

Syracuse University

## SURFACE

---

Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects    Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects

---

Spring 5-5-2015

### Critical Mass: An Exhibition Competition

Allison Kirsch  
*Syracuse University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://surface.syr.edu/honors\\_capstone](https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone)



Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Kirsch, Allison, "Critical Mass: An Exhibition Competition" (2015). *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*. 909.

[https://surface.syr.edu/honors\\_capstone/909](https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/909)

This Honors Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact [surface@syr.edu](mailto:surface@syr.edu).

© Allison Kirsch

4 April 2015

## **Abstract**

I organized *Critical Mass: An Exhibition Competition* for my Honors Capstone Project. This was a juried art exhibition for undergraduate visual artists in the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University. Ten artists were selected from student applications to represent a broad range of artistic achievement.

## Executive Summary

*Critical Mass* was an artistic exhibition of undergraduate artwork from Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts (VPA). Three curators from Utica and Buffalo, NY juried the exhibition and selected the best work from student applications. For my Honors Capstone Project, I organized the event by scheduling the jury and the gallery, creating an application process for the students who wished to participate, and installing the show once the top work was selected.

After taking two graduate courses through the Museum Studies program at Syracuse, I began to construct *Critical Mass* for my Capstone. These courses focused on how to properly conserve and display artwork for a museum or gallery, and this knowledge added an important supplement to my visual art BFA. As young artists, we are taught to conceptualize and produce artwork, but many undergraduate studio classes do not place enough emphasis on professionally presenting artwork after it has been created. Therefore, I felt that if I launched an exhibition, for which students must be selected to show their work, it would give undergraduates an opportunity to exhibit their best pieces in the type of competitive environment they would encounter after graduation.

I scheduled the exhibition to take place from January to February 2015 at 914Works, an intimate space within the Department of Drama for students and faculty in VPA. Not only did the project aim to give students invaluable, first-hand experience exhibiting their work, but it also afforded me the opportunity to put into practice everything I had been learning about galleries and museums. Over the course of seven months, I worked through every aspect and issue involved with putting on a gallery exhibition. I learned much more than I anticipated, since studying a process in the classroom is so different than doing the same thing in practice.

I was in charge of organizing and implementing the application process and then reviewing submissions once the jury had made their selections. I designed the submission guidelines so that students would be required to submit a curriculum vitae (or artist resume), a proposal for the piece they intended to submit, renderings of that work, images of previous work, and an image script that gave the titles, dates, materials, and dimensions of each piece. These documents are required for most art residencies or gallery applications, and requiring them ensured that the students applying had the appropriate documents assembled, prior to their graduation. Very few artists continue to make art after graduating from college, but I feel that understanding how to submit applications and manage one's art "business" is an important step in succeeding as an artist.

After the application deadline, the jury panel reviewed and ranked the applications. I then took the top ranked pieces and arranged them in the gallery space using a digital 3D model. This served as a preliminary sketch, on which I based the exhibition design. In total, I arranged for three videos, three paintings, a drawing, a digital print photograph, and two sculptural installations. There was a wide range of styles and media, which allowed for an eclectic exhibition. Finally, in January, I worked with the students and the gallery director to install the show. This served as another part of the learning process for me because I underestimated the importance of physically seeing an object in a gallery space, and as pieces were delivered I had to engage with them differently than in my 3D model, and thus edit some of my curatorial decisions. I was also able to work alongside a few of the students to hang their work, and I appreciated the initiative they took to be part of the installation process. I do wish that a few of the students had been more involved with the exhibition, but overall it was successful

nonetheless. There was a reception for the exhibition on February 5, 2015, at which time awards were given to the top three artists in the show, as selected by jury member Mary Murray.

