, technical manuals, paper dolls and old photographs. Her careful juxtaposition of imagery transforms the presupposed chaos of subjects into cohesive compositions that re-

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imagine patterns in nature and investigate the neurotic processes of humankind. “I find beauty in odd and disturbing imagery,” Kroll has said, “I find the challenge of transforming the grotesque into something beautiful to be especially satisfying.” Her exhibited work highlights not only the potential tension between human beings and machinery, but also the absurd and insidious human obsession with technological advancement and efficiency at any cost. Relating these themes with her practice, Kroll has said, “As to the dark side of human nature I am not afraid to dig in it and cut it up, bringing what I find to light... There is also a dark side to collage in its ruthless destruction and dismantling of books and photographs.”

Croatian-Swiss conceptual artist **Izidora Leber LETHE** maintains a studio art practice spanning the disciplines of installation, sculpture, writing, and the video essay. Currently based in the Bay Area, she extracts and traces site specific (art)histories to examine their impacts onto our understanding of culture today. Leber LETHE has described herself as a “visual anthropologist and queer secret agent” who subverts the Bay Area’s silent complicity in consumerism by amplifying marginalized voices and excavating erased queer histories. About this she has said “It is essential for an artist to gather information about the specificities of where he is; it is our role to grasp the complexity of the notion of ‘culture’... Newcomers [to the Bay Area] live in extremely short time periods and do not seem to be concerned by the historical understanding of a place. In addition, Americans often have a ‘limited vision’ of the long term.” Leber LETHE is creating new work specifically for *Planned Obsolescence* that seeks to expose the collapsing of the history of monument making, particularly monuments to normative American ideology and values, through a traversing of notions of ancient “Classicism” and “Modernism” to “Contemporaneity.”

Diana Li is an artist and arts organizer who experiments with video, technology, and installation to channel intergenerational transmissions of memory, knowledge, and personal experiences, mostly deriving from the ether-nets of her mixed diasporic background. Born and raised in the United States to Chinese-Peruvian parents, Li concerns herself with the intergenerational passage and overloading of information. The installation she is creating for this exhibition is a literary and found-object portrait of her parents' sedentary lives. Much more than that, it touches on the idea that they continuously need to submit themselves to burning out under a capitalist system and that this process of submission sustains itself through the numbing consumption and escape of television, food, hoarding, medication, and memory loss. Memory and its loss are areas of particular interest to Li as she fragments the links we hold dear to contemporary consumer electronics and conceptualizes the liminal capacity of technology to possess and display the cognitive afterlife of migratory human and object dementia. About this she has said, “I see the techno-transference of memory as a non-linear process that offers a gateway to feel closer to the aura of loss in an age of pixilated preservation.”

Born in New York and currently based in San Francisco, artist and educator **Darrin Martin** is concerned with what is gained and lost in the process of translation as mediated by old and new technologies. He engages the synesthetic qualities of perception through video, performance, sculpture, and print-based installations. Knowing a little lingo, a little java, a little Max/MSP/Jitter but really not “knowing” any of it, Martin has reversed engineered his way through projects, as he watches some programs grow while others wither into obsolescence. Of his artistic practice he has said, “I’ve become more interested in the subject of technology than the act of manipulating it.” *Planned Obsolescence* includes work from two of Martin’s projects. One questions the art world’s obsession with “classical” forms using 3D scanning, 3D printing, and video manipulation while the other reflects on the everyday as it is experienced through the lens of the seemingly

indispensable technology embodied in the cell phone as well as a record of its limitations.

Born in San Francisco, **Daniel McClain** is a painter whose work combines a synthesis between painting and collage. He combines surfaces of scuffed, torn, and layered scrapes of discarded papers and disassembled books with the pages and text removed and the spines revealed. McClain's painted images of familiar objects invite the viewer to question what they are, what they represent, and how they connect with our lives. This recognizable imagery creates an opportunity for dialogue between viewer and artwork, opening a discussion that reveals something about the viewer in a particular moment in time. This interaction, in McClain's point of view, completes the artwork. Through the simple graphic quality and the inherent physical presence of everyday objects, his exhibited work explores the familiarity of objects and their subversion by modern life.

Lucy Puls works with images and objects to explore the uniquely human relationship to material possessions. To Puls, personal belongings play a psychological and cultural role that is exceedingly complex, which is why her artistic practice focuses on combining these kinds of objects into her installations. About this source material she has said "It's easy to see how a society lives and what is valued through the objects it casts off." Puls believes possessions have long functioned as code for one's position in the world and are employed as signifiers of what and whom we believe ourselves to be. She is fascinated with the relationship between human and object because of her interest in how a culture and society that is based on capitalism can continue to find ways to attract individuals to participate. *Planned Obsolescence* includes work from three projects by Puls from a span of approximately fifteen years that focus on discarded personal items. One question that unites these projects, as well as her practice as a whole, is "How can we know who we really are given the competition for our mid-space and pocketbook?"

Artist **Lauren Jade Szabo** makes paintings composed of man-made objects in the process of being reclaimed by nature. Being originally from Los Angeles, she was impacted by the tendency of locals to spend a significant amount of their time in their cars commuting where they are constantly bombarded with advertising. Szabo's subjects are always in an unrestored state and include paper billboards, neon signs, incandescent bulb signs, and skytyping. Szabo chooses to depict such signs in a state of decay as advertisements seem to promise perfect, static, and ultimately false outcomes. About her work's focus on addressing contemporary social issues through painting Szabo has said "I consider my work to be a part of a generation that shares a collective consciousness of reevaluating the ways that humans interact with the environment and each other as our hybrid landscape progresses." Indeed, her exhibited work reflects an urgency of reevaluating our relationship to consumerism.

In conjunction with the opening of this group exhibition, participating artists Woody De Othello and Lucy Puls will present illustrated lectures 5:00pm - 6:00pm in the Department of Art & Art History Lecture Hall (room 133) the evening of January 29, 2019, just prior to the opening reception, 6:00pm-7:30pm in the Natalie and James Thompson Art Gallery. Both events are free and open to the public.

We would like to extend our humblest appreciation to Woody De Othello as well as Jessica Silverman, Barret Lybbert, Jennifer Bindman, and the staff of Jessica Silverman Gallery (San Francisco, CA) for their help in facilitating the loan of Woody De Othello's work and to Sebastian Alvarez, Ebitenyefa Baralaye, Terry Berlier, Ilana Crispi, Hope Kroll, Izidora Leber LETHE, Diana Li, Darrin Martin, Daniel McClain, Lucy Puls, and Lauren

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Jade Szabo for generously loaning their own works to us directly.

LOCATION: Natalie and James Thompson Art Gallery, Art Building, San José State University
(Near 9th / San Carlos Streets)

EXHIBITION DATES: January 29 – February 22, 2019

OPENING RECEPTION: Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 6:00pm-7:30pm
Natalie and James Thompson Art Gallery, Art Building, San José State University
Free and open to the public

ILLUSTRATED PRESENTATION

Woody De Othello & Lucy Puls: *Planned Obsolescence*

Tuesday, January 29, 2019, 5:00pm-6:00pm
SJSU Campus, Art Building Lecture Hall, Room #133
Free and open to the public

GALLERY HOURS: Monday – Friday, 10:00am-4:00pm and
Tuesday evenings 6:00pm-7:30pm
(and by appointment)

FURTHER INFORMATION: Jo Farb Hernández, Director
jo.hernandez@sjsu.edu

ADDITIONAL IMAGES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

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