

ArtWorks gallery exhibit displays the artistic process

- Katie O'Brien | The Breeze
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Matthew Perkins chose to combine humor and academics with the above installation to represent the "deceased" application.

Jenna Gilbert | contributing photographer

An organized mess of memories, a slow-motion video, colorful quotes, green leaves and live portrait drawings are just a glimpse into DOLPH, JMU ArtWorks' current exhibit. The South-London-based project prompts artists to respond to a 500-word brief about "what makes them tick." The four artists selected for the show explore ways to contextualize their influences and process of artwork into a piece of art itself. Artworks is featuring the DOLPH exhibit from Oct. 17 to Nov. 2 on Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

“It’s one of the most difficult questions,” said Luiz Navas-Reyes, a senior studio art major and one of the artists with featured work in the gallery. “So much of the time we are asked, ‘What do you want to do?’ but we’re not asked, ‘What is it that makes you do what you do?’”

Navas-Reyes challenged himself to only use video, light and color in his conceptual installation. His minimalist approach featured two parallel white walls, scattered line drawings on the top and bottom and a video projected in between. Through the exhibit, Navas-Reyes searched for the balance between his individual creativity and cultural heritage from El Salvador.

Another student with work featured in the gallery, fifth-year studio art major Matthew Perkins, said his original approach to DOLPH was too serious after he attempted to discover something profound about himself at first. He explained his artwork has a duality between a humorous and academic approach. Inspired by the humor in podcast banter, Perkins wanted to reflect his joy of laughter through an installation based on the social video app Vine.

“A large part of my work is being silly,” Perkins said. “How much of a risk would it be something silly and putting it in a serious art gallery?”

Perkins used the walls for audience interaction, allowing people to write their favorite Vine quotes in colored markers. With a vine compilation video and a cardboard coffin for the “deceased” app, Perkins hopes to send the message that everyone has humor, so why not laugh even in serious settings.

For Joanna Pottle, a fifth-year art history major, the DOLPH brief meant creating a personal environment of organized chaos. She combined aspects of her room with her Duke Hall studio space to create what she calls an “enmeshment” of work.

“It has a two-fold meaning where on one hand, it’s synonymous with ideas of submerging and intertwining things,” Pottle said. “But it also means the idea of codependent relationships and unhealthy symbiosis, which is basically just a fancy way of saying human relationships can be very dysfunctional and how do we combat that in a healthy way.”

Pottle investigates personal trauma and recovery by relating her unfinished exhibit to the idea that people are also a work-in-progress who cannot always fully recover after a traumatic experience. She explains that similar to the disfunction inherited from her family, many of the objects that influence her work were acquired from her parents.

She said she wanted to break the barrier of an art gallery by encouraging viewers to explore and interact with her space. Overflowing drawers of ticket stubs and maps, a bookshelf overhead crowded by movies from “Les Miserables” to “The King’s Speech,” a record player the size of her desk and a cluttered wall of postcards and screen print stencils all influence her work.

Another featured artist, Emmanuelle Garcia, a sophomore studio art and anthropology major, said she originally expected to have refined artwork in the show. Seeking advice from Duke Hall Art Director John Ros and Curator and DOLPH director Natasha Khan, Garcia had to rethink her creative process and approach the prompt from a different perspective.

“I was looking at it too formally and expecting it to be finished pieces, but I needed to really show my process,” said Garcia. “It's supposed to be messy and it's supposed to be vulnerable to show this part of you that people don't really normally see.”

She used her inspiration of both body language and sign language to create a performance piece. Garcia traced projected portraits of people in and outside the gallery and posted each on a wall that she hopes to cover by the end of the show.

DOLPH challenged the artists to display a behind-the-scenes look at their process with new materials and perspectives of their work. Many of the students took the brief a step further by redefining how viewers interact with artwork at galleries.

“Having that show is definitely going to break boundaries and hopefully push students to break boundaries and make artwork that they are uncomfortable with and be more vulnerable in terms of showing their artwork,” said Garcia.

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