



The Artist as Witness

Elise Engler, Michael Caron, Ryan Carpenter, Nancy Chunn, Sue Coe, Lee Jupina Sr, Käthe Kollwitz, Michael Reddick, Rowan Renee



Available for booking, January 2022 – May 2024

Exhibition Narrative

The Artist as Witness presents a group of artists whose work has a laser focus on conflict and suffering, commentaries on injustice, and provoking social change. Our exhibition comprises works by academically trained artists; artists trained in the Community Partners in Action Prison Arts Program; and students of art, sociology, and history from Eastern, Central, UConn and Manchester Community College. They all challenge us with their profound engagement, whether as direct participants, or sympathetic supporters and allies. Their witness is rendered in meticulous figuration, the emotions conveyed are raw: empathy, compassion, outrage.



Nancy Chunn, *The Jail*, from the series, *Chicken Little and the Culture of Fear* 2014-16, acrylic and giclee prints on canvas, and 3-D printed sculpture, 27 canvases, 134 x 244 inches.

Incarcerated for removing her mattress tag, and awaiting bailout by her friends, Chicken Little cowers in the women's shower area. The *Jail* houses 150 undesirables, crooks, pedophiles, cultural icons gone bad, products that should be banned, plus the visual dangerous batshit political crazies.

Nancy Chunn exposes geopolitical themes and the power of the media to define and control public opinion. With a dose of dark humor, she explores the media's role in America's contemporary culture of fear. Chunn deploys elements of the news, clip art, cartooning, and fairy tales. A recipient of two National Endowment for the Arts awards, legendary Chunn spent the year of 1996 "editing" the front page of the New York Times every day. Using rubber stamps and pastels, the artist embellished and amended the images and text with symbols that could be recognized by people of all ages and languages they spoke.

Chicken Little and The Culture of Fear, restages the folktale of the paranoid fowl in 11 scenes - The Garden, The Bathroom, The Kitchen, The Bedroom, The Road, The ER, The Main Hospital, The Diner, Poor Town, The Jail and Fox News --contain 296 canvasses in varied sizes and more than 3,000 individually mixed colors. <https://www.nancychunn.com>.



Elise Engler, *Diary of a Radio Junkie, 1888 Days of Waking Up to the News*, mixed media collage on paper, 270 drawings, various dimensions, 2016-2021.

“For the *Diary* I had planned to depict one headline each day for all of 2016. I was not expecting to chronicle a prolonged drama. When Donald Trump ran for office and won, I quickly realized this was not the time to stop my drawing. His would be a presidency like no other, and I wanted to continue to document it, day by day. So, over the course of five years, I carried on, rising at the crack of dawn to catch the morning’s radio news. By the end of 2019, my work formed a record of one of the most turbulent periods in our history. I had no idea that the coming year would top it. When the Covid-19 pandemic began, and George Floyd was murdered, an already frenetic time drastically ratcheted up.” Elise Engler, 2021.

The recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in drawing and an Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation grant in painting, Engler has also received two MacDowell residencies and a fellowship at Civitella Ranieri in Umbria, Italy. Her work has been written about in *Art in America*, the *New Yorker*, and the *New York Times*, among other publications. Engler teaches at City College, City University of New York, and the School of Visual Arts and for the Battery Park City Authority. She lives in New York.

A Diary of the Plague Year: An Illustrated Chronicle of 2020 by Elise Engler, 288 pages, has been published by Metropolitan Books this year and is on sale at major bookstores.

<https://eliseengler.com>.



Sue Coe

Strike. 1980. Mixed media on heavy white board. 27 5/8" x 20 5/8". Poster design for the Hospital and Health Care Workers Union, courtesy of the artist and Galerie St. Etienne.

Paul, 1994, gouache, charcoal and collage on white Strathmore Bristol board, text, 40 x 30 in, from the "AIDS" series image courtesy of the artist and Galerie St. Etienne.

Police State, 1986, oil on gessoed paper, initialed and inscribed, "I Saw This on Nov. 2 1985," reproduced in X (The Life and Times of Malcolm X), p.29 and on the cover of Police State catalog by Donald Kuspit.

Sue Coe is an activist whose art is a blend of visual journalism, social protest, and propaganda. She is a widely acclaimed painter, illustrator, printmaker, and comic book artist whose expressive, political works engage with issues such as animal rights, social injustice, war, anti-capitalism, and racial inequality. Coe has contributed to Art Spiegelman's iconic *Raw* magazine. As an illustrator, she is a frequent contributor to *World War 3 Illustrated*, and has published in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *The Nation*, and other periodicals.

"My work has a public role. It's seen, without me attached, in books or backlit on a screen, or hanging on walls ...until the corporate overlords, the extractors, can be hung in it's place."

Sue Coe in email correspondence, 2021.