My Capstone was a rewarding experience because I was able to use the knowledge I gained over my four years as an undergraduate student to give back to the university community through the Critical Mass exhibition. Now, after graduation, I will be taking this engagement one step further by working with the greater Syracuse community, as my partner Holly Wilson and I open an art gallery in Syracuse. I feel confident that my Capstone Project has prepared me for this next major step in my life, and our gallery would not be possible without the knowledge I gained from Syracuse University. Additionally, many people associated with the university assisted in making this project a reality, and it would not have been possible without them. I am grateful to the School of Art, the Department of Drama, the Museum Studies program, and VPA as a whole for all of the administrative and financial support I received.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Reflective Essay .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>18</b>



## Reflective Essay

Though I am a practicing studio artist, I decided to base my Capstone Project on a different subject area—Museum Studies. It did not occur to me until the fall of 2013 that museum studies was even a career path, let alone a potential interest of mine. After taking the Introduction to Museum Studies graduate course, I realized that working in a gallery or museum is the behind-the-scenes aspect of preparing and exhibiting artwork. I have always loved various aspects of management; therefore, when it occurred to me that installing an exhibition is a form of management, I developed an idea to organize my own exhibition. Thus, the planning for *Critical Mass* began.

*Critical Mass* was an undergraduate, juried art exhibition, which I arranged for visual artists in the College of Visual and Performing Arts. It was not the original idea for my Capstone Project, since I initially proposed a series of sculptural installations. However, from everything I had heard and read about Capstone Projects, I knew that previous students suggest choosing a topic in which one is intellectually and emotionally invested. Therefore, the summer before my senior year I decided to abandon my original idea and move outside the scope of my Sculpture major. I focused my efforts on developing *Critical Mass*, and I knew from the moment I switched my topic that I was enthralled with this new idea.

The additional motivating factor for switching my topic was due to my increasing interest in Museum Studies. I knew that after graduating from Syracuse University, I would be focusing all my efforts on creating artwork and applying to artist residencies. Therefore, I felt my Capstone Project would serve as a way to practice organizing and curating an exhibition, and it would give me hands-on experience I would not otherwise acquire.

In the spring of 2014, I enrolled in Museum Preparation and Installation and began to learn the appropriate techniques for installing artwork in a gallery space. During this course, I realized that my undergraduate studio art degree placed little emphasis on the process of installation, which I deem to be equally as important as the process of creating artwork. It occurred to me that student artists are taught to produce art, but the details of presentation are frequently overlooked. By organizing *Critical Mass*, I wanted to give students the opportunity to practice exhibiting their work in a real gallery setting, prior to graduation. I specifically selected the title because it left the exhibition open-ended. A basic definition of the scientific term “critical mass” is that it is the smallest amount of mass necessary to produce a reaction. I felt that it aptly described a small group of talented visual artists, who together would represent the College of Visual and Performing Arts. Additionally, by leaving the exhibition title fairly ambiguous, I aimed to allow students the opportunity to present work that they were creating as they moved towards their final thesis projects. Unlike some exhibitions, which are curated around a selected theme, I did not want students to feel confined to a particular requirement.

In Fall 2014, I then took Museum Management with Edward Aiken. This class was fascinating, since it not only focused on managing not-for-profits, but also on managing people and businesses. It was at this point that I really began assiduously developing the exhibition. While I did have assistance from Scott Rose, the director of 914Works, and I received advice from copious sources—including but not limited to my advisor, Sam Van Aken, and the new director for the School of Art, Stephanie James—I predominantly organized every aspect of the exhibition on my own.

It is one thing to study something in class, but it is extremely different to take what you have learned and turn it into a tangible reality in practice. Over the course of the last semester,

my Capstone afforded me the opportunity to actually do what I had been studying for the past year and a half. I learned to write a successful grant proposal, for which I received a Crown-Wise Scholarship. I continued to fundraise as I sought additional monetary support for the project. I arranged for three visiting curators to jury and attend the exhibition. I used social media to publicize both the application process and the reception. I also organized the installation, from when the work would be delivered to how to arrange the lights. Additionally, I scheduled a press hour before the reception to strengthen my ability to address the media. During the course of the exhibition, I took on the roles of exhibition coordinator, curator, PR, fundraiser, and preparator. The only role I did not fully embrace was graphic designer. While I had studied all of these issues in the multiple Museum Studies courses I have taken, doing them in practice lent a different perspective on how much preliminary work is involved with curating an exhibition—even a smaller show like *Critical Mass*.

