

# CREATIVE REGENERATION

## WYNNE, DERRY & L'HEUREUX ESCAPE HEARTBREAK AT THE NARROWS

Providence-based artists Michele L'Heureux, Amy Wynne and Jonathan Derry together are showing 25 sculptures, drawing/installations and hybrid 2D & 3D works in "No Mud, No Lotus," on view through October 12 at the Narrows Center for the Arts in Fall River, Massachusetts. Their works, produced in alliance with the artists' shared Buddhist mindfulness practices, explore and encompass the pain of personal loss. They are intense, intimate and poignant.

L'Heureux, also the curator, is a former director and curator of galleries at Brandeis University, Montserrat College of Art and Wheaton College. L'Heureux had been slogging alone through the "mud" of terminating a 20-year marriage a year ago when she invited Wynne and Derry to join her

in a weekly studio dialogue to develop and refine works to be included. The title quotes Vietnamese monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh on the suffering that precedes creative regeneration. Authenticity has been their touchstone, derived through a meditative practice that accepts the presence and transitory nature of difficult feelings without passing judgment. The works on view may be subtle, bizarre or over-the-top, yet none sentimentalizes or denies the facts of pain and grief.

Painter Wynne, who for years has taught meditation, landscape painting and creative process, discovered, through mindfulness, ways of integrating repetitive rituals and daily disciplines around loss into her art.

Derry, after losing several family members shortly before the exhibition, found room to accept the possibility that aggressive, even destructive emotions might re-infuse his sculptures with positive energy.

L'Heureux was able to tolerate the grief in recalling happier days while reclaiming "failed" prints, drawings and materials for new purposes.

Wynne had long channeled her gifts for drawing, color and precise visual recall through naturalist landscape painting.

### FEATURED GALLERY

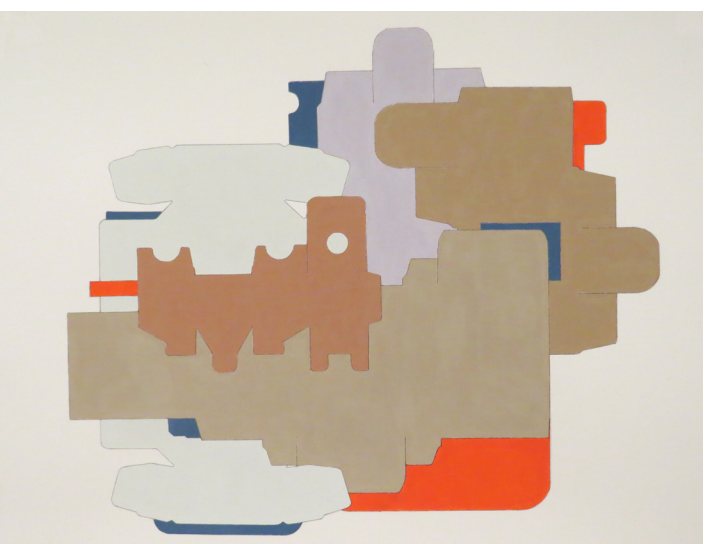
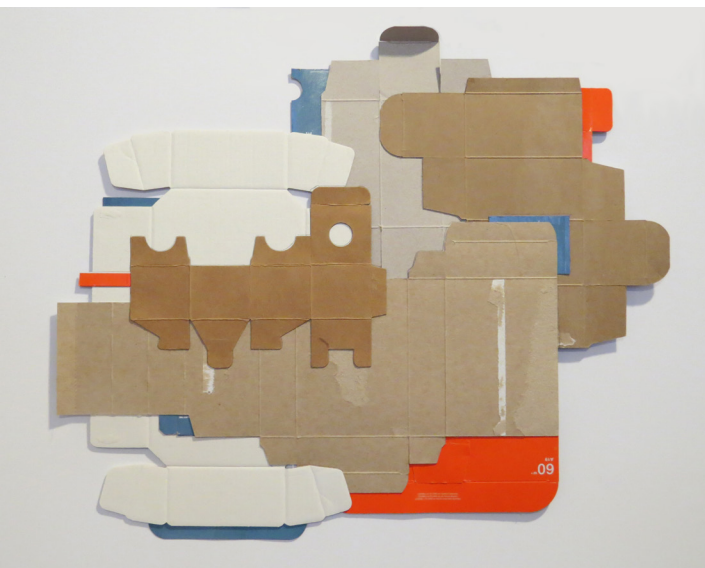
**AMY WYNNE,  
JOHNATHAN DERRY,  
AND MICHELE  
L'HEUREUX: NO MUD, NO  
LOTUS**

