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Strange-Making: A Study of Curation

Mirel Crumb

Departmental Honors Thesis
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
College of Arts and Sciences BFA Art: Painting and Drawing

Examination Date: 2 April 2018

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Introduction

“Strange-Making” is the title of a three-person exhibition I curated at Apothecary Gallery in March 2018. This curatorial project is the culmination of creative research conducted in pursuit of a departmental honors thesis with the guidance of The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga faculty members: Christina Vogel, Assistant Professor of Painting and Drawing, Ron Buffington, UC Foundation Professor and Head of the Art Department, and Dr. Gavin Townsend, Professor of Art History. This group exhibition of professional artists in the southeast region was modeled by “idea-laid curation,” a theory that considers exhibitions as objects of knowledge, a form of published research.¹ The exhibition itself, the curatorial statement,² and this expository essay intend to add to the critical discourse of contemporary representational painting.

I became interested in curation as a profession through an opportunity I have had to work as an assistant to Ruth Grover, Director and Curator of UTC’s Cress Gallery of Art. I have been able to develop a skill set in handling, installing, and cataloguing artwork. Curation is a multifaceted, project-based profession with elements of administration, marketing, archiving, budgeting, and creative research and production. As a student in the BFA program with a concentration in painting and drawing, I focused on curation as an artistic practice. My perspective as a painter has shaped my priorities. I am attentive to the formal qualities of work, the process, and the intention of the artist. As an artist in Chattanooga, I am motivated to fill the need to exhibit contemporary and critically vetted work. With the support and resources of the

¹ Arnold, K. *Show Business: Exhibitions and the Making of Knowledge.*, in: Kaniari, A. and Wallace, M. (eds.) *Acts of Seeing. Artists, Scientists and the History of the Visual.* A volume dedicated to Martin Kemp. London: Zidane Press. 2009.

² See Appendix A

Department of Art, I was able to contact and include well-established artists in this exhibition and to choose artworks from a larger network directly and purposefully.

Background

There is not a direct formula for the creation of an art exhibition. The conditions, resources, and methodologies are defined by the art space and the intended audience. Museums, university galleries, commercial galleries, and artist-run spaces develop exhibitions through distinct structures, responsibilities and means of production. However disparate the aims of each exhibition some elements remain constant, a collection of art objects and the curator or curatorial team. The role of a curator is to select and position art objects in the physical space of a gallery with a sensitivity to conceptual intent. The curator draws out contextual information that can guide the interpretation of the work.

Leading up to my own curatorial decisions, I interviewed Mike Calway-Fagen, curator of exhibitions at Stove Works. Stove Works is a 75,000 square foot facility developing in Chattanooga to provide resources for local artists, and to host national and international artists in residency programs. Calway-Fagen is an artist and independent curator most recently involved in the creation and direction of a new exhibition space “The Finishing School” at Lamar Dodd School of Art. In our conversation, he described a curator as “[an individual] able to further unfold the possibilities of a work, in a way enabling agency in the work. Rather than talking about the discrete object of art, a curator draws connections and is not limited to a certain

medium.”³ To shape or maintain the relevance of artwork, a curator focuses on drawing connections between different works of art, and between art and lived experience.

My conversation with Dr. Jordan Amirkhani, Professor of Art History at UTC, focused more on the responsibilities of a curator. Dr. Amirkhani held curatorial positions at The Phillips Collection in Washington, DC and The Royal Academy in London, England.⁴ “Environments matter, they ask of the works different things. Curation frames the work.”⁵ Physical and conceptual environments can be anticipated by the curator. There are many small decisions that can serve to elevate or undermine the work of an artist. The motivations for curatorial selections were discussed with Dr. Amirkhani in terms of “curatorial care.”⁶ Caring in this context means not just selecting artists for their fame and reputation or the monetary and spectacle value of their work, but for their content. Curators that hold these values bring work together to point to a concept that is important for an audience to see and consider.

There are different types of group exhibitions. Juried exhibitions involve an open submission process. Artists send images of their work to a juror who selects work for the final exhibition. Invitational group exhibitions begin with a selection process. Decisions are made about which artists and artwork to include, then each artist is contacted about the opportunity. A two- or three-person invitational exhibition is more professionally significant in the field of fine art than a juried exhibition. The focus given to the work of each artist in the gallery space and in the curatorial statement makes the accomplishment more highly regarded.

³ Calway-Fagen, Mike. “Role of Curation.” Interview by Mirel I Crumb. November 13, 2017.

⁴ UTC. “People.” UTC Art Department. Accessed April 05, 2018. <http://www.utcart.com/people/>

⁵ Amirkhani, Dr. Jordan. “Role of Curation.” Interview by Mirel I Crumb. November 29, 2017.

⁶ Ibid.



Fig 1. Apothecary Gallery exterior at the opening reception. 744 McCallie Ave Chattanooga TN, 37403. March 22, 2018.

The Apothecary Gallery (Fig.1) is a contemporary arts project space supported by the Art Department at UT Chattanooga. In fall 2017, I enrolled in the Apothecary class, a three-hour upper division studio credit course that organizes exhibitions by students and visiting artists throughout the semester. In this class, I was given the opportunity to coordinate with professional artists and become familiar with installing work in the Apothecary Gallery. By the end of the semester, I had a good idea of the size of the three walls of the space and how many works they comfortably accommodate. It was through this experience that I began to understand the identity of the Apothecary Gallery that has formed over time as a flexible gallery space that invites experimentation while carrying the validity of being associated with a university. In the fall, I submitted a gallery proposal for “Strange-Making” to the faculty members in charge of organizing the spring programming for Apothecary Gallery.⁷ The academic context was ideal for

⁷ See Appendix E

framing this project and I knew that my familiarity with the space would allow me to make clear decisions about the size and format of works to include.

Concept

The most important role a curator needs to fulfill is to develop an idea for an exhibition. The concept of defamiliarization, Viktor Shklovsky's term "Ostranenie,"⁸ became the catalyst for this curatorial project. This formalist concept is discussed in terms of imagery in literature as the technique of describing something familiar in a way that makes it appear unknown.⁹ The concept stems from the basic belief that the world can change; the way that we think about things is constructed and can therefore be deconstructed or reconstructed. This term has long been considered for its revolutionary aims, but at its core, "enstrangement" or "strange-making" is a device for becoming more fully aware of everything that can be witnessed or perceived as it occurs. Shklovsky articulates the technique of strange-making as a counter to the automatization¹⁰ of perception that occurs through repetition, routine, and familiarity. "We do not see them but recognize them by their initial features. A thing passes us as if packaged; we know of its existence by the space it takes up, but we only see its surface."¹¹

⁸ Shklovsky, Viktor. *Art, as Device*. Translated by Alexandra Berlina. *Poetics Today*, 36(3). Duke University Press. 2015.

