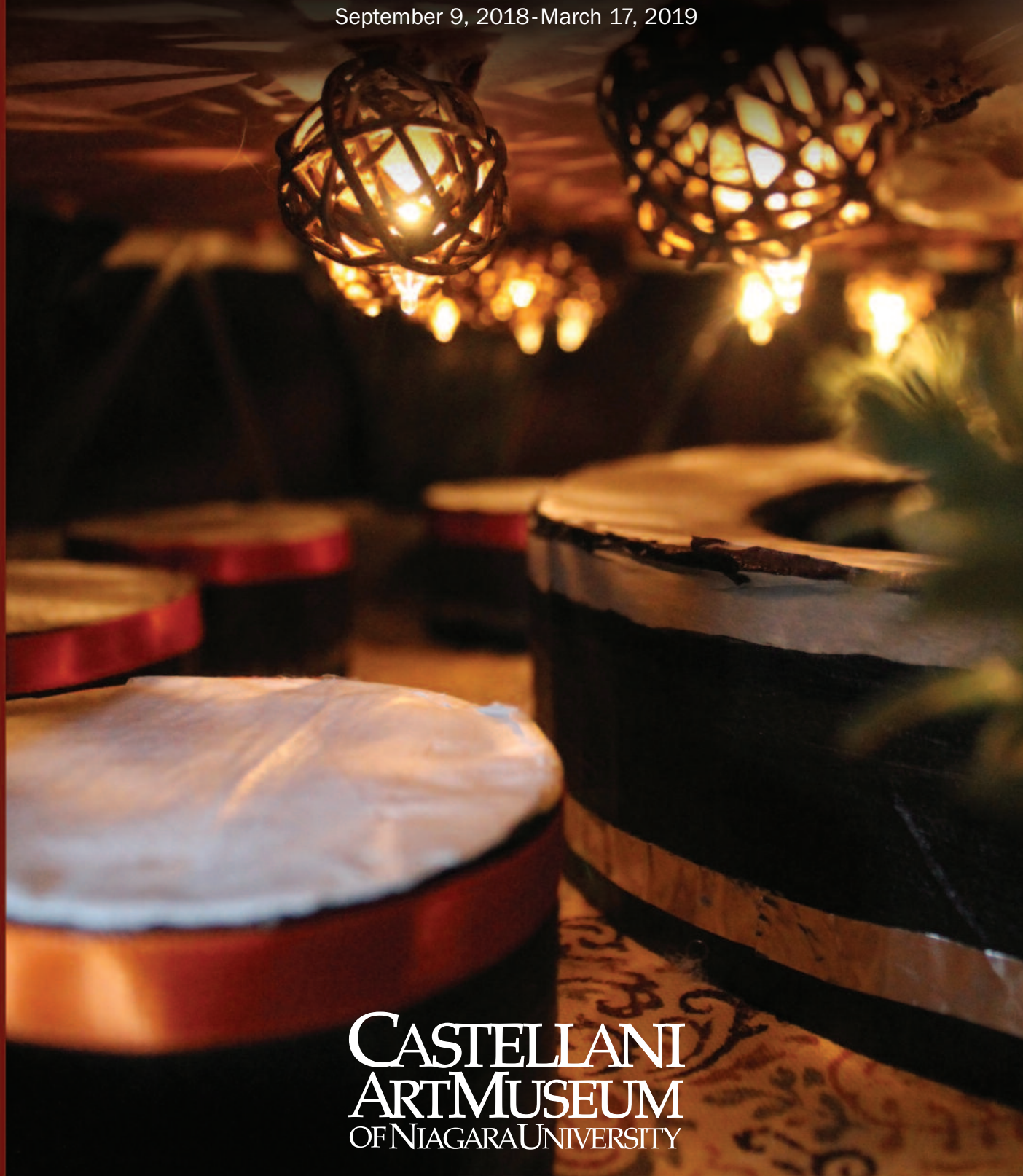


The Higner Maritime Collection: *Twenty-Five Years of Ship Building* by Justin Higner

September 9, 2018-March 17, 2019



**CASTELLANI
ART MUSEUM
OF NIAGARA UNIVERSITY**

Australia (detail: bar Interior), 2017, mixed media and found objects, 67x25x24 inches. Collection of the artist.



