

# Artist addresses ageism in 'Age of Experience'

**Amanda Sieradzki**  
Council on Culture & Arts

Tramping through the woods with her husband, artist Amy Fleming rescues the lost and neglected. They come in all shapes, sizes, and colors: antique typewriters, rusting gearshifts, china shards, broken bottles. Bringing them home with her, she will photograph these remnants of consumer culture to include in her drawings and screen-prints of junkyard landscapes.

One of her most prized possessions is a round, vintage, coral and pink Hoover floor waxer that she speculates was sold in the 1950s as a tool marketed to the feminine ideal of that era. It has appeared in many of her works as the color and shape continue to peak her creativity.

In the same vein, as she and her loved ones age, Fleming has become interested in ideas surrounding ageism and disposability. It's the central theme behind her show "The Age of Experience: We Tell Better Stories," at the Claude Pepper Center through Jan. 19.

"I think I've always been a bit of an archaeologist at heart," remarks Fleming. "I've always liked things that show their history. What you throw out really tells a story of who you are, and even more, nowadays, it's who you throw out, too."

Her collages of scrap materials have become a fitting background for the portraits of mature women with stories to tell, but who have fallen victims to another kind of disposability. They smile in the foreground, appearing as iconic as a Madonna, and are haloed by radiator hoses and hairspray bottles.

"My dad is a minister, so I grew up my whole life with images of saints in the church," says Fleming. "The whole patron saint kind of style came naturally and I stuck with it."

Fleming also grew up surrounded by art supplies — paper, crayons, pencils — and remembers her mother even giving her the white cardboard her hosiery were wrapped around to use as a drawing pad. She continued fine-tuning her skills at Old Dominion University in Virginia where she graduated with a BFA.

Fleming's interest in printmaking grew alongside drawing. She says the mediums naturally tie together. Eventually, she attended Florida State University and earned an MFA with a concentration in printmaking. Fleming speculates that the feel of the medium is what hooked her, as well as the community surrounding it.

"It's something about holding those particular tools, whether it's a carving tool for a woodcut or an engraving or a pencil," says Fleming. "There's also the fact that printmaking is very much a communal way of working in art. Not many people have private print spaces because the equipment is extremely large, heavy, and expensive. You tend to work in shared workshops and that's part of the enjoyment of it."

While Fleming saves her screen-



"Florence," is part of the portrait series Amy Fleming said can expand as she continues to unearth artifacts and people rich with stories. AMY FLEMING



Amy Fleming has a show "The Age of Experience: We Tell Better Stories," at the Claude Pepper Center through Jan. 19. JIM FLEMING

printing for the FSU Printmaking Studios, she has a small print shop at home devoted to drawing and collaging. One

portrait can take her three weeks to finish if she works diligently on evenings and weekends around her schedule as an adjunct art instructor at FSU. Her goal as a teacher is to equip her students with as many tools as possible when it comes to screen-printing.

Fleming pulls from both digital and commercial screen-printing techniques and encourages her students to apply them to whatever art-making ideas they might conjure up. She hopes they will "dive in" and not shy away from making missteps.

"I think as artists we get an image in our head and we want to try and make it match that image," states Fleming. "At some point, you have to realize that the materials and the process will take over and a work of art wants to be what it wants to be. Students have shown me projects they thought were a disaster, and I'll say 'let's look at this because there's some interesting things going on in here.'"

When it comes to her own discarded projects, Fleming laughs and says she usually sticks them in a flat file drawer for later. As collecting is a major part of

## If you go

**What:** The Age of Experience: We Tell Better Stories

**When:** 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Friday through Jan. 19

**Where:** Claude Pepper Center, 636 West Call St.

**Cost:** Free Admission

**Contact:** For more information, visit <http://www.amyflemingstudio.com/>.

her artistic practice, she continues to find interestingly shaped and colored items to spur on her drawings. Sometimes it's the memory of a similar object like the "busted up percolator" that continues to pop up in her collages which reminds Fleming of the great coffee her mother used to make in theirs.

In creating her latest show, "The Age of Experience," Fleming says she looked a lot at artist Kehinde Wiley's work, which touches on inclusion and exclusion in terms of race and western art history. She thought it would be interesting to take a similar approach with ageism, spotlighting those who might have been pushed aside or forgotten by society.

"I wanted to portray people as still vibrant and interesting," explains Fleming. "When I say 'We Tell Better Stories' in the title it's twofold. For one, let's start telling better stories and change the narrative around age and aging. And second, if you want to hear good stories about anything go talk to someone who has a history."

Out of the six portraits that hang in the show, Fleming says she has continued striking up conversations with men and women at the Tallahassee Senior Center as well as learning more about her own parents' histories. Hanging "The Age of Experience" in the Claude Pepper Center was another intentional part of the project, as Claude Pepper was a senator known for his work benefitting senior citizens and strengthening laws to protect them.

Fleming feels this series can only expand as she continues to unearth artifacts and people rich with stories. She hopes to find more venues that will allow for different audiences to experience the art, as well as capture the portraits of even older adults.

"We all are just marching down through the years," says Fleming. "You see how your history shows on your face, in your body, in everything. I think there's a certain grace that can come with age. There's also something about being 80 when you can learn to carry the weight of those years. It's something quite remarkable."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).