

This exhibition, brochure, public lecture and artist visits are sponsored by the Art and Art History Department and the Olin Art Gallery, and are supported, in part, by Alumni and Parent Programs, the Inaugural Planning Committee for President S. Georgia Nugent, the Provost, and the Mesaros Fund.

With this body of work, Anthony Luensman enters into a collaboration with his past. He comments on the multi-layered relationships stemming from the people and artwork encountered during the time that he matriculated at Kenyon College.

Luensman adopts a strategic approach that at once embraces, avoids and subverts traditional models of collaboration. Even the title of the exhibition, *Eolian*, embodies this complex, nuanced strategy. Referring to materials carried or arranged by the wind, and also cleverly containing the name of Kenyon's gallery, *Eolian* implies that Luensman's experiences here in this space have been carried with him. Many artists react to the physical spaces holding their work. Luensman looks beyond the gallery as merely a container to hold his work. He responds to the history of a space, to the psychological space of a gallery, to the audience, and to the intersection of his own history with that space. Luensman deals with personal histories and institutional narratives, much of which are necessarily at some remove from the direct experience of his audience. While his work is challenging, it is, nonetheless, important to him that it remain accessible. In this

way, the artist is cognizant of his viewers, subtly guiding them into a range of responses and interactions. Luensman generously invites the gallery visitor into an active dialogue with artwork that serves as proxy for the artist. This body of work is simultaneously sculpture, painting,

necessarily linear, but rather, more cyclical or cumulative. This manifests itself in practical ways and in metaphorical value. Eclectic avenues of inquiry inform Luensman's practice. He has studied painting, literature and sculpture. He is a self-taught musician capable of handling a variety of traditional instruments, but more notably, he "masters" a strange, growing cache of hybrid, invented and appropriated instruments (which are often found incorporated into his installations). He has learned enough about electronics, circuitry and programming to animate—to breathe life—into his work. Luensman is the co-director of the highly influential, Cincinnati-based performance group Saw Theater, which has infused his work with a suitable sense of theatricality. As each of these varied skills and activities (and surely countless more yet discovered or admitted) provide the tools by which Luensman builds his projects, they are paralleled by the narratives and personal histories operating just beneath the surface of the work.

Pearl Diver (1988-2003) is an excellent

example of just such a personal form of collaboration. Luensman dusted off one of the few sculptures still extant from his Kenyon years and has given it a new setting and updated content. The sculpture is a figurative work that developed out of collegiate investigations into sexuality, reflected in the work of many young artists. In the original work, a nude figure was depicted standing on a bed of pearls submerged in a fish tank. The updated



Twitch, 1988-2003, wood, paper, nylon, acrylic, electronics; 12"x 33"

action, performance, environment, soundtrack, literature, readymade and situation. Taken individually, each work in the exhibition draws upon very specific moments in history, although drifting between personal, institutional and experiential histories. Taken as a whole, a commingling of the deeply personal and the ostensibly public strikes at the core of Luensman's approach.

The artist's process is not

piece retains all of the same components, but the tank is completely filled with pearls, rendering the figure nearly invisible—effectively appropriating and subverting the earlier work. This gesture recalls Robert Rauschenberg's famous

with fellow Kenyon classmate, Patrick B. Williams ('89), whose work Luensman admires. Luensman asked Williams to recreate elements from an early work that contained miniature hand-sculpted cows. Luensman has taken the cows and inserted them into

it were, is the lid of a large stainless steel vat scavenged from a Kenyon salvage yard. (The vat itself has found its way into another of Luensman's pieces, *Thunder Vats and Motor Rain*.) The lid languished in the studio until, as Luensman states, it "suggested itself" as a natural arena for the cows and pigs to playfully battle for supremacy over the Ohio landscape.

A third approach to collaboration is evidenced in the work *Peirce, Chalmers & Church* (2003). This work highlights Luensman's pointed hyper-responsiveness to a space and its history. Retro-fitted bike horns, which are installed over the entrance to the gallery, are sequenced on a timed cycle. They animatedly move back and forth, emitting lectures delivered by past presidents of Kenyon (their images hang just beyond the gallery in the library atrium), while one horn interjects an amalgam of lectures by former Professor of English, Philip Church.

