

General statement

It's become traditional, at Hunter College, for an outside critic to visit the studios of graduating artists and write in response to their work. That is about the only tradition going. 21st century art schools are not known for groupthink, but even among its peers Hunter is an unusually individualistic program. It has no dominant tendencies, nor even any evident center of gravity. Students are encouraged to establish their own frameworks of reference, to develop their own unique vision and an equally unique skill set to support it.

I have therefore elected not to generalize about the current graduating class, instead offering short essays on each individual practice. Taken together, they may be taken as a census of where New York's art is at the moment – or just as a random sample of highly talented people. In any case, it has been an honor to encounter these artists at this decisive moment in their careers, and to offer an immediate critical response to their work. I feel sure you'll be hearing about them again.

- Glenn Adamson

Amy Butowicz

This summer, Amy Butowicz took up a residency in upstate New York, at Salem Art Works. Her time there was devoted to a single felled tree. She harvested its branches, which were laced with disease, and incorporated them into sculpture. It was heavy work, formally powerful and deeply felt.

But here's the thing: until the residency, Butowicz had been making very different works, possessed of urban glamor. Made mostly of fabric, scrunched and twisted and painted with garish color, her sculptures were all dressed up with everywhere to go. She returned to her final semester at Hunter, then, with a particular objective in mind: to resolve the seeming contradictions between two bodies of work. She'd been an exuberant city mouse, then a sober country mouse. Now she needed to drag both those personas on to the floor and get them dancing.

And dance they do. At this crucial moment, Butowicz hit on an unconventional sculptural material: rush, a twisted grass often used in upholstery. You've probably sat on it, but you'll never have seen it like this: arranged in long, loping forms, like lounging bodies. To this primary element she has conjoined a diverse range of found objects, some of rustic character, some fit for a queen (a drag queen, that is). Swept up into the compositional vortex are bits of furniture, a door, seemingly the contents of a whole house in glorious disarray. The sculptures arrange themselves in extended phrases, as if trying to communicate in a language only objects understand. Maybe artists do too.

Standing vigil nearby, and completing the impression of domestic dishabille, is a three-panel screen, spray-painted in bruising palette of green, purple and bronze. At the bottom, a red velvet cushion peeks out: a little moment of indiscretion, a secret dying to be revealed.

Life is filled with conflict. At its best, art does not look away from that fact, nor try to resolve the mess of experience into a single unified whole. Butowicz's rough and tumble creations have this wisdom within them: that contradiction is its own kind of truth.