

FLOORS & CEILINGS

Brandeis Students Explore Gender

June 1 - September 23, 2011

Women's Studies
Research Center
at Brandeis University



Kniznick Gallery
Women's Studies Research Center
Brandeis University
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Milcah Bassel

Matthew Grogan

Angela Jennings

Judy Kaufman

Aviva Paiste

Leonard Schnier

Sinéad Sinnott

Nichole Speciale

Avraham Eli Tukachinsky

About the Exhibition

“Floors & Ceilings” is a juried exhibition of original work by nine Brandeis students, the first show of its kind at the Women’s Studies Research Center (WSRC). Also for the first time, a Brandeis student co-curated an exhibition for us. Nera Lerner ’12 conceived of “Floors & Ceilings” and assisted in its execution from start to finish. Lerner and WSRC Curator Michele L’Heureux issued a call for entries, visited numerous fine arts classrooms, and worked closely with visual and performing arts faculty to promote the idea to students; as a result, they received dozens of submissions. A jury made up of arts faculty and staff, along with Lerner and L’Heureux, reviewed these submissions and selected the final work based on aesthetic merit and interpretation of the theme. The artists are both undergraduate students and students from Brandeis’ post-baccalaureate program.

Floors and ceilings can represent structure or confinement, homes or prisons. The so-called “glass ceiling” still exists today for women, and getting in on the ground floor is nearly impossible for many people. Moreover, we often speak of “sharing common ground” as a key to understanding one another and alleviating social ills. The work in this exhibition responds to the theme of floors and ceilings in both literal and metaphorical ways. Some pieces depict rooms and spaces that serve to define gender roles or life choices; others rely on the floor and ceiling as a metaphor for the binaries of gender and sexuality in our culture; still others engage the actual floor and ceiling of the gallery.

“Floors & Ceilings” Jury:

Roy Dawes, Director of Museum Operations, The Rose Art Museum

Fran Forman, Artist and WSRC Scholar

Alfredo Gisholt, Assistant Professor of Fine Arts

Michele L’Heureux, Curator & Director of the Arts, WSRC

Nera Lerner ’12

Ingrid Schorr, Associate Director, Office of the Arts



Nichole Speciale, Post-Baccalaureate ’11
Taunton, MA

Housewife, 2010

All Dressed Up, 2010

Streetlamp, 2010

My work is often motivated by gender, or more specifically, the separation between intellect—devoid of gender—and a gendered body that serves a specific biological function. My current work masks or obscures the figure to conceal gender or the importance of gender. Gender is a limiting factor in the human experience. I view intellect like light in the physical world; it is a universal of human existence, crossing the boundary of gender, just as light crosses the boundary of the physical and nonphysical.



Avraham Eli Tukachinsky ’11
Jefferson, MA

Emily, 2010

Emily holds the images of her Russian ancestors in her home. Huddled among her family belongings, she exemplifies the changing gender roles that accompany immigration and living abroad.



Leonard Schnier '13

Long Beach, NY

Portrait of Jessika Savage, 2011

In this piece, I invite the viewer to consider the relationship between sex and gender—specifically, the role drag plays in challenging social gender norms. What kind of architectural boundaries are created by the gender binary in our society? What can we do to deconstruct those structures and allow for more fluidity within our world?



Sinéad Sinnott '12

Concord, MA

Four Old Ladies, 2010

My work reflects my evolving notions of woman as she matures. Though some find growing up daunting and even sobering, I believe that with age really does come wisdom (or perhaps, more accurately, unflappable perspective).

Four Old Ladies is a look at the old (unorthodox) (obliging) (severe) (resigned) ladies some women will become.

Introduction

On September 15, 2008, opposites reinforced themselves: in New York, Wall Street's Lehman Brothers crashed and ignited a domino effect of lay-offs and major bank failures; simultaneously, inside London's Sotheby's auction house, Damien Hirst broke records by creating the single largest auction of a living artist's work, selling 223 works for a whopping \$198 million. Soon after, the implications of the economic recession overshadowed the dazzling success of contemporary artists.

