

The Chronicle

Mandeville artists respond to archival materials of alumnus Sheldon Jackson

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Last year, the [Mandeville Gallery](#) asked three contemporary artists to create artwork in response to materials held in the Union College Special Collections and Archives pertaining to Sheldon Jackson (Class of 1855), a missionary, minister and political leader.

The result is “Addenda,” which features a wide range of works by Gina Adams, Merritt Johnson and Sonya Kelliher-Combs, on view at the Mandeville Gallery Jan. 29-June 12.

Jackson, a Presbyterian minister from Minaville in New York’s Mohawk Valley, became the first general agent of education for the territory of Alaska in 1885 – nearly two decades after another Union alumnus, William Seward (Class of 1820) negotiated the Alaska Purchase from Russia.

The Union archives detail Jackson’s missionary path as he traversed North America, from east to west and north to Alaska. As general agent, Jackson made decisions whose impact on Alaska Natives continues today. He became known for founding numerous schools and training centers but also for his efforts to suppress their languages.



Gina Adams, *Honoring Modern Manifest Destiny.1*

The “Addenda” artists bring three different perspectives and their own lived experiences to their artistic process and their responses to the archival materials, said Julie Lohnes, Union’s director and curator of Art Collections and Exhibitions.

“Adams, Johnson and Kelliher-Combs draw on history, cultural traditions and archives, along with a strong belief in seeking alternative narratives, to create artworks that exist as a record of unconsidered perspectives and often unrecognized pasts,” Lohnes said.

Rather than highlighting Jackson’s recognized accomplishments, “each artist questioned and examined his life found in these papers. The exhibit interprets and augments past and present in an effort to construct a fuller future.”

Adams focuses on early archival materials that chronicle Jackson’s travels and interactions with Native tribes in the west. Her cross-media studio work includes the reuse of antique quilts and broken treaties between the United States and Native American tribes, as well as sculpture, ceramics, painting, printmaking and drawing. She is an American descendant of both Indigenous (Ojibwe-not enrolled) and colonial immigrants of Irish and Lithuanian descent.

Her work is represented in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Mass., Portland (Maine) Art Museum, North American Native Museum in Zurich and other noted museums and collections. She is on the faculty of Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Johnson, the mother and stepmother of six, lives with her family on Lingít Aani, her partner’s home territory, in Sitka, Alaska. In “Addenda,” she reflects on the generational impact not found in the sheer volume of inked script and pages that make up the Jackson archive.

Johnson’s work is represented by Accola Griefen Fine Art in New York and is included in many private and public collections, including the Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama and Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe.

Kelliher-Combs focused on a specific section of the Jackson archive, reproducing the pages and creating a new interpretation. She is Iñupiaq/Athabaskan and was raised in the Northwest Alaska community of Nome. A resident of Anchorage, she chronicles the ongoing struggle for self-definition and identity in the Alaskan context through mixed media paintings, sculptures and installations.

Her work has been shown internationally and is included in the collections of the National Museum of the American Indian and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the

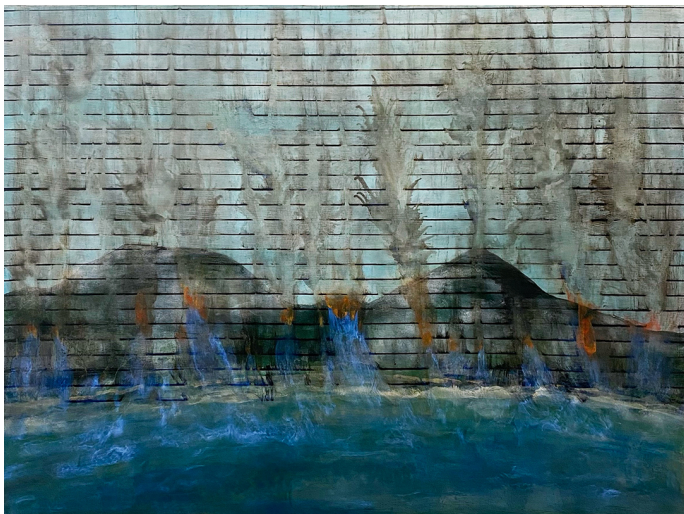
Anchorage Museum, the Denver Art Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe.

In addition to showcasing art that responds to the Jackson archives, the Mandeville exhibit features other works by the three artists.

"All pose questions about the purpose of archives and how the artists' active additions to these collections can illuminate the people often silenced by what has been recorded in the past," Lohnes said.

Located on the second floor of the Nott Memorial, the [Mandeville Gallery](#) is open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Currently, all campus visitors are required to wear surgical or N95, KN95 or KF94 masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status.

In spring term, the Schaffer Library Lally Reading Room will present an exhibition that examines Jackson's archives and life. It will be mounted by student-curator and history major Matt Giarratana '23, along with Andrea Foroughi, associate professor of history and department chair, and Sarah Schmidt, director of Special Collections and Archives.



Merritt Johnson, *When the world turned upside down long enough for Water to move and catch fire and wipe out the ink lines that divide, claim, kill and bury*



Sonya Kelliher-Combs, *Small Secrets, Sheldon Jackson*