



## Kristine Donnelly: Paperwork

*The Taft Museum invites emerging artists to respond to its collection*

**MATT MORRIS** // AUG 17, 2010

Last year, the Taft Museum of Art embarked on a new series of exhibitions called Keystone Contemporary. The goal is that each exhibition would feature one local emerging artist who's been invited to respond — directly or abstractly — to the Taft's collection, the historical house, its interior décor or perhaps even other special exhibitions on view at the museum.

The Taft considered that former residents of the house represented a long history of supporting the working artists of their day, especially those just starting into their careers. For example, Nicholas Longworth gave Robert S. Duncanson his first major commission: the suite of landscape murals in the foyer of the historic house. Likewise,

the Tafts themselves purchased several paintings from Cincinnati artists Frank Duveneck and Henry Farny, and they treated their collection as a public resource, inviting artists to visit their home to study the artworks on display.

Keystone Contemporary is presented in a modest little gallery space that's shared with the museum's Wadsworth Watch Case, full of bejeweled and ornate pocket watches and similarly small-scale accessories. Although the series was conceived to be annual, there are plans to mount two exhibitions a year in the hopes that younger and more diverse audiences will be interested in visiting the Taft and its famed collection.

The first Keystone Contemporary exhibition last year featured a series of new works by local realist painter Emil Robinson. An oversized painting of a cloudy sky was accompanied by three oval works: two figure paintings and a digital photograph of the artist's studio wall.

The relationship between Robinson's tender, studied paintings and the Taft's collection of figurative and landscape oil paintings was clear. The ovals even made sense in relationship to the circular enamel paintings on the watches at one end of the room. One felt that Robinson's work celebrated the traditions in art-making upheld in the Taft collection and added to them with contemporary works.

The Taft's second selection is less obvious but no less appropriate. Kristine Donnelly is a local installation artist who works with printmaking and cut paper to create highly ornamental tableau from basic materials. A Cincinnati native, she graduated with a Master of Fine Arts and a Master of Arts Education from the University of Cincinnati in 2009 and received a Summerfair Individual Artist grant the same year. She's shown locally in numerous exhibitions at venues like ArtWorks and Carl Solway Gallery.

Donnelly (pictured above at the Taft) currently designs art programs for children and families at the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Her newly opened exhibition *Paperwork* presents two new works: the wall-bound "Pose" and a tall piece hung from the ceiling titled "Enclosure." Rather than draw inspiration from artworks in the collection, Donnelly sought to create a site-specific installation that responded and added to the décor of the building. Making use of patterns in the various curtains and ornate moldings around doorways and hanging chandeliers, she created screen-printed patterns that form the basis of her work.

Donnelly's art is very process-based. Beginning with long sheets of paper printed repeatedly with the patterns she has designed, she cuts away the excess blank areas by hand, resulting in fragile webs of paper and transparent vellum. When installed in spaces, these sheets drape and tumble about, wavering between two- and three-dimensionality.

"Pose" is constructed from rolls of paper onto which a deep yellow floral pattern has been screen-printed. When discussing the work with the exhibition's curator, Tamera Munte (a frequent *CityBeat* contributor), she pointed out that this goldenrod shade is derived from the wall color of the nearby music room.

With the excess paper cut away, Donnelly has created an irregular, lace-like pattern. Reams of this handiwork run down the toffee colored walls and, just above the floor, loop back up on themselves. The front of the entire work has been painted to match the wall color so that, in some moments, the wall appears perforated, or else it seems to be shedding some mysterious wallpaper. The way the scrolls of paper unroll down the wall and roll back up lends a whispered, secretive quality.

By comparison, the hanging work "Enclosure" is more experimental, and in some ways less successful. Said to be "chandelier-inspired" on the exhibition's didactic panel, the turquoise-printed transparent vellum from which it is comprised attaches to a metal ring hung from the ceiling with monofilament (the precise name for fishing line). There is lovely interplay between the intensity of the blue-green ink and the softness of it when seen through the frosted paper. Chilly and crystalline, this quality is what most recalled a chandelier.

To compose the work into undulating cascades that fold in on themselves, Donnelly reinforced the work with stitching and more fishing line. Strung up thus, it's easy to think of a marionette snared in its own strings, and I found these additions to the paper distracting.

That being said, it's laudable that the Taft has featured such a progressive installation artist dealing in abstraction and process-based work. The move has been happening more and more in historical collections around the world and is a brilliant way to introduce new access points into artwork and interior design from yesteryear.

Donnelly has a unique, personally developed approach to art-making and a trustworthy process. I relish her experimentation even if the results are sometimes inconsistent.

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**KRISTINE DONNELLY: PAPERWORK continues at the Taft Museum of Art downtown through Oct. 24.**

**<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13013743/kristine-donnelly-paperwork-review>**