

THE CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM BIENNIAL OF HAWAI'I ARTISTS

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ORGANIZED BY INGER TULLY, CURATOR OF EXHIBITIONS

THE CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM HONOLULU, HAWAI'I SEPTEMBER 24, 2010 – JANUARY 9, 2011

ROSA SILVER

*Born in 1964 in New York, New York
Lives and works in Kilauea, Kaua`i*

Urban Manhattan and rural Kaua`i—the two islands that represent the reach of Rosa Silver’s life could hardly be farther apart in terms of psychic space if not literal geography. One might be tempted to consider the polarities of those two sites in terms of sensory overload vs. sensory deprivation, but Silver has learned to attune her intellectual and creative inclinations to a different frequency; part of her life’s work is to orchestrate a convergence between nature and culture, science and art, with an eye and a heart attentive to the moral and ethical implications of living compassionately in the world.

Silver has always been a student of art—perhaps it would be impossible to be otherwise, having grown up two blocks from Grand Central Station in what many consider to be the epicenter of the contemporary art world, along with those immersed in that world. There were the after-school and Saturday art classes, and the visits to art schools and museums. While attending high school in the SoHo area, Silver and others even talked a teacher into focusing on contemporary art in lieu of modern

European history, with gallery visits turned into field trips.

Silver, however, began her undergraduate work at Carnegie Mellon University as a physics major; she tried a double major with art before eventually dropping physics, receiving her BFA in metalsmithing in 1986. She returned to New York to pursue graduate study in sculptural metalsmithing at SUNY-New Paltz, reputed to have one of the best programs in that field in the country. During and after graduate work, Silver taught metalsmithing at both Carnegie Mellon and SUNY-New Paltz, expanding her repertoire of specialized techniques and learning to use her craft in more sculptural ways. After earning her MFA in 1989, she also worked as a metal technician for sculptor Ellen Driscoll. She was introduced to another medium while working at Dieu Donn  Papermill in New York City, where she had a chance to observe many artists using handmade paper—most often thought of as two-dimensional—in a variety of innovative, three-dimensional ways, a structural transition that is also part of her current work.

Silver also became involved in curating exhibitions in New York and Spain. One of the exhibitions she organized focused on the subject of Permaculture—an ecological design system with strong philosophical

roots, combining the concept of sustainability (*permanence*) with those of practices in *agriculture* and human *culture* in a way that allows for human needs to be met in a non-exploitative manner. For Silver, this provided an essential focal point that has continued to guide her—“Looking at nature as a model for how to live your life—that’s what I have been saying with my art for years.” Silver also opened and for a while operated a gallery in New York city, Foramen Magnum, gravitating toward artists who shared her deep respect for craftsmanship but also engaged conceptual issues of a humanist nature.

