

HAY LEE EBERSOLE

new works



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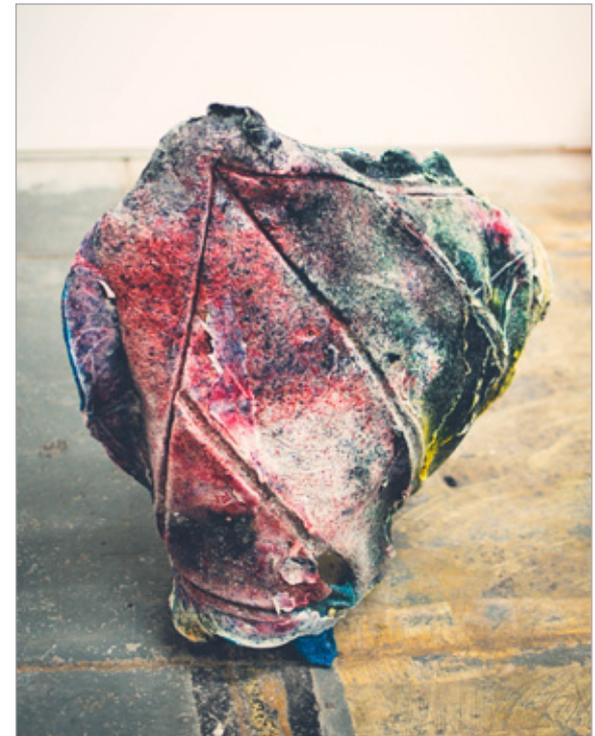
2017 Emerging Artist of the Year
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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—Haylee Ebersole





FOREWORD

Liz Rudnick

Hidden at the heart of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History is a faceted hallway where samples of over 2,500 minerals and gems are mounted in a striking display. Each specimen is distinct in color and character: some contain filaments as fine as human hair, while others, comprised of opaque, Lego-like crystals, appear almost plastic. Untold millennia lay between their formation and acquisition, but over the course of the 1970s each stone was purchased in turn by the Hillman Foundation and shipped to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where it now sits, mounted on museum-quality glass, refracting shards of light across the infinitely mirrored room.

I have often come to this room in search of painting inspiration: Pilgrimage to the Hillman Hall's treasury of form and color rarely fails to jolt my brain into action (and even when it fails, who doesn't enjoy a good stare at something shiny?). Recently on one of these reconnaissance missions, I became so enamored with a piece of azurite that I leaned in too quickly and, not noticing my proximity, bounced my forehead off the vitrine. Thunk. Whipping my head back, I then feigned composure before noticing the vaguely circular print my face had left on the glass—a tiny ghost made of oil and powder, floating conspicuously between me and the geometry inside.

