

Walking the Edge — Exhibit Explores 'Between Area' Of Mediums

By KATHLEEN SHAW Daily News-Record
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Ayako Aratani attends the opening reception for Edge Walkers, the latest exhibition at James Madison University Duke Hall Gallery on Monday. Aratani stands in front of her featured artwork, "Roommate Desktop Lamp." The Show features contemporary work from six creators that confront the distinction between art and design.

HARRISONBURG — Edge Walkers, the latest exhibition at James Madison University's Duke Hall Gallery, forces viewers to question the definitions of art, design and craft to discern the meaning and purpose of creation.

Six artists are featured in the gallery with distinctly distinguishable projects that are connected by their intersections across art fields. Exhibition curator Keenan Rowe said nearly 300 people attended Monday night's opening reception for the show, which included a lecture by Tanya Aguiñiga, the keynote artist.

Rowe said the purpose behind the exhibition is to highlight how artists redefine their departments which are normally categorized into distinguished, isolated fields when reality allows for overlap and collaboration within the art mediums.

"It's trying to pull people that really would traditionally be viewed as these very separate fields and really look at how they are taking work and pushing what it means to be a graphic designer or a landscape architect or a furniture designer," Rowe said.

Aguiñiga, who has nine pieces on display in the exhibition, works with natural materials such as alpaca wool and clay to honor her upbringing in Tijuana, Mexico. Her work is designed to facilitate conversations on identity, culture and gender through sometimes deformed basic shapes and organic textures. *Edge Walkers* serves as both a recognition to an unconventional blend of art disciplines and also to National Hispanic Heritage Month, which is celebrated from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15.

The Office of Interior Establishing Exterior is a studio that creates under the discipline of "open-practice" — an intentional resistance to capitalism, strategy and self in exchange for organically occurring work. The studio has two pieces in the show — both made from birdseed — so the art is temporary and destined to eventually be consumed and disappear.

Matt Olson, founder of OOIEE, said the deconstruction of invented barriers between creation and action and existence allows artists to create more fulfilling and purposeful work.

"Less specialization, less strategy, less goal and more love and humility around the things we're excited about," Olson said. "It's kind of based on this ongoing exploration of what self even is in a world where everything is alive."

Other featured artists include Aya Kawaba, a Japanese designer who features colorful Jacquard weavings; Doug Johnston, a Brooklyn-based artist who hand-sculpts with textiles; and Ayako Aratani and Evan Fay, a modern furniture-making duo from Detroit.

Aratani and Fay have two lamps and a chair on display at the gallery. Aratani traveled from Detroit to attend the opening reception and meet visitors. She said craft, art and design are usually discussed independently, but she hopes the show will leave an impression on students to expand their perceptions of how the fields intertwine and what is possible within the mediums.

“I don’t know how many chances they have to see the edge or between area, so we are very interested in the medium area. So if they are starting to think or question: What is this? Is it design or art or craft? That is the impression we want them to have,” Aratani said.

Twisted metal, hairy bowls and colorful tapestries all come together in the exhibition so art can serve the purpose of inciting curiosity and redefining what is accepted as the norm.

“Often people don’t think about the type of work that is in this show as necessarily even being design. I hope that people are challenged to think about what are these objects and why were they created,” Rowe said.

Edge Walkers will remain at Duke Hall until Oct. 13 and is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Tuesday to Saturday. Admission is free and the gallery will remain open until 8 p.m. for October’s First Friday.

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