⁹ "Tolstoy's method of estrangement consists in not calling a thing or event by its name but describing it as if seen for the first time, as if happening for the first time. While doing so, he also avoids calling parts of this thing by their usual appellations; instead, he names corresponding parts of other things." Shklovsky, Viktor. *Art, as Device*. p.13

¹⁰ "This is how life becomes nothing and disappears. Automatization eats things, clothes, furniture, your wife, and the fear of war." Shklovsky, Viktor. *Art, as Device*. p.12

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.11

Ostranenie was originally applied to imagery in literature, particularly in terms of how specific words build into an image. This phenomenon of description also exists in painting. The impressions, brushstrokes, lines, color, and texture of a painting make up a visual vocabulary for the creation of an image. “Poetic speech is constructed speech.”¹² Formal aspects of written language like word choice are uniquely applicable to representational painting because the same choice lies in the manner in which an image is built. When the process of recognition is made strange, we see a thing for its parts before realizing what we are looking at. Our eyes draw in raw information, and our minds process that information, using conventions and patterns to tell us what we are seeing. Once we have recognized what we are looking at, the eyes can rest. When the process of recognition is interrupted, we actually see that object for longer, or are forced to look again. “The goal of an image is not to bring its meaning nearer to our understanding but to create a special way of experiencing an object, to make one not ‘recognize’ but ‘see’ it.”¹³ Poetic images create conditions for the senses to be used fully and allow the mind to conceive new experiences and sensations.¹⁴

David Onri Anderson’s *Apple Core Unscrolled* (Fig.2) is a painting that depicts something that has many elements of an apple. But unlike like any apple, it is also a skin or a scroll. It is not so much that this is a weird image of an apple, but seeing this image has made me reconsider what I know about apples. Suddenly the core of an apple is not just a center of a fruit,

¹² Ibid. p.22

¹³ Shklovsky, Viktor. *Art, as Device*. p.17

¹⁴ The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things; the device of art is the “enstrangement” of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is, in art, an end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is the means to live through the making of a thing; what has been made does not matter in art. Ibid. p.12

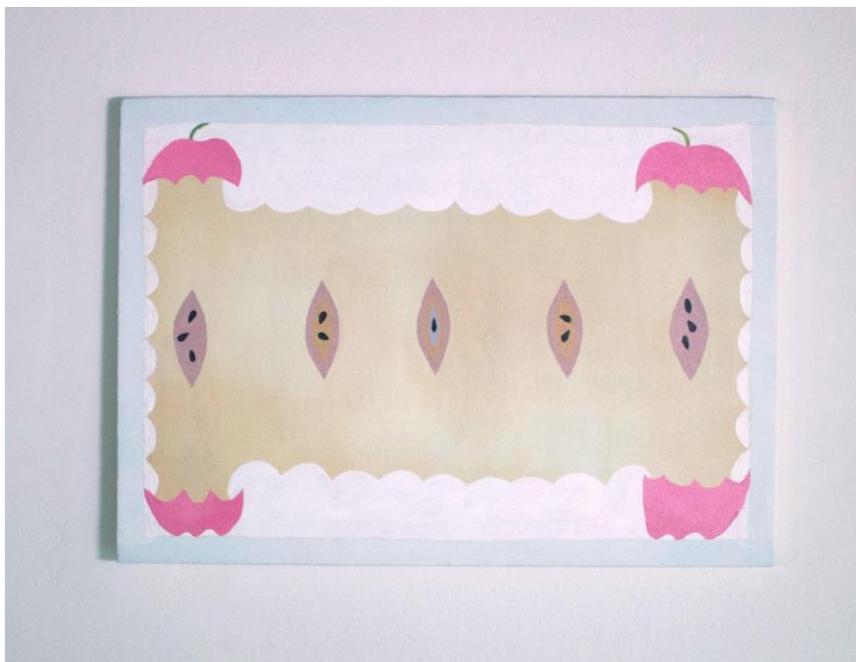


Fig. 2 David Onri Anderson., *Apple Core Unscrolled*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 14 x 20 ½ inches.

but a cuneiform cylinder meant to be rolled across a surface to record the sequence of the seeds revealed on each side. From my recognition of “enstrangement” in this painting, I formed a general premise for this curatorial project that informed my methodology. It was my aim to find “ostranenie” in other bodies of work, and in doing so, describe the technique’s relationship to painting.

Methodology

One of my initial parameters for the selection of artwork was that they would be made by professional, established artists. This would place more importance on the concept of “ostranenie” and my articulation of how the works relate to it. Artists that have already completed a professional degree and have shown work multiple times in different contexts tend to have a developed vocabulary concerning their practice. Emerging artists are in a position to

accept most offers of exhibitions for the merit of exposure. It was important to me that the artists I chose would be accepting or rejecting my proposal¹⁵ based on whether or not my read of their work is viable and if my concept for the show and choices for pairing resonate.

Some resources for finding professional artists were online registries, social media, gallery websites, and artist websites. My initial contact list was comprised of national artists. It became quickly evident that narrowing my search to Tennessee and the surrounding states would provide me with an opportunity to visit studios and would give me the ability to transport work myself. I used a database provided by Locate Arts to find professional artists in Tennessee. Locate Arts serves Tennessee by anchoring and spotlighting the contemporary visual art events in each city and fostering a unified statewide art scene. Its programs promote dialogue between the different cities in the state, and between the state of Tennessee and the world.¹⁶ I also have been attending gallery exhibitions in Nashville and Atlanta for the past two years. These two cities have a variety of galleries that regularly hold temporary exhibitions of local artwork. Over time, I have developed my own list of artists exhibited in these two cities which became an additional resource in this selection process.

Though a strict formula for finding the phenomenon of “enstrangement” does not and perhaps should not exist, spending time with this proposition while shifting through many examples allowed me to see patterns emerge that have become clear criteria. First, the works needed to be paintings because painting is the discipline that employs the construction of an

¹⁵ See Appendix D

¹⁶ "LOCATE Arts." LOCATE Arts - Connecting Promoting Contemporary Art in Tennessee. Accessed April 05, 2018. <https://locatearts.org/>

image through raw material.¹⁷ There is space for an analysis of this term in relation to photography, sculpture, and design, but I believe the role description plays in representational painting is directly related to the role of description in prose.

Representational paintings are made of a subject, this category ranges from hyperrealism to figurative abstraction. I found that representational paintings that were made of a symbolic image or made to describe a conceptual image from imagination or memory were more likely to make sense in context of defamiliarization than observational paintings. Observational paintings depict real spaces and situations as they occur and in doing so tend to be more realistic, specific, and they refer to the world outside of them.

Recognition of the subject in works that are abstracted too far from their referent, instead of being slowed down and altered, may never occur. The way the image is composed, painted, the level of information, and degree of ambiguity were all factors in my selection process. I was particularly drawn to paintings that seemed to be made with very little revision. The confidence of mark, evidence of layers, and the commitment to composition can be measured by whether the surface of the painting has been disturbed or if the drawing is revealed. When a painting contains initial marks, a limited number of paint strokes, or a clear process of construction, the sense of a painting as an object is heightened. These elements of the painting's construction draw attention to the importance of the materials in addition to the image they create. Paintings I found that had this quality of confident initial marks, all contained evidence of image being part of the process and developed within a series or an investigation.

¹⁷ "Art is the means to live through the making of a thing" Shklovsky, Viktor. *Art, as Device*. p.12

I found three artists with bodies of work that cultivated defamiliarization through abstraction of a once-observed form. These deceptively simple, descriptive works were created by Eleanor Aldrich (Knoxville, Tennessee) David Onri Anderson (Nashville, Tennessee) and Amy Pleasant (Birmingham, Alabama). From each artist, I selected representational works that contain an element of “nonrecognition” at the core. Each image has developed through sustained process and re-imagination. It is not just that the works are abstracted that makes the viewing experience disorienting; recognition of the subject raises more questions than it answers. With the level of information available, the formal qualities of surface, color, mark, and texture hold equal ground with the image. In December, I reached out to each artist with a proposal that included information about the exhibition, the resources available, and my curatorial concept.

