

## As the world around him polarizes, Portland artist Isaac Layman shifts his gaze internally



*"Red Devil," 2018, by Isaac Layman, photographic construction, 71 x 59 inches.  
Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery*

By Jeffrey Gillespie, Dec 15, 2018

“Everything seems to be arguing right now,” says Isaac Layman as he sits in the large central exhibition space at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, in conversation with an audience of collectors and fans. “Even being a 41-year-old white male seems argumentative.”

As such, instead of going into the territory of other people's lives, Layman – after a recent trip to Botswana that gave him time for introspection – returned to the Northwest to assemble a body of work

that operates in the realm of his own psychological processes, as opposed to using images of "other people" as a mechanism for negotiating his anima.

In an era now considered by many to be one of extraordinary divisiveness in the American cultural identity, Layman's instinct has been to approach his practice from within: both on a personal level and in terms of where his pristine and highly original work originates. As such, his current show, "Never Was a Thing" at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, is filled with images of everyday items from his home, which at first glance seems mundane.

Upon further inspection, however, it is clear that each photographic image is a painstakingly rendered, bona fide masterwork of photo collage, wherein Layman – an accomplished young artist who at 41 has already made his solo debut at Seattle's Frye Museum and is well represented in other important institutional collections – works meticulously through digital channels to layer and integrate multiple sections into images of ordinary household items that are crisply rendered and startlingly intimate.

"Untitled" (2018), a photo construction of an open cardboard box viewed from above, invites onlookers into a manila-tinted bunker of piercing perfection. "Mother 1977" (2018), showcases a simple wooden chest of drawers that belongs to Layman's wife, but the sensitivity and intelligence with which the artist positions and executes the image will be immediately apparent to the trained eye. It's hard to tear yourself away once you start to examine the piece more closely, because there were no shortcuts in its execution. "Mother 1977" was made by utilizing more than two thousand photos, all shot with a straight 35mm camera, to create a stellar and striking work – a work described somewhat diffidently by Layman as "generous but limited." Layman revels in seeking out what he calls "jewels" in places where others might see only abandoned space. An empty CD case, a piece of trash or a discarded crayon may become the cynosure of an important gallery show should Layman elect to pluck some lucky object out of obscurity through his camera lens. At one point in recent months, Layman elected to incarcerate himself in his bathroom for 24 hours with only a camera and a radio for sustenance.

The result, fueled by a National Public Radio soundtrack of the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings for then-Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, is a compelling and peculiar photographic installation entitled "Silent Retreat, 24 hours, No. 1" (2018). It's made up entirely of images from inside Layman's bathroom, with the artist himself in situ, shot in shirtless self-portraits from various angles in a harrowing series of pictures that create a strong impression of isolation and despair. Layman says that at this point in the formation of the work, he felt as though he was physically occupying an area similar to a no-man's-land between borders – a sort of DMZ for the emotionally agitated. Layman cites the female members of his family as a significant influence. The show is a nod to what he calls "foundational feminine support" in his life. "Red Devil" (2018) is an image of a dilapidated putty scraper that the artist says was influenced by his wife's dresses. It was a conscious decision for Layman to eliminate any phallogocentric imagery from the program. He has almost succeeded, barring one small image of a lackluster light bulb hanging forlornly from a ceiling, the molding in which it is housed pulling away from its underpinnings. Surely not by accident, this work, "Still Life" (2018), is the most impotent image of those assembled. "I would like to first have my work be inclusive, then either curious or problematic," says Layman. Despite a technical process that might be daunting to the casual viewer, the images are ultimately sublime and accessible – a fitting offering from a prodigious young talent who will continue to make waves in the art world.

**“Isaac Layman: Never Was a Thing – Photographic Constructions”**

**When: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, through Dec. 29**

**Where: Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave.**

**Admission: Free, [elizabethleach.com](http://elizabethleach.com) or 503-224-0521**



Delaney Allen  
Nancy Bulalacao  
Jacques Flechemuller  
Sally Haley  
Tahni Holt  
Kristan Kennedy  
Isaac Layman  
Storm Tharp  
Terry Toedtemeier

curated by Meagan Atiyeh

An exhibition of ten works,  
installed one at a time in the  
gallery through January 8, and  
installed in full January 9-25.

December 5, 2013 - January 25, 2014  
Tuesday to Saturday: 12:00 P.M. - 6:00 P.M.

Reception & Conversation with the Artists:  
January 25, 2014 | 5:00 - 8:00 pm



THE WHITE BOX  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF  
OREGON IN PORTLAND  
24 NW FIRST AVENUE

# ARTFORUM

## Isaac Layman

ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

417 N.W. 9th Avenue

August 1–September 21

Seattle-based artist Isaac Layman titled his exhibition of recent photographs “Funeral,” suggesting that the quiescent images of objects and spaces in his home are concerned with loss and absence. Funerals honor departure through rituals of remembrance; Layman’s works contemplate the sites and remains of daily life’s most ritualized activities, such as cooking and grooming. In one work, *Untitled*, 2013, Layman fills our field of vision with an oily piece of aluminum foil bearing traces—shards of pink flesh and diamonds of skin—of the salmon that it had just sheltered in the oven. Like a seventeenth-century vanitas painting, Layman’s still life, in the words of art historian Norman Bryson, “assaults the value, centrality, and prestige of the human subject” by displaying the debased remains of its sustenance.



Isaac Layman, *Sink*, 2013, ink-jet print, 58 x 82”.

Layman refers to his works as “photographic constructions” because each startlingly detailed image is composed of hundreds of pieces—slivers and varying angles painstakingly layered into one seamless vision through digital means. In the past, Layman has employed this technique to intensify images to supernatural proportions. In *6 Glasses*, 2010, for instance, a tub of shattered drinking glasses is transformed into a conglomerated crystalline mass. Throughout “Funeral,” however, Layman uses his compositing method to depict the gently graduated voids and enclosures of an empty medicine cabinet, a household sink, the interior of an empty packing box, and the surface of a cutting board crisscrossed with calligraphic stains. The works’ conceptual logic is deconstructive, but unlike an analog collage Layman’s digital mediations touch upon the subrepresentational—the “white noise” of being as articulated by philosopher Gilles Deleuze. The most elegiac of these in the exhibition is *Sink*, 2013. Here, a white porcelain sink—pristinely scrubbed—fills the frame head-on, its brass drain glowing like a setting sun.

— Stephanie Snyder

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# The Oregonian

July 26, 2013

## Galleries unveil new exhibits for August

John Motley

One of the most revered African American artists of the 20th century, Jacob Lawrence famously translated the urban black experience of the 1930s into stylistically daring and emotionally harrowing vignettes in his "Migration Series," which he created while still in his 20s. In August, the Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University in Salem offers another, lesser-known side of the artist's work in "Aesop's Fables," a group of 23 drawings commissioned for the 1970 Simon & Schuster edition of the tales by the Greek fabulist. Here, Lawrence uses his acumen for visual storytelling to bring animals, insects and birds to life. And if you need a refresher on these ancient stories, each of Lawrence's illustrations is accompanied by the original fable and the moral lesson it was meant to impart.

*700 State St., Salem, 503-370-6855, [willamette.edu/arts/hfma](http://willamette.edu/arts/hfma), Aug. 3 through Oct. 27 .*

Read on for other notable exhibitions coming to local galleries in August.

Adams and Ollman: The gallery continues to roll out its excellent inaugural programming season with a two-person show that pairs Jennifer Levonian and Pearl Blauvelt. Levonian, who lives and works in Philadelphia, creates stop-motion animations from hundreds of watercolor stills, while Blauvelt, who worked in obscurity in northern Pennsylvania, is represented by drawings she made from the 1930s through the 1950s on envelopes, notebook paper and paper bags.

*811 E. Burnside, #213, Friday through Aug. 30*

Sovereign Fine Art: Part of the influential generation of local artists that included Mel Katz, Michele Russo, Jay Backstrand and others who showed at Arlene Schnitzer's Fountain Gallery in the 1960s and 1970s, Harry Widman was revered as a bold and imaginative painter, inspired by the New York School of Modernism. In recent years, his battle with Alzheimer's has slowed his output, but this exhibition revisits a body of sculptural work Widman created in the 1970s while an instructor at the Museum Art School. Paired with a sampling of his paintings from the last 50 years, these sculptures provide an occasion to celebrate his contribution to the city's arts community.

*716 S.W. Madison St., 503-206-8601, Saturday through Aug. 31*

**Elizabeth Leach Gallery:** Like an aerial cartographer, Seattle photographer **Isaac Layman** shoots his subjects in discreet, detailed sections and then digitally combines them into a single, realer-than-real image. But Layman, who debuts new work in "Funeral" at Elizabeth Leach this month, isn't using his camera to wrangle outsized landscapes or explore uncharted terrain. Instead, he applies this technique to familiar objects within his home, creating enormous, hyper-detailed images of a bathroom sink, a radiator grill or the interior of an oven.  
*417 N.W. Ninth Ave., 503-224-0521, Thursday through Sept. 21*

**Pacific Northwest College of Art:** In the past few years, Portlander Hayley Barker has emerged as an important painter of the Northwest, capturing its natural beauty in wildly stippled abstract works and more earthbound studies of trees, lakes and sky. "My Dark House Is Full of Comets," a body of new drawings and paintings at PNCA's Gallery 214, was actually made in the great outdoors; Barker created these works at dawn and dusk during an artist residency at Caldera in central Oregon.  
*1241 N.W. Johnson St., 503-226-4391, Thursday through Aug. 30*

**Laura Russo Gallery:** At Laura Russo in August, local mainstay Michael Brophy exhibits a new body of work in gouache, which, like the rest of his oeuvre, captures the dramatic vistas of the Pacific Northwest. Portland stoneware sculptor J.D. Perkin also presents "The World's a Stage," a new collection of his hybridized human and animal figures.  
*805 N.W. 21st Ave., 503-226-2754, Thursday through Aug. 31*

**Rocksbox Contemporary Fine Art:** Following its 2011 show at Rocksbox, "Sensitivity Training," the artist collective Paintallica, led by Portland painter Dan Attoe, returns with "Smell the Bar Oil," another edition of its hyper-masculine and beer-soaked installations. Among the mayhem, expect chainsaw-carved sculpture, blue-collar imagery and more than a little spite for the established art world, all whipped up over a few days of exhaustive collaboration.  
*6540 N. Interstate Ave., 503-516-4777, Aug. 10 through Sept. 15*