Church's influence and ideas have continued to inform Luensman's work well beyond the classroom. This work combines an intensely personal history with the broader institutional history of Kenyon College, and in this manner suggests that the college nurtures multi-layered legacies. In this instance, legacies brought to the fore include the polished, enduring public face of Kenyon, as well as the less lofty but profoundly significant impact of the teacher-student relationship. In the gallery, we hear rhetorical, well-mannered lectures by past Kenyon presidents who proclaim the oft-stated mission of the institution in a cacophony of sound. In contrast to this presidential form of address, we also hear Philip Church wrestling performatively in the classroom with the works of Yeats, Woolf and Becket, enacting for his students the deepest meanings of these authors' learned texts. In amusing fashion, when the Church horn "speaks," the presidential horns pause and turn deferentially. The technology and apparatus of *Peirce, Chalmers & Church* is juxtaposed with a small, simple gesture that is easily overlooked. Just inside the entrance to the gallery, in a seam in the carpet, Luensman has installed *Threshold Fray* (2003). Peeking through the seam is a



Pearldiver (detail), 1988-2003, ceramics, pearls, painted wood, air pump; 72" x 24"

erasure of a Willem de Kooning drawing although this particular obfuscation is realized through an additive process. Like *Erased de Kooning* (1953), *Pearldiver* represents a communication between "old" and "new" perspectives, but given that the old still exists within the new, *Pearldiver* implies a more subtle maturation than negation.

With the work, *Ohio Tru-action Cowzandpigz* (2003), a somewhat more traditional collaboration was initiated

one of his own environments, playfully blending Williams's work with kinetic and participatory elements. Luensman's process serves as a very direct reconnection to his past (contacting a former classmate) as well as a more generalized homage to the notion of communal learning (gleaning as much from classmates as professors). *Ohio Tru-action Cowzandpigz* also engages another of Luensman's material tactics. The "playing field," as

small section of gold leaf, an efficient nod to the history of art, and to the Olin Art Gallery's history. Luensman playfully points to an underpinning of the gallery, a "hallowed ground" that in its frayed décor evidences the rigors of generations of foot traffic.



Slate's Shadow, 2003, red acrylic, suction cups, electroluminescent wire; 60" x 40" x 1"

In another homage to an influential professor, Luensman references a work in the Kenyon collection installed in the library on the floor above the Olin Gallery. The work is *Saint's Habit* (1988) by former Professor of Art, Joseph Slate. Luensman duplicates the exact scale of the work but radically alters the materials in his own piece, titled *Slate's Shadow* (2003). The original work is a gold line and acrylic painting on canvas executed in red and gold tones. Interpreted in Luensman's visual vernacular, the red background becomes tinted plexiglas and the gold lines are transformed into a glowing cord (electroluminescent wire). The new materials allude not only to Luensman's material biases, but also serve to reanimate the work. This gesture is not meant to suggest that the painting requires updating or new life, but rather that the work of Slate deserves a new or reinvigorated audience, which may tend to overlook the painting's presence today. By referring to a work located in another space in the building, Luensman invites travel between the gallery and the library, welcoming all of the

associations and discoveries along the way.

In their capacity as a quasi-welcoming committee, the *Gallery Buoys* (2003) provide a literal overview of the gallery. Their form is a slightly simplified footprint of the Olin Gallery. As Luensman worked on the layout and design of *Eolian* he realized that the gallery floor plan itself had captured his attention. Luensman determined to bring life to the gallery blueprint in the form of diminutive polyvinyl characters—whimsical, inflated figures. If the gallery is an entity, then these figures are perhaps the offspring sent out as ambassadors for the space. From a certain perspective they are ideal representatives of the Olin Gallery; their arms raised in a joyful pose, they exhibit an unabashed delight in their surroundings and the contents therein. In a certain sense they are the most lighthearted of the works in the exhibition. But from another perspective, they most poignantly direct us toward Luensman's insistence that the Olin Art Gallery is a living, physical being capable of interacting on a deep and elemental level with its history—with its past parade of artwork and patrons.

Anthony Luensman's work exists in an unclaimed space between discrete object and installation. It is responsive to a space in very specific ways, but can also be read in more general terms. He points us toward themes that have universal implications such as growth, interdependency, overlapping histories and student-teacher relationships. If the viewer chooses to scratch the surface of these objects, more deeply personal histories are also revealed. His generative impulses are layered in such a way as to suggest a strategy more substantive than pastiche or simple, cathartic personal revelation. Luensman's projects represent an active, thoughtful and open-ended collaboration with his past.