Results

I met with Eleanor Aldrich in Knoxville, Tennessee, first. Aldrich holds a Master of Fine Arts in Painting and Drawing from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting and Drawing through the Academie Minerva and Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff.¹⁸ I visited her studio (Fig.4) at “Vacuum Shop,” a building that she and a few other artists rent together.

The work I initially asked about is titled *Fat Back with Tattoos* (Fig.3). I saw the painting originally at Channel to Channel, a gallery in Nashville. I was captivated by her daring texture, the paint seems too thick for the painting to support, too thick to be paint (Fig. 3). She mixes

¹⁸ Aldrich, Eleanor. "Eleanor Aldrich." Eleanor Aldrich. Accessed April 05, 2018. <https://eleanoraldrich.com/>



Fig. 3 Eleanor Aldrich. Left to Right: *Lawn Chair with Sweater*, 2017, oil, caulking, and resin on canvas 20 x 24 x 1 inches; *Fat Back with Tattoos*, 2017, oil, canvas, found decals, and silicone on canvas, 30 x 20 1 3/4 inches; *Lawn Chair with Rose*, 2018, oil, silicone, found decals, and canvas on panel, 20 x 24 3/4 inches

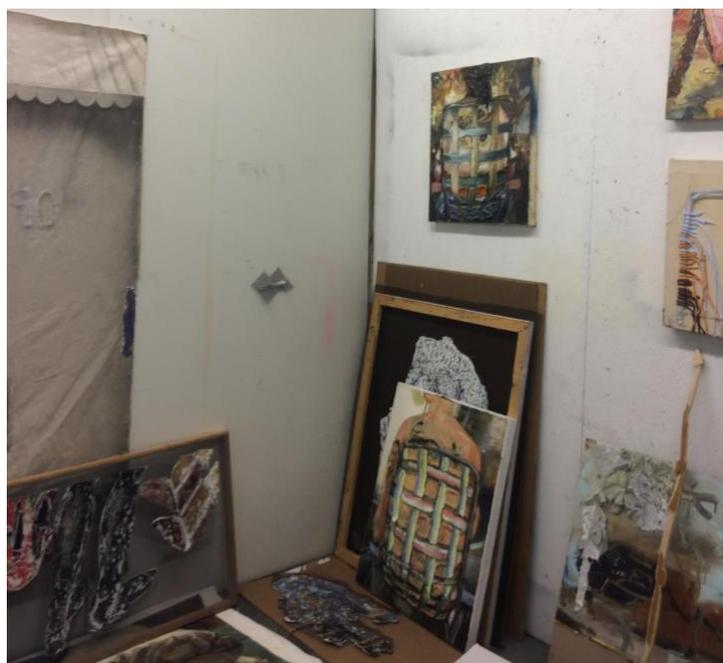


Fig. 4 Eleanor Aldrich's Studio, Vacuum Shop in Knoxville, TN

silicone into her paint to achieve a fleshy and wet-looking surface. Its repulsiveness is mediated by the bright colors of the grid and by the quiet, nostalgic tone of the overall composition. The geometric lines and grids of color cover the canvas nearly edge to edge. At first glance, the works are purely abstract, the seated figure receding into the space of the painting. Recognizing that the lawn chair paintings are depictions of skin does not stop them from being geometric cake slices of silicone in a grid. This makes the viewer acutely aware of the way the painting was constructed square by square. I selected two additional lawn chair paintings for this exhibition. The image is derived from an observed moment, but it is one from memory. Aldrich spoke of her remembrance of family reunions and unknown relatives sitting in beach chairs in the backyard. She works from this image that exists in her mind, negotiating the strangeness of the interaction between skin and tight-stretched canvas, articulating the half inch between the surface of the skin and the wall of muscle and bone of a human back. Skin, something we are so used to that we forget about it, becomes visible as a soft membrane wrapped around our bodies, looser than we ever imagine.



Fig. 5 Eleanor Aldrich, *Fat Back with Tattoos*, 2017, oil, canvas, found decals, and silicone on canvas, 30 x 20 1 3/4 inches (Detail)

David Onri Anderson, the artist of *Apple Core Unscrolled*, earned his BFA from Watkins College of Art. He is also co-curator of Mild Climate, an artist-run gallery space in Nashville.¹⁹ When I visited his studio, I was surprised to see the number of works that he had developing all at once. He was working with acrylic paint and with experimental, handmade, and pre-made surfaces. I selected six paintings in varying sizes, because a larger sample more clearly showed a vocabulary of description that has developed over time: repetition of centralized compositions, deckle edged forms, and separated gradients of luminous color. Even though different subjects are depicted, the slightly a-rhythmic use of repeated motifs makes the works unified and prioritizes the way the work is painted over immediate recognition of the subject.



Fig 6. David Onri Anderson, *Growing Apple Core*, 2018 acrylic on canvas 18 x 24 x 1 inches



Fig. 7 David Onri Anderson, *Goldenrod and Asters Paper Lantern*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 16 x 10 x 1/2 inches

¹⁹ Anderson, David O. "Work." David Onri Anderson. Accessed April 05, 2018. <http://davidonrianderson.com/section/429812.html>.

The element of representation in Anderson's paintings appears to be a few steps removed from direct observation. There is also a sense of repeated forms, as if the centralized image of an apple core (Fig. 6) or a paper lantern (Fig. 7) is something embedded, that arrives automatically on the surface of a new canvas. Despite commonality, each lantern was unique in color, size, texture, and shape. The sometimes subtle differences are amplified by the sheer number. It occurred to me that these works, both the lanterns and the cores, were images of something that is both an object and an opening into internal space. I asked David Onri Anderson if he thought of his works in terms of the human figure. Both Eleanor Aldrich's lawn chair paintings and Amy Pleasant's work chosen for the exhibition depict the face or body. He talked about the paintings as spaces for the mind to inhabit and referred to the viewer as the figure implicated through interaction with the works. I have come to see these forms as depictions or symbols of the way the mind feels the space of being within a body. To know that the soft structure of gradients depicts a paper lantern does not satisfy the overall curiosity of Anderson's subjects.



Amy Pleasant. Left to Right: *Looking Down*, 2015, oil on canvas 12 x 14 x 3/4 inches; *Turning III*, 2017, oil on canvas 12 x 14 x 3/4 inches

Amy Pleasant received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and an MFA from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University. Spring 2018, Pleasant was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship. She is the recipient of the South Arts Prize for the state of Alabama in 2018 and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Award in 2015. Her work is represented by Jeff Bailey Gallery, Hudson, New York, and Whitespace Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia.²⁰ I visited her in Birmingham, Alabama, where she lives and works. Her studio was set up in the gallery space of The Fuel And Lumber Company, a curatorial project she co-founded with Pete Schulte in 2013. This space functions as a studio only when it is not being used as a gallery. I was able to gain insights into her process and practice and discuss how her engagement with depicting the human figure has developed through her education and professional practice.



²⁰ Pleasant, Amy. "Home." Amy Pleasant. Accessed April 05, 2018. <http://amypleasant.com/home>.

Fig. 9 Amy Pleasant's studio. Fuel and Lumber Company. Birmingham, AL.

