

Sacred Curiosities

October 13–November 17, 2017

About the Exhibition

This wide-ranging invitational exhibition includes the work of thirteen artists. Through sculpture, painting, and drawing, this exhibition is a meditation on the meaning we assign to things.

“A large part of Sacred Curiosities is focused on found object sculpture. The beauty of this method of making art is that many disparate parts—all with their own meaning or connotation—come together to form something new. The grouping of materials may be harmonious or it may be a collection of diverse and contradictory parts. The artists create new meaning from the various materials.

The paintings, drawings, and other more traditionally constructed sculpture add to this by depicting personal, historical, or cultural signifiers as they relate to the artist.”

— Bradley Butler, gallery director and curator

Featuring the work of:

Stephanie Albanese	Martha O'Connor
Dianne Baker	Joanna Poag
Bob Conge	Richard Rockford
Jacquie Germanow	Bill Stephens
John Greene	Jean Stephens
Chad Grohman	Bill Stewart
Emily Kenas	

Stephanie Albanese

This current body of abstracted collage paintings created 2016-2017 is mixed media utilizing Japanese brushes and chops, incorporating multiple layers of watercolor, photography printed on hand painted Japanese Mulberry paper, and collage. These paintings represent an intuitive exploration into non-objective design, integrating my background as a watercolor and photographic artist.

Dianne Baker

I am drawn to what is overlooked, the transcendent in the forgotten, the discarded, and the mundane. By reconfiguring these unexpected materials and objects into collages, assemblages, and sculptures, I attempt to subvert the viewers' perception and to value the past and its remains for they provide insight and connections to the present. If the art reminds them of a grandparent, a work experience, a family holiday, they establish a connection and can then imagine the extraordinary in the debris from our materialized culture and abused environment. Thus, I see my work as providing a transformational experience in that the viewer cannot only see but also appreciate the creative possibilities which exist within the discarded—find the “magic in the ordinary”.

Bob Conge

I am a collector, and have always been as far as I can recall. I remember, as a young boy, my most prized possession being a small box in which I kept colorful or uniquely shaped stones, butterfly wings, bird's feet, dried flowers, a skull I had carved from wood, a small red plastic A-Bomb, and a wave-washed piece of deep blue glass. This first collection was a micro cosmos of my world at that time.

Since then, my world and the collection it reflects, has grown to include many other items including Mexican carved wood masks. It was while I was researching these masks that I discovered the 19th century Nichos of New Mexico.

I began building my shrines in 2003, having been inspired by the contextual forms of these nichos, and the roadside shrines to accident victims that I saw while traveling in Greece.

The Spanish nichos (a niche or box) serves as a sacred shrine for home worship, and the road side shrines are memorials to the time and place of the death of a loved one.

The construction and exterior surface of my shrines reflect the traditional ethnic wooden nichos in form, color and archaic textures. My boxes imply the historic connection to their inspirational form. I see them as vintage stages upon which one-act plays are performed by objects that life has used and discarded.

The interiors of traditional nichos are embellished with Christian objects of worship, hand-carved wooden figures of Christ, Mary or various saints, clothed in delicate fabrics surrounded by dried or paper flowers and colorful ribbon.

The interiors of my shrines explore the themes of contemporary American worship, and those core experiences of life that shape who we have become as human beings.

My interiors are more akin to the mind of Franz Kafka salted with vague memories of the curio museums on the Boardwalk of Coney Island. Each box holds a collection of things found and life experienced in an arrangement guided by some internal poetry.

Jacquie Germanow

Earth materials, either grown or manufactured remnants, begin the magic story that draws me into the interactive process of making sculpture. I juxtapose freshly fabricated organic forms with these historical seeds, sometimes on the edge of existence, to probe heart, memory, healing and connection.

Each material sings its own energy in these elegiac translations that echo a wry, redemptive humor. Earthy textures contrast with the liquid glint of glass or metal.

Glass begins as clay and is kiln cast in plaster silica molds. It brings the cleansing, fluid clarity of water or ice to each piece.

Stone, the bone of the earth, anchors with a strong, quiet, calm, and is carved to receive.

Provoked terrestrial clay; pops and cracks in a geologically characteristic way before being fired to stone.

