'The Matter That Surrounds Us'

'The Matter That Surrounds Us', staged in the Lower Gerald S. and Sandra Fineberg Gallery, pairs German artist Wols' artwork from the late 1940s and early 1950s and Charline Von Heyl’s current work and is curated by curator-at-large for the Rose Art Museum, Katy Siegel.

The exhibit description notes that as a child, Von Heyl was influenced by Wols' painting, "Blue Phantom." Wols and Von Heyl, both abstract artists, work with delicate, fine lines in order to create an enormous amount of detail and complexity within their pieces. However, their artwork also makes use of larger and more generalized images.

The two artists' styles are different enough that it is easy to tell who created which pieces. In general, Wols' pieces are smaller and were staged clustered together while Von Heyl's pieces were larger and spread out around the gallery. Wols' works used fleshy tones while Von Heyl's works were vibrant and colorful.

Von Heyl's "Skull" juxtaposes elements of neatness with messiness as it depicts a smooth skull shape filled in with what looks like an explosion of purple and red. Next to the piece, a quote from Von Heyl is mounted, reading, "As an artist you peel away and peel away what you don't need and sometimes at the end you're surprised at what you need."

Wols' "La Grande Tete," or "Big Head" looks like a deformed and melting visage. The piece was drawn with hundreds of thin lines, creating intricate details. At the same time, however, the piece looks cartoon-like, with accented features, even in its wealth of detail.

Another piece by Wols—"Nu Gris" or "Gray Nude"—depicts the outline of a female torso represented abstractly by a single, slightly warped curve. In keeping with his technique of combining the large-scale with the intricate, Wols uses many thin lines to create a generalized and abstract shape.

In a very unconventional way, this exhibit presents as a thesis—comparing these two artists and their works side-by-side, exhibiting what ties them together as well as what differentiates their work.

-Emily Wishingrad
'Collection in Focus'

Collection in Focus: The Threshold of Recognition in the Mildred S. Lee Gallery and curated by Prof. Nancy Scott (FA), is composed of just three paintings: "Nebenwerte" (2013) by Thomas Scheibitz, "Le Siphon" (1913) by Juan Gris and Fernand Léger's "La Femme Bleue" (1929).

"Nebenwerte" has an imposing presence, taking up the space of an entire wall. The piece is comprised of big, blocky, geometric shapes that resemble graffiti. In a description mounted on the wall to accompany the work, Scott writes about the puns in its title "The title 'Nebenwerte' conveys ... ambiguity: the German compound word conjoins neben (near, adjoining, peripheral) with werte (worth or value), yielding a range of possible translations, among these secondary value, or peripheral assets. For Scheibitz 'the work controls the title and not the other way around,' and thus, we can read this enigmatic title as a reflection of the puzzles his painting presents." "Nebenwerte" is an extremely puzzling piece but the somewhat ambiguous title reveals that Scheibitz welcomes many interpretations.

To the right are the two smaller works, "La Femme Bleue" and "Le Siphon." "La Femme Bleue" depicts a curvaceous woman surrounded by similarly curved, abstract blobs that mirror the woman's form. "Le Siphon," then, is a cubist representation of water and metal imagery. Scott describes the piece as an "analytic dissection of objects in a café [that] centers on the new gadgetry of the popular soda siphon, a bottle used to carbonate beverages." The modernistic representation of a gadget that is itself a symbol of modernity is very fitting.

In the exhibit, Scott creates a tension between very different artists, creating an interesting arrangement of works that span diverse time periods. The pieces deal with bold, geometric and highly abstract structures, using simple shapes to represent the complex, conventions of cubism.

Collection in Focus: The Threshold of Recognition portrays a historical look at cubist works and how the form has retained its presence in modern-day art.

-Emily Wishingrad

'Bowls Balls Souls Holes'

German artist Mika Rottenberg's Bowls Balls Souls Holes is an out-of-the-box museum experience. The exhibition feels more like a piece of performance art than a traditional art exhibit as one walks through the interactive and puzzling space.

Staged in the Lois Foster Gallery, Bowls Balls Souls Holes is set up in a very stark atmosphere—the gallery's walls are white and very bare. On opposite walls are two air conditioner units each topped with small potted plants. As you approach the air conditioners, a hissing sound greets you, created by perfectly timed water droplets falling from the air conditioner and hitting a heated pot below. The water drop patterns of the two installation pieces are timed at slightly different intervals, creating an echo effect that is hypnotizing. The air conditioners are programmed to drip at a constant, steady pace—allowing for no breaks in the sound. The piece is fittingly called "Tsss."

On the right side of the exhibit is the only conventional wall hanging, "Squeeze," a photograph of a woman in a pristine, form fitting dress holding and cringing away from what looks like a cube of food and metal candle-holders squished together. I could not help but imitate the woman's disgusted expression I looked at the grotesque cube.

