

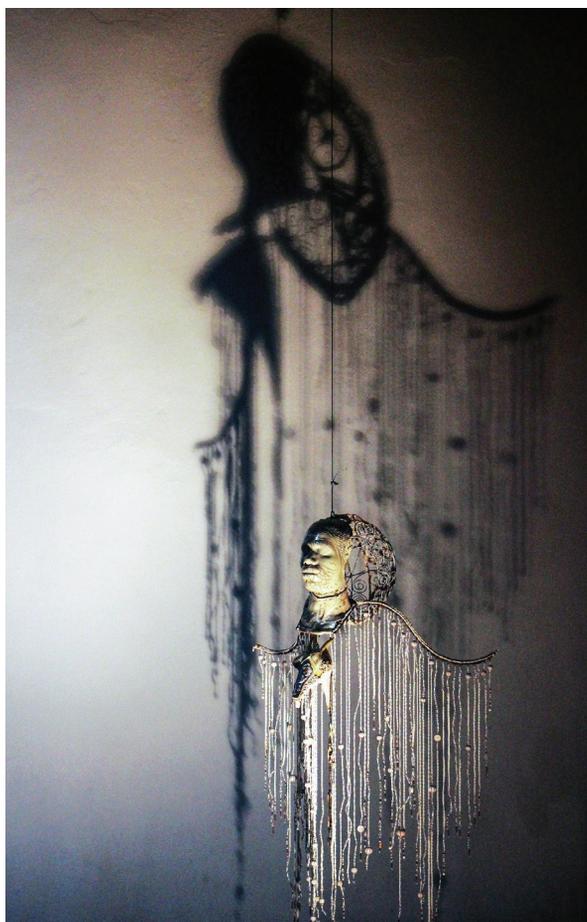


CREATING DANGEROUSLY: ART AND REVOLUTION

Vladimir Cybil Charlier, Sasha Huber, Edouard Duval-Carrie, Pascale Monnin, Nyugen E. Smith, and Didier William. Also on view, art works from Eastern's Haitian art collection, as well as loans from Trinity College, Pioneer Works (Brooklyn), and private collectors.

January 17 — March 12, 2020

Opening reception: January 23, 4-6 p.m.



PASCAL MONNIN, *Sacrificed Angel, Kingdom of this World*, 2004-17, 67 x 31 x 31 inches, raku ware, bone, beads, image courtesy of the artist.

In the case of Haiti, the island has been an authentic cultural crucible, the mix of Carib, Arawak/Taino Indians, the Spanish invaders, the fearsome Brothers of the Coast, filibusters, pirates of all kinds from French, English, and more than thirty African tribes. *Caribbean-ing* is a global condition.⁸ The artists in *Creating Dangerously* deploy a multitude of languages to support freedom struggles worldwide.

The Black Atlantic – shaped and sustained by the slave trade – united the continents of Africa, South and North America and Europe in an indissoluble bond. Between 1492 and 1820, millions of African people crossed the Atlantic. Haiti was one of the ports through which the “insemination of the Caribbean womb with the blood of Africa” took place.⁹ This violently brutal migration played a key role in a call for freedom rooted in a shared African heritage. In the words of Natalio Galán, the ancient pulsations brought by the African diaspora, the memory of sacred drums, and the words of the griot

were amplified by the rhythms of the sugar cane milling machines, the machete strokes that cut the cane, the overseer’s lash, and the planter’s language, and gave birth to a yearning for freedom.¹⁰

The 1791 Haitian revolution posed a set of absolutely central political questions. As Laurent Dubois states, Haitian revolutionaries were survivors of the Middle Passage and carried with them the African spirit of independence.¹¹ In her book, *Haiti, Hegel and Universal History* Susan Buck Morss claims that the “Haitian revolution informed the Hegelian master/slave dialectic and that it stands above the French and American revolutions.”¹²

It inspired the abolitionists, the Civil Rights movement, and the Black Lives Matter movement. This revolutionary creativity imbues the artworks in *Creating Dangerously*. It also sends out danger signals to those who are in power.

The more traditional artists in our exhibit ironically – and no doubt intentionally – hint at the dangers that simmers just below the surface of their bucolic Haitian landscapes through their valiant attempts to hide it from view: Haiti as Paradise defies the reality known to all!

