



**Portraiture:** *Inside Out*



**This catalogue accompanies the exhibition  
“Portraiture: *Inside Out*,” on display at the Walsh Gallery  
February 28 through April 1, 2011**

**All measurements are in inches, height by width**

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**Catalogue Design: Whitney Fehl  
Editor: Jeanne Brasile**

**Walsh Gallery at Seton Hall University  
400 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange, New Jersey 07079  
Phone: 973-275-2033  
Fax: 973-761-9550  
[www.shu.edu](http://www.shu.edu)**



# **Portraiture:** *Inside Out*

*Sarah Bliss*

*Dominic Guarnaschelli*

*Gwen Hardie*

*Jenny Hyde*

*Pat Lay*

*Greg Leshé*

*So Yoon Lym*

*Ryan Roa*

*Steve Rossi*

*Jesse Eric Schmidt*

*Travis LeRoy Southworth*

*Tonja Torgerson*

*Peter Whittenberger*

*Christine Wong Yap*

*Raphael Zollinger*

curated by Ruth Ballester, Whitney Fehl and Lauren Thompson



*Portraiture: Inside Out* confronts the genre of portraiture in a progressive manner. In general, traditional portraiture is known for its use of often homogenizing conventions including pre-determined poses, extravagant attire, symbolic props and idealized settings. From Archaic Greek kouroi to 19th century carte-de-visite photographs, artists sought to idealize their subjects' physical appearances and psychological states in order to propel them to a higher plane of spiritual and intellectual being. These paintings, sculptures, drawings and photographs were created by a small group of skilled artists with particular training and were often commissioned by society's elite. In contrast, many contemporary artists now seek to expose private identity in a frank and conceptually dynamic manner. The artwork becomes further liberated through the use of accessible contemporary materials including video, photography, multi-media and even the body itself.

The artists featured in *Portraiture: Inside Out* push the parameters of portraiture by incorporating alternative media and dynamic subject matter in a manner that encourages public engagement and analysis. With artists using commonplace materials such as digital photographs, video, the written word, consumer products and the body, viewers are able to more easily understand and actively engage with the artwork. Additionally, although artists traditionally concerned themselves with established socio-political qualities that elevated their subjects above any singular instance, today's contemporary artists often humanize them, grounding their subjects in the moment. However, this cannot be accomplished through mere representation. In order to effectively reveal the palpable essence of an absent individual, artists must leave room for viewer interpretation; this encourages viewers to become psychologically invested in the art.

In Christine Wong Yap's mixed media installation *Cloud II (Aura/Good Thoughts)*, the viewer becomes an integral part of the artwork through an act of coincidental participation. Addressing perceptions of optimism and positive emotion, a mass of brightly colored words and phrases are suspended from the ceiling, representing an individual's thought processes and aspirations. When viewed alone, the work functions as a metaphor for the artist's own thoughts. However, when standing beneath it, viewers fully activate the work, adopting the mass as their own thoughts. This simultaneous exploration of the artist and the viewer is taken a step further when the viewer, now engaged with the work, becomes the viewed.

Portraying the self is a conscious mark that signals a moment of astute awareness of one's own being. This understanding can be extremely personal, but through the artist's attempt to define him or herself, viewers are able to recognize their own struggle for self discovery. Conversely, the depiction of the other addresses subjects beyond the artist. In this way, the artwork becomes a direct avenue from the subject to the viewer. Without this channel, the other would remain remote and inaccessible.



Group portraiture explores the identity of several subjects forming a signified unit and community. To create his compositions on blue and white (*Dental Records of an Art Community*), Steve Rossi distributed packages of chewing gum to individuals surrounding his Beacon, New York gallery space. The chewed gum was then carefully cast and mounted on a wood panel. The plaster casts are the unique identifiers for each chewer. These remnants act as physical records of people's participation in a collective activity.