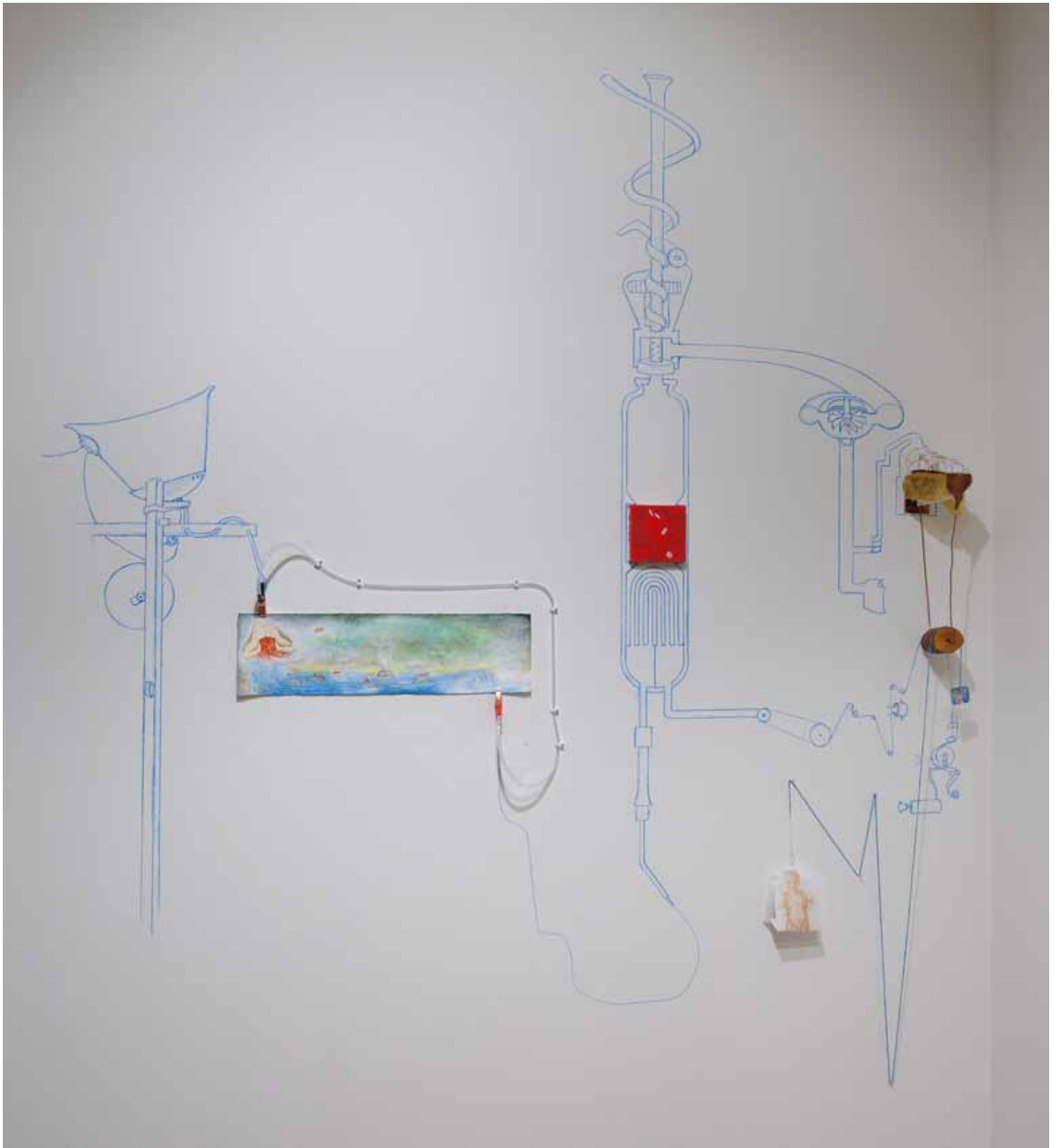
Silver’s connection to the island of Kaua`i began with periodic visits in the late 1980s. She describes her first impressions of the island as “like the New York City of nature” for the absolute abundance of creativity she experienced in flora and fauna. For a while she migrated back and forth, sometimes sending raw materials back from Kauai to work with in her New York studio. With her husband and fellow artist Hugh Russell she moved permanently to Kaua`i in 2001, having purchased a parcel of land with an inheritance received after the death of her father. Silver and Russell, who knew the urban jungle but nothing about the subtropics, conceived of the property as a

VERITATEM PROPONO

Garden Island Immersion, (detail), 2010
watercolor, paper, copper, carambola wood,
plastic, canvas, resin

Installation dimensions variable

Photo: Brad Goda



kind of canvas, clearing it to begin anew, observing patterns of water-flow and terrain levels, giving it new contours and plantings, gradually constructing the home that would shelter them and their young family; their first son Zane was born in the fall of 2001; a second son Lexington (Lex) was born in 2003. Silver has since designed and, with Hugh, built a small studio for herself, nestled in the trees not far from the main house.

Silver is aware of the significance that land has in the context of indigenous culture, and of her equivocal position as a recent, though respectful, settler. "This time in Hawai`i all started for me at the moment when the Kahuna was blessing our land. Hugh honestly told her that he felt uncomfortable, that he was not wanted, that the land did not belong to him, it was for Hawaiians... the Kahuna told us to look up at the bird on the wire that was looking down at us. She said that he does not judge us or discern that we do not belong. He simply accepts that we are part of the landscape. She also clarified that we are merely borrowing the land; our time is short to care for it. It has thrived before us and will continue once we are gone. This experience created so much softening and acceptance for me and Hugh. And I still look at the birds and imagine the bird's eye view—what are they seeing? Can I see as

they do, with an entirely different set of parameters... desires?"

