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MFA Thesis Catalogue

James Madison University
School of Art, Design, and Art History

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR,
SCHOOL OF ART DESIGN AND ART HISTORY
DR. KATHERINE A. SCHWARTZ

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2018-19 MFA Graduate Exhibition. This catalogue documents *White Noise*, the Thesis Exhibition of Chris Cohen. A selection from the work, *White Identity Politics in the Home*, was recently featured in the Spring/Break Art Show in New York City, and received recognition in *Art News* and *The Art Newspaper*. Chris's interactive New York exhibition inspired him to reconsider his thesis exhibition, helping him transform it into one that could engage visitors with meaningful dialog about issues of white supremacy and white identity politics.

The work in this exhibition was created in response to the culture the artist has experienced. The large audience who participated in the artist's talk held in the Duke Gallery of Fine Art witnessed the artist's personal response to his own identity as a white, southern, American male. For example, by adding white masks to a collection of family portraits, including himself, serious questions were raised regarding cultural and racial stereotypes, racism, and fundamentalism. The exhibition challenges viewers to thoughtfully discuss the issues as we examine our humanity in contemporary society.

Chris Cohen's work raises the questions:

How can we move beyond the "white noise" of difficult issues, to a place where we feel safe to have meaningful discussions about race and equality?

How can we create art to reflect upon racism and white supremacy without causing additional harm to those who have been the victims of both?

How and when do the stories of others become part of our own experience?

What information can be trusted?

How do historical references to events, places, and periods inform our understanding of reality?

What is the role of the artist in furthering public debate about ethical behavior and our humanity?

The questions raised in this exhibition reinforce the School's vision to radically transform ourselves and our communities through creative and scholarly work.

Appreciation is extended to Cole Welter, Graduate Director, for the enormous passion he brings to the program, and to the graduate faculty for serving as artist mentors. I also thank John Ros, Gallery Director, for his curatorial assistance; Richard Hilliard, Associate Professor of Graphic Design, for producing this beautiful catalogue; and Karen Gerard, Assistant to the Director, for managing the graduate budgets that make this catalogue possible.

Warm congratulations are extended to Chris Cohen as he prepares for future exhibitions and debates regarding his provocative work. Thank you.

Katherine A. Schwartz, Ph.D.
Director of the School of Art, Design, and Art History

LETTER FROM THE GRADUATE PROGRAM DIRECTOR
DR. COLE H. WELTER

This catalogue documents a 2019 Thesis Exhibition entitled **White Noise** by artist Chris Cohen. As an exemplary model of outstanding creative research and personal artistic growth made possible by the James Madison University Master of Fine Arts program, artist Chris Cohen's Thesis Exhibition presents us with a mature examination of difficult and relevant questions about the role of gender, race, political history and white male identity in contemporary American culture. Displaying a masterly command of a diverse range of media, including painting, ceramics and photography, Chris has activated and electrified the entire Duke Fine Arts Gallery with an engaging range of subdivided areas to contemplate his visual response to powerful questions and ideas. The result is a skillful presentation that is both provocative and reaffirming in its effort to stage intimate areas where personal responsibilities and concerns about the role of white male patriarchy may be considered. Chris Cohen's exhibition is a point of inflection and personal reflection about his responsibility as a white male father, and as an American artist astounded by present-day manifestations of political intolerance. In sum, the theme of the exhibit is timely, the substance of the work accomplished, and the impression made on this gallery visitor, enduring.

As with most successful exhibits, acknowledgements and expressions of appreciation are owed to several people. Duke Fine Art Gallery Director John Ross is thanked for his contribution to Chris in mounting an inspiring exhibition installation. Drs. Aderonke Adesanya and Bill Wightman are thanked for their countless hours spent as guiding members of Chris Cohen's Thesis Committee. Dr. Kathy Schwartz, Director of the JMU School of Art, Design and Art History, Dr. George Sparks, Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts, and Dr. Jie Chin, Dean of The Graduate School, are thanked for their continuing support for the MFA program. And a special

thank-you is extended to all other members of the graduate Art faculty for their individual work with Chris, their continuing involvement with graduate education at JMU, and in helping Chris Cohen achieve the significant professional accomplishment of earning his Master of Fine Arts degree.

Cole H. Welter
Director, Graduate Program

WHITE NOISE

CHRIS COHEN MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

Chris Cohen

White Noise

White Noise is a mixed media exhibition of paintings, cyanotypes, photographs, ceramics, sculpture and installation that investigates moments when white supremacist ideology injects itself into the conversation about American Identity and American History in an attempt to co-opt those definitions, and end the conversation.

The exhibition considers the effects of this identity crisis on American identity, white identity, American history, and family unity. The exhibition looks at these issues through the lens of the Virginia Historical Markers program, Civil War reenactment, contemporary white identity politics and supremacy, monuments, educational history museums, and my personal narrative about white supremacy as it relates to my sense of loyalty and connection to my own family.

By weaving a personal narrative of division and loss caused by these racist ideologies, into a wider narrative of loss and destruction caused by white supremacy, I hope this exhibition has opened a dialogue about the damage that white supremacy causes, both to the people it targets, and to the humanity, culture, and identity of the group they claim to represent.

- Chris Cohen







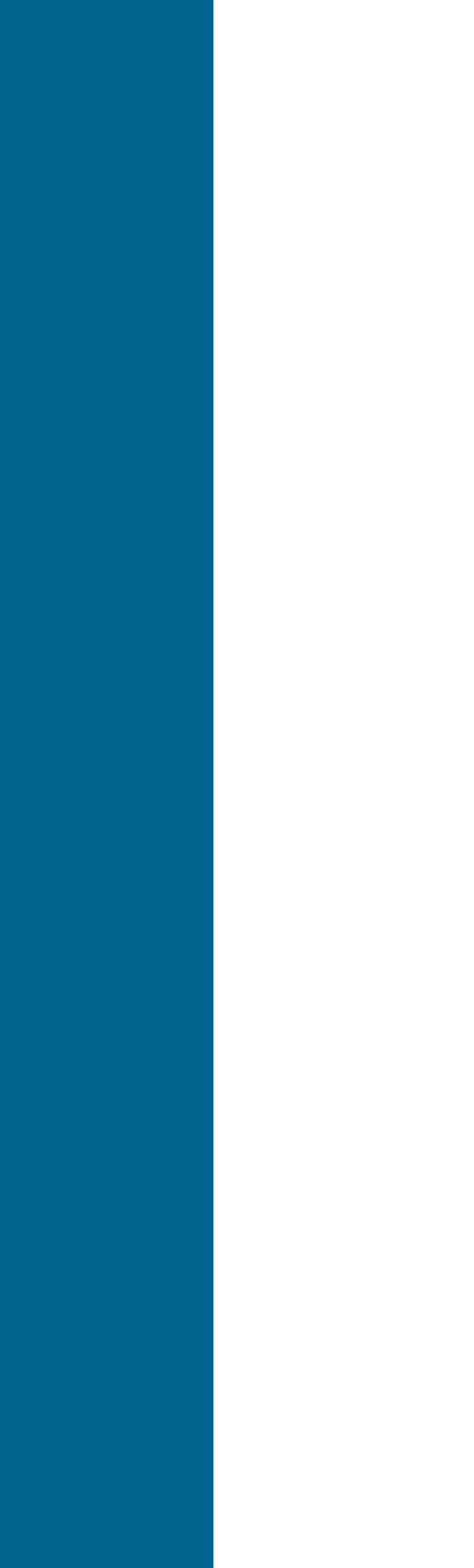




































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