Frequently, works of art presented in *Portraiture: Inside Out* effectively reveal their subjects' private identity by focusing on external physical cues and internal dialog. Commonly emphasizing personal idiosyncrasies instead of idealized states of being, these portraits render the subject candidly. This is accomplished by incorporating meaningful processes, actions, gestures and in particular, artistic choices of material and subject matter. The liberty that contemporary portraiture introduces to the genre, allows for a deeper more sincere expression, alleviating any necessity for the restricted practices of the past. Through the use of actions, a portrait can effectively reveal a subject's psychological state through body language. Additionally, contemporary portraiture can concentrate on the psychological state of the audience who are invited to inspect the artist's emotional responses. In this way, viewers are invited to explore the limits of the mind and body. Whether the artist focuses on the physical or psychological aspects of identity, the resulting works are daringly personal.

Several artists in *Portraiture: Inside Out* incorporate and even highlight the eccentricities of their subjects into their work. In his *Detouched* series of abstract photographs, artist Travis LeRoy Southworth digitally erases an individual's (or group of individuals') face(s) leaving only the perceived physical imperfections of his subjects. The resulting cacophony of wrinkles, moles and stray hairs contradicts culturally accepted standards of beauty and bears little resemblance to a face. Often our distinctive and even "flawed" characteristics become most closely intertwined with perceptions of self. Southworth follows a similar blueprint in his video *Absent Minded Monotonous Splendor*. In this self portrait, his face gradually dissolves, leaving only his own physical blemishes. Appropriating audio from the History Channel's series *The Universe*, his imperfections manifest a cosmic form, implying that like the stars and planets in our own galaxy, each mark is a defining unit of a larger whole.

Other artists featured in *Portraiture: Inside Out* focus on physical action as an outlet or means of exploring the capabilities of the body and psychology. Jesse Eric Schmidt's *Expenditure* explores the manner in which identity can be expressed through the use of the body. Interested in incorporating unconventional media into the presentation of portraiture, he physically exerts himself in order to deposit a large amount of perspiration onto his grey cotton shirt. Through the gradual evaporation of the sweat, a signifier of labor, Schmidt is able to visually represent the deconstruction of the self. Additionally, the work reveals the societal tendency with which people obsess with cleanliness and find discomfort with



their own bodies.

Similarly, in his video and performance work, Greg Leshé pushes the limits of his body in order to re-examine past challenges. In his video installation *Shovel Ready*, he presents himself performing the fruitless task of shoveling gravel from one large pile to another. Through action, he attempts to reconcile his past and present as he investigates his relationship with his father. With grueling yet meditative actions, Leshé physically reveals his own life-defining experiences.

While the physical body is also an integral aspect of Ryan Roa's *You Make Me Want to be Better*, it is more of a memory than an actual physical presence. In this way, he focuses on the emotions associated with gender and identity. By covering his masculine image in the mirror with red lipstick, he conceals it with a waxy layer embedded with feminine associations. The work is also closely linked to his emotional struggle coping with his mother's illness. Roa's state of psychological expression signifies his struggle with loss and his viewpoint on gender

Many of the artists featured in *Portraiture: Inside Out* use non-traditional materials, reflecting the freedoms in contemporary art. While incorporating various media, scales and subjects, a dialog is shaped that emphasizes the private inner self of the artist, the viewer and the other. Contemporary portraits are no longer restricted by past convention, but are the result of creative use of subjects, materials and processes. In this way, artists remove the elitist aspects notoriously associated with portraiture. Through the assessment of the self and the other, the translating of the physical and the psychological, and the incorporation of non-traditional materials, *Portraiture: Inside Out* illustrates the capabilities of and the extent to which portraiture can reach