**NARROWS CENTER FOR  
THE ARTS**

**16 ANAWAN STREET**

**FALL RIVER,  
MASSACHUSETTS**

**THROUGH OCTOBER 12**



TOP LEFT: Amy Wynne,  
"Consumption Series"  
[collage] 1A, 2020-present,  
cardboard boxes, glue, 18" x  
21". Photograph by Michele  
L'Heureux.

BOTTOM LEFT: Amy Wynne,  
"Consumption Series"  
[painting] 1B, 2020-present,  
Flashe paint, graphite, 140lb  
watercolor paper, 20" x  
26". Photograph by Michele  
L'Heureux.

RIGHT: Johnathan Derry,  
*Tenebris et Luce*, 2024,  
burlap, plaster, paint, found  
TV antenna, neon/glass tube,  
120" x 66" x 6". Photograph  
by Johnathan Derry.





Around the time that she took up meditation, she began to value and trust a wider range of senses and develop her poetic sensibility. During the pandemic, she weathered relocating her family to care more easily for aging parents, while helping her teenage daughter adapt to a disrupted high school education. Nine months into the pandemic, however, the death of the family's beloved dog, Captain, unleashed profound grief.

In what became the "Absence is Present" series, Wynne embraced her anthropologist's predilection for classifying forms and documenting change. She set out to make daily gestural drawings on brown paper bags of recollected moments with Captain. She strengthened heavy black lines and filled in abstract voids with white. After this, she decided to trace these abstract patterns onto black plastic bags and cut out the resulting silhouettes, meticulously saving the waste bits in plastic bags, labeling and dating them. Pinning each grouping together in a chronologically ordered grid, she wrote of her memories. The resulting series both preserved her memories of the cherished past and supported her patience and hope in making further work.

Wynne's "Consumption" series, begun soon after, utilizing recycled cardboard boxes that had been piling up during the pandemic. Unfolding and flattening them, she combined several into collaged reliefs. Returning in a later stage, she painted an accurate but softened image of the collage with matte Flashe paint on white paper. The viewer must peer closely to tell which is which. She observed, "From each series a spark develops that teaches me what might come next. I gather 'clues' that allow me to know more about my direction forward."

An ambitious work, "Bardo Botanicum," consists of two large wall panels of fluttering vellum sheets, each forming a grid seven units across and seven down. "Bardo" is the 49-day ritual period after death in Tibetan Buddhism that marks the soul's passing from one body to rebirth in another. On its surface float 98 unique images of flowers, leaves and stems that Wynne drew in black while walking in the fields of Tuscany. An underlying layer of vellum lists seven words in red. For each column, reading downward, the first list repeats, but the words and letters progressively break apart and scatter.

Michele L'Heureux,  
*From the Wreckage*,  
2024, collage,  
screenprint, cut book  
pages, acrylic paint,  
charcoal, paper bag,  
Sumi-e ink, sand, 42"  
x 112". Photograph by  
Michele L'Heureux.

silver anniversary  
timeline exhibition

September 8 - October 13, 2024

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This scrambling of ordered language into entropic marks tracks the progressive disintegration Wynne has been observing in her mother's handwriting during her descent into late-stage Alzheimer's. For Wynne, this deterioration of language also portends the dissolving bond of recognition between mother and daughter.

