CONVERGENCE:
10 Years of Artistic Excellence at the WSRC
May 30 – September 14, 2012
Kniznick Gallery

To celebrate the Women’s Studies Research Center’s (WSRC) 10-year anniversary, the Kniznick Gallery presents a juried exhibition of art work by 13 past and present WSRC and Hadassah-Brandeis Institute (HBI) scholars, staff, and board members. As the tagline of the WSRC is “where research, art, and activism converge,” it seemed only fitting to title this anniversary exhibition “Convergence” to highlight the convergence of these three pillars of the WSRC, as well as the convergence of ideas, scholarly interests, artistic practices, and personalities that make the WSRC the dynamic and productive research center that it is.

Artists:

Ornit Barkai, Former HBI Scholar-in-Residence

The TopLess spinning tops series takes a whimsical spin on the traditional *dreidel* -- the four-sided spinning top played with during the Jewish holiday of Hannukah.

Typically used in a modified version of the “teetotum” gambling game, each side of a traditional dreidel bears a letter of the Hebrew alphabet: *Nun, Gimel, Hei, Shin* (or *Peh*) which together form *Nes Gadol Hayah Sham* (or *Poh*), “a great miracle happened there” (or “here,” when in Israel).

Barkai’s hand-fabricated sterling silver tops are adorned with colorful precious gemstones like amethyst, citrine, sapphire, garnet, tourmaline, malachite or onyx. They bear thin gold or copper squiggles or playful cutouts hinting at the traditional Hebrew letters that are found on dreidels: *Shin*, or its upside-down look-alike *Peh*. While some tops are embossed, stamped or hammered, others come in various brushed or patina finishes. But all offer minimalist design and subtle textures that are both stylized and utilitarian.

Stripped of their traditional form, shape and context, these modern spinning tops become multicultural, religion- and gender-neutral *objets d'art*.

Patti Cassidy, Former WSRC Scholar

Several years ago, I became aware of the invisible "bubble" that forms around people when they begin listening or texting on their cell phones. They unconsciously withdraw from their environment during conversations while still outwardly functioning normally. At the same time, they unmistakably reveal their vulnerability to passersby.

This phenomenon is, I feel, a clear example of our paradoxical isolation even while we are in the midst of “communicating.” My photo series, “The Power of the Cell,” explores this experience.

Though I’ve been a filmmaker and photographer for many years, over the past two years, I’ve become increasingly intrigued with "street photography." This style of black-and-white candid
shooting is, in fact, a form of documentary art which, at its best, makes viewers “fill in the story” of the faces they see, the moments they witness.

**Emily Corbató, WSRC Scholar**

There is a special group of my photographs that particularly delights me, as it speaks loud and clear for women who are comfortable within themselves and not afraid to be “out there.” These women are from all over the world. They are strong, powerful, sometimes humorous people, with emboldened spirit and an air of confidence. They are my “Glorious Women.”

**Susan Eisenberg, WSRC Scholar**

A multi-disciplinary artist and educator, Eisenberg’s work re-imagines the everyday, playing with scale and juxtaposition to investigate issues of power and social policy. She is drawn to humor and art as tools for sense-making and bearing witness. Among the first women in the country to achieve journey-level status as a union (IBEW) electrician, her art, activism and research have helped document the history and frame the issues of tradeswomen for more than three decades. “On Equal Terms,” a mixed-media art installation about women in the construction trades, launched at the WSRC’s Kniznick Gallery in 2009 and was exhibited most recently at the Smithsonian-affiliated Michigan State University Museum Main Gallery. The photograph, “Cynthia Long, Melinda Hernandez: Justice for Bianca, Manhattan” is the most recent addition to “On Equal Terms.”

**Fran Forman, WSRC Scholar**

In exploring the nature of art and reality, I continue to create images of memory, the dislocation of time and place, and our human/non-human interdependence. Using the alchemy of camera, scanner, film, computer, and traditional drawing tools, I create composites that become a seamless photographic print. I use these tools for creating personal visual narratives, extending the photograph beyond its original limitations. These constructed images are intended to evoke a sense of transience, longing, memory, and, despite our yearning for connectedness, the dislocation we all too often experience.

My artistic process is an act of intuition, investigation, and the construction and amalgam of, at first glance, seemingly random objects. These dream-like visions and altered habitats are constructed of photographs I’ve taken with a variety of cameras, as well as discarded portraits of long-forgotten ancestors.

**Karen Frostig, WSRC Scholar**

Working as an arts activist, my art art deals primarily with issues of genocide, community and breaches of trust.

The Mourners’ Kaddish is a specific prayer praising God that many Jews recite when in mourning. As the daughter of a Viennese Holocaust survivor, my work deals with the persistence of memory and the legacies of genocide. “Kaddish” takes the long view, citing the persecution of Jews over the
centuries, while creating an altar of hope. The mirror captures the viewer’s eye, while indicting onlookers as bystanders to the ongoing genocides of the 21st century.

“The Carnage Series” foreshadowed the *Exiled Memory* project. The paintings conjure up images of gore—wounds, cuts, bruises and lacerations—to simulate a close-up encounter with injury and human vulnerability.

“No Nonsense” represents a short reprieve. I create a whimsical statement about personal habits concerning food, money and work. Encased in plaster, the work emanates an other-worldliness.

Countering legacies of murder with present-day patterns of consumption and distraction, my work probes the depths of both worlds in a bilateral search for meaning.

**Mary Oestereicher, WSRC Scholar**

In Medieval European chess, each of the eight pawns was unique and represented a common man of a particular occupation, such as blacksmith or merchant or doctor. The altered book "More Pawns" proposes an expansion of the set of possible pawns to include the under-represented half of the populace who were female. Here are Medieval images of women weaving, harvesting, milking, cooking, selling, teaching, dancing, worshipping, nursing, and more. (Image sources include Evans, Cutts, Strutt, MS Royal, Alchemy Book MS, Harleian MS, Rhetorica ad Herennium, Florentine woodcuts, Tournay windows.)