**The Cooley Gallery at Reed College:** Opening Aug. 27, "Will Return" marks the first retrospective of work by New York artist and Reed alumna Jamie Isenstein, while kicking off this year's Time-Based Arts Festival two weeks before its official opening night on Sept. 12. 3203 S.E. Woodstock Blvd., through Oct. 17

-- John Motley

roll out the barrels to wash down glorious grub from the Rose City's finest eateries at this annual celebration of all things Oregon. The state's top chefs will battle it out in an Iron Chef-style competition to crown our most daring culinary creator. Meanwhile, musical guests will provide tasteful and tuneful diversions. A percentage of the funds raised will go to Special Olympics Oregon. *Fri-Sat 11-10; Sun 10-8. \$5-15. Gov. Tom McCall Waterfront Park, 1020 SW Naito Pkwy. biteoforegon.com*

**Festa Italiana**

**Aug 22-24** You don't have to be from Venice to enjoy Italian food, wine, singers, and dancers—but it certainly wouldn't hurt to pretend for a few days. It's the 22nd edition of this Roman holiday, designed to celebrate Italian culture while remembering the past. *11-11. Free. Pioneer Courthouse Square, 701 SW Sixth Ave. festa-italiana.org*

**FAMILY**

**OMSI: Mummies of the World**

**Thru Sept 8** Egypt doesn't have a monopoly on mummies, as this fascinating exhibition so ably reveals. More than 150 amazingly preserved wrap stars and burial artifacts from Asia, South America, and Europe—the largest collection of mummy memorabilia ever assembled—will be on display, including a 6,400-year-old child and an Argentine monkey wearing a feathered skirt and headdress. *Mon-Thu, Sun 9:30-7; Fri-Sat 9:30-9. \$10-21. 1945 SE Water Ave. 503-797-4000. omsi.edu*

**SOCIAL DATEBOOK**

**Providence Bridge Pedal**

**Aug 11** Wiggle into some spandex shorts and hop on your spindly steed for a day of special bike access to all 10 of the city's Willamette River bridges—part of the country's second-largest community bike ride. Choose the tough 36-mile ride, or a gentler 12- or 24-mile route. Proceeds benefit the Providence Heart and Vascular Institute. *Visit blog.bridgepedal.com or call 503-281-9198 for route options, registration information, and times.*

**ART**

**Art in the Pearl**

**Aug 31-Sept 2** More than 100 local artisans set up makeshift galleries *en plein air* under the North Park Blocks' trees, alongside live music and hands-on activities for the whole family. *Sat-Sun 10-6; Mon 10-5. Free. NW Eighth Ave between Burnside and Glisan Streets. 503-722-9017. artinthepearl.com*

**Augen Gallery**

**Aug 1-31** *George Johanson: Recent Monotypes* This new series of paintings, prints, and tiles by longtime Portland artist (and recipient of the Oregon Governor's Award for Art) Johanson is steeped in his love of jazz, cubism, abstract expressionism, surrealism, and the people who live in his city. *Tue-Sat 10:30-5:30. 716 NW Davis St. 503-546-5056. augengallery.com*

**Butters Gallery**

**Aug 1-31** *Anniversary Group Show* This group show by gallery artists will pay tribute to this bed-

rock local art exhibitor on the occasion of its 25th birthday. Works in a variety of media by the likes of Ted Katz, Carolyn Cole, Ming Fay, and Christopher Perry will be among the items on display. *Tue-Fri 10-5:30; Sat 11-5. 520 NW Davis St. 503-248-9378. buttersgallery.com*



EDITORS' PICK

**ISAAC LAYMAN**

**Aug 1-Sept 21** This Seattle artist is pushing the boundaries of what digital photography can be beyond most artists today. Having referred to himself as "an anti-National Geographic photographer," Layman photographs items in his house—the most mundane items, like the inside of the oven or his iMac screen—multiple times from varying vantage points and focal depths. He then layers the images to create a composite that is simultaneously abstract and hyperreal, drawing out the weave of the fiber optics and the thumbprints on the screen, for example, to ultimately create a new object.

He's exhibited at Minneapolis's Walker Art Center, had a decorated solo exhibit at Seattle's Frye Art Museum, and won the Seattle Art Museum's Betty Bowen Award in 2008. As one of six artists picked for the Contemporary Northwest Art Awards at the Portland Art Museum in September, he is considered a strong contender for the top prize. His show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery will include new works and some of the items from his house that he photographed (in the Frye exhibition, he removed actual windows from his house and hung them in the museum) to play on the ideas of what's an image and what's an object. *Tue-Sat 10:30-5:30. 417 NW Ninth Ave. 503-224-0521. elizabethleach.com*

**Laura Russo Gallery**

**Aug 1-31** *Michael Brophy: Recent Works on Paper* What makes Brophy's patiently wrought artworks remarkable are their refined surfaces, oils applied in a thin, loose play of line and form, taking inspiration from Old Masters such as Tintoretto and Titian. Their sly takes on history—the way they razz the Romantic ideal of the Eternal Landscape even as they lament grimmer, present-day realities—reveal an intellect influenced by figures ranging from Goya to Woody Guthrie. *Tue-Fri 11-5:30; Sat 11-5. 805 NW 21st Ave. 503-226-2754. laurarusso.com*

**Museum of Contemporary Craft**

**Thru Sept 21** *Object Focus: The Bowl* Is there any object more fundamental to our daily lives than the bowl? Yet it can range from utilitarian to works of intricate art, from simple to conceptual. For this exhibition in two parts, MoCC curator Namita Gupta Wiggers pairs a range of bowls from the museum's and private collections with writers and chefs to consider this object of everyday life. *Tue-Sat 11-6. \$4. 724 NW Davis St. 503-223-2654. museumofcontemporarycraft.org*

**Portland Art Museum**

**Thru Sept 8** *Cyclepedia: Iconic Bicycle Design* Whether you're a lycra-ed racer, fixie connoisseur, or yellow-coated commuter, *Cyclepedia* promises pure, unadulterated bike porn. Drawn from the collection of Vienna-based designer Michael Embacher, the exhibition features 40 models running the gamut from racers and vintage cruisers to unusual entries like parachute and ice bikes.

**Thru Sept 8** *Gaston Lachaise: Man/Woman* This early-20th-century sculptor abandoned his Parisian home in order to pursue a married American woman, Isabel Dutaud Nagle, who was his muse and eventually his wife. Co-curated by the art museum and the Lachaise Foundation, this exhibition displays more than 50 of his bronze and marble figurative works, many inspired by Nagle. *Tue-Wed, Sat 10-5; Thu-Fri 10-8; Sun noon-5. \$12-15. 1219 SW Park Ave. 503-226-2811. pam.org*

**Oregon History Museum**

**Thru Oct 31** *Windows on America* Get better acquainted with the U.S. executive branch by perusing this astounding collection of presidential memorabilia, including a Teddy Roosevelt speech with a bullet hole in it, Harry Truman's top hat, JFK's rocking chair and much more. *Mon-Sat 10-5; Sun noon-5. \$5-11. 1200 SW Park Ave. 503-306-5198. ohs.org*

**August 2013 Volume 11, Issue 8**

*Portland Monthly* (ISSN 1546-2765) is published monthly by SagaCity Media, Inc, 921 SW Washington St, Ste 750, Portland, OR 97205. Subscriptions are \$16.95 for one year (12 issues). Back issues are available for \$9.95 (includes shipping and handling). Periodicals Postage Paid at Portland, OR. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Portland Monthly, Subscriber Services, PO Box 433217, Palm Coast, FL 32143-9778. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part of any text, photograph, or illustration without written permission from the publisher is strictly prohibited.

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID TESH; ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

# MUSEUM ANNOUNCES ARTISTS FOR CONTEMPORARY NORTHWEST ART AWARDS

ANNE APPLEBY, MONTANA

KARL BURKHEIMER, OREGON

ISAAC LAYMAN, WASHINGTON

ABBIE MILLER, WYOMING

NICHOLAS NYLAND, WASHINGTON

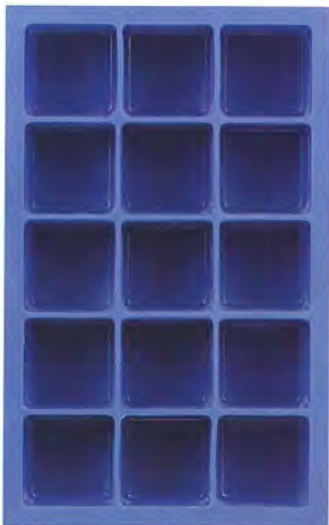
TRIMPIN, WASHINGTON

*The Contemporary Northwest Art Awards exhibition, presented by the Portland Art Museum, is funded in part by The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Endowments for Northwest Art and The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation.*

These six artists will be celebrated in the 2013 *Contemporary Northwest Art Awards* exhibition opening this fall. In addition to being featured in the exhibition, they will be honored with a full-color catalogue, exhibition-related programming, and cash awards. One recipient will be further recognized with the Arlene Schnitzer Prize in the amount of \$10,000.

Regional arts professionals including curators, artists, dealers, academics, and critics were invited to nominate visual artists based on the quality of their work, innovation, relevance to community or global issues in the arts, continuity of vision, commitment to their practice, and level of development in their career. The Museum received 235 nominations and invited the nominated artists to submit application materials. Of the nominated artists, 176 submitted materials for review.

Bonnie Laing-Malcolmson, The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art, and guest curatorial advisor Apsara DiQinzio, the newly appointed curator of modern and contemporary art at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, reviewed the nominees' materials and selected 28 finalists. Laing-Malcolmson visited the 28 artists' studios and presented her recommendations to the Museum's director and curatorial staff for the final review.



1 to R, 1 to B: Ann Appleby, *Frosted Sunflower*, 2006, oil and wax on canvas; Isaac Layman, *Untitled (H 39)*, 2011, enjuyt print; Trimpin, *Concolorpurple*, 1997, electro-mechanical actuators, electronics, metal, and wood; Abbie Miller, *Dysfunctional Superhero*, 2010, vinyl, wood, and PVC pipe; Karl Burkheimer, *In Site* (performance), 2011, wood and pigment; Nicholas Nyland, *Untitled*, 2012, glazed ceramic.





