

INTRODUCTION

The *Garden Statement Project* grew out of the simple idea of curating an exhibition of work by New Jersey artists who deal with issues specific to the state. At the most basic level, this would seem to be a straightforward regional concept, defined by the geography of New Jersey, but from a more complex viewpoint, one must ask what is meant by a regional identity in this transnational world of rapid travel and instant communication. Many New Jersey artists were born in one place, grew up in another, and went to school somewhere else. Although they may live in New Jersey today, their influences likely derive from an infinite variety of sources. Unlike artists of just half a century ago, the artists participating in the *Garden Statement Project* have access to artwork produced all over the world, from virtually all cultures and all time periods.

At Kean University, the challenge posed by this quest reflects a paradox inherent in the student body itself. The university is located just fifteen miles from New York City, and we boast proudly of having one of the top five most diverse student populations in the United States, with students from nearly seventy countries. As a state institution, however, we have a regional mission as well. The *Garden Statement Project* is a celebration of this contradiction, which is a reality we all deal with. These artists do address issues specific to New Jersey, but in a universal sense their ideas could be altered and executed nearly anywhere in the world. As it should be, life reflects art, and the *Garden Statement Project* successfully reflects life itself.

As we sought out artists for the project, we sent a call for proposals throughout the state, and six artists were chosen; Pat Brentano, Rachael Faillace, Marco Muñoz Jaramillo, Michelle Mechanic, Joseph Gerard Sabatino, and Rocco Scary. Each artist's direction is formed and supported by critical observations of his or her environment with social and sometimes political considerations, and their ideas are translated into visually beautiful and captivating work.

The *Garden Statement Project* urges the viewer to be more observant and more concerned with the issues that directly affect and reflect on us as New Jersey citizens in a global community. On behalf of Kean University, I thank the artists for generously sharing their most creative and vulnerable selves. For the installation of this show, we are grateful to our gallery assistants Diana Palermo, Josh Green, and Afieya Kipp. Special thanks go to Kean University President Dawood Farahi, Vice President Jeffrey Toney, and George Arasimowicz, Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts. We appreciate their support for our growing exhibition program and for the opportunity to investigate the social, political and environmental issues of the Garden State through art.

Neil Tetkowski

Director of University Galleries