The exhibition advertising—the posters, flyers, and exhibition cards—was extremely important for publicizing the event. I wanted a striking design, since I could not include a photograph from the exhibition, as the work had not yet been selected. Therefore, I hired a design team to create the poster and flyers, and a printmaker to handprint the exhibition cards. These three artists graduated from VPA in 2014 and 2015. I made sure to contract my peers for the design work, because artists are too frequently undervalued by mass-production and the business world. I feel it is absolutely essential to support artists to work in areas in which they have been trained. Therefore, I wrote and received a grant for a Crown-Wise Scholarship—for which I very much thank the Honors Program. The scholarship allowed for the exhibition advertising to be produced by my peers, for my peers.

Though I received the scholarship, it still did not cover all of the costs associated with the exhibition. My advisor, Professor Sam Van Aken, gave support for the exhibition when he offered to pay the jury members to visit Syracuse for the reception, and we arranged for them to conduct studio critiques with graduate students during their visit. Additionally, I scheduled a meeting with the new director of the School of Art, Stephanie James, in order to ask her support for the project. I wanted to give prizes to the top three students in the exhibition. At first I thought I would contact alumni to ask for donations, but Ms. James and I agreed that she would support the exhibition by allotting \$150, \$50, and \$50 prizes for the top three finalists. Though fundraising is often a difficult subject to broach, the project forced me to find different ways to secure enough money. This was an excellent learning experience because I have now gained confidence in both pitching my project and asking for financial support. These skills are vital in both the for-profit and not-for-profit worlds.

As the semester progressed, I frequently referred to the timeline I created to keep myself organized and cognizant of approaching deadlines. This timeline also helped when plans changed and forced me to alter and reevaluate the direction the project would take. One of the first major alterations to be made was with regard to the jury panel. Originally, I planned to have a jury of graduate students select the top applications. However, after conferring with Professor Van Aken, we decided to ask three professional curators from the local CNY regions of Utica and Buffalo to jury the exhibition. They were to receive digital copies of the applications, then on the day of the reception they would travel to Syracuse to select the top three pieces in the exhibition, as well as conduct studio critiques with graduate students. The jury panel consisted of Mary Murray, Monika Burczyk, and John Massier. I arranged to share the applications with the jury via Dropbox, an online file sharing software. They then ranked the applications based on

which pieces they felt were the most to the least successful. After receiving each of their rankings, I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to determine which pieces had been ranked highest between the three of them. This allowed for an unbiased selection of the top work, and did not put additional pressure on the jury to coordinate their selections amongst one another. By averaging their rankings afterwards, I allowed the jury to rank pieces on their own time, since I did not want the exhibition to be a burden on them.

As mentioned previously, my theory behind the exhibition was to provide students eager to challenge themselves with an opportunity to learn about presenting their artwork in a gallery setting. I specifically wanted to organize a “juried exhibition” because when a jury selects a piece for display, it qualifies that the work is worth exhibiting. As an undergraduate student, it is a privilege to be selected and participate in a juried exhibition. It also marks a valuable line on one’s curriculum vita or resume, and elevates the caliber of exhibitions in which one’s work has been shown. The College of Visual and Performing Arts does not offer any opportunities like this, and I wanted my Capstone to make a difference for my peers. That is not to say that there are no opportunities for VPA students to exhibit work; in fact professors or students frequently organize group exhibitions. The difference is that a juried exhibition lends value to the work in a way that a group show of friends or classmates does not—this is especially true if a professor organized the exhibition and it is a class requirement to participate. I feel that it is important for students to have the experience of drafting applications and applying for opportunities—like exhibitions and residencies—before completing their undergraduate degree. Submitting applications is the “business” side of being an artist, and while it is important to understand how to be creative, it is equally as important to know how to sell one’s self as an artist. This is why I

decided to create an application process for *Critical Mass*; however, I was not at all anticipating the reactions I received with regards to the submission requirements.

The application process itself was not rigorous. Students were required to submit a CV, a proposal of 300 words or less, up to three images of their proposed piece, up to eight images of previous work, and an image script. All of these documents are standard requirements for general applications. I made sure to check my submission guidelines against other exhibition applications to make sure that they feel within the norm. Additionally, over the past three years in the Sculpture program, the importance of these documents for artistic success has been made extremely clear to me. Everyone needs an updated resume, and artists tend to have this in the form of curriculum vitae. An up-to-date portfolio of previous work is also paramount for anyone graduating from a BFA program, and all students should be able to photograph their recently completed work for any current applications. The image script is included to give the titles, materials, dimensions, and dates for each piece, and finally, a 300-word proposal is the equivalent of an artist statement about a particular piece. Generally, an artist statement explains one's artistic practice to the audience. However, for the *Critical Mass* application, I was requesting a paragraph that explained the concept behind the piece proposed for the show, as well as how it related to the artist's thesis work.

