

Alfred University alumni artists to 'Break the Mold' in campus exhibition

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The Fosdick-Nelson Gallery at Alfred University will present "Breaking the Mold," a sculpture exhibition opening Friday, Jan. 26 with a reception from 6-8 p.m. and running through Tuesday, Feb. 20, 2007. The exhibition will highlight cast and fabricated metal work by alumni artists who have graduated over the last 30 years. The gallery is in Harder Hall. Hours are Monday-Friday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 1-3 p.m. For information call 607.871.2777. "Breaking the Mold" marks two significant events at the School of Art and Design: Professor Glenn Zwegardt's upcoming retirement following 38 years of teaching in the NYS College of Ceramics and the opening of the National Casting Center at Alfred University. "Breaking the Mold" was juried by the School of Art and Design Gallery and Visiting Artist Committee and will feature a wide range of work, including figurative sculpture, organic abstraction and site-specific installation. Judith Strahota, assistant professor of sculpture, heads the panel. She is joined by Lise Lemeland, assistant professor of painting; Sanam Emami, visiting assistant professor; Sharon McConnell '87, director of the Fosdick-Nelson Gallery; Judy Ross, assistant professor of graphic design; Ezra Shales, assistant professor of art history; and Kathleen Thum, visiting assistant professor. Participating artists include: Jessyca Burke '03, Duncan Chase '05, Josh Garber '86, John Gerding '93, Harry Gold '03, James Horn '96, Frank Morbillo '80, Johnny Ninos '06, Joy Powell '04, Kristy Summers '06, Jeffery Swift '03, David Vertacnik '75, Jen Violette '94, and Zwegardt. Several of the featured alumni artists took the time to put their Alfred University student experiences and their current art directions into words. Jessyca Burke notes, "My current work is based on my reading 'The Little Prince.' I am interested in the notion of the landscape in miniature, shifts in the scale of the interior and exterior landscape, and perceptions of nature. I am not casting bronze right now, but mostly working in mixed media and drawing." She lists Sharon McConnell; Diane Cox, associate professor of sculpture; Dr. Gerar Edizel, associate professor of art; Dr. Mary McInnes, associate professor of art history; Fred Tschida, professor of glass design; and former faculty Nick Tobier and Carlos Szembeck, as mentors. "I especially loved the isolation and focus made possible by the environment at Alfred," she added. Harry Gold writes: "After Alfred, I moved to Santa Fe, NM, to work at Shidoni Foundry. At Shidoni I started out as a wax worker for their lost-wax investment bronze casting. However, I shortly became the patina artist, taking over the department for around three years. I worked with hundreds of artists as the sole patinour, working on anything from sculptures you could fit in your hand to monumental (15 feet +)." "While in Santa Fe I made a lot of work. The most recent pieces I have been working on involve farm animals, bells and retro explosives," said Gold. "I showed work in Santa Fe at Shidoni Gallery, which just got voted best gallery in Santa Fe. I also have a gallery in Dallas, Craighead Green." Gold currently works at an architectural metal shop in Brooklyn. Frank Morbillo's experience reflects that of many who have trod the three-dimensional path to their art careers. "My original interest was pottery. In Freshman Foundation, the goal to experience a wide range of disciplines in the arts opened up new possibilities that I had never considered. Glenn Zwegardt was one of the five professors teaching Foundation that year and although we did not make a strong connection then, we would in the following year. "I took Allen Term (four weeks during the winter break) in my first and second year at Alfred. The first term was with Bill Underhill (associate professor of sculpture emeritus) The next year I took metal forging with Glenn; the introduction of metal forging and fabrication was another one of those eye-opening moments that marked a major change in my work Working with metal would be my focus and Glenn Zwegardt my mentor." Morbillo earned a master's degree in fine arts from the University of Montana-Missoula, then moved to Santa Fe, NM to work at Shidoni Fine Art Bronze Foundry for 22 years. "During this time I continued to produce my own sculpture, take on commissions, and participated in many exhibits." Last year, he left Shidoni to focus on his sculpture full-time. "As a sculptor I have focused on the dynamic relationships that influence and shape our physical world," he said. The Alfred exhibit "speaks directly to how my work is produced. During the casting process, while the bronze is still in its molten state, I pull the mold apart at critical moments, manipulating the molten bronze." David Vertacnik taught three years at the University of Miami-Coral Gables and is now an associate professor of design at the University of Kansas, Lawrence. "My current art continues to explore the relationship between nature and nurture expressed as linear abstractions. Many of my pieces have been composed using found objects combined with fabricated clay elements. Most recently, I've moved into casting some pieces in bronze that continue my interest in assemblage. I'm intrigued by the ability to visually morph a mechanical element with that of an organic form. The finished pieces address the human figure, while some suggest botanical compositions and others tap motion into their persona." Vertacnik's Alfred influence came not from one individual but

"a total experience. I had the opportunity to interact with an amazing array of gifted individuals from (Ted) Randall to (Val) Cushing to (Bob) Turner to (Bill) Parry, Zweygerdt, (Wayne) Higby - and that's only a partial list. There were so many others, both faculty and fellow grads." Jen Violette waxes, well, artfully, when she talks about her AU experiences. "AU was a wonderful place to go to art school - the great faculty; the ability to cross over between media (was a big plus for me); mixing metal, glass and wood, access to all studios." Steve Edwards (professor of glass), Fred Tschida (professor of glass design), Glenn Zwegardt, Jesse Shefrin '70 (professor of print media, retired), and Tom Lacagnina (associate professor of art emeritus) made the biggest impression on me as far as the faculty at AU goes. [They were] always pushing me to challenge myself and take my pieces to that next level, one step further to better the final artwork. Also, the wonderful rural setting at AU was very inspirational and felt like home for me, since I grew up in a small rural town, and now live in rural, small-town Vermont "Since leaving AU, it took a few years to find an artistic career path that would create a balance between paying the bills to survive and one that would allow me to still create my artwork at the same time. I found it pretty challenging at times, and now, 12 years later, I feel like I'm finally where I want to be as far as my career as an artist goes. I'm starting to make a name for myself in the art glass world and my husband and I are renovating our old barn into what will be my glass studio." She met her husband, John Gerding, at the University; he is also exhibiting one of his metal sculptures in "Breaking the Mold." "I can't say enough about how Alfred helped me with my goals as an artist. I continue to challenge myself daily with my sculpture," said Violette. "AU helped me to be more self-motivated as an artist, and act on the creative forces that direct us from within. Always having a sketchbook nearby for that fleeting idea is something that I feel also came from Alfred." My mixed-media wall sculptures incorporate detailed hot sculptured glass fruits and vegetables with stainless steel and wood, creating three-dimensional still-life settings."