



Max Collins: *Natural Processes*

May 15-September 11, 2016

Opening reception, with artist talk at 3:00 p.m., Sunday, May 15, 2:00-4:00 p.m.



Max Collins: *Natural Processes*

Max Collins: *Natural Processes* is the culmination of integrative learning partnerships the artist developed with Niagara University students and regional schools including Stella Niagara Education Park, Lewiston and LaSalle Preparatory School, Niagara Falls.

This exhibition combines a three-dimensional wall installation, large-format photographs and a documentary film detailing the creation and burning of a large “nest” made of paper wrapped twigs—which is ultimately launched into the Niagara River. The work can be seen as a reflection on the natural circle of life as the paper and wood nest, and its river journey, reference elements of earth, fire and water—a cyclical cleansing process. Collins refers to this creative process as “wilderness therapy,” an opportunity to reclaim a personal connection with nature.

The artist invites visitors to the exhibition to experience a thoughtful, reflective calmness—a meditative environment analogous to, as Collins says, “certain transcendental eastern philosophies whose core beliefs are in the inherent goodness of both people and nature.”

Michael J. Beam, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections, Castellani Art Museum

Niagara died 12,000 years ago. The details no longer matter; life happened until it didn't. The land once unfurled from its own grand expanse had cracked from its rupture—a rapture. It began to cry. It sobbed until it wept; and it weeps still, for lives it can no longer remember, for a wound that will never close.

A new community huddles every day around its gushing corpse, admiring its titanic scar, trading tears for souvenirs. We gawk at its mother's puffy eyes. We borrow her sorrow for a backdrop; unknowingly, her evolution and rebirth.

The fact of the matter: some losses we do not get over. This reckoning befalls us, but in time, heals us. In fighting contrast to death's absence, we must advocate for presence, returning blood to our own hearts.

These existential questions oxygenate artist Max Collins's work: his observant editorial photography; his empowering portraiture; his environmental sculptures; his triumphant murals and public installations. Each piece examines the dissonance between our internal and external selves. On the topic of this theme: how might we portray our loss?

Not long ago, Collins's world ruptured, too, with the sudden and unexpected death of his girlfriend Cortney. Max's work changed after Cortney's death because everything changed after Cortney's death, the same way everything changed after Cortney's birth. More specific than change, though, it found focus in the unfocused. Niagara falls every day, but with intimidating strength. Some wear their losses like that.

In this show's production, Max's process began with the simple exercise of marking pain. This is a surrendering of ego, a practice of faith. This step appears across traditions and institutions. According to Jewish ritual, for instance, the immediate family of the deceased tears a piece of their clothing to alert the community of their loss. This is a statement of intent—to grieve unequivocally; to welcome condolences unapologetically; to inform bluntly—to both the public and to self.

These declarations come through in Max's public wheat-paste installations. On rock formations and boulders, on tree trunks and rampant sticks, slathered paper





identifies these souls—these bodies count. His use of bright white paper is a cleansing, bright alarm to onlookers. When wrapped around fallen tree limbs, they form a protective skin, webbing over crevices and sealing the surface. These jagged, amputated limbs are once again pure and present; they may be visible however you wish to see them. In their abstraction, they can adopt any new definition.

These specific installations, though vague, are as striking as Max's more literal versions—photo portraits of locals, wheat-pasted onto wild surfaces in civic spaces—that made his work visible in Buffalo, Michigan and New Orleans. These pastings draw attention to their subjects as well as the surfaces their disintegrating coverings reveal. How might this interrogation and confrontation accelerate our city's rebirth? There, these buildings weep the glued paper off of their physical vessels and into the wind, the subconscious jet stream.

Max continues this public grieving by guiding the personal, hand in hand, to the communal. This is how we welcome support and invite hope; this is how we choose to live.

Max invited students from Niagara University, as well as regional primary and secondary schools to help produce these wrapped sticks. At first glance, their participation serves a mechanical need for the project. But their fingerprints are fully in view at the project's public unveiling: a giant, circular, wrapped nest. These sticks, after having been detached from their source, and reunited with their own by-product—paper—embody a sort of quiet mummification. Stories of loss, wrapped around a new life force.

This is a powerful catharsis, and luckily for us, a tangible one. We can feel the layers of these sticks' lives and deaths in one grasp; the students and patients worked their hands to bond these strange unions, participating in an assessment of identity, purpose and irony. When gathered together on the ground and

in public, these sticks re-emerge as a life-affirming vessel. Each strand of the nest's DNA having been reborn, they can create a new structure, a perpetual, infinite loop of life. A new life, but not a version of its lost life.

