



About the artists:

Scott Wolniak is a multidisciplinary artist, teacher and curator based in Chicago. He served on the Hyde Park Art Center Exhibitions Committee from 2017 to 2019, and proposed this exhibition shortly after his appointment. Curation has played a lo-key but significant role in Wolniak's practice over the past two decades. He ran Suitable Gallery, an influential alternative space in his Humboldt Park garage between 1999 and 2005, as well as the tangential video platform, Suitable Video, which organized screening programs and DVD editions between 2005 and 2011.

Wolniak is currently an Instructional Professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago and exhibits his work regularly in Chicago and abroad. His work in drawing, painting, sculpture and video utilizes labor-intensive techniques and humble materials, along with humor and optical effects, to explore the ever-evolving relationship between landscape and abstraction, outer space and inner space.

Wheel of Life

Kaner Family Foundation Gallery
March 19 - July 2, 2022



Daisy Schultz, *Airhead*, 2022.

Hyde Park **ARTCENTER**

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Exhibiting artists: Carris Adams, Leslie Baum, Jessica Campbell, Sophia Chai, Ryan Travis Christian, Flor, Charles Irvin, Laura Letinsky, Franny M. Levitin, Devin T. Mays, Dutes Miller, Daisy Schultz, and Georgina Valverde.

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The concept for this exhibition originated from the Experimental Animation: Exploring Manual Techniques course, which I have been teaching at the University of Chicago for ten years. My students create zoetrope animations as the first class assignment with consistently interesting, strange, and varied results. I wanted to see what would come out of this prompt if given to a group of advanced artists. I thought it would be more interesting to only invite artists whose primary medium is not animation or any motion-picture media, thinking that this angle might generate unconventional responses.

“Wheel of Life” is an experimental exhibition. It was experimental for me as the curator because I did not know what the work would end up looking like or how the different pieces would relate to one another. It was experimental for the artists in that none of them are moving-image makers and, presumably, had never made a zoetrope before.

I began my invitation process by thinking first about artists whose work I loved, and then considering it in relation to the ideas of time and motion. I can’t overstate my gratitude for these artists who accepted my invitation, agreeing not only to work outside of their ordinary practices, but also to make new work for the show. I received the finished works with great anticipation and surprise! The range of work has been a thrill to see. Several artists made precisely animated loops, capturing the illusion of movement through sequential imagery, while others have treated the zoetrope like a perception machine, capable of producing wild visual energy and disorienting optical effects.

There is something funny and magical about the generation of moving pictures, however simple, within these low-tech, manually operated devices! With a quick spin of the wheel we can see Daisy Schultz’s head repeatedly inflating and shrinking to ridiculous proportions, or a dog named Hoagie twirling in a toga in Jessica Campbell’s & Aaron Renier’s piece. Charles Irvin’s elk-man walks upright across a saturated desert landscape, glancing over at us like a goofy hallucination.

While some of the artists made work completely distinct from their typical practice, others reimagined their work to fit the format of the zoetrope. Leslie Baum has engaged in a daily painting practice for many years, in which changing seasons impact the colors and shapes in her work. For her zoetrope, Leslie selected one of her paintings as a starting point and then repainted it sixteen times in ever-progressing positions, suggesting a plant in decline. When “played” in the zoetrope, the looping effect is a vivid, cyclical dance of rising and falling blooms.

Dutes Miller made a vibrant zoetrope that produces numerous points of animation simultaneously. A photographic collage sequence of wrestlers plays like

a small film strip embedded in a field of brightly painted patterns and shapes. A snake-like form darts in and out of a circle, moon phases cycle and rotate, and the words “can’t stop living / can’t stop dying” ash repeatedly, competing for attention.

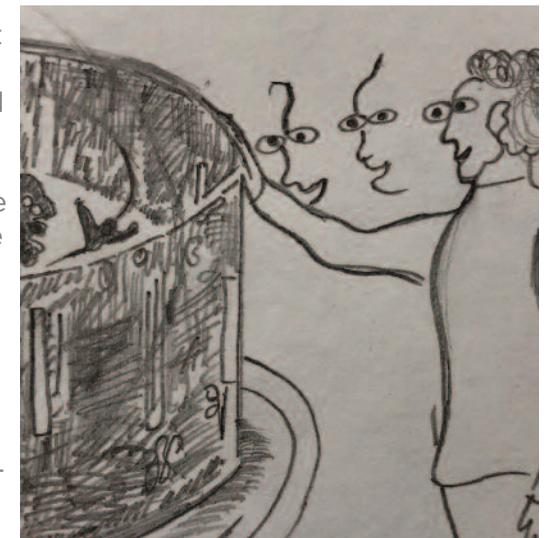
Georgina Valverde approached her project from a sculptural perspective, giving consideration to the interior space, the viewing apparatus and its mechanical properties. She created an abstract pattern-painting that wraps around the interior circumference, which is then extended and refracted through the addition of a mirrored floor and column at the center of the zoetrope. The reflective surfaces not only complicate the geometry of her painted surface, but also greatly expand interior space and viewing parameters.

Franny M. Levitin produced the ambient sound piece that drifts through the space, mixing with the rumble of zoetropes in action... or playing like echos when the gallery is empty. Franny built her piece from a single audio sample of a spinning zoetrope, with the slight clatter and whir of shifting ball-bearings. She processed, stretched, warped and looped the sound into an hour-long sonic wallpaper that subtly interacts with the other pieces.

And of course the show could not have occurred without the zoetropes themselves— the hardware and delivery system for the artwork. Sami Elahi assisted me with all aspects of the show, including the design and engineering of the zoetropes, bringing them from sketchy fantasy into physical reality. I can’t thank Sami enough for his commitment to the project.

The experience of seeing images move must have been incredible in the 1800’s, when zoetropes were first invented (and marketed as a toy). Although motion pictures are ubiquitous in 2022, the mechanics of perception are no less amazing today. I hope that Wheel of Life might allow people to see the illusion of movement a little differently. One of the things that I like best about zoetropes is their manual operation; the clunkiness and unsustainable effects of a spin, the way imagery speeds up and slows down, and the necessity to comport oneself into a particular viewpoint in order to apprehend the illusion.

Scott Wolniak, April 2022



Zoetrope drawing by Scott Wolniak, 2021