

Artist gives new life to old photos in 'Assemblage' exhibit

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In 1996, Charity Myers was in the midst of finishing her BFA installation works for her graduation show at Florida State as well as figuring out her next steps as a professional artist. She was just beginning to explore collages and experimenting with the intrigue of its layers. Post-graduation she took a job at a publishing company as a graphic designer instead, even though she had never taken a class in college for design.

After a crash course in programs like Photoshop and InDesign, she felt more skilled in creating compositions, and started working as an exhibit designer for the Museum of Florida History. She enjoyed working in a three-dimensional space that shared similarities with installation art. Concurrently, she appreciated the function that the museum served in the community, and that it brought her closer to her interests in personal and past histories.

"I was fortunate enough to be able to apply my knowledge and ability in art to this digital realm that I didn't have much interest in at first," states Myers. "[Interior designer and TV personality] Genevieve Gorder says a good designer can design anything, and I really believe that. It's all about color and proportion where all those same art rules apply."

Flash-forward to 2016, and Myers, now 42, continues to work in collage as her primary medium, though she's left behind her work at the Museum of Florida History. However, all her experiences have helped with her business endeavor, Creative Pool Design, which provides creative support via branding, marketing, and merchandise design. She began the business over a decade ago and is set to open her first retail location, The Pop! Shop, in Railroad Square this August. The expansion will also give her a chance to clear out her home studio-space that she currently shares with her 5-year-old daughter.

"We've been sharing a studio since she was about 3," smiles Myers. "It's hard because if I'm working and she sees she wants to help, so we've done many collaborative pieces. She's excited to be working on her own prints too that we're going to have in her own little corner of the shop."

While the word collage may bring to mind clutter or muddled layers, Myers approach calls for precision and



ANDREW MYERS

Collage artist Charity Myers got her start as a BFA student in FSU's Fine Arts department.



order, the outcome of which are streamlined and graphic-design driven pieces. The medium also allows for her to pursue an interest in historical photographs.

She began collecting photos during college from thrift and antique stores, often buying entire boxes for only \$5 or \$10. These windows into the past are central to Myers' idea that every piece tells its own unique story whether it be based in reality or fiction.

"I'm always looking at vintage stores and even yard sales," says Myers. "It's always really sad to me to see this big box of someone's life that nobody wants anymore. I feel like I need to make something with them to elevate them because they were meaningful to somebody at some time and I want to honor them."

Myers has used her own family's photographs, such as a collage featuring her mother-in-law bespectacled in sunglasses, barefoot, and carefree in a piece titled "Dispatches From the World of." Another work uses a childhood photo of her husband where he struggles to proudly hold up a fish he'd hooked. Many of her inspirations are drawn from water related imagery, and as a fifth generation native Floridian, she's naturally drawn to these environments in her found photographs. Family has always been a major focus in Myers' work. She caught the creative bug at a young age after admiring the ingenuity of her father and grandmother, and their aptitude for building and inventing out of necessity in North Florida. She began primarily as a photography student at Tallahassee Community College under instructor Barbara Edwards who became her instant artistic mentor. They bonded

over storytelling through the medium as Myers built up an impressive portfolio and was accepted into FSU's BFA in Fine Arts program. Another mentor was Mark Messersmith for his approach to teaching and art making.

"To me he embodies everything an artist should in that he's talented, humble and gracious," says Myers. "He paints every day because he loves it and whether he ever showed in a gallery it wouldn't matter. He's doing it because he has to, and that's something I aspire to be."

Myers will return to as an alumna artist to the Florida State Museum of Fine Art this summer, though she won't be alone. In a blast from the past, she'll share the gallery space with her former classmates — Melissa Harrington, Richard Grillotti, Joel Beaman, and David Wayne Miller — in the BFA 1996 reunion show, Assemblage, through Sept. 18. She laughs that while one of her main motivations behind bringing the show together was partly to see her old friends again, as she is proud of their many accomplishments from the past 20 years in terms of where they were then and what their art has become.

Beaman and Miller's photographic projects include a converted pinhole camera van; Harrington found success as a painter in Los Angeles; and Grillotti's pixel art uses video games as a muse. Myers is also looking forward to the gallery closing party in September at Proof Brewery, which will be a nostalgic event for her cohorts. The building's former days as the BFA students' art studio space hold many memories with the middle of the bar housing her former shared workspace.



DISPATCHES FROM THE WORLD OF

CHARITY MYERS

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"I'm always striving to be humble and gracious by making art that makes me happy and hoping people will enjoy it," states Myers. "I just feel really lucky and honored to be in this show and have FSU accept us sight unseen."

One piece in the show, titled "Sometimes It's Just Not in the Stars," plays out Myers' imagined story between a smiling woman and a silhouetted man walking away from the ocean. A vibrant pink orb flares out with triangular bits of texture, as constellations in royal and lighter blues bounce between the circular-cut photos. Myers knew when she found the images that she would make a piece for the sun kissed, star-crossed 1940s lovers.

Another piece in the Assemblage exhibit, centers on a vintage photo of two young men with a baby on a beach. This inspired a different fictitious story as the San Francisco Bay Bridge can be seen in the background, provoking Myers to think about what a closeted couple's reality might have been in the late forties. She named the piece "Uncle Rich and His Roommate," and implores viewers to contemplate the varied historical implications of her works and how we can learn from history. She uses the fuzziness

and size of these old photographs to pull viewers in to stand close to her work, and enjoy that not every detail can be made out clearly.

"It's usually a photograph that kind of triggers the whole story," explains Myers. "The storytelling aspect is where you get people with art and seems to be what draws people in. You might see a color that you like but knowing the story behind it is sometimes more interesting than the piece itself."

In her layering of materials, Myers favors fashion publications for their high quality photos of fabric and finds inspiration in listening to the likes of musicians like Bob Dylan and Alabama Shakes as she works, as well as viewing other artists' work online for inspiration. Though she doesn't always start

IF YOU GO

What: Assemblage: 5 Artists...20 Years
When: 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday to Friday through Sept. 18
Where: FSU Museum of Fine Arts, 530 W Call Street
Cost: Free
Contact: For more information, call 850-644-6836.

with a clear vision or idea, her process usually begins with laying out materials and layering paper and printed textures alongside the photographs.

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).

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