

The Chronicle

New Mandeville exhibit explores the art of well-being

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"On Being: Exploring Psychological and Spiritual Well-Being through the Creative Process," opens Jan. 4 in the Mandeville Gallery and runs through March 9.

The exhibit features three contemporary figurative artists -- Valerie Hammond, Keun Young Park and Sheila Ross -- and their visual explorations of well-being.

"The artists use the figure as their subject matter to represent self-actualization, spiritual exploration and reckoning with mortality," said Julie Lohnes, curator of Art Collections and Exhibitions. "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 the human experience."

An opening reception will be held Thursday, Jan. 9, 5-6:30 p.m. The event is free, and the public is welcome.

Hammond, a California native who credits her early experiences attending church as a major influence on her visual vocabulary, creates in a variety of materials, including wax, thread, paint and natural objects.

She works in such mediums as printmaking and digital rendering. Concentrating on the hand and forearm, she uses an obsessive repetition of form and a highly developed code of marks and symbols. Asian art, from Tibetan medical drawings to Buddhist sculptures, is another strong influence on her work.

Park, born and educated in Seoul, South Korea, is based in New Jersey. Depicting the body in a state of transformation, she creates works on paper of floating figures, faces, draped arms and cupped hands, which appear to be disintegrating and reforming at once.

“The artist begins her process with original photographs keyed to various evocative hues,” Lohnes said. “The images are shredded by hand into thousands of tiny pieces that are then reassembled in a metaphorical self-deconstruction.”

Park has won numerous awards, participated in artist residencies, and exhibited in the U.S., Korea and China.

Ross, who lives in New York City, is an installation artist and photographer who trained as a sculptor in London and received an M.F.A. from Hunter College. She has since shifted from the physicality of substantial materials to work with light, space and sound, first in environmental installations, and currently in photography and video.

She is also a Zen meditation leader whose art is increasingly influenced by her Zen practice. Her digital prints intersperse figurative images that float and spin across the pictorial plane.

As Lohnes explained, “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 conjunction with the new exhibit, Ross will join two other individuals in a panel discussion titled, “Living with Creativity and Mindfulness,” on Feb. 4, 4:30-6 p.m. in the Nott Memorial.

The other panelists are Robert Kennedy S.J., Jesuit priest, Zen master and author of *Zen Gifts to Christians* and *Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit*, and Miriam Healy, Dharma Holder and chaplain. Ross studies under Kennedy, and Healy is the model for her archival prints.

The panelists will discuss how meditation, the visual arts and poetry guide their lives toward well-being. There will be wine and light refreshments before the discussion. The event is co-sponsored by the Office of Religious & Spiritual Life.

The Mandeville Gallery will host a session of Zen meditation led by Ross on Feb. 5, 12:45-1:45 p.m. Yoga mats will be available, and green tea and hot chocolate will be served.

The panel discussion and meditation sessions are also free and open to the public.

“On Being” is one of a number of programs promoting a culture of wellness across campus this academic year. The wellness focus will enhance Union's commitment to the education of the whole person as outlined in the College’s new strategic plan, adopted in the fall.

For more information, call the gallery at (518) 388-6729 or visit www.muse.union.edu/mandeville/.