# PORTAL

PORTLAND ART MUSEUM MAGAZINE

PORTAL, VOL. 2, ISSUE 2

# PACIFIC NORTHWEST

The Seattle Times  
SUNDAY MAGAZINE  
JANUARY 15, 2012



Fixed on  
everyday things,  
photographer  
**Isaac  
Layman**  
forces us to  
stop and see

## REALITY REMIX

**Home** *Little place, big ideas* | **Garden** *Taking time for trees* | **Dining** *Humble, soothing soup*

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#### ART IN THE EVERYDAY

by *Michael Upchurch* |

*photographed  
by Benjamin  
Benschneider*

Seattle photographer  
Isaac Layman's gift  
is in making  
the mundane look  
monumental and in  
imbuing unimpressive  
sights — an ice-cube  
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**ON THE COVER** *Isaac Layman moves quickly in the Frye Art Museum during an exhibit of his work. His deceptively simple photographs take hours and hours to make.*

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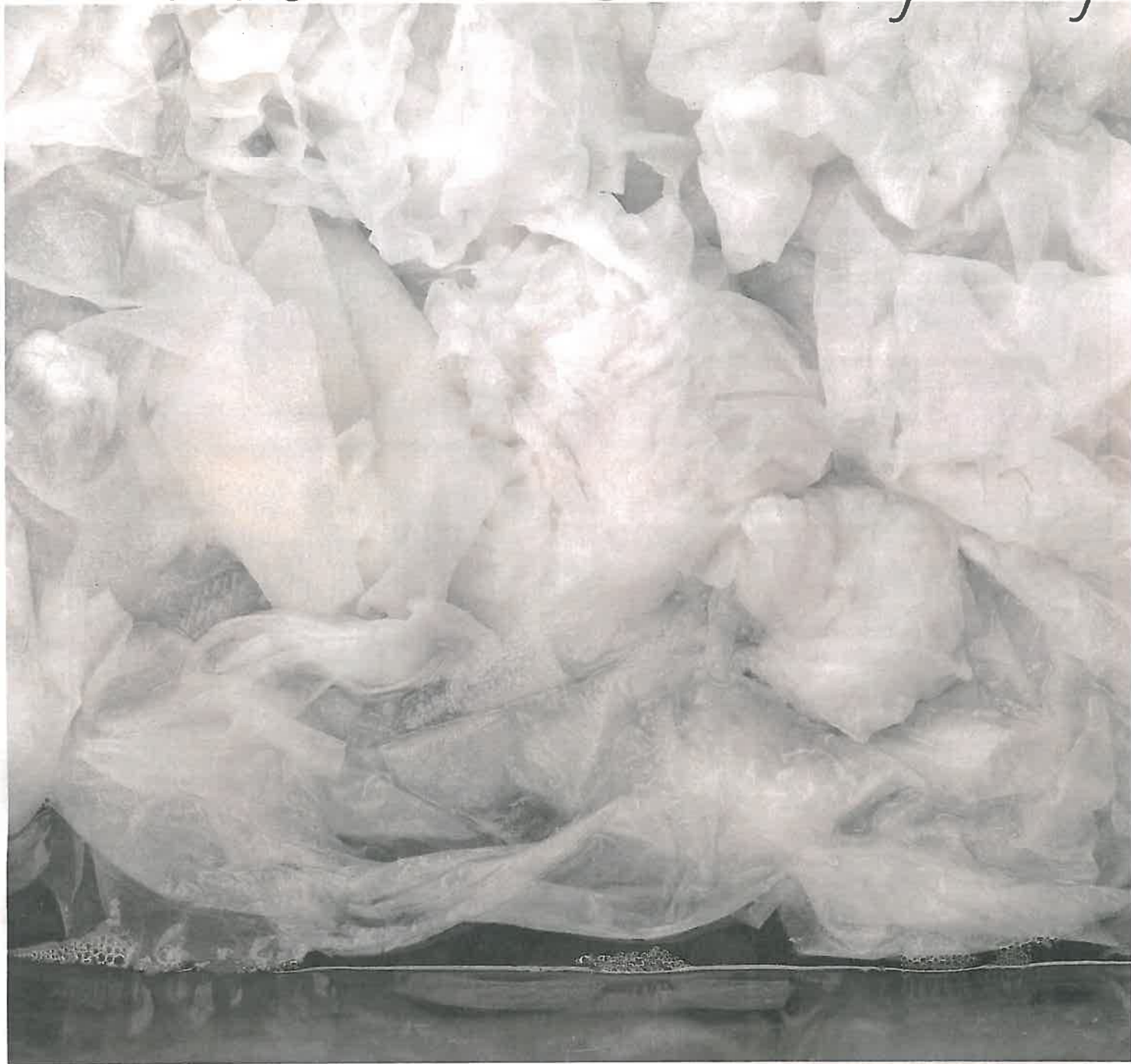
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by Michael Upchurch  
photographed by  
Benjamin Benschneider

# Art In The Everyday



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BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Seattle photographer Isaac Layman discusses one of his pieces at the Frye Art Museum, 704 Terry Ave. The exhibit runs through Jan. 22.

## With humble household things, photos create a curious power

**S**TEPPING INTO Isaac Layman's Wallingford house is a bit like entering a Wonderland-in-reverse. You arrive, bearing in mind the enormous hyper-crystalline Layman photographs you've seen in museums or galleries: images of his oven, his kitchen sink, his tool bench and other household items.

And there, lined up like a "greatest hits" of domesticity, they all are!

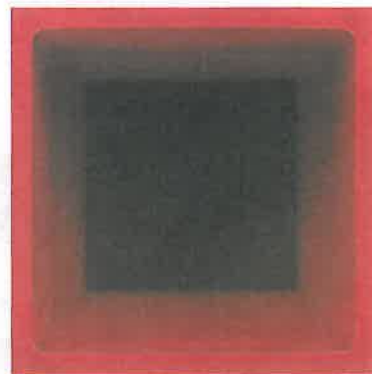
Problem is: They couldn't, in context, look more unassuming or ordinary.

Layman's gift, in part, is in making the mundane look monumental and in imbuing unimpressive sights — an ice-cube tray, an accumulation of used Kleenex — with strangely universal meanings. His work is improbably palatial in feel. Yet for the past 10 years, he has restricted his photographic gaze almost entirely to the quarters he shares with his wife and two children.

What we have here is an artist who's a homebody on the grandest of scales.

Layman's exhibit of new work, "Paradise," at the Frye Art Museum through Jan. 22, contains one piece that's a single-exposure photograph: a vast close-up of an empty ice-cube receptacle in a red ice-cube tray. But that's a rarity for him. Most of his images are composites of multiple shots — sometimes dozens of them — "knitted" together on the computer using Photoshop to let the viewer see what the naked eye can't.

Take "Cabinet," from 2009, one of Layman's best-known works. It shows a kitchen cabinet surrealistically crammed with



glassware. It's instantly recognizable. But there's also something "off" about it. For one thing, what kind of lunatic needs that much glassware? Then comes the odd realization that you're able to see both the tops and bottoms of the shelves on which the glassware is resting.

"Cabinet," in fact, is a Photoshopped compilation of dozens of scans that Lay-

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man made. Each of the 12 recesses in the cabinet — filled with the same set of glasses over and over again — has its own focal point. The white wood frame around the cabinet is the product of 18 scans. And that's just the start.

The rows of transparent glasses are, oddly, as crisply focused in back as they are in front. That's because they, too, are the result of multiple scans, made at different depths of field and layered over one another.

Gradually, it dawns on you that "Cabinet" was a huge undertaking. Indeed, it took Layman a month to create it.

Why put such effort into a sight so simple?

Layman argues that people *think* they know what their drinking glasses look like, when, in fact, they don't. In photographing such workaday items this way, he says, "They actually end up looking different."

In "Cabinet," he adds, all the points-of-view want to be known at the same time. You'd think the result would bristle with visual tension. Instead, it's oddly seamless, unsettling only on a subtle level.

"The eye wants to believe," Layman explains. "It's remarkable all the disparate photographs you can put together and have them work as a vision."

**"I DIDN'T SET OUT** to do this," Layman remarks as he gestures around the living quarters he's photographed so meticulously. "But I found myself searching through what I've got here, to address some fascination with life — or need from life."

Layman, who grew up in Clinton on Whidbey Island, was interested in ceramics in high school. But he frequently played hooky and missed the day to sign up for a ceramics class.

"So I was stuck with photography," he recalls. "It was the only thing that had an opening."

Getting stuck with photography, he adds with a twist of mind that's typical of him, "was a really good way to start, instead of falling in love with it and wanting to do it more . . . I also was seeing the curious ways it fails."

After graduating from high school in 1996, he got the travel bug and made an extended trip to Africa, primarily Botswana. He later made bike trips down the West Coast to San Francisco and, again, in Africa.

After his first African trip, he enrolled at Seattle Central Community College. By late 1999, he had moved on to the University of Washington where he studied with digital-photography pioneer Paul Berger. He married Camilla Lindsay, a fellow Whidbey Islander, in 2002. By that time his work had turned its focus inward toward home.

Now 34, he's got an energy and a

build that's still boyish, but there's also something haunted or even a little bruised about him. In conversation, he's nervous. Almost every time he wants to say something, he'll make four or five false starts before suddenly coming up with a contradiction-filled statement that makes you feel you're in the presence of a mind unlike any other — a mind that's always reversing itself, always restating its intentions.

He'll startle you, for instance, by describing wedding photography (something he used to do) as being "pretty close" to travel and war photography. He immediately clarifies this by adding, "You take a lot of images and then you select those five good ones."

Then he registers his fundamental impatience with this way of working, declaring that it's "rife with self-congratulatory storytelling. If I take 10 photographs of myself and then send you one, I will pick the good one because that's the way I like to think of me."

That one decision can be magnificent, he concedes. "But because of how fast it happens, it will let you escape before you have to stay and deal with it."

The scan-back camera and other equipment Layman now uses for his largest pieces slow his work habits to a snail's pace and rule out much of the choice that comes into play with more conventional photography. The subject matter, camera angle and lighting are all strictly established beforehand, and once he starts scanning they can't be altered. The scans take 15 to 20 minutes apiece.

"It's just horrible," Layman says with a humorous solemnity. "It's kind of the worst. I would rather be watching a movie with a car chase than doing this — except that . . . there's a moment where things change. A very uncomfortable moment. But things change, and then you just can't even put enough time into it."

**B**YOND THE time he's taking and visual trickery he's performing, Layman is also grappling with the fabric of his life, bringing to it an outlook that's simultaneously ecstatic and bleak. In his shots of his fireplace, his sink and other household realities, he seems continually to teeter between the mundane and the menacing, the banal and the sublime.

