

The Burlington Free Press
Sunday

LIVING

Books, 4D

Sunday, June 7, 2009 • Features Editor Sarah Long 660-1851 or (800) 427-3124



EMILY NELSON, Free Press

University of Vermont associate professor of art Nancy Dwyer of Winooski is part of a group exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City titled "The Pictures Generation: 1974-1984." Dwyer will also have an exhibit at the Firehouse Gallery in August.

Early work by UVM art professor selected as part of show at Metropolitan Museum of Art

By Sally Pollak
Free Press Staff Writer

L[WINOOSKI] ast summer, when Nancy Dwyer received an e-mail from a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art about her possible inclusion in a group show at the Met, Dwyer figured something was up. "Something big. 'I didn't know they did curating of modern artists,'" Dwyer thought. "Am I actually dead and no one told me?" Dwyer, 54, associate professor of art at the University of Vermont, is very much alive, and very much making art.

She is doing these things in her "little art commune," a light-filled corner house in Winooski that she shares with a fiber artist in the basement and a photographer upstairs.

It was photographer Tarrah Krajinak, a new housemate, whom Dwyer prevailed upon to search through boxes of artwork when the Met came calling. Dwyer was in Mexico when she got the e-mail. From south of the border, she directed the hunt for work suitable for the Met exhibit, "The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984."

"They've been in a box 30 years," Dwyer said of "Cards," on exhibit at the Met. "It's lucky I saved them."

The exhibition, called a "winner" by New York Times art critic Holland Cotter, presents the work of 30 artists in a range of mediums, including painting, sculpture, photography, prints and more. The exhibit includes pieces by well-known artists, like Dwyer's friend, photographer Cindy Sherman, and those who are lesser known.

Two pieces by Dwyer were selected for the exhibit, which is open at the Met through Aug. 2. Dwyer, who attended the April opening, says the exhibition presents "a really clear feeling of what the New York art world was like in the mid-'70s."

The young artists, many New York-based, were commenting on media images and pop culture. They explored the possible influences of these phenomena on ideas, perceptions and experiences.

"We got really involved in talking and thinking about pop culture," Dwyer said. The artists approached their work with the same impulse as pop artists such as Andy Warhol, but intent

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Contributed photos
Two images from
Dwyer's "Cards"
series on display
at the Met.

Objects from a future world

By Sally Pollak
Free Press Staff Writer

On the shelves of her office in the art department at the University of Vermont, Nancy Dwyer has been collecting Styrofoam packaging.

"She'd collect the stuff from the garbage; her students would laugh about it," Dwyer said.

"I had a whole wall of these objects," Dwyer said. "They've just been rolling around in my mind for years."

Now they are taking form as furniture in her Winooski living room, which Dwyer has transformed into her studio.

Two chairs, made with fiber artist Caroline Byrne, are still to be made. A pile of Styrofoam packaging, familiar (but funny-looking) forms used for shipping computers and CD players, await use by the sculptor. "I was really attracted to them as abstract modernist objects," Dwyer said. "I love these things. And they don't recycle."

The pieces are covered in papier mache. Byrne, 32, is making fiber pieces for the furniture and creating a story, set in 2248, about who uses it.

The furniture is in the home of Anla, a 12-year-old girl. Her father likes the pieces; her mother does not. No one knows or cares about the original use of the material, packing Styrofoam; the furniture is made from.

The material is stripped of its function, which is long forgotten. The furniture is an aesthetic object; a valuable one, belonging to a future fictional environment.

"It's the history of the future," Dwyer said. "There's no way to verify the facts."

For example, you can't dispute the major



Contributed photo
New work by Dwyer that
will open at the Firehouse
Gallery on Aug. 14.

holiday that is celebrated in 2248. The artists have created the holiday's symbol, a star-like Styrofoam piece in Dwyer's living room. She will make a huge blow-up version of the symbol out of nylon.

The work will be on display at Burlington's Firehouse Gallery from Aug. 14 through Oct. 24, part of an exhibition titled "Human-Landscape."

"The project took on its own life," Dwyer said. "It started turning us on so much. This can be its own show."

Dwyer needs more styrofoam forms (not peanuts). If you have any, e-mail her at ndtoday@gmail.com

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Pollak, Sally. "Artist Redux." *The Burlington Free Press*, June 2009.

DWYER: Exhibit brings back N.Y. state of mind

Continued from Page 1D
such as Andy Warhol, but intent on making it their own, she said.

"We can't just say, 'Hey, look at this,'" Dwyer said. "But why, what about that? The work comes from that desperate sense of wanting it to involve me in some way. How do you make it yours? How do you co-opt it?"

Restating history

Dwyer's Met piece, "Cardz," was made in 1980, when she was teaching at California Institute of the Arts. It's a set of 26 laminated silk-screen prints presented as a deck of cards. They are figures drawn in outline form printed in four colors. Except for a few decks Dwyer has given away as gifts, the cards were stored in her boxes.

