



Natascha Seideneck's "Disaster Archive," metallic inkjet on resin-coated acrylic.

Center for Visual Art

## Review: Metro Faculty Show *Collective Nouns* Rates an A

MICHAEL PAGLIA | JANUARY 11, 2017 | 8:28AM

Organizing faculty shows can be challenging, since the pieces involved are often tied together by nothing more than the fact that they were created by artists who live and work right in town. *Collective Nouns*, the current show at the **Center for Visual Art**, was a particular challenge: **Metropolitan State University of Denver** has one of the largest art programs in the state, and although just half of its faculty members contributed to this exhibit, the source of their work ranges from traditional fine-art fields to various design disciplines. But CVA curator Cecily Cullen has managed to pull it all together.



From left: "is EMANCIPATION" by Peter Bergman; Carlos Frésquez, Nuestra Señora de Aztlán; ¡¡Liberty and Justice for All!!

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*Collective Nouns* gets off to a strong start in the gallery to the right of the entry with “It keeps to itself,” by Karin Davis. The shape of the monumental sculpture is organic, simultaneously reminiscent of a plant, a tornado and a figure; it’s covered in combed natural wool that’s been hand-dyed in shades of green, yellow and brown. Although there’s a hidden armature underneath, the wool covering gives the piece a soft, tactile feeling. Nearby is Phillip Mann’s “#175,” which conveys the opposite effect: hardness. Made of wood and metal, the sculpture – which comprises a handle, a blade-like element and a sphere – looks like a tool, but its purpose is indecipherable. With this piece, Mann manages to directly refer to people without employing any figural elements.

Diagonal from the Mann is a pair of three-dimensional, cartoonish vignettes by Michael Bernhardt in the form of wall-hung sculptures, each containing a set of elements placed on a shelf. In “Nothing Rhymes With Orange, Except Maybe Mutual Mass Destruction,” a mushroom cloud is included among the items on the shelf; this is one of a handful of pieces in the show made in reaction to Donald Trump’s recent election victory. The adjacent wall takes you from the Apocalypse to the sublime: a half-dozen of Charles Livingston’s elegant, large-format drawings. These are from the “Infinite Drawing” series that he began in 2007, and each subsequent drawing is partly based on the one that preceded it, exemplifying conceptual abstraction.



Tsehai Johnson, "Glacier Blue."

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As you work your way along the corridor, an unusual installation by Sandy Lane, "Mapping the Liminal," is on view in the first of the south galleries. Suspended by a multitude of cords are little boxes that Lane has built out of wood and paper; inside the boxes and visible through the paper are pressed plants and dead birds. At first I thought they were accurate renderings of these things rather than the actual specimens, since Lane is best known for her drawings. The real references to mortality make the piece creepy, but that feeling is offset by the poetic handling of the paper-clad boxes.

Mortality also seems to be the theme that Natascha Seideneck is conjuring with images from her much larger “Disaster Archive” series. For these 21 photo-based works, Seideneck has appropriated found Internet images of disasters such as airplane crashes, floods, accidents and other unpleasant situations. Interestingly – and anti-intuitively – she exploits the decorative potentials of these striking images by setting each within a circular format and carrying them out with metallic inks. Despite the negativity of the subjects, the results are gorgeous. In the next gallery, which has been curtained off, Kelly Monico also looks to the Internet as a source, with found YouTube clips of kids replicating the choreography from Beyoncé’s “Crazy in Love” video presented in a three-channel projection. This piece is very engaging, with the soundtrack permeating the entire CVA. It must make the staff crazy, but it’s easy to dance to.



Karin Davis, "it keeps to itself."

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For the installation “Mutability: One Thing Becomes Another,” Tsehai Johnson has covered the long wall that runs along the north side of the corridor with an assortment of small, gray-painted knickknack shelves. These hold odd, small ceramics that are parodies of mid-century-modern, industrially produced tableware; several of the vessels incorporate renditions of food. The little elements that Johnson orchestrates make a big statement, and they represent a continuation of her interests over the past few years.

Several large works occupy the roomy double space at the back, notably an enormous roundel painted directly on the wall titled “Chicanos Avanzan/Correr Fuerte” – which means “Chicanos advance, run strong.” The piece, by Carlos Frésquez, is based on the Converse sneaker logo, with a blue star in the middle against a white ground. Frésquez created an additional piece that was added to the roster at the last minute: “Nuestra Señora de Aztlán: Liberty and Justice for All,” another work that comments on Trump’s election. In it, Frésquez conflates Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Statue of Liberty; the painting includes a family of silhouetted immigrants at the bottom of the panel, fleeing toward the señora. Both works emphasize Frésquez’s brilliant ability to make art that expresses his cultural identity through the deconstruction of established clichés.



Michael Bernhardt (left), "We Fear the Wrong Ideas of Others but Fail to See Them in Ourselves"; Phillip Mann, "#175"; Charles Livingston, "Infinite Drawing Series."

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A couple of other artists with pieces in this area also delve into politics. Sandra Jean Ceas's "Homeland Doors" explores religious conflict in Israel/Palestine with expertly done collages of enlargements of news photos. The collages are mounted on both sides of a pair of wall-hung doors; by flipping them, it's possible to see both sides, but they won't actually close together. Making a broader social comment about the pursuit of wealth is Sarah Rockett's "Five Star Fixation." The installation features a baby carriage painted gold and accented with rhinestones; hanging from the ceiling overhead are lighted globes on a gold chain that terminates in the carriage. Though the piece doesn't specifically mention Trump, its ostentatiousness does match the over-the-top sensibility seen in his family photos.



Lisa Corine von Koch (left), "The Pterosaur and the Muse"; Sarah Rockett, "Five Star Fixation."

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The show finishes up in the north gallery, where some of the most intimate pieces are clustered. Among the standouts are two conceptual “paintings” by Rachael Delaney: precise copies of found children’s crayon drawings done in felt on canvas that are really charming. Also charming is “Anthony,” by Andrew Kuebeck, though his subject is more adult: a full-frontal depiction of a male nude done in laser-engraved felt. Looking positively sweet – and kitschy – are lighted boxes by Jessica Moore in which wooden cut-outs of silhouetted animals and trees are set in front of little paintings of the landscape. These Moore boxes are clearly tongue-in-cheek copies of Wild West-style wall plaques from the first half of the last century.



Dawn S. McFadden (left), "tutto gia"; Martin Mendelsberg, "Tipping My Bowler to René Magritte"; Andrew Kuebeck, "Anthony"; Jessica Moore, "Animals of the Forest."

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As noted earlier, there's an inherent difficulty in assembling an exhibit like *Collective Nouns*, because it has a subject – artists who teach at Metro – but no real theme to link the works together. I wasn't surprised to see that Cullen had used her refined instinctual sense for installation to meet this challenge. By carefully placing the works and giving each artist a lot of space, she makes the whole exhibit look so smart that I nearly forgot to notice that *Collective Nouns* doesn't make any conceptual sense. This feat is all the more remarkable considering that many thematically curated shows wind up having a shuffled-deck-of-cards quality. *Collective Nouns* could have, or even should have, a similar free-association feel, but it doesn't.

Give this faculty show an A.

***Collective Nouns, through Saturday, January 21, at MSUD Center for Visual Art, 965 Santa Fe Drive, 303-294-5207, [msudenver.edu/cva](http://msudenver.edu/cva).***

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