

[FOUNTAIN STREET]

UPENDED Curator's Statement

"The exquisite corpse shall drink the new wine."

French Surrealists of a century ago invented a playful method of collaborative drawing, adapted from a writing game in which each participant's contribution was concealed before being passed along to the next. We don't know who wrote "exquisite" and who wrote "corpse," but in all likelihood they were seated next to each other as they played this parlor game.

As I write, seven Fountain Street artists are concocting an exquisite-corpse-like installation. Their multi-media collaboration will be the centerpiece of the exhibition. I have not seen it assembled; no one has, as the pieces will not be brought together until we open the show. I eagerly await the big reveal and fully expect their amalgam of individual and collective creativity to be as vivid, provocative, and puzzling as the single sentence which first gave name to the technique.

As with this art, our lives are being juxtaposed and joined together in wholly unanticipated ways due to the novel coronavirus. The exhibition pays tribute to all whose lives and livelihoods have been "upended" by the pandemic. It offers an in-the-moment glimpse of artists' experiences of being turned upside down. Fountain Street's exhibition schedule was itself upended by the coronavirus, as well as by last April's water main break in Boston's SoWa District. We are indeed grateful to Piano Craft Gallery for taking us in.

One of my heart's deepest desires is to help awaken and cultivate creativity—others' as well as my own. The privilege of curating this exhibition allowed me to see my fellow artists tapping their multitudinous creativity, sometimes despite, and other times inspired by, the chaos and constrictions of the time. The twenty-two participating artists have drawn, painted, photographed, printed, sculpted and woven together threads of connection amidst the disconnection. They also have discovered new ways of looking, new ways of working, and new sources of inspiration. One of my favorite phrases from the artists' statements is Georgina Lewis' "post-upending trajectories." Where will they lead? I can't wait to see.

On the catalogue cover is Jim Banks' disturbingly beautiful *Carnifex*. With a skeleton struggling toward the sunlight, the image captures the duality of the show's theme—a life upended on the one hand, and an artist's act of upending expectations on the other. While artists have been among those disrupted by the pandemic, they are also disruptors by trade. Artists consciously and conspicuously upend familiar patterns and change the way we look at things. They challenge conventions. Unorthodoxies abound. We need art in real time, now as much as ever, to give us new frames of reference, to illuminate deeper truths and starker realities, and to help us cultivate humor, beauty and grace.

Melissa Shaak