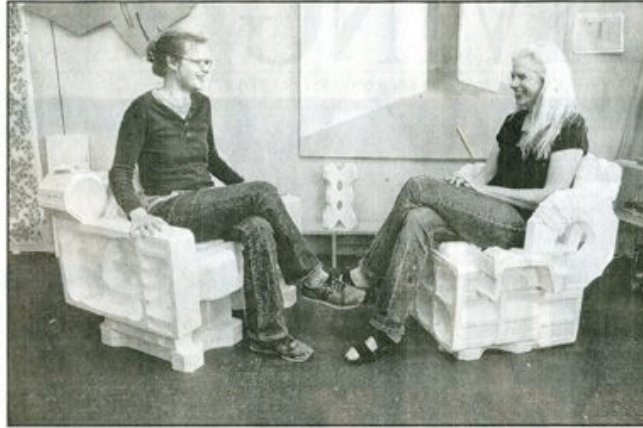
Dwyer also suggested a second work, a 1982 painting called "Yoga Woman," that was hanging in a friend's apartment.

"There's a painting in Brooklyn. You can get it," Dwyer recalls telling curator Douglas Ecklund. "He liked it."

(Ecklund was unavailable to comment for this article, according to the Met.)

Stephan Jost, director of Shelburne Museum, saw "The Pictures Generation" recently and said by e-mail he liked it a great deal.

"When I walked through the exhibition I was pleased at how aesthetically appealing and strong much of the art is," Jost wrote. "... I have always loved Cindy Sherman's 'untitled film stills,' but seldom are they seen within the context of other artists, working at the same time, engaged in the same issues. The exhibition was refreshing because they included artists who are in the history textbooks AND included artists who deserve to be in them. My guess is there will be a more general re-evaluation of Nancy Dwyer's work. I am glad the Met was willing to look back 30 years and attempt to restate the history a bit."



EMILY NELSON, Free Press

University of Vermont associate professor of art Nancy Dwyer (right) of Winooski and fiber artist Caroline Byrne test the chairs they made from collected packing materials.

No-money art

For Dwyer, it's unusual and fun to be in an exhibit with Sherman, an influential artist. "She's a superstar and I'm not," Dwyer said. "So we haven't been in a lot of shows together, even though we're pretty good friends."

Dwyer studied art SUNY-Buffalo, while Sherman was an art student at another Buffalo college. With other young artists in that city, including Robert Longo and Michael Zwack (both represented in the Met exhibit), they founded Hallwalls, a contemporary arts center in an old ice factory.

In 1976, Dwyer moved to the Bowery, a neighborhood in New York City. Sherman and Longo followed a year later, she said.

She worked and lived in lower Manhattan when the financial district cleared out at night, its only life a mix of Blarney Stone drinkers, night watchmen and artists.

"We were the last no-money artists," Dwyer said. "Now you get to be a no-money artist if you grew up rich."

Bathrooms were in loft hallways. Day jobs paid the bills (Dwyer was the "Magic

"We were the last no-money artists. Now you get to be a no-money artist if you grew up rich."

Nancy Dwyer,
artist, professor

Marker Girl" at Barnes & Noble, using a calligrapher's touch to mark price slashes). Making art was a serious pursuit.

"We made it happen," Dwyer said. "We were incredibly serious. That's what blows my mind the most and it wasn't about money. There wasn't any. We were really serious about our work and really serious about our ideas."

The move to the city was a return for Dwyer to her first home. She was born there, the youngest of three

daughters of a New York cop and his wife.

Her father died when she was 4. Her mother, Eugenie Dwyer, moved with her three daughters to Schenectady, her hometown. She worked as a secretary for the school district and raised her daughters to be independent spirits.

"She really backed it up," Dwyer said. "She put that spirit into me and told me to feed that part of myself. She's a very talented woman, with good taste."

Dwyer discovered practi-

A show at the Met

■ **WHAT:** "The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984"

■ **WHERE:** Metropolitan Museum of Art, Joyce and Robert Menschel Hall for Modern Photography and Tisch Galleries, second floor

■ **ADDRESS:** 1000 Fifth Avenue at 82nd Street, New York, N.Y.

■ **WHEN:** Through Aug. 2

■ **HOURS:** 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday; 9:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Sunday

■ **ADMISSION:** (suggested); Adults \$20; seniors \$15; students \$10

■ **INFORMATION:** (212) 535-7710

■ **WEB SITE:** www.metmuseum.org



CINDY SHERMAN, courtesy photo
This image featuring Nancy Dwyer (in front) of Winooski is the cover of the illustrated catalog for the Met exhibit.

cally on her own, in her 40s, when she decided that "tenure-track teaching is where it's at."

She got a master's degree in digital communication from NYU in 2002 and has been on the UVM faculty since 2004. "It's been nothing but a positive experience," she said.

Among the greats

At the Met opening, Dwyer saw longtime friends from her early days in the city, artists whose work is in the exhibit. She walked through galleries of Roman antiquities, and was awestruck to think her work is in the same museum. She followed little candles, lighted and placed on the stairway, to the Pictures show.

"It was really walking into it that did it," Dwyer said. "That's when it first hit me."

In the first room of the exhibit, she saw none of her work. Dwyer thought there was probably no room for her art, after all. As a kid, she wanted to be a backup singer for Joe Cocker. Now she wasn't even backup; she had no part.

Dwyer next walked into the second room. There she saw her cards, printed long ago in muted colors, retrieved from a box by her housemate while Dwyer was painting in Mexico.

Her simple outline drawings — "they look like an exercise, diagrammatical" — are leaning on a shelf at the Met. They're displayed as cards, not just prints, like some kind of game.

"I was just thrilled," Dwyer said. "From then on, it was just a lovefest."

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