She has developed a process of abstraction for arriving at the ambiguous and simplified body shapes in her paintings (Fig. 8). Pleasant begins her process with ink paintings or small drawings observed from live models and sometimes sculptures. She then pins these initial works up and begins a drawing on a new piece of paper with the first as a reference. She repeats this process, sometimes running the drawing through a copy machine to flatten the image into a single tone, until the form becomes condensed and simplified. Recognizing the resulting shapes as human silhouettes does not stop the image from reversing and becoming a crumpled mass or a hole cut out from a surface.



Fig. 10 Amy Pleasant's studio. Reference imagery.



Fig.11 Amy Pleasant, *Her*

One of the first questions I asked was about her choice of using monochromatic tones. Pleasant has explored color in the past and does not intend for the works to be seen as dark or in mourning. She subtracts color from the equation to place full emphasis on the shape and contour. This chromatic choice may also be an influence of figurative sculpture. Pleasant discussed her study of marble and bronze busts and her specific interest in the backs of the heads (Fig. 10), where an irregular patterned mass is stylistically carved to emulate the hair of the figure.



Fig. 12 Amy Pleasant *Head # 4* external side Fig. 12 Amy Pleasant *Head # 4* interior side

Head #4, one of two sculptural works curated into the exhibition *Strange-Making*, is painted on two double-sided clay panels that intersect at a right angle. *Head #4* (Fig. 12,13) is a composite of two or four paintings of the back and sides of a head. The resulting object is perplexing, like a coin with two same sides, a head without a face. The approach of the viewer is considered in the sculptural works. As they walk around the piece, the face is either revealed or denied. The viewer's approach is also considered with the smaller paintings *Looking Down* (Fig. 8) and *Her* (Fig.11). The small scale of the work and their placement in the lower section of the

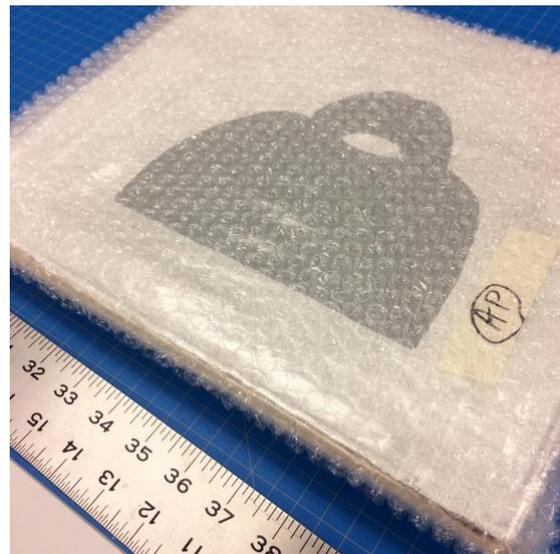
picture plane allows the shapes to appear as objects from a distance. The double read persists even after recognition of the subject. In the gallery space, I placed the three small paintings evenly across the back wall with considerable space between them. I chose this positioning so that as the first work to be seen, they will draw visitors to enter the space and investigate. The spacing between them emphasizes that they should be looked at individually, when the viewer steps close enough to see the work clearly, the other two will disappear from the periphery.

The Exhibition



I wrapped and transported artwork, using the UTC Art Department's permanent collection as a storage space between the time I retrieved the work and the exhibition. I studied

the formats and produced different forms of writing for the press release,²¹ loan agreement,²² and curatorial statement.²³ The logbook is an important convention of gallery openings. It is a collection of information available at the reception that acts as an exhibition guide. The logbook information is accompanied by a sheet of paper for visitors to sign-up for the mailing list of the gallery or to make comments. For “Strange-Making,” the logbook was a white one-inch binder that contained the curatorial statement, artist statements,²⁴ an image list,²⁵ biographies, and curriculum vitae for each artist. The image list was also made available as a “take-away” for visitors to refer to the titles, year, and materials of the works.



The works by Aldrich, Anderson, and Pleasant were positioned in different areas of the gallery to give each artist their own space. Group exhibitions often hang paintings of multiple artists intermittently along the same wall. However, having works next to each other directly

²¹ See Appendix G

²² See Appendix F, formatted with reference to Drift Station. *Field Guide*. 2012.
<https://archive.org/details/fieldguide-driftstation>

²³ See Appendix A

²⁴ See Appendix B

²⁵ See Appendix C

compares their formal qualities and is better suited to a group exhibition that is curated around a commonality of material process or subject matter. I did consider visual cohesion when selecting specific paintings: choosing centrally focused compositions, images containing a single subject, rhythmic patterns, and pink, yellow, and gray colors. These groupings of work represent the larger practice of each artist as a whole. More than highlighting any formal similarities in structure and image, I am interested in how “enstrangement” is employed in each body of work in its own terms. An understanding of the way each artist is using visual vocabulary to construct an image is strengthened by each painting being next to the ones they initially developed alongside.

Because the exhibition was installed for a limited amount of time, I consulted two photography students and arranged to have documentation taken. Though ideally the work would be experienced in real time, installation images simulate the experience of the exhibition more vividly than a list with isolated images of each work. Scale and placement in relationship to viewers is a crucial element of understanding the exhibition. For this reason, photographs were taken on the night of the reception by Clayton Aldridge. Photographs of the reception are also a record of the successful attendance of the event since signing the logbook is elective. The Studio at UTC’s library has a portable iKan light kit available to students. This high-powered, professional lighting kit consists of four adjustable, battery-powered LED light modules and four tripods with attachable diffusers. I rented this portable kit and commissioned Stephanie Gould to photograph the walls and installation of the exhibition.

Members of VERSA, an artist-run space exhibiting contemporary art in Chattanooga that develops exhibitions and programming organically to facilitate mutually ennobling exchange, were contacted to help on the installation day. They helped move artwork from the library to the

Apothecary Gallery, helped adjust lighting, and were present for placement decisions. By working with members of VERSA, the connections that I have made within the regional art network through organizing this exhibition will have an opportunity to lead to future collaboration outside of the context of UTC.

Reflection

There were no complications with the installation and the reception was well attended. The exhibition was highlighted on Locate Arts as the “top pick” for the city of Chattanooga in the month of March. This is significant because Locate Arts is the voice for contemporary art in Tennessee and is well respected by professionals in the arts community. Locate Arts Co-Founder Brian Jobe has contacted me about a possible blog feature on their website and I was able to provide documentation images. Anderson attended the reception and Pleasant was able to see the space before de-install when she came to collect her work. Aldrich was attending a Hambidge Center Residency in Rabun Gap, Georgia²⁶ for the duration of the show. Artist residencies are important for maintaining an artist practice because they provide time and space to focus on making work outside of the context of daily life. If this exhibition was planned further in advance or without having to fit within programming in the Apothecary, it is likely that the opening reception could have been at a time when all three artists would be able to attend. It would have been ideal for the artists to be present, for the visitors to meet but also for the three of them to have a conversation. I discussed the process and content of the paintings and

²⁶ "Residency." Residency Program. Accessed April 05, 2018. <http://www.hambidge.org/residency.html>.

sculptural works with visitors as a curator and when I could, answered questions on behalf of the artists.

The event benefitted UTC students by providing them with access to contemporary work they would otherwise have to travel to see. There were no technical issues and it gave increased visibility to the Apothecary Gallery by drawing in individuals that had not previously attended events at the space. The event was publicized in beyond the department of Art at UTC in local newspapers and submitted to *Locate Arts* and *Burnaway Magazine*. The participating artists were also encouraged to share the event with their own network. The benefit to the participating artists was an opportunity to show with other professional artists in the southeast and to have their work written about. It is standard for contemporary artists to spend time writing about their own work, process, and intent. Art criticism remains important to the artist, the viewers of art, and to archive the experience for the future. It is significant for someone to take the time to write about the artwork itself. Even a description of the work can bring new discoveries.

