Intersections

Elizabeth Snowdon ’17

Through my experience in Professor Jackie Brown’s Bio Art class, I found inspiration in scientific ideas of hybridization and genetic modification, as well as the artistic styles of photomontage and surrealism. This inspiration took shape in a series of collages that combines botanical images and anatomical/scientific illustrations. The intention for these works is to blur the lines between the real and the imagined, and to engage the viewer in the intersection between the natural and human worlds. I have been using collage as a “mad-scientist” method of creation, using familiar images to compose unfamiliar forms. The Kaempfer Summer Art Grant has allowed me to purchase the materials necessary to continue my exploration of these ideas, allowing me to focus and to fully engage myself in a body of work that challenges me both technically and conceptually.

Collage is my primary medium as an artist because it offers me instant gratification, allowing me to respond intuitively and quickly to images. In this series, I have had to adapt how I use the medium; my collages have become less like final products and more like sketches through which I can explore a more imaginative potential. By using collage to create my own reference images, I have gone beyond my initial idea of creation through combination, and have engaged in the study of these specimens as if I were visiting a lab or a natural history collection. Creation begets creation. The vibrant addition of watercolor and the intricacy of pen details awaken the parent images with a new sense of life; it is through my invention and the use of these materials that I have seen my work evolve.

My process began with two 14” x 17” hand-drawn works, which are the largest works of the series to date. Then, I completed a few watercolor and pen illustrations before shifting back to collage for further inspiration. My proposal for this project gave myself the challenge of incorporating image transfers into the series. Image transfers are done by applying a layer of gel medium (which is an acrylic glue) to a surface, placing an image face down, burnishing, and peeling back the rest of the paper. The image will remain on the surface. The technique courts the favor of serendipity; sometimes the image will come out perfect, while other times the results are more atmospheric than exact. The challenges presented by this technique offer me the opportunity to use this atmospheric quality to my advantage. By enhancing the images with water-soluble marking pencils, watercolor, and other mixed media elements, I was able to create ethereal environments for my creatures, placing them outside the context of a stark, white page.

I am still working on this series and will continue into the first weeks of the semester. As a condition of my grant, I will be able to exhibit my work in the fall. For this gallery show, I’m excited to continue my exploration of scale by creating large format digital prints to display alongside the originals. I hope to captivate viewers with the detail of my work, and to involve them in the sense of questioning created by the composition of these images.

Faculty Mentor: Professor Jackie Brown
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Images:

Pen drawing with watercolor, 9”x12”
Collage, 9”x12”
Collage with pen drawing, 9”x12” (detail)
Mixed media with image transfer 11”x14” (detail)