THIS IS KILLING ME
This is Killing Me brings together eight artists whose practices are grounded in self-reflection and the anxieties inherent in making art. In their diverse works they reveal a palpable sense of unease about being artists. Although professional anxiety is common in all fields, the artists in this exhibition address the dilemmas particular to creativity. These artists transform fear into works of art, making public their private misgivings in ways both humorous and painful.

Feelings of inadequacy are evident in some of the work—the artist plagued by the idea that she or he is not good enough, hard-working enough, or famous enough (and never will be). Other works unveil the sources (or lack thereof) of the artist’s inspiration—laying bare the pressure to develop meaningful and original ideas. Some artists give shape and form to the creative process, emphasizing their labor (and their procrastination). Many of the artists derive content from psychoanalysis, exposing their conscious and unconscious fears.

Despite their cool and often amusing presence, all of the works in This is Killing Me bear traces of their making, betraying the apprehensions that engendered them. In contrast to popular conceptions of the studio as a site of inspired genius, the studio as represented by these artists is a space laced as much with anxiety as with brilliance.

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This is Killing Me is on view at MASS MoCA May 23, 2009, through March 31, 2010 and is curated by Diana Nawi.
For the past eight years, each time Whitney Bedford has moved into a new studio, she has continued her series of paintings of broken hands. Featuring images of bloodied, mutilated, and injured hands on white backgrounds or, conversely, hands that have been treated, wrapped in plaster, and confined in casts on black backgrounds, these works are derived from images found on the internet. Bedford searches for photographs of disfiguration and trauma as well as images of the healing process. These paintings of hands offer an array of tools of the trade: a slide, a razor blade, a paintbrush, a screwdriver, and other supplies combined with more banal objects, like a tube of ChapStick, a penny, and the lid of a bottle. Also included is Haendel’s Soapbox #2 (Howard Beach Group), presenting the small box of Cheer detergent as a clever literalization of the word “I'm not sure of anything,” is a small arrow leading to the tentatively promising, “But I have a lot of hope for something.”

The inspiration for Sean Landers’s paintings ranges from elaborations on his own signature, to parodic interpretations of the history of painting, to completely text-based works. Le’Go My Ego (2007), a kind of flow-chart of ideas, allows the viewer to see the paths and cul-de-sacs of Landers’s thought process as he creates a new painting. His words are often a preemptive criticism and undermining of his own work; for example, “Are you cringing yet?” and “I want to make movies.” An uplifting note, next to the words “I’m not sure of anything,” is a small arrow leading to the tentatively promising, “But I have a lot of hope for something.”

Andrew Kuo’s paintings and sculpture are a sometimes riotous attempt to quantify his life and his ideas in the most mundane form of data presentation, the chart. Using varied forms of charts, graphs, and grids, Kuo employs bold graphics and concise, thoughtful language to illuminate with an unsettling empiricism some of the tedious details and central concerns of his life. My Relationship to Art as of May 10, 2008 [Crooked-Mouth Face], which features three separate graphs, is part of a series of paintings that feature multiple charts on related themes. In this work, Kuo has included a bar graph labeled “Twelve Artists I Wish I Was [Solely Based on Their Stuff].” Scaled only with “The Most” at the top of the chart, it is a deceptively straightforward ranking of the contemporary artists Kuo admires and, as the title indicates, wishes he could be.

For this is Killing Me, Haendel is exhibiting thirteen works, including Questions for My Father #1 (Howard Beach Group) (2007), an amusing but uncomfortably intimate glimpse into the artist’s thinking about his father. Studio Still Life #3 offers an array of tools of the trade: a slide, a razor blade, a paintbrush, a screwdriver, and other supplies combined with more banal objects, like a tube of ChapStick, a penny, and the lid of a bottle. Also included is Haendel’s Soapbox #2 (Howard Beach Group), presenting the small box of Cheer detergent as a clever literalization of the word “I'm not sure of anything,” is a small arrow leading to the tentatively promising, “But I have a lot of hope for something.”

For This is Killing Me Bedford created Broken Hand and Cast, monumental versions of the smaller works from the series.
Kalup Linzy
b. 1977, Stuckey, Florida
Lives and works in New York

Kalup Linzy’s video works employ the saccharin melodrama of soap operas and the barbed humor of comedy sketches to unveil the subtexts that permeate our lives—domestic, professional, and public. In Conversations wit de Churen V: As da Art World Might Turn (2006), Linzy turns his attention to the (often) unspoken hopes and fears of artists. Dressed in too-tight women’s clothing and wearing a shiny blonde wig, Linzy portrays Katonya, an emerging artist trying to find love, glory, and gallery representation in the big city.

When Katonya faces what appears to be an unbeatable disappointment, an opening night party in her honor for which no one has shown up, she reads a weepy speech to a non-existent audience. Thanking everybody she wished would have attended, Katonya offers the viewer an unbearable disappointment, an opening night debacle.

In making work under the guise and inspiration from his videos to create this work. Where Do We Go From Here #1 and #4, two whimsical gouaches, evoke the creative talents and oeuvre of Katonya (we see her painting similar works in the video). In making work under the guise and inspiration of Katonya, Linzy develops her from a parodic character into an almost real artist—a version of himself further expanding the already blurred narratives of his work.