In evaluating whether the conceptual framework and writing about the work is felt to be relevant or productive, it is important to articulate the relationship between my concept, the artwork, and the artist. My initial premise, to find “ostranenie” in three bodies of work and define the technique’s application to painting, was articulated in the description of the project I sent to each artist when I first contacted them. I prepared questions for each studio visits leading up to the exhibition. I was able to speak more specifically about individual works of art and the connections I have found between the three. These conversations reaffirmed my observations about the works. We discussed the aspects of the paintings in relation to the concept of perception, embodied recognition, and strange-making. Anderson specifically requested a copy of the curatorial statement and was invested in my description of estrangement regarding his

work. Following the reception, I sent documentation, the curatorial statement, and image list to the participating artists. I asked for specific feedback about the concept of the exhibition, the value of attributing this formalist concept to their work, and their thoughts about their inclusion with the other two artists. Anderson and Aldrich have given me their responses. David wrote about the commonality of their work in approaching the “mystery of familiarity” and the inherent defamiliarization of an image arrested in paint, things that are moving and breathing when encountered in life are forced to be still. Eleanor drew out the comment in my curatorial statement of "Over-abundance of images and information has led to desensitization and loss of meaning" as something she aims to counter by creating images that have a physical presence in space.

I considered curating work around a shared identity of the artists or to show works with a common subject matter. However, curating around a phenomenon that I have seen in certain works of art, pushed me to develop language around something I could not explain simply. I had to think deeply about something that began wordless and abstract until I was able to deconstruct the occurrence of “strange-making” into a theory of image recognition and physical aspects specific to a selection of paintings. The need to uncover and create a vocabulary for describing defamiliarization in concise representational painting has taught me much more the relationship between language and painting than a simple selection criteria about the context of a work would have. I have found intersections between descriptive words and descriptive marks. The difference between representational artwork that is of an observed original and representational artwork that derives from observed form but is created methodically, the way symbols are stitched into a textile, has become clear to me through a literary analogy. Observational painting describes an instance. In literary terms, it is related to journalism or exposition, but appears also

in prose and novels whenever an image needs to be described to serve the action of the plot or the understanding of the viewer. The second type of representational painting is almost the same, but somewhere in the structure or word choice, the prose becomes the description of a metaphor. Though even in this instance, painting does not have a clear literary parallel, I have found that the techniques for describing imagery in works of literature are useful for describing imagery in paintings.

The premise for this work has led me to recognize a fundamental element of painting between observed image and image as form. This experience has made me more confident to write about artwork, to draw new connections between works, to create new opportunities for work to be seen, and to cultivate interactions between different ways of making. My curatorial sensibilities have developed quickly and significantly through this process. Though I benefitted immensely from the support and focus provided to me by the faculty and resources at UTC, the most important aspect of the project was the number of decisions I made. I now have a voice as a professional independent curator and have developed a rapport with three artists I greatly respect. My understanding of what is happening in contemporary painting through this group of three painters from the southeast region shows evidence that contemporary representational painting is about embodying image rather than pointing outside of itself. The revisiting of a perceived form over multiple surfaces is a meditative, automatic process, and the resulting works are meant to be seen together as equals. The repetitions are not just studies or echoes of a single great painting. Great painting exists in the relationship between works that develop together in the space of a studio. In this moment, painted surfaces are objects that bear the archetype of image.

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Appendix A: Curatorial Statement

STRANGE-MAKING

March 22—25, 2018 Eleanor Aldrich David Onri Anderson Amy Pleasant

Curatorial Statement Mirel Crumb

The concept of defamiliarization, Viktor Shklovsky's term "Ostranenie," (*Art, as Device*, 1917) is the technique of describing something familiar in a way that makes it appear unknown. Often used in riddles, "non-recognition" is employed to draw attention to absurdity that has become overlooked. The concept stems from the basic belief that the world can change, the way that we think about things is constructed and can therefore be deconstructed or reconstructed. This term has long been considered for its revolutionary aims, but at its core, strange-making is a device for becoming more fully aware of everything that happens around you, to live more fully. Over-abundance of images and information has led to desensitization and loss of meaning. Poetic images create conditions for the senses to be used fully and allow the mind to conceive new experiences and sensations.

Texture builds the desire to touch, to know how the surface will feel against our fingertips. The texture of skin brings forth a similar desire to know, but it is complicated by the codes and boundaries we have socially around the body. Eleanor Aldrich renders in thick layers of translucent color and texture that so clearly mimics skin. These works create a sensation of knowing how it feels to have our skin pressed against a surface, a grid, a park bench. In Aldrich's work, more than serving to create an image, paint is transformed into the plastic and skin it is depicting. The context of the painting, the confident color and composition, lets us believe the contradiction that a thick cut cube of plastic is skin. The recognition of the figure comes late, almost an afterthought to the immediacy of the colorful grid.

Amy Pleasant's paintings also cultivate empathy for the form. We feel the weight of the forms, the presence of a figure, but the identity of the other is missing. These works are not concerned with identity in terms of outward symbols, they are about embodiment of the self. These works are contemplative and deceptively simple. The forms provided by Amy Pleasant have evolved from a lineage of previous ink drawings that have been redrawn from one another and mediated through a xerox machine. This process of abstraction through sibling works creates an archetypal form that inhabits each painting.

These small paintings appear to be pushed to the simplest form they can be while retaining enough specificity that they carry an index of the original form. The heads are drawings that have become dimensional. Though they are ceramic busts they do not depict individuals, the shape of the piece extends to the contour edge of two flattened planes. These head shapes present a face without identity, an uncanny yet neutral presence.

There is no direct formula for creating a productively strange image, but a sense of nonidentity despite affinity is crucial. David Onri Anderson's apple core paintings present an impossible object that is believable and undeniably familiar. In this exhibition, these paintings of objects hang beside figurative work and share a centralized composition that negotiates the rectangular edges of the support. There is a methodical nature to the gradient bands of the lantern pieces. The paintings do not hide their construction, pencil lines and raw canvas peak through, and the consistent surface and edge of each color show little revision. These lanterns and cores are rendered as both objects and spaces. The depth within each composition provides a space that can be inhabited by the mind. The images appear to be painted symbols or illustrations of ideas or dreams. There is a referent and there is invention; the two seem to arrive on the surface simultaneously.

Each work presents its own visual dilemma. The resulting images are both inventive and embedded with experience. These paintings appear quiet, but they are deliberate. Each image has developed through sustained process and re-imagination. It is not just that the works are abstracted that makes the viewing experience disorienting, recognition of the subject raises more questions than it answers. With the level of information available, the formal qualities of surface, color, mark, texture hold equal ground with the image. Realizing that the lawn chairs are depictions of skin does not stop them from being geometric cake slices of silicone in a grid. Recognizing the shape as a human silhouette does not stop the image from reversing and becoming a crumpled mass or a hole cut out from a surface. To know that the soft structure of gradients depicts a paper lantern does not satisfy the overall curiosity. The mundane truth of each subject does not lift the mystery. Identification does not interfere with the need to look closer, to see and look again for the first time each time.

