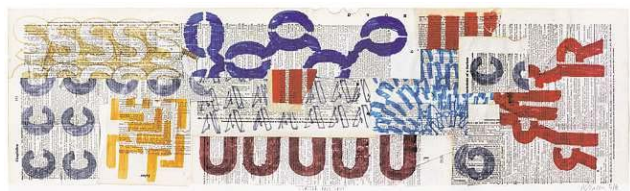


ZEST



Drew Bacon's "Stutter and Spill 5," a collage on paper, is among works on view at Hiram Butler Gallery.

# A young artist makes a splash with his first show

By Molly Glentzer

What are the chances that a 26-year-old artist, even a very talented one, would be given his first solo show at the venerable Hiram Butler Gallery, whose stable of A-list artists includes the luminaries James Turrell and Michael Petry?

And how often do you sell out any show, Butler was asked. "Never."

That has been the amazing good fortune of Drew Bacon, a casually genteel Houstonian whose first show, "Stutter and Spill," has done anything but since it opened a few weeks ago.

Bacon, who focused on painting as a student at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, said the show's title reflects how he felt when he was creating a stop-action video and its related collages.

The video runs on a 15-minute loop through two projectors that create a 10-foot-long horizontal slice on the wall. It reads like a constantly evolving mosaic of drawings in a controlled palette of blue, red and ochre. Made with pages from an old dictionary, the drawings lead through the alphabet, letter by letter.

"I did a marker drawing on each page with a stencil, photographed them incrementally, then strung those images together. Then, in a motion-graphics program, I made this composition, which is copy and pasted," Bacon explained.

"The scale varies. It's a digital medium, so it's totally elastic. You can do whatever. That's what makes it hard to finish, because there's so many possibilities."

Imagine a video by the great South African artist William Kentridge, only done with a whiff of Abstract Expressionism instead of a narrative.

"I had this professor who was so thick on ABEK, he made us bow down to Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. He sent us to MoMA all the time, and we had to look really hard at that," Bacon said.

He was into skateboarding, not technology, as a teen. He didn't even take his first spin with PhotoShop until his junior year of college. But then it snowballed.

"I have a real sentiment for painting. But getting out of school, I realized that while I spent a lot of time in museums, I also spent a lot of time on the Internet looking at peeps. I could see hundreds of thousands of paintings on the Internet. It made me want to be a painter that's a part of that information



Molly Glentzer / Houston Chronicle

## Stutter and Spill

**When:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday  
**Where:** Hiram Butler Gallery, 4520 Blossom  
**Tickets:** Free; 713-863-7097, hirambutler.com

age, the wave we're going in," Bacon said.

An "old and mysterious" 1930s Webster's dictionary he found as a sophomore at Pratt turned out to be an early muse. He liked that it was an "obsolete" object but didn't know what he could do with it.

He went through about 100 pages, drawing on them and trying to figure out a stop-motion video process. He posted one-minute compositions on Facebook, feeling great if they got five "likes." But that got old fast because he realized how cheap images are on the Internet.

"You inhale them at an alarming rate," he said.

"I had this constellation logic about what I draw. It would refer back to the page but take on some words that I was writing on it. I spent eight or nine months on that, and it was a total tallsip. I couldn't finish it. It's a failed work sitting in my hard drive. I was building lots of puzzle pieces but couldn't actually make the puzzle."

Bacon struggled eight months to make "Creation Myth," an amazing, seven-minute narrative animated stop-action film about the creation and the destruction of the world. It's still posted on YouTube.

"All my early learning curves are in that piece," Bacon said. "It's got sound and music and all that; I got completely over it."

Most importantly, he realized that if he wanted to make more than 10 animated drawings over his lifetime, he'd have to find a faster way to work. He'd make a mark, step way back to shoot it, step in, draw some more, step back again and so on. A minute's worth of stop-action video can contain thousands of such moments.

Bacon built a drawing desk with a green screen,

so now he shoots from above after he completes each part of an animated drawing. And he found a better dictionary to play with — a big, thick Webster's from about 1912. That became the source material for "Stutter and Spill."

He didn't design it for Butler's space, but when they decided to project it there through two channels, he had to learn more. "I had software like what mega-churches use to manage

their media outlets. It was a great burden to understand the technological infrastructure enough to make solid-state video from that," Bacon said. "They come in and just flip this on, and it's going. You have these little half-computers up there. They're like feral computers; you just plug them in and they do their thing. They're funny devices."

Bacon wants his videos to "sit and act" like paintings, he said. "I never want to have a piece of video art that's kept behind a curtain in a tiny room."

He sliced up the physical pages, reassembling them into the collages that hang on the gallery's opposite wall.

"I like to create this tension between a physical work and a work that's made of robots and pixels. That dual processing is like the way we live," Bacon said. He don't know what the collages will look like when he's making the video, and vice versa. "I consider it a continuum," he said.

Bacon came home from New York three years ago partly because he was tired of the starving artist lifestyle. He comes from a high-performing family, the son of an investment banker and a retired chef, with a sister who's a financial consultant.

## Artist Drew Bacon in front of his video "Stutter and Spill"

His family wasn't pressuring him, he said, "but I try to treat my work the way they treat their work."

His parents must have always known he'd be an artist. "My dad would explain real estate stuff to me when I was growing up. We'd look at a map, and he'd say, 'It's just like a painting,'" Bacon said. "Both of my parents could always bend things and make them relate to whatever I was into. There's always this attitude that 'something is just like something else, but different.' The structure and the way that I think is very informed by that nuance. It's part of my family's culture."

He met Butler at a Christmas party two years ago and invited the dealer to visit his studio.

Yeah, sure, Butler said. "I'm about to leave for the Christmas holidays. I'll be back in two weeks; let's get together then."

At 8 a.m., exactly two weeks later, Butler's phone rang. "That made a big impression. It meant he was serious, organized and responsible," Butler said.

Further surprised by the deal draftsmanship he'd seen in Bacon's studio, Butler — an expert in works on paper — bought one of the artist's collages immediately after seeing it, also impressed with the related video.

"I all delighted my mind and eye instantly," Butler said. "Videos have become such a part of art but they drive me crazy because you walk in and know you'll have to be there 20 minutes to get it. Or you walk during the middle of it. Or you're at the end and you have to wait for it to rewind. I thought this was so brilliant because no matter where you come in on it, you get it."

Bacon's first solo exhibition experience has been a dream. Now he will have to keep delivering, although it sounds like he's prepared.

"I like the format of the dual process, when you're making physical things in traditional media but using a palette that creates digital media. I'll continue with that. I've invested a lot of time into it, and a lot of failed work," he said. "I may emphasize found artifacts more as a point of departure, reconstituting it into something that's like a collage appropriation. I don't think it will ever be just video. I have big dreams of giant projectors and 10 projectors."

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Richard Shotwell / Associated Press

SPOKEN

*"I did not go speechless; I went breathless. And I just said to myself, 'My dear, you had better start breathing. Otherwise you are not going to be here to accept this incredible honor.'"*

Actress Cately Tyson, 90, who learned last week she will be recognized at the 38th annual Kennedy Center Honors in December

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