Republic II, 1998, 46 x 8 x 13 in.



Violet Jessop, (ex. *Saturn I*), (Museum Ship), 1997, 39 x 11 x 17 in.



Universe II (detail: interior – Galaxy Dining Hall), 2003/2017, 134 x 22 x 28 in.

The Higner Maritime Collection: Twenty-Five Years of Ship Building by Justin Higner

The Higner Maritime Collection of model seagoing, lake-and river-going vessels is unmatched in its scope and uniqueness. This exhibition, which celebrates Justin Higner’s twenty-five-year shipbuilding career, highlights the evolution of his model-building techniques and his inventive, pseudo-historical nautical allegories.

This exhibition features models of cargo ships, cruise ships, salvages, shipwrecks, tankers, and tenders (or dinghies), as well as ships repurposed as convention centers, hotels, and museums. Drawn from a collection centered on the artist’s fictional maritime settings, these works are accompanied by narratives that chronicle not only the vessels’ imagined histories, but also the interactions and relationships between the various builders and owners that populate the artist’s mythological world.

Higner has, however, utilized many of the ships’ interiors to display reproductions of works by regionally and nationally known artists, as well as his own artwork. These micro-exhibitions, featuring artwork accompanied by real-world historical documentation, reflect Higner’s admiration for the central mission of any given art, history, or cultural museum— to serve the public.

As we engage with and examine the artist’s meticulously built fleet of ships and other vessels, we are reminded of how unique and impassioned an artist’s commitment to self-expression can be. Higner is the mercurial master – Commodore, in fact – of his fictional maritime world, and we are all invited aboard.

Michael J. Beam, Curator of Exhibitions and Special Projects

World-Building / Ship-Building

Real Worlds Imagined

Justin Higner builds worlds. For as long as he can remember, Justin has created all sorts of environments for real and imagined figures, from full cities made of brick and found stones to cardboard box villages with streets and a port. With their own rules, customs, and aesthetics, each envisioned world exists to its fictional inhabitants just as much as we exist in our real world.

In 1994, Justin's passion would take a new direction after watching documentaries about the *Titanic* and the *SS Edmund Fitzgerald*. He began building worlds by building ships.

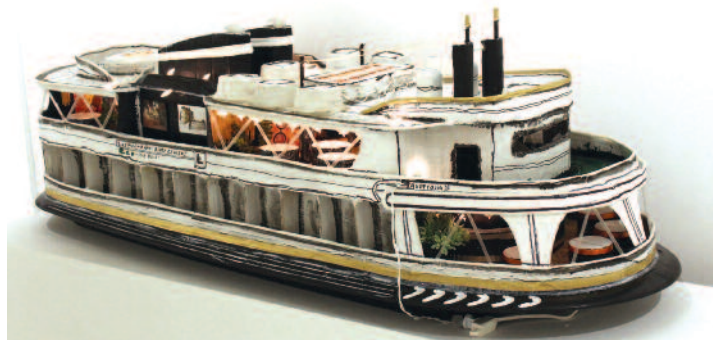
It was the very concept of a ship that caught his interest – they were worlds that travel. A self-contained, curated expression of culture, community, and place that carries the hopes, skills, and experiences of its makers and passengers to distant shores.

Every individual ship in the Higner Maritime Collection is a fusion of multiple worlds: First, each ship is a world in itself, having the specific rules, aesthetics, and uses that exist within the ship; Secondly, it exists within the fleet-world, 'living' within the same universe as other ships within the same line and across the fleets in the collection; Finally, each ship-world interfaces with our world in embodying Justin's thoughts, emotions, and meanings from his lived experiences.