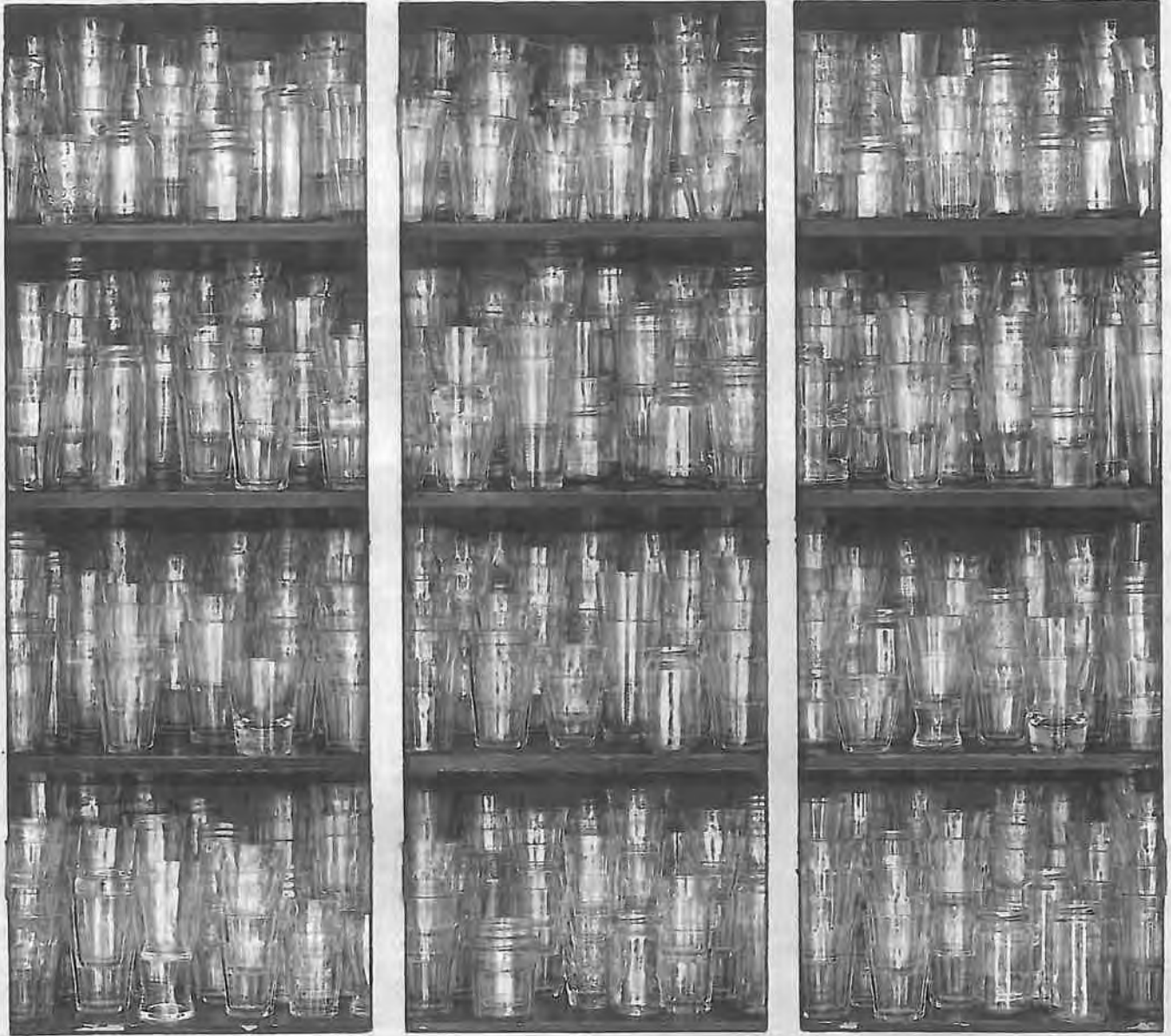
"I'm doing this to make my life more interesting," he says. "Or I do this to continue to be interested in my life."

He adds disarmingly: "Where I live is a paradise. Where I live is a jail cell. And I mean both those statements, though they seem to contradict each other."

His quest seems to be as much philosophical as aesthetic: "Instead of 'Why am I here?' I'm often asking 'What's it like to be here?' And then what comes out is pretty difficult. Being here is pretty difficult."

Continued on page 14 >

# Art In The Everyday



# Art In The Everyday

Continued from page 10

Sylvia Wolf, director of the Henry Art Gallery where Layman's work has appeared in group shows, sees him as part of a lineage of "artists who have employed digital means that reflect on the medium itself, but also give us a whole new eye on reality."

She has vivid memories of walking with him through the Henry: "I felt I was standing next to a kind of human aperture — someone who understood all the physics, all the capacity of digital picture-taking, but with the soul of a humanist. . . . He's quite unlike any other artist I've spoken to who's using the same tools."

Berger, who taught Layman as an undergraduate at the University of Washington, believes Layman has latched onto "a kind of flexibility in the (photographic) medium that people don't often associate with it — because, in fact, the flexibility's in our heads."

When we look at objects, Berger adds, it's useful to remember that we're looking at them "with a particular three-pound gelatinous mass in the cranium" that has its own ways of processing the visual world.

Layman, he suggests, is keenly attuned to what that "gelatinous mass" is up to.

Because of the time it takes to make these photographs and because they have to be done in perfect quiet, Layman's work has, at times, caused considerable inconvenience to his family.

"It's incredibly intrusive," he admits. When he was working in his kitchen, for instance, the room was off-limits to his family for weeks. (Luckily, his wife's aunt lives next door and opened her house to them.)

Moreover, his projects put him on a night-owl schedule because any nearby movement affects the camera's action. The equipment is so sensitive that even the rumble of a fan or air-conditioner can impart a seismograph-like jitter to the lines of its scan.

"Because of that," he says, "I can't go do something else in the house . . . I'll push GO on the camera and then I'll wait around 16 minutes."

These constraints, as he sees it, have hidden advantages. "It's hard to quickly enter and leave with what you want," Layman says. "You've got to hang around for a day."

The work is printed on an enormous ink-jet printer that occupies one whole wall of Isaac and Camilla's bedroom — the only spot in the house where it would fit. All the framing is done in their dining and living rooms, both mostly empty except for a small island of furniture in one corner of the living room.

Ask Layman about the possibility of having a studio outside his home and it's clear the idea is anathema to him. "I'd rather have my whole life almost as a workshop."

LATELY, LAYMAN'S art-making activities haven't disrupted the household routine quite so much. He's focusing on ever-smaller objects — those ice-cube trays, a caliper case, a stove-pot lid — which he takes up to his attic studio to shoot, usually working through the night while everyone else is asleep.

"Then I'll crash out," he says, "and have to sleep for half a day."

The Frye exhibit shows him creating images of humble items that aren't immediately recognizable. All but one of the pieces are untitled.

Layman explains his aversion to titles as he points to a shot of a heating vent. "I'm not going to call it 'Heating Vent' because, at this moment, 'heating vent' would be like the 30th thing it is instead of the first. So why push that one forward?"



Talking about these things, Layman admits, it's hard to sidestep definition. And definition is the last thing he's after. "I'm not looking for a conclusion or an explanation," he says. "But it's rewarding to pay attention to looking, instead of just receiving and letting go."

The longer he looks, the more he's able to make the commonplace objects around him "stand in as grand spectacular visions, when they aren't."

And yet, he argues, there's actually nothing so grand in life.

"What staying in the house initially did for me was that it didn't give me an easy out. I couldn't wait around and say: 'I'm going to go take pictures when I go travel.' I couldn't say: 'I'm going to wait to go to an important place to take a picture.' Or 'I'm going to wait to go to a difficult place to take a difficult photograph.' I'm just always here. And always here should be good enough." 📷

Michael Upchurch is a Seattle Times staff writer. He can be reached at [mupchurch@seattletimes.com](mailto:mupchurch@seattletimes.com). Benjamin Benschneider is a Pacific Northwest magazine staff photographer.

## If you must know

1. Used Kleenex in a Pyrex dish, collected when the artist and his family had colds.
2. An extreme closeup of one empty square of a red ice-cube tray
3. A caliper case
4. "Otter Pops #1"
5. "Sink"
6. "Cabinet"
7. A glass stove-pot lid
8. "Basement"

Note: "Cabinet" is from the collection of Christopher and Alida Latham





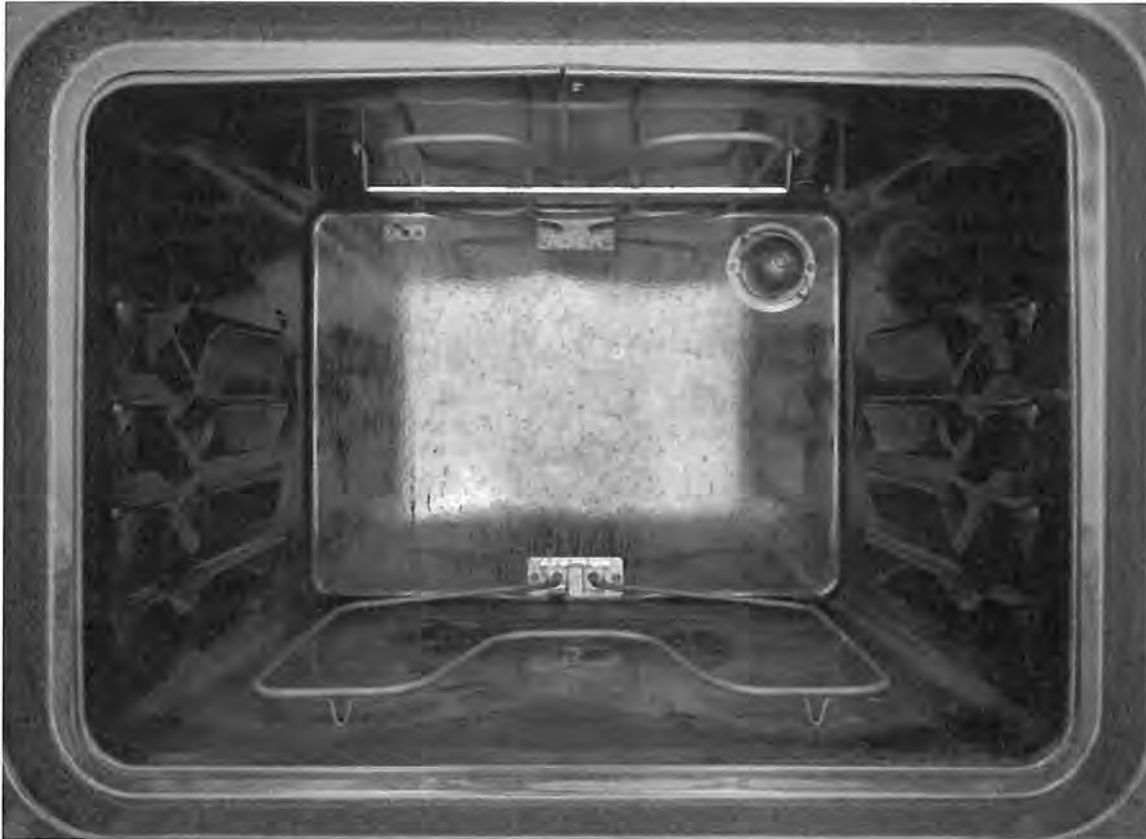
# The Stranger

Visual Art, July 13, 2010

## Flying off the Walls

Isaac Layman's Best Images Are Impossible to Apprehend

by Jen Graves



In the few years since his graduation from the University of Washington in 2003, Isaac Layman has become the undisputed leader of Seattle artists making photographs about photography.