Silver's commitment to being a part of the island landscape affirmed many of the precepts of Permaculture, and, as founder of *GMO-Free Kaua`i*, she has been active in educating people about the risks of the genetically modified organisms (GMOs) that are being grown on the island. Becoming a mother, being immersed in another kind of nurturing practice, was informed by another ethical framework. Intent on raising her children to have a healthy sense of respect for themselves and others, Silver studies NVC—Nonviolent (also known as Compassionate) Communication, a basis for interpersonal relationships that stresses mindful perception, listening for the meta-messages or sometimes unspoken subtexts of human discourse, so that people can interact with collaborative and mutual support. The point at which an attitude of care for the environment and care for one's fellow human beings converge is the realization that we can explore the self, the workings of both nature, and human nature, to understand and heal rather than to exploit and control. The precepts of both Permaculture and Nonviolent Communication strongly resonate with and have brought into deeper focus Silver's own creative exploration and

understanding, and continue to inform and nourish her work.

Taking another but equally creative approach, Silver, in her persona as "mama-Rosa," also tries to share many of these ideas with the local community via *The Loquat Lounge*, a weekly radio show broadcast on KKCR, Kaua`i's community radio station. MamaRosa, a D(iva)J par excellence, offers a fearless mix of music and commentary definitely intended to lighten her listeners' existential load with playful stream-of-consciousness (a sample riff: "Oops, there goes my ego, and yours, merging in the collective unconscious—it's so sexy! You say you need to change the hardwiring of your thinking? Well, you can be your own electrician!")

From Silver's rich and articulate worldview that embraces all aspects of her physical and social environment, a central metaphor has emerged that informs much of her work and provides the core idea of her new installation. As she notes, with a tone of serious play, "Life is like an experiment; life is a laboratory. What are you going to create today, and how will you choose to perceive it? Will you be fully present to all that is offered, or only to what you can reshape to conform to your preconceived ideas?"

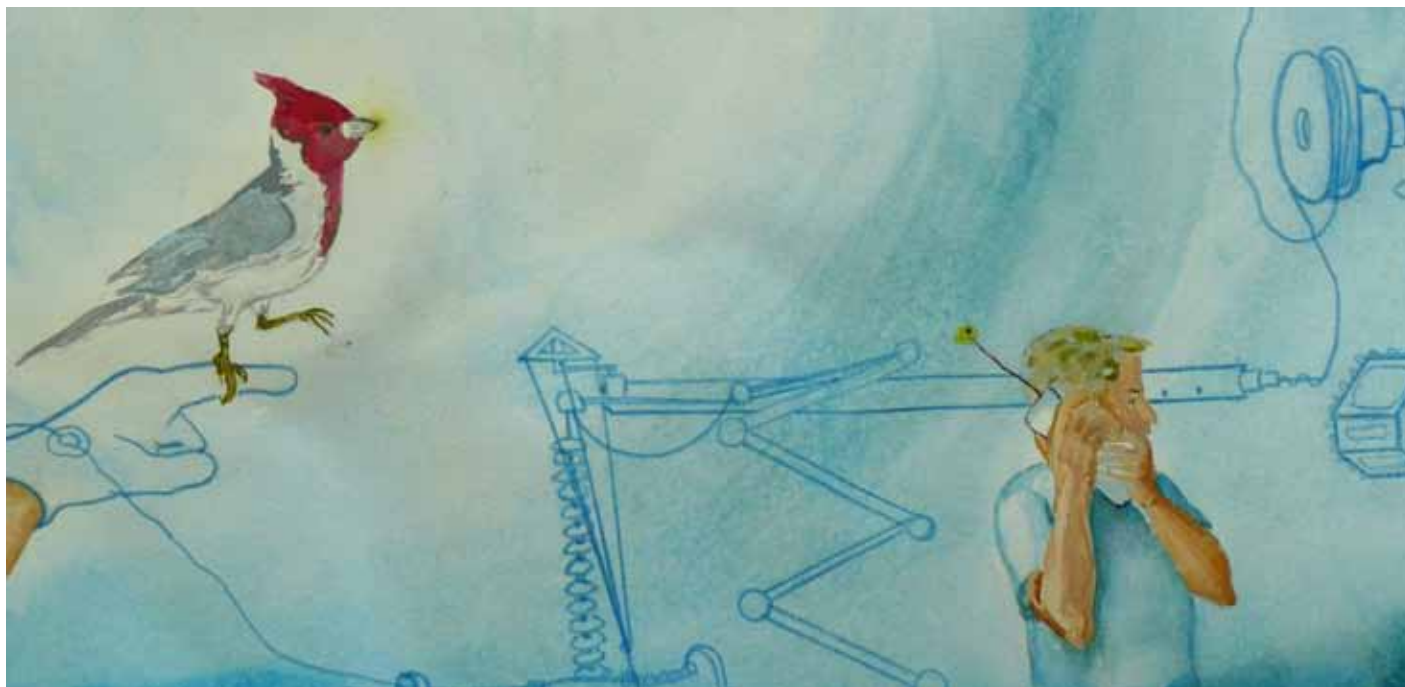
The idea of a living laboratory allows Silver to consolidate a significant array of

