



UConn student Annalisa Mudahy, left, talks with Prof. Thomas Dabrah during the opening of the Crosscurrents exhibit on Jan. 24 about a work about seafaring women created by artists Anastasiia Raina and Rebecca Sittler.



Sarah Patulak, a junior in Prof. Nat Trumbull's class, talks with fellow students Chris Rice, second from left, Oliver Hesketh, center, and Mead Bragdon about the work by artist Sam Ekwurtzel titled, "Costco Bulk Molded Water Package."



Artist Diane Barceló, left, and Cliff Sebastian of Mashantucket share a high-five during the opening of the Crosscurrents exhibit. Barcelo and Ashby Carlisle are the creators of the work in the foreground, "They Came by Water," and Sebastian recited Native American words for an audio that accompanied the piece.



Jennifer Wozniak, left, talks with fellow UConn Avery Point senior Llssa Galalone about the piece, "Swish, Specimen 2.2" by artist Deborah Hesse.



Syma Ebbin, left, research coordinator for Connecticut Sea Grant and co-curator of Crosscurrents, looks at one of the "Ghost Whales" created by artist Kristian Brevik as UConn Avery Point student Colleen Franks looks on.



Co-curators Syma Ebbin, left, and Chris Platts stand in front of "Starboard," a work by artist Carla Goldberg that was part of Crosscurrents.

All photos: Judy Benson

# CROSSCURRENTS

## CONNECTICUT SEA GRANT'S RETROSPECTIVE ART EXHIBITION MAKES WAVES By Syma Ebbin

Entangled ghost whales floated in the darkened gallery, the last vestige a 10-year retrospective exhibition showcasing Connecticut Sea Grant-supported artists titled *Crosscurrents*.

The pod of ethereal, illuminated whale effigies — some wrapped in fishing gear and plastics, others with propeller cuts from ship strikes — filled one of four rooms of the Alexey von Schlippe Gallery at UConn Avery Point from January through mid-April. They were retained after the rest of the exhibit had been dismantled to provide a setting for a thought-provoking talk by the artist and a marine mammal biologist. Kristian Brevik, creator of the ghost whales, and Andrea Bogomolni of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute discussed the integration of the arts and sciences focused on the goal of enhancing conservation of North Atlantic right whales and other marine mammals now endangered by a suite of human-induced drivers.

Bogomolni works with fishermen in Cape Cod to increase understanding and communication and reduce antipathy towards these species. Brevik, a doctoral candidate at the University of Vermont and recipient of the 2018 Connecticut Sea Grant Arts Support Award Program, has also shown his work at the New Bedford Whaling Museum. He is interested in empirically measuring whether art can promote stewardship behaviors. After their talks, the audience toured the gallery, inspired by both the art and the conversation.

This was just one example of the many interdisciplinary bridges represented by the artwork displayed

in *Crosscurrents* and created through the Arts Support Award Program overall. The seeds of the program were planted 11 years ago when I met artist Susan Schultz, who introduced me to the metaphorical concept of drawing outside the lines. For Connecticut Sea Grant and my role as research coordinator, staying within the lines meant using our grants exclusively to support scientific research. Inspired by Schultz, I now wanted to add a crossover component to Sea Grant's funding portfolio — a competitive award targeting art and artists that would shepherd creation of works with marine-related themes aligned with Sea Grant's mission. Since the first year, the award has given grants of up to \$1,000 to one or two artists each year.

The idea for a 10-year retrospective of the work of artists supported through this program came from Ana Flores, an environmental artist who had curated a retrospective show for Rhode Island Sea Grant. Thus it was that last October, with the campus gallery recently reopened, I approached Chris Platts, the newly installed curator of the gallery. Platts, a recently graduated art historian from Yale, has more experience with 15th and 16th century art than with the contemporary styles of the Sea Grant-supported works. Nevertheless he was receptive and planning for the exhibit began. Every artist I contacted agreed to contribute to the show. Ultimately the four rooms of the gallery were filled with the works of 13 artists, which included paintings, films, sculptures, audio visual installations and mixed-media collages. An adjacent hall was hung with paintings created

at the Avery Point campus by members of the Connecticut Plein Air Painters Society.

The show opened in January with a lively reception attended by more than 100 people despite gale-force winds. In the following weeks, Platts and I led many tours to a diverse array of classes focusing on the history of the oceans, marine biodiversity and conservation, marine fisheries economics and policy and geographic information systems, among others. We hosted a workshop for teachers of courses in UConn's Early College Experience program, where high school students earn college credit. The session focused on integrating the arts into humanities.

We also gave tours to friends, faculty and community members. Originally scheduled to close in March, it was extended into early April due to its pedagogical relevance. A video of the exhibit is being created. Building on the success of the exhibit, the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development's Office of the Arts joined forces with Sea Grant to enhance the award, enabling sponsorship of an additional artist in 2019.

The positive feedback from students, faculty and the community has been tremendous. By the end of June, new artists will have been chosen for the 2019 award cycle, harnessing the power of art to initiate conversations and create new ways of seeing the sea around us, extending Sea Grant's message to new audiences. Perhaps in another decade, we will be able to reprise this retrospective, again filling a gallery with meaningful and provocative art.