READY FOR TAKEOFF

Boston's art schools boast many notable alums. Painter Cy Twombly and photographer Nan Goldin studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts. Painter Brice Marden went to Boston University. Photographer William Wegman attended the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. Will any of this year’s Master of Fine Arts degree candidates soar to the top? Here’s your chance to spot them early: Many have work in thesis shows this spring. From a performance artist dressed as a '60s stewardess to an Expressionist painter, here are six of the shows’ most promising artists. BY CATE MCQUAID | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

ROBERT HERNANDEZ, 31
Mixed-media artist, School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Tufts University

Hernandez used to stay at home reading comic books while his brother and cousins were out making graffiti in the streets of Los Angeles. Now images from graffiti, comic books, Disney cartoons, CNN, and fashion magazines swirl together in his drawings on wood panels as if in a fever dream.

"It's like news sources," Hernandez explains. "One story is overtaken by another story is overtaken by another. It's about the saturation of information." When a Disney-type figure leans over bomb victims in one work, or the giant sunglasses on a model echo the lines of a cartoon, pointy associations make that information coalesce into haunting commentaries.

RON NADARSKI, 31
Painter, Boston University

An Expressionist painter who grew up north of San Francisco, Nadarski came east for the community, institutional support, and history. He points out that Franz Kline attended BU in the 1930s. Kline’s studies on the pages of phone books inspired Nadarski’s recent work, in which he starts with a grid on yellow, suggesting the yellow pages.

"I got into using yellow as something to react against," he says. "It's so bright, you want to cover it up. It makes me paint faster, to make actions and not decisions." Those actions include calligraphic gestures and sometimes washes of color. "The blue," he says, "that's driving over the Golden Gate Bridge and looking out across the bay."
ALEXIA MELLOR, 33
Multimedia artist, School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Tufts University

As a girl in upstate New York, "I wanted to be a stewardess," Mellor says. As an artist, when she has an idea, she finds the medium to suit it: performance art, video, photography, painting, installation. For her thesis show, Mellor made a 1960s-era stewardess's uniform, donned it, and went out into the world. She performed the flight-safety routine in public, set other tasks for herself, and photographed what ensued. The photos, in a pattern recalling those on a flight-safety card, entice the viewer to devise a story.

"I was embodying the presence—the uniform and nostalgia—of this icon, interacting with the public," she says. "It was fun to see the reactions."

KELLI ELISE THOMPSON, 27
Painter, School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Tufts University

Thompson was living in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina hit. She lost all her work. Home with her family in northern Louisiana, "I sat around and cried for a couple of weeks," Thompson says. "Then I spent three or four months making all new work."

She paints larger-than-life portraits of women that play on pop-culture and art history. Her models have combed-tihers poses, but Thompson has punched up their creamy skin into lard, heightened reds and peaches. "I'm playing with the tension between attraction and repulsion," Thompson says. "The scale makes them more intense, more repulsive, almost creepy."

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