ARTS

"It's raining men! Hallelujah!"
IT'S RAINING MEN THE WEATHER GIRLS

REVIEW

In MFA exhibition, Yale artists reveal human strangeness in bold moves

BY ELLIE KOO
VISUAL ARTS CRITIC

The meaning of objects we encounter in our daily life have become so automatized in our perception that we often forget to consider or question their nature. Part of art's enduring allure lies in its ability to present the familiar in a new lens — to pull us from the routineness of what we know and force us to reconsider what is possible. Art brings to the surface the strangeness of human existence, expressing things that words often cannot.

The School of Art's second-year exhibition — titled "Overcurrent" — excels in that regard. On display in the Green Hall Gallery through Oct. 4, the exhibition features artwork from all four areas of Yale's Master's of Fine Arts program — graphic designers, painters and printmakers, photographers and sculptors. Through the reworking of vaguely recognizable forms and objects presented in entirely new ways, a transformative and electric quality runs through the show. With such a wide range in medium, form and content, the exhibition takes viewers on an uninhibited sensory ride. Fast-paced and bursting with vitality, "Overcurrent" leaves viewers with their minds reeling, a statement to the creativity of the works these artists bring to the School of Art.

The show is one of tension and contrast. Pieces are juxtaposed in ways that feel conflicting yet stirring. "GGL526," a sculpture by Bobby Smith ART '27 that is positioned in the center of the first floor's left rooms, resists easy interpretation. The life-sized form resembles a satellite, a telephone wire, an alien spaceship and a Mars rover all at once. Amplifying that ambiguity are the warbling, echoed sounds emanating from the top of the sculpture. Within the white-cube space of the gallery, Smith encourages viewers to consider the strange tangibility of electricity, technology and man-made structures that surround us in everyday life.

On the wall behind this sculpture hangs an oil painting by Idris Young ART '27, titled "Tailings." Rendered in shimmering tones, the piece depicts a full-bodied, slightly abstracted figure turning to the left. As the eye travels down the canvas, the painting begins to erupt with specks of vibrant purple, red, teal and periwinkle. With an emotional ambiguity reminiscent of the works by Gustav Klimt or Frank Auerbach, "Tailings" retains a recognizable figurative form while pulling the viewer in through its visible brushstrokes and evocative color palette.

Seeing Young's painting in the same periphery as Smith's mechanized sculpture underscores the vast possibilities of artistic creativity. The two form a striking contrast, but not necessarily a divide; both speak to the seemingly endless potential of visual expression in contemporary art.

This tension manifests itself in not just the placement of the works, but also within the works themselves, particularly in their transformation of everyday materials into something uncanny and unfamiliar. "Heaven's Gate (Engedi)," a sculpture by Josh Vasquez ART '27, is almost overlooked at a first glance across the gallery. Yet take a step closer, and something disturbing emerges. The sculpture is a plastic water dispenser — but instead of water, it holds a dark purple, toxic-looking substance, and submerged within this murky liquid is a pair of Cortez shoes. These are all materials we immediately recognize and interact with, but arranged in this manner, they become disorienting and uncomfortable. Vasquez prompts us to consider what we put into our bodies, what we consume and what we put back into the world.

The currents of imagination and creativity continue to run strong on the lower level of the gallery. "Canerows" by Charitssa Stone ART '27, a series of three prints arranged horizontally, is presented directly next to "Little Things" by Grace Han ART '27, a series of 12 prints oriented vertically and stretching towards the gallery's ceiling.



ELLIE KOO / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
"Overcurrent," the exhibition for second years at the Art School, features artwork from multiple disciplines and resists viewer expectations. Several works stretch the boundaries of the transformative potential of artmaking.

The works are both two-dimensional and of a similar papery material, but that's perhaps their only point of connection. "Canerows" draws you closer, with its almost hypnotic patterning and black-and-white mark making. The effect is dizzying. Take one step to the right, however, and "Little Things"demands a different kind of attention. The prints contain swaths and blobs of color, reminiscent of the moment a camera flash goes off, leaving behind spots of vivid color and expanses of pure white in your vision. There's a moody, discombobulated quality to the work, and as viewers tilt their heads upwards to take in the full vertical arrangement, the warped perspective further destabilizes their vision.

It is evident from the exhibition that Yale's artists are able to achieve and express their full potential for art making. In "Giotto's Probe" by Young Grace Cho ART '27, for instance, a fresco is incorporated directly into the gallery wall. As a result, the work feels ephemeral and tangible — not simply placed in the space for viewing, but a direct product of an artist working within it.

"Overcurrent" is hard to place within a singular category — much like art itself. Every piece resists definition, traversing the bounds of form and meaning. Through their bold subversion of notions of what art can be, these artists create something new, transformative and brilliantly alive. Like many other Art School exhibitions, this is not a show to approach with preconceived expectations; it is one that simply must be experienced firsthand.

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Alley Cats tap two women, including one of color, for the first time

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For the first time in its 82-year history, the Yale Alley Cats tapped a class that included two women, including among them the a cappella group's first woman of color.

Savannah Emery '30 and Miah-Reese Govan '30 were tapped for the group, which was Yale's first a cappella group to begin touring internationally, last Wednesday alongside four other first-year students. The Alley Cats tapped their first female member, current Whiffenpoof Ryann Schaffer '27+1, in 2023, a year after officially dropping its "all-male" moniker — though women had been able to rush the group for years before that.