Hector Hippolyte, Jacques Wesley, Wilfrid Teleon, and Henry Valbrune depict idealized scenes of Haitian life, towns squares, rural villages, children rushing to school, and tropical landscapes. The pastoral scenes, bright palette and joyous spirit of the paintings could be viewed as politically safe style reinforced by the state, which conducted an intensive campaign against voodoo’s “superstitious beliefs,” in which tens of thousands of sacred voodoo objects were destroyed.

These artists utilized multiple perspective, detailed rendering, vivid colors, and simplified human forms. These stylistic qualities stand in sharp contrast to the highly visible political stance of our contemporary artists.

Other Westerners invested in the development of Haitian culture, as they continued to search for their alter-ego – the exotic other. In the 1940s and ’50s Haiti was touched by the globalized spread of Modernism. André Breton, Maya Deren and Wilfredo Lam were drawn to Haiti in search of “raw” imagination untainted by Western culture.¹³ They championed its “unspoiled” nature, which led to the subsequent commodification of Haitian “primitive” art by Western collectors. Local art patrons, Stanley Popiel and Ingrid Feddersen, who worked in Haiti on a health mission, gifted the selection of traditional paintings on view. Early scholars saw Haitian art as important evidence of an African diaspora aesthetic that journalists described as naïve and exotic.

10 Natalio Galán, musician, composer, teacher and writer, gained limited but international recognition during his lifetime. Galán wrote music for films and composed two operas and other compositions. With the event of the Cuban revolution he returned to his native land, where for several years he flourished as composer and teacher and began a writing career as music critic for the *Diario Revolución*.

11 Dubois, *Ibid*.

12 Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2009. She places the Haitian experience at the core of political and social modernity: “Scholars of modern philosophies of freedom are hobbled in attempting to do their work in ignorance of Haitian history.

The Haitian revolution is a singular event in the history of colonialism. It is the pinnacle of revolutionary creativity amongst the slave societies that defined the economies of the New World for four hundred years.

The Haitian revolutionaries propelled the Enlightenment principles of universalism forward in unexpected ways, by insisting on the self-evident principle that no one should be a slave.¹ Haitian artists are heirs to that revolutionary creativity, but also the post-colonial reaction, retribution, and *comprador* regimes that impoverished and terrorized the country.

As Edwidge Danticat tells us in her book, *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*² (which was a guide star for this exhibition and lends its title), Haiti's history begins the history of the Black Atlantic – the shared territory and culture both real and symbolic of Africa, the Caribbean, South, and North America, infamously created by the Middle Passage of the Atlantic slave trade.³ What can be more dangerous than art steeped in the history of terror and transcendence of the Black Atlantic?

Edouard Duval Carrié, Cybil Charlier, Sasha Huber, Pascale Monnin, Nyugen E. Smith, and Didier William are contemporary artists inspired by Haiti's enduring legacy of slavery, revolution, exile, and diaspora. Their works engage a knowledge of Haiti that is both lived-in, representational, and conceptual, are set against a backdrop of “traditional” Haitian art (from Eastern's own extensive collection). Together, they reflect an artistic lineage that commingles the energy, joy, and danger of Haiti's history.



EDOUARD DUVAL-CARRIÉ, *Hispaniola Saga*, 2002, mixed media on aluminum, 60 x 60 inches, image courtesy of the artist.

EDOUARD DUVAL-CARRIÉ, a Haitian-born painter and sculptor, engages Haitian iconography to address contemporary social and political conditions of the region. His work explores the genesis of the island nation, and the suffering of this society of slaves and masters that brought forth the Haitian Revolution. Duval-Carrié reverts to the pictorial effects, imagination, and fictions that were used to present the Caribbean as the “New Eden,” a fertile land of possibility that we see in the “traditional” works from Eastern's collection. The artist never loses sight of the fabulous world of spirits that pervade Haitian mythology.

