

DailyFreeman.com

Museum, reinvented

By Blaise Schweitzer

If the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson has anything to do with it, the next generation of museums will be about more than dusty, static displays dedicated to history or art.

On Nov. 12, the center puts its art and money where its philosophy is with a new CCS exhibition in a new space.

"Wrestle" is the name of the show and the new Hessel Museum of Art is the venue.

Among the sights to see at the opening? A couple of dummies animated with the projected voice and face of artist Tony Oursler. For a trifecta, look for the artist himself.

Marieluise Hessel, the namesake of the museum, said Oursler himself should be in attendance at the event. She looked amused as she watched Oursler's larger dummy scolded by his smaller dummy, who said: "Sounds like a lie to me."

Hessel laughed and said: "It sounds a little bit like therapy."

Beyond Oursler's work, visitors will also see photos by Robert Rauschenberg and Cindy Sherman, video art from Bannerman Castle near Beacon and an installation that features hundreds of pounds of beach sand strewn with several cases of lovingly restored beer cans.

In a bold move, curator Tom Eccles also promised champagne for all, at the open-to-the-public ribbon cutting at noon Nov. 12. The museum is located on campus along Blithewood Avenue off Annandale Road.

Hessel is one of the original founders of CCS, and her 17,000 square-foot addition to the CCS was designed by Goettsch Partners, the same people who created the original 1990 center structure. The airy space features skylights above, classic white walls and - in the entryway - a glass floor that seems to be held up by thousands of small humanoids.



Marieluise Hessel stands at Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies' Hessel Museum of Art in Annandale-on-Hudson (Freeman photos by Tania Barricklo)

DailyFreeman.com

This is the first of a series of exhibitions that will be drawn from Hessel's lifetime collection of art. She has donated much of that collection to CCS as part of a permanent loan. Students and faculty in the CCS program can tap her collection as they study.

Even the student who was called on to help create the pamphlet that will accompany the exhibition is benefitting from the experience, said Trevor Smith, co-curator of "Wrestle."

"That's something they are going to have to be good at," Smith said.

Although the 1,700-item collection dates back to the 1950s, the pool of available art is by no means "last century." Collecting is a big part of Hessel's makeup and she continually adds artworks to the body of work.

Hessel even collects shoes. She laughed when asked to credit the maker of her very-pointy footwear, during last week's interview. She may know the artists in the CCS collection intimately, but she did not remember the shoe maker and declined to pull them off to check the maker's mark.

In addition to iconic male artists like Robert Mapplethorpe, William Copley and Robert Kushner, Hessel has collected female artists including Janine Antoni, Nan Goldin, Mona Hatoum, Kiki Smith and Rosemarie Trockel.

Seeing Smith and Eccles select pieces from her collection and arrange them in what Eccles has called a "contentious" new contexts has delighted Hessel, she said. "It's an extremely exciting time for me," she said.

Different rooms in the exhibition, feature different themes. In what Smith called the "aggressive" room, some of Mapplethorpe's classic images of (partially) leather-clad men are offset by a Christopher Wool painting that reads "ANDIFYOUDONTLIKEITYOUCANGETTHE@@@@OUTOFMYHOUSE" (expletive deleted).

The Center for Curatorial Studies now works with 22 students, but as it grows with its new resources, those numbers should increase closer to 30, Hessel said during a cigarette break with Eccles.

It is a point of pride that graduates of the program actually get jobs in museums.

DailyFreeman.com

Hessel, who speaks German, English, Spanish, Italian and French, in that order of fluency, studied at the University of Munich and at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico in Mexico City.

Depending on the season, she spends several days a week at the center. As she said hands-on teaching isn't her focus at the center, Eccles interrupted to say she provides the "overall vision" of the program.

Works in the permanent collection that are not on display will be available to graduate students, faculty and guest curators for study and for use in master's degree exhibitions and other exhibitions at the center.

The \$10 million-plus additions were paid for by Hessel and her husband, Edwin Artzt, Laura-Lee Woods, Melissa Schiff Soros and Robert Soros.

During the inauguration of the exhibition, which runs through 4 p.m., a special panel will discuss "Wrestle," including curators Eccles and Smith along with professors from Columbia University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Vassar College, as well as the director of an Istanbul, Turkey, art center.

Also special to the opening day, British conceptual artist Martin Creed, accompanied by students from the Bard College Conservatory of Music, will put on a special performance.

For more information about the center visit www.bard.edu/ccs