

THE JAMES AND AUDREY FOSTER PRIZE

DECEMBER 10, 2006 -
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SHEILA GALLAGHER
JANE D. MARSCHING
KELLY SHERMAN
RACHEL PERRY WELTY



SHEILA GALLAGHER

Sheila Gallagher uses combinations of painting, video, sound, drawing, and sculpture to express intangible phenomena, with examples ranging from attempts to prove the existence of miracles to the practice of making New Year's resolutions. For this exhibition, Gallagher has created *Unknown Source*, a series of related works inspired by "The Cloud of Unknowing," a seminal text by an anonymous 14th-century Christian mystic offering a practical path toward contemplation. Landscape and cloud imagery serve as the series' primary visual metaphors, through

which Gallagher explores the tension between the known world and alternate states of awareness. For these works she uses unexpected materials that are both highly physical and impermanent, such as fresh flowers and soot. On view are *Cumulonimbus*, her startling depiction of clouds with fresh flowers, and landscapes made with smoke and inspired by luminism (a term coined for 19th-century American landscape painting characterized by dramatic views of natural and celestial light). A video work blends images of people engaged in prayer and people dowsing (where pendulums or rods are used to locate water beneath the earth's surface) with depictions of the natural world above and below.

Gallagher earned a Master of Fine Arts from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1996. She is Assistant Professor in Fine Art at Boston College.

Study for Cumulonimbus, 2006

Equivalents (video still), 2006



Sheila Gallagher, Jane D. Marsching, Kelly Sherman, and Rachel Perry Welty, whose work is on view in this exhibition, are finalists for the 2006 James and Audrey Foster Prize. Established in 1999 as the ICA Artist Prize and renamed the James and Audrey Foster Prize in 2006, the award recognizes Boston-area artists who demonstrate exceptional artistic promise. The Foster Prize is key to the ICA's efforts to encourage innovative artistic talent found within Greater Boston.

Gallagher, Marsching, Sherman, and Welty were chosen earlier this year by a distinguished jury including Lisa Corrin, Director of the Williams College Museum of Art in Williamstown, MA; Taylor Davis, a Boston-based artist and past winner of the prize; Billie Tsien, artist, designer, and Principal of Tod Williams Billie Tsien and Associates in New York; Benjamin Weil, Executive Director of Artists Space in New York; and Jill Medvedow, ICA Director. The four finalists were selected from a pool of more than 40 artists who were nominated by 30 locally-based artists and arts professionals. The jury's choice for the winner of the \$25,000 award will be announced in February.

MORE VOICES: A BIGGER IMPACT

In its new waterfront home, the ICA has expanded the James and Audrey Foster Prize exhibition and award program, offering visitors a broader glimpse of the creative activity thriving in and around Boston. Previously, only the winner of the Artist Prize received an exhibition at the ICA. The increased gallery space of the new museum allows us to present the work of all the finalists, creating critical opportunities for more area artists to exhibit and for visitors to respond to four different bodies of work.

BOSTON AS INCUBATOR: GALLAGHER, MARSCHING, SHERMAN, AND WELTY

Sheila Gallagher, Jane D. Marsching, Kelly Sherman, and Rachel Perry Welty all cite one or more of Boston's amenities as having a positive impact on their work. Both Gallagher and Welty point to the preponderance of institutions of higher learning. Sherman derives energy from the no-nonsense, tough-loving, and hard-working style of the city's inhabitants. Marsching simply states, "I like the parades."

Boston, often called the Athens of America, has made significant contributions in the areas of medicine, higher education, sports, and technology. But a healthy debate about Boston's relative merits as a vital center for contemporary art has circulated among artists, educators, curators, and dealers alike for several decades. Does Boston provide a favorable climate for contemporary art? Do collectors, museums, and other institutions give Boston artists their due? Is there incentive for important artists to live and work here? The ICA is committed to finding creative strategies for addressing these questions. The James and Audrey Foster Prize is of primary importance to this effort in its aim to propel an area artist's career at a critical stage.

The artistic output of Gallagher, Marsching, Sherman, and Welty indicates that Boston is an effective incubator for contemporary art. Individually and collectively, these artists are consumed with humanistic, timely themes, such as the state of the environment, belief, emotion, and the poetic yet un sentimental examination of daily life. Like many celebrated artists from around the globe, Gallagher, Marsching, Sherman, and Welty use a variety of approaches and forms to make their work, including painting, drawing, sculpture, found objects, and video.

Also reflecting wider trends in contemporary art, these four invite other individuals to play roles in their artistic production, both directly and indirectly. Such participation takes many forms and occurs on many levels, from the active involvement of scientists and other professionals in Jane D. Marsching's *Arctic Listening Post* to the collective gathering and assembling of countless twist ties and other ephemera for Rachel Perry Welty's works. Horticulturalists, flower wholesalers, and the American Society of Dowsers play key roles in the new work Sheila Gallagher created for the ICA. No less important is the indirect participation of Kelly Sherman's unknown authors of wish lists posted on the Internet.

The artistic pursuits of these four demonstrate an active, joyful immersion in the beauty and incongruity of today's world. Not surprisingly, three of these four artists used the term "wonder" when interviewed about their work. One detects an old-fashioned sense of optimism and derring-do toward their chosen topics. The respective artistic projects of Gallagher, Marsching, Sherman and Welty, resulting from highly personal responses to today's circumstances, weave narrative and conceptual threads that call attention to global phenomena that touch the lives of countless individuals

Carole Anne Meehan
Curator

Please visit the *Post Family Mediatheque* for more information about the James and Audrey Foster Prize and this year's finalists. While a jury will select the winner, visitors are encouraged to use the Mediatheque to register their choice.

