

Peponides, Meropi. "From College to Collages," *Daily Bruin*, 12 January 2006.

As I sat in Brenna Youngblood's studio among thousands of photo clippings, observing what has emerged from the chaos, she apologized for the mess. "Write that it was pristine," she said with a short laugh. But out of this colorful assortment of clippings, the elements of the Hammer Projects' next exhibit have taken shape.

Youngblood is a photo-collage artist in her third and final year of the photography MFA program at UCLA. Though she began the program solely as a photographer, through use of her studio space and by being surrounded by artists of different mediums, she has expanded her work into photographic collages, occasionally using other mediums such as paint.

The Hammer Projects are a series of exhibitions that focus on lesser-known artists, particularly within the L.A. community, who exhibit promise for the future. As a graduating UCLA student having had little of her work previously displayed, Youngblood was a prime candidate for the series.

"Her work is new – it's innovative," said James Elaine, curator of the upcoming exhibit at the UCLA Hammer Museum, which opens Jan. 14. "She is using photography as a base, then taking her medium and reinventing it for herself."

Youngblood's art reflects the world around her, as she draws from her surroundings as well as current events for material and inspiration. A piece reflecting the tragedy caused by Hurricane Katrina and the national reaction to these events will be featured in the exhibit, along with other works she hopes will force people to question aspects of the modern world.

"I want people to look at this and ask themselves, 'Where am I in this picture?'" Youngblood said, looking at another collage that will be featured at the Hammer Museum.

"I strive to make pieces of art that are a bit difficult to enter. I don't want anything to be too easy to understand. There are a lot of things going on socially that are difficult and overwhelming, and I want my work to act the same way, reflecting those things."

In an attempt to describe how she began working with photography, Youngblood said, "I've always taken photos. Everyone has something they do to get through the day, and this is mine. It's just a reaction to things around me."

After finishing her undergraduate degree at California State University, Long Beach in 2002, Youngblood applied to a few different graduate programs and was accepted to UCLA. She credits fellow artists, an accomplished faculty and the program's annual open studios as key to her success.

Open studios take place each February at the building in which several MFA artists have their studio space. This is an opportunity for the artists to display their work and meet with professors throughout the day to discuss their progress.

In the evening the studios are open to the public, and gallery and museum curators come searching for new talent. This is how Elaine first discovered Youngblood's work, and he has been following her artistic progress ever since.

"I was very taken by her work and thought that she would benefit from displaying her work in a laboratory-type environment," he said. "The Hammer Projects series is an opportunity for the artist to make work for an exhibit with no commercial influence, with no strings attached."

UCLA's MFA art program gives emerging artists such as Youngblood valuable exposure to curators. In this case, Youngblood's exposure resulted in an exhibition at a critically-acclaimed museum.

"I didn't really do anything," Youngblood said about how she was selected for the project series. She was, in fact, approached by curators at the Hammer Museum who had been following her work through open studios and the MFA program. She began her work for this exhibit in November.

Although Youngblood acknowledges the slightly inaccessible nature of her work, she does not hesitate to explain it to anyone who asks. The exhibit will feature 10 pieces of work that she says are a compilation of her individual experiences and a reflection of those experiences in the world today.

"There are a lot of personal things that expand into cultural things," she said. "A lot of my work is about being ignored as a human being, being alienated."

Despite her admitted sense of alienation, Youngblood is well on her way to finding a place for herself in the art world.