VLADIMIR CYBIL CHARLIER utilizes painting, embroidery, collage, and site specific installation to reflect the gender and cultural stereotypes that have disfigured Haiti as well as other Caribbean countries. *Dreammaker I and II*, are 9-foot tall paintings that portray island women carrying on their heads larger than life baskets of fruit, vegetables, poultry, and bottles. Their colors and textures delight our eye, only slowly is our eye drawn to the tiny woman's head at the bottom of the painting that carries this outsized tropical cornucopia. Charlier's challenges the burden of Euro-centric stereotypes: the Dreammakers dissects the colonial romance for a tropical paradise of exotic otherness. We recognize pictorial styles used by Gauguin, Cezanne, as well as early Florida landscape artists, who introduced tropical lushness to the vocabulary of Western visual world. These paintings reveal Charlier's synthesis of her Haitian ancestry and her Western fine art education.

For Zurich-born, Helsinki-based **SASHA HUBER**, Haiti has never been a lived experience, only something imagined by listening to the stories of her mother and her grandfather, Georges Remponeau, one of the founders of Centre d'Art where the Haitian paintings at Eastern art collection were produced. Huber wields a compressed-air staple gun as her paint brush, a visual metaphor of the action of shooting back – the artist's personal weapon to confront her history. Each shot represents lost human lives, which can perhaps be counted in the millions. Her quilt, *Remedy For Freedom - The Underground Railroad on Staten Island*, on view at the gallery, is a collaboration with Petri Saarikko. This work belongs to a larger series of Remedies that explore the aural knowledge of traditional folk remedies passed down through families across the globe.

PASCALE MONNIN shares her cosmopolitan upbringing with that of Huber. Moving between Haiti and Switzerland, Monnin's transnationalism is evident in her work. She creates dazzling installations of suspended crystal beads, raku human and animal heads that are mobile, hovering and ghostly – brought to life by the

1 Laurent Dubois, *Atlantic Freedoms*, Aeon, <https://aeon.co/essays/why-haiti-should-be-at-the-centre-of-the-age-of-revolution/> Accessed 23 October, 2019.

2 Edwidge Danticat, *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*, 2010, Princeton University Press.

3 English historian Paul Gilroy defines the Black Atlantic as a space of transnational cultural construction. For more information see <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/black-atlantic/about/>

4 Alejo Carpentier, *Kingdom of This World*, 1957, translated by Harriet de Onís.



VLADIMIR CYBIL CHARLIER, *Dreamaker II*, 2006, 109 x 36 inches, acrylic, india ink, sequins and beads, image courtesy of the artist.

cast shadows that are intrinsic to the concept. *Sacrificed Angel, Kingdom of this World*, 2004-17 is inspired by Alejo Carpentier's book of the same title. Sacrificed Angel is a metaphor of the Haitian revolution.⁴ It pays homage to the dreams of freedom eventually killed off by the Black regimes that failed to break the mold imposed by the French colonists. The ruling Afro-Caribbeans enslaved and oppressed their own countrymen, provoking decades of violence and devastation. Monnin reflects on the fact that political vision is often betrayed by the very ones who dreamed it, by giving *Angel* a double face; on one side is a man, on the other is a non-face, framed by a human jaw.

NYUGEN SMITH has been working on the concept of *Bundlehouse* for 15 years. It is a metaphor for the shanty house, emergency shelter, and hideout created from scraps of found materials. The artist uses different media to uncover the significance of the precarious natural and political circumstances that burden the Caribbean. He builds, paints, and draws make-shift, cardboard dwellings by carrying over the improvisational genius of shantytown residents who can transform any material into a dwelling. His houses contain the joyous complexities of lived Black spaces. These shanty houses have been the inspiration of a unique confluences of diasporic trajectories for Smith, who is of Trinidadian and Haitian descent. Smith's use of collage, performance, and installation recalls the work of artists such as Nicole Awai, Adrian Piper, Ana Mendieta, and Jose Bedia.

