

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday Talks Every Saturday at 2PM
Join Joan Wilson or Katie Lyle for an informal introduction to the exhibition. All welcome.

Members' One-Hour Mixer Friday 21 February 2014, 7-8PM
For all current and new members - join Mercer Union for drinks and a social view of *Push and Pull*.

IN STUDIO with Jean-Paul Kelly Thursday 27 February 2014, 7PM
For Sustaining Members and above. See overleaf for details or visit www.mercerunion.org

Push and Pull Artist Performance Thursday 13 March 2014, 7PM
As part of *Push and Pull* there will be a site-specific performance by Bridget Moser in the galleries at Mercer Union. This event is free and all are welcome.

Push and Pull Artists' Talk Saturday 15 March 2014, 2:30PM
As part of the exhibition there will be a discussion between Bridget Moser, Michael Vickers, Nikki Woolsey and Georgina Jackson. All are welcome.

SPIKED TEA Saturday 29 March 2014, 2PM
Mercer Union's raucous afternoon tea social returns for its third iteration. Enjoy a proper cuppa with a contemporary art edge! Watch www.mercerunion.org for more details coming soon.

For a full list of forthcoming events, talks, screenings and in studios please see the gallery website or become a member and keep up to date with regular invitations, members' socials and other benefits.



Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art
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Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 11AM – 6 PM
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Director of Operations and Development: York Lethbridge
Director of Exhibitions and Publications: Georgina Jackson
Gallery Administrative Coordinator: Liana Schmidt

Exhibition Technician: Jon Sasaki
Curatorial Assistant: Katie Lyle
Gallery Attendant: Joan Wilson

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Cover Image: Bridget Moser, *I want to believe* (2014), production still

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Bridget Moser graduated from Concordia University in Montreal in 2009 with a BFA in Studio Art. Her work has been exhibited in galleries and artist-run centres across Canada, including La Centrale, Montreal; VIVO Media Arts Centre, Vancouver; Harbourfront Centre, Toronto; Video Pool, Winnipeg; The Khyber Centre for the Arts, Halifax; and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Her work has also been exhibited internationally in San Francisco, Miami, and Portland, USA; Frankfurt, Germany; and Como, Italy. She was a resident at the Banff Centre with Michael Portnoy, Ieva Miseviciute and Reggie Watts in 2012 and was selected to participate in the Artist Research Laboratory at the Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Como, Italy, with artist Matt Mullican in 2013. She performs regularly at *Doored*, a monthly performance art and comedy show organised and hosted by Life of a Craphead (Jon McCurley and Amy Lam). Bridget lives and works in Toronto.

Michael Vickers completed his BA in Visual Arts at the University of Ottawa and an MA in Art History at the University of Toronto in 2013. Select recent exhibitions include; *That Same Small War Within You*, Truck Gallery, Calgary (2013) (solo); *Everything and Nothing*, N/A Space, Toronto; *Rooms*, University of Toronto, Toronto; *Post*, Fifty Fifty Arts Collective, Victoria, BC, (all 2012); *Drawn together*, Siena Art Institute, Siena, Italy; *The Billboard Art Project*, Billboard on Interstate 90, Chicago; *Hang with the Best*, Toronto Image Works Gallery, Toronto (all 2011). Michael lives and works in Toronto.

Nikki Woolsey graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 2008. Recent exhibitions include; *One, Two, and More Than Two*, The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto; *Doored 18*, Double Double Land and AGO Weston Family Learning Centre; *Kitchen Party*, 772A College Street, Toronto; *Groaners*, Videofag, Toronto (all 2013); *That's not a run in your stocking, it's a hand on your leg*, Narwhal Art Projects, Toronto, curated by Jon Davies (two-person show); *Theory of Condensation*, collaboration with CN Tower Liquidation, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; *NonMom*, collaboration with Cameron Lee, Double Double Land, Toronto; *Shore for Shore*, Port Said Street, Alexandria, Egypt, (all 2012). She performs and exhibits at *Doored*. Nikki lives and works in Toronto.



Nikki Woolsey
Holder (2013)
Foam, hair elastic



Bridget Moser
Man's Gotta Do (2012/13)
Performance documentation: Henry Chan



Michael Vickers
Deep Fever Dream (2013)
Spray paint on galvanized steel

IN STUDIO with Jean-Paul Kelly
Thursday 27 February 2014, 7PM

Join Mercer Union for an intimate view of Kelly's studio and current practice. Refreshments will be served. Free for Sustaining Members and above; open to other members and select non-members for \$25. Space is extremely limited. RSVP to York Lethbridge, Director of Operations & Development, at york@mercunion.org or by calling 416.536.1519