Appendix B: Artist Statements

Eleanor Aldrich

My work is textural and alchemical; I match materials – often industrial sealants – and techniques to the subject matter they look like. This creates a physical similarity to the actual object and a level of realism is achieved without realistic rendering. The low-relief mimicry of objects contributes to a two-dimensional image, while pushing against the expectation of flatness. I find this creates tension between reality and image in a way that is familiar to life. I attribute my appreciation of mystery and the possibility of transformation in my work to my Catholic upbringing, in which materials were transformed and images held power over life and death.

The body of work is about the grid and the human body. The lawn chairs that frequently appear in my work are a reference to the Modernist grid and the canvas weave, but with the physical reality of the body pressing against it, breaking it, and causing it to sag. The body as subject is caught between the illustrative plane of the chair back and the actual picture plane. It is a model in which the tension between the organic and geometric play out.

David Onri Anderson

I make small-scale paintings that use elements of hard-edge abstraction and a subtle palette to point to familiar objects that resist being fully identified or understood as their typical selves. With subjects such as paper lanterns, leaves, notebook paper, candles, and apple cores, I establish grounds of commonality and go from there to create a pattern or a space in between where one finds ambiguity of knowledge or name. The paintings are made to record the losing of thoughts, language, self, worries, beliefs and finding an image that can open back to the core, that unnamed state of mind.

Amy Pleasant

My work includes painting, drawing, and ceramic sculpture, all exploring the body and language through repetition. Adopting the structure of a diagram or list, I explore the fragmented figure as sign or symbol. With a limited palette and an economy of line, I draw images like writing a letter, documenting essential, universal motions and human behaviors.

Appendix C: Image List

STRANGE-MAKING
Eleanor Aldrich
David Onri Anderson
Amy Pleasant
A group exhibition curated by Mirel Crumb
Apothecary Gallery | Chattanooga TN
March 22, 2018—25, 2018



David Onri Anderson
Growing Apple Core
2018
Acrylic on canvas
16 ¼ x 20 ⅛ inches



David Onri Anderson
Natural Ways Paper Lantern
2018
Acrylic on canvas
20 x 16 ¼ inches



David Onri Anderson
Apple Core Unscrolled
2017
Acrylic on canvas
14 x 20 inches



David Onri Anderson
Vision in Cloudland Canyon
2017
Acrylic on canvas
10 x 8 inches



David Onri Anderson
Goldenrod and Asters Paper Lantern
2017
Acrylic on canvas
16 x 10 inches



Amy Pleasant
Turning III
2017
Oil on canvas
12 x 14 inches



David Onri Anderson
Peace Piece
2018
Acrylic on canvas
10 x 8 inches



Amy Pleasant
Looking Down
2015
Oil on canvas
12 x 14 inches



Amy Pleasant
Her
2015
Oil on linen
10 x 8 inches



Eleanor Aldrich
Lawn Chair with Rose
2018
Oil, silicone, found decals, and
canvas on panel
20 x 24 inches



Eleanor Aldrich
Fat Back with Tattoos
2017

Oil, canvas, found decals, and
silicone on canvas
30 x 20 inches



Amy Pleasant
Head #4
2015

Fired and painted clay
10 1/2 x 8 x 8 1/4 x 1/4 inches



Eleanor Aldrich
Lawn Chair with Sweater
2017

Oil, caulking, and resin on canvas
20 x 24 inches



Amy Pleasant
Head #11
2015

Fired and painted clay
12 1/2 x 8 3/4 x 9 1/2 x 1/4 inch

Appendix D: Email to Artist

Eleanor Aldrich,

I am a senior painting student at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. I am reaching out to you in hopes to gather work for an exhibition that will be held at the Apothecary Gallery on UTC campus March 2018. The Apothecary Gallery is affiliated with the UTC Art Department but is used by students and faculty for a range of projects. This curatorial project will be my capstone piece for departmental honors. Christina Vogel is overseeing the project. I aim to work as a curator professionally in my community, and grow regional collaboration.

Your work comes to mind because the exhibition is centered around works of art that contain recognizable imagery but are painting in a way that introduces ambiguity. Paintings that are open, that hold between the line of known and unknown quietly demand sustained attention from the viewer. Focusing on the concept of contradiction and defamiliarization, this exhibition will bring together works that subtly alter the viewer's perception or understanding of objects as they relate to the body. The working title of the exhibition is *Strange-Making*.

I am most excited about your recent paintings *Lawn Chair with Sweater* and *Fat Back with Tattoos*. I attended Channel to Channel's exhibition *Shadyville*. Often thick texture will interfere with the read of an image, but in your work the paint begins to double as the subject being depicted proving a visceral viewing experience. I named these paintings specifically, but I am truly interested in any work you have available.

I am reaching out to a small number of practicing professional artists in the southeast region for this project. I am still finalizing exhibition dates but it will be early in March 2018. I understand that this is a very short timeline, I hope you will be able to participate. Should you be interested, I am willing to transport work and am able to offer a modest \$100.00 honorarium. I appreciate your consideration, please let me know if you are interested in this opportunity. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mirel Crumb

David Onri Anderson,

I am a senior painting student at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. I am reaching out to you in hopes to gather work for an exhibition that will be held at the Apothecary Gallery on UTC campus March 2018. The Apothecary Gallery is affiliated with the UTC Art Department but is used by students and faculty for a range of projects. This curatorial project will be my capstone piece for departmental honors. Christina Vogel is overseeing the project. I aim to work as a curator professionally in my community, and grow regional collaboration.

Your work comes to mind because the exhibition is centered around works of art that contain recognizable imagery but are painting in a way that introduces ambiguity. Paintings that are open, that hold between the line of known and unknown quietly demand sustained attention from the viewer. Focusing on the concept of contradiction and defamiliarization, this exhibition will bring together works that subtly alter the viewer's perception or understanding of objects as they relate to the body. The working title of the exhibition is *Strange-Making*.

I have had the opportunity to see your work in Nashville galleries and admire your curatorial work for Mild Climate. I am most excited about your series *paper lanterns* and your painting *apple core unscrolled*, but am truly interested in any work you have available.

I am reaching out to a small number of practicing professional artists in the southeast region for this project. I am still finalizing exhibition dates but it will be early in March 2018. I understand that this is a very short timeline, I hope you will be able to participate. Should you be interested, I am willing to transport work and am able to offer a modest \$100.00 honorarium. I appreciate your consideration, please let me know if you are interested in this opportunity. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mirel Crumb

Amy Pleasant,

I am a senior painting student at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. I am reaching out to you in hopes to gather work for an exhibition that will be held at the Apothecary Gallery on UTC campus March 2018. The Apothecary Gallery is affiliated with the UTC Art Department but is used by students and faculty for a range of projects. This curatorial project will be my capstone piece for departmental honors. Christina Vogel is overseeing the project. I aim to work as a curator professionally in my community, and grow regional collaboration.

Your work comes to mind because the exhibition is centered around works of art that contain recognizable imagery but are painting in a way that introduces ambiguity. Paintings that are open, that hold between the line of known and unknown quietly demand sustained attention from the viewer. Focusing on the concept of contradiction and defamiliarization, this exhibition will bring together works that subtly alter the viewer's perception or understanding of objects as they relate to the body. The working title of the exhibition is *Strange-Making*.

I have followed your work for a few years and had the opportunity to see a few of your paintings in Platform Platform's exhibition *Different Beginnings* in TN Contemporary's space at the Chattanooga Choo Choo this past fall. I am most excited about your sculptural work and your *torso* paintings, but am truly interested in any work you have available.