In certain circles, this would be a nonstatement. (All photographs are about photography.) In other circles, it would be an insult. (Does everything have to be post/modernist?) In still other circles, it would be praise. (Even after all these years, people continue to look through photographs at what's in them rather than at photographs, and work like Layman's helps correct this mass distortion, which can lead viewers to believe much bigger and more dangerous lies.)

But let's back up. What is it like just being in the room with these photographs? Well, they are mostly very big, but some are small. They show a level of detail across the visual field that would be impossible for the naked eye to apprehend, because these single, smooth, super-detailed images are actually seamless conglomerations of hundreds of images of the same thing, each segment shot close-up, piled together to provide more information than any hungry eye could ever want, or that any brain could ever quite make sense of—which means each final work has a subtly strange feeling while you're looking at it.

The works are, unequivocally, impressive. Their subjects are, unequivocally, unimpressive: an oven interior, frozen strawberries in a package, an empty fireplace, glasses in a cupboard, a doorknob and a keyhole, a piece of black plastic taped over a studio door in order to keep out extraneous light. Layman shoots only inside his house. (He's called himself an anti-*National Geographic* photographer.)

And people want these images. They fly off the walls like nothing else in Seattle contemporary art. Layman's new show at Lawrimore Project (his second major showing there, the last in 2008), *110%*, was almost sold out before it opened. Not only that, but Layman's works are admired by curators and art historians; his last show inspired an essay by contemporary art historian Ken Allan, and a work in this show has already been featured in *The Digital Eye*, a new Prestel book that provides an overview of digital photography, by Sylvia Wolf, former photography curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art and now director of Seattle's Henry Art Gallery. Given that Layman's body of work stands out as philosophically committed, intelligently well-made, and pleasurable, it's time for a look at the ways the images differ among themselves, and to consider which ones are exceptionally interesting.

Layman is clever, and this has its short sides, namely, self-satisfaction and artiness. A few of his works fold too neatly into the pages of art history: A roomful of giant photographs of packets of Otter Pops is, well, too pop. They're perfectly enjoyable as a right-in-your-freezer subversion of a color-field painting chapel by Rothko, and they're ingeniously installed, ringing the gallery's white cube room beneath a rectangular fluorescent light amid track spotlights—the flat coloring of the fluorescent, oddly, making the room feel skylit. But this neat operation is not the full extent of what Layman can do.

There is a darker, almost morbid, and therefore interesting, side to *110%*. *Hot Dog Wrapper* is the inverse of the *Otter Pops* series. It pictures a six-foot-tall, dirty, emptied hot dog package that looks like it might have been picked up and set under this perfectly clean and clear lens from one of those meth-cooking Northwest backwoods-backyards depicted in Eli Hansen's recent show at Lawrimore Project, *We Used to Get So High*. If you hung *Hot Dog Wrapper* across from an *Otter Pop*, you'd notice immediately that one is limp, the other erect.

Meanwhile, the two most affecting images in *110%* are holes. *Fireplace*, which is basically life-size and hangs across from the real fireplace in the back room of the gallery, pictures a charred brick opening (with an eerie, mutilated hole in the floor) that becomes pure black void at the top, as if the chimney were a suckhole and you its next victim (unless you were unlucky enough to fall down that other hole). In the next room over—the black-box room of the gallery, which is dark except for the light on the single artwork on the wall—there's *Oven*. It seems fair to say that this is Layman's most powerful work to date. It's a portrait of the maw of an open oven. The back wall of the oven shows as much detail as the front edges, bringing the back right up to the front—and on that back wall is a white, glowing, rectangular reflection. This oven is a mirrored tunnel similar to the great void of the fireplace. The camera that should appear in the reflection is absent—the viewer, you, are erased, and this oven has become its own godless universe. It brings to mind Lee Friedlander's '60s photographs of TVs glaring back aggressively at the camera, as well as Hiroshi Sugimoto's transcendental photographs capturing entire movies as a single white rectangular blur (by leaving the shutter open the entire running time). *Oven* is menacing, transcendent, and killer sexy all at the same time. I'd hang it above my anything.

The show is rife with moments of connection between photographs, and its circulatory system is connected to the story of Northwest art, too, in fresh ways. Take the eponymous *110%*. Glass is a recurrent theme here and regionally (see Dale Chihuly, Josiah McElheny, the brothers Hansen and Oscar Tuazon), and Layman uses it prominently in four photographs that culminate in *110%*.

First is an image of a cupboard with mugs and glasses. Second, Layman takes his six favorite glasses from the cupboard and replicates them digitally into towering, super-reflective stacks, creating a glass world inside that same cupboard. Third, those six glasses are seen smashed,

forming a huge abstract landscape (white writing by Northwest "mystics" Mark Tobey and Morris Graves comes to mind, along with Pollock). And fourth is *110%*, the earthiest, dirtiest, and least clear—in all senses of the word—of the glass portraits. *110%* is several orders smaller than the other glass photographs (12 by 16 inches as opposed to 5 to 7 feet to a side), and it looks like a picture of a sink after a party, full of ice and leftovers swept off kitchen counters. But on closer inspection this is apparently broken glass, not ice. The top edge of this pile is cropped out, and the bottom seems to form a spout, almost as if instead of a sink this were a thought bubble, or a lower male torso cut off just above the genitals.

*4 Lb. Strawberries* is what it says it is. The portrait of a frozen package of the sweet fruits is verified by the label and bar code right in the middle of the picture. But somehow this straightforward depiction of a simple food has transformed into a murky, purple field of fruit-roadkill, a frozen pond implicated in a murder with all kinds of weather on its surface. Layman can be one hell of a showman, but his greatest trick is amplifying the wondrous, disturbing static between thinking and seeing.



Isaac Layman's "Bookcase," 2006. Archival inkjet prints, 61.25 x 78.25."

## Quite a group at Leach

By CHAS BOWIE  
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Of the many wonderful and well-documented reasons to be grateful for the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, its occasional group exhibitions must be counted near the top of the list. While the gallery's one-person shows are formidable in their own right, its group shows offer particularly compelling dispatches from Leach's tireless schedule of international studio visits, art fairs, biennials and gallery hopping.

The current exhibition, "Re-Present," is smart and tasteful in the ways we have come to expect from Leach's group shows. Namely, the artists, who do not regularly show with the gallery, are not only strong talents with serious voices but their work also speaks a common language, albeit in diversely nuanced dialects.

"Re-Present" examines how five contemporary artists, including three from the Pacific Northwest, are investigating themes of visibility, cognition and optical psychology. With unwaveringly meticulous craftsmanship and unextraordinary subject matter, the artists analyze and occasionally subvert the complex men-

tal processes through which we decipher and decode visual information.

Isaac Layman's unnervingly banal color photographs of household items are astonishingly subtle in their perception-based tomfoolery. The Seattle artist's earliest work on view presents an almost-seamless image of a bookcase whose spines are turned away from the camera, so that the books become little more than nameless swathes of bound paper. The viewer's impulse to scan the shelves for familiar titles is doubly thwarted when they notice that the photograph almost seems to shift its perspective, depending on where the viewer looks. Almost imperceptibly, Layman has combined photographs taken from different vantage points in creating *Bookcase*, resulting in a deceptive network of impossible sightlines.

Our capacity to mentally reconstruct images is hypnotically envisioned by Adam Chapman's kinetic drawings. Framed somewhat awkwardly as traditional works on paper, two computer screens display a floating nebula of squiggly lines and atmospheric bursts of color. These scrappy elements drift about for a few minutes, screen saver-

style, eventually lining up to create momentary portraits of the artist's friends and family. Randomized by Chapman's computer program, the formless drawings never repeat themselves in precisely the same way and drift back into abstraction without so much as a pause.

In her "NYT Little People" drawings, which were included in her recent show at Marylhurst University's Art Gym, Pat Boas re-creates the front pages of *The New York Times*, omitting everything except for photographs of everyday citizens, which she impeccably copies in gouache. With broad chunks of "data" missing from her depictions of the front page, Boas demands the viewer supply their own content.

Paintings by Joe Park and Xioze Xie round out the exhibition. Park's slick, quasi-Cubist panels look better here than they did a few months ago at the Portland Art Museum, thanks in no small part to their contextualization and relatively small dosage. Xie, a Chinese-born painter living in the Bay Area, made his Portland debut in a group show last year at Reed College, and the two photorealist canvases in "Re-Present" argue further

for a larger examination of the artist's work.

417 N.W. Ninth Ave.; 503-224-0521, [www.elizabethleach.com](http://www.elizabethleach.com). Hours: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Exhibition closes March 27. Free admission

# BETTY BOWEN AWARD THIRTY YEARS





Installation view of Betty Bowen Award winner Isaac Layman's photographs at Seattle Art Museum, October 2008–October 2009.