Käthe Kollwitz from the Death Series

Death Seizes a Woman, 1934, 30 x 28, framed lithograph, private collection.

Death Holding a Girl on his Lap, 1934, 33 x 29, framed lithograph, private collection.

Death Calls, 1934, 30 x 28 in, framed lithograph, private collection.

Woman with the Dead Child, 1903, 25 x 28 in, framed lithograph, private collection.

Born in the Prussian city of Königsberg in 1867, Käthe Kollwitz established herself in an art world dominated by men by developing an aesthetic vision centered on women and the working class. Her representations of women, including her frequent self-portraits, effectively communicated her subjects' predicaments during a period when women were still negotiating ways to represent themselves in the arts. While her naturalistic style appeared out of touch in an era that witnessed the birth of abstraction, her depictions of universal human experiences, given depth and emotional power through her dense networks of lines and light and dark contrasts, were also reflective of her time. The loss of her son during World War I, for instance, led to a lifelong exploration of the subject of mourning. She also found many of her motifs in her husband's medical clinic for workers and people in need, where she also kept her studio. Initially trained as a painter, she gave up painting in favor of etching and sculpture after 1890, and later turned to lithography and woodcuts. Moving from one technique to another, she increasingly simplified her visual language over time, but never at the expense of legibility. The detailed quality of drawing matched her concerns with depicting the stark reality of war and its victims. The ease of distribution and accessibility of prints such as those on view in this exhibition, appealed to the artist's sense of advocacy.

Luise Mahler, Assistant Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MOMA 2016 (excerpted)

The exhibition *All Good Art Is Political: Käthe Kollwitz and Sue Coe* was presented at Galerie St. Etienne in March 2018.

Connecticut Prison Arts Program – Michael Caron, Ryan Carpenter, Lee Jupina Sr., Michael Reddick (Curated by Jeffrey Greene, program coordinator)



Michael Caron, Ryan Carpenter, Lee Jupina Sr., Michael Reddick developed their own rigorous, evolving, artistic practice as part of a dynamic arts collective in the Prison Arts Program. They explore within the prison, and within themselves, darkness, confusion, path-making, road-blocking, connection, separation, building, demolishing, remembering, forgetting, moving forward, and giving up.

Jeffrey Greene is the Prison Arts Program Manager for Community Partners in Action (CPA), a non-profit agency founded in 1875. The Prison Arts Program was initiated in 1978, by, among others Mark Twain and advocates for the arts and artists within Connecticut's correctional institutions. Arts experiences, exhibition and publication opportunities, are designed to develop and foster positive, constructive, and meaningful living in prison. The program asks artists to take on unique, personal endeavors, while being open to ambiguous and evolving pursuits. Most art-making is undertaken, individually, in cells and prison blocks. Workshops and meetings include group and individual critiques and serve to remind artists that they are part of a much larger world, and that they are sane/right to take on unique artistic pursuits in the prison. Over time, participants develop remarkable technical skill, while also developing the ability to consider their work and themselves, and their relationships to others and the world. As a result, participating artists become exponentially less likely to return to prison upon release.

Didactics and Programming

The Artist As Witness includes digital files with didactic and interpretive texts and wall labels. The exhibition works well across curricula and can engage students at all levels in arts, criminology, social sciences, and humanities through visits, discussion, free writing exercises, and assignments. The subject matter lends well to public programming, including artist talks, panel discussions, and workshops. Jeffrey Greene, Nancy Chunn, Elise Engler, and Rowan Renee are variously available for both in-person and remote programming.

Exhibition Checklist:



Nancy Chunn, *The Jail*, from the series, *Chicken Little and the Culture of Fear*, 2014-16, acrylic and giclee prints on canvas, and 3-D printed sculpture, 27 canvases, 134 x 244 inches.

Stored: 4 heavy duty cardboard boxes: 48 x 24 x 28, 34x 12 x 23, 23 x 16 x 13, 13x13x13

Display: According to artist's diagram.



Elise Engler, *Diary of a Radio Junkie, 1888 Days of Waking Up to the News*, mixed media collage on paper, 270 drawings, dimensions of drawings vary starting from 2 x 4 and 3x 6 inch, 2016-2021. While we displayed 270, we selected these randomly from five years – the number you show will be decided according exhibiting venue.

Stored: 2 archival boxes 9 x 11 x 3,5 inch

Display: Engler prefers chronological display. No adhesives of any kind, only map pins or push pins on the edges but not through the paper, no holes. Magnets are also acceptable; gentle paper adhesive, alternatively, push pins that don't damage the edges.

A Diary of the Plague Year: An Illustrated Chronicle of 2020 by Elise Engler, 288 pages, has been published by Metropolitan Books this year and is on sale in the major book stores. Engler welcomes book-signing opportunities.

Käthe Kollwitz



Käthe Kollwitz, *Woman with dead Child*, 1903, 25 x 28 inch, framed lithograph.

Death Calls, 1934, 30 x 28 in, framed lithograph.

A selection of Kollwitz works for your venue will be determined in consultation with Galerie St. Etienne, NYC.



Käthe Kollwitz, *Death Holding a Girl on his Lap*, 1934, 33 x 29, framed lithograph.

Death Seizes a Woman, 1934, 30 x 28, framed lithograph.

Sue Coe:



Sue Coe, *Paul*, 1994, gouache, charcoal and collage on white Strathmore Bristol board 40 × 30 in, courtesy of Galerie St. Etienne, NYC.

Strike. 1980. Mixed media on heavy white board. Signed, lower left, and titled in image, lower center. Artist's copyright stamp, lower left corner. 27 5/8" x 20 5/8" (70.2 x 52.4 cm). Poster design for the Hospital and Health Care Workers Union.

Police State, 1986, oil on gessoed paper, initialed and inscribed, "I Saw This on Nov. 2 1985," Reproduced in *X (The Life and Times of Malcolm X)*, p.29 and on the cover of *Police State* catalog by Donald Kuspit.

Stored: crated to out-state travel Galerie St. Etienne, NYC

Display: framed



Ryan Carpenter, *Tethered*, Pen on paper, 2020, multiple drawings, 12 x 17.

Ryan Carpenter was an artist prior to entering prison, but it was in prison that his work, and his work ethic, really blossomed. His drawings are made in pen with a confident hand, cleanly comprised of thousands of lines and markings: bark, branches, blades of grass, leaves, bricks, and bones build a desolate world.

Stored: Archival Boxes

Display: under clear plexi-glass, secured to wall with L-shaped pins.



Michael Reddick, *Jury Duty*, Pencil and colored pencil on Bristol board, 2004. 11 x 14 inch

Reddick is presently incarcerated at Connecticut's Cheshire Correctional Institution and has been working with the Community Partners in Action (CPA) Prison Arts Program for over two decades. Reddick's drawings are built of layers of pencil, repeatedly drawn and erased. Faces, figures, places, and actions are seemingly pulled out of the paper, drifting in and out of focus, dreamlike (or rather, nightmarish), and ethereal.

Stored: Archival Boxes

Display: under clear plexi-glass, secured to wall with L-shaped pins.



Michael Caron, *Ice Cream Truck*, Carved soap and string, 2005, 6 x 4 x 4 inch

Drug addiction has led Michael Caron to prison again and again. "I guess I take drugs just as seriously on the outside as I do my carving on the inside." He began carving cells out of state issued "Lisa" brand soap as a project for a CPA Prison Arts Program workshop at Cheshire CI in the 1990s, and, when he returned to prison around 2005.

Stored: Archival Boxes

Display: tables covered with plexi protectors, alternatively shelves, covered with plexi



Lee Jupina Sr., Drawings, ballpoint pen on Bristol board, 2014-2019, 7x 5 inch

Lee Jupina Sr. was given a stack of small Bristol board, a handful of ball point pens, and an

assignment: make a new drawing every day and use up the pens completely. His first drawing took the shape of a spot of peeling paint in his cell. He filled in that empty, jagged spot with as much ink as he could and went from there, establishing a stark silhouette style to first document the prison, and then on to his own dark, tragi-comical vision/version of the world.

Stored: Archival Boxes

Display under clear plexi-glass, secured to wall with L-shaped pins.



Rowan Renee, *No Spirit on Me*, selection of 12 photo-lithographs, 2019.

Display: flexible according to the venue consideration

Stored: 2 Boxes 13 x 16 x 13

No Spirit For Me was exhibited at MoMA PS1, Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration, curated by Nicole R. Fleetwood, Long Island City, NY, September 17, 2020 – April 5, 2021. Depending on your venue, Rowan will present a larger installation from the original PS1 installation.

Should your venue have sufficient space, sourcing artwork produced by incarcerated people from the State agency enhances the exhibition content and forges community connections. Please contact us for information on Prison Arts collections in your area.

Associated Costs:

Loan fee: \$4000 + art transit to and from the venue. Footage 105 linear feet.

Additional Exhibition flexibly based on discussions with curatorial staff

Security Medium

About the curator:

Julia Tikhonova Wintner is the director of Eastern Connecticut State University Art Gallery, Willimantic, CT. Wintner envisions Eastern Art Gallery as a leader in situating the arts in the service of the quest for social justice and promoting the role of artists in building economic and cultural equity. Wintner presented her paper From Louverture to Lenin: Haiti, Russia, and the Dilemma of Post-Coloniality at The UK Association For Art History (AAH) Annual Conference. In her previous position as the director of UCF Art Gallery, Orlando, FL Tikhonova developed a solid record of multidisciplinary curating. Tikhonova is a graduate of The Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, NY.