**Ronni Komarow, Former WSRC Scholar**

My work in artist's books and mixed media is rooted in personal narrative: family stories, scraps of conversation and fragments of everyday life. Found materials, photographs and ephemera add dimension to these stories, giving them a larger, more universal resonance.

My approach is influenced by my life-long love of craft and also my years of experience in graphic design. I love typography, juxtapositions of text and image, and the inherent sequence of a book's unfolding pages.

I am continually fascinated by objects found in second-hand shops. There always seems to be a mysterious past embedded in these objects. I seek to leverage this feeling in my work with found objects, combining this once again with personal narrative.

My work naturally leans towards narratives that reflect a woman's experience. Recent works are based on experiences related to my personal experiences as a daughter, granddaughter, niece, wife and mother. Elements and images are inspired by personal story, though always with the intent of tapping into larger truths and searching out a more universal resonance.
Michele L’Heureux, WSRC Curator & Director of the Arts

My work explores ambiguity: how you can’t always be sure what you’re seeing at any given time and how our lives are filled with many more questions than answers. I am particularly interested in ambiguity and fluidity as it relates to gender. My paintings and objects examine—and attempt to dismantle—societal notions of gender as fixed and binary. My work explores the mutability and performance of gender through the use of gender-laden symbols, marks, and images that are disrupted, layered, entwined, and partially occluded, creating ambiguous spaces where multiple meanings/identities can exist simultaneously.

Karin Rosenthal, WSRC Scholar

In photographing nudes in nature, first in traditional black and white and now in digital color, water and light have been my allies. They transform the figure and take it beyond the physical into the abstract and metaphysical. My desire to photograph nudes was born of the water, of a passion for being in and meditating upon still waters.

Tide pools have always fascinated me. As incubators of life and repositories of death, they are appropriate settings to contemplate human existence and the cycle of life. Where I had photographed the body and its reflection before, I now only photograph its reflection. Increasingly, my images convey the fragility of life. We are permanent only within nature’s elements.

When first looking through a microscope, I was amazed at the magical world that lay beneath the lens. I learned there was wonder within the obvious, if one could only perceive it. As I’ve photographed the human figure in nature over the years, I’ve used my camera more and more as a tool to push vision into the unseen. Moving in closer than ever before, I am capturing convergences in time and space that I could never have imagined, nor would I have thought to construct. My images are straight shots even when they look composited, the result of decades of observing reflection and transparency.

In some images, the projection of the human figure with surrounding overcast sky is turned so the reflection appears to be the actual body. The human figure joins with disparate pool elements, overlaying two different visual realities and scales into a new unity.

In other images, where the model is lit by the sun, the figure has become abstract. Flesh seems to dissolve and flow within the pool elements. Sometimes, near-plankton sized figures mysteriously reveal themselves. One photograph of a reflected nude results in multiple bodies seen from different angles tucked into shells, wrapped around edges, morphing into a dolphin. Disruptions of the surface tension create numerous mirrors as shells and seaweed break the water, reflecting and distorting the body reflection in different ways simultaneously.

The closer I get to the tide pools I am photographing, the more the tide pool components fill the frame, but also, ironically, the tinier the reflections of the whole figure become. Some are less than 10% the size of a barnacle or fit within a snail. At the same time, the surrounding spaces can appear vast. The close-up world invokes the cosmic.
Rosalie Ripaldi Shane, Co-chair, WSRC Board of Directors

In our fast-paced, sometimes chaotic world, we seldom stop to savour the sweet moments in everyday life. My bright-colored paintings of life-like pastries are meant to remind us of those happy times when a delicious dessert could make us happy. They are meant to elicit a smile and a feeling of pleasure.

Rhoda Sapers, Member, WSRC Board of Directors

My construction art is a natural outgrowth of my experience and passion working with arts and crafts. I am a crafts junkie. Over the years I have used materials and processes such as copper enameling, silversmithing, plexiglass and stained glass, painting and sandblasting glass, glass bead-making and acrylic painting.

As a stay-at-home mom, then working professionally for more than twenty years as a nursing educator and administrator at Beth Israel Hospital, I attended every craft show possible and was constantly inspired by the dramatic and creative work of other artists. The work in this exhibition owes much to these artists, and to the teachers and talented students at the New Art Center where I've taken classes and inspiration for more than fifteen years.

About three years ago, my passionate and energetic teacher John Murray came into class carrying pieces of cardboard and challenged us to create art with it. Always willing to experiment, I became enamored with the task and never went back to strictly painting on canvas. Adding three-dimensionality to my painting captivated me. Driven by my ardor for crafts, I continue to transform simple materials and paint into works of art.

My excitement with this transformation, in addition to designing and making glass beads at my studio in Somerville, and the wonderful feedback I receive from both is very rewarding.

Louise Weinberg, Member, WSRC Board of Directors

My work focuses on the issue of containment—the human desire for the safety of enclosure and structure vs. the terror of possible entrapment. In my paintings, an array of containers—which are at times metaphoric, at times literal—suggest that a container can protect or imprison. In this series “The Tension of Opposites,” the containers—bowls, bottles, cups, spheres—are quite literal. Whether metaphoric or literal, the images continue to suggest this ambiguity—that containers can protect, imprison or do both.

Working with mixed media on polymer is similar to the process of making monotypes. It is a reductive process, with much wiping away. Many “happy accidents” occur because the surface is so very unpredictable. I find that some loss of control, the continuous making of surprising discoveries, and an unpredictable end result are all essential parts of the painting process for me.