Jean-Paul Kelly (Canadian, b. 1977) creates videos, drawings and photographs that are often displayed together. His work has exhibited at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery (Toronto), Vox Populi (Philadelphia), Scrap Metal Gallery (Toronto), Mercer Union (Toronto), Gallery TPW (Toronto) and Tokyo Wonder Site. Kelly was a Guest Artist at the 2013 Robert Flaherty Film Seminar. Other recent screenings SBC Gallery (Montreal), Nightingale Cinema (Chicago), New York Film Festival: *Views from the Avant-Garde*, International Film Festival Rotterdam, Toronto International Film Festival: *Wavelengths*, Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, Migrating Forms (New York), Arsenal - Institute for Film and Video Art (Berlin) and Pleasure Dome (Toronto). From 2009 to 2012, Kelly was Programming Director and Curator of Trinity Square Video (Toronto). He holds a Master of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto (2005) and lives and works in Toronto.

Push and Pull

Bridget Moser
Michael Vickers
Nikki Woolsey

Curated by Georgina Jackson

7 February–22 March 2014
Opening Friday 7 February, 7 PM



Push and Pull

Front and Back Galleries

Push and Pull presents a series of new works by artists Bridget Moser, Michael Vickers and Nikki Woolsey. The exhibition title refers to a constant tension, a position between moving in one direction, and into another; a perpetual state of struggle.

Bridget Moser's performance and video work is suspended between internally voiced conundrums, stand-up comedy, experimental theatre, performance art, and prop comedy, with a continuous slippage from one state to another. In this in-betweenness a certain absurdity materializes, questioning a world of assumptions and belief systems.

Michael Vickers's works sit between painting and sculpture, in prioritizing their objecthood physical struggle becomes manifest, highly industrialised materials are folded, pushed and beaten into other forms acknowledging the precarity of their formation and labour.

Nikki Woolsey coalesces distinct everyday found materials into sometimes seamless yet habitually unfamiliar forms. Broken vases, glass panels, and other quotidian objects seep into abstraction, questioning how we perceive objects and place value, and disrupting existent systems of knowledge.

In their in-betweenness each of the artists explore, negotiate and re-imagine the status quo.

—Georgina Jackson, Director of Exhibitions & Publications



Michael Vickers, *First Blue* (2013)
Spray paint on galvanized steel

Push and pull.

In his classroom in the 1940s German/American abstract painter Hans Hofmann reiterated the necessity to use colour and form to create spatial depth, combining the two-dimensional with the three-dimensional and opening up the parameters of the canvas from any single point of view. He repeated the instructions, 'push and pull' and, 'expansion and contraction.' Focusing on the necessity of visual tension, he stated '[M]ovement does not exist without life, movement is the expression of life.'¹

In April 1963 as part of an exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art Allan Kaprow created two adjacent rooms within the Santini Brothers warehouse in Manhattan; one decorated with yellow wallpaper and a violet potato print, included a yellow chair, desk, and dresser, a vase, a cot with a mattress and a number of paintings including one by Kaprow; the other darkened and overfilled with objects, crates, junk and a lone shining lightbulb. Outside the adjoining rooms a crate titled 'Push and Pull' held placards providing 'points of view' and 'instructions' stating:

Anyone can find or make one or more rooms of any shape, size, proportion and color—then furnish them perhaps, maybe paint some things or everything. Everyone else can come in and, if the room(s) are furnished, they can also arrange them, accommodating themselves as they see fit. Each day things will change.

There was a conflation between domestic spaces in which we assert our position and other spaces where we gather. The juxtaposition of structure and chaos, colour and darkness, invited activity and, slowly, visitors began to move things around, alter the structured environment and play. According to reports the evening ended with a number of women putting the rooms back into place, their social force becoming manifest.

While Hofmann identified the necessity to activate the pictorial space, displacing the singular viewpoint for a multitude, the confines of the canvas were maintained. His habitual usage of the phrase 'push and pull' became a source of comedy for his students, Allan Kaprow among them. Indeed, the New York exhibition was titled *Hans Hofmann and His Students* and Kaprow's work, *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann*, suggesting a humorous nod to his former teacher. And yet it has also been proposed² that Kaprow was honouring Hofmann's theories, marrying structure and displacement as both physical and social space, stepped beyond the parameters of the stretcher and into everyday spaces. The tension expounded by Hofmann through the juxtaposition of colour and form was literally expanded by Kaprow. Rather than creating movement through colour and form, this 'environment/happening' consisted of literal physical interaction, shaping the world around us. As Kaprow asserted "[e]ach day things will change."

Push and pull.

