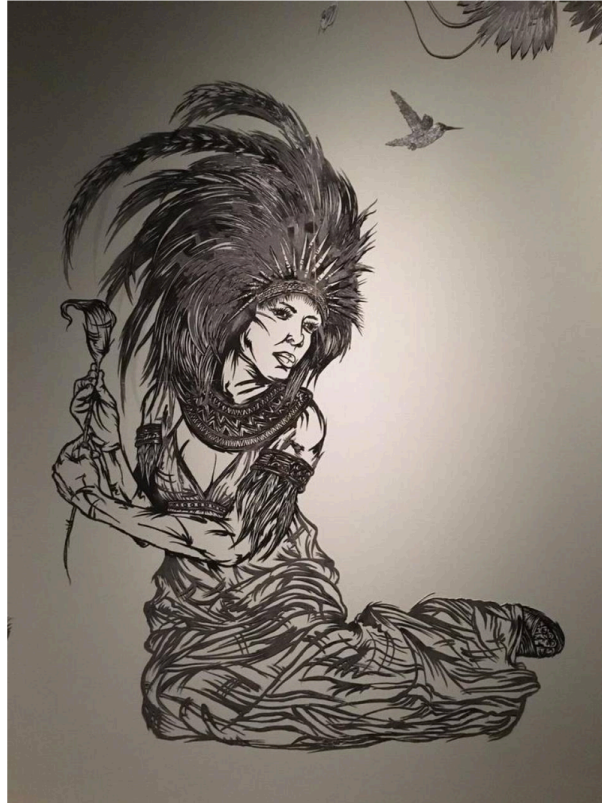


# The Herald-Sun

## Transforming hurricane wreckage into art



Mathew Curran's drawing "Without War Paint" is on view at CAM Raleigh. **Courtesy of the artist** - Submitted

BY BLUE GREENBERG  
*Correspondent*

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"Installation: Leonardo Drew," through June 11; "Boris Bidjan Saberi: O-11," through May 7; "Without War Paint: Mathew Curran," through May 7, at Contemporary Art Museum (CAM), 409 W. Martin St., Raleigh.

Some people get charged up watching a Duke-Carolina basketball game, others from a brisk walk in the park. Mine comes from art that has a new twist and makes me think. That is what happened to me this week at CAM. Leonardo Drew (b. 1961) has created an installation using materials gathered from demolished homes left by Hurricane Matthew. Boris Bidjan Saberi (b. 1978) is a men's fashion designer, and 11 of his fashion investigations plus a video of his Paris runway shows are in this one-of-a-kind museum-fashion show. Mathew Curran (b.1979) presents intricate cut paper objects made from hand-made paper stencils, stencils he uses until they fall apart.

Drew happened to be in town for a special preview night and we talked about “43 X,” his installation. The number is a catalogue designation and serves as a title. He said he has done over 200 installations, some small, but most are mural size or larger. “43X” is site specific. Drew asked the CAM staff to gather wood from houses destroyed in Wake County by Hurricane Matthew and paint them black. He suggested they invite a group of pre-teens to help him assemble the wood.

“I had about 10 kids here and I told them to think of themselves as a hurricane and throw the pieces at the wall as hard as they could. They had a ball and the arrangement is pretty much theirs,” Drew said. In two vitrines across the room are cast paper sculptures of toys, like stuffed animals, trucks, a gun in a holster. He said the sculptures tell us people were also destroyed. Using backdrops of sheer plastic painted with large splashes of black, the wood leans against them like a clean-up after a storm.

Drew was born in Tallahassee, Florida, and grew up in a housing project in Bridgeport, Connecticut. There was a huge garbage dump outside his window. He showed me pictures of other installations, and I felt his work is not so much about specific disasters or about social injustices as it is about how natural materials like cotton, wood, rusted iron and paper which he may subject to burning, oxidation or decay, can become art. From the time he was 13, he wanted to be an artist and found his models in Norman Rockwell and comic books, like Marvel. His “ah-ha” moment came when he saw some black and white reproductions of Jackson Pollock’s paintings in a book at the local library. “It ruined me for traditional art,” Drew said. So he headed toward art school, first to Parson’s and then on to a degree at Cooper Union.

Since he has been working with big installations for quite a while, I asked what is next and he said it is China to learn how to make porcelain. He makes his second trip this summer and will begin a project there. He said in art school he studied every technique they taught. Recently he learned how to make paper sculpture and now is going to find out about porcelain from the masters. His work is in important collections, like Washington’s Hirshhorn, the Tate in London and the Fogg at Harvard. In one week he is off to San Francisco’s De Young Museum to do an installation in its entry gallery. Drew’s statements are about nature and how it manages to flourish despite what man or the elements do to it. “43X” is certainly about rebirth and hope.

Saberi fashions men’s clothes from cotton, canvas and leather; leather is his fashion signature. Eric Gaard, CAM’s exhibition director and the curator of the Saberi show, took me through the collection and gave me a thorough lesson in men’s avant-garde fashion. The show has 11 garments which are experimental. Gaard said the designer is always trying to find something new for leather. In “#6” he tanned horse skin to make a jacket, which was body molded, and then dip-dyed in a copper bath for 12 hours. The copper coating began to flake and so this particular experiment did not work.

Gaard explained most of the leather garments are quite rigid, requiring the wearer to walk in a certain way. Stitching is part of the design and makes one think of scarring rather than decoration. The number 11 appears on every garment, like a protective fetish. If the wearer is about the same size as Saberi, then the garment has been molded to Saberi's body and it becomes a kind of cult uniform. (Gaard called them "Safari Warriors.") The piece de resistance is a pair of silver boots, made from horse skin and dip dyed in a silver bath for 24 hours. They are gorgeous. In the runway videos, the young models do walk a certain way and look like they are off on a post-apocalyptic journey. A famous customer is Brad Pitt.

Curran, is an academically trained artist, with a degree in fine art from UNC Greensboro; he found his voice through tagging, pasting and stenciling in public places. He was born in Northamptonshire, England, and came to the States as a teenager. His early years were influenced by American teen skateboarding culture. Transitioning from street art to a dedicated studio space has helped him to explore a broader visual language, which, for this show, is a rich display of cut paper animals and plants in nature, sparked by two Native American figures.

The image begins in ink then changes into stencils by hand cutting paper. He layers the stencils repeatedly until they disintegrate. The gallery has framed images on one side and a mural on the other. In one picture, a hand holds a flower toward a bird delicately poised on a floating plant. The center of the room is covered with the broken stencils; it is as if the artist is making room for something new.

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