



BITTERSWEET
OBSERVATIONS
Jun 9–Oct 1, 2017



BITTERSWEET OBSERVATIONS

JUN 9–OCT 1, 2017 | ROCKFORD ART MUSEUM

Sponsored by Women's Art Board + Niccole Ranz, In Home Medical Group



EXHIBITION TEACHER GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Bittersweet Observations explores the grown-up wonder of childlike nostalgia in a dramatic, fairytale setting through paintings, drawings, prints, animation, sculpture, and installations by Cincinnati artist, author and illustrator **Casey Riordan Millard**, Rockford artist and illustrator **Jenny Mathews**, Rockford printmaker **Sarah Reed-McNamara**, and Rockford custom craftsman **Jeremy Klonicki**.

To describe the installation of this exhibition as a labor of love would be an understatement. Never have these galleries had such a flurry of artists and volunteers working fervently alongside each other to create so many site-specific installations in the days leading up to the debut of an exhibition. Special thanks to volunteer production assistants and in-kind donors Elizabeth Horvath, Steve Nofsinger, Jessica Tackes, Carmen Turner, Thomas L. Vaultonburg, Rick Zillhart, Luxe Productions, and Lonnie's Carpet Max. More often than not it felt like a family affair, and one with a resounding Rockfordian flair.

We gratefully acknowledge Women's Art Board and Niccole Ranz, In Home Medical Group, for sponsoring the exhibition and its related educational programming. Many thanks to the trustees of Rockford Art Museum and especially to staff members Linda Dennis, Denise Glasenapp, Nancy Sauer, Miranda Lindvall, Sarah Axelson, Sarah Bursley McNamara, and Dillon Coulahan for help producing this magical exhibition.

And to the *Bittersweet* artists, Jeremy, Casey, Jenny and Sarah – thank you, from the bottom of my heart. I'm honored to call you my friends.

Carrie Johnson

Curator, Rockford Art Museum

Bittersweet Observations is organized by Rockford Art Museum, curated by RAM Curator Carrie Johnson. This exhibition and its related educational programming are sponsored by Women's Art Board of Rockford Art Museum and Niccole Ranz, In Home Medical Group, and partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency, and by the Armer Ahlstrand Charitable Foundation.

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EXHIBITING ARTISTS

CASEY RIORDAN MILLARD (American, b. 1973) received her BFA from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, and has been adjunct professor at the Art Academy of Cincinnati since 2013. Millard has exhibited her large-scale installations, ceramic works, paintings and drawings in galleries throughout the United States, including Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio; John Michael Kohler Center for the Arts, Sheboygan, Wisconsin; and Lubeznik Center for the Fine Arts, Michigan City, Indiana. A recipient of numerous fellowships and awards, she is represented by Aron Packer Projects, Chicago. Millard lives in Cincinnati with her husband, their two sons, and two cats. *Shark Girl and Belly Button* is her first children's book. Learn more about her at caseyriordanmillard.com.

Rockford native **JENNY MATHEWS** (American, b. 1973) is a visual artist who concentrates on traditional hand-drawn illustrations and watercolor paintings. She's the owner of Rockford Illustrating, art editor for Zombie Logic Press, a member of the 317 Studio and Gallery Artists Collective and Kandinsky Creative Group, and an active member of the Rockford Art Attack Movement. Mathews collaborated with creative and real-life partner, Rockford poet Thomas L. Vaultonburg of Zombie Logic Press, to produce their recently published children's book, *Atrocious Poems A to Z* ("a book about all the things kids love to hate"). *Bittersweet Observations* marks the debut of her 26 original illustrations for the book. Learn more about her at jennymathews.com.

SARAH REED-MCNAMARA (American, b. 1983) is a printmaker and textile artist from Rockford, Illinois. She studied printmaking at Rockford University, where she received her BA in art history with minor in history. Owner of SRM Prints, Reed-McNamara is best known for her prints with idealistic, playful, whimsical imagery inspired by notions of American childhood depicted in vintage illustrations, found photographs, and family slides from the 1900s through the 1970s. She lives in Rockford with her husband, Thomas, their 1-year-old daughter, Olympia, and their newborn son, Malachy. Learn more about her at srmprints.etsy.com.

JEREMY KLONICKI (American, b. 1981) is a functional and display artist based in Rockford, Illinois. His objective is to reimagine art that exists in found materials, seeking to find the perfect rhythms that lie within opposing mediums. He often works with architectural wood, organic materials found in nature, and the most random metal objects, and finishes projects off with glass and light. He's the owner of MainFraiM custom art services studio and anchor to the collective art studio Fraim & Mortar. Learn more about him at mainfraim.com.

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EXHIBITION VOCABULARY

ANIMATION. The technique of photographing successive drawings or positions of puppets or models to create an illusion of movement when the movie is shown as a sequence.

ILLUSTRATION. A picture illustrating a story, poem, book, or newspaper.

LINOCUT. A printmaking technique in which the artist cuts a design into a linoleum tile or plate with sharp carving tools and gouges.

SITE-SPECIFIC. Art that is created by an artist to exist in a certain place; created with consideration for the space, and often erected on-site.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY #1 | FACE YOUR FEARS

ARTWORK IMAGE Credit

Casey Riordan Millard's Shark Girl character stemmed from the artist's own childhood fear of sharks. As time went on, Millard developed more mature fears that impacted her life. Shark Girl allowed Millard to confront those fears—both rational and irrational—head-on, while finding temporary distractions.

Materials

paper
pencil
colored pencils
paints

Have students explore Millard's artwork, and consider the role of fear in the work. Be sure to read any written words, and pay close attention to details. Watch the artist's short animated film, *Come Follow Me*, and take some time to think about Shark Girl's life – is she scary, or is she scared?

Have students think about what they are afraid of – spiders, snakes, the ocean, etc. Once they have arrived upon their fear, have them think about ways to make it less frightening. Have students draw and paint the imaginary character they have created, taking some time to develop a backstory: What does it like or dislike? Who are its friends? What does it do for fun? By humanizing this character based on our fears, we take away its power to frighten us, while showing us that maybe it, too, is fearful.



ABOVE: Casey Riordan Millard, *Immobilized Push Through*, 2010, mixed media on paper. Courtesy of the artist. On view in *Bittersweet Observations*.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY #2 | WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

ARTWORK IMAGE Credit

Rockford artist Jenny Mathews took on the challenge of altering the folk tales and fairytales of old, looking more closely at the central characters – who are they, and what were they really doing before, during, or after the story we know? Mathews also considers gender roles in the stories she alters, flipping the script and empowering the central characters she presents.



Jenny Mathews, *Someone's Been Tagging my Ears*, 2017, courtesy of the artist. On view in *Bittersweet Observations*.

Materials

paper
pencil
colored pencils
paints

Explore Mathews's *What Really Happened* series. Be sure to read the explanations attached to each, to understand more fully the story surrounding the imagery. Collectively discuss the notion of gender roles present in the stories.

Ask students to think of a story they know well – a fairytale or a favorite book, or perhaps a story passed through their family for generations. Taking inspiration from Mathews, think about the main themes of the story, and consider an alternative – who is at the center of the story, and how are they presented? Have students write a short description of the story and how they've changed it. Have each student choose one scene from their updated story to illustrate, then present it to the class. Did anyone choose the same story, and did they make similar changes?

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WEBSITES

Rockford Art Museum	rockfordartmuseum.org
Casey Riordan Millard	caseyriordanmillard.com
Jenny Mathews	jennymmathews.com
Sarah Reed-McNamara	srmprints.etsy.com
Jeremy Klonicki	mainfram.com