

POEMS, PLASTER & PAPER

MORE THAN WORDS AT SIMMONS

On the walls of the Trustman Gallery, shadows from plastic wire, fiber and thread constructions hover over the soft grey texts of blown-up poems, plaster and paper reliefs and white-and-black print-collages. "Linger and Shift" is a collaboration between Boston sculptor Julia Shepley and Scottish-born poet

tudes and illness, they both developed artistic sensitivities in an enforced solitude. "Being alone in rooms without adult intervention, life goes on, and you're left to survey the passage of time," Henderson mused. "You don't know about time, so you study light and try to interpret your environment. You imbue your physical surround-

ing with emotional significance."

These works play off both conversations and responses to each other's formal works. A skilled printmaker, Shepley incorporates repeated marks and multiples in layered 3-D works hinting at voids, separation and leaps of light. Henderson's terse poems excavate the past for clues to the present, grunting, choking and thrusting forward in a struggle with breath itself. At the entrance, Shepley's individual wall reliefs and print-based works in related pairs will

alternate with Henderson's poems. A separate area will show Shepley's precursory works.

"Some of the work that I didn't produce within the collaboration still speaks to the same issues that we're dealing with," Shepley explained. "I'd like to include some of the different languages. The sculptures will go where they work the best with whatever work is there."

In advance of the exhibition going on view, I spoke with Shepley and Henderson about the multi-media works in the show and the collaboration that added words to the images.

YOU'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT SPOKEN OR WRITTEN LANGUAGES, BUT THE LANGUAGES, THE DIFFERENT IDIOMS, OF ART. HAVE YOU WORKED BEFORE WITH TEXT OR LANGUAGE IDEAS?

JULIA SHEPLEY (JS): I write down words sometimes that capture the emotion or atmosphere I'm feeling at the time I'm doing a piece. I collect them and they influence the piece. In this case, it was more Audrey's words. This is part of the "Migrant" series, before I started working with Audrey.

THERE'S THE HOUSE FORM AND THE WINDOW. IS THERE A NARRATIVE?

JS: It's about things shifting, and capturing the shift and channeling; you bring your home with you wherever you go.

THERE'S INSTABILITY.

JS: Yeah, but also a kind of stability, because you're bringing the stuff with you. When I work, I try to have strength and fragility at the same time.

I SEE THE FRAGILITY. THE STRENGTH IS HARDER TO UNDERSTAND.

JS: There's strength, too. It survives me, and if it survives me, it survives a lot!

Last fall, Audrey told me about these match strikes on the courthouse wall that were really beautiful.

FEATURED ARTIST

JULIA SHEPLEY:
LINGER & SHIFT (WITH
POETRY BY AUDREY
HENDERSON)

TRUSTMAN ART
GALLERY

SIMMONS COLLEGE
300 THE FENWAY
BOSTON,
MASSACHUSETTS

SEPTEMBER 4
THROUGH OCTOBER 1



Audrey Henderson. Their separate, yet deeply intermeshed works grew out of monthly conversations begun over a year ago.

The longtime friends were spurred to parallel play by a Boston Sculptors Gallery exhibition featuring verbal-visual collaboration. It intensified their psychic bond to discover that, as children undergoing family viciss-

Embedded Memory, 2018,
cast paper, plaster, polymer,
thread, 27" x 20" x 6".

AUDREY HENDERSON (AH): I was walking around the court in the heart of Edinburgh (Scotland). In the era of heavy smoking, people would strike their matches against stone walls and light cigarettes. The walls had these intense carbon lines and the carbon would seem to seep into the wall and seem fused with it, in a way that reminded me of Lascaux and early cave painting. I started taking pictures of them.

JS: I wanted Audrey to send me the pictures, and to talk about it more. The courthouse had another resonance for me. I have an opioid-addicted family member who robbed a convenience store. The courthouse walls and the people sitting outside, stressed ... it's a transitional state you're in, waiting for a hearing.

AH: You could tell someone had just argued a case, and they came out for a cigarette, and there's so much violence in the match strikes.

You always can tell the kind of energy that was contained in the room by the weight of the match strikes on the wall. There's a meditation there, on law and building blocks for society, the language around that and the way they can shift, the power or the vulnerability of that system.