ideas and images; science and art take on metaphysical as well as physical or operational significance, and even the more arcane inquiries of alchemy, medicine and religion may be seen as manifestations of an ever-present human desire to understand the world and our place in it. In this sense, Silver is engaged in creative epistemology, pondering how we know what we know, and ultimately, how we act on or use what we know.

Silver's installation, entitled *VERITATEM PROPONO: Garden Island Immersion*, is a laboratory constructed not with conventional equipment but with various artifacts and bits of apparatus drawn in delicate blue lines on the gallery walls, so that entering the gallery one is immediately surrounded by and contained within this space of inquiry and discovery, this energy circuit. The blue lines invoke blues in the environment—the sky, the ocean; they also seem to suggest

the graphic designer's blue pencil, making marks that disappear when photographed. Blue is pure, virginal, crisp and cool. The very act of drawing on the walls itself conjures up disparate associations: prehistoric image-making, transgressive tagging, even problem-solving on a blackboard. The diagrammatic nature of the blue-line drawing provides the connective tissue for a variety of works in other media and materials: watercolors and drawings on paper, small

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VERITATEM PROPONO

Garden Island Immersion, (detail), 2010

watercolor, paper, copper, carambola wood, plastic, canvas, resin

Installation dimensions variable

Photo: Brad Goda

sculptures, and found or repurposed objects (handmade teabags with small drawings; a used breast pump.) Silver incorporates individual studies (a genetically modified papaya tree with fruit-like breasts; a sky-borne koa`e `ula bird) as well as several series of very small vignettes mounted in the black plastic frames more commonly used for dental x-rays: the images emulate the style of illustrations from science textbooks of the 1950s, but their sequences hint at some narrative that remains elusive. Other key ingredients include copper (acknowledgement of Silver's work as a metalsmith and valued for its conductivity), plant material grown on family land or on the island, and octopus ink. Sounds from ambiguous sources and small video vignettes on iPods are also included to create a fuller sensory environment. Silver reveals that principles of a sacred geometry pertain: "...the placement of objects and certain areas of the installation have overarching themes like purification, freedom, connections to life forces...healing mechanisms." Though this installation has its own visual and structural integrity, it also possesses interactive potential as we ponder some process of chemical transformation, or wonder just what hypothesis is being tested, ultimately

reaching our own conclusions based on the evidence Silver has presented us.

Silver still acknowledges the tensions, the trade-offs between the two primary environments that have shaped her life. Though it is home, Kaua`i, ironically, sometimes feels a bit foreign; it's "...warm, no drastic seasons; I'm not dealing with cold, slush, taxis; I'm not even dealing with the intensity, the negativity of being disconnected from nature..." New York is missed for the different kind of social community it provided, the diversity of human creativity, the productive and durable art scene, even the comfort of familiarity. At the same time, Kaua`i, the oldest island, the "garden island," possesses its own compelling magic, giving its inhabitants what they need, once those needs are honestly identified. "This island truly is a garden—a garden of self-reflections. There is something about being in such intense beauty and abundance that has an effect on the psyche...Kaua`i has a magic about it beyond the material beauty and lushness. There is the energy of mother earth here, like an intensity of acceptance and safety. This island gives you what you need, and so I can feel safe and trust in all that happens."

