

Oklahoma Visual Arts Coalition

Art Focus

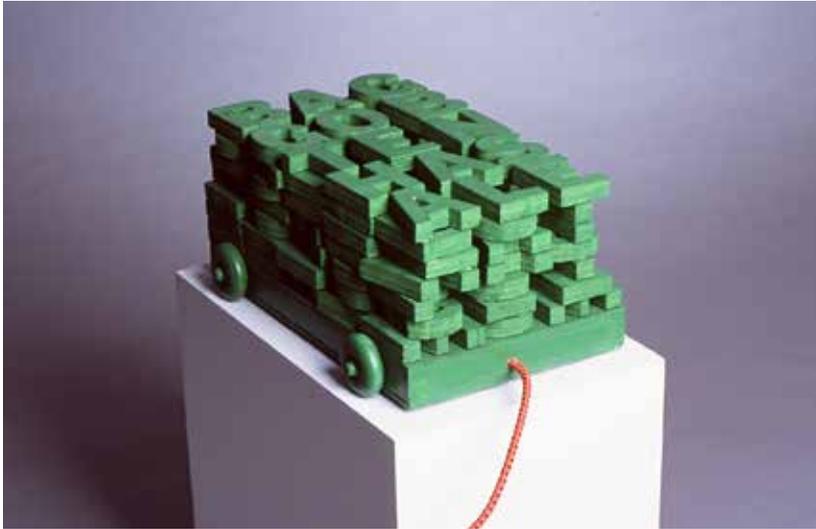
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MODELLA GALLERY: Exploring Contemporary Art in Rural Oklahoma

By Roxanne Beason



Roland Bernier, *Words on Wheels*, painted wood and string, from *Text and Textile*

Opening reception for Ingrid Hendrix: *Archetypal*

Nestled in the historic heart of Stillwater's downtown Mainstreet, the Modella Gallery serves as a new space to view changing exhibitions of up-and-coming and established contemporary Oklahoma artists. After only one year, this non-profit gallery has become a cornerstone in this rural college town's art scene as a place to engage with not only the visual arts, but also a place to enjoy films and performance art.

Since their first launch in April 2017, Modella Gallery has had at least 8 rotating exhibitions featuring artists from around the state working in a variety of mediums from painting, sculpture, and fiber arts to performance artists. A recent exhibition, *Observations: Bloodgood and Bonifield*, formerly on display from March to April, was a major success for the gallery because it showcased local abstract painters Dean Bloodgood from Stillwater, Oklahoma and Jay Bonifield from Lawton, Oklahoma. Currently on display until June 6th is a show entitled, *Text and Textile*, which features selected fiber pieces and mixed media works by Cherrie Hampton, Janis Updike Walker, Judy Laine, Miriam Young, and Roland Bernier. Most artists in rotation are local, but since Modella's opening, no two shows have been exactly alike. Additionally, to further engage Stillwater with contemporary visual works, Modella is also hosting events that highlight

local performance art such as poetry readings, film screenings, and live music.

Valerie Bloodgood, the board president, explains how the Modella Gallery allows for flexibility while still retaining the serious nature of its exhibitions, which still allows room for creativity and growth. Bloodgood reinforces her ambitions for the gallery in her statement, "We want to morph and regenerate interest in art for the Stillwater community."

Bloodgood's grandmothers, Alice Modella Mae and Hazel are revered as the gallery's namesakes because of their profound influence on their children's and grandchildren's lives, she explains, "Both these women raised children to be successful, hardworking, and tenacious and passed that on to each generation. Each of my grandmothers had dreams and hopes they pursued and achieved." With a concentration on engaging the community with art in a variety of interactive ways, the Modella Gallery is how Valerie Bloodgood is successfully achieving her goals of proving a space for her community to absorb a refreshing intake of contemporary art.

Not only serving as a space to exhibit contemporary art, the Modella Gallery's specific mission as a non-profit gallery is encouraging appreciation and understanding of original works of art by supplying a direct

presence. One of the ways Modella successfully encourages visitors to engage with the work is by hosting regular artist talks, receptions, and events that feature various performance artists. Mondays at Modella are select Mondays which feature live performances of Stillwater's signature music genre, Red Dirt Music, and other touring and local singer-songwriters while the gallery is open to the public. Also open for viewing, Modella's hosts a monthly film series, the Mecca at Modella, which features avant-garde, independent, and experimental films. The Modella Gallery can also be visited during its participation in Stillwater's new monthly art crawl, Final Fridays.

With most of the viewing audience being the student body of Oklahoma State University, Modella has worked to incorporate students by giving them opportunities to volunteer and display their work. By helping with events and being present during gallery hours, students are learning necessary ways to interact with audiences and help facilitate a conversation about contemporary art with visitors. Because of this mutually beneficial relationship between students and the gallery, Modella allows for students to organize and host their own periodic pop-up student work shows, which increases exposure for both parties.

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Jay Bonifield, *Air Arrives*, acrylic, from *Observations: Bloodgood & Bonifield*



Dean Bloodgood, *Understory*, oil, from *Observations: Bloodgood & Bonifield*

Moreover, allowing for students and local art lovers alike the opportunity to volunteer and be involved is one of the main ways Modella Gallery is achieving its mission of, “encouraging appreciation and understanding of art through direct contact with original works of art.”

Looking towards their second year, Modella is adding a shop where works of art and locally made jewelry will be showcased and sold. This addition will help the nonprofit bring in earned revenue to support their programming as well as providing income streams for local artists. By treating the space as an “incubator of ideas,” the board of directors at Modella Gallery is constantly trying to find new ways to provide access and inspire Stillwater residents to take an interest in contemporary art. Bloodgood states, “I think that Stillwater has such growth and opportunity in the arts...we have a great art culture here.” This is evident through the success of connecting Stillwater with contemporary art at Modella Gallery. ■

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