Edward Yong Jun Millar, Curator of Folk Arts

This exhibition, the culmination of Justin Higner's decades-long shipbuilding activity, is something that simply has to be seen to be believed. As I became increasingly aware of the depth and range of his earnest and obsessive creative practice, it became clear that the Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University, with its well-regarded history of exemplary folk art exhibitions, would be the ideal venue to bring attention to Higner's prodigious output. I was pleased to encourage and advance the possibility of this exhibition of Justin's ship models – suitably accompanied by their imagined historical narratives – and am gratified to see it become a reality. Prepare to be amazed and enjoy the voyage.

Gerald Mead, Independent Curator & Art Collector



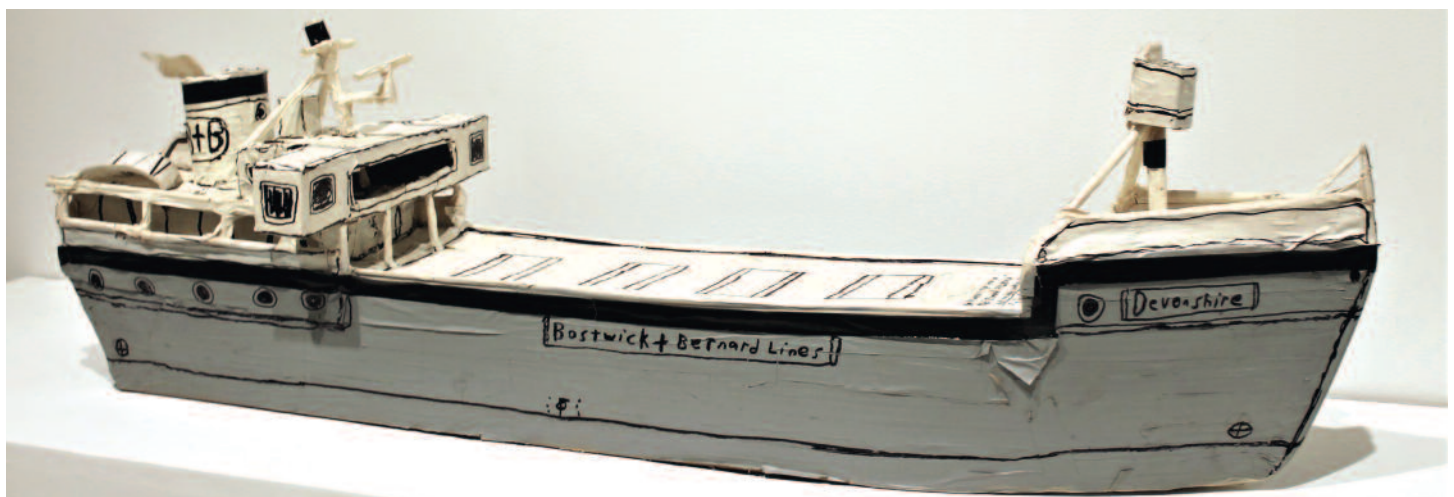
Australia, (illuminated), 2017, 67 x 25 x 24 in.



Media, 1996, 15 x 9 x 10 in.



Virginia, 2002, 74 x 13 x 26 in.



Devonshire (Museum Cargo Ship), 1999, 45 x 13 x 14 in.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Justin Higner considers himself “a budding artist from the great, yet hardly known town of Wheatfield, NY.” Born in Amherst, NY, in 1983, the artist was raised in Wheatfield, NY. He lives in Dapplewood House, built ca. 1960 by master mason and artist Alfred “Fast Freddy” Wolonyk (1929-1989). In addition to his sprawling studio, the artist maintains a large estate and tends several gardens, each named in honor of women in his family, dear neighbors, co-workers, and close friends.