Since the submission requirements were standard, I was shocked when I began to hear from other students that people were nervous about applying because it was "too much work" or they "didn't want to write that much." I even received multiple questions from the students who applied asking, "What is a CV, and how do you format it?" Though it surprised me that graduating seniors were unsure of these facts, I was happy to answer the applicants' questions because I wanted the exhibition to be a learning process. Therefore, I showed students an

example CV and gave them a website address where they could research how to properly draft a visual art curriculum vitae (Visual Artist). Despite the few applications I received from conscientious students, most of my later frustration was centered on the many students who did not even bother to try to apply. They do not realize that one must also embrace the business side of producing artwork in order to be a successful artist. It is unfortunate, but if students are not already prepared with basic business knowledge and these professional documents by the time they graduate, there is not much hope for their longterm artistic career.

The most difficult part of the exhibition was the moment I realized that people were not applying for the show. In August of 2014, I expressed concerns that I would not receive any applications. In an effort to ease my concern, I decided to spend a week in November going to the main thesis-prep classes in the various visual art majors. I hoped that by personally pitching the exhibition, I would gain more attention for the project and subsequently more applications. Though many people sounded genuinely interested in applying, as the Friday, December 5th application deadline drew nearer, only one person had turned in a completed submission. Originally, I picked a deadline in the middle of finals week because I wanted to give students enough time to finish their final projects, but not so much time that they blew off the application completely. However, this did not pan out as intended. Eventually, I was forced to extend the deadline to Sunday, December 8th, and then I found myself accepting submissions multiple days later from those who had promised to turn them in. Professor Van Aken and I decided that twenty applications was the minimum number I needed, and after browbeating multiple students and friends into applying, I was able to reach our set minimum. This was extremely frustrating for me because while I am aware that students are notoriously bad at meeting deadlines, I expected my peers to jump at the chance to submit a free application to an exhibition juried by

regional curators. The enthusiasm I witnessed when I was pitching the project in thesis classes dwindled significantly when students were faced with the prospect of actually drafting an application.

I could potentially attribute the shortage of applications to the lack of physical exhibition advertising I personally gave out to students. It is possible that I should have brought printed flyers with me to each of the classes I visited, but in order to conserve the environment I did not want to print flyers that would just be thrown away. In an attempt to circumvent this issue, I decided to take down email addresses on a signup sheet for those who were interested. This allowed me to send mass emails to everyone who had shown even the slightest interest in the exhibition. I also used these emails to send out digital copies of the flyers and the submission guidelines. Ultimately though, I did not feel that I received very many applications from this process—though I know a few students applied because I visited their classes.

The other potential reason for a smaller number of applications than I expected could be attributed to the fact that I called the exhibition a “competition.” Professor Van Aken and I later discussed the semantics of what it meant to label the show a competition rather than a juried exhibition. Professor Van Aken’s feeling was that “competition” is too harsh of a term and people are disinclined or nervous about the idea of “competing.” I disagree, since I feel that a juried exhibition is inherently a competition. By applying to a juried exhibition, one runs the risk of not being selected, and that means that there are those who are chosen, and those who are not. Since I am naturally competitive, I see this as a welcome challenge; yet it is possible that students were disinclined to run the risk of “losing” the competition. Conversely, a competition could be considered a peer-to-peer event, rather than a juried exhibition, which connotes a level of professionalism. I plan on keeping this issue in mind for future exhibitions because semantics

are extremely important when publicizing anything—be it an exhibition or not. Perhaps the show should have been titled, “Critical Mass: a Juried Exhibition,” but it is impossible to know if this would have made a difference in the number of applications I received.

There was an additional moment, while I was still trying to reach twenty applications, when I had to make the decision to continue with my original plan to curate an undergraduate exhibition. Graduate students began to ask me if they could apply because they wanted the opportunity to have three local curators look at their work for free, especially since at the time very few undergraduates seemed to be taking advantage of it. However, my original intention was to curate an undergraduate show, and I had to ultimately decide not to allow graduate applications simply because I had not received as many submissions as I would have liked. I felt that including graduate students in the exhibition would have made the jurying unfair for the undergraduate students who did apply.