The public is invited to witness this grand nest, the diameter of which lays at a defiant 10 feet and the height of which stands tall at 15. The mighty Falls roar within earshot. Next door, the towering Seneca Niagara Casino and Hotel looms. Equidistant to this beacon, the sight of blighted homes, deserted storefronts and empty lots, the remnants of a dying city still in decay, pointing toward resurrection. The milestones of life and death pivot on the nest's axis. How might one inform the other, its location asks? Here, mourning is a gateway from one reality to another.

The nest is lit from within, a donut burning in its hole. It smothers itself to death, but first, it glows; a demonstration of life's circular strength, the oxygen in both water and fire. A new skeleton forms in its rubble.

Recovering our eroded surfaces with blank canvases—here, dead sticks in white paper—we permit our voices to be heard, and until they sing, to be broken. Our mending seeks new beauty in their exposed grooves. Max's work theorizes this approach to grieving. His work communicates that our mourning is not a step to complete, but a reality to adopt.

The mythical ouroboros was a visual manifestation of Cortney's personal philosophy; we are infinite; we flow and breathe and consume and burn as one, in perpetuity. One must imagine that Max's attraction to the themes in his work today were present before he met and lost Cortney, and that perhaps this is one of many reasons why, in each other, they found mutual attraction. His thesis, in that way, is a tribute to not one, but two healing souls, finding their way home.

Ben Siegel, Arts Critic



Max Collins

www.maxcollins.net

Max Collins (b. 1988) is a photographer and installation artist born and raised around Western New York and is a Master of Fine Arts candidate at the State University of New York at Buffalo. While earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in fine art and journalism from the University of Michigan, Collins began taking his photography into the streets physically pasting large portraits on the sides of buildings. He has since done projects around the country in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, but his artistic practice remains rooted in his hometown where he has executed numerous public art projects, organized exhibitions, and taught workshops to students of all ages.

EDUCATION

2016 Master of Fine Arts, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

2011 Bachelor of Fine Arts, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2014-2015

Art'scool Exhibition Judge, Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Photographer/Creative Consultant, Painkillers Kill Campaign, Buffalo, NY

2014

Instructor, SUNY Buffalo, NY

Instructor, SUNY at Fredonia, NY

Instructor, Williamsville Public Schools, Williamsville, NY

Instructor, Alden High School, Alden, NY

Workshop Instructor, Lancaster High School, Lancaster, NY

Instructor, Depew High School, Depew, NY

2013

Art'scool Exhibition, Judge, Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY

DEC Grant Panelist, New York State Council for the Arts, New York, NY

Installation Assistant, Inside Out: Times Square Project, New York, NY

Juror, Springville Center for the Arts: Art Crawl, Springville, NY

2012-2013

Freelance Photographer, Artvoice, Buffalo, NY

Panelist, Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY

Visiting Artist, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE

Guest Presenter, SUNY Buffalo, NY

Workshop Instructor, Buffalo Center for Arts & Technology, Buffalo, NY

Teaching Artist, Young Audiences of Western New York, Buffalo, NY

2012 - present

Contributing Photographer, Block Club Magazine, Buffalo, NY

Freelance Photographer, New York Times, Ann Arbor, MI

AWARDS AND HONORS

2015 Juror's Selection, *Big Orbit Member's Exhibition*, Buffalo, NY

2014 Genre-Defying Artist, *Artvoice Awards*, Buffalo, NY

2013 Profiled Artist, *Streets of Art*, film by Nate Peraciny, Buffalo, NY

2012 Juror's Selection, *CEPA Members Exhibition*, Buffalo, NY

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Solo exhibitions are indicated with an asterisk (*)

2016

Young Buffalo Artists, curated by Anna Kaplan, BT&C Gallery, Buffalo, NY

A Decade in Movement, CEPA Gallery-Big Orbit Project Space, Buffalo, NY

The Belt Line: Hiding in Plain Sight, Sugar City, Buffalo, NY

2015 *Last Exit*, Hi Temp Fabrications, Buffalo, NY

2014

Mirrored: Artists' Self-Portraits from the Gerald Mead Collection, H. Haberman Gacioch Center for the Visual & Performing Arts, Daemen College, Amherst, NY

Deconstructing Main Street, WNY Book Arts Center, Buffalo, NY*

Obsolence, Rò, Buffalo, NY*

Emerging Converging (invitational), The Avant Building, Buffalo, NY

Evolution (invitational), 464 Gallery, Buffalo, NY

2013

Youth Contingent (invitational), Big Orbit Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Western New York Young Artists Exhibition, Impact Artists Gallery, Buffalo, NY