Art, history, politics, science fiction/fantasy, anthropomorphism, and sublime nature are influences on the artist, and their importance is reflected in his creative output. Over the course of his formal education, as well as his lifelong learning, these topics continue to provide deeply personal and enriching experiences. Moreover, to the artist's appreciation, there is generous crossover of these subjects found in historic television documentaries, short stories, historical narratives, and feature-length films. As an artist, Higner prefers “a truly sublime approach to life, as if time is the overawed specter of ourselves.” Unequivocally, he specified that *Titanic—The Complete Story*, a 1994 two-part documentary produced by the Arts and Entertainment Network, inspired “everything”—everything that was to become the Higner Maritime Collection.

Extremely active in his community and the town of Wheatfield, Higner is the Chairman of the Town of Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan Task Force Board; a member of the Wheatfield Garden Club; the Sergeant-at-Arms and Board Member of the Wheatfield Lions Club; a Member of the Board of Trustees for the Historical Society of North German Settlements (Das Haus, Einhaus, und Der Stall Museum), Village of Bergholz, NY; a member of the Veterans Memorial Committee; and a life member and volunteer at the Niagara Aerospace Museum, located in Niagara Falls, NY. He is also a member of the Sierra Club and the Phi Alpha Theta (National History Honors Society). While attending Buffalo State College, he served as President of the Commuter Counsel and was a four-term Student Senator and a theater artist at Niagara County Community College, Sanborn, NY. While at NCCC he designed the current seal and logo of the college's Student Senate. He also actively supports causes and projects that, in his words, “work for us all,” including environmental awareness, responsible housing developments, Native American issues, LGBTQ rights, and public programs that document and highlight historic landmarks and people of the Western New York region.

Perhaps as unique as his mythological, seafaring pseudo-historical allegories, Higner identifies with a multitude of historical and contemporary figures as his “chief historical and artistic heroes.” These diverse individuals' lives, pedigrees, and accomplishments have influenced his creative process and helped direct his maritime allegories including all of the artists on display within each of his works.

Higner's work can be viewed on Facebook at [facebook.com/groups/311457415657037](https://www.facebook.com/groups/311457415657037).



Justin J.M. Higner,
Photography by David Moog.
Courtesy Burchfield Penney
Art Center, Buffalo, NY.

EDUCATION

2012 Bachelor of History, State University of New York College at Buffalo, NY

2006 Associate Degree of Liberal Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, Niagara County Community College, Sanborn, NY

Professional Experience

Since 2017, Higner has been the Town Historian for the Town of Wheatfield, NY, focusing on archiving, collections care and displays, cemetery research, and monument preservation at Fairmont Park. He is also writing a science-fiction, action-adventure novel, *Cascadia*. Higner, as

Wheatfield, NY Town Historian, also plans to write a book on the history of the town.

From 2007 to 2017, Higner was a Tour Guide and naturalist for the Niagara Regional Interpretative Programs Office at DeVeaux Woods State Park in Niagara Falls, NY. There he focused on the Schoellkopf

Power Station Historic Site, the bridges of the Niagara Gorge, the Great Gorge Route, and the DeVeaux College Campus Site. Higner, throughout his life, has always placed a special emphasis on historical/geological subjects and the cultural legacies of the Western New York region.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Adriatic III, 2001, 35 x 8 x 10 in.

Alberta, 1995, 18 x 4½ x 7 in.

Alexandria, 2005, 108 x 13 x 28 in.

Appalachia, 2004, 77 x 18 x 24 in.

Aquar—, (beached/scrap yard scenario), 2003, 99 x 12 x 23 in.

Aquatania II, 2008, 112 x 21 x 31 in.

Aries Star II, 2005, 74 x 18 x 29 in.

Australia, 2017, 67 x 25 x 24 in.

Batavian (Museum Ship), 1999/2000, 82 x 17 x 30 in.

Bavarian, 2011/2017, 87 x 18 x 25 in.

Bella Contessa, 2009, 112 x 26 x 35 in.

Buckinghamshire (Shipwreck), 2000, 92 x 12 x 12 inches.

Caledonia II, 2010, 84 x 19 x 24 in.