After I received all twenty applications and sent them to the jury via Dropbox, I began to focus on the next stage of the project—installing the exhibition. Over winter break, I collected the jury members’ bios, wrote my own bio, drafted a synopsis for the exhibition, and finalized a press release. Upon receiving the jury’s rankings and averaging them to determine the show’s finalists, I contacted the selected students (and notified those who were not chosen). In the notification email to the finalists, I stated that the artists would be able to drop off their work between January 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, and that we would be installing the show on Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The email discussed proper installation techniques and processes. I explained what was required for the various types of objects (i.e. hardware for paintings, video footage, pieces to be personally installed by the artist, etc.) to give the finalists a basic idea of what the installation process would entail. The artists and I also discussed how they would each like their pieces installed and

displayed. I was also pleased that one of the sophomores selected for the exhibition brought her piece to 914Works, and she stayed to help me install it. It was exciting for me that she was interested in learning about the installation process, and I felt that she valued the new experience of exhibiting her work in a gallery setting.

Prior to the drop-off week, I began to lay out the exhibition digitally. I took the top ten pieces and used a CAD drafting program called Chief Architect to virtually lay out the space in 914Works. Each artist had included the size of their piece in their original application, so I was able to play with spacing and develop a three dimensional sketch of how the pieces would look on the walls (Figures 1 and 2). From the jury's rankings, I selected three video pieces to be played on a projector, three paintings of various sizes, a drawing, a digital print photograph, a three dimensional print installation, and a ceramic sculpture. In order to model the work in the computer I was paying attention to size, material, and color; yet it is so difficult to properly experience a piece of art unless it is physically in front of you. This is the main reason I arranged to have the jury travel to Syracuse to choose the top three prizewinners once the work was installed at 914Works, because artwork appears so differently in person, than in a digital image.

I wanted to design the exhibition space in a way that was balanced and cohesive, and I felt confident about the digital model I had created. Scott and I had planned to install the show Friday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, so I gave the artists the deadline of having their pieces delivered to 914Works before Friday. Unfortunately, this proved to be problematic because only three students delivered their pieces by the set deadline. In order to judge size and aesthetic, it is best to first lay out all the artwork in the space before hanging anything on the wall—even though I had a digital, preliminary sketch. However, we were forced to begin the installation without all of the artwork because one of the artists actually arrived on time, and we could not make her

wait for the tardy students in order to install her piece. After she completed her installation, we were still waiting for four of the seven pieces to be delivered. Finally, after multiple objects had been arranged on the walls, a student delivered a painting, and the moment it came through the door, I realized it could not go in the location I originally planned. It was vibrant and loud, and it would have visually competed with a nearby sculpture (Figure 1). Thus, I had to quickly readjust and continue to balance two black and white pieces on opposite walls, while finding a better home for the colorful painting that would have otherwise conflicted with its wall-mates (Figures 3 and 4). During my art education, I have been learning to visually analyze the artwork and the world around me, though most of the time I am working with my own pieces. *Critical Mass* gave me an opportunity to develop my visual skills on work that I did not personally create. With the broad range of media, it was a welcomed challenge to ensure that each work added its own voice to the aesthetic balance of the space, while also complementing those around it.

Though there were a few mishaps along the way, the exhibition followed the basic trajectory I had envisioned seven months prior. I set out with an envisioned goal, and for the most part that goal was achieved. Yet when one is producing artwork, sometimes it is the moment when things do not go according to plan that new possibilities are realized. In this case, I believe that physically coming face to face with the work and having to redesign the exhibition reminded me that even the best plans are liable to change. And in this case, they changed for the better. The pieces created a coherent flow around the exhibition, and each of the artists' work stood well in the space. When I first contacted the three jurors, I conducted a mini email-interview with each of them asking questions about what it means to curate an exhibition. The response that stuck with me was that a curator should be "like a child at a dinner party. Seen but not heard too much or too loudly" (Massier). The curator should guide the visitor's understanding and experience of

