BARRETT ART GALLERY AT UTICA COLLEGE TO PRESENT
GRAHAM WILSON: *dam’ nāshen*
FROM FEBRUARY 5 THROUGH APRIL 20, 2019

Wilson’s first academic solo exhibition will debut new provocative large-scale installation

Utica, NY – This February, the Barrett Art Gallery at Utica College presents a solo exhibition of new work by contemporary artist Graham Wilson. On view February 5 – April 20, 2019, *dam’ nāshen* will feature a series of large-scale installations that use the tropes and signifiers of the persistent violence and political upheaval that characterize daily life in America to explore and reflect upon recent history. Wilson’s site-specific installations draw on both particular events and what has become commonplace gun violence in the US to explore societal suffering and reflect on our current collective mourning process.
dam’ nāshen reflects Wilson’s shift away from painting to a more installation-based and performative practice. Wilson sees his sculptural works as thought markers that together reveal a contemporary narrative. For Wilson, this shift in medium reflects a movement towards navigating his relationship with the outside world, and away from the more intimate process of self-exploration that painting allows. Through this process of gazing outwards, Wilson has conceived of an exhibition that takes the form of an individual navigating his way through society, confronting the tragedy and embedded hope of our current social and political climate.

Under the direction of Gallery Director Megan C. Austin, the Barrett’s revamped programming focuses on exhibiting new and timely work made by contemporary artists who comment on the current state of our social, political, and visual culture. Selecting artists who provoke conversation around relevant issues that impact Utica College students, faculty, staff, and the greater community presents a unique opportunity for an academic institution to explore the contemporary art world and how the ideas explored by artists connect across disciplines and differences. Wilson’s work resonates with Austin’s vision and offers an opportunity for artists to experiment and exhibit their work to new audiences.

“It is important that the artists exhibited at the Barrett Art Gallery make work that resonates with the students, faculty, and staff at Utica College,” said Barrett Art Gallery Director Megan C. Austin. “I think that Graham Wilson’s work will speak, in particular, to the young people on campus, as it is asking probing questions about the culture of division and violence that is plaguing America today. It offers students space to confront what is happening today, and to think about our current political situation in new terms.”

The exhibition opens with “Lost In Translation,” an oversized vinyl text, that resembles a page taken out of a screenplay. The text on view is the result of a bot that was fed one thousand hours of Trump rhetoric, distilled into a few sentences. The garbled language provides a sense of disorientation that permeates the exhibition and provides a framework for beginning to process the works on view. Below the work, fragments of discarded letters are strewn across the floor – deleted thoughts and incomplete sentences. Around the corner from the work lies “State Farm,” a group of t-shirts that appear to be discarded like a pile of laundry. The airbrushed t-shirts resemble pop culture designs that commemorate the death of a loved one, but the portraits and dates are absent with text that reads simply “Your Neighbor Here,” signifying the latent effects of society's trajectory.

Moving past the pile of t-shirts, visitors encounter what appears to be a pool of blood, leading them to the central work in the exhibition “Eulogy,” a work inspired by the brutal murder of 15-year-old Lesandro Guzman-Feliz in June of 2018 in the Bronx. After begging for help from the clerks at his local corner store to no avail, Guzman was dragged outside and killed. The event struck Wilson so acutely because it transcended the gun violence that Americans have become inured to, and reflected a new level of tragedy, one in which someone pleads for help and is refused and ignored. To Wilson, the egregiousness of this event spoke to a deeper problem that runs through Trump’s America – the way that individuals have become reduced to signifiers, the media’s depiction of who they should be – a condition that allows humans to turn a blind eye to one another.

“Eulogy” takes the form of Bodega-style shelves, tightly arrayed like dominos about to topple, and lined with what New Yorkers know as “dollar candles.” The candles and shelves are arranged to form an abstract rendering of an American flag, a memorial that pits at its very center the crisis of contemporary America. As viewers take in “Eulogy,” they will hear faint, and what are seemingly random clicking sounds. Following the sound, visitors will encounter “Everybody Got A Name, Everybody Got A
"The final work in the exhibition is composed of a series of seven cubes that take the form of bales of discarded cardboard and other detritus, such as posters, stuffed animals, and deflated balloons, all bound together. Each cube is named for one of the seven stages of grief, and the cubes will correlate to the EKG monitor as well as the Kübler-Ross change curve. Upon closer inspection the sound is revealed to be emanating from a metronome that sits inside each cube, beating the rhythm of a healthy heart in its last 30 minutes of life – decreasing and simultaneously loosening as life fades, then accelerating and tightening with false hope.

Throughout *dam’ nāshen* Wilson draws on materials that he describes as “memory triggers” – cardboard boxes that recall the garbage left outside a corner bodega in New York, posters discarded from protests, and candles that have become synonymous with street side memorials. The abundance of candles included in “Eulogy” reflects a signifier that has come to symbolize the notion of ‘thoughts and prayers,’ shorthand that indicates a lack of action once again. Through these meditations on our current environment, Wilson uses these materials that have become imbued with such hopeless connotations in a new context. In doing so, he attempts to remove their inherent meaning by “unlearning” the lessons that have led Americans to this point of apathy, violence, and despair.


The Edith Langley Barrett Art Gallery programs are made possible with support from the Utica College School of Arts and Sciences and private contributions.

**Gallery Hours**
Tuesday – Saturday 1 – 5 p.m.

**PUBLIC PROGRAMMING**
All exhibitions and programs are held in the Gannett Library Concourse at Utica College and are free and open to the public.

**Opening Event**
Thursday, February 7
*Gallery Talk and Artist Reception*
5 – 7 p.m.
Hors d’oeuvres and drinks will be served.
Talking Across Differences: Freedom of Expression Panel Discussion
Thursday, February 21
5 p.m.
Join exhibiting artist Graham Wilson, Utica College Assistant Professor of Creative Non-Fiction Suzanne Richardson, Assistant Professor of Government Daniel Tagliarina, and a Utica College Black Student Union member for a panel discussion, moderated by Director Megan C. Austin.

Join the conversation on social media by tagging @barrettartgallery and using the hashtag #damnashen when posting.

About the Edith Langley Barrett Art Gallery at Utica College
The Barrett Art Gallery at Utica College opened in November 1980. The gallery is dedicated to Edith Langley Barrett, Utica College Professor of English, 1961-1973. Barrett led the way for the founding of the gallery, with the support of fellow faculty, and provided visual art engagement opportunities for the college community. The Barrett Art Gallery is an interdisciplinary space for the development of visual communication, critical analysis, and reasoning skills. The gallery presents three exhibitions of regional and national artists each academic year.

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