Whether we live and work in the country, the suburbs or the city, our daily environment is organized and influenced by constructed objects – houses, stores, office buildings, roads and schools to name just a few. This ever-present built arena influences our outlook, emotions and lives in ways we can only begin to imagine. The five artists presented in Here and There, the inaugural exhibition at Hudson Valley Community College’s new Teaching Gallery, explore, investigate and wrestle with many of the issues surrounding our physical and emotional existence in the human-made landscape of twenty first century America.

One must eat to survive. Hudson Valley Community College faculty member Richard Garrison has noted that Route 4, the very road that leads to our college, offers an astonishing number of fast food joints to the students and workers who travel this corridor. His quasi site-specific series of watercolor drawings combines a near scientific rigor with artistic concept. The result is his Drive-thru Color Scheme series portraying the colors utilized in the signage and graphics of fast food restaurants along Mr. Garrisons’ commute to Hudson Valley. Along with this series of works, Garrison presents Shopping Cart Inertia an ongoing suite of drawings that map his paths as he hunts and gathers provisions for his family in the contemporary wilds of the supermarket aisle. There is a subtle play in Garrison’s work between the humor inherent in both of these bodies of works and the strict rigor of their execution, belying a crushing feeling that one can never quite get away from contemporary commercial culture.

Julia Christensen’s series titled Big Box Reuse takes a possibly more optimistic view of contemporary retail practices. The series tracks the creative rehabilitation of former giant retail store buildings that have ‘gone dark.’ Restored, renewed and re-occupied often by community groups who would have never have had the resources to build such large spaces. The once abandoned Wall Marts, K-marts and you-name-it -marts, have been reborn as churches, schools and even the Spam Museum in Austin, MN. The series presented here, views of the Hong Kong Food Store, is typical of how the needs of a small community, here the immigrant Asian community of East New Orleans, LA, have been met by adapting the cast offs of the majority.

Christensen’s interest in the commercial/retail environment is echoed in Peter Dudek’s decentralized. Using, among other things, a quartet of ubiquitous institutional desks from the college’s own surplus storage area, Dudek has created a temporary world of topographical environments of shifting scale and time frame. While Christensen’s work is clearly about the suburban experience, Dudek builds a decidedly urban environment; desks become monolithic buildings, cut out drawings become parks and marbles become inhabitants, albeit ones much more colorful and playful than their surroundings. Is this a comment on the misguided optimism of utopian architecture or a hopeful portrayal of the triumph of the individual in the face of bureaucratic kitsch, simulacra and banality?

Also confounding our expectations of material and location are Oona Stern’s two pieces, patio and untitled (path). Seeking to mix up our ideas of in and out, natural and manufactured, precious and utilitarian, (they may indeed be walked upon) these works combine familiar but unlikely materials and images. With the many glass walls and...
partitions of the new Administration Building, itself a reference to twentieth century modernist ideas of transparency of governments and administrative departments, Stern’s works call our attention to the arbitrary nature of boundaries both built and imagined.

The work of architecture firm, Architecture + as presented here by architects Arien Cartrette, Anthony Garner and Amy Wong takes the practical development of built space and transforms it into a visual context. Their piece, Crystallization of Design graphically maps the process of developing the actual building that the Teaching Gallery inhabits. From concept to ground breaking to the final handing over to its users, the process of designing and fabricating an object that be both useful and aesthetically pleasing to a myriad of inhabitant is a daunting challenge. Cartrette and Garner have employed a graphical system of notation and tracking to convert and convey the branching lines of decision making and communication required by the architectural process into a powerful representation of time, collaboration compromise.

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