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Sarah Liebowitz

*The Clock, Plymouth State University*

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# Resilience: An Interdisciplinary Exploration Featuring Jason Mitcham and PSU Students

By Sarah Liebowitz; A&E Editor

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## Resilience: An Interdisciplinary Exploration Featuring Jason Mitcham and PSU Students

**Sarah Liebowitz**

A&E Editor

*svl1010@plymouth.edu*

**A** new interdisciplinary exhibit is on display at the Karl Drerup Art Gallery, based around the theme of resilience.

The exhibit features work by Jason Mitcham, a New York-based artist who creates animations with paintings, as well as work by PSU students from across disciplines.

One of Jason's paintings, and some of his video animations, are displayed at the center of the gallery. He creates the animations by layering paint on top of his original painting.

"I wanted to tell a story with my paintings, and I felt like I couldn't tell as much of a story with still painting. I wanted to make them move," said Mitcham.

Mitcham's subjects center around American landscapes that change rapidly. His videos portray both construction and decay. Some show buildings and cities that seem to crumble to the ground.

"Even if they're left in a state that's like a ruin, that's still potential for resilience," said Mitcham.

One of the exhibit's goals is to define the word "resilience". One idea tossed around is the idea of bouncing back.

Gallery director Cynthia Robinson thinks that the phrase comes close, but adds, "you're not going back to something you already know. You're almost bouncing forward."

The idea for the exhibit came about after the interdisciplinary project last year, called 10,000 Steps: Exploring Our Footprint and Her Long Walk for Water. "That was such a huge success," said international student advisor Jane Bjerklie-Barry, "so we decided to do it again."

Essays hang along one of the walls, written by students in Amy Villamagna's environmental science and policy class. These were interpreted into collages by Pamela Anneser's graphic design class.

A projector shows resilience-themed animations by students learning to program in Susan Schwarz's creative digital media class.

Gallery director Cynthia Robinson explained how the process worked.

"It's taking existing courses and tweaking the curriculum. Every professor that's participating had a piece in their curriculum that made sense for this project," she said. "It's not like they had to change what they teach, but it changes how you present that, or what the outcome is going to look like for the student."

Other aspects of the exhibit include the shoebox gallery, which contains material for visitors to design cards or collages about what resilience means to them.

Brian Eisenhower and Amy Villamagna collaborated on a Public Participatory Geographic Information System (PPGIS), which allows visitors to enter in vulnerable places on a map via a computