

**University of Pennsylvania**  
**MFA Thesis 2002 Gallery Notes**  
**By Matt Freedman**

Impressive as the formal evolution of the work of the University of Pennsylvania's large and talented MFA class of 2002 has been in the past two years, it pales in comparison to the almost universal development of exactingly personal themes and processes by these young artists. As academic allegiances to style and content have given way to passionate and committed bodies of work, self-conscious experiments in identity and polemics have been replaced by emphatic, beautiful and persuasive art.

**Hamdi Ahmed** is drawn to the image of the telephone pole, a particular icon of mass communication at once contemporary and anachronistic. His poles are intimate, distressed, and completely, fatally, isolated. The exuberant skeins of paint in **Michelle Albert's** cacophonous orchestrations underlie an alarming intrusion, in the strange and witty form of toy plastic animals, into the real space surrounding her paintings. **Bradford Bailey's** conflation of violent and narrative tropes from the familiar visual vocabulary of cartoon art does not ease up on the rigor of his esthetic manipulations but rather introduces a new tool in his arsenal: wit.

**Catriona Baker's** beautiful animations of a vaguely sinister yet sentimental quotidian world usher us into a weirdly profound investigation of autobiographic issues. Clouds of color and swooping lines give **Erica Bradbury's** paintings a heady buzz. Her overload gluts the eye and short-circuits the brain. The abstract curvilinear shapes that constitute **Heather Brammeier's** serene paintings imply infinite replication, and their edges become simply the meddling intrusion of clumsy reality.

**Julie Cardillo's** surreal landscape paintings are so packed with overwhelming visual details and narrative contradictions they seem x-rayed self-portraits. The extraordinary labor-intensiveness of **Daniel Dalseth's** detritus-based structures give these elegantly profane spaces a profoundly sacred presence. **Joseph Erb's** computer animation of a Cherokee legend reinterprets a traditional creation myth and subtly mocks the apocalyptic story lines favored by the video game industry. **Donald Gensler's** civic-minded public murals have evolved intriguingly into performances that question the purpose of social convention at both the institutional and individual level. The ephemeral nature of **Alston Johnson's** installation work has acquired a fine bite as she has edged her own body literally albeit ambivalently into her stylized narrative photographs.

Sculptor **Erica Johnson's** figure-based work has moved from symbolic representations to the poetry of the paradoxical: rickety ladders promise to take us nowhere fast and vegetal tendrils flutter in a windless breeze. **Jessica Doyle's** playful and gently libidinal musing move effortlessly back and forth from the maternal to the frankly sexual, the one clarifying and enlarging the other.

**Paul Komada's** huge and colorful geometric abstractions have always suggested leaps off the canvas. Now, more than ever before, they seem to be poised to do just that. **Mark Munson's** narrative paintings have given way to resolute abstraction, but a "story persists; the jewel-like clusters cloak the absent artist. The figures lurking just off screen in much of **Loi Nguyen's** earlier work have moved confidently and eccentrically to center stage in this portrait series of friends of the artist.

The formal appeal of **Nicholas Nyland's** abstractions; washes, hard parallels and curlicues, belies their juicy playful verve. The rhythmic, syncopated swing and sway of **Matthew Osborn's** bustling paintings are the pictorial incarnations of the music that constitutes his creative output. **Linnea Paskow's** portraits are more than character studies; they project a calmness and generosity of spirit that seems to reflect the artist's own nature. **Gautam Rao's** enormous photographic projections personify America's cultural divide; the artist "occupies" other bodies, interiors, whole buildings.

**Jacqueline Sweeney's** prints and video animations express the verve and logic of music. The sheer physicality of her swirling forms creates muscular organized noise. **Sean Taylor's** system based painting strategies have led to carefully calibrated play: randomness is quantified in grids merged with swirling masses of uncontrolled paint. **Jaime Treadwell's** tough satiric paintings are at once acidly funny polemical attacks on social convention and unflinching explorations of his own complicit behavior.

The complexity and precision of **Jin Tsubota's** eroticized bed/torture chamber, seemingly at odds with his earlier more casual work, ultimately establishes more persuasively than ever the artist's trickster magician persona. **Marjorie Van Cura's** edgy paintings are meditations on the notion of communication itself: what is communicated is less important than the challenge of transferring meaning itself. **Gregory Vigo-Torres's** casually elegant color bars on nearly raw plywood teeter between the ephemeral and the concrete, bemusing the audience, amusing the artist. **Tom Walther's** inward looking, gritty and angular experiments with sculptural reliefs have evolved formally and emotionally into a series of carefully yet emotionally drawn images that seem to be schematic diagrams, hieroglyphics almost of a personal history.