"Bowls Balls Souls Holes," one of Rottenberg's video installations, highlights her captivation with the female body in all of its voluptuousness as well as her interest in the industrial process. The film juxtaposes scenes of obese women with images of the process of rubbermaking. It shows
industrialization as a compartmentalized process—workers in different sectors have no idea what is happening in the other departments. The film is extremely fragmented and choppy, reflecting the nature of the process. The end of the film portrays the finished product: the cube of food and metal shown in “Squeeze.”

On the left side of the exhibit is an entrance into a small bedroom that looks as though it has been shrunk with a door and ceiling that are slightly shorter than average height. Visitors are welcome to crouch inside and examine the interior. The floor is littered with candy wrappers and a bowl of used cigarettes and empty Splenda packets sit atop a table next to a small cot. The room is accented with moving parts—a fountain with a rotating ball, the flutter of yarn hanging out of the air conditioner and a mechanism that creates a knitting motion using pieces of wool. Rottenberg’s exhibit is unlike anything I have seen—the artist takes everyday and at times, gruesome materials, and she re-appropriates them as art, creating images that sicken, frighten and make viewer think.

-Emily Wishingrad

‘Mall of America’

A deep bass shakes the walls outside of the “Mall of America” video screening room. From the inside, the sounds and sights of Josephine Meckseper’s 12 minute 52 second long piece are even more intimidating. The video consists of shots of the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minn. and shots of the film Fighter Pilot. Meckseper’s method of filming takes these seemingly normal scenes and makes them off-putting. She focuses in on sale signs—anything that reads “USA” or “America”—and aspects of the mall that depict its sheer enormity, such as the Ferris wheel in the amusement park section. She uses slow-motion capture, making each action in the film seem more deliberate and sinister. The music is also dissonant and hard on the ear. Throughout the video, she uses two main colors to filter the shots: red and blue. The violent red shots with stark black and white highlights instill a sense of fear while the blue shots create a cold and alienating atmosphere. This forced the viewer to look upon shoppers, storekeepers and companies with disdain and fear.

The only exception to the use of reds and blues is when Meckseper films part of Fighter Pilot, a film about the American Air Force. She films the piece as it plays on a television in the mall, connecting the battlefield to American consumerism. Meckseper cleverly highlights elements of Fighter Pilot with use of drastic colors, such as a bright red explosion. “Mall of America” creates a dissonant distaste for American consumerism. In the information brochure from the exhibit, Meckseper said she filmed most of the piece in 2007, right before the recession. She captures what is arguably the American center for every-day capitalism at a vulnerable yet profitable time.

Through her use of simple yet drastic changes in how we use our senses to observe shopping culture, Meckseper’s unsettling video forces audiences to reflect on their own consumerist culture.

-Rachel Liff
'The Master Builder'

The Rose Art Museum’s "Please do not touch" policy will be very hard to obey with the arrival of Chris Burden’s *The Master Builder* exhibition. Walking into the Rose this semester means avoiding the immediate temptation to touch, to lift or even to sit on Burden’s small-scale model bridges. The bridges are constructed out of classic Erector Sets, metal modeling and construction kits that had great popularity among American boys in the first half of the 20th century.

Burden’s early work in the 1970s was much different from today. In the beginning of his career, Burden focused on performance-based shock art, much of which was considered dangerous or harmful. "Shoot" (1971) featured the young artist being shot in the arm with a .22 rifle. Another noted piece, "Trans-fixed" (1974) involved Burden lying face-up on the roof a Volkswagen Beetle with nails driven through his hands to simulate crucifixion. After the trials of his early performances, it is not entirely surprising that Burden turned his focus to architectural work by the 1980s.

*The Master Builder* consists of seven miniature bridges, spaced evenly throughout the well-lit, baby-blue-walled gallery. The bridges are intricately built, with hundreds of metal rods, screws and girders coming together to convey an image of great strength and sturdiness. The first, "¼ Ton Bridge" (1997), can support 500 pounds with no trouble. His largest, "21 Foot Truss Bridge" (2003), is four feet tall and surely can manage a heavier load than that. "Tower of London Bridge" (2003), one of several inspired by real-world structures, features a series of small-scale pulleys that would be used to simulate the drawbridge.

The exhibit presents ideas of contradiction. The bridges, so compact yet so strong, have surprising capabilities. Something once a children’s toy now becomes stark, serious, and powerful. While remaining serious, the bridges are unable to abandon their inherent qualities of boyish playfulness. Burden’s exhibit allows visitors to contemplate the careful relationship between work and play, delicacy and strength through a new and innovative medium.

-Matthew Manning