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Climb ladders of success in the library

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Jennifer Williams, contemporary artist and Professor of Art and Photography at Cooper Union, was invited by Union College to create an art installation piece for the Schaffer Library Learning Commons last week. We were fortunate enough to sit down with Williams to discuss her beginnings and how she has evolved as an artist.

JS: How did you get started in art and what do you love about the discipline?

JW: My mom attended community college when I was about ten years old, and as a general education requirement, she had to take an art class. She opted on photography. Her assignments included taking photos of objects around the house. I would watch her in action and fell in love with the idea of capturing an object and its essence without actually using the object itself. And I grew up in rural Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where there was a lot of potential to use the environment as your photographic subject. I went on to study photography and sculpture at Cooper Union.

JS: So why did you decide to decorate the library with ladders?

JW: Whenever I create a piece, I look at the space and how I would incorporate it into the piece itself. I saw a lot of potential in Schaffer's high ceilings and rectangular pillars – plus, I thought ladders represented the idea of a library. The rungs of a ladder are like the steps of learning and reaching your academic goals. They also serve as a way

to take you places that you don't normally inhabit. And that is what books do. They take people to different worlds. I thought ladders captured that essence.

JS: Could describe your artistic process? What or who inspires you and your artwork?

JW: I'd have to say I really admire Gordon Matta-Clark. He was an American artist in the 70's who treated space not how it was supposed to be treated. For example, he'd put large holes in houses or split them in half. I was intrigued with the idea. I, for instance, like putting things in high places. Places people don't normally look. And when I am in the process of creating a piece of artwork, I look at the space from an architectural standpoint.

JS: What is it that you love about photography specifically?

JW: It's hard to say. I like using photography to make art. Photography documents things, but I like to push the envelope beyond just documenting something. I like to fuse [photography] with sculpture or other artistic mediums to make an active and imaginative piece that intrigues and surprises.

Williams is represented by Robert Mann Gallery in New York and her work is displayed all over the country. Her current exhibitions can be found at San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, The Hunterdon Art Museum, and Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, amongst other art institutions.



Courtesy of Jenna Salisbury



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