

This exhibit was curated by Lydia Beachum, Anna Blackman, Rosemary Cruse, Olivia DeAngelis, Elizabeth Gordon, Kylie Jensen, Alexis Larrow, Vivian Newman, Callie Oliveira, Ava Shutze, Caroline Wissig, and Emily Wonders. These Furman University students worked under the direction of Dr. Sarah Archino, Associate Professor of Art History / Department Chair and coordinated with the Matthew Baumgardner Estate.

Since 2019, Baumgardner's art and archives have been studied, documented, and curated by the Furman University Art Department through an ongoing collaboration with his estate, as reflected in their website www.BaumgardnerArchives.com.



Additional information on the artist can be found at www.BaumgardnerArt.com.

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Matt Baumgardner: Winter Metamorphosis

How do the elemental forces of our world change and adapt to winter? It is a time of powerful sensations like cracking ice and roaring fires, when dark nights of crystalline air intensify the glowing stars. In the face of this winter metamorphosis, we turn inward; for many, it is a time of self-reflection and spiritual grounding. With palettes of maroon, purple, red, and navy against the stark white of winter, this show elicits emotions of nostalgia and comfort. Baumgardner's art grounds the viewer in nature, even in a season when everything seems to be in flux.

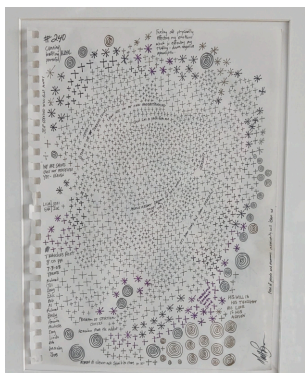
Sift gallery
November 2022 – January 2023

FUArt
Furman University Department of Art

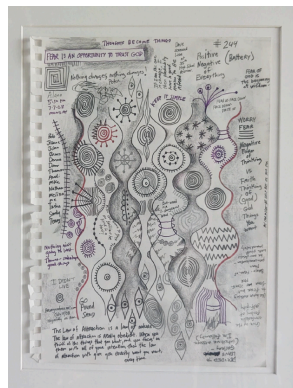
Sift gallery
at McMillan Pazdan Smith
400 Augusta Street, Suite 200
Greenville, SC

Exhibition Checklist

- #22 *Angel Poised*, 1992. Mixed media on birch plywood, 23¾ x 22½ in.
- #27 *Pink*, 1992. Mixed media on birch plywood 27 x 28 in.
- #35 *Snow Waters*, 1992. Mixed media on birch plywood, 27 x 34 1/8 in.
- #134 *Song of Solomon*, 1995. Mixed media on birch plywood, 13¼ x 13¼ in.
- #135 *Fire in the Fog*, 1995. Mixed media on birch plywood, 13½ x 13¾ in.
- #136 *Intimate Flame*, 1995. Mixed media on birch plywood, 13 x 13 in.
- #137 *Fire*, 1995. Mixed media on birch plywood, 13 x 13 in.
- #138 *Fire and Wind*, 1995. Mixed media on birch plywood, 13¼ x 13¼ in.
- #139 *Flame On*, 1995. Mixed media on birch plywood, 13 x 13 in.
- #140 *The Fire Inside*, 1995 Mixed media on birch plywood, 13¼ x 13 3/8 in.
- #141 *Light My Fire*, 1995. Mixed media on birch plywood, 13 x 13 in.
- #142, 1995. Mixed media on birch plywood, 13 x 13 in.
- #240, 2008. Mixed media on Carson 90 lb acid free paper, 12 x 9 in.
- #244, 2008. Mixed media on Carson 90 lb acid free paper, 12 x 9 in.
- El Greco's Angels*, 1993. Mixed media on birch plywood, 16½ x 18¾ in.
- Embers*, 1994. Pure pigment, gypsum, dispersion, solubar, 44 x 41 in.
- Ghost in the City*, 1984. Pigment, aluminum paint, oilstick, acrylic, wall-tex on gessoed rag paper, 30 x 44 in. (Framed: 35½ x 48½ in).
- Mind Tattoo #1*, 1986. India ink, graphite on rag paper, 30 x 22 in. (framed 37 1/8 x 29 1/8 in.)
- Mind Tattoo #2*, 1986. India ink, graphite on rag paper, 30 x 22 in. (framed 37 1/8 x 29 1/8 in.)
- Purple Night*, 1996. Mixed media on paper, 25 x 22 in. (Framed: 30 x 27¼ in)
- Spirits in the Sky # 5*, 2015. Gypsum, Golden Acrylic products, pigment, Lascaux varnish on acid-free lenox paper, 35 x 32 in.
- Symi Series #19*, 1992. Mixed media on paper, 35 x 23 in.



