

**Sara M. Zak: An Overwhelming Familiarity**

September 25, 2016 - January 11, 2017

Opening reception, with artist talk at 3:00 p.m., Sunday, September 25, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.



sarazak



*Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past, 2016, oil on canvas (seven panels), 108 x 144 in.*

## Sara M. Zak: *An Overwhelming Familiarity*

Sara M. Zak's large-scale paintings are composed of complex multi-layered narratives. Built primarily around recurrent imagery of a blissful young girl, a swing, suspension apparatus, the American flag and architectural interiors; her work combines lush color and loose brushwork.

Presented in shifting perspectives, repetition of these elements, communicates the tediousness of a too familiar everyday life. Also entwined in the works, though not immediately apparent, is Zak's consideration of perpetual "Inter-generational self-replacement"—daughter becomes mother...becomes grandmother...in perpetuity.

With deep personal trepidations, which she is not fully willing to communicate, Zak's canvases provide a heightened awareness of half-remembered dreams or uninvited premonitions. Devoid of any sentimentality (a term the artist despises), her paintings convey a purposeful sense of unease. Discomfort at the thought of "what ifs"—a fear of unforeseen life-changing catastrophes—clouds Zak's psyche while painting.

With these understandings, her awareness of the fragility of life becomes evident. Zak, expertly handling her medium, constructs ingenious complexities that are physically flat but are also multi-dimensional.

This exhibition marks the conclusion of the TOPSPIN exhibiton program. Running from 2003 through 2017, the TOPSPIN exhibition series has featured the varied work of thirty-seven diverse regional artists. Thanks to fourteen-years of generous support from Tops Friendly Markets, LLC, the staff of the Castellani Art Museum is proud to have had the opportunity to be a catalyst for emerging artists in the Western New York region. While TOPSPIN comes to a close, the exhibition space and project mission are being re-structured to offer new and exciting exhibitions and artist engagement opportunities.

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



That was the hour when it all started/Echoes of Suspended Motion, 2014, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in.



Think you're escaping and run into yourself, 2016, oil and light on canvas, 48 x 96 in.



A circle is not absurd, 2014, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in.



Let my country die for me, 2016, oil on canvas, 48 x 60 in.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

### An Overwhelming Familiarity

#### The Opening Quote:

Francis Bacon said, "If you can talk about it, why paint it?"

#### The Social Concern:

Neuropsychology - Perception, Memory. Terms found in DSM-5: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Prolonged Grief Disorder, Post-Traumatic Growth.

#### The Allusions:

I heard a radio interview with David Kushner, an author who lost his brother to a violent murder when he was only four. I re-read *Catch-22* and *The Uncanny*. I repeatedly circled back to the way James Joyce writes. I devoured Francis Bacon. I looked at a million painters. I listened to *Invisibilia* and *Hidden Brain* podcasts about psychology and psychological anomalies.

#### The Rational.

We swing; we ride the carousel; we let the waves lap over us and over us and over us and over us and over us. Our

lives are accumulated repetitions with slight variations... except when they are not. When Paris or Belgium is bombed, when a passenger jet crashes, during any mass tragedy, we all tune in. In all probability our lives don't really change—except if we number in the survivors, first responders, or the families of the victims. Without fail, I am overwhelmed with the thought of children left behind during these tragedies. I consider them for their loss of a parent or parents, yes, but even more for how this early loss will affect their lifelong experiences. In these paintings, I attempt to explore the psyche of children who experience the trauma of loss. From personal experience and research, I found that the child who experiences an early violent loss experiences a fracturing of time and memory. They repeatedly cycle back to the moment of loss even if they were not present at the moment of trauma.

#### The Elevator Speech:

These paintings, like the vast majority of my work, explore the shifting nature of time, place, concept, actuality, and

paint. All of these notions rely heavily on the stability of our own perception of them – what if the perception keeps fracturing? What if time doesn't just move forward but rather it moves like the swing, or the carousel, or the waves?

#### The Esoteric

The process of painting – can paint on a static substrate move? Stillness is not reflective of existence. Can an oil painting continue to breathe on its own once the artist's flurry of brush strokes is finished? Can it converse with viewers, reveal new depths and return to the surface; can it reveal simultaneous reflections? Can it change its purpose?

#### The Paint

I paint in a way that reflects my interest in the way the brain works, and the way I perceive the walk through life. I paint the same repeated figures, objects, colors, and shapes. I explore thin layers, frenetic and searching brushwork, pentimenti (traces of previous work; evidence that the artist changed his/her mind), accident, and anomaly. Back to Francis Bacon... he writes "In my case

all painting... is an accident. I foresee it and yet I hardly ever carry it out as I foresee it. It transforms itself by the actual paint. I don't in fact know very often what the paint will do, and it does many things which are very much better than I could make it do."

