

## They Insist: Works by 18 young sculptors at GreenHill compel viewers to pay attention

By Tom Patterson Special Correspondent Sep 11, 2016

Objects are generally assumed to be inanimate, but the title of the current exhibition at GreenHill implies that they can act on those who engage with them. It's an intriguing proposition that's generally backed up by the art on display in "Insistent Objects."

Take for example Kamal Nassif's installation consisting of 15 life-size, white hands with bronze fingernails. They're attached to a wall in an apparently random configuration, each with its index finger pointed toward viewers.

This work's insistent action is emphasized by its title "Accountability," which lends it an accusatory quality, as if holding viewers accountable for something they've done or neglected to do.

Tofu, aka bean curd, is the primary object or material from which Lu Xu, a Chinese-American artist, created her piece assertively titled "Moldy Tofu is Good for You." After cutting firm tofu into the shapes of individual alphabet letters that spell out the word "DEMOCRACY" in both English and Chinese, she placed them in four cube-shaped, clear-glass jars where she has allowed them to ferment and grow mold, hence the title. The implication is that democracy is personally beneficial, just as moldy tofu is supposed to aid digestion.

Peter Goff is a connoisseur of small, seemingly ordinary found objects — the kinds of things most of us ignore because the sidewalks and roadsides are so often littered with them. As one who habitually pays close attention to the ground, he clearly feels a kind of insistent attraction to random twigs, paper scraps, bits of plastic, castoff playthings, broken hardware and the like.

Such are the materials from which Goff has created his elegant, intimately scaled sculptures, six of which are wall-mounted in pristine white frames while three others are displayed on a pedestal. Although viewers might ordinarily overlook the kinds of materials from which these works are made, they're likely to find Goff's sculptures compelling to look at, if not for aesthetic reasons, then for the challenge of identifying their individual components. Most of their titles — such as "Granite Quarry," "Salisbury" and "Cleveland" — reference spots where Goff gathered his materials.

In his two cast-glass sculptures, Joe Grant III calls special attention to ordinary weapons by enlarging and stylizing them. His piece titled "Loaded" is modeled on a revolver, while "That's Not a Knife" is closely based on a dagger with its blade pointed upward. The latter piece's title quotes a line from a Crocodile Dundee movie, while also alluding to the French title of a surrealist painting by Rene Magritte.

In a thematically related vein are Aaron Earley's sculptures made from military airplane parts or convincingly similar components. The show's largest and most imposing example is "Adamance (Post-Inboard B-17 Flying Fortress Engine)," the upper portion of which closely resembles an engine salvaged from a wrecked bomber airplane. With its propellor blades bent backward, it's elevated to eye level on a multi-stemmed, scrap-metal base.

Scrap-metal parts that look like they could also be salvaged from a wrecked military plane are also the main materials that Earley used to create his smaller "Airborne Derelict." It incorporates a reference to a gunner's target sight, while its overall form alludes to an open, airborne parachute.

The latter sculpture's form resonates with the six steel-stemmed porcelain umbrellas that make up Rachel Garceau's installation titled "January swim," suspended overhead in a nearby alcove. Although they're identical, these open umbrella forms hang at slightly different heights and angles. Garceau employs this display strategy to reference her observation about

the relationship between umbrellas and the pedestrians who use them: “The height and tilt of each umbrella suggests the characteristics of the person who carries it as well as their interactions with those around them,” she wrote in an accompanying statement.

In his “Balasana Deer,” one of the show’s more visually straightforward pieces, Andy Denton depicts a young deer standing calmly on the back of a man occupying the yoga pose named in the title, with his knees sharply bent and his forehead, lower legs and lower arms on the floor. Although it appears to be carved from wood, this piece is made of boldly orange-hued cast aluminum.

Frankie Toan’s quirky, interactive piece titled “What Is You?” alludes to the human body through its size and shape, similar to that of an adult’s torso or a child-size body bag. Made of brightly colored yarn knitted into festive geometric patterns, it incorporates six vaguely mouth-shaped openings. Viewers are invited to plunge their hands into these openings to feel the electronically heated plastic balls tightly packed inside.

On roughly the same scale as Toan’s piece — and equally quirky — are Benjamin Reid’s three electronically powered, hollow assemblages. They’re intricately pieced together from unpainted wood, leather and metal components, including wire, rods and — in the large, vertically oriented one titled “Lure” — a drum head pierced with tiny holes. Suspended alongside each other from the gallery’s ceiling and activated by switches on a nearby column, they’re arguably the exhibition’s most insistent objects. When turned on, each of them is transformed into a loudly clattering, self-playing percussion instrument that insists on getting the attention of viewers.

Mario Gallucci, formerly an assistant curator at GreenHill, is represented by two pieces made up of convincingly realistic, ordinary objects. But what appear to be three polished stones on a pedestal and a three-piece “Chinese Knife Set” attached to a magnetized wall holder are actually made entirely of paper. Nonetheless, from a visual standpoint they insist on being what they represent.

Gallucci’s other piece, “Box Trap,” is exactly what the title says it is, at least in part. A wood-plank box large enough to accommodate a crouching or kneeling human body is precariously propped up on one side by a vertically oriented plank. On the floor immediately under the box is the object that represents the trap’s bait. It appears to be a big slab of raw steak, but it’s actually a meticulously painted stone.

Also included in the exhibition are compellingly “Insistent Objects” by Ivana Beck, Casey Cook, Paul Howe, John Seefeldt, Austin Sheppard, Meg Strein, Kevin M. Vanek and Ashley York.

Organized as usual by Edie Carpenter, GreenHill’s chief curator, it’s a lively, provocative show, well worth driving to Greensboro to see.

## **Want to go?**

**Who:** 18 artists

**What:** “Insistent Objects: Works by Young NC Sculptors”

**Where:** GreenHill, Greensboro Cultural Center, 200 North Davie Street

**When:** Through Nov. 6; open noon to 7 p.m. Tuesday to Friday; noon to 5 p.m. Saturday; 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.

**Information:** (336) 333-7460 or visit [www.greenhillinc.org](http://www.greenhillinc.org)

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