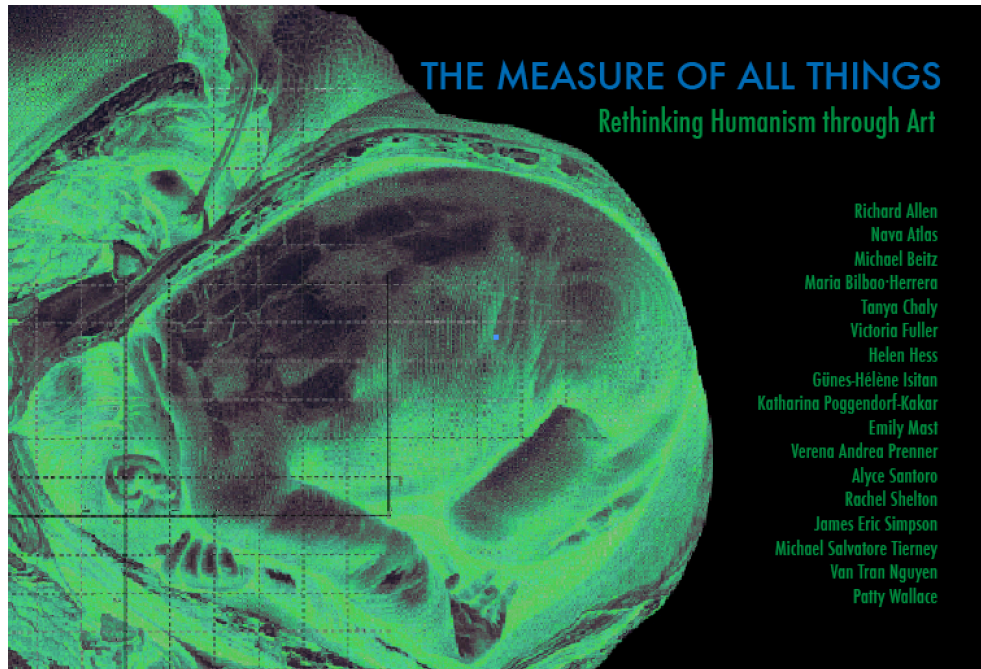


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Date: September 21, 2016

Media Contact:
Natalie Fleming, Co-Curator
(716) 645-0557 | nmflein@buffalo.edu



The Measure of All Things: Rethinking Humanism through Art

Sixteen Select Local, National, & International Artists Probe What it Means to be Human

Buffalo, NY – The University at Buffalo Department of Art’s exhibition, *The Measure of All Things*, features sixteen artists whose work calls on us to rethink our reliance on the philosophy of Humanism. The exhibition will be on view from Thursday, October 13, 2016 until Saturday, December 10, 2016 and will open with a public reception from 5pm to 7pm on October 13th.

The ancient philosopher Protagoras famously claimed: “Of all things the measure is Man.” In response, the curators ask: “What is Man?” Ask this question to more than one person and you will most likely get more than one answer.

Those who place their trust in science will assert that DNA, the molecule that carries the genetic instructions for all living organisms, makes humankind unique. Even the fact of DNA, however, falls short of explaining what it means to be human, as evidenced by controversies such as that over abortion. At its most basic level, this is a question of whether or not, despite DNA, the not-yet-born have a claim to humanity.

The romantics among us might say that what separates humans from all other beings is our emotional capacity. But how does one measure our aptitude for feeling? What emotions count and how should we express them? And if our emotions are deemed lacking...does that make us less human?

Agency, creativity, intelligence, love, expression, bodily integrity...each response to the question of what makes us human also acts as a dangerous barrier for those that fail to measure up.

Humanism has been trumpeted as the hallmark of a civilized society, founded on the unquestioned value of humankind defining not only our economic, political, religious, and social systems, but also our ethical code. This philosophy posits that as long as we are human, we are entitled to certain rights, such as the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness so-famously declared in the founding documents of the United States. However, artists recently have questioned whether humanism has actually lived up to its promises of making the world a better place for humankind. Considering our seeming inability to define what makes us human, are we truly better off privileging this category above all else or could there be other, preferable, ways to value life? With the persistence of discrimination based on superficial differences such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, and class, and the continuation of violent crimes, even genocide, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we see the ways in which the discourse of humanism falters. Groups are targeted through rhetoric that reduces them to the subhuman, and therefore disposable. But what if we reconsidered the worth of the subhuman, nonhuman, and even the non-animal and material?

The artists in this show interrogate the legacy of humanism while posing alternatives to an anthropocentric framework. Works by the artists Helen Hess, Verena Andrea Prenner, Maria Bilbao-Herrera, and UB Department of Art MFA student Rachel Shelton, disturb our distinctions between the human and the nonhuman through practices based on documentation, repetition, and exchange. Artists Tanya Chaly, Victoria Fuller, Richard Allen, and MFA student James Eric Simpson visually record the global impact of our anthropocentrism as a guiding principle in our systems of capitalism, environmentalism, health care, and cultural production. The work of Patty Wallace, Michael Beitz, Nava Atlas, and Michael Salvatore Tierney blur the conventional boundaries that distinguish nature from humanity. Through the eyes of these artists, we see humans in self-imposed cages while flora and fauna are personified and gendered, both as agents of change and helpless signifiers of human desire. Alyce Santoro, Katharina Poggendorf-Kakar, Günes-Hélène Isitan, and MFA student Van Tran Nguyen expand our notion of communication with the nonhuman. In their work, birds, mushrooms, single-cell organisms, and even rocks interact, connect, and create, along with, for, and against their (mostly) human audience.

The Measure of All Things: Rethinking Humanism through Art destabilizes our false dichotomies, our hierarchies, and our claims of originality (The single-celled organisms in the exhibition might ask what is so wrong with being a copy anyway). No longer limited by Man as the measure of all things, we can reconsider our relationships and responsibilities within a world where we are all inextricably interconnected.

About the Curators

Natalie Fleming is the Visual Resource Curator for the University at Buffalo Department of Art and a PhD student in the American Studies program within the University at Buffalo's Transnational Studies Department.

Van Tran Nguyen is a second year MFA student University at Buffalo Department of Art and the Graduate Assistant for UB's Coalesce Center for Biological Art.

About the UB Department of Art Gallery

The UB Department of Art Gallery is located in the Center for the Arts, Room B45, North Campus, and is open to the public Tuesday through Thursday, 1pm to 6pm, and Friday & Saturday, 12pm to 3pm. For more information on the gallery and its upcoming schedule:

<http://art.buffalo.edu/resources/gallery/>

####