CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

CENTENNIAL ALUMNI EXHIBITION

JANUARY 23 — FEBRUARY 24, 2012

JOHN CYR

SHEILA GALLAGHER

MATTHEW GELLER

KATHY KING

EMILY LUCE

JEDEDIAH MORFIT
“It is the aim of the department to offer work which will be of general cultural value to all students, and will afford the major student foundations for later professional work.”

— Connecticut College Course Catalog, 1925

WITH THESE WORDS, Connecticut College’s Department of Art introduced its goals as an integral part of a liberal arts education. From the start, the small college’s first faculty included three in studio art, a strong statement in itself. The first course catalog announcement from 1915 lists five art courses that students could elect: Principles of Design, Freehand Drawing and Painting, Mechanical Drawing, Ceramics, and Photography. Over the decades the offerings varied, but always affirmed an unwavering commitment to the visual arts, recognizing their ability to actively foster creative solutions both to problems in the present and to those not yet conceived. Today’s students benefit from this tradition, working with a faculty who would still identify with the original aims of the department.

Now this means teaching in both traditional and emerging areas of inquiry, implementing the latest in technologies while attending to the time-honored craft of the artist.

To help celebrate Connecticut College’s Centennial, the Department of Art is pleased to present this exhibition of six distinguished alumni artists: John Cyr ’03, Sheila Gallagher ’89, Matthew Geller ’76, Kathy King ’90, Emily Luce ’97 and Jedediah Morfit ’96. All have continued their studies beyond their “Great Beginnings” at Connecticut College to be granted advanced degrees and establish professional practices in their fields.

Art students at Connecticut College learn in a rich and varied intellectual environment while engaging broad curricular requirements. The work of these alumni artists does not fall into neat compartments or categories; it exhibits instead the kind of porous boundaries one sees when many and diverse ideas come together in the creative mind. They are curious, intellectually nimble, unafraid to question and test boundaries. Not one of these artists has produced art like their teachers. They have not emulated a style; they have been influenced by the process of artistic inquiry to produce their own distinctive, engaging work, the product of logic, emotion, intuition, craftsmanship and creative leaps of faith.

— Ted Hendrickson
Associate Professor of Art
Coordinator, Centennial Alumni Exhibition
Ansel Adams’ Developer Tray, 2011, archival pigment print.
FROM THE mid-19th century until today, silver gelatin printing has been one of the most utilized photographic processes. From classic reportage to fine art photography, the majority of it was performed in a black-and-white darkroom until the mid-1970s. As recently as 2000, black-and-white darkroom classes still served as the location for introduction to photography courses. The digital advances in photography over the past 10 years have been remarkable. I am photographing available developer trays so that the photography community will remember specific, tangible printing tools that have been a seminal part of the photographic experience for the past 100 years. By titling each tray with its owner’s name, I reference the historical significance of these objects in a minimal manner that evokes thought and introspection about what images have passed through each individual tray.

STUDYING AT CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

I have nothing but fond memories of being an art major at Connecticut College. The countless hours that I spent in Cummings as an undergrad helped spark the artistic interests that I have today. After completing the requirements in drawing, painting and sculpture over the first three years at Connecticut College, I was able to concentrate on my main area of interest: photography. Working with my photography professor senior year, I created a series of textural, urban landscapes of New London and its surroundings. Art department critiques as well as individual meetings helped me greatly throughout the course of my senior year in fine-tuning my compositions, subject matter, editing and sequencing. My education at Connecticut College set the course for a career in the arts. After graduation, the skills that I had learned prepared me to work at a custom black-and-white printing lab in New York City for six years, attend the MFA program at the School of Visual Arts, and start my own business as a professional printer and photographer in Brooklyn, N.Y.
Daily Calendar Mandala, 2009, digital image on synthetic silk
Sheila Gallagher
School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MFA, 1996
The Cooper Union, New York City, Continuing Education, 1990-1992
Connecticut College, BA, 1989

The Works
exhibited here take as their subject my troubled relationship with time. I want to live like a monk (or at least be able think in geological time), but my everyday reality is closer to that of an overcaffeinated air traffic controller averting disaster every 15 seconds. Working with some of the sacred art forms and meditational tools of Buddhism — the Lotus Sutra chant and the Kalachakra Mandala — I explore what happens when a western subjectivity rubs up against another wisdom tradition. Examined together, the work reflects a longing for spiritual experience and is a humorous documentation of the mundane chafing against the desire for the eternal.

“Daily Calendar Mandala” follows the rigorous geometry of the Kalachakra mandala (Kalachakra is a Sanskrit term used in Buddhism that literally means “time-wheel” or “time-cycles”). It is composed of more than 20 years of scans of my “to-do” lists and academic calendars, including one from when I was a student at Conn in the late ’80s. The Kalachakra tradition revolves around the concept of time (kāla) and cycles (chakra): from the cycles of the planets to the cycles of human breathing, it teaches the practice of working with the most subtle energies within one’s body on the path to enlightenment.