"It was just so much relief because I was very scared on and off that I would be the end of the women in the Alley Cats, or at least for a year, and I wanted to make sure that I would still be on campus when we welcomed the girls into the group," Schaffer said in a phone interview.

Govan said that when she was tapped, she was "completely unaware" that she and Emery had made history.

"It didn't feel like I was doing something big because they made me feel like I was one of them," Govan said in a phone interview.

Over the past few decades, Yale a cappella groups have begun to embrace gender inclusivity despite decades of initial hesitation.

When Yale first became co-ed in 1969, existing student organizations, including a cappella groups, remained apprehensive about admitting women. Yale's first historically female a cappella group, The New Blue, formed in 1969.

The first all-gender a cappella group, Redhot and Blue, was founded in 1977.

In 2017, the Doox — formerly known as the Duke's Men — became the first historically all-male group to open auditions to all gender identities. That same year, they tapped their first non-male member and former Whiffenpoof, Morgan Baker '21+1. Many groups declined to follow suit at the time.

A year later, the Whiffenpoofs — the world's oldest collegiate a cappella group — tapped their first female member, Sofía Campoamor '19+1, a member of the group Mixed Company. For three decades prior, the group had voted to tap only males, though women had auditioned as early as 1987.

Whim 'n Rhythm, a traditionally female senior a cappella group and the Whiffenpoof counterpart, also opened their audition process to all gender identities in 2018.

In 2022, the Singing Group Council, the organization that governs Yale's a cappella groups, began requiring all of its member ensembles to label themselves by voice part, not gender, and allow anyone to audition. The Alley Cats opened auditions to women before the SGC's mandate.

Since 2022, all Singing Group Council TTBB groups — those composed of tenor and bass voices — have tapped non-male members. Those groups include Yale's second- and third-oldest a cappella groups, the SOBs and the Spizzwinks.

"A lot of the tap process isn't governed by the Alley Cats specifically — it's governed by the Singing Group Council," Jaden Nicita '28, Yale Alley Cats president, said in a phone interview. "But, as far as our philosophy this year, we really every year just try to take what we consider the best singers."

In years past, Alley Cats members have cited non-male rushees' comfort levels singing in the group's tenor-bass range as a reason for delaying integration.

While members said vocal register is still important to the Alley Cats, attitudes about non-male singers' abilities have changed.

"We just want people to know that we support all voices that feel full and supported in our tenor, tenor, bass sound, and we're super excited to welcome Savannah and Miah-Reese," Lyle Mondano '28, head rush manager for the Alley Cats, said in a phone interview.

Schaffer said joining the group was a gamble at first, since many of her close relationships were female.

"I went into this expecting a lot of toxic masculinity, a kind of frattiness and feeling I'd be left out of this frattiness that is so inherently male," Schaffer said.

According to Schaffer, the a cappella group's choice to become co-ed not only allowed for a more inclusive space, but also allowed for a diverse, improved sound.

But being the first non-male in a traditionally all-male group also had its challenges, Schaffer said.

"When you are the person that people are taking a chance on, I fear that my voice is going to bring down the group," Schaffer said. "Is my being here actually beneficial to the group?"

However, she said her time in the Alley Cats has been rewarding.

"These past three years have really, really changed a lot of who I am, mainly because of the people I've been surrounded by," Schaffer said. "Even though there wasn't another woman in the Alley Cats, I found a really great queer community through it. I also met some of my best friends."

While Emery, who ran her high school's a cappella group, said she was starstruck and excited to audition for the Alley Cats after watching them perform, Govan said she was more hesitant.

"I thought a cappella would be a fun way to continue singing," Govan said in a phone interview. "After Marsh Jam, I decided to rush the Alley Cats on a whim."

According to Govan, she originally couldn't really see herself in the group before beginning the rush process, but now feels welcomed by all members of the group.

Emery said she was grateful for the opportunity to sing with the Alley Cats, especially alongside Govan.

"It's nice having another girl," Emery said.

The other new Alley Cats were also excited that their class was making history.

Ethan Savage '30, a new member tapped alongside Emery and Govan, said in a video interview that he is thrilled at "such an amazing step forward for the group."

"There's lots of love and adoration for this new class from the most senior Alley Cats to the ones just in the year above," Savage said.

After a retreat last weekend, all of the new members said they are excited about the year ahead.

Cary Friedrich '30, another new tap, said he thinks that the diversity of voices present in the newest tap class will "create opportunities for really interesting music experiences."

"It's important to have space for everyone who wants to make art," Friedrich said in a phone interview. Additionally, he thinks it's a "testament to meritocracy and social progress" that the most qualified applicants can be admitted regardless of their identities.

For Schaffer, the moment the group decided to tap two women was both emotional and a relief.

"I think we're gonna start sounding fuller, and I think we're going to be a lot more welcoming," Schaffer said. "And I'm just really, really proud of the Cats right now," Schaffer said.

The Yale Alley Cats were founded in 1943.



COURTESY OF JADEN NICITA
The historic moment comes three years after the a cappella group, Yale's fourth-oldest and its first to begin touring around the world, tapped its first woman. The last 50 years have seen a gradual shift away from male-only campus a cappella groups.

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