Copper holds as it conducts.

Bronze transforms to precious.

Iron's strength supports, imprisons and rusts (bleeds).

Bone is the material of immortality, of what cannot change, and like wood, a message of what remains from the life force.

The engineering of a seemingly impossible combination of materials is a process of many iterations encouraging chance to deliver the sublime, and coaxing one material to key into another so that the work cascades.

John Greene

I try to introduce elements that are hidden or apparent, that will encourage 'reading' the piece many times and constantly discovering something new. My work is primarily about surface, and surface in turn is about feeling— it can be ambivalent. It gives the illusion of depth and reflection, of time and memory and complexity.

I find myself continually going off in new directions. I have created a number of series, each of them inspired by a trip I've taken or an image that has moved me, a structure that speaks to me or maybe just an idea that keeps coming back to me. In every case, I have taken an idea and then both developed it and allowed the work itself to guide me.

The making of art is a sensual endeavor, and all the better if it speaks to the viewer—to me that is the greatest barometer of success.

Chad Grohman

I have been a Nichiren Shu Buddhist Priest (novice) for four years. I made these objects inspired by the Buddhist altar. Image content comes from doctrinal concepts found throughout the Buddhist cannon.

Emily Kenas

My current work in assemblage focuses on using disparate fragments of natural and other found materials. These works evoke the origins of the material used at the same time as making new sense of things; imagery that is both irrational and coherent in its own way.

Martha O'Connor

This body of work in female forms has been a consistent theme in my work over the years. Of human-hand scale, in a variety of media, they are totemic, created in homage, with gratitude, or perhaps as request for assistance from the gods. Working as an ESOL Adult teacher with refugee women in Rochester, I am humbled and inspired by the powerful stories my students share. Brave generous women, having travelled thousands of miles, often with little in tow besides their children and their faith, can make great change happen.

Joanna Poag

My work explores the homeostasis of a system, and the resulting equilibrium of a living, open system. The time and process involved in the creation of each piece is a meditation that is reflected in my work; there is an organic, human quality clearly visible in the fingerprinted surfacing of each piece.

The renewing of life and growth in even the smallest of structures is refreshing to me and I hope my work encourages my viewers to explore the intricacies of the world in a fresh way. I frequently I continually seek to create a glimpse of the elegance of structure and order that I find so captivating.

Richard Rockford

I have always loved old things. Virtually all the artwork I have ever made uses only old items, old paper, old bits and pieces with old patina. This comes from a desire to be different from most current artists and a desire to share the surfaces and things I love.

The “limit” of only old materials is combined with my use of low technology. I do not wish to show off advanced skills, I have no love of technique that overshadows simple, energetic, and rapid assembling of components.

I try to create art that causes the viewer to start seeing old things, discarded things, items around them everywhere, as having beauty of color and texture. I take old surfaces – wooden panels, ink-stained blocks, deconstructed household furniture – and without changing their color and texture, I make them part of something colorful, genuine, and beautiful.

Bill Stephens

My work is process driven and inspired by nature, morning meditation, writing, memory and imagination. Each piece is extemporaneously developed and contains open-ended symbols that encourage personal interpretation and reflection. I approach each day with a beginners mind not knowing exactly where the work will take me. It's always an adventure.

Jean Stephens

A love of organic form is at the heart of my still life drawings and paintings. I depict found natural objects in a sensuous, yet reverential way, aspiring to elevate these subjects to a higher visual, emotional and spiritual plane.

Bill Stewart

My work is narrative, utilizing assembled information obtained from a variety of sources over an extended period of time. Roots exist in personal experiences disguised and combined with actual and fictional events. Pre-planning and intuition are combined in fabricating the objects. Images may be derived from or contain, in some convoluted way, social and political commentary or they may be fictional, a total product of my imagination.

Body decoration and costuming relative to contemporary cultures has provided the foundation for some of these objects. The visual, psychological and physiological effects on the decorated and the viewer is significant.

The assimilated information integrated with a working approach based on intuition and a spontaneous response to the magic of the imagination hopefully produces objects that have an eccentric energy. The objects are somewhat on edge, off center, weird, absurd, or irreverent.