Derry, a sculptor and teacher who also works in residential construction as a day job, frequently scrounges abandoned objects from his worksites for his sculptures. In the run-up to the exhibition, Derry was whipsawed by the sudden loss of three important parent figures in a few short months. Having lost his mother early in the pandemic, the past winter saw his stepmother's death, followed in April by his father, and two weeks after, that the man who had been his mother's partner and helped raise him.

The loss of a parent was not an easy subject. Earlier in the year, Derry had attempted a large, static wall-work associated with his mother, called "Buoy," which to him was "about the fundamentals of sculpture," yet he felt repeatedly stymied. Under the pressure of the mounting losses and the exhibition's approach, however, meditation helped him to question his assumptions, and something burst free. Simpler, more intuitive works sprouted up, often incorporating fragments from Derry's earlier sculptures. Working with his recently inherited baby-crib was a difficult case. It took smashing it with a hammer to develop its form further by adding cast-offs from another piece, whose hooks pulled it in three conflicting directions.

Derry's final work for the show, "Tenebris et Luce" (Latin for "Darkness and Light"), galvanized unresolved feelings triggered by his father's funeral just months earlier. A well-respected Boston OBGYN, John Derry's name and fertility clinic were associated with the early development of in vitro fertilization, bucking the Vatican's opposition to the technique in the 1980s.

At the elder Derry's funeral, the officiating priest forbade Johnathan and his brother from mentioning their father's principled contributions to the medical community and women's health in their eulogy. The brothers stood their ground, however, and Johnathan Derry spoke his piece, but not without anger at the insult to his father's accomplishments.

In the resulting sculpture, the gleaming metal and neon-reinforced spine of a defunct TV aerial hovers over the viewer like a dark spirit, stiff black drapery gripping its ribs in rigor mortis. Guided skyward by an inner light, it combines a link between father and son with an image of leave-taking.

L'Heureux has entered a new, unpartnered period in her life with a wild efflorescence of mixed-media collage, painterly reliefs and 3D forms. Composed in the space of six months, they are arrested in limbo between virtual and living space as though uncertain of what or who they are. She slaps repeated forms around extravagantly and almost haphazardly, quoting leaves, petals and other life forms that appear to derive from just a few "ancestral" images — the most notable being a 10-year-old sketch of a bivalve multiplied a thousand-fold. At any moment, it may be hard to distinguish whether she's drawn or painted forms directly on paper, appliqued old, rejected images, painted over prints or cut out and overlaid newly collaged images.

L'Heureux piles on copies, near copies and degraded copies of copies that seem to evolve through countless stages, iterations and scale changes, reoccurring as tiny leaves, bird feathers, giant insect wings and even protruding rib cages. She further augments these from a hodgepodge of craft-store decorations lying about the studio — fake flowers, cotton balls and glittery holiday leaves — taste being of no consequence.

The earliest pieces are dark agglomerations confined to wall panels. Later works give birth to appendages and grow into full-fledged installations. L'Heureux makes no bones about their artifice. A tabletop "volcano," appears little more than stuffed garbage bags clotted with black ink, gunk and fake flowers dripping down to the floor. "Ruin and Rebirth" straddles a corner as if to push off, while petals, flowers, leaves and wings thrust frantically outward, seeking escape.

"From the Wreckage" is an elegant outlier, an elongated drawing vibrating with penciled, painted, printed and collaged flowers and suggesting a hidden narrative. To the lower left, flowers bathed in a grisaille wash cower in a lightless underworld; spreading rightward toward the upper corner, brilliant-colored patches festoon forth in a rainbow of leaf-buds, blossoms and color swatches.

In the end, it's hard to tell which is the mud and which is the lotus, two inseparable poles along our human journey.

Elizabeth Michelman

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