#### The Catch-22

I often forget many of the painting techniques I use from series to series. Where I do have too much memory of the ins and outs of each painting I create...I could not paint the way I want to paint – I would only be left with the way I know how to paint. And if I know how to paint the way I want, then that means I have lost the experience of painting, in which case I would have to go about forgetting how to paint before I could be a painter of worth.

#### The Closing Quote and Bit of Sage Advice:

"Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past."  
- James Joyce, *Ulysses*

# Sara M. Zak

saramzak.com

Sara M. Zak is a Western New York visual artist and instructor specializing in oil painting. Her work is in private collections across the country and was recently acquired by Roswell Park Cancer Institute and the Burchfield Penney Art Center, both in Buffalo, NY. Zak was honored to be named a 2014 finalist for the Sustainable Arts Foundation Award in San Francisco, CA. The artist founded the grassroots artists' initiative Painting for Preservation in 2011. Zak teaches at Villa Maria College, conducts regular painting workshops and is a New York Foundation for the Arts Mark alumnus.

# 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.

**TopSpin** is made possible through the generous Support of Tops Friendly Markets, LLC.



Sara M. Zak: An Overwhelming Familiarity is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

Catalog design: JCharlier Communication Design

## EDUCATION

**2009**  
Master of Science in Multidisciplinary Studies, State University of New York College at Buffalo, NY

**2002**  
English 7-12 Teaching Certification; Art K-12 Teaching Certification, State University of New York College at Buffalo, NY

**2000**  
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting, State University of New York College at Buffalo, NY  
Bachelor of Arts in Art History, State University of New York College at Buffalo, NY

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**2015-present**  
Adjunct Professor, Villa Maria College, Buffalo, NY  
**2014-present**  
Private Oil Painting Instruction

**2013-present**  
Teen and Adult Art Classes, Buffalo Arts Studio, Buffalo, NY  
**2011-present**  
Oil Painting Demonstrations, East Aurora Art Society, Alden Art Society, West Seneca Art Society,

Centennial Arts Center Inc., the Buffalo Niagara Art Association and others  
**2012**  
*Building Stories Pecha Kucha*, The Buffalo History Museum, Buffalo, NY

**2012**  
*Art + Activism*, visiting lecturer for Graduate Museum Studies at Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY

## RECENT RELATED EXPERIENCE

**2016**  
Juror, *Centennial Art Center Spring Exhibition*, Hamburg Public Library, Hamburg, NY  
**2015**  
Curator, *Seeing and Being: Making Art in WNY*, Betty's Restaurant, Buffalo, NY

**2014**  
Curator, Buffalo Arts Studio, Buffalo, NY  
**2013**  
Exhibition Organizer, *City of Night Silos*, Silo City, Buffalo, NY  
Curator, *The Changing Atmosphere of Preservation*, C.G. Jung Center, Buffalo, NY

Juror, *West Seneca Art Society Members Exhibition*, Charles E. Burchfield Nature and Art Center, West Seneca, NY  
**2011 - Present**  
Founder of *Painting for Preservation*, an artists' initiative designed to bring positive attention to distress properties and communities, Buffalo, NY

**2011**  
Curator, *Art + Preservation*, Statler City, Buffalo, NY  
Curator, *City Strings and Lines*, Carnegie Art Center, Tonawanda, NY

## RECENT AWARDS AND HONORS

**2015**  
Juror's Pick Award, Big Orbit Members Exhibition, Buffalo, NY  
Silver Medal, Buffalo Society of Artists 118th Fall Catalogue Exhibition, Hi-Temp Fabrication Gallery, Buffalo, NY

**2014**  
Finalist, Sustainable Arts Foundation, San Francisco, CA  
Gold Medal, Buffalo Society of Artists 117th Spring Exhibition, Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum, Buffalo, NY  
Silver Medal, Buffalo Society of Artists 118th Fall Catalogue Exhibition, Buffalo, NY

**2013**  
4th Place, Buffalo Society of Artists 117th Catalogue Exhibition, Kenan Center, Lockport, NY  
Juror's Award, Big Orbit Members Exhibition, Buffalo, NY

**2012**  
Gold Medal, Buffalo Society of Artists 116th Catalogue Exhibition, Buffalo, NY  
**2011**  
New York Foundation for the Arts' MARK Award, Professional Development Program, New York, NY