ARE THESE ALSO PART OF THE MATCH-MARKING?

JS: No, that's "Into the Shadows"; that's "Sense Sparks." They're about the energy and the light and the dark in a room.

IN A CONTAINED ROOM ... IT'S ARCHITECTURE.

JS: The marks are from photographs and drawings I did from a big bonfire, the way the sparks were being caught in the wind.

ALL OF THESE ORIGINAL MARKS ARE FROM PRINTS?

JS: They're from ink drawings first, but they're shifted in a different perspective. I will hang pairings, different things that are both made from the same prints.

My husband says [I] always have to do things the hardest way possible! It's because I'm always looking for surprise.

THAT'S A POSITIVE WAY TO PUT IT. IF YOU CAN SEE IT FOR WHAT IT IS, OR COULD BE, INSTEAD OF WHAT IT ISN'T.

JS: And for the emotional underpinnings that might be there. I have been starting with visual stuff that Audrey's been sharing with me in words. It's process – the texture of things, the feeling of things, the light. When I was drawing [stone blocks], I wasn't sure what scale, what perspective, so I did drawings of blocks in a row and I cut the block out of the paper – and I loved the holes! That was a complete surprise.

OPPOSITE LEFT: *Part*, 2016, woodcut, collage, stitching on paper and fabric, 15" x 15" x 1".

OPPOSITE RIGHT: *Striking a Light, Courthouse Stone* (detail) (work-in-progress), cast paper with plaster and pigment, collaged borrowed poem fragments by Audrey Henderson, scrim, thread, 34" x 44" x 4".



Island Cottages, acrylic on canvas, 20"x20"

PAUL PEDULLA

450 Harrison Ave., studio 314, Boston
617.480.7364 · paulpedulla.com

BEE STREET STUDIO
6445 Cedar Springs Rd., #103, Dallas
469.233.5505 · beestreetstudio.com

SAUGATUCK ART TRADERS
129 Griffith St. #106, Saugatuck, Michigan
773.218.0594 · saugatuckfineart.com

SERENA & LILY
serenaandlily.com

SHARON WEISS GALLERY
20 East Lincoln St., Columbus, Ohio
614.291.5683 · sharonweissgallery.com

VIZIVEL
855.849.4835 · vizivel.com



THIS IS [THE ORIGINAL, WITH] A NEW LAYER OF CUTOUT ON TOP?

JS: It's scrim. I wanted it to be an empty void, something becoming physical; I didn't like for it to be so literal. I loved the cutout and it took me time to figure out how to have both exist at the same time. It's the emptiness and the embodied, the physical and the absence, and the space, the opening left behind.

It's like my relationship with the words right now. They're living with me, they're just popping up – little phrases from Audrey's poems all by themselves, or words will tie up with other words from a different poem. It's like a conversation in my head about the words. That was a surprise.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT? YOU'RE HANDING A LOT OF POWER OVER TO EACH OTHER!

AH: Well, after the poem's written, you're just another reader. It's out there, existing in different ways and different times, and memory snatches phrases. What Julie's done with the pieces of writing is a physical representation of that process of

memory and resonance and the way that one particular word will strike you and hit an emotional chord. How she's written the word on the fabric gives it almost an echo! Then there's an element of chance when you're writing a poem. You're always grabbing something that's fleeting.

JS: We like our work, but we don't feel intensely after it's done – unless we're not finished with the idea. In this piece, there's something I want to come back to, but I don't know how – yet. Qualities I see about light and dark, but I want to do it differently. So that piece is going to live with me for a while.

AH: Seamus Heaney says about a poem being finished, "It's done when I leave it alone and it leaves me alone." You're done. We're done – with each other.

The opening reception for "Julia Shepley: Linger & Shift (with poetry by Audrey Henderson)" takes place on Thursday, September 13 from 5-7 p.m.; there will be an artist talk

and poetry reading on Wednesday, September 26 at 6 p.m.

| Elizabeth Michelman

Odell ■ studios ■ gallery



Tom Odell
Eternal Whirl
bronze on marble base
24" x 12" x 12"

Carol Odell
Walking Deep Greens
oil on panel
48" x 36"



423 Main Street • Chatham, MA • 508 945-3239
www.odellarts.com