Isaac Layman's ambitious, intricate, and highly detailed photographs of everyday domestic objects—such as his grandmother's vintage 1960s stereo (p. 1), a kitchen sink, a medicine cabinet, tools, and an ice-cube tray—as well as his self-portraits, simultaneously critique and relish in exaggerating a heightened sense of reality. To achieve this visual sensation, Layman photographs his subject matter from a variety of perspectives and depths of field using a traditional 4 × 5-inch camera that is retrofitted with a digital scanner attached to its back. The information is gathered digitally rather than on film and is stored in incremental, extremely dense pixels. Layman collages the files to create a single, hyper-real photograph that at first glance appears to be a straightforward view of a domestic object but then suddenly challenges our perception of the object at hand. Because of the precision and clarity of the information gathered by the digital apparatus, Layman produces images that are unsettling doppelgängers. In many ways, the unreality of the object pictured threatens the viewer's vision because the precision defies rationality, destabilizing our experience and perception of the object in real time. His images are an assault on our vision because the naked eye could never perceive the object in its entirety as it is presented by the artist.

*Sink* (2008) is a monumentally impressive, slightly larger-than-life encounter with a kitchen sink filled with unwashed dishes. We can consider this image in relation to a traditional seventeenth-century Dutch still life in which the remains of an evening's consumption are made visible on a tabletop. Here, the tabletop is replaced by a sink, and the drapery traditionally used in Dutch paintings is replaced by a faux-marble countertop. The view shows evidence of what was consumed, but the artist's interest in this mundane scene is more in line with what he said in a recent interview: "These [photographs] are for me an exercise in awareness."<sup>1</sup> This exercise is made evident in a number of visual tricks occurring in this photograph, including how the bottom of the sink and the surface of the water within the metal cooking pan are both in perfect focus. This dynamic precision is carefully choreographed by the artist. In doing so, he brings banal objects into extreme focus, challenging his audience's perception of everyday experiences.

—MCS

Born in 1977 in Yakima, Washington, Isaac Layman received a BFA in photography from the University of Washington in 2002. He has had solo exhibitions in Seattle at Crawl Space Gallery and at Richard Hugo House. In 2007, he had his first show with Lawrimore Project, titled *Early Works*, and he was given his second solo show, *Photographs from Inside a Whale*, at the gallery in July 2008. Group exhibitions of his work include *Light Box* at the University of Washington, Seattle (2002), *Still-life* at Pulliam Deffenbaugh Gallery, Portland (2007), and *Terrible Twos: A Lawrimore Project Biennial*, at Lawrimore Project in Seattle (2008). Layman lives in Seattle and is a member of the artists' collaborative and Seattle gallery SO11. He is represented by Lawrimore Project.

1. Interview with Jen Graves, *InVisible*, weekly Podcast, with Isaac Layman, *The Stranger*, August 5, 2008.



## SINK

2008, ARCHIVAL INK-JET PRINT, 58 × 78½ IN.,  
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LAWRIKORE PROJECT, SEATTLE



# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL ● REVIEW

JAN'09



View of Isaac Layman's exhibition, showing *Pool Table*, 2007, inkjet print on Plexiglas, painted wood plinth; at Lawrimore Project.

## SEATTLE ISAAC LAYMAN LAWRIMORE PROJECT

In his ambitious second solo exhibition at Lawrimore, Isaac Layman managed to strip away the "problem" of photographic artifice with surprising rigor and mind-bending ingenuity, presenting large-scale prints that directly probe the potential of digital technology. Most of the work consists of tightly framed, frontal views of common objects made with a large-format (4 x 5) camera outfitted with a scanning back that enabled Layman to make multiple digital images over several minutes. Masterfully cobbling these shots together in Photoshop, Layman achieves a clarity that rivals that of HDTV. As with that medium, Layman's photos (most dated 2008) seem oddly realer-than-real, beyond the powers of human vision.

The 9-foot-wide *Stereo*, for example, presents the backside of a 1970s entertainment console, revealing in crystalline, all-over, deep focus the speakers, tubes and simple circuitry that operated this once-chic behemoth of a music system. Multiple perspectives are presented—impossibly, the vertical wooden slats of the cubbyholes containing the speakers at both ends can be seen simultaneously. Layman's image has been digitally pieced together, an amalgam that is analogous, as art historian Ken Allan points out in his excellent catalogue essay, to the effects of stereoscopic photography, the 19th century's visual "stereo."

The uncanniness of the work is more immediately apparent in *Asleep 4.5 Minutes*, a self-portrait taken with the scanning apparatus while the artist (apparently) dozed. The photo seems simple enough

until one notices the breast pockets and collar of his shirt, which have wavering lines that indicate the rise and fall of his chest as he breathed during the 4½-minute scanning process. In a digital twist on Muybridge's motion studies, a single, static, "realistic" image summarizes movement over time.

Other large photographs of household objects are near-abstract formal studies that rival, in a new technology, the still lifes of Walker Evans or Irving Penn. The frozen solids of *Ice Cube Tray* have a complex volumetric presence. In *Sink with Lettuce*, three forks appear upon a surface of food waste with a kind of miraculous full-bodied presence.

*Pool Table* (2007), a crisply executed, life-size photograph of the eponymous object mounted on a rectangular pedestal at pool-table height, is a strangely self-reflexive stand-in, an object of surreal post-modern gamesmanship in the spirit of Sherrie Levine's *After Man Ray (La Fortune)*, 1990, itself a full-scale creation of the pool table depicted in Man Ray's painting. Perhaps Layman's *reductio ad absurdum* is the mind-twisting *Picture Framing Glass*: a full-size photograph of the glass protecting the actual framed photograph. This particular work is unique—as is the mind of this engaging young artist.

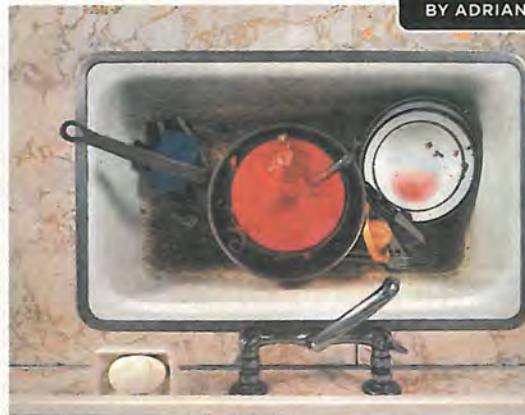
—Michael Duncan

## VISUAL ARTS

By Adriana Grant

SEATTLE WEEKLY • AUGUST 13 - 19, 2008

**I SAW THIS**  
BY ADRIANA GRANT



ISAAC LAYMAN AND LAWRI-MORE PROJECT, SEATTLE

### Hyper-Real Home

A peek into a medicine cabinet, a look into a dirty sink, an aerial view of a crusty four-burner electric stove—Isaac Layman's large-scale digital images capture messy domestic scenes in gorgeously exacting detail. (*SINK*, 2008, is shown above). Yet each photograph is a complete fabrication. From the wire-tangled rear view of a hand-me-down stereo to a lettuce-clogged sink to a kitchen drawer crammed with familiar, branded objects, it's all hyper-real. Created with a 4-by-5-foot digitized panoramic camera, each framed image is a composite of many individual photos. The depth of field is off: There are areas of sharp detail not just in one area but all over the picture plane, and in some cases (for this viewer anyway), your eyes hurt in their effort to focus. This visual strangeness is not immediately recognizable because the images are so very clean. My favorite work in the show is the image of a white plastic ice-cube tray. Each of the 14 cubes in the tray is its own shiny framed object, one bluer, another greener than the next, all with a bit of sediment from the first rush of standing water in the morning. One cube is completely melted, another bears a skin of thin, crackly ice, several others contain ovoid solids afloat in liquid puddles. The melted ice is outlined by the white parallel lines reflecting the overhead fluorescent lights in the artist's studio; these lines help delineate what's liquid and what's solid. For all their high-res details, these images are slippery with the truth. **Lawrimore Project, 831 Airport Way S., 501-1231, [www.lawrimoreproject.com](http://www.lawrimoreproject.com). Tues.-Sat. Ends Aug. 30.**

# SAM prize goes to Seattle artist

## BETTY BOWEN AWARD OF \$15,000

### 2 others from Seattle win \$2,500 each

BY SHEILA FARR  
*Seattle Times* art critic

The Seattle Art Museum's 30th annual Betty Bowen Award goes to Seattle artist Isaac Layman, who wins a cash

prize of \$15,000 and the opportunity to display his work at SAM during October.

Two other Seattle artists, Eric Elliott and Wynne Greenwood, will each take \$2,500 special-recognition prizes.

The winners were among five finalists selected from more than 500 applicants from Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Layman, Elliott and Greenwood will receive their prizes and talk about their work at a

public ceremony from 6 to 7 p.m. Oct. 10 at SAM's Pleascheff Auditorium.

Layman graduated from the University of Washington in 2002 with a bachelor of fine arts degree in photography and had his second solo show in July at Seattle's Lawrimore Project.

His photographic images can appear stark — a single coat hanger suspended from a wire — or as complex collages as-

sembled from multiple digital images.

Elliott earned a master of fine arts degree from the UW in 2007 and now teaches at the Gage Academy of Fine Arts and North Seattle Community College. His muted still-lives, painted in oil, were recently exhibited in a solo show at James Harris gallery.

An installation and performance artist, Greenwood holds a master of fine arts degree from

Milton Avery Graduate School for the Arts at Bard College. She has shown recently in Los Angeles and was an artist in residence at The Kitchen in New York. She toured as a solo act called Tracy + the Plastics and will perform next year at On the Boards.

The award is named after the late Seattle arts patron Betty Bowen.

Sheila Farr: sfarr@seattletimes.com

# Artweek

OCTOBER 2008  
VOLUME 39  
ISSUE 8

## Washington

### Adam Satushek at Gallery4Culture and Isaac Layman at Lawrimore Project

The truism that we don't yet fully know the impact of the computer on art still holds. Like photography at the end of the nineteenth century, the computer's effect becomes clearer as its availability and popular use increases. And, just as photography was initially understood (and perhaps still is) through the medium of painting before it, much of today's best computer art is filtered through the photograph itself. As if to emphasize this point, Isaac Layman uses computer technology to set up the photo as a foil, challenging former assumptions about that medium's beauty, efficacy, and function. All the various rooms at Lawrimore Project had large, incredibly, tightly focused photographs. While there were some references to historical painting (a

Isaac Layman, *Sink With Lettuce*, 2008, archival ink-jet, 59" x 93"; Isaac Layman, *Stereo*, 2008, archival ink-jet, 58" x 102", at Lawrimore Project, Seattle.

still life, *Tools*, in the back room) and one photograph of the gallery's floor (titled *Floor* that was coolly tilted downward as if its long span was a mirror instead of a documentation), the superficial sum was one of loosely defined self-portraiture. Layman's subjects, titled prosaically *Pool Table*, *Self-Portrait*, *Sink*, *Medicine Cabinet*, etc., are presumably from his home. It becomes immediately clear however, that while he may be documenting his life with a camera, the artist is not interested in the traditional frozen frame.