the work in an exhibition. For *Critical Mass*, there was a wide range of media, and broad diversity even within similar techniques—for example, the three paintings on display were of different styles, and the three videos in the video reel were vastly different: a film, a performance, and a digital video. But even with this broad range of stylistic and media diversity, the aesthetic choices I made when sequencing the art objects created a cohesive flow throughout the exhibition. I paid strict attention to the physical and visual needs of each piece as well as the collection as a whole. In the end, the pieces complemented one another without dominating the group show. Once all the pieces in the show were installed, there were a few final touches that had to be taken care of with regards to the labels, lights, and painting the walls. Though we still encountered a few issues, which were to be expected and unavoidable, the show opened to the public on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015, with the reception scheduled for February 5<sup>th</sup>.

The day of the reception was the culmination of everything I had scheduled for the exhibition. The jury was to arrive at 1:00pm to see the work in the space. Originally Mr. John Massier and Ms. Monika Burczyk would have joined Ms. Mary Murray at 914Works to select the winning pieces, but they were unable to come to Syracuse due to medical issues. They both offered to give their thoughts on the work, but I felt that the majority of the selection process should be left up to Ms. Murray because she could physically see the work in the exhibition space. Using the same principle that prompted deviation from the original 3D model: artwork appears differently when hung on a white wall, and I wanted the jury to select the work in person. However, since I had arranged to sit in on the jurying, I was able to show Ms. Murray the rankings that Mr. Massier and Ms. Burczyk had given each piece previously. This gave her a basis on which to make her decision. I enjoyed speaking with her about each of the pieces, because I wanted to get a sense of what a jury panel discusses when choosing winning artwork.

This will be useful to me during future endeavors because it not only gave me a sense of what curators look for in artists' work, but also what I should be looking for if I were to jury an exhibition myself.

After Ms. Murray selected the winning pieces on behalf of herself and the other jury members, I signed letters of recognition to give to the winning artists. The prize money itself could not be given at the reception, but I wanted to hand the artists a physical document stating that they had been chosen. The process of establishing prizes through the university was tricky because there are certain channels through which grant money must be processed. When I received the grant funding for my Crown-Wise Scholarship, I had to file a grant refund request on my bursar account. The money was then directly deposited into my bank account. Since there was no physical check, the grant lacked a certain tangibility to make it seem as though I had actually been *awarded* something. Additionally, if the student owes money on their bursar account, the grant money is automatically applied to their tuition payments—ultimately negating the prize money. Therefore, I wanted to find a way to secure physical checks for the winning students.

After speaking with Ms. Deborah Amedro in the financial aid office, I arranged with Ms. Sandra Puro and Director Stephanie James to have the papers processed for the winners, and once the checks were printed, they would be delivered to me. This allowed me to give the artists their prize money myself, making it personal and official. The only additional hiccup was that two of the winning students were in the Department of Transmedia, instead of the School of Art, so Ms. James had to arrange for their prize money to come from the Department of Transmedia instead. It is still unfortunate that the checks could not be given at the reception, but at least I was able to personally give them physical awards.

Additionally, I had scheduled a press hour before the reception at the suggestion of Ms. James. She felt that it would be good practice to speak with the media about the exhibition, so when the original press release went out, I personally contacted the Syracuse University news outlets stating that I would be available before the reception to answer questions about the exhibition. Though I received one email response prior to the reception, no news outlets were present for the press hour. I did however conduct a Skype interview with a writer for the Daily Orange, and I was able to give an account of the exhibition and the artists. I also sent out another press release after the reception to announce the names of the winners and that the show was extended due to popular interest.

Before the reception, I had sent handwritten invitations to personally invite alumni, so that they could see the work that current BFA students were producing. I had hoped that the students would have a chance to speak and connect with other Syracuse University graduates, and that the alumni would give inspire the current students. However, I did not meet any alumni at the reception, so it is unlikely that this occurred.

Over the last year, an enormous amount of work has gone into the creation of this exhibition. In addition to the work I personally did to complete my Capstone Project, I received financial assistance from the Honors Program; Stephanie James and the School of Art; and Sam Van Aken and the Sculpture Department. The jury, consisting of Mary Murray, Monika Burczyk, and John Massier, put their personal time into ranking the artists in the show, and Mary Murray came to Syracuse to choose the winners in person. Andrew Saluti agreed to give his time to be the reader for my Reflective Essay. Lynn Nuzzi, Deborah Amedro, and Sandra Puro helped with the administrative side of paying the jury and awarding grant money to the winners. Jim Dungey assisted with contacting alumni, and Scott Rose gave assistance wherever and whenever

necessary in order to schedule and install the exhibition. *Critical Mass* would not have been possible without the money, time, and effort that each of these people put forth, and I would like to thank each and every one of them on behalf of myself and the students in the show.

