

Review: MFA Thesis Show I

The first of three rounds of the 2017 MFA thesis exhibitions in the Eisentrager-Howard Gallery features works by Larry Buller, Michael Villarreal, and Rana Young. Each of these three artists individually explore memory and experience, and while their approaches vary, all invite the viewer to an intimate and nostalgic experience.

Viewers of Buller's exhibit, *Domestic Curiosities*, are confronted with a Rococo menagerie of glossy, ceramic objects. Fixed firmly in the kitsch, these seemingly household objects from an era past, confront the viewer with ornate decor, veering towards overt sexuality. Buller is a collector; his relics are intermingled with his own ceramics. His work's phallic imagery is at once welcoming and jarring when presented as objects one might find in an antique store or a curio cabinet. The viewer must slow down and read the artist's subversive questioning of masculinity. Visitors may approach the red velvet curtain with hesitation. There is something off-limits about discovering the content beyond. This, as Buller mentions in his thesis statement, is exactly the type of reaction he wants. Buller's work challenges the viewer to confront their own willingness to embrace what is uncomfortable, and does so with a cheeky extravagance!

In his exhibition *Whitetail*, Villarreal's art takes the viewer into an intimate, ants-eye-view of his childhood. His parents, employees at U-Haul, would bring excess materials and discarded objects into the home, which was built by his father. The sculptures in this show represent those domestic wares: a leather couch cushion, piled cinder blocks and an overhead mattress ask the participant to reconcile their memories of the materiality with Villarreal's construction of them. These objects were fabricated out of materials that are nostalgic for Villarreal and generally associated with the construction of a home -- wooden structures, insulation foam, joint compound, and latex paint. By recounting the memories of his childhood, this show invokes nostalgia. The oversized sculptures are playful and inviting; one almost wants to ascend the stairs or pick up the water hose.

Young's exhibition, *The Rug's Topography* demonstrates a meticulous eye for detail. As the viewer approaches the entrance to the show, they are greeted by a pale blue suspended wall. The wall gives a placid sense of calm as it blocks the public space from the private gallery. Young creates an intimate setting with seductive, cinematic lighting. Her work is suffused with brilliant jewel tones. Whereas Buller's show overwhelms the viewer with details, Young asks the viewer to slow down and search for them. Thematically, the show explores issues of sexuality, gender, and the private/public boundary. We follow the physical and emotional transformations of a single figure, permitted a glimpse of their private world. Young raises questions about society-imposed gender-norms, and the viewer is asked to be a voyeur.