Layman's photographs consist of multiple viewpoints so subtle they linger just outside of conscious awareness. It takes a moment when looking at the life-sized and horizontally displayed image of a pool table, before one becomes aware that this piece gives an individual perspective of the table specific to each pocket. The artist takes numerous "recordings" of each object (the press release states as many as forty-five for some of the works) and then "sutures" the images together on the computer. The results, as in the *Medicine Cabinet*, *Stereo*, or the kitchen sinks, are an unnerving, second-by-second, realism that is measured in not only in small

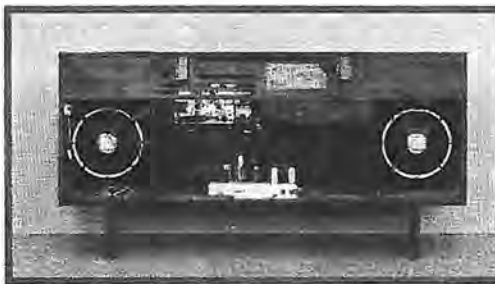
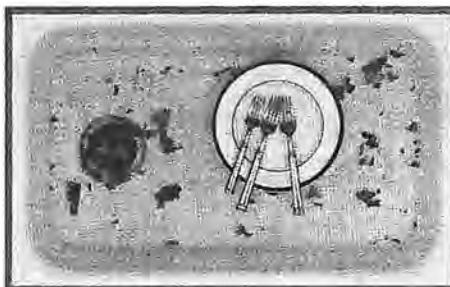
increments of time but, as in the case of *Stereo*, throughout history as well.

For his self-portraits, Layman used a large-format camera with a digital scanning back, a tool reserved for creating dense layers of pixels that takes seconds, even minutes to record. Every pore on the faces are lucid, while the hands are softly out-of-focus because it took twenty-minutes to digitally scan himself sitting—and his fingers moved. In these

printing techniques and a bit of cut and paste, but Satushek's work is fairly straightforward, tempered by traditional notions of connecting an artist's eye, a lens and light.

Composition is one key to the pleasure of Satushek's work along with humor and irony. The bottom half of *Yard* consists of a close-up of the ground, every bit of gravel articulated, including two stray plastic bottles. The density of this long view is a set up for what the title describes: a boat yard with the boats in the distance.

*Warehouses* shows a big, prefabricated storage unit that was somehow designed to integrate itself—ingratiate itself—into a suburban setting with three utterly false facades. Two other pieces, *Pole* and *Three Houses*, also focus on middle-class or working-class neighborhoods, their setting variously abridged by vegetation or human presence. *José Olivia* was taken in Costa Rica. It is a picture of a genteelly



works, the image becomes a testimonial to the body's presence and the performance of sitting for a portrait. The press release likens these to the famously long and utterly realistic Warhol film, *Sleep* and the comparison is apt conceptually, but these are 2-D works and are far more multifaceted, more densely informative than a film still could ever be.

If celebrating such technology were Layman's only purpose, it would be as relevant to art as painters who work to promote a brand of pigment, but that isn't what he is doing. What Layman does, and does extremely well, is mimic what our minds do effortlessly and what video or film does through recording a series of moments and subsequent movements. By freezing all of this action and reflection into a single image, he puts a new burden on two-dimensional art. If photography inadvertently brought about the invention of truly abstract painting, Layman is suggesting that these new technologies can bring about a hyper attenuated recording of real life that questions both what we see and our point of view.

Photographer Adam Satushek has a simpler, but no less emotionally affective goal. All six of his large-scale photographs at Gallery4Culture used digital

crumbling courtyard with a pool that has an odd, equally decrepit crumbling obelisk extending up through the space. This structure looks as much like the support for a superhighway as a modernist sculpture and is painted with a fabulist tropical scene including a parrot and an ocean hosting sharks underneath. It is brilliantly odd, suggestive of all kinds of contradictions and Satushek simply found and photographed it without needing to abridge its strange reality.

In entirely different ways, both Layman and Satushek affirm what we all already know about art: The magic begins in the mind of the maker. While Layman uses technology to make us see our present in more complex terms, Satushek presents us with the inconsistencies and surprises of life just outside our door.

—Frances DeVuono

Adam Satushek: *Disconnect* closed in August at Gallery4Culture, Seattle; and Isaac Layman: *Photographs From Inside a Whale* closed in August at Lawrimore Project, Seattle.

Frances DeVuono is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

# Artweek

NOVEMBER 2008  
VOLUME 39  
ISSUE 9



Betty Bowen Award recipient Isaac Layman, *Tools*, 2008, archival ink-jet print, 58" x 76".

## Layman wins Betty Bowen Award

Isaac Layman is the winner of the 30th annual Betty Bowen Award, which comes with an unrestricted cash prize of \$15,000. The Seattle Art Museum exhibited a selection of Layman's work in October.

Layman received a BFA in photography from the University of Washington in 2002. He lives in Seattle and is represented by Lawrimore Project, where he recently had his second solo show in July. Layman photographs objects from a variety of perspectives and then collages the individual, digital photographs to create a sin-

gle hyper-real image. By focusing on commonplace objects such as a sink, stovetop or tools, Layman hopes to challenge viewers' perceptions of day-to-day experiences and objects that are often taken for granted.

Two artists were also selected to receive special recognitions. Eric Elliott is the recipient of the Kayla Skinner Special Recognition Award in the amount of \$2,500, and Wynne Greenwood was awarded the PONCHO Special Recognition award in the amount of \$2,500.

Elliott received an MFA in painting and drawing from the University of Washington in 2007. His paintings have a limited palette, including only red, blue, yellow and white mixed with neutral gray, and highly textured surfaces. This past summer, Elliott's paintings were on view in *Transitions*, a solo show at Seattle's James Harris Gallery.

Greenwood received her MFA from Milton Avery Graduate School for the Arts at Bard College in 2004. She combines visual art, music, videos and performance to create dynamic works and installations that explore the shifting nature of identity. Most recently, Greenwood's work was on view in *Face It*, a solo show at Susanne Vielmetter Gallery, Los Angeles. She has toured with Miranda July, Tracy + the Plastics and the Need, and in April 2009, her multimedia performance *Sister Taking a Nap* will debut at On the Boards, Seattle.

Winners were selected from a group of five finalists that also included Nicholas Nyland and Alexis Pike. Finalists were chosen from 524 applications this year, a 13 percent increase over last year's applications. In commemoration of the anniversary, the amount of the award also

increased, from \$11,000 to \$15,000.

Betty Bowen (1918-77) was a Washington native and enthusiastic supporter of Northwest artists. Following her death, friends established the annual Betty Bowen Award to celebrate her life and honor her efforts to support artists of the region. Since 1977, the Seattle Art Museum has hosted the yearly grant application process. The selection committee chooses one artist, living and working in

Washington, Oregon or Idaho, to receive an unrestricted cash award.

# Ordinary images magnified

The Seattle Channel's "Art Zone in Studio with Nancy Guppy" highlights the work of a most unusual Seattle photographer at 8 p.m. Thursday. Isaac Layman's large-scale photos are humble in subject matter but bright and hyperfocused, thanks to his painstaking methods.

Layman spends two to three hours accumulating digital images of, say, his kitchen sink — taking a photograph, moving the camera slightly, taking another photograph. He needs 10 to 20 images — shot from minutely different viewpoints and at different depths of field — to serve as fodder for his end product. Then he puzzles the layers of imagery together on his computer.

"When an area of a photograph has content that I want, in focus and at many different depths, I stack those images up and then systematically erase the parts that are out of focus," he says. "A strange thing happens, then, as your eye wanders through the image — you're seeing things newly in focus that would not have been from a single perspective."

The result is a high-definition take on common household sights. Layman, winner of the Seattle Art Museum's 2008 Betty Bowen Award, notes that while his images are superficially "icy-cold and clear," what they show is "grungy and



ISAAC LAYMAN

A photograph by Isaac Layman, titled "Sink."

human": a liquor-bottle-strewn workbench, a grimy electric-stove top.

"I've never photographed my sink empty," he quips. "It's always been with a pile of dirty dishes or food scraps. But there's that moment where, before I go to clean it up, it just looks like a beautiful still-life."

The result of Layman's patient palimpsest methods: ev-

## ON TV

### Isaac Layman

The photographer is featured on "Art Zone in Studio with Nancy Guppy," 8 p.m. Thursday on The Seattle Channel. For more information: [www.seattlechannel.org](http://www.seattlechannel.org)

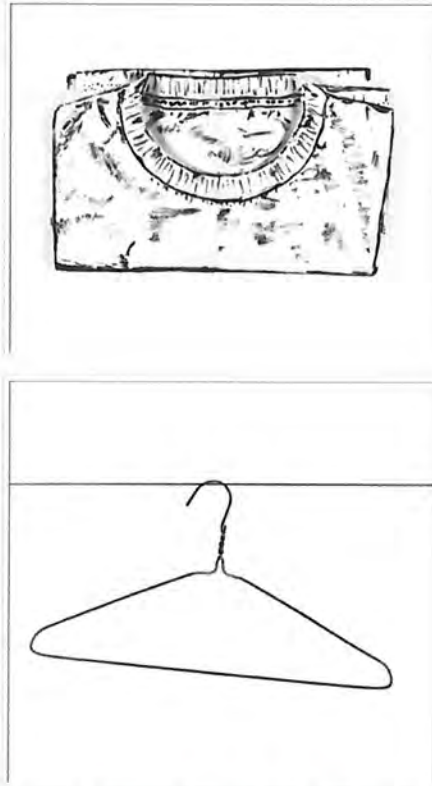
eryday objects that manage to be "interesting in the face of being ordinary," as he puts it. His work is on display at Seattle Art Museum and the Henry Gallery, and can be viewed on request at Lawrimore Project ([www.lawrimoreproject.com](http://www.lawrimoreproject.com)).

Michael Upchurch,  
Seattle Times arts writer:  
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**ARTS** The Continuation of Isaac Layman's  
World Domination Tour

posted by JEN GRAVES on JANUARY 24 at 12:45 PM

I say that with **nothing but love**. The photographer, who was picked up by Lawrimore Project in Miami after his pastiche bookcase photograph took the place by storm, is now showing in the white-cube gallery at LP.