In her more recent work Linzy demonstrates a continued interest in the flexibility and variability of meaning. The six photographs from her Prop series (2008) depict small rectangles arranged against a white background. These images suggest the formal possibilities of limited materials and gestures, and they create a subtle almost anthropomorphic narrative. Elegant and lonely, the rectangles and their multiplied shadows, like Linzy’s work about dreams, offer an ambiguous and evocative space for interpretation.

Joe Zane
b. 1971, Utica, New York
Lives and works in Boston

Often combining found and fabricated objects, Joe Zane’s work revolves around failure and success, both imagined and real. Zane (2006), a sculpture of the artist’s own last name, is made to look like a neon sign. Because it is constructed from vinyl tubing, plastic, and wire, the sign will never light up, and its apparent ambition, to put Zane’s name in lights, is rendered unattainable.

Feather in My Cap (2009) evokes a similar combination of confidence and pathos. Piled in a window and comprising two second-place medals accompanied by honorable-mention ribbons (one simply says “participant”), the work is an attempt on behalf of the artist to award himself tangible yet unheroic accolades.

Counter to these displays of failure Zane’s work into seminal art historical texts. Together with his medals, they also suggest the hopeful and potentially self-fulfilling possibility that his work will find its place in (art) history.
Whitney Bedford

Cast 9, 2004
16 3/16 × 13 1/16 in.
Collection of Tony Feher

Cast 2, 2004
16 3/16 × 13 1/16 in.
Collection of Michael Benevento

Broken Hand 9, 2005
16 3/16 × 13 1/16 in.

Broken Hand, 2005
16 3/16 × 13 1/16 in.

Broken Hand, 2009
60 × 84 in.
Cast, 2009
60 × 84 in.
- All mixed media on canvas
- Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects unless otherwise noted

Karl Haendel

Little Legless Longo #5, 2004
Pencil on paper
30 × 22 in.
- Courtesy of the artist, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, and Harris Lieberman, New York

19th Question Mark, 2008
Pencil on paper
30 × 22 in.
- Courtesy of the artist, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, and Harris Lieberman, New York

Faith/Failure (After Florian Maier-Aichen, After Mungo Thompson) ghost version, mirrored, 2004
Unique C-print
51 × 41 in.
- Private collection, Los Angeles

Ripped Scribble #4, 2007
Pencil on paper with staples and MDF frame
59 × 100 in.
- Courtesy of the artist and Harris Lieberman, New York

Studio Still Life #3, 2004
Pencil on paper
80 × 52 in.
- Collection of Pamela and Arthur Sanders, Greenwich, Connecticut

Family Drawing #6, 2007
Pencil on paper
41 × 26 in.

Andrew Kuo

My Relationship to Art as of May 10, 2008 [Crooked-Mouth Face], 2008
Acrylic, Carbon transfer on paper
24 × 18 in.
Every Hour of Friday May 2, 2008 [I Should Have Worked More], 2008
Acrylic, Carbon transfer on paper
24 × 18 in.

What I Fear About Traveling: Being Stranded Alone [Pink], Being Away from Home When Something Bad Happens [Blue], Feeling Lonesome [Green], Getting Lost [Purple], Losing My Wallet [Yellow], Plane Crash [Gray], Losing My Glasses [Orange], Spending All My Money [Dark Blue], 2008
Acrylic, wood
Dimensions variable
- Courtesy of the artist and Taxter and Spengemann, New York

Sean Landers

Le’Go My Ego, 2007
Oil on linen
78 × 96 in.
Collection of Lisa and Steven Tananbaum

Apathy, 2006
Oil on linen
58 × 80 in.
Collection of Elie and Rory Tahari

Kalup Linzy

Conversations with Churen V: As da Art World Might Turn, 2006
DVD, color, sound
11 minutes, 16 seconds
Where Do We Go From Here #1, 2006
Gouache on paper
15 × 19 in.
Where Do We Go From Here #4, 2006
Gouache on paper
15 × 19 in.
- Courtesy of the artist and Taxter and Spengemann, New York

Shana Lutker

Mixed media
49 × 50 × 27 1/2 in.
Dream Book 2003 (Word Version), 2004
Inkjet prints on paper
300 pages, bound
8 1/2 × 11 × 2 1/2 in.
Unlimited Edition
Dream Book 2004 (Word Version), 2005
Inkjet prints on paper
280 pages, bound
8 1/2 × 11 × 2 1/2 in.
Unlimited Edition
Schema (January 11, 2003), 2005
Pen, carbon on paper
30 × 44 in.
Schema (January 16, 2003), 2005
Pen, carbon on paper
30 × 44 inches
- Courtesy of the artist
- Back Cover: Shana Lutker, Schema (January 11, 2003), 2005

Joe Zane

I wished I was a Giant, 2006
Vitrine with various books and periodicals
Not Quite, 2006
Vitrine with various, misshapen heads
Zane, 2006
Vinyl tube, paint, plastic, wire
Feather in My Cap, 2009
Ribbons and medals
- Courtesy of the artist and Carroll and Sons, Boston