## RECENT EXHIBITIONS

*Solo exhibitions are indicated with an asterisk (\*)*  
**2016**  
*It's Ridiculous to Leave All the Conversation to the Pudding*, (716) GALLERY | Hydraulic Hearth, Buffalo, NY\*  
**2015**  
*Buffalo: A Work in Progress*, Studio Hart, Buffalo, NY  
*MISHAP* contained, Peter A. and Mary Lou Vogt Gallery, Canisius College, Buffalo NY\*  
92nd Annual Spring Show, Erie Art Museum, Erie, PA  
Big Orbit Members Show, Big Orbit, Buffalo, NY

Buffalo Society of Artists 2015 Catalogue Exhibition, Center for Art and Technology, Buffalo, NY  
**2014**  
*Echoes of Suspended Motion*, Starlight Studio and Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY\*  
*20"x20"x20"*, Louisiana State University Student Union Gallery, Baton Rouge, LA  
Buffalo Society of Artist Juried Spring Exhibition, Buffalo Arts Studio, Buffalo, NY  
**2013**  
*A Crowd of Small Metamorphoses*, 464 Gallery, Buffalo, NY\*

ELAB's *City of Night*, (on-site interactive installation at Silo City), Buffalo, NY  
*The Technoluminist Eye*, Meridian West Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
*The Changing Atmosphere of Preservation*, C.G. Jung Center, Buffalo, NY  
**2012**  
Joyce Hill, Elizabeth Leader, and Sara Zak: *Selections from the Buffalo Society of Artists, Olean Public Library Visual Arts Program*, Olean, NY  
*Dreams, Dramas, Desires*, Artsphere Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
Showoffs: *Hallwalls Artists and Models*, Buffalo, NY

Buffalo Society of Artists 116th Catalogue Exhibit, Niagara Arts and Cultural Center, Niagara Falls, NY  
*Finger Lakes Juried Plein Air Competition*, Canandaigua, NY  
*The Artist Among Us*, Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY  
MARK11/12, Cathy and Jesse Marion Art Gallery, Michael C. Rockefeller Arts Center, Fredonia, NY  
Trinity, 464 Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
Exhibit and Sale, Dana Tillou Gallery, Buffalo, NY

## BIBLIOGRAPHY AND PUBLICATIONS

**2016**  
Dabkowski, Colin. "Buffalo's Smallest Gallery to Host Sara M. Zak's Paintings," *The Buffalo News*, Jan. 25, 2016.  
**2015**  
Featured cover artist, *The Daily Public*, Dec. 17, 2014.  
Foran, Jack. "Works by Three Buffalonians on Display at Studio Hart," *Artvoice*, v14 n3.

Foran, Jack. "Sara M. Zak at Canisius College," *The Daily Public*, Nov. 18, 2015.  
**2014**  
Foran, Jack. "Hi-Temp Fabrication showcases a wide inventory of works," *Artvoice*, v13 n39.  
**2013**  
Dabkowski, Colin. "Sara M. Zak's paintings reflect Buffalo's slow and steady progress," *The Buffalo News*, Dec. 26, 2013.

Behr, Bob. "Can Art Save Buildings?" *Plein Air Magazine*, Sept. 9, 2013.  
Foran, Jack. "Members Show Big Orbit," *Artvoice*, v12 n7.  
**2012**  
Foran, Jack. "Artists and Models: Showoffs," *Artvoice*, v11 n39.  
Dabkowski, Colin. "Saving Works: Artists Draw Attention to Local Preservation," *The Buffalo News*, June 22, 2012.

Dabkowski, Colin. "The Artist Among Us," *The Buffalo News*, May 25, 2012.  
**2011**  
Newton, Matthew. "Creating a Legacy with Painting for Preservation," *Western New York Heritage Press*, Winter 2011.  
Foran, Jack. "Group Show at Carnegie," *Artvoice*, v10 n42.

## COLLECTIONS

Regional and national private collections

Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY

JRS Morgan Realty, Buffalo, NY

Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Buffalo, NY

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

*A circle is not absurd*, 2014, oil on canvas, 36x36 inches  
*A very short space of time through very short times of space*, 2016, oil on canvas, 48x60 inches.

*Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past*, 2016, oil on canvas, (7 panels) 108x144 inches  
*It is as painful perhaps to be awakened from a vision as to be born*, 2016, oil and light on canvas, 48x96 inches

*Let my country die for me*, 2016, oil on canvas, 48x60 inches  
*Limits of the diaphane*, 2016, oil on canvas, (6 panels), 108x132 inches  
*Something is beginning*, 2013, oil on canvas, 90x60 inches

*That was the hour when it all started/ Echoes of Suspended Motion*, 2014, oil on canvas, 36x36 inches  
*Think you're escaping and run into yourself*, 2016, oil and light on canvas, 48x96 inches



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