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Sight meets sound in new exhibit featuring renowned artist Susan Weil, works of author James Joyce



The new exhibit will feature the mixed-media works of renowned artist Susan Weil, who uses an assortment of images and materials to illustrate James Joyce's fiction.

By Marcene Robinson

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BUFFALO, N.Y. – Time, motion and language will intersect in “Susan Weil’s James Joyce: Shut Your Eyes and See,” a new exhibit in the University at Buffalo Libraries’ Poetry Collection.

The exhibit, on display from Feb. 9 to March 11, will feature the experimental, and often three-dimensional, works of renowned mixed media artist Susan Weil and selected works from UB’s James Joyce Collection.

An opening reception is scheduled on Feb. 9 from 5–7 p.m. in 420 Capen Hall on the UB North Campus. Weil will deliver remarks at 6 p.m. The exhibit, reception and talk all are free and open to the public.

The exhibit is sponsored by the Poetry Collection of the UB Libraries, Department of Art, Department of English, Department of Comparative Literature, the Modernisms Workshop and riverrun.

“Susan Weil, an original denizen of Black Mountain College and an active artist for more than 60 years, goes toe-to-toe with that original avant-garde master who seems to never show his age, James Joyce,” says Jonathan D. Katz, interim chair of the Department of Art and director of the visual studies PhD program.

“Her art, seen alongside Joyce’s original manuscripts, pulses with the fervent call and response of a true believer. The opportunity to exhibit Weil’s spectacular work in concert with original Joyce manuscripts is a rare opportunity.”

Coming of age at the center of the New York School – a group of American poets, painters, dancers and musicians active through the 1950–60s – with its eclectic cultural influences and interdisciplinary experimentation, Weil studied under artist and educator Josef Albers at Black Mountain College. Her peers included Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly.

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The writings of novelist and poet James Joyce, regarded as one of the most influential authors of the 20th century, have inspired many of Weil's works. A visual reader, Weil uses an assortment of images and materials to illustrate Joyce's fiction.

Fascinated by the relationship between seeing and knowing, Weil often fractures the picture plane in her work. To simultaneously represent time, motion and language, she frequently restructures images using a range of materials that include collage, blueprint and paint on recycled canvas, acrylic and wood.

"James Joyce's writing is brilliant and the top writing in the world for me," says Weil, a recipient of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship.

"My father was also a writer, and when I was a child he read us everything. I didn't understand a thing but heard it as music. As an adult, to read the things I heard as a child and interpret them in my own way as a visual artist has been an absolute joy."

Weil's work has been displayed in major exhibitions across the U.S. and Europe, and her work can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Victoria and Albert Museum, J. Paul Getty Museum and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

The Poetry Collection makes an ideal home for Weil's exhibition, as the university is one of the leading resources for Joyce scholarship, holding 10,000 pages of the author's working papers, notebooks, manuscripts, photographs, criticism and even Joyce's private library.

"The James Joyce Collection is our crown jewel," says Michael Basinski, curator of the Poetry Collection.

"The collection is rich in the working papers and notebooks Joyce used in his composing of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* – what he defined as epiphanies, sudden flashes of perception and insight – which continue to inspire poets, readers, scholars and artists like Susan Weil, Henry Matisse and Robert Motherwell."

The Poetry Collection will also hold a lecture by Joyce scholar David Weir on alternative ways of reading, in particular, Weil's use of visualization and illustration to understand text.

Weir, professor emeritus of the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, will present, "Susan Weil: James Joyce and the Uncommon Reader," on Feb. 23 at 3:30 p.m. in 420 Capen Hall on the UB North Campus.

Weir has published eight books, including two on Joyce, the most recent of which appeared in 2015, "Ulysses Explained: How Homer, Dante and Shakespeare Inform Joyce's Modernist Vision."

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