

COLOSSAL FIGURES REMIX IDEAS ON VULNERABILITY AND STRENGTH

SCC Showcases Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor in BRIDGE Exhibition

PITTSBURGH, PA—November 10, 2014— Made from a mash-up of two by fours and discarded bedclothes, blankets, couch cushions, knit Afghans, and other repurposed materials, Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor's massive creatures stop visitors in their tracks. A solo exhibition of these distinct figures, part of the Society for Contemporary Craft's biennial *Bridge Exhibition Series*, is presented in concert with a feature of sculptural ceramics by artist Jason Walker and an exhibit of surreal jewelry—made from remnants of antiques, crustaceans, teeth, and more—by internationally renown metalsmith, Keith Lo Bue. These three solo exhibitions highlight the high quality craft being produced by contemporary artists today. The *Bridge Exhibition Series* opens with a public reception on Friday, January 23, from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. and continues through August 22, 2015.

Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor's colossal beasts, standing upwards of eight feet tall, confront the viewer with their force remixing conventional ideas on vulnerability and strength. O'Connor builds her sculptures by cutting, re-sewing, wrapping, and tying layers upon layers of fabric and cardboard onto wooden armatures. As the figures amble forward, parading through the gallery, their postures suggest heaviness and fatigue, traits often present in our own human condition. On closer examination, the artist's use of domestic materials becomes apparent. The discarded afghans and pillow cases that have been given new life encourage viewers to reflect on their own discarded past, and the nostalgia of objects come and gone. The artist readily reveals their burdens by purposely exposing the "crutches" (parts of the interior wooden frames) that keep them upright and by leaving some creatures without limbs or giving others heads that are almost too big to support.

The titles of works like *Wanna Do Right But Not Right Now* and *Fever to Tell*, again allude to our basic human instincts and desires. The layers of these anthropomorphic creatures can be seen unraveling – exposing frailty and flaw in contrast to their inherent strength. The bright, candy colored palette and use of recycled materials spark notions of domesticity and materiality, further pushing the tension between endearing and endangering. Of these oversized, overburdened figures O'Connor comments, "I want the struggle to stand upright to be easily perceived; I want the fatigue, vulnerability and weakness to be present, but also



Fever to Tell, 2014, Torn and cut bed sheets, cut blankets, found cardboard, wood, paper, paint, glue, drywall screws, wood 7 1/2' x 9 1/2' x 6 1/2'
Photo: John Wilson White

a certain resourcefulness...all the realities of our lives— war, political and economical headlines, the struggles that happen out on the streets... all these topics mash up with my interest in posture, gesture, and the rendering of expressions.”

O'Connor is a native of Calif., and currently resides in Sacramento. She holds an M.F.A. from the University of California, Davis, and a B.F.A. in Ceramic Art from California State University, Long Beach, where she was largely influenced by her time working with Professor Tony Marsh. O'Connor has held academic appointments at the University of Washington, Seattle, and Sacramento City College, and participated in residencies at various national institutions including the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, Omaha, Nebr., and The John Michael Kohler Art Center, Arts/Industry Program, Kohler, Wisc.

To complement the *Bridge 13 Exhibition Series*, educational programs are planned. In a visiting artist weekend workshop, *Sculptural Heads: Patched, Fastened and Cobbled Together*, Saturday and Sunday March 13 – 15, 2015 students can learn to build an expressive sculptural head using a foundation of found cardboard, paint and re-used fabric. An artist talk is planned for Friday, March 13, at 5:30 p.m. in SCC's gallery. For more information, visit www.contemporarycraft.org for workshop details and registration.

An exhibition brochure documenting O'Connor's solo show includes biographical information, photo-documentation and an essay titled *Meticulous Turmoil*, written by Doug Jeck. Jeck is ceramic artist living in Seattle, Wash. He is currently chair of 3D4M: *Ceramics+ Sculpture+Glass* at the University of Washington. Jeck has received awards and grants from the Illinois Arts Council, National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Fellowships, the Virginia A. Groot Foundation, and an NEA travel grant to the La Napoule Foundation in France. His work is included in numerous private and public collections including The Los Angeles County Museum and The Smithsonian Renwick Gallery of American Art.

Bridge 13: Keith Lo Bue, Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor, Jason Walker is made possible by the Allegheny Regional Asset District, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Elizabeth R. Raphael Fund of The Pittsburgh Foundation, Ted Rowland, BNSF Foundation, Ferrin Contemporary, and other generous donors.

Presenting contemporary art in craft media by regional, national and international artists since 1971, the Society for Contemporary Craft offers cutting edge exhibitions focusing on multicultural diversity and non-mainstream art, as well as a range of classes, community outreach programs and a retail store. SCC is located at 2100 Smallman Street in the Strip District of Pittsburgh, PA. Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Exhibitions and informal, hands-on art activities in the Drop-In Studio are always free to the public. For more information, visit www.contemporarycraft.org or call 412.261.7003.

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Links

Keith Lo Bue: lobue-art.com

Jason Walker: jasonwalkerceramics.com

Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor: elisabethhigginsconnor.net

Ferrin Contemporary: ferrincontemporary.com

Please see complete press kit for additional information on programming and events, exhibition technology, and downloadable high-resolution images.