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## School of the Art Institute 2006 MFA Graduate Exhibition

Written By: Tara Foster

It is to be expected that the graduating MFA candidates from one of the most prestigious establishments of higher learning, dedicated entirely to artistic study, would produce innovative, thought provoking, and altogether awe-inspiring works of art. Despite its almost overwhelming size and scope (most every artistic media is equally represented), the "School of the Art Institute 2006 MFA Graduate Exhibition" is cohesive and engaging. Through the winding space of Gallery 2, the bombardment of artwork is overwhelming. Still, there are four artists that stand out beyond all the others. The work of these four artists, Amber Hawk Swanson, Ho Yun Son, Matthew Hilshorst and Tom Long, evokes the feeling of being privy to greatness before it has even been fully realized.

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 5/6/2006 - 5/19/2006

Amber Hawk Swanson's digital videos are displayed on small format screens strewn throughout the gallery space. All but one of the videos features the artist as the main subject, and most of the videos display mock pornography. While the artist/subject is filmed amid various, inherently female and sexualized activities - a beautifying regimen (bleaching her facial hair), being spanked while scantily clad, engaging in oral sex, auditioning for "Girls Gone Wild" - she emotionlessly defines and discusses feminism. These pieces are both shocking and endearing. Swanson has succeeded in illustrating and critiquing the already existing dichotomy within what it means to be female and a feminist in twenty-first century American society.



Ho Yun Son also exhibited installation pieces, notably *FYI - For Your Information*, which is repeated in a few inconspicuous places all over the gallery. The installations consist of constructed information phone booths, appropriately colored in red and white. Upon picking up the receiver and becoming an active participant in the installation, one is confronted with an automated recorded system much like most telephonic customer service centers. Proceeding through the voice prompts that Yun Son has created, it becomes apparent that the entire piece acts as an analysis of what it means to be American. Such an issue is extremely apropos of the current political climate within this country, but would be thought provoking and meaningful regardless. Yun Son has reconstructed a now commonplace experience into social commentary that is so superbly subtle that it is entirely unsettling.



Matthew Hilshorst's work also focuses on restructuring and examining the mundane and commonplace. However, his work is much more accessible in the sense that his pieces directly portray the commonplace. *Stallion*, a collage constructed of bottle caps in the shape of a horse and landscape, at first glance appears overly kitschy. Upon closer examination, though, one notices that all of the bottle caps used directly relate to the larger whole of the image. The piece then ultimately becomes a statement about the old American West and the current consumerist and mass-produced culture that has overtaken it's historic past. This statement is restrained, making it all the more powerful. Such is the theme of all of Hilshorst's exhibited pieces.

Tom Long's work is striking in a more aesthetic way. His technical ability is what draws the viewer in, and engages him/her to probe the pieces further. Long's paintings stylistically combine recognizable influence from Southeast Asian Buddhist iconography with Western architectural iconography. This melding into the fantastical images that Long creates is both visually stunning and culturally provocative.

While much of the other work exhibited in this show is stimulating, the four artists mentioned here seem to be on the cutting edge of careers that have only just begun. It is exciting to view the early pieces of artists who will continue to broach difficult, controversial and edgy ideas in their work. It is also a testament to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for producing and nurturing such work and artists.

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