The effects of the economic recession were felt hard at Brandeis, as elsewhere. In what seemed a safe zone to students where global events, politics, sociology, and economics are studied as intellectual subjects, suddenly theory became reality. The university's instability in the face of economic disaster forced an entire academic community to confront constant turbulence at home.

This disruption was the initial inspiration for "Floors & Ceilings," which showcases the work of nine Brandeis students. At first glance, "Floors & Ceilings" is a dialogue about space and structure, but it also provokes questions of how to define power within the limits of our circumstances. Further, in the context of feminist history, "Floors & Ceilings" considers a range of issues, from the female image to the imprisonment of both convention and opportunity.

In my capacity as Assistant Curator for "Floors & Ceilings," I have had the unique opportunity to re-envision many of my academic and intellectual pursuits. As an Economics and Art History double major, I have often considered the implications of the two disciplines for one another. Working on this exhibition and reflecting on the work of these nine students have prompted me to consider a range of interdisciplinary issues: the economics of the female image, equal employment opportunities, and even the disenfranchisement of a huge female vote based on "pocketbook politics."¹ I hope "Floors & Ceilings" will prompt you to do some fresh thinking, as well.

Nera Lerner '12

Assistant Curator for "Floors & Ceilings"

¹*Pocketbook Politics* is a book by political economist Meg Jacobs that discusses the role of the contemporary housewife in the political agenda. Jacobs posits that housewives, along with many other female voters, are difficult to approach politically, so they are simply unaccounted for in political strategy and planning.

About the Women's Studies Research Center

At Brandeis University's Women's Studies Research Center (WSRC), research, art and activism converge. The Kniznick Gallery is committed to feminist exhibitions of artistic excellence that reflect the activities of the Women's Studies Research Center Scholars and engage communities within and beyond Brandeis University.



Milcah Bassel, Post-Baccalaureate '11
Jerusalem, Israel

This Monster, The Body, 2010-11

I build site-specific installations that challenge our bodies within a given interior of an architectural space. Questions of being or becoming the space verses invading, inhabiting and leaving the space tie this piece to unresolved tensions pertaining to gender differences in our society and within our own psyches. Furthermore, how do the body, fluidity of intuition, and organic form interact with structured, planned, cerebral constructs?



Matthew Grogan, Post-Baccalaureate '11
Allenwood, NJ

Shared Living, 2011

Books, 2011

Shared Living deals with gender communication. Two circular pathways intersect each other, one for each gender. The paths arc in some areas while intersecting ambiguously in others. Walking on them, the two genders separate and unite, implying a fluid dialog between them. The environment does not determine any role either gender should play nor does it define one path as male and the other female. Rather, it raises questions about each gender's capability to move between masculinity and femininity.

Shared Living exists on a site where Brandeis stores granite and concrete rubble. Remnants of a paved walkway, fieldstone wall and foundation remain.



Angela Jennings '11
Rochester, MN

C Piece, 2011

The words within *C Piece* iterate archaic, cookie-cutter thoughts of the feminine role. Women should contemplate cock, cookie jars, copulating and creamulation. This contemplation takes place while carrying out the task of the period, the red dot, menstruation. The pureness of the archaic woman is seen through the clean white words, set in front of happy shades of yellow and the cool blues of man.



Judith Kaufman '12
Newburgh, NY

Self Portrait, 2010

The perspective in this painting changes as you look from the top down, creating a tension that reveals the struggles of painting, of representing myself as a woman artist, an equal to my fellow male counterparts.



Aviva Paiste '13
Salem, NH

Just When You Thought It Was Safe to Go Back in the Water, 2010-11

Man Was in the Forest, 2010-11

Just When You Thought It Was Safe To Go Back in the Water evokes a dialogue about the Service and the women and queer people who serve. The title, a quote from the film *Jaws II*, refers to an issue that can consume everything and only leave destruction.

Man Was in the Forest is about not being safe. The piece asks the question if “man” or “mankind” is behind destruction.