Ruth Ballester, Whitney Fehl and Lauren Thompson



# Sarah Bliss



*Before the Drop*

single channel video installation with sound; 9 minute loop with audio; 2010



# **Dominic** *Guarnaschelli*

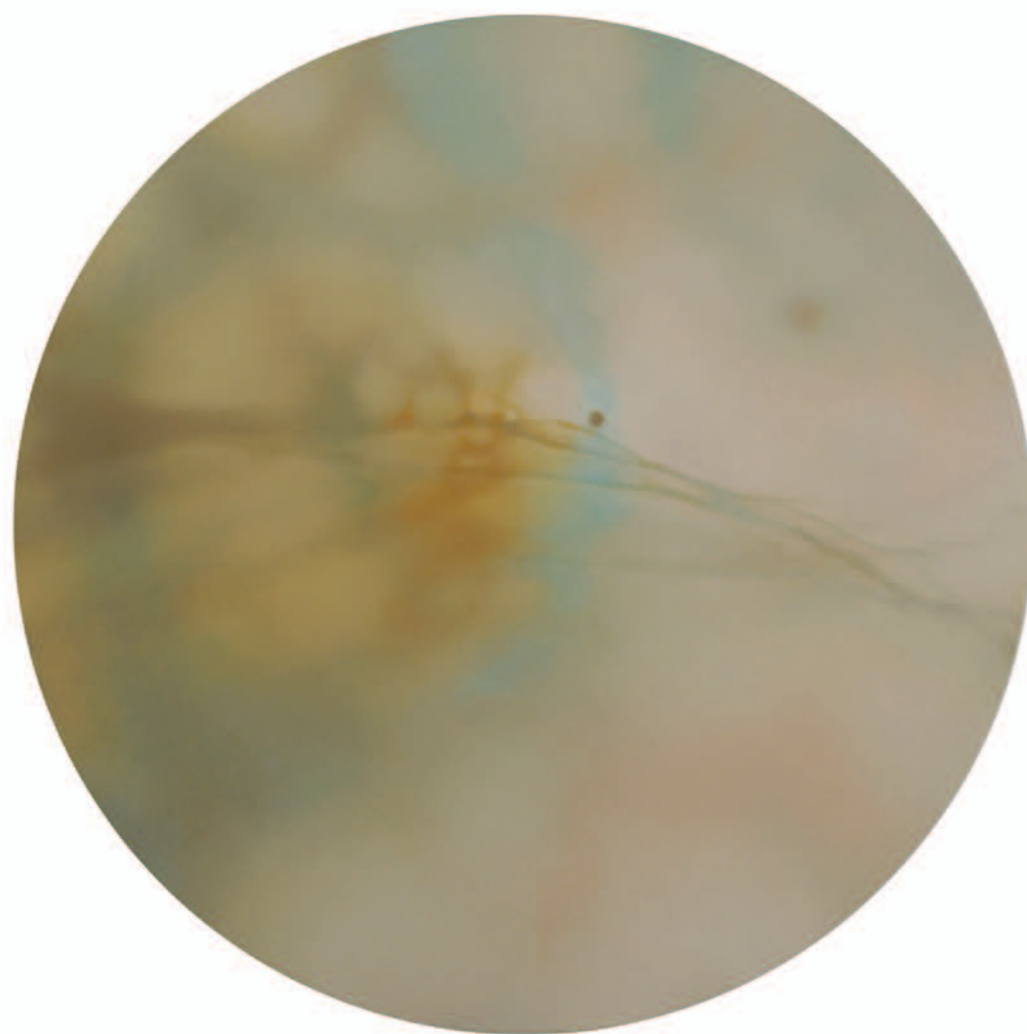


*The Space Inside One's Clothes*

latex and foam cast from artist's discarded clothing on glass and treadle sewing base; 36" x 32" x 28"; 2007-2010



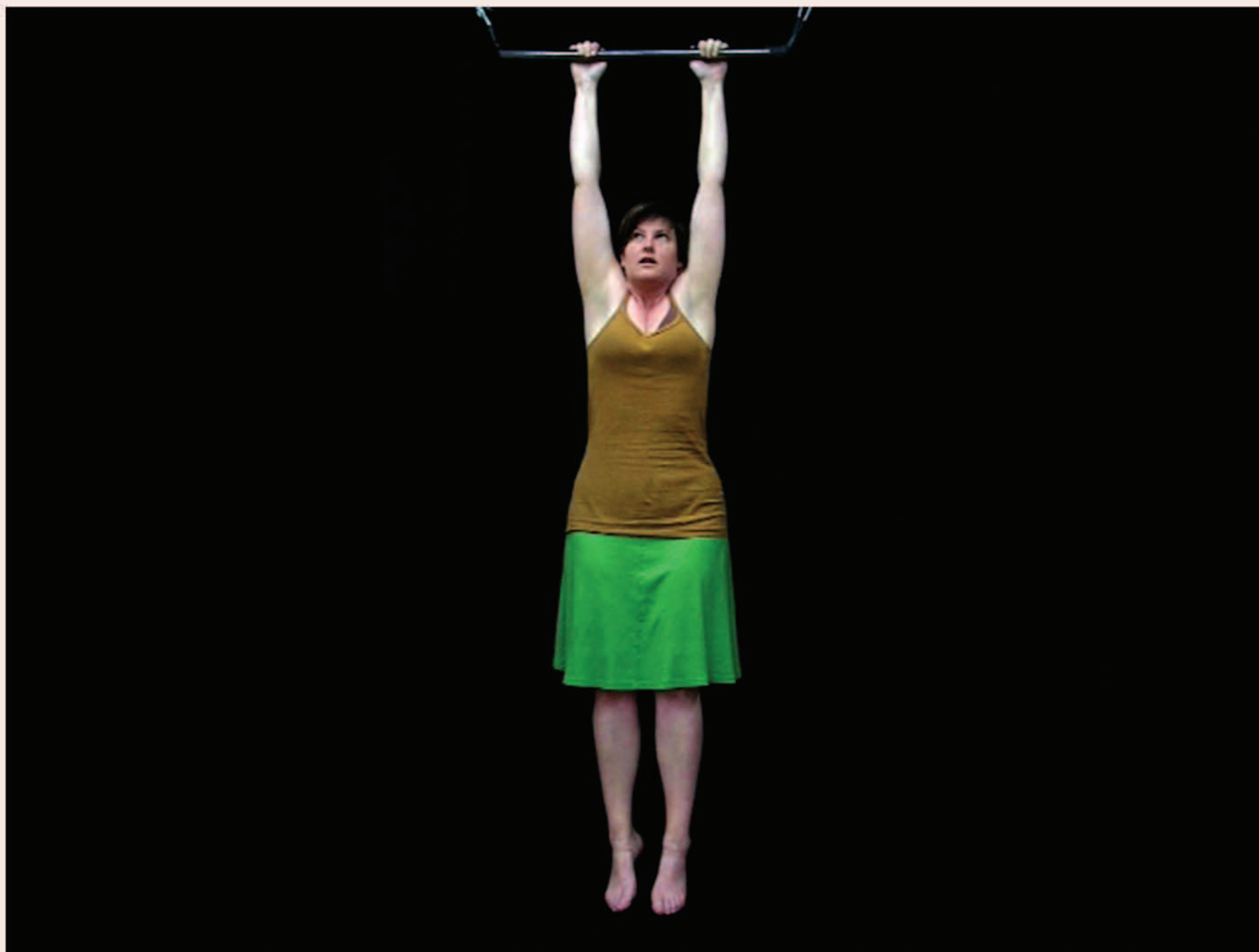
# **Gwen** *Hardie*



*Body 12.09.10*  
oil on round canvas; 42" diameter; 2010



# Jenny Hyde



*Hanging On*  
single channel video; 1 minute loop; 2007



# Pat *Lay*



*Transhuman Personae #11*  
fired clay, graphite, aluminum powders, acrylic medium, computer parts,  
cable, wire, tripod; 75" x 46" x 46"; 2010