The video, “Lotus Sutra Daily List,” engages imagery of colored smoke shot in real time billowing fervently, a stream of energy, visible, but not material, layering over a soundtrack of me, my husband and our neighbor chanting. The beginning sequence is a shadow of a figure as a flat and fleeting projection spelling out the smoke signal equivalent of SOS (three long puffs). The colored smoke has a number of potent associations — the stuff of ritual, air force target identification, and the means by which hikers show they are in distress. The chanting in the video is a compilation of one of my own recent daily “to-do” lists and the second chapter (Höben) of the Lotus Sutra, which is considered by many to be the pre-eminent teaching of the Buddha Shakyamuni in the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism.

STUDYING AT CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
Visiting the College I remember being totally seduced by the Cummings Arts Center and chose to attend Connecticut College specifically for its art department. I wanted to be at a small liberal arts college that took art seriously, and then, as today, there are very few institutions that truly value individual vision, the visual arts and their relation to culture the way Connecticut College does.

The art department during my time (1985-1989) seemed to attract the emotional and edgy. Students were competitive, quirky, cried during critiques, pulled all-nighters in the senior studios, and made extravagant decorations and costumes for the Beaux Arts Balls. It was a rigorous and critical environment, but also incredibly fun and tolerant. I remember it was no big deal to smoke in some of the classrooms — during class! — and also being allowed to keep a rotting 30-pound swordfish in the senior studio for about two weeks. Even though I was a distracted student, I was also very aware that I was incredibly lucky to be taught by professional artists who were devoted to their own practices. The faculty modeled what it was like to devote your life to making, and they treated the majors more like young artists rather than undergraduate students. They knew us, they knew our work and they weren’t shy to tell us what they thought. I am very grateful.
Woozy Blossom (Platanus nebulosa), 2010, steel, water, copper, pump. Photo: Margaret Fox.
I’m particularly drawn to overlooked or underutilized environments, from private imaginary worlds within brick walls to back alleys to very public, sprawling open spaces. Whether the work takes the form of public art, sculpture, installation or video, it is in these environments that I tease out small fragments of narrative by augmenting or amplifying the raw materials of a given place. I ask the viewer to engage both with what was always there as well as what might be.

I approach public art opportunities with the notion of making the site more congenial and communal for those who use it. The site always influences the structure and the materials such that the site itself becomes an element of the work.

The works are playful, accessible — and very often unexpected. By using disparate elements (including everything from mist to swings to showers) in surprising and interactive ways, my work aims to disarm and enchant, encouraging engagement with the work and among viewers themselves.

Studying at Connecticut College
Art was something that always interested me, but it wasn’t until going to Connecticut College that I could imagine it as a lifelong pursuit. At Connecticut College, art wasn’t just an extracurricular subject, it was a serious discipline, and that was exhilarating.
MY WORK centers on the presentation of narrative through ceramic vessels, tile work and printmaking, either separately or combined in installation, with a feminist point of view. I am interested in mapping the ways popular culture not only reflects women’s lives, but also shapes them. It is this influence that demands critical examination.

The use of satirical humor, irony and sarcasm often provides a seductive vehicle to approach issues of gender and sexuality within my work. The combination of narrative presented on the surface, united with the intended utility of each vessel, allows a dialogue between the essence of the object and its narrative. Individually, each pot’s narrative may convey a singular thought, but when the work is considered together in a serial format, the story unfolds.

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STUDYING AT CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

Coming from a “blue-collar” background, I had no intention when coming to Connecticut College on a scholarship to pursue a life as an artist. My young perception of life as an artist was one of impracticality, though it was always an area of study that I truly enjoyed in high school. By my sophomore year, I was exposed to amazing, active teacher/artists who truly opened my eyes to a life that embraced one’s passion while applying the work ethic that would make a career possible. Their guidance and support certainly allowed me to consider a new way of thinking about my future. In addition, the wider perspective I gained from taking top-notch art history courses was invaluable and gave me the confidence to find my own voice within the process of art making. The day I went home on holiday and broke it to my parents that I was going to switch my major to studio art and concentrate on ceramics was, indeed, a nerve-wracking one. On looking back, they have said that they could see a newfound confidence in me and supported my choice wholeheartedly. They wished only that I chose a career that made me happy and fulfilled.

After completing my MFA at the University of Florida in 1998, I was invited back to Conn in the role of visiting faculty. This was indeed a great honor, though it took quite a bit of getting used to, being the teacher in the studio I was a student only eight years prior. The perspective I gained from being both a student and educator at the College really made me appreciate the high-quality resources and openness that Conn provides to the students regardless of their chosen area of study. A true liberal arts program must support the arts to be great, and Conn certainly continues to do so.