The six images at Lawrimore Project (see those and more on his artist's page) are limited in tone (mostly black to white) but range widely in technique and approach.

Unlike many of the big names in photography, from Sherman to Goldin to Struth, Layman has no signature style, or at least not yet. The closest you could come is to say that he subtly alters or arranges everyday objects for the sake of photography. It's his insistence on the **subtlety of his intervention** and the gorgeous way he executes each image that keeps you coming back. *Coat Hanger* (2003), for instance, is an austere beautiful formal portrait. Is the hanger hanging? Is it lying down? The questions fade the longer you allow yourself to be seduced by the thick, round lines in the landscape of white.

The performative nature of what he does before he takes the photographs (or after, in the case of the digitally compiled bookcase image) is made literal in the earliest work in the show. It's a 2001 black-and-white portrait of himself in a sweatshirt, pointing out a window to another window that looks like it has a window built into it. It's called, of course, *Window*.

Also earlier are his photograms. A portrait of himself in a chair, made of collaged photograms (2002), is **ghostly and impressive** in size, but it comes off as bland. A 2003 photogram of a **lawn mower mounted on a plinth** makes the opposite use of the technology—it's eggheaded and witty in a warm way, like what comes later.

For *White T-Shirt* (2004), **the triumph of the show**, Layman drew dark lines on a folded T-shirt. He made a spotless white T-shirt look like one of van Gogh's boots: used, rustic, loved, lovable. At the same time, all of those charming cartoonish marks are obviously fake, and the shirt is no longer a shirt, but a drawing on one part of the shirt. So now it's a **photograph of a drawing on a sculpture**, an homage to and a critique of each one of those disciplines.



## THEATER/FINE ARTS

Last updated March 8, 2007 10:59 a.m. PT

### **Lawrimore Project knows a good thing when it sees it**

Isaac Layman's photograph of himself pointing at a window is not a photograph of himself pointing at a window.

Like Gerhard Richter's paintings, Layman's "Window" is a slippery fish, and its back story is a net that may or may not retain the truth of the image, a photo of a photo with a photo reflected on a wall.

Layman exhibited around town to little notice until he went to the Aqua Fair as part of Seattle's Soil art collective at Miami Art Basel. He dazzled, and Lawrimore Project picked him up. A similar thing happened to Chris Engman. He joined the Greg Kucera Gallery after he'd been a hit in Miami. (Can't these dealers see what's up in their city?)

Lawrimore is showing Layman's early work, which is smart, tender and funny with an overlay of dumb/smart mystification.

Also at Lawrimore is the terrific Josh Azzarella, whose videos and photos attempt to rewrite history by erasing its horrors. In "Untitled No. 8," a person falling from the World Trade Center will never crash, because Azzarella holds him up in an endless loop.

*Through Saturday at Lawrimore Project, 831 Airport Way S. Hours: Tuesdays-Saturdays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.*

**-- Regina Hackett**



Of high priority during my recent visit to Seattle was a trip to Lawrimore Project, a young gallery just south of the International District. Housed in a nifty modern building, it's a place you're unlikely to find unless you know to look for it. But once you spot the generic neon OPEN sign and pass through the hulking metal door, you enter a cavernous space ripe with possibilities.



Instead of cramming the walls full, the hangar-like front room was being used to showcase just one painting. In his large canvas *To Whom It May Concern*, Michael D. Linares aims and fires his brush at a big target, but from what I could gather it's mostly just goofin'. The work is simply two words - FUCK DUCHAMP - rendered in a fat, blocky font. The words are pale yellow and float in a star field, as if they were scrolling up the screen following the famous "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." So is that the point? Duchamp's legacy was long ago encased in carbonite while today's artists continue the struggle to keep things fresh and new. But to be honest this piece feels a little like something that would come out of an artist's studio if it were attached to a frat house. Disrespecting your elders and a subliminal Star Wars reference? Awesome, dood!

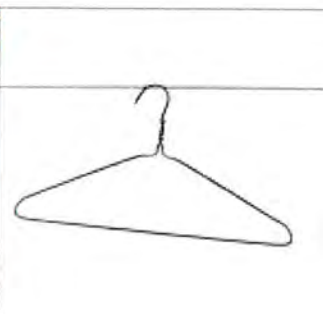
No less subtle but somehow much more delicate was the video work of Josh Azzarella. He's taken a selection of short, historically potent video clips and removed the primary reason for their resonance. For instance, the well-known clip of the single man blocking military forces approaching Tiannenmen Square is now shown sans tanks. The man furtively hops about, but for no apparent reason. The most powerful of Azzarella's historical interventions features the caught-by-accident footage of the first plane hitting the World Trade Center on 9/11. As firemen inspect a manhole cover, the ominous roar of a jet is heard above and the cameraman looks up to follow the sound. The clip as it exists ends in a horrific burst of orange; in Azzarella's version, the plane clears the tower and fades into the crisp September sky. The clip is so very short that I must have watched it 15 times; each viewing broke my heart anew.



I'd come to see the photo-critical photography of Isaac Layman and it was well worth the trip. I stood in awe before his enormous *Self-Portrait* photogram (left). Of course the photogram is nothing new, but Layman manages to ratchet it up a notch - there was a depth to this image that I wasn't expecting of a photogram and it quite frankly messed with my head. The same held true for his photogram *Lawnmower*, but it lacked the intense human presence of *Self-Portrait*.

Two of Layman's non-photogram works had me nodding along like a music fan at a great performance. *White T-Shirt* features just that: a photograph of a spotless white t-shirt on a white background, only Layman has added accents of charcoal or ink to key lines and shadows on the shirt, giving it a perceived mass that a straight photograph would never have captured. In the process, Layman has made a photograph of a drawing that's also kind of a sculpture. The layering kept my eyes and mind busy for quite some time.

I also lit up upon seeing his image *Coat Hanger* (right). What appears to be a simple wire coat hanger dangling from a taut line is actually a playground for perception, and closer inspection reveals that the hanger is merely lying on the wire. Or is it? Is the wire simply a drawn line? The longer the print held my gaze, the more I was convinced of what was happening; now, after the fact, I'm struggling to keep it straight. Like any photograph, this one obscures more than it reveals. As Arbus supposedly said: "A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know." Layman's economy of means simultaneously tells us a little and a lot.



## Q&A WITH CURATOR BONNIE LAING- MALCOLMSON

Following her studio visits with the 28 finalists, we sat down with Laing-Malcolmson to learn more about the exhibition and the process of selecting the artists.

### Why is this exhibition important?

It recognizes leaders in the Northwest visual arts world and allows us to recognize the work being done in this region. It raises the profile of Northwest art and the artists working here.

### How are the artists selected?

The process begins with a nomination. Regional curators, historians, gallerists, and others are invited to submit the names of three artists who they think are doing excellent work. This year we received some 200 nominations. The nominated artists are then invited to apply; we received 176 applications.

Then this year's guest curatorial advisor Apsara DiQinzio, the curator of modern and contemporary art at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, and I reviewed the nominees' materials and selected the 28 finalists.

This past summer I conducted studio visits with each of the finalists. I then recommended the six award winners for the 2013 exhibition.

### Could you describe the studio visits?

I visited finalists in four states. I actually did a 2,200-mile road trip from here through eastern Washington and into Montana and Wyoming. I arranged to sit with the artists in their studios and to see their newest work; there was actually some very exciting new work that I saw during the studio visits. I also interviewed the artists and talked to them about where they were right at that moment in their practice as well as what they would do or what they would want to do if

they were chosen to exhibit in the awards show. So there was a discussion about their vision, their practice, and really a discussion about looking into the future.

Many of the finalists are involved in installation work which deals in a very direct way with the space in which it is exhibited. It's helpful to talk to them about their ideas for installations within the Museum galleries.

It's a really helpful process, not only for this exhibition, but it gives me a chance to get to know artists throughout the region for other opportunities such as the APEX series.

The studio visits are so important. It's very different seeing work in person than it is in a slide review.

### How does this selection of artists and the potential for this exhibition differ from past Contemporary Northwest Art Awards?

First, we've moved up the process so the featured artists have more time to create new work for the exhibition.

This is also a broader representation of artists—beyond the I-5 corridor and more artists from outside of Oregon.

### Exhibitions of this nature are often criticized. How do you feel about that?

When you are selecting artists for an exhibition like a biennial, there is always some controversy and a good contemporary show should create that. The selection of artists and the exhibition should engage the community in dialogue. It's a good thing.

### Any final thoughts?

I love doing this exhibition. It's so exciting to discover and present new artists and reintroduce established professional artists working in this region to the Museum audience.

## CNAA FINALISTS

ARTIST	STATE
Anne Appleby	Montana
Rick Araluce	Washington
Hayley Barker	Oregon
Debra Baxter	Washington
Gretchen Bennett	Washington
Leo Berk	Washington
Cris Bruch	Washington
Karl Burkheimer	Oregon
Laurel Bustamante	Oregon
Sang-Ah Choi	Oregon
Claire Cowie	Washington
Anna Gray & Ryan Wilson-Paulson	Oregon
Wynn Greenwood	Washington
Jeremy Hatch	Montana
Victoria Haven	Washington
Blake Haygood	Washington
Laura Hughes	Oregon
Kate Hunt	Montana
Isaac Layman	Washington
Nickolus Meisel	Washington
Abbie Miller	Wyoming
Donald Morgan	Oregon
Nicholas Nyland	Washington
Matthew Offenbacher	Washington
Jay Schmidt	Montana
Heidi Schwegler	Oregon
Tip Toland	Washington
Trimpin	Washington



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## WWJ Isaac Layman: Funeral

Visual Arts

RICHARD SPEER

Thursday August 29

Elizabeth Leach Gallery  
417 NW 9th Ave.

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Large in scale, fastidious in execution, Isaac Layman's photographic prints glorify the banal. In the past, his images of ice trays, clothes dryers, ovens and hot-dog wrappers have made mountains out of molehills, elevating quotidian objects to objects of veneration. Although a cool minimalism suffuses his work, it is more Pop Art than minimalist. Like Warhol with his soup cans, Layman believes that anything, no matter how humble its station, can become the stuff of glamor and import, if only it is presented as such. *Aug. 1-Sept. 21.*

**Where:** [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#)

**Phone:** 224-0521

**Address:** 417 NW 9th Ave.

**Website:** <http://www.elizabethleach.com/>