DIDIER WILLIAM paints silhouette figures composed of all-over fields of small eyes incised into the picture plane and inked in black. The tiny machetes that form the surface pattern allude to the heroines of the Haitian Revolution. They speak of phantoms born of a legacy of violence. The eyes are a Voodoo symbol and give the figures a spooky power. Not content to settle into a role as "object" of our gaze, William's figures stare

REMEDY FOR FREEDOM - THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD ON STATEN ISLAND

1664 SLAVERY BEGINS ON STATEN ISLAND	1748 ONE OF THE FIRST "RUNAWAY" ADS	1775 BOSTON KING ESCAPES BONDAGE & PRESENTS HIMSELF TO THE BRITISH COMMAND	1783 "BOOK OF NEGROES" FOUR STATEN ISLANDERS OF AFRICAN DESCENT HEAD TO NOVA SCOTIA	1798 "RUNAWAY" AD DESCRIBES THREE AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN	1799 THE QUARANTINE STATION CREATED ON STATEN ISLAND; THE BRADIAL ABOLITION LAW GOES INTO EFFECT	1825 WILLIAM CRIMES "SLAVE NARRATIVE" ESCAPES VIA STATEN ISLAND AT THE QUARANTINE STATION WITH THE HELP OF A CONDUCTOR	1827 SLAVERY IS ABOLISHED IN NEW YORK STATE	1832 MOSES ROPE "SLAVE NARRATIVE" ESCAPE VIA THE QUARANTINE STATION AT STATEN ISLAND	1835 FAILED ESCAPE ATTEMPT OF THE "WHITE SLAVE" FROM NEW ORLEANS TO SIERRA LEONE	1848 AMISTAD RESISTORS DOCKED AT STATEN ISLAND BEFORE HEADING TO SIERRA LEONE	1851 THE STATEN ISLAND UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH IS FOUNDED IN WEST NEW BRIGHTON	1855 500 AFRICAN AMERICANS GATHER AT THE CLIFTON STATEN ISLAND	1863 CIVIL WAR DRAFT RIOTS ON STATEN ISLAND THREATENED/ROBERT G. SHAW & THOMAS P. ROBINSON STORM FORT WAGNER, SC WITH 54TH MASS. USGT	1865 CIVIL WAR ENDS, 13TH AMENDMENT RATIFIED	1868 14TH AMENDMENT RATIFIED	1870 15TH AMENDMENT RATIFIED	1877 RECONSTRUCTION ERA ENDS	1964 THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT RATIFIED	1994 THE VIOLENT CRIME CONTROL & LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT (CRIME BILL)	2014 ERIC GARNER IS MURDERED ON STATEN ISLAND BY NYE POLICE DEPT. ON JULY 17TH	2019 THREATENED RAIDS ON IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES
---	--	---	--	---	---	---	--	---	---	--	---	---	--	---	---------------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------------------------	--	---	---

WAYS TO FREEDOM

1. MANUMISSION: RELEASE FROM SLAVERY BY OWNERS
2. FREEDOM SUIT: INITIATED ON BEHALF OF ENSLAVED PERSON
3. SELF-EMANCIPATION: ENSLAVED PERSON TAKES UP DANGEROUS ESCAPE

ANTI-SLAVERY FRIENDS

ABOLITIONISTS

SNUG HARBOR: MARIA DE PEYSTER, DAVIS AV: WENDELL PHILLIPS, CHARLOTTE GRIMKÉ FORTEN, WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON, HARRIET & ROBERT PURVIS, ELIZABETH CADY STANTON, ELIZABETH & SYDNEY HOWARD, SUSAN B. ANTHONY, SARAH & FRANCIS GEORGE SHAW, COLONEL ROBERT GOULD SHAW (54TH MASS.), JOSEPHINE SHAW & CHARLES R. LOWELL

ANTI-SLAVERY FRIENDS

FREDRICK DOUGLASS
SOJOURNER TRUTH
HARRIET TUBMAN
HORACE GREELEY
HENRY WARD BEECHER

BARD AV: ANNA & GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS
LIVINGTON AV: DR. SAMUEL MCKENZIE ELLIOTT
DELAFIELD AV: GEORGE C. WARD
SANDY GROUND: THOMAS P. ROBINSON (54TH MASS.), WILLIAM H. PITTS (A.M.E. ZION MINISTER), ISAAC COLEMAN (A.M.E. ZION MINISTER), JEPHTHA BARCROFT (A.M.E. ZION MINISTER)

EVENTS

1. PORT RICHMOND BAPTIST CHURCH WHERE THE LYCEUM LECTURES WERE DELIVERED.
2. STAPLETON/CLIFTON - LOCATION OF THE 1855 AUGUST 1ST CELEBRATION OF THE "WEST INDIAN" EMANCIPATION.
3. BULLS HEAD - LOCATION OF THE 1856 A.M.E. ZION CAMP MEETING WITH HORACE GREELEY AS THE GUEST SPEAKER.

NEW UNDERGROUND RAILROAD?

MEN-STEALERS JOHN WALLACE & NED SHORES

SASHA HUBER & PETRI SAARIKKO, *Remedy For Freedom - The Underground Railroad on Staten Island*, 2019, from the series Remedies Universe, oil pastel and pigment of cotton, 230 x 62 inches, image courtesy of the artists.

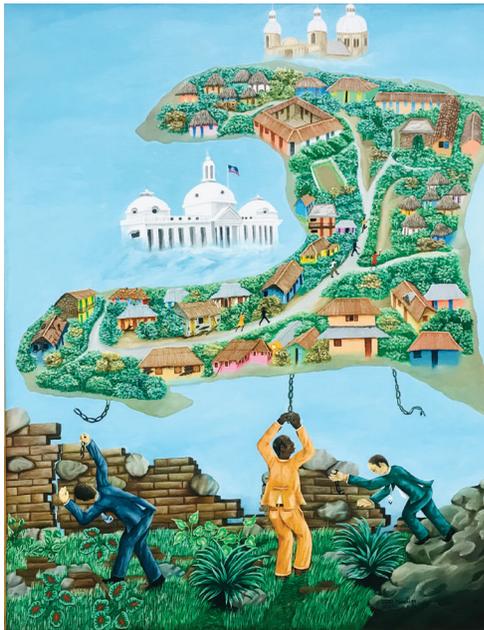
5 According to Stuart Hall, "Caribbean" is an "route". With the suffix "-ness" the term alludes to a condition or quality of "being Caribbean." This encompasses an amalgam of Spanish, French, English, Jewish cultures.

6 The 206 pieces of Haitian art were donated to ECSU by the local art patrons, Stanley Popiel and Ingrid Feddersen in 2001. This is a highly anticipated curation since its last showing, 10 years ago at Yale Institute of Sacred Music. Creating Dangerously is also apropos to the geographical context of Hartford area, with its large population of West Indians.

7 Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island, The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 1997, Duke University Press.



NYUGEN E. SMITH, *Bundlehouse* (like oil + water), 2018, mixed media and collage on paper, 43 x 36 inches, image courtesy of the artist.



MARCELLUS JOSEPH, *Haiti Raising*, 1986, oil on canvas, 31 x 25 inches, collection of Eastern Connecticut State University.

back at us with eyes like ghosts in a haunted forest. They serve as an analogy for the arduous labor of a Black re-imagining of a history dominated by a white colonial discourse. William pays homage to contemporaries like Mickalene Thomas, and the colorful fabrics of West Africa.

Duval Carrié, Charlier, Huber, Monnin, Smith, and William experiment with diverse forms, media, and ar-

tistic traditions. They create a powerful tension between established artistic genres (painting, portraiture, installation), formal artistic styles (conceptual and realist), and discursive modes of creative production (collage, assemblage). Their work differs from the more “traditional” paintings by the Haitian artists in Eastern’s art collection. However, it is the traditional artists who preserved the spirit of cultural freedom, seeded by the revolution. Our contemporary artists are heirs to this freedom. The danger of their art is rooted in their relentless and passionate struggle for dignity.

How should we understand the dangers these artists face? Exclusion and misinterpretation are threats that face every artist. Haiti has been portrayed as a land of savages. Columbus described it as an island of cannibals. Its heat and humidity, tropical food, and diseases inclining them to moral turpitude, brutality, sexual laxness, and insanity.² Here, the African gods made a pact with the devil to conjure up Voodoo, the religion of the revolution. Voodoo has been blamed for every possible disaster, natural and man-made, including AIDS, debt, deforestation, corruption, exploitation, and violence. This region has been considered an antipode to Western rationalism, historical progress, and the Enlightenment – a black hole of “otherness,” in which the colonialists defined their superiority.

I am reminded of Stuart Hall’s assertion that the colonial discourse in this region was fueled by the desire for otherness and its dichotomies of civilized/uncivilized, cultural/natural, superior/inferior.⁵ These linkages between coloniality and “otherness” had a formative impact on the visual arts of the Caribbean. The multi-vocal local art can be grouped into two schools. The first group employs the raw art objects that served in Voodoo ceremonies. The artists transformed ready-made and recycled materials into apocalyptic images. Their sculptures render the eerie, naïve, and occult. The second school is refined and peaceful – traditional: detailed paintings of rural areas and the towns and their central squares, made for a secular environment (and tourists).⁶

Haiti was not alone in being a doomed signifier of “otherness.” The entire Caribbean constellations of islands: was a suspicious *tabula rasa*. Each island was a vulnerable rim opening onto the sea, where the tensions between movement and settlement, island and mainland, land and water were defining parameters. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, an acclaimed Cuban novelist saw similarities between archipelagos world-wide, including New Zealand and China. While individual islands maintained their uniqueness, the connections between seemingly disparate cultural elements constituted one continuous culture.⁷

8 Consequently, from about 1990- through 2000 the art from Haiti was almost unknown along with other Caribbean countries. Recently, the new generation of Art historians spearheaded by Tatiana Flores, who curated *Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago* a highly acclaimed exhibition that traveled to five venues in 2018.

9 Most of the Caribbean islands were slowly transformed into slave societies. During the three and half centuries of the trade, slavers brought more than five million Africans to the Caribbean, eight hundred thousand of them to Saint Domingue alone. Peoples from the thirty African cultures were carried in chains to the island. From Barbados and Jamaica northward to South Carolina and Virginia and southward to Brazil, slavery came to dominate the economies of the western Atlantic.

Until recently, the artists in this exhibition were dismissed as “ethnographic:” conjured in isolation and under the mystical Voodoo spell. Latin American art historians often selectively excluded Caribbean artists, favoring the Hispanophone countries and omitting the French, Dutch, Anglophone and other islands. In the last decade, a new generation of scholars emerged: Tatiana Flores, Michelle Stephens, Jerry Philogene, and many others, who have suggested nuanced definitions of Caribbean identity, and placed it firmly within the Diasporic and Trans-Atlantic discourses.

Creating Dangerously humbly follows in their footsteps and attempts to reveal the almost invisible linkages between the mainland Haitian artists and their contemporary colleagues. The exhibition proposes a system of definitions that binds together the works on display into a close knit body of cross-cultural dialogs and traditional connections. It conveys the multiple vantage points that converge and articulate the Caribbean diasporic experience.

Creating Dangerously emphasizes the resilience of the Haitian people, communicating their optimism and their commitment to the survival of their unique culture. They create in the dangerous context of escalating violence and anti-immigrant frenzy. They refute the noxious policies of our politicians and the white noise of the media. They challenge conventional ideas of art practices and explore the global realities of the Haitian artistic diaspora. They provide us with inventive tools with which to reflect on our collective histories. They re-imagine freedom as it emerges from old conventions and stereotypes; and daily risk everything to create art that boldly guides us towards a more just and humane future.■

—Yulia Tikhonova

Coordinator of Gallery and Museum Services, 2019



NYUGEN E. SMITH, *Bundlehouse Borderlines No. 6 (_emembe_)*, 2018, 85 x 54 inches, pen and ink, watercolor, thread, colored pencil, acrylic, graphite, gesso, metallic marker, colored pencil, tea, Diaspora soil, sequins, oil pastel, fabric, lace, canvas on paper, image courtesy of the artist.

Image on Cover **DIDIER WILLIAM**, *M mache toupatou ave l*, 2018, 48 x 60 inches, collage, acrylic, ink, and carving on panel, image courtesy of the artist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the artists for participating and contributing their compelling work to this exhibition. Most of all, I wish to thank the faculty of Arts and Art History for their intellectual and emotional support of this project; President Dr. Nunez, Dr. Salka, and the administration of ECSU. Without Mark McKee, the preparator, and the gallery staff, this exhibition would not be possible.



Tuesday & Wednesday 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
Thursday 1-7 p.m. | Saturday & Sunday 2-5 p.m.
www.easternct.edu/artgallery/
All events are free and open to the public.



EASTERN
CONNECTICUT
STATE UNIVERSITY
www.easternct.edu