Twenty-one years after graduating from Conn in 1990 (how did that happen?), I have had a career as both an artist and an educator, actively showing and recognized in my field. I am certain I would never have walked this path without being encouraged so early on by my professors at Connecticut College, and for that I am eternally grateful.
I live in a suite in a house owned by the artists Janet Cardiff and George Burress-Miller in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. At one time, they lived here, as have a slew of other Canadian artists who invited people in, made their work, and were a part of the arts community over the years. Throughout the house one can find a collection of “artist repairs,” slightly left-of-center solutions to problems. The storage spaces are gold mines: collections of discarded art projects, furniture finds from the thrift store (mostly broken, a lot orange), and usable, random art supplies. The house has started to establish somewhat of a mythic quality for itself. Locals are curious about who is living in the suites; everyone has an opinion about how it should be repaired. It’s a place that’s right on the brink of a certain history — someday it could become a significant art site. Then again, it could be sold and renovated by someone who wants to take advantage of its large footprint and strategic location.

I am interested in this tipping point. Through the construction of a miniature portrait of the Cardiff-Miller house, I aim to explore the qualities of this building in the present moment, and its domestic presence in Canadian art history. The work presented is a set of building plans for an 8’ x 14’ miniature portrait of the Cardiff-Miller House. They detail instructions on the nuts and bolts of tiny house building, attaching a house to a trailer, towing rules for each of the ten provinces, framing scenarios. There are also specifications for characteristics of the house such as the sculptural downspout, the house numbers array and the painted paper plate hole covering.

The Cardiff-Miller House is the first stage in a multi-part project to develop tiny but inhabitable replicas of significant art houses across Canada. Construction for the first house is funded by the Alberta Creative Development Initiative, a collaboration between the Canada Council and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Sales of the plans for the Cardiff-Miller House will fund the next stage, including the Agnes Martin Family Homestead, located in Macklin, Saskatchewan, and the Emily Carr House in Victoria, B.C.

Studying at Connecticut College
It took years for my education at Conn College to reveal itself as a significant influence on my practice. Now I am so grateful for my experience there. In the art department we studied drawing, sculpture, ceramics, photography, design, collage, painting, computational arts; meanwhile we were taking all manner of classes in humanities, sciences, art history .... The liberal arts curriculum, combined with a generous and knowledgeable set of professors, fostered a love of research and writing and a fluency in moving between mediums as well as specific preparation in our chosen area. A combination of art, architecture, sustainability, design, technology wasn’t out of the ordinary in the studios of Cummings Arts Center. Now that I’m out in the world, I feel most comfortable moving between disciplines, and can thank my undergraduate education for that.
JEDEDIAH MORFIT

JEDEDIAH MORFIT
Rhode Island School of Design, MFA, 2005
Connecticut College, BA, 1996

This new body of work emerges from a number of different, but
related, sources. First: a personal
reaction against contemporary
sculpture’s indifference to craft,
allergy to narrative, and short cul-
tural memory. Second: my fascina-
tion with the possibilities of modu-
lar sculpture. Third: a reverence for
beautifully designed, beautifully
rendered object; and fourth: a love
of the larger-than-life imagery of
comic books, actions figures and
religious art.

In this body of work, the in-
dividual elements (the winged
monkeys, the lamp, the gun, the
old woman, etc.) are the constants.
They are, for the most part, cre-
ated without narrative or practical
connections in mind. There are no
preconceived plot points, charac-
ters or set pieces that they need to
fulfill. Instead, the narratives and
relationships develop spontane-
ously as the piece comes together
on the wall or in the frame.

As a sculptor, I have always
been attracted to the traditions
of the genre. I have “re-staged”
bronze busts so that they pounded
their foreheads through the wall,
and made waterless fountains. In
this project I have re-staged bas-
relief, lifting the figures from the
frieze, and allowing them to move,
change, interact.

As for the big, obvious question:
“What does it mean?” There isn’t an
easy answer. In my experience, art-
ists are the often the wrong people
to ask about their work. Whatever
I thought I knew about what I
was making has turned out to be
only half-true, or simply wrong.
I know that what has emerged is
not a single narrative, but images
from an uncomfortably bleak, and
surprisingly religious, worldview.
These are dark, religious stories
wrapped in jokes, crude violence
and absurdities. Enjoy.

Studying at Connecticut College
As an artist who has both attended
and taught in art schools, I am con-
tinually grateful for the education
I received at Connecticut College.
Indeed, the longer I am in the field,
the more convinced I become that
a liberal arts education is exactly
what a young artist needs.

At Conn, everything I learned
in the studio was complemented
and informed by what I was learn-
ing everywhere else. In art classes,
I learned new techniques and how
to apply those techniques to con-
tent. In dance classes, I learned
about the expressive vocabulary of
the human form and how emotion-
al relationships could be defined
by physical space. As a religion
major, I not only discovered new
ways of understanding the world,
I discovered many of the themes,
concepts and narratives that con-
tinue to define my work to this day.

Of course I can’t say what
would have happened if I had
enrolled in art school as an under-
graduate, but I can say that I’m
glad I went to Conn. It may sound
like sheer, unadulterated booster-
ism, but the truth is that, in many
ways, Connecticut College made
me the artist that I am.
This exhibition has been made possible, in part, by the Dayton Artist in Residence Program and the Centennial Committee of Connecticut College.