New Talent: 4 Artists Under, Studio Hart, Buffalo, NY

Coup d'Etat (invitational), The Waiting Room, Buffalo, NY

Press: In the Flesh I *Buffalo News*, Main Street Studios, Buffalo, NY*

No More Talking, IPrintFromHome Gallery, Kenmore, NY*

2012

Getting Physical, Main Street Studios, Buffalo, NY & Springville Center for the Arts, Springville, NY*

echo Art Fair (juried), Larkin Center of Commerce, Buffalo, NY

No More Talking, 464 Gallery, Buffalo, NY*

Knot, Block Club Inc., Buffalo, NY*

The Witches Ball (invitational), Hotel Lafayette, Buffalo, NY

City of Night, Silo City, Buffalo, NY

SELECTED MURAL COMMISSIONS

2015 *U.S. Open Horse Show*, Central Park, New York, NY

Roberto Clemente Memorial, Buffalo Spanish Corridor, Buffalo, NY

2014 SUNY Fredonia-Rockefeller Center for the Arts, Fredonia, NY

2013 *echo: Art Fair*, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, Buffalo, NY

Mural Project, Allen Street Art Collective, Hardware, Buffalo, NY

Buffalo Center for Art & Technology, Buffalo, NY

Larkin Development Company, Buffalo, NY

Signature Development Company, Buffalo, NY

Rò, Buffalo, NY

2012 SUNY Buffalo Anderson Gallery, Buffalo, NY

National Horse Show, Alltech Arena, Lexington, KY

The Compound Comedy Club, Los Angeles, CA

Freestyle Faces of Main St, Main Street Studios, Buffalo, NY

Reimagine, Buffalo, NY

BIBLIOGRAPHY/PUBLICATIONS

2015

Dabkowski, Colin. "As memories fade, so will this Elmwood mural," *Buffalo News*, May 18, 2015.

Adams, Bruce. "LAST EXIT: Max Collins, David Mitchell, and Flatsitter at Hi Temp," *THE PUBLIC*, June 30, 2015.

Eisenberg, Jana. "Local communities come together to bring art to public spaces," *Buffalo News*, November 23, 2015.

2014

Dabkowski, Colin. "Fall on Me (Route 5)," *Buffalo News*, April 16, 2014.

Mead, Gerald. "Max Collins: Commissioned Walls," *Buffalo Spree*, January 7, 2014.

2013

Kelly, Geoff. "Ian De Beer and Max Collins talk about street Art at the Burchfield Penney Art Center," *Artvoice* (cover), December 12, 2013.

Jovanovic, Rozalia. "10 reasons to check out the art scene in Buffalo," *ArtInfo*, August 21, 2013.

Dabkowski, Colin. "Ian De Beer and Max Collins collaborate on new mural," *Buffalo News*, October 21, 2013.

Dabkowski, Colin. "New Max Collins exhibition is a paean to newspaper journalism," *Buffalo News*, August 1, 2013.



Nussbaumer, Newell. "Press in the Flesh: A series by Max Collins," *Buffalo Rising*, 2013.

Mead, Gerald. "Max Collins Presses On," *Artvoice*, August 8, 2013.

Tsujimoto, Ben. "5 best April Fools' jokes in Buffalo," *Buffalo.Com*, April 2, 2013.

Steel, David. "Silo City rocks and a tribute to Buffalo's mustached men," *Buffalo Rising*, April 1, 2013.

David, Alexis. "The semi-permanent work of Max Collins," *Sunspin Media*, 2013.

2012

Dabkowski, Colin. "Year in Review: Western New York cultural renaissance continues," *Buffalo News*, December 28, 2012.

Maynard, Lauren Newkirk. "Celebrate Main Street," *Artvoice*, November 21, 2012.

Kearns, Michelle. "Max Collins and putting Frank Sinatra on the garage door," *Buffalo News*, November 24, 2012.

"A Look at Obsession, Addiction in the Internet age," *Spark Magazine*, 2012.

Wlosinski, Michelle. "Painting the town gold," *Buffalo News*, August 30, 2012.

Dabkowski, Colin. "A new mural on Main Street," *Buffalo News*, July 14, 2012.

PROJECT COLLABORATORS

Niagara University Students: Christine Bacon, Jessica Bazzo, Alessia Barzetti, Caitlin Feno, Riley Johnston, Miranda Kraft, Liz Masterson, Aiden Pasquarette, Amanda Slish, Paige Stryker.

Facilities Department, Niagara University, NY

Mark A. Gallo, Ph.D., Professor of Biology, Nature Studies (BIO 302) students sampled Collins's work and documented effects of the nutrients on microbial composition and environmental impact, Niagara University, NY

Patrick J. Liuzzi, Art Teacher and students, Outdoor Education Program, Stella Niagara Education Park, NY

Andrea Mathews, LaSalle Preparatory School, Niagara Falls, NY

Various other (undisclosed) locations throughout Niagara County, NY.

TopSpin

Artists of the Buffalo/Niagara Region

The museum's Tops Gallery—dedicated to the exhibition of work by local and regional artists—presents the **TopSpin** series. **TopSpin** features a broad range of visual expressions, varied in media as well as message, and focuses mainly on new and emerging artists.

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TOPS



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CASTELLANI ART MUSEUM

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