

On Being:

Exploring Psychological & Spiritual Well-Being through the Creative Process

UNION
COLLEGE
FOUNDED 1795

January 4 – March 9, 2014

Opening Reception: Thursday, January 9th 5-6:30pm

MANDEVILLE GALLERY

As our nationwide interest in a holistic approach to well-being grows, Union College is engaging in a campus-wide call to wellness during the current academic year. Embracing this theme, the exhibition *On Being* presents a visual exploration of psychological and spiritual well-being through the creative process.

A natural departure point for this artistic investigation begins with the human body and thus, figurative artwork. The three artists included in this exhibition use the figure as their subject matter to represent self-actualization, spiritual exploration and a reckoning with mortality. In doing so, each artist has developed a distinctive approach to image making in an effort to convey individual journeys toward well-being and to speak universally about human experience.

At first glance, Keun Young Park's muted minimally tinted collages do not betray the destructive force behind her images. Park begins by photographing herself on blank backdrops with no narrative cues or indicators, in hues of pale blush, aqua and robin's egg blue. Once the photographs are printed, she begins ripping and shredding each one into tiny pieces, less than a half inch long, metaphorically deconstructing herself. Each self-portrait is then slowly, painstakingly, pieced back together, reconstructing a select portion of each form, as well as physically representing a struggle toward building selfhood.

In juxtaposition, the stark, black voids found in the digital prints created by Zen practitioner, graphic designer and photographer Sheila Ross appear bleak. Yet Ross intersperses figurative images ethereally floating and spinning across the pictorial plane, adding levity to these otherwise black expanses. Signs of humanity appear throughout Ross' large, linear images as she depicts her personal grappling with life and death. Small gestures and movements add a sense of lightness and vitality that prevails over the large swathes of darkness in Ross' work. In one instance, a diaphanously clad woman peers down into the void beneath her and all that might dwell there. Other images find the same woman whirling across the dark background or tumbling summersault-like through levitating flowers. While looking into the depths of mortality, her photographs maintain a sense of calm, representing triumph in the struggle "to reclaim ourselves" as Ross writes.

Valerie Hammond takes an altogether different approach to her search for pictorial spirituality. Using visual motifs drawn from nature and world religions, her images are created in materials such as wax, thread, paint, and natural objects, as well as mediums such as printmaking and digital rendering. She concentrates on the hands and forearms of the human figure. Divorced from the body, Hammond's hand/arm combinations become talisman-like, emphasized by her obsessive repetition of form. The similarities in composition reveal her determination to create an individual code of marks. Over time Hammond has winnowed down her image vocabulary to a small, select group of symbols that have become icons of her personal, artistic spirituality.

"It is through critical reflection....and meaning making of our experiences that we construct and reconstruct our life paths."¹

EVENTS: All events are free and open to the public.

Panel Discussion: Zen Master, Robert Kennedy, S.J., Dharma Holder and chaplain Miriam Healy, and exhibiting artist and Zen Leader, Sheila Ross discuss their journeys and how mediation, the visual arts, and poetry guide their lives toward well-being. There will be wine and light refreshments before the discussion. Co-sponsored by the Office of Religious & Spiritual Life.

WHEN: Tuesday, February 4th at the Nott Memorial, 1st Floor from 4:30-6pm.

Zen Meditation: led by exhibiting artist, graphic designer and Zen meditation leader, Sheila Ross. Yoga mats will be available. Green tea and hot chocolate will be served.

WHEN: Wednesday, February 5th at the Nott Memorial, 1st Floor from 12:45-1:45pm.

For More Information: www.union.edu/gallery or 518-388-6004. 807 Union Street, Schenectady, NY 12308

Image: Valerie Hammond, *Couer*, 2011, pigment, wax, color pencil on paper, 62 x 38 inches, Courtesy of Walker Contemporary, Clearwater, FL



¹ Halima Bebe Goss, Thomas F. Cuddihy, and Michaud (Lois) Tomson, "Wellness in Higher Education: A Transformative Framework for Health Related Disciplines," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport, and Physical Education* 1, no. 2, 2010, 29-36.