This exhibition has been an amazing experience for me. It is common for graduating Honors students to say that their Capstone was the most influential project they encountered during their time at Syracuse University, and I can without a doubt say the same. *Critical Mass* gave me the ability to put into practice everything that I spent the past four years studying. During the last six months of organizing this exhibition, I learned much more than I thought possible, and now I will be able to use this knowledge as I move forward from Syracuse University. My new partner Holly Wilson and I have made the decision to open an art gallery in Syracuse, and I know that my Capstone Project has prepared me for this next major step in my life. We plan to work with the University and the Syracuse community to expand our new gallery and the Syracuse art scene. The experience I have gained from *Critical Mass* has made me confident that I am fully prepared to take on the role of co-Director of *Holly and Allison Studios*.

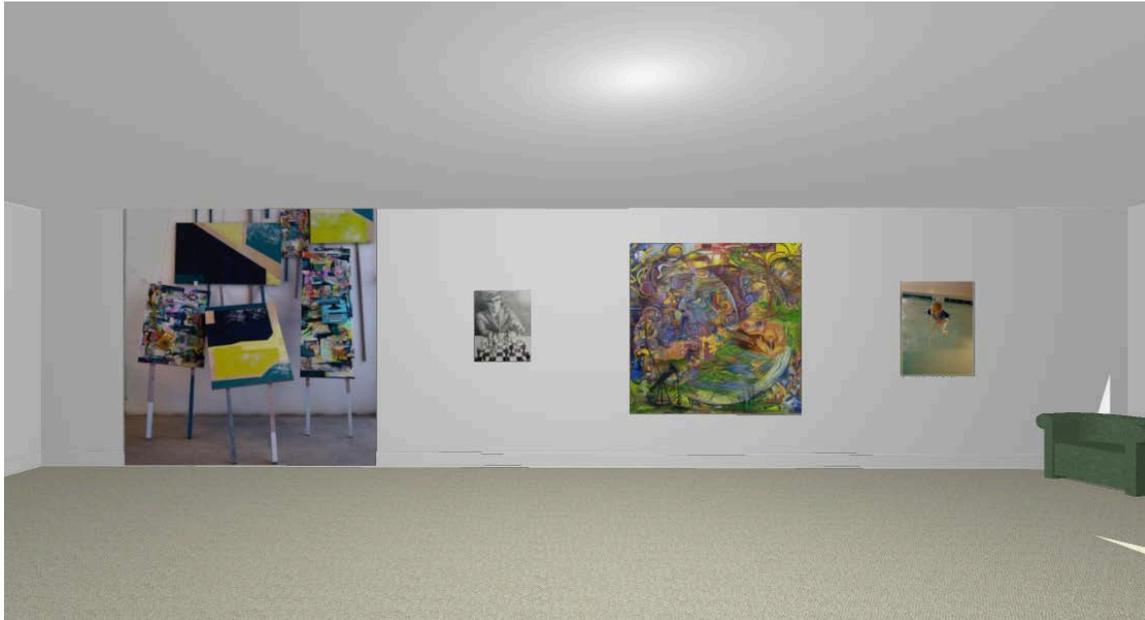


Figure 1. Allison Kirsch. *Critical Mass 3D Model (right)*. Digital Rendering. 2015.



Figure 2. Allison Kirsch. *Critical Mass 3D Model (left)*. Digital Rendering. 2015.



Figure 3. Allison Kirsch. *Critical Mass* (right). Photograph. 2015



Figure 4. Allison Kirsch. *Critical Mass* (left). Photograph. 2015

### **Works Cited**

*Visual Artist Curriculum Vitae: Recommended Conventions*. College Art Association. 28 October

2012. Web. 2013. <<http://www.collegeart.org/guidelines/visartcv>>

Massier, John. Email Interview. 4 November 2014.