The tension between painting as pictorial space and sculptural form, action and inaction, forms and formless-ness, and comedy echoes in the work of Bridget Moser, Michael Vickers and Nikki Woolsey. Vickers' work sits between painting and sculpture, occupying both positions and slipping from one to another. Defined lines become blurred, both colour and form are altered. Woolsey's sculptures and photographic collages, coalesce from one form to another and back again, in their formless-ness, there is a certain abstraction but concurrently a continuous movement. While Moser's performances and video works defy classification, references to stand-up comedy, performance art, pop videos, experimental theatre, and everyday encounters, permeate the work but become more, and beside, than the sum of their parts. In-betweenness becomes a state in which there is perpetual struggle, where something is at stake.



Nikki Woolsey, *Florida* (2013)
Ceramic, felt, powder, foam dust



Nikki Woolsey, *Offers* (2013)
Collage

Prioritizing the objecthood of both painting and sculpture, Michael Vickers combines monumentality with imperfection and a certain precarity. Canvas is folded and altered while steel is forced and jostled into shape, physical struggle becomes manifest. Working on multiple scales, Vickers bends, folds and pushes into shape durable and robust materials such as steel and copper altering industrial, and domestic, materials into forms which acknowledge their formation. His own physical capacity comes into play with a struggle between material and physical force. These folds and subtle bruises are accentuated with the addition of bright spray paint, luminous pinks, mint greens, yellows, rich purples and blues, altering perception of light and form while their titles, *Cassius Clay* (2013) or *Where My Left Hand Met Your Waist* (2013) allude to another time and space.

The tentative positioning of works such as *First Blue* (2013) underscores a continuing precariousness. Material form becomes incompatible with human failure and loss. Fallible, these 'monuments' allude to the forgotten, the personal, the invisible and the precious, and perpetual struggle.

In Nikki Woolsey's sculptural works everyday objects, vases, plates, glass, flour and other materials, become segregated from their original purpose or era. Broken, altered or added to, divergent materials and objects are meshed with one another, coalescing to produce new forms. In taking apart and putting together such objects the parameters and associations of each part becomes abstract, a 'fuzziness' emerges. *Baby USA sock with lentils* (2013) commingles a ubiquitous foodstuff, found spilling out of friends' shelves, with a tiny mass-produced sock triumphing nationhood but on a very minor scale. Each material has multiple associations but in this fusing, a sense of things concurrently emerges and recedes hinting at a certain absurdity.

Objecthood resonates also with Woolsey's practice of collage, photographic images culled from multiple reference sources are precisely cut out and meshed together, in which familiar forms become abstract, and the question of one where object begins and the other ends is obscured. In this shape-shifting, Woolsey explores how we perceive objects, undermining given associations and diverse values. Through material experimentation, preordained knowledge shifts towards the indefinite, and systems of knowledge, the known and unknown, become blurred.

Fleeting between experimental theatre, stand up comedy, performance art, prop comedy and contemporary dance, a sense of play combined with existential crises pervades the work of Bridget Moser. In both performance and video works, objects become tools in which action is unscripted. A grey folding table, a telephone, a notebook, singular chairs become props, or tools, as both starting point and end point and everything in between, but a non-linearity pervades. As she states "I am interested in working through a process that mimics the way the mind works, making associative leaps between seemingly disparate ideas in order to generate new meaning." Associations and systems of belief are undermined and their ludicrousness becomes apparent.

In *Asking for a Friend* (2013) Moser dressed in a generic white t-shirt and navy tracksuit pants moves around a white walled space, while a voiceover layers question upon question, "what's the difference between manipulation and cooperation?" "or is it really relevant?" "if gravity is constant what do we mean when we say constant?" or "If you can't teach an old dog new tricks, what happens if you bring in another dog? Like a new dog." This incessant enquiry into our world shifts between inner monologues to more universal conundrums while she holds, moves and becomes entrapped in chairs, a bench, and everyday objects. Language, gestures and situations no longer have a determined outcome but allude to tragedy and absurdity as questions on the nature of relationships, both personal and with the world that surrounds us, are brought to the fore.

In rethinking politics in the mid-2000s sociologist Bruno Latour and artist/curator Peter Weibel revived the German concept of *Ding* [thing], in its historical and present usage, as both archaic assembly and subsequently objects.³ In considering the role of objects, or things, questioning what is at stake when we come together, politics shifts from operating in a defined space, between a given number of people, to being something which draws out the complexities of how we live together. Each of the artists in this exhibition explores, plays with and re-evaluates objects, from sculptural works to collages, surplus materials are transformed and renegotiated in the work of Nikki Woolsey, folded canvas and beaten steel marry the hand and the industrial through struggle in the work of Michael Vickers, or persistent fictions tease out the absurdity of our associations and our place within the world in the work of Bridget Moser.

Push and pull.

—Georgina Jackson

¹ Hans Hofmann, "Plastic creation" (1932), p.38.

² Kelly, Jeff (2004). *Childsplay: The work of Allan Kaprow*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p.85.

³ For the exhibition and book project *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (2005), curated by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel at Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie [Centre for Art and Media], Karlsruhe, Germany.