#240+++, 2008



#244(), 2008



Mind Tattoo #1, 1986

car or his high school reunion, we gain insight into Baumgardner's world. In #240+++, the swirl of plus signs, stars, and spirals demonstrate a more disruptive moment, while in #244(), eyes drawn within concentric shapes exhibit Baumgardner's more peaceful spiritual vision. These sketches illuminate the push and pull Baumgardner witnessed between the spiritual world and the natural world in a simple yet powerful way. "Absorbing each of these works on paper fulfills a number of different unspoken needs in me, and my hope is that they speak to you as well."



Mind Tattoo #2, 1986

Among his works on paper are these two pieces torn directly from one of Baumgardner's sketchbooks. Using graphite and ink, he scatters quotes within the curved and spiral patterns that occupy the pages. #240+++ and #244() are tangible images of the idea that "our brains have a constant flow of thought, from the very perverse and negative, to the very sacred and uplifting, from fraction of a second to fraction of a second." As his sketches go from intense thoughts on religion and human nature to random notes about his



Spirits in the Sky # 5, 2015

In *Spirits in the Sky* #5, we find rounded, colorful spirit entities scattering across a dark background that emulates the vastness of the night sky. White dots speckle like stars while cloudy sweeps of bluish yellow tones swirl behind like nebula clouds in space. Each spirit takes on a slightly different personality through color, shape, and the spiraling direction of its movement. In this work, the spirits and sky interact, conveying Baumgardner's perception of the intersecting relationship and ultimate unity between the spiritual and natural worlds. While both nature and spirit can exist separately, the spirits exist in nature just as nature exists within the spirit.

El Greco's Angels uses inspiration from the titular Old Master visionary painter to create a strikingly vivid work. Baumgardner's color palette contrasts bright red with aquamarine blue and dark evergreen, distinguishing *El Greco's Angels* among his birch plywood works. Adding and subtracting layer upon layer, Baumgardner brings to life his round crackly forms, sporadic lines, and complementary colors birthed by inspirations ranging from the Spanish Renaissance to 20th-century vampire-esque literature. Overall, the noisy, messy, and loud origin of *El Greco's Angels* is echoed in the energetic designs and contrasting colors sprawling across its surface. The viewer actively gazes upon the work, fulfilling Baumgardner's hope for a pure enjoyment of art.



#81 *El Greco's Angels*, 1993



Embers, 1994

Embers, created in 1994 (the last painting created in Baumgardner's 70 E. 1st, New York studio), resembles the last remaining sparks of a slowing dying fire, soon to be engulfed by the surrounding darkness. The liveliness and energy of the embers are rendered almost tangible. The vibrant red is a stark contrast to the deep darkness of the black, placing these two strong colors in balanced opposition. *Embers* also represents the spirituality Baumgardner felt in nature and which he sought to communicate through his

work. As one writer remarked, "quite simply put, his work affirms the Unity of Nature."

The pitch black of *Purple Night*, overlaid with overlapping bright purple curving lines, breaks from traditional images of nighttime skies dotted with stars. Baumgardner's lines cross the plane of the heavens, pulling the viewer in and bringing life to this work; they make the viewer feel the movement of the sky. Lighter purple appears in the center, pulling us deeper into the artwork. The black sky is alive with light; the purple seems electric as it dances across the sky, creating a feeling of otherworldliness as the universe merges the simple and soothing night. Rather than viewing the galaxies from afar, *Purple Night* entices the viewer to take a closer look and enter the spiritual world of the cosmos.



Purple Night, 1996



#27 Pink, 1992

One of his birch plywood paintings that showcases his signature "mud," Baumgardner's thick, paste-like paint, *#27 Pink* layers shades of navy, indigo, and purple. Carving into these strata, he created and played with textures that evoke nature, the elements, bodies, and energies. This work, presumably named for the colors of the carved forms, features networks of lines that are inconsistent in both thickness and color. Some of these are smooth, while others are jittery – details that emphasize their organic quality. Baumgardner described

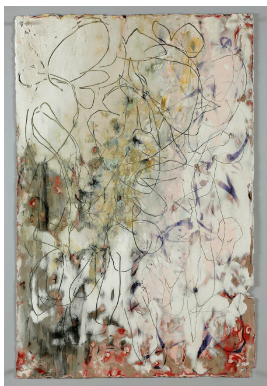
his process of painting with mud to be one of constant addition and subtraction in which he continuously layered and excavated paint until he was pleased with the result, an affair that could take months to complete.

Ghosts in the City was created in the 1980s, as Baumgardner explored aspects of Abstract Expressionism – seen here through the thick, silvery, brighter brush strokes that inhabit one side of the painting. Contrasted against the dark, plain, and spatial side of the canvas, he creates a non-objective form that recalls the gestures of Action Painting and the graffiti of Street Art, both deeply connected to the urban streets of New York where Baumgardner painted this image.



Ghosts in the City, 1984

In this particular painting, Baumgardner explores the potential of spirituality in a cityscape – one that differs from his later, more natural spiritual images. We see here a darker and more elusive tone illustrating what one author described as work "guided by a strong spiritual center that was occasionally tested by the dark demons that lounge in our creative souls."