I am reaching out to a small number of practicing professional artists in the southeast region for this project. I am still finalizing exhibition dates but it will be early in March 2018. I understand that this is a very short timeline, I hope you will be able to participate. Should you be interested, I am willing to transport work and am able to offer a modest \$100.00 honorarium. I appreciate your consideration, please let me know if you are interested in this opportunity. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mirel Crumb

Appendix E: Gallery Proposal

Mirel Crumb
(423) 999-5734
Mirelcrumb@gmail.com

UTC Apothecary Gallery
744 McCallie Avenue
Chattanooga, TN 37403

Strange-Making

“This is how life becomes nothing and disappears. Automatization eats things, clothes, furniture, your wife, and the fear of war. “If the whole complex life of many people is lived unconsciously, it is as if this life had never been.” And so this thing we call art exists in order to restore the sensation of life, in order to make us feel things, in order to make a stone stony.”

—Viktor Shklovsky, *Art, as Device*

Defamiliarization is a process by which fine art or literary work presents familiar objects or situations in an unfamiliar way, distorting the space of signification until the viewer is unsure of what they are seeing or can no longer reconcile what they are seeing with what they know to be true. Works that employ this strategy mobilize critical consideration in the viewer and allow people to examine things and events that they take for granted; to truly see rather than simply recognize.

The proposed exhibition will draw together paintings and sculptures of three or four artists centered around this concept of defamiliarization. The type of work I will pursue will be linked to mundane subject matter including clothing, food, and the unheroic human form. I will focus on finding works that are based on a type of transformation. These paintings and small sculptures will have recognizable sources or cues but will employ some sort of disconnect. In sourcing

work for this exhibition, I am looking at regional artists that have been represented by galleries and academic institutions: Lauren Taylor, Mckay Otto, Jovanni Luna, and Corinna Ray. Beyond the value of this exhibition as a philosophical work, this event will aim to develop a regional collaboration of emerging and established artists. It is a student initiative that encourages scholarly engagement outside of the context of an administrative jury, and collaboration across state lines.

The preferred time for the exhibition is early March, before March 12th or after March 18th. There will be a one night reception. There is some flexibility, the exhibition can take place during late February if necessary. I would be interested in having gallery hours beyond the initial reception or possibly a second event if possible. I will be available to install and can provide my own tools and materials. I will also provide refreshments for the reception and any other resources needed. This initiative is the capstone of a Departmental Honors Thesis approved by the administration of the Department of Art and the Honors College at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Please consider providing space for this project and contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you

Appendix F: Loan Agreement

UTC APOTHECARY GALLERY
744 McCallie Avenue
Chattanooga, TN 37403
<http://www.apothecarygallery.com/>

LOAN AGREEMENT FORM

EXHIBITION TITLE **Strange-Making**

EXHIBITION DATES **March 21, 2018—March 25, 2018**

DATES OF LOAN **February 21, 2018—May 8, 2018**

ARTIST/LENDER

NAME _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____

EMAIL _____

ARTWORK INFORMATION

___ / ___

TITLE _____

MEDIA _____

SIZE _____

DATE _____

Special instructions for installation of the work

UTC APOTHECARY GALLERY

___ / ___

TITLE _____

MEDIA _____

SIZE _____

DATE _____

Special instructions for installation of the work

___ / ___

TITLE _____

MEDIA _____

SIZE _____

DATE _____

Special instructions for installation of the work

___ / ___

TITLE _____

MEDIA _____

SIZE _____

DATE _____

Special instructions for installation of the work

UTC APOTHECARY GALLERY

TERMS

1. Although UTC Apothecary Gallery (“The Gallery”) believes it takes reasonable measures to protect artwork, there can be no assurances that the artworks will not be damaged. The lender-artist hereby releases and discharges The Gallery, and The Gallery shall not be responsible for or held liable to lender-artist, for any damage, impairment, modification, vandalism, loss or theft of the artworks during transit, installation or de-installation of and the artworks or during the run of the exhibition. The Gallery will not provide insurance for the listed works, so lender-artists requiring insurance must provide their own insurance for the artworks for each phase of the exhibition.

2. The artworks listed above will be carefully handled during installation and secure throughout the exhibition. Every reasonable care will be taken in transporting and returning the work.

3. Unless specifically excluded in this agreement or in a separate writing submitted with this agreement, in consideration of the exhibition of the artworks lender-artist hereby authorizes The Gallery to photograph the objects lent under the terms of this agreement and to use those photographs now and in the future for publicity purposes on the Apothecary Gallery website.

4. Lender-artist agrees that no artwork will be removed from the exhibition prior to the close of the exhibition.

5. Unless noted below, “The Gallery” will assume that objects lent under the terms of this agreement may not be handled by the public. _____ Yes, objects may be handled (please include instructions)

6. Special instructions or terms for the loan:

UTC APOTHECARY GALLERY

I have read the conditions above and agree to them.

Signature of Artist/Lender	Date
----------------------------	------

Signature of Apothecary Gallery Representative	Date
--	------

Mirel Crumb
(423) 999-5734
Mirelcrumb@gmail.com
3327 Northrop St.
Lupton City, TN 37351

Appendix G: Press Release

Firstname Lastname,

I am reaching out to you in hope that you will include an announcement of an art exhibition I have curated in (Publication Title). This exhibition opens March 22nd, 2018, and includes artwork from regional artists Eleanor Aldrich, David Onri Anderson, and Amy Pleasant. It will be held at The Apothecary Gallery, a contemporary arts project space supported by the Art Department at UT Chattanooga located at 744 McCallie Ave, on the corner of Palmetto and McCallie. I have included a detailed description of the event below.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me. Sincerely,

Mirel Crumb
(423) 999-5734
mirelcrumb@gmail.com

Strange-Making is a regional group exhibition of works from Eleanor Aldrich (Knoxville, Tennessee), David Onri Anderson (Nashville, Tennessee), and Amy Pleasant (Birmingham, Alabama) curated by Mirel Crumb (Chattanooga, Tennessee).

This three-person exhibition was curated around the concept of defamiliarization, Viktor Shklovsky's term Ostranenie, the technique of describing something familiar in a way that makes it appear unknown. Often used in riddles, this technique is employed to draw attention to absurdity that has become overlooked.

These paintings and sculptural works are representational, but rather than documentation of observed reality or narrative depictions, these images are archetypes each artist has formed through sustained investigation of a subject. Amy Pleasant creates uncanny flattened shapes that evoke the figure indirectly. A series of paintings contributed by Eleanor Aldrich focus on the interaction of skin on a tight grid of a lawn chair back; she thickens and embeds oil paint until it mimics her subject.* David Onri Anderson's apple core paintings present an impossible object that is believable and familiar. Each work presents its own visual dilemma.

The exhibition is free and open to the public.

March 22 - March 25, 2018

Opening Reception: Thursday, March 22, 5:00 - 8:00 pm

Gallery Hours:

Friday, March 23 and Saturday, March 24, 11:00 am - 7:00pm

Sunday, March 25, noon - 4:00 pm

The Apothecary Gallery is located at 744 McCallie Ave, on the corner of Palmetto and McCallie.