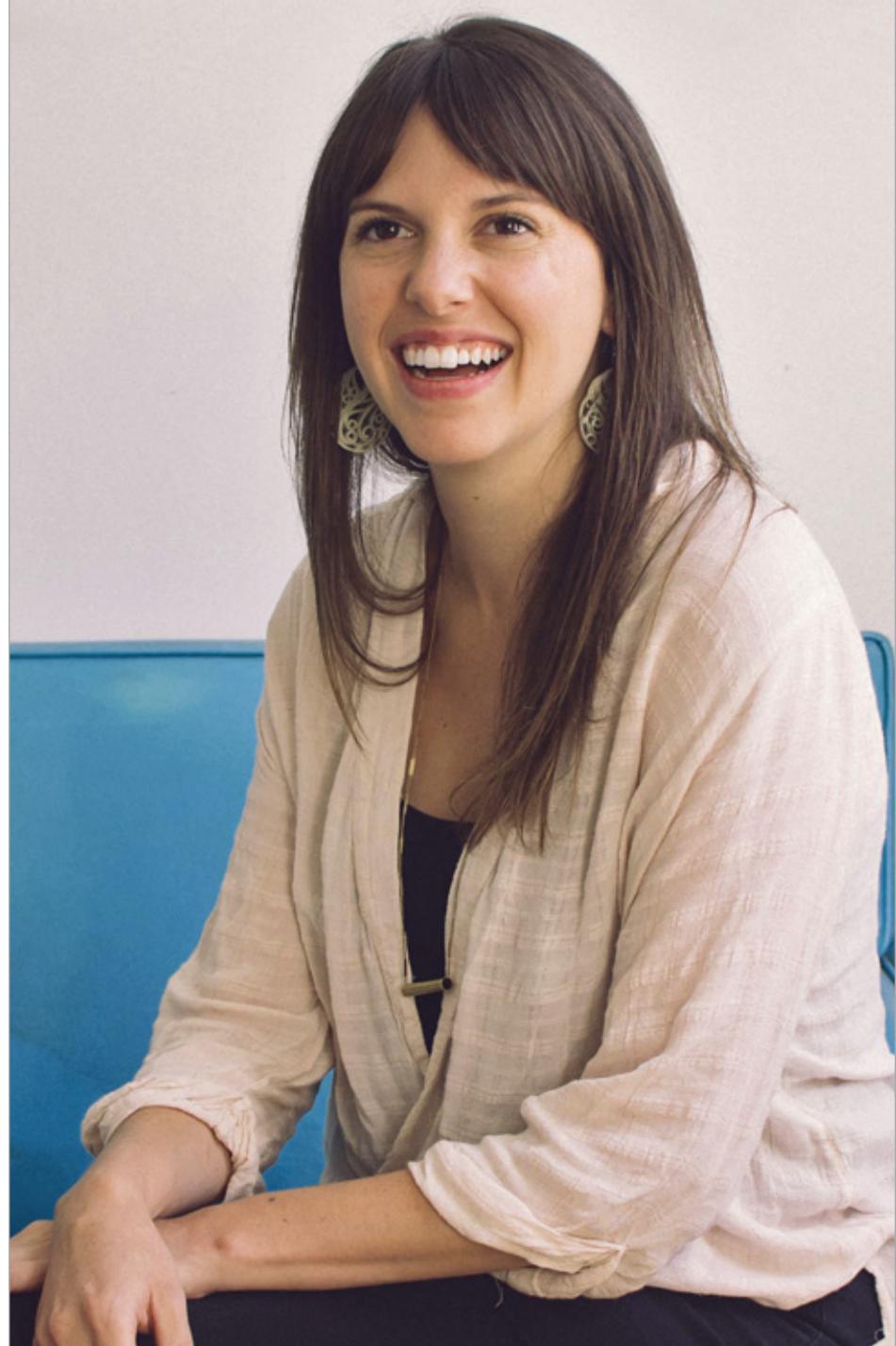
This is the memory that surfaces whenever I encounter the work of Haylee Ebersole: an unexpected layering of human and geological accretions. They evoke both the awkward ephemerality of the human body, and the comparatively graceful permanence of its environment.

Emerging from a printmaking background at Ohio University, Haylee Ebersole has developed a material-based practice that features dehydrated, crystallized gelatin. Through a continuously renewable process of containment and heat, she creates sculptural objects that operate in the biomorphic space between skin and stone. Everything about Ebersole's work is alchemic, from the crystalline tactility of her surfaces to their complex, allusive forms. Her sculpture appears at once sedimentary and delicate, with deckled edges that twist and fold unpredictably. The work conjures images of fungal growth, marine life, hard-water deposits; snowfall, fossils, and calcified skin.

As impressive as the variety of allusions contained within Ebersole's material is the range of methods she has employed to exploit its unique behavior. Her early gelatin works—iterative, neutral in palette, and concerned with the structural collapse of the upright rectangle—owe much to the late work of Eva Hesse. Slightly later experiments push structural boundaries by casting the gelatin in varying thicknesses, from paper-thin sheets to luscious mounds. The latter calls to mind Lynda Benglis' aluminum casts of molten polyurethane. Also reminiscent of Benglis is Ebersole's penchant for mounting her sculptures in such a way as to make them seem uneasily frozen in midair. I've now had the pleasure of watching several curators' faces freeze while she expertly dangles a piece from a single screw in a well-hidden crag.