# Greg Leshé

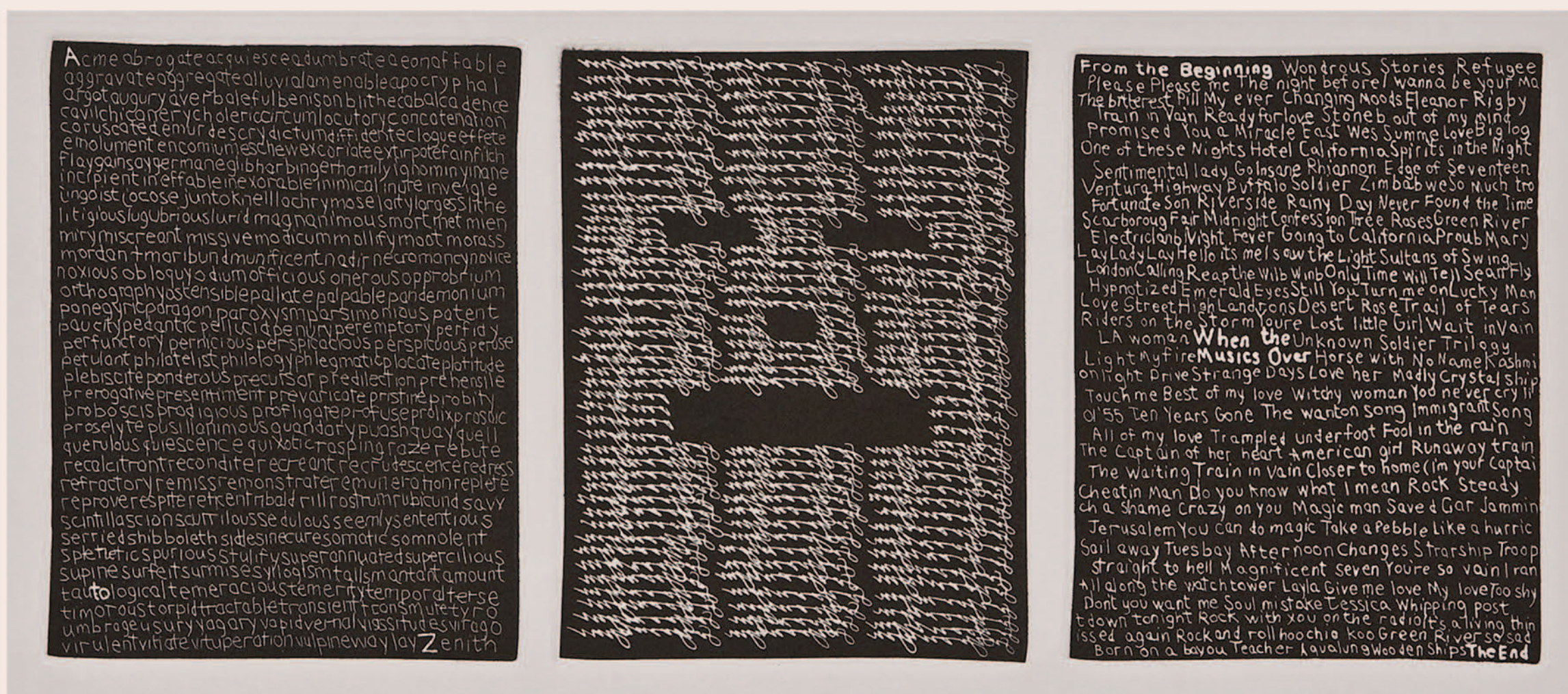


## *Shovel Ready*

double channel video installation from October 2010 performance; dimensions variable; 2010



# So Yoon *Lym*



**Signature Triptych: When the Music's Over**  
relief print; 15" x 20"; 1991



**Ryan** *Roa*



*You Make Me Want to be Better*  
lipstick on mirror; 60" x 18"; 2009



# Steve Rossi



*Composition on White (Dental Records of an Art Community)*  
plaster casts of chewing gum, wood panel, acrylic paint; 14" x 14"; 2009



# Jesse Eric Schmidt



*Expenditure*

sculpture with 3.5 hour duration; dimensions variable; 2011



# Travis LeRoy Southworth



*Absent Minded Monotonous Splendor*  
digital video; 3 minute loop; 2010



# Tonja Torgerson



*So Bad*  
serigraph on paper; 27¼ " x 25¼ "; 2010



# Peter Whittenberger



***Bravado: Resume Plaques***  
plaques of artist's resume; dimensions variable; 2007 - present



# Christine Wong Yap



***Cloud II (Aura / Good Thoughts)***

**mixed media installation; (glitter foil on board, 3-D illusion plastic, fun fur yarn, thread, elastic, hula hoops, beads); dimensions variable; 2011**



# Raphael Zollinger



*Tara in the Round*  
archival UltraChrome print; 38" x 28"; 2009



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