Eleanor Aldrich was born in Springerville, Arizona. A participant at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, she also holds an MFA in Painting & Drawing from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she currently lives. She earned her BFA in Painting & Drawing through the Academie Minerva (Groningen, the Netherlands) and Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff. She was a participant in the Drawing Center's first Open Sessions.

David Onri Anderson is a Nashville-based artist who received his BFA as well as the Anny Gowa Purchase Award from Watkins College of Art in Nashville, TN. He has exhibited nationally, including shows at ZieherSmith in New York, the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center, and Zeitgeist Gallery in Nashville. His work is collected nationally and internationally. In addition to his work as an artist, Anderson is co-director/curator of Mild Climate, and ran art-space Bijan Ferdowsi from 2016-2017 in the Wedgewood-Houston neighborhood.

Amy Pleasant received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and an MFA from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University. She was a recipient of The Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Award for 2015. Amy Pleasant currently lives and works in Birmingham, Alabama and is represented by Jeff Bailey Gallery, Hudson, New York and whitespace gallery, Atlanta, Georgia. She co-founded the curatorial initiative The Fuel And Lumber Company with artist Pete Schulte in 2013.

Mirel Crumb is an aspiring curator and a 2018 BFA candidate at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. She exhibited work as a Lillian B. Feinstein Scholarship recipient at UTC and participated in a group show at AVA gallery in November 2016 titled "verēant." She has worked as a gallery assistant at the Cress Gallery of Art since 2015. In 2017, she was a co-writer for an ArtsBuild Community Cultural Connections Grant for a neighborhood art fair, The St. Elmo Incline Crawl in its first year, October 2017.

Appendix H: Documentation

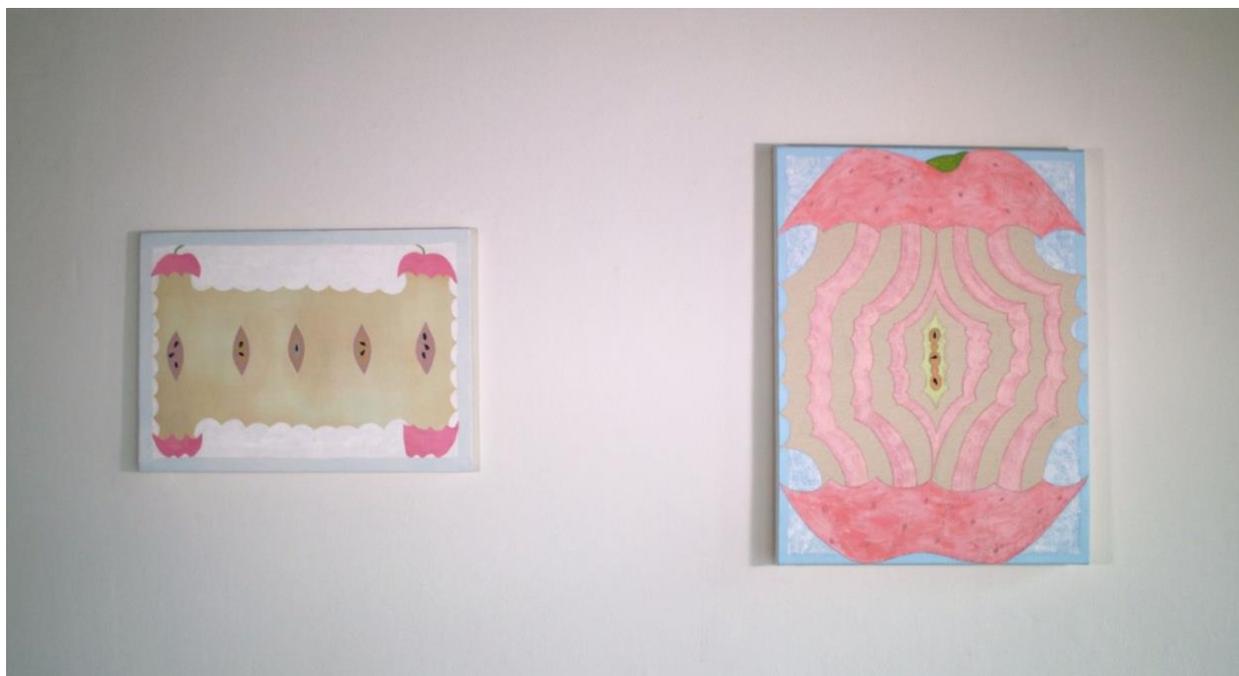




Documentation of *Strange-Making* Reception 22 March, 2018

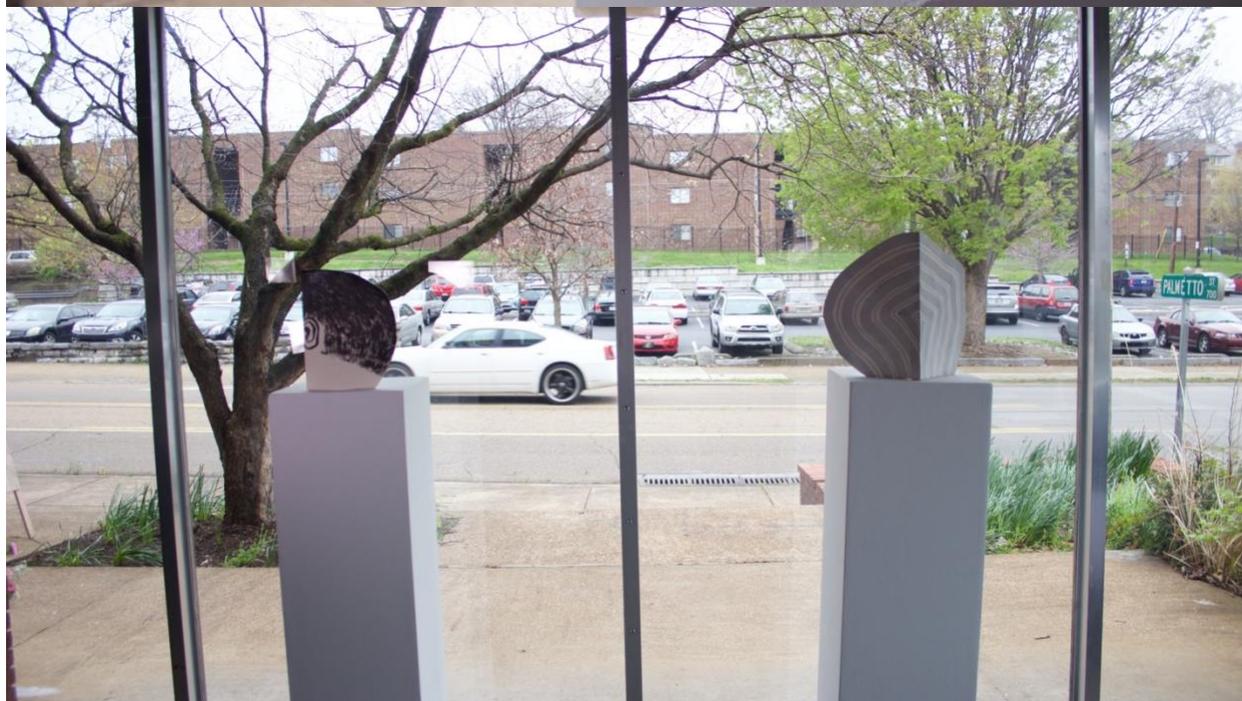
Photography by Clayton Aldridge













Documentation of *Strange-Making* Installation 25 March, 2018

Photography by Stephanie Gould