

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)



Curfman Gallery

New photography exhibit opens in Curfman Gallery

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Leighton McWilliams found his passion for photography in the many parts of the trinket toys of his childhood. But it wasn't until adulthood that Erin Antognoli found hers.

And it wasn't in disassembled miniature cars and airplanes. It was in the cracks of D.C.'s sidewalks and the images of the city's alleyway trashcans.

And after the two found their passion, CSU found them.

Both artists applied to be featured in the Curfman Gallery in the Lory Student Center over a year ago, and their exhibit opened on Jan. 23 to bring yet another variation of art to the student body.

Each artist studied photojournalism, but Antognoli strives to combine the documentary style with her art and McWilliams follows a more hands-on approach by creating physical objects, such as collages and sculptures, with his photographs.

One of McWilliams' photographs, which he displayed for a lecture but did not put up in the exhibit, shows a little child alone in an all-night laundromat.

"I took this picture in the late 70s, when it was a whole different world," said McWilliams.

"Nowadays, you see a little kid in an all-night laundromat and take a picture, you'd be arrested. I look at low art, bad art and good art and reconcile all that; It's surreal, sometimes sick, creepy or funny."

Antognoli's photography has an inconsistent quality, as each photograph has multiple others overlapping and blending in with each other. The photographs are either of the same thing at different angles or completely separate items that somehow coincide with each other.

"I have a warped way of seeing with everything kind of meshed into one," said Antognoli. "I go to museums, where tourists would go, or where no one would go. It's all the same with putting things together to say something different."

Stan Scott, manager for the LSC arts program, helped decide on the artists and the mechanics of the show.

"There's a committee that reviews submissions, professors, grad students, undergrads. People that offer a variety of backgrounds, viewing the art through their own lens," Scott said.

The exhibits are balanced across all mediums, having a photography show following a sculpture or painting show.

"We want as broad of view as possible. We don't want pretty art without substance, we want it with depth," Scott said. "The purpose is to provide an education in art to the student body. So if it's someone's first experience in a gallery we want them to be intrigued and have their view of art questioned."

Even though Antognoli and McWilliams had not met before the collaboration of their show, their art has a similarity that each described as "eerie."

Things that go fast

As the other half of the exhibit, McWilliams describes his work as "combining creepiness and beauty."

Often using an old, plastic camera like Antognoli's, McWilliams focuses on aspects of collage, along with sculpture collages and projects.

"Digital is very hands off, you don't actually get to get in it," McWilliams said. "But with collage you do. And with the plastic camera, the Diana, it's mechanically terrible but artistically wonderful."

McWilliams is fascinated with Las Vegas, he said, roadside attractions and "things that go fast, like cars and airplanes." As a teenager McWilliams would take apart and rebuild cars and his collection includes parts of mechanical items, images that give the impression of movement and speed.

"I use whatever feels right at the time for what I'm envisioning," he said. "I like to see the beautiful in these not so beautiful, rather disparate things."

Boxes are also an artistic approach for McWilliams, with a combining picture on the lid while the inside brings together items that complement it. One box consists of a shooting range target, shot through on the lid, with the inside containing bullets.

“The artwork that I do is about me, it’s an obvious and crucial idea: Do the art for myself rather than for someone else,” McWilliams said.

McWilliams uses a single image with multiple exposures, paralleling the work Antognoli creates. He has also created photo sculptures, pieces of various frames printed on photographic paper, and photogramming, which is photographing something, placing an object on top and shining a flashlight through to silhouette the overall intended image.

His experiments don’t take precedence over his photography life as McWilliams teaches photography at University of Texas at Arlington.

He usually shows at universities, looking “for venues that appeal to you. I send my work in hoping it will be well received. You know places where you think ‘I’d like to show there’ and ‘God I hope I never show there.’”

A Holga camera

and trash cans

Antognoli works in Washington D.C., searching alleys and museums or setting up shoots to capture a unique image. The Holga camera she uses is an old, plastic camera that is often unreliable, she said. Through the unexpected results that the camera has produced, Antognoli has found an artistic output that presents a visual of her interpretation of the world.

“I get funny looks when I’m out photographing trash cans and cracks in the sidewalk,” Antognoli said. “I have a warped way of seeing, with everything kind of meshed into one. I create my own little world, kind of where I fit in my life.”

Antognoli explores all of Washington D.C. and also takes photographs on road trips. She does not often arrange or look for a certain shot, instead she photographs anything she finds.

“Sometimes I plan it out, sometimes it happens as I find it and sometimes there are happy accidents,” she said.

Because she does not plan things out, Antognoli often takes only one photograph, leaving the outcome to chance. The shoots she sets up are an exception and she takes her time on these.

“A set up is a big deal and I may take a photograph twice, or a few more times,” she said. “The models are there specifically for the artists, so I tend to take more while I’m there.”

The Holga allows her to take multiple exposures, overlapping images to create a collage, “making me slow down and appreciate the details.”

Antognoli picks out a certain image or theme as she explores, but she does not plan the photographs. She merely goes off of what was shot last.

When she reviews her rolls, she does not alter the photographs, hoping to capture it with the camera. “I try to get it right on camera. One shot and that’s all,” she said.

Unlike some artists, Antognoli names her photographs very generically, usually after something material that is in the photo.

“I see something very specific in the photos, but I don’t want to pigeonhole that for people,” she said. “I want everyone to see it how they will and see it in their own way.”

The photography she is displaying is a side hobby as she also runs a wedding photography business called Halo Photographic.

“The business is totally out of my control. I can’t set things up,” she said. “I try to capture the energy, the rituals that happen. I challenge myself on ways of presenting it.”

Antognoli said that, artistically, she tries everything she thinks up, forcing herself to experiment with ideas and opportunities she previously thought impossible.

“I challenge myself and set up ridiculous goals,” Antognoli said. “If you don’t try you automatically won’t succeed. If you do try, you still may not succeed, but you could.”

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