Calypso, 1995, 31 x 20 x 21 in.

Claramont, 1994 (rebuilt in 2017), 26 x 12 x 20 in.

Devonshire (Museum Cargo Ship), 1999, 45 x 13 x 14 in.

Diamond Isle III, 2006, 74 x 19 x 21 in.

Edmund Fitzgerald (model), 2015, 152 x 14 x 26 in.

Fruitopio (Shipwreck), 2000, 38 x 10 x 13 in.

Gemini Star II, 2003, 72 x 14 x 25 in.

Georgic, 1996, 26 x 6 x 7 in.

Grand Destiny, 1998, 38 x 8 x 10 in.

Imperio, 1995, 13 x 3 x 5½ in.

Kincardshire, 2018, 48 x 16 x 20 in.

Laurentic III, 1998, 37 x 6 x 10½ in.

Leviathan, 1999, 146 x 19 x 20 in.

Majestic III, 2001/2018, 42 x 9 x 12 in.

Media, 1996, 15 x 9 x 10 in.

Neptune III, 2003/2017, 87 x 16 x 32 in.

Oceanic IV, 2005/2017, 35 x 5 x 9 in.

Paridot Isle, 1998–2014, 49 x 14 x 20 in.

Republic, 1998, 46 x 8 x 13 in.

Romania, 2001, 90 x 15 x 25 in.

Sahara, 1998, 52 x 10 x 18 in.

Savannah, 2014, 48 x 20 x 23 in.

Scorpio Star II, 1999, 69 x 13 x 25 in.

Scythia, 1997, 49 x 12 x 19 in.

Teutonia, 2011, 37 x 16 x 21 in.

Universe II, 2003-05, 134 x 22 x 28 in.

Violet Jessop, (ex. Saturn I), (Museum Ship), 1997, 39 x 11 x 17 in.

Virginia, 2002, 74 x 13 x 26 in.

Windsor Castle, 2000-2004, 78 x 14 x 22 in.

This publication was printed in an edition of 250 on the occasion of the exhibition *The Higner Maritime Collection: Twenty-Five Years of Shipbuilding* by Justin Higner, on view September 9, 2018-March 17, 2019, at the Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University.

Justin J.M. Higner, and the Castellani Art Museum staff, would like to thank the following dear family and colleagues of the artist: his mother, sister, brothers and their families, Skeezix, all of his late grandparents and the artist's late father; Gerald Mead; Gordon Ballard; Thomas P. Asklar; Niagara University; the Town of Wheatfield, NY; Dapplewood House; the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center; Lewiston Council on the Arts; North Tonawanda, NY Public Library; Canal Festival of the Tonawandas; S.G. Falk School of Kenmore, NY; Kenilworth Public Library; Know Your Ships; Sharp Printing, our guests, and Higner's associated suppliers, neighbors, alma maters, dearest friends

and mentors. Thank You for 25 extraordinary years! In conjunction with the Castellani Art Museum exhibition, the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center (1201 Pine Avenue, Niagara Falls, NY) will be presenting selected works from the Higner Maritime Collection in the *Immerse: Interactive Sculpture and Artwork Exhibition* and the Garden Gallery August 11-September 30, 2018. For more information, visit thenacc.org.

Additional works from the Higner Maritime Collection will also be on view at the North Tonawanda Public Library (505 Meadow Drive, North Tonawanda, NY) September 4-October 15, 2018. For more information, visit ntlibrary.org. Justin Higner, with Tom Asklar, will be hosting the annual multi-media and music *Tribute to the Edmund Fitzgerald* on November 3, 7 p.m. in Lewiston, NY. The *Edmund Fitzgerald* (2015) piece from the Castellani Art Museum exhibition will make its fourth appearance at this event. For more information and event location, visit artcouncil.org.



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the Arts

The *Higner Maritime Collection: Twenty-Five Years of Ship Building* by Justin Higner is made possible, in part, by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.



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