

The Martha and Robert
Fogelman Galleries of
Contemporary Art

Erin Harmon: Aggregate Optics of Make-A-Do

January 18 – March 8, 2019

Artist Lecture: February 21, 7 pm, ACB 310

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Erin Harmon's work dwells in the twilight zone between painting and sculpture. Filled with longing for places that do not actually exist, contradictions flourish with invocations of both the animated and the arrested, the joyful and the staid, the high and the low. Material and processes become sites for fantasy, illusion, and the interplay between flat and not-flat. The vibrant work in *Aggregate Optics of Make-A-Do* tinkers with scale—from miniature ceramic forms to floor-to-ceiling painted panels—to produce environments that we can project ourselves into as landscapes, even while confronting their qualities of un-nature.

Borne from Harmon's previous body of painted paper collages, her new work is influenced by techniques common to theatrical painters, a lineage of shapes and images become a trail of breadcrumbs from one idea to another. In 2014, Harmon was invited to design a theatrical set in collaboration with Choreographer and Ballet Memphis Artistic Director Steven McMahon. The resultant performance, "Flyway," from the ballet *River Project III: Moving Currents*, was an experience that spawned work on a larger scale and with materials often used in set design such as latex theatrical paint and muslin. Her materials are scoured, drawn, painted, cut, and recycled over time, one idea begetting another, endlessly self-generating. Whether it be through ceramic, painted muslin, or projection animation (a collaborative video in which Harmon's gouache-on-paper cut-outs have been animated by artist and musician Kyle Statham), the finished works encapsulate a romance with materials and processes.

Related to theatrical spaces, the works in the exhibition function as sites for an event or performance. Yet, while conspicuously absent of humans, their uncanny existence exerts control over the viewer as actor, prescribing the way they move through space. Both the eye and the body at large are taken over in perceptual ways. Even the act of making the painted canvas works, due to their scale, become performative. They must be stood on while being made, which posits Harmon literally in the painting as a figure in her own landscape.

Oscillating between celebratory yet also oppressive, the works create a tension between the joyful liberation of conjuring a new, not-nature and the estranged sense of an unreality that has been manufactured. Harmon is interested in the idea of a place as a thing and a thing as a place.

The works in *Aggregate Optics of Make-A-Do* evoke Boris Pasternak's 1952 letter to Stephen Spender: "I would pretend (metaphorically) to have seen nature and universe themselves not as a picture made or fastened on an immovable wall, but as a sort of painted canvas roof or curtain in the air, incessantly pulled and blown and flapped by a something of an immaterial unknown and unknowable wind."

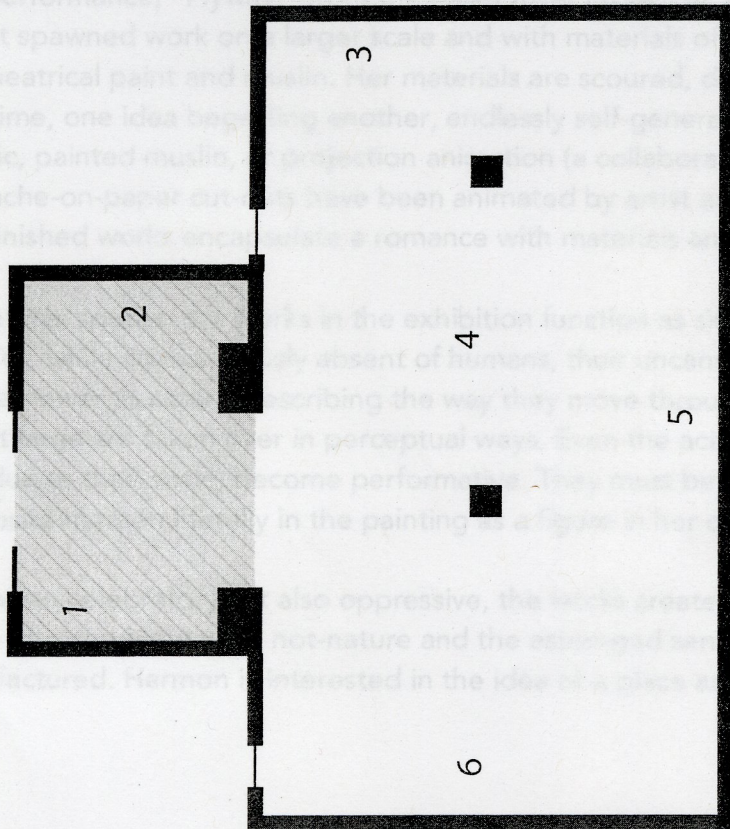
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Erin Harmon was raised in the suburbs of southern California. After graduating from San Diego State University with a BA in studio art, she earned her MFA in painting from Rhode Island School of Design. She has been featured in numerous group and solo exhibitions around the country including at LAUNCH Gallery, Los Angeles; Field Projects, New York; the Target Gallery at the Torpedo Art Center, Alexandria, VA; the Atlanta Artists Center & Gallery, GA; and the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, TN. She is a founding member of Tiger Strikes Asteroid, Los Angeles. She lives and works in Memphis, TN, and is Associate Professor of Art and Art History at Rhodes College, where she served James F. Ruffin Chair of Art.

AGGREGATE OPTICS OF MAKE-A-DO

Erin Harmon

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1. Erin Harmon
Echo, 2015

Gouache on paper, cut and collaged
16 x 12 1/2 in.

2. Erin Harmon
Sloppy Espalier, 2018

Latex on cut muslin garland, painted magnets, and wood blocks on painted muslin wall covering
Approx. 7 1/2 x 14 ft.

3. Erin Harmon
Horizon Allsorts, 2018

Ceramic, latex on cut muslin, pine floating shelves
9 in. x 12 ft.

4. Erin Harmon
Proscenium Hedgerow, 2018

Latex on three cut muslin panels, dowels
10 ft. 4 in. x 9 ft. x 2 ft.

5. Erin Harmon
Piecemeal Promenade, 2019

Latex on cut muslin
9 x 48 ft.

6. Erin Harmon and Kyle Statham
Blinky Bricolage, 2019

Gouache on cut paper, animated and projected
2:29 min.

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