



Drawings by
Erin Anfinson, Kristi Hargrove, Mark Hosford,
and Chris Scarborough

Frist Center for the Visual Arts

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Metamorphoses



*T*his exhibition includes drawings by four artists from Middle Tennessee: Erin Anfinson, Kristi Hargrove, Mark Hosford, and Chris Scarborough. Rendered with virtuosic skill, these drawings combine odd forms and fragments, an often confounding sense of space, and the surprising juxtaposition of elements to convey the dissolution of a coherent understanding of the world. While the sources of their imagery can be difficult to recognize, their works carry hints of the unstable body as a symbol for the condition of flux that often seems to be a hallmark of our times—the body, that is, as mirror of a society that is unpredictable and perhaps unknowable.

The title of the exhibition, *Metamorphoses*, derives from Ovid's narrative poem on the mythological history of the world, which contains descriptions of bodily transformation in legend and lore. Ovid's poetic evocation starts with the beginning of time, which he describes as a chaotic condition, in which materials contain opposing tendencies as a way of symbolizing a period of confusion, paradox, and instability.

The World, form'd out of Chaos. Man is made.
The Ages change. The Giants Heaven invade.
Earth turnes their blood to men. Iove's flames confound
Lycaon, now a Wolfe. The World is drown'd.
Man-kind, cast stones restore. All quickning Earth
Renewes the rest, and gives new Monsters birth.
Apollo, Python kills; heart-wounded, loves
Lust-flying Daphne; Shee a Lawrell proves.
Ioue, Iö made a Cow, to maske foule deeds.
Hermes, a Heardsman. Syrinx, chang'd to Reeds....¹

Ovid's epic goes on to explain people's relationships with each other, with nature, and with the gods, devising lyrical, if improbable reasons for the way things are, with recurring instances of one type of being changing into another. In our own times, many artists explore the difficulty of getting a fix on what seems to be a world in constant degradation and re-formation; what was believed to be tangible and inarguable—distinctions between human and animal, good and evil,

mind and body, spiritual and secular are today less clearly delineated than they were once thought to be. The artists in this exhibition convey states of fragmentation and hybridization, slipping from the solidity of surfaces toward the mutability of what lies beneath.

It may be a coincidence that this recapitulates the Surrealists' interest in breaking down boundaries between the inner and outer worlds, emphasizing the marvelous as a way of penetrating the intransigent exterior to reveal the underlying fluidity of perception. But there are parallels; Surrealism arose in a time (like ours) of transition. After World War I the old political and social order had dissolved; to take its place, poet and theorist André Breton articulated an argument for the liberation of the senses in both personal and political realms. In *The Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Breton writes that "the greatest virtue" of Surrealist imagery is that it:

is arbitrary to the highest degree... [it] takes the longest time to translate into practical language, either because it contains an immense amount of seeming contradiction or because one of its terms is strangely concealed; or because ... it is of a hallucinatory kind, or because it very naturally gives to the abstract the mask of the concrete, or the opposite, or because it implies the negation of some elementary physical property, or because it provokes laughter.²

The Surrealists explored these paradoxes in such activities as the Exquisite Corpse game, in which drawings were developed through random collaboration as a way of illustrating the limits of conscious control. They also conceived of automatism, in which random and undirected drawing—drawing without thought or plan—used improvised mark-making to escape conscious control, to give visibility to the repressed forces that lie deep within the unconscious.

Automatic drawings were rarely pure regurgitations of the unconscious—for most artists, there was a back and forth between randomness and conscious assessment; an artist would typically look at pencil and ink meanderings and tweak them, clarifying this or expanding upon that nascent image to make something readable. In the end, automatic drawings, like those in *Metamorphoses*, utilize the control of the hand and eye to make icons of the semi-formed, incoherent, and provocative.

In his *Rorschach Series*, Mark Hosford playfully alludes to the Surrealists' idea that psychological truths could be revealed through drawing. He takes for his starting point light gray ink-jet Rorschach blots, which were invented to help psychologists lead their patients to reveal repressed meanings through free association. Hosford transforms these symmetrical organic forms by inlaying penciled-in images of his own eccentric devising; monstrous creatures and hybrid



beings reminiscent of the dark animation of the Brothers Quay and Tim Burton. The works hilariously reverse the instrument of psychology by showing us right up front what phantasms might crowd the imaginative mind. An interpreter is no longer needed to make psychic meaning of these wild and playful speculations—the little monsters and demons occupying the far reaches of our psyches are all out in the open for easy viewing, if not clear understanding.

