One day, there it just was in the park, where the metal-rooster thing used to be. The rooster had a sign that said, "do not climb on" and another saying "do not touch." But this one didn’t have any sign, and it looked like something you could maybe climb up or slide down, something you could fall into or bounce off of without hurting. The second we were out of the van we were running toward it, arms outstretched, Hannah in front because she’s older and fast, but me not far behind, and then Oscar and Liv. Hannah’s mom was still in the van, talking on the phone about paying for camp with a credit card, and I already had my hands on the thing’s smoothness, my cheek pressed against its whiteness. We couldn’t climb it, not even Hannah with her thick-soled shoes and her monkey legs. I couldn’t get my arms around it, and it didn’t swing or move or do anything. So after not very long, Hannah’s mom still on the phone, we four sat on the wood chips in front of it, or maybe behind it, looking up.

“It’s an eyeball,” Hannah said, picking at the bite on her leg. “No. It’s a whole corner of a face. The eye’s in the middle, an eyebrow hanging over. See? He’s got ears like a pig, and you can only see one. Maybe he’s looking at you through a hole in the fence.”

“It’s a cartoon bubble,” Oscar said, still out of breath from running. “Like when someone’s talking, the words in it. It fell upside down, got dented.”

There was no fight in his voice, and Hannah smiled. We were quiet, just the sounds of cars going by and the sprinkler ch-ch-ch-ing on the other side of the park.

“It’s a dollop,” I said. I didn’t mean to make it funny, but when they laughed, it was funny to me. “Dollop dollop dollop.” I said, louder each time, and then Liv said it, too, and I laughed so hard I leaned back, my braid in the grass, and Hannah told me to watch out for chiggers.

“A dollop of whipped cream,” I said, sitting up straight, so happy I was almost singing.

“I wish I could get inside it,” Oscar said.

Hannah’s mom walked toward us, yawning, phone in one hand, keys in the other. She was nice. She let us eat in the van, the stereo playing music. It was kid music, but it didn’t bother her. She just drove, like she didn’t even hear it.

She looked at the white thing and frowned.

“What the heck is it?” she asked, like she didn’t really want to know.

So no one answered.

“That’s what I thought.” She rolled her eyes, checked her watch. “I should make whatever. Call it art.”

Laura Moriarty
Art of Our Time

Selections from the Ulrich Museum of Art

Patricia McDonnell and Emily Stamey

With contributions by

Toby Kamps, Laura Moriarty,
Antonya Nelson, Timothy R. Rodgers,
and Robert Silberman

Photo-essay by Larry Schwarm

Urich Museum of Art | Wichita State University
in association with the University of Washington Press
Toby Kamps is senior curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. He has organized exhibitions on the work of Vanessa Beecroft, Ellsworth Kelly, and Claes Oldenburg as well as such themed exhibitions as Small World: Dioramas in Contemporary Art (2000), Lateral Thinking: The Art of the 1990s (2002), and The Old, Weird America (2008).

Patricia McDonnell is director of the Ulrich Museum of Art. Her scholarly focus is upon European and American modernism, and she is a leading specialist on the painter Marsden Hartley. Her publications include Marsden Hartley: American Modern (1997), On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art (2002), and Painting Berlin Stories (2003).

Laura Moriarty is the author of three novels and the recipient of several literary awards. Before becoming a full-time writer, she was a social worker. Moriarty lives in Lawrence, Kansas, where she teaches creative writing at the University of Kansas.

Antonya Nelson has written three novels and published six short-story collections. She contributes often to the New Yorker and the New York Times Book Review. Nelson holds the Cullen Chair in Creative Writing at the University of Houston. Her award-winning novel, Loving to Tell (2000), takes place in her hometown of Wichita, and her forthcoming novel, Bound, is set there as well.

Timothy R. Rodgers is director of the Scottsdale (Arizona) Museum of Contemporary Art. Formerly chief curator at the New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe, he is involved in a range of writing and curatorial projects. His scholarly concentration is on American early modernism.

Robert Silberman is an associate professor of art history at the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities campus. His chief scholarly interests have been photography, film, and contemporary art. Silberman collaborated with former New York Times photography critic Vikki Goldberg on the companion volume for the 1999 PBS series American Photography: A Century of Images.

Larry Schwarm is a professor of art at Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, and a nationally regarded photographer whose work has been shown at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. His 2003 book, On Fire: Larry Schwarm, won the Honickman Book Award and Prize.


Ulrich Museum of Art Advisory Board, 2009–10

Carol Wilson, Chair
Joan S. Beem, Vice Chair
Martin Bauer
Kelly Callen
Ronald Chisholm
J. Eric Engstrom
Dr. Alan Feuer
Sonia Gettner
Edward Hargrave
Lou Heldman
Tish Higgins
Jacque Kouri
Dr. George Lucas
Nancy Martin
Mike Michaelis
Jane C. McHugh
Chris F. Paulsen-Polk
Bruce Schreck
Shoko Kato Sevart
Chris Shank
Dwayne Shannon
Ann Townsend

Ex-Officio
Ted D. Ayres
Dr. Elizabeth King
John Moore
Dr. Patricia McDonnell
Dr. Gary C. Miller
Dr. Rodney Miller
Dr. Martha Shawver

Ulrich Museum of Art Staff

Linda Doll, Assistant Director of Finance and Management
Aimees Geiss, Curator of Education
Mark Janzen, Registrar and Collection Manager
Angela Lemine, Administrative Specialist
Dr. Patricia McDonnell, Director
Kevin Mullins, Curator of Exhibitions
Dr. Emily Stamey, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art
Teresa Veesey, Public Relations Manager