Despite the codified aspects that living in a laboratory suggests, Silver also

acknowledges that she is learning to live with uncertainty, with the knowledge that there may, and perhaps inevitably will, be things she does not or cannot know, even as the search for truth continues. And also, as she acknowledges, "I am trying to unlearn some of the things I learned in school—for example, you are supposed to 'research' symbols before you work with them or talk about them. That has its place, but sometimes you just go with your instinct, especially when the research could in fact be an obstacle to the gems of immediate creation...I say let us work with the sweet pain—a moment may be imperfect, but we can always reflect on how we might have done better—and that is true learning."

Silver, for whom a New York mindset is still intrinsic, has come to understand the complexity of life in the islands, wanting to come to terms not only with the extraordinary beauty of nature's creation, but the more tangled terrain of a diverse social and cultural environment. So perhaps Silver's installation is, in fact, a kind of autobiography—a record, in part, of the many observations made, questions asked, and ideas tested, some to be put aside as unviable, others to be proven and embraced—in that laboratory we call life.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Dimensions are listed in inches, height x width x depth.



KLOE KANG

Picture City: Chinatown, 2010
video animation

Picture City: Chinatown I, 2010
charcoal, graphite on paper
32 x 40

Picture City: Chinatown II, 2010
charcoal, graphite on paper
32 x 40

Picture City: Chinatown III, 2010
ink on paper
32 x 40



ROSA SILVER

**VERITATEM PROPONO: Garden
Island Immersion**, 2010
watercolor, paper, copper, carambola
wood, plastic, canvas, resin
Installation dimensions variable



JASON TERAOKA

Mercury, 2009
acrylic on canvas
32 x 18

Lollipop, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

Sunshine, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

Guardian Angel, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

All Smiles, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

Mind Reader, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

Sweet Tooth, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

The King, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

Mr. Unlucky, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

Backstabber, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

The Doughnut Prince, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

Rumour Mill, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

Etcetera, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

The Perfectionist, 2009
acrylic on canvas
15 x 13

Gift Of Plenty, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Meet Me At The Gates, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Just Bitter, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

4 A.M. Friend, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Hey, Pineapple!, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Every Which Way, But Loose, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

In A Pinch, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Oh My, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST *(continued)*

The Island Witch, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Mr. Needy, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

20/20 Hindsight, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Poke Your Eye Out, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Quick Cut, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Lost Again, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Stomper, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

The End, My Friend, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

3 A.M. Friend, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

Sweet Dreams, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8

The Mental Meddler, 2010
acrylic and India ink on cotton vellum
9 x 8



MARC THOMAS

Untitled No. 13, 2010
oil, latex, wax, and mixed-media on
wood panel
96 x 126

Untitled No. 14, 2010
oil, latex, wax, and mixed-media on
wood panel
60 x 78

Untitled No. 15, 2010
oil, latex, wax, and mixed-media on
wood panel
60 x 78

Untitled No. 16, 2010
oil, latex, wax, and mixed-media on
wood panel
60 x 78

Untitled SP1, 2010
latex, enamel, wax, and mixed-media
on wood
9.25 x 10

Untitled SP2, 2010
latex, enamel, wax, and mixed-media
on wood panel
9.25 x 10

Untitled SP3, 2010
latex, enamel, wax, and mixed-media
on wood panel
9.25 x 10

Untitled SP4, 2010
latex, enamel, wax, and mixed-media
on wood panel
9.25 x 10

Untitled SP5, 2010
latex, enamel, wax, and mixed-media
on wood panel
9.25 x 10



MAIKA'I TUBBS

A Life of Its Own, 2010
plastic forks, spoons, knives
and plates
installation dimensions variable



ABIGAIL ROMANCHAK

Tracked, 2010
shellac, ink, iron oxide, earth from
Waikamoi, on sekishu paper
installation dimensions variable
(each print 36 x 36)



SCOTT YOELL

Tsunami, 2010
cast plastic, mixed media
180 x 144 x 60

Monopoly, 2010
cast plastic, mixed media
96 x 96

Cold Pink & Alone Action Figure,
2010
cast silicone, plastic, electronics,
mixed media
13 x 12 x 4

Design: Kat Sat Design
Printer: FCA-Hawai'i