

UW-Eau Claire: 'Drawing on Narratives' exhibit opens Feb. 2 in Foster Gallery

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The [Foster Gallery](#) at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire will present "Drawing on Narratives," an exhibition featuring works by artists Melissa Cooke Benson, Jason Cytacki, Hayley Prestifilippo and Sohail Shehada. The exhibition will be on view from Feb. 3-March 12, with an opening reception from 6-7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 2. The exhibition and reception are free and open to the public.

"Drawing on Narratives" explores the various ways artists tell stories through visual imagery, metaphor and the drawing process. Artists in the exhibition "draw" from a range of themes and approaches to comment on a larger popular culture. The exhibition is an opportunity for audiences to explore the different ways that drawing can be used to create narratives and draw out a story, and how different drawing processes, both traditional and nontraditional, can evoke a sense of nostalgia, emotional or social tension, and human connection and vulnerability.

Artworks include large-scale graphite drawings, pastel and charcoal portraiture, mixed media drawings and 3D drawing installations. The exhibition also reaches across the curriculum beyond the visual arts; three student music composers studying under [Dr. Chia-Yu Hsu](#), associate professor of music-composition, have composed individual scores in response to the exhibition and will present their music as part of the opening reception.

About the artists

[Melissa Cooke Benson](#) specializes in large-scale, powdered graphite works on paper that are thematic narratives that often investigate the relationship between

photography, performance and drawing in portraiture. Her recent drawings fuse elements of realism with the transformative nature of parenthood in a global pandemic. Between a global pandemic, social injustice, isolation, and mounting stress and anxiety, drawing becomes a respite [and an opportunity] to make a conscious effort to process and reflect on her surroundings. The act of drawing slows down time, while observation alters and shapes memory. The drawings become meditations on the act of observing, and on being and becoming. More recently, Cooke Benson has begun to step away from the dependence on photography to create deconstructed portraits. These drawings reference the figure while simultaneously departing from the confines of traditional portraiture, allowing space for play and absurdity. Cooke Benson received her MFA from UW-Madison and is a Minneapolis-based freelance artist. She is represented by Koplín Del Río in Seattle, Washington.

Jason Cytacki uses assemblage and sculpture to explore drawing and painting narratives. His work examines serene meditations on everyday Midwestern scenes. Pieces of walls, furniture and objects are all re-creations from his childhood home in Indiana and related spaces. Inspired by the crumbling wonders of classical ruins, the life-size fragments are painstakingly reconstructed from family photos, archival images and his own memories. Much as classical ruins reflect an irretrievable halcyon era, these sculptures draw a sense of unattainable reality, a futile re-creation of a seemingly perfect past. Cytacki earned his MFA from the University of Notre Dame and lives and works in Norman, Oklahoma, with his wife and two sons. He is an associate professor of painting at the University of Oklahoma.

Haley Prestifilippo's drawings explore the nature of relationships to underscore the intricacy of human experience. The drawings assemble and interpret some of the objects the artist has saved throughout her life and by extension the people and moments they embody. Many of the drawings are partially erased, unformed or unfinished, while some of the drawings include woven hair she lost and subsequently saved after the birth of her second child, further activating the drawings as mementos themselves. Without knowing the history of the objects, they might appear meaningless to others, but for Prestifilippo, they are a tangible bridge to a specific person, place or event, to remember them, and that the objects truly existed as some point in time. Prestifilippo earned her MA in studio art from Eastern Illinois University. She lives and works in Norman, Oklahoma, with her husband and two sons, and teaches drawing at the University of Oklahoma School of Visual Arts.

[Sohail Shehada's](#) portraits grant us the ability to see beyond human exterior appearances and dive into the psyche of the subject by highlighting the subtle qualities that make each person unique. The complexity of the human face and the expressions that facial features can reveal to the outside world have been of great fascination to Shehada. The models he uses for his portraits are often individuals he knows; the choices he makes in the compositions to reveal the personality of the subject — how to place, angle and present the sitter, and how the environment is composed around the subject — are based on communicating with the individual more than what simply lies on the surface. Shehada holds an MFA in ceramics and a BFA in studio art from the University of Oklahoma, and a BA in architecture from Oklahoma State University. Shehada is a master figurative sculptor with multiple large-scale works in public spaces and in private commissions throughout the nation. He teaches figurative sculpture and drawing at the University of Oklahoma School of Art.

Events

Artist panel discussion: Melissa Cooke Benson, Jason Cytacki, Hayley Prestifilippo and Sohail Shehada will discuss their artwork. Haas Fine Arts Center, Room 101. Thursday, Feb. 2, 5-6 p.m.

Opening reception: Thursday Feb. 2, 6-7:30 p.m. in the Foster Gallery. Artist Haley Prestifilippo will facilitate an audience “drawing performance” during the reception. The reception also will feature live music by UW-Eau Claire student composers studying under Hsu:

- J.M. Lee composed “Covid Kids” inspired by Cooke Benson’s “The Lookout” drawing. This piece is based on the juxtaposition between the innocence of a four-year-old girl and the fear that comes with a global pandemic.
- Jacob “Yaki” Hallett composed “A Simple Heirloom” inspired by Prestifilippo’s drawings.
- Lee and Hallett also collaborated on “The Boy King” in response to Shehada’s “Operetta.” The music is composed using a three-part story based on the impressions each face in the drawing gave the composers.
- Luke Tackett wrote the composition “From My Time” for Cytacki’s drawing installation to reflect the themes present in the art, mainly nostalgia and the passage of time.