Ebersole's most recent body of work is her most ambitious to date. A significant increase in size, paired with a dynamic new approach to color, finds Ebersole reaching beyond her previous wheelhouse into fresh territory. Calling to mind the contemporaneous Landscape Paintings of Rodney McMillian, these works move beyond their natural physicality into a distinctly artificial realm. They revel in grossness, calling to mind great floating islands of multicolored trash or the leftover trimmings of some imagined industrial process. The Pittsburgh Center for the Arts has named Haylee Ebersole 2017's Emerging Artist of the Year, and her work is thus the focus of an impressive survey (the first effort under PCA Director of Exhibitions Lauren Goshinski). As the works in this catalogue illustrate, Ebersole's biomorphic shrouds of dehydrated gelatin carry the legacy of much Feminist Post-Minimal sculpture while pushing the boundaries of contemporary art at large. The show is therefore a celebration: of the mysterious intimacy in Ebersole's chosen material, the ingenuity of her process, and of the latest chapter in a rapidly developing and prolific practice.

Liz Rudnick is an artist and writer living and working in Pittsburgh, PA



IN / ANIMATE MATTER

Haylee Ebersole

When I began working with gelatin as an art material, I was both fascinated and disgusted. The seductive swirling colors, saccharin smell, and glazed, gummy surfaces provided an enticing aesthetic experience but also proved superficial as I contemplated the origin of the material and its underlying morbidity. Literally made up of body, gelatin consists of collagen extracted from boiled and processed animal skins, connective tissues, and bones. Spanning use in the production of food, batteries, paper, photographic film, adhesives, pharmaceutical capsules, and medical bandages, gelatin also plays an integral role in the cosmetic industry and within the fields of bacteriology and tissue engineering. The surprising extent by which gelatin pervades our daily lives in addition to its potential for continuous transformation has become a primary focus of my recent work. For my Emerging Artist of the Year 2017 exhibition at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, I have created a collection of large and small scale crystallized gelatin sculptures and unique monotype prints.

My first experiments with gelatin entailed working with Jell-O. In collaboration with the artist Cayla Skillin-Brauchle, I began by casting large and unwieldy 'jello jiggle' blocks. I became intrigued by the ways the gelatin moved and quivered in response to its environment and was reminded of the movement of our own bodies. It was a bizarre feeling and realization; that a material once animated and now rendered inert, could assume the look of life again with such vitality. Over the course of a few weeks, the jiggle blocks scabbed over, grew pungent with bacteria growth, and literally exploded. This was my initial introduction to the inherent agency this enigmatic material asserts, which then led to several years of a Frankenstein-esque love affair with gelatin.

One day in the studio after I failed to clean up from a series of cast jigglers, I noticed that a calcified, shell-like remnant was left in the mixing bucket. I cautiously peeled and placed the remnant on the table. Paper-thin, it was simultaneously structural and fragile. Its shape mimicked the hard edges of the bucket while at the same time warped them; the gelatin exhuming its own kind of material logic. Inspired by this experience, I developed the method of casting and dehydrating gelatin that I employ presently in my work. My process begins by mixing large quantities of powdered unflavored gelatin with water, various synthetic and organic pigments, and household crystallizing agents. The mixture is then poured into a variety of plastic molds. In some instances, I intuitively pour blobs that respond to the space, other times I use pre-manufactured objects, and most recently I've incorporated hand-poured silicone casts of interior and exterior spaces and objects. In the following several weeks, the moisture evaporates and the gelatin transforms into a hardened, crystalline, and bone-like structure.

Through these experimentations, I encountered another aspect of the gelatin that has captivated my interest. Pointing back to its origin, gelatin holds a direct molecular memory to the animal from which it was derived. Although completely dehydrated, the gelatin will reabsorb moisture and melt back into a liquid when heated to the animal's natural resting temperature. Inspired by this visceral connection to the past, I began reconstituting previous sculptures by melting them down and casting them into new forms. In this way, my work does not remain fixed but instead moves cyclically through different lifetimes. These cycles lead directly back to a 'once living being' that has been reanimated through my process.



The series *variations in size and color*, on display for this exhibition, consists of an array of bright, speckled, and painterly gelatin panels. Cast from mass-produced rectangular molds, this work highlights the ways that printmaking and the notion of the multiple have influenced my work. When initially cast, the panels take on a manufactured, standardized form. However, as the gelatin dehydrates and takes on a life of its own, it fluctuates and develops unruly edges resulting in a series of variant impressions that refuse to be constrained by the rigid, commercial, form it began in. These imperfect casts reveal the ultimate failure of the material to render and reproduce, but also provide a compelling illustration of its rebellious agency. I view my work as a metaphor for empowerment and resistance by revealing the links between the multiple, the body, and capitalism through use of gelatin and the forms of serialized manufactured goods.

The series *cosmic dandruff* consists of monotypes on paper and is the most traditional demonstration of printmaking in this show. Created by using gelatin fragments and various found substrates as matrices, these prints resemble trace fossils, sunburnt skin, microscopic views of cells, and everyday detritus. The flattened quality of the images calls to mind the squashed look of trash run-over by a tire and the view of pavement underfoot; a ground riddled with cigarette butts, lotto tickets, aluminum cans, and fluttering leaves. This series in combination with the large scale gelatin works *by the roll*, *marbled drum*, and *ODB* represent a new direction for my work. They capture a variety of human-made traces;

from the industrial nature of words scribed in concrete, to the forms of abandoned materials such as roofing panels, gutters, and ladders to the textures of domestic objects such as placemats, towels, and cushions.

As a whole the work in this exhibition resembles a collection of archaeological finds that emulate discoveries of organisms from the natural world but upon further inspection reveal the inextricable trace of human influence. This relationship connects to the topic of the Anthropocene, a term used to describe our current geological epoch and the significant impact human activities have had on the environment. We have witnessed the depletion, decay, and mutation of living organisms, landscapes, habitats, and natural resources. While the negative effects of our human impacts on the earth are undeniable, I believe examining the agency of inanimate matter and its innumerable, possible relationships with living organisms will yield progressive outcomes. For instance, a new strain of bacteria has been discovered that can consume and live off of plastic, which indicates an unprecedented symbiotic relationship that may influence, slow, or reverse plastic pollution and waste. It is within this scope of thought that I create my work in effort to suggest new possibilities for everyday matter. Upon viewing, I intend for my work to slip between associations, but ultimately emerge as a field of cryptic yet familiar objects that envisage my own anthropogenic landscape, one that provokes contemplation of the traces our human existence may leave behind.

by the roll | dehydrated and crystallized gelatin, approx. 42x96x29" / 2017

ODB | dehydrated and crystallized gelatin, 53x36x16" / 2017

flow freely | downspouts, two parts, dehydrated and crystallized gelatin, approx. 5x108x2" / 2017

marbled drum | dehydrated and crystallized gelatin, approx. 48x66x36" / 2017

diagonal / stylish statement | dehydrated and crystallized gelatin, approx. 24x27x12" / 2017

BIOGRAPHY

Haylee Ebersole is an artist living in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania. She earned a BFA in Printmaking from Metropolitan State College of Denver and a MFA in Printmaking from Ohio University. She has exhibited her work nationally and internationally at spaces such as Blue Star Contemporary Art Museum, Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Center for Visual Art in Denver, and Menningar Tjarnarborg in Iceland. Ebersole was recently awarded a Creative Development Grant provided by the Investing in Professional Artist Grants Program, a partnership of The Pittsburgh Foundation and The Heinz Endowments.

