



A World of His Own Making

Christian Schmit's visionary ideas result in a new class and exhibition

MATT MORRIS // APR 2, 2008

At Covington's Art Off Pike last fall, amidst the more anticipated tents assigned to anxious-looking artisans, I came up to an outhouse-sized structure with wheels called "The Draw Box." The public was invited to put suggestions for drawings into a slot on one side of the box and wait for their drawing to emerge from a similar slot on the other side. It was artist and art teacher Christian Schmit who was sitting in the booth, drawing out requests as quickly as possible, and this was just one of his many pursuits that aim to offer artistic sustenance and social connection to our community.

The Draw Box is one of Schmit's performance-based projects that have thrived as well in art fairs, high schools and even the Contemporary Arts Center. Several years ago he collaborated with poet Terry Ford to explore "the risky business of providing sonic

accompaniment for poetry." Calling themselves "Uncle Glockenspiel," they aimed their outreach at dispelling fears about poetry and were pleased to see their efforts getting people into the CAC and eliciting reactions from their audiences.

Schmit, a lifetime resident of the Cincinnati area, is a visionary in full force with a penchant for exploding, Big Bang-style, given possibilities into whole new worlds. Any given day finds him filling commissions for illustrations as well as building oversized papier-mâché/ installation environments. Perhaps you have seen his popular Klumpas, which are handcrafted, whimsical heads Schmit has shown in galleries like ArtWorks and 1305 Gallery, as well as in Covington.

"Maybe all the lines are blurred now," he speculates innocently, as if he is not a prize example of someone living an artistic life on their own invented terms.

Imagination, endless possibilities and follow-through drive the classes Schmit teaches at Covington's Baker Hunt Art and Culture Center. The newest class that he and artist Lindsey Whittle have offered at Baker Hunt is called Inspiration Nation.

"I had just read *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and I was thinking of using that as the basis for a class," Schmit says.

Without being as concretely based in H.G. Wells' novel, Inspiration Nation is nonetheless intended as an "installation studio" class for all ages in which a series of "environments" are realized, all based on narratives of the students' invention. Now giant sea serpents, snowy worlds, red lagoons and glittering robots proliferate on Baker Hunt's campus. Schmit aims to teach that, "You can build your own world and build your own life and do what you want to do."

An unconventional art workshop doubles as a site for humanist empowerment. Schmit encouraged parents to get involved and paraded guest artists through who have shared their own art and then set to work alongside the children, parents and teachers. All of their efforts will culminate in a giant exhibition at Leapin' Lizard Gallery, opening Friday. Along with the installations from the class, the guest artists have been invited to present work that responds to their experiences at Inspiration Nation. Local musician Cameron Martin Cochran is composing a soundtrack that will play as atmosphere to the extravagant exhibition.

Within the whimsy of Christian Schmit's endeavors are solid commitments to collaboration and community.

"Why is art so important?" he says. "People are miserable and art has the potential of improve that situation. There is a poverty of spirit in this country. Art connects people and gives them power."

Schmit has put this strong vision into every kind of venue, and even taken it to the streets. If Inspiration Nation does not exactly present a vision of a perfect world, it will certainly impress viewers with its power.

INSPIRATION NATION opens Friday at Leapin Lizard Gallery in Covington.

<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13024681/art-a-world-of-his-own-making>