- Matthew Distel

Matthew Distel is Assistant Curator of Exhibitions, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH.



Ohio Tru-action Cowzandpigz, with Patrick B. Williams [detail], 2003, Sculptey, stainless steel disc, joysticks, electronics; arena: 33" x 4", joystick: 42" x 6"



Gallery Buoys (detail), 2003, polyvinyl, acrylic; 12" x 12" x 4" each

Eolian is dedicated to the memory of former Kenyon College Professor of English, Philip Church.

The artist would like to thank the following individuals and institutions: Adam Barton (Starks Plastics); Carissa Barnard; Andrée Hymel Bober; Mark Fox; Nick Helton; Kenyon College workstudy students; Gordon Lahmon; Amy & John Meyer; Mark & Jennifer Middendorf; David Phipps; Scott Pringle; Royal Rhodes; Matthew Roberts; Heidi Sarkozy; Mitchell Sipus; Karen Snouffer; Tom & Dee Stegman; The Weston Art Gallery; and Samuel Worthen. A special thanks to Matthew Distel; Claudia Esslinger and family; Bradley Gray; Tim Hogan; Lois Luensman; Patrick B. Williams and Dan Younger. Very special thanks are extended to Don DeSander and Eric Puryear for their exceptionally generous contributions of time and talent. Finally, appreciation is extended to Patrick Luangkhot for his innovative photographic documentation.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS AND PERFORMANCES

2003

Massive: Luminosity, SSNOVA, Cincinnati, OH

Zeloso, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH

NOW y2k+3 Music Festival, Capital University, Columbus, OH

2002

Ocean Music Festival, Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Oberlin, OH

Kid Thunder, Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, CA

Irato, Weston Art Gallery, Aronoff Center for the Arts, Cincinnati, OH

Sound Ghosts, SSNOVA, Cincinnati, OH

2001

Insist/Resist, Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, CA

*The Kiss**, 5th Third Black Box Theatre, Aronoff Center for the Arts

2000

*The Tempter Ris'n**, Weston Art Gallery, Aronoff Center for the Arts

Stacked, Weston Art Gallery, Aronoff Center for the Arts

*Account Me Puppet**, Tour: New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Atlanta and Cincinnati

Converging Currents, Old St. George Church, Cincinnati, OH

1999

*The Tempter Ris'n**, Headlands Center for the Arts

*Faust**, The Cincinnati Opera, Cincinnati, OH

Criminal Impulses, College Conservatory of Music, Cincinnati, OH

*Account Me Puppet**, Black Freezer Theater, Cincinnati, OH

Built, Rike Center, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH

1998

*Account Me Puppet**, The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI

Fallen Stages: Drawings, Pages and Chapters from Account Me Puppet, The Detroit Institute of Arts

* Saw Theater Production

AWARDS

2003-4

Taipei Artist Village Residency, Taiwan

Individual Artist Grant, Cincinnati Arts Allocation Committee

2001

Headlands Center for the Arts Residency

2000

Ohio Arts Council Fellowship

1998

Individual Artist Grant, Cincinnati Arts Allocation Committee

1997

The Poetry Prize, Xavier University

1995-97

Xavier University Graduate Assistantship

1995

Individual Artist Grant, Cincinnati Arts Allocation Committee

1988

The Kenyon Prize, Kenyon College

The Ryerson Prize in Painting, Kenyon College

Hallstein Memorial Award for Sculpture, Kenyon College

1984-88

Kenyon Scholarship, Kenyon College

ABOUT OLIN

The Olin Art Gallery seeks to foster an understanding of art by presenting artistically and culturally diverse contemporary and historical exhibitions within the educational environment of Kenyon College. Olin Art Gallery sponsors monthly exhibitions, lectures and artist visits by international, national and regional artists, as well as Kenyon art department faculty, students and alumni.

Please contact Daniel P. Younger, Director, for further information the Olin Art Gallery's exhibitions and programs. 740.427.5346. We invite you to visit the Olin Art Gallery website at: www2.kenyon.edu/artgallery.



Olin Library

Kenyon College

Gambier, OH 43022

Mon-Fri: 8:30 am to 8:00 pm

Sat & Sun: 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

Holidays: Please call.

740.427.5346