Symi Series #19, 1992

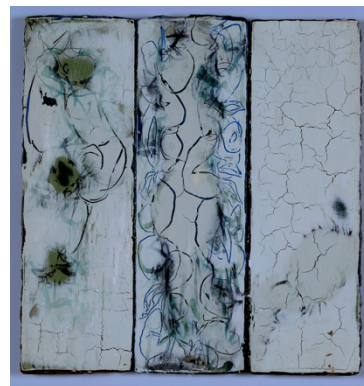
One in a series of twenty paintings named for a family trip to the Greek island of Symi, this painting conjures the texture and depth of ancient ruins. The light palette evokes an environment baked by the brilliant sunlight and contrasting with hints of bold color that emerge from the heavily-worked surface. Painted on paper, Baumgardner first experimented with gypsum in this series, allowing him to build up the forms and carve back into them to reveal glimpses of layers beneath.

This triptych, as the title suggests, is an abstract representation of snow and water. The two outer panels feature a similar color palette of white that has been altered with tones of green, black, and brown. Baumgardner's iconic linework and layering techniques are especially prominent in these two panels, which also use his original 'mud' medium, a combination of pigmented gypsum (joint compound). Baumgardner then drew through the layers of this unique substance, revealing color through the under layers. The middle panel also displays Baumgardner's signature craquelure or cracked appearance. Together, these techniques create a winter sensation of snow and icy water.



#35 Snow Waters, 1992

Throughout his career, Baumgardner was heavily influenced by the four elements: earth, air, fire, and especially water. An avid swimmer, he studied how the lines of water reflections gyrated and morphed into new patterns and shapes. This piece focuses on the movement of water in the winter months through abstracted representations of snow and water. The brown splotches are reminiscent of the snow as it mixes with the earth, while the black lines represent Baumgardner's study of water's movement. This piece conjures feelings of peace, even in the face of changing seasons of nature - or life.



#22 Angel Poised, 1992

Baumgardner's studios were not only a space for creating works of art, they were also places of spirituality and natural inspiration. His deep connection to Christianity and nature's inherent spirituality is apparent even in his titles. This painting is composed of three different birch plywood pieces that form a triptych, a structure reminiscent of the religious altarpieces found in churches. Swirling across the work, the glyphs record a stream of consciousness through drawing without rational thinking. This process of automatic drawing, popularized by the Surrealists, gives a voice and value to the subconscious mind which infuses the work with a spiritual and self-reflective quality. From the white background, deep blue glyphs pierce through the snowy environment like waters of a lake peeking through the winter snow.

Baumgardner viewed his artwork as noumena: "neither paintings, nor sculptures; but quite simply real objects." Baumgardner's cubes are experiential objects that are sculpture and painting combined, moving his "mud" and grid works into three-dimensional space. All six sides of the cubes have layers of paint, Baumgardner's "glyphs," and are full of symbolism, creating many possibilities for display and interpretation. The viewer notices that "each rotation brings the experience of not knowing the other three sides" as they move around the cube. *Cube #8* stands out among Baumgardner's cube series—the moody black, orange, and red color scheme and jagged "glyphs" evoke a dark, dystopian scene. One face of Cube #8 depicts a crowd staring up at a screen, and an adjacent side has a series of squares carved into the surface forming a portal that the glyphs also carved into the cube seem to be sucked into. The unsettling imagery combined with the colors of the paint evoke classic dystopian sci-fi movies and novels from the 80s.



Cube #8, 2011



#140 *The Fire Inside*, 1995



#141 *Light My Fire*, 1995



#142, 1995



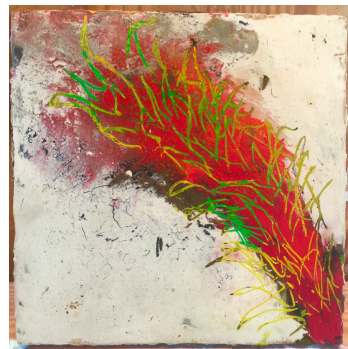
#136 *Intimate Flame*, 1995



#138 *Fire and Wind*, 1995



#139 *Flame On*, 1995



#137 *Fire*, 1995



#135 *Fire in the Fog*, 1995



#134 *Song of Solomon*, 1995

This series of nine fire paintings reflects Baumgardner's ongoing connection to the natural elements. Using a blow dryer to heat, dry, and crack the pigments and materials on the surface of the wood, Baumgardner created not just representations of fire but physical evidence of fire itself. In doing so, he not only shows the flame but suggests how its heat has impacted the layers beneath the surface. Emanating from the flames are carved markings that reveal layers of greens and yellows that give the flames a sense of life as they reach outward. Thickly layered with his signature "mud," these panels reflect a dynamic, transformation of elements that evokes the ferocity of the flame.