Hosford's insertion of new meaning onto a received image recalls André Breton's citation of Pierre Reverdy, who wrote on the expressiveness to be achieved through "a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be—the greater its emotional power and poetic reality."³ Along this line, Chris Scarborough skillfully integrates depictions of people and animals—in drawings titled simply with descriptive nouns like *The Economist* (cover) and *The Modernist*—with fragmenting or even exploding elements. These unstable interactions call to mind the Cubists'

Fig. 1. Mark Hosford. *Plate IV*, 2010



dissection of space and form as a way to emphasize the contingent nature of our perceptions. Inspired by the financial collapse in 2008, Scarborough's images are icons of absurdity and trauma, in which the illusions propping up society explode in a cultural "big bang."

Similarly activating the energy that rises from linking unlike modes of representation, Kristi Hargrove creates intimate drawings that hover between abstraction and recognition. She pushes the limitations of the humblest mediums—pencil, pen, and paper—to explore perceptual paradoxes, in some instances creating realistic illusions, and in others employing collage or the physical properties of distressed paper to create actual space and depth. The artist's playfulness and curiosity do not mask the works' invitation to voyeurism, with their tantalizing, often subtly erotic, glimpses into a very private world. This is even seen in drawings which, like Scarborough's, depict animals undergoing metamorphosis. Her dog, depicted in *Peep Hole II* (cover, top right), evinces the sense of innocent charm that pets often embody. But seen in

Fig. 2. Chris Scarborough. *Big Bang*, 2009



silhouette, this domestic creature contains a topography of human skin, rolling and swelling in a rhythm of pure sensuality.

Erin Anfinson provides an even more intimate voyeurism in her depictions of an imagined human interior. The series *Migration of the Disruptors* was inspired by news stories about the adverse effects of some pharmaceuticals on fetuses. Termed endocrine disruptors, one such chemical, a plasticizer, is commonly found in toys. As a new mother, Anfinson was sensitive to reports that these chemicals can interfere with the hormones of the fetus, potentially causing cancer, birth defects, and a host of other medical problems. She envisioned an inner landscape, in which cellular transformations resulting from harmful chemicals might alter the systems that keep us alive. Her images of twisting intestinal tubes, clusters of blood cells, and porous or spongy organ walls are colored with poisonous greens and the lurid patterns of a coral snake, transforming the body from a protective vessel into an arena of risk and foreboding. Her related series, *Viscera*,

Fig. 3. Kristi Hargrove. *Peep Hole I*, 2008



extends her meditation on biological transformations, although instead of the human interior the imagery is drawn from bees and insects.

Each of the artists in *Metamorphoses* creates work that is beautiful and unsettling. They seduce us with mystery, opening doors to confusion, misunderstanding, and the generation of new meanings that arise from the flow between our internal and external perceptions, the constant metamorphoses of ourselves and our world.

Mark Scala, *chief curator, Frist Center for the Visual Arts*

Notes

1. Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, trans. Georg Sandys (1632; The Ovid Collection at the University of Virginia Electronic Text Center), <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/latin/ovid/sandys/contents.htm>.
2. André Breton, *The Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 38.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Cover images (clockwise): Erin Anfinson. *Testing God 10*, 2009. Encaustic on paper, 8 x 8 in. Courtesy of the artist; Kristi Hargrove. *Peep Hole II*, 2008. Graphite on clay board, 16 x 16 in. Courtesy of the artist; Mark Hosford. *The Bunny King*, 2011. Graphite over archival ink-jet of inkblot, 13 x 12 in. Courtesy of the artist; Chris Scarborough. *The Economist*, 2009. Graphite and watercolor on Fabriano Artistic, 14 7/8 x 19 7/8 in. Courtesy of the artist; Fig. 1. Mark Hosford. *Plate IV*, 2010. Graphite over archival ink-jet of inkblot, 15 x 22 in. Courtesy of the artist; Fig. 2. Chris Scarborough. *Big Bang*, 2009. Graphite and watercolor on paper, 14 3/4 x 19 1/4 in. Collection of Walter Ochinko, Washington, D.C.; Fig. 3. Kristi Hargrove. *Peep Hole I*, 2008. Graphite on clay board, 16 x 16 in. Courtesy of the artist; Fig. 4. Erin Anfinson. *Migration of the Disruptors 3*, 2010. Encaustic on paper, 9 x 6 in. Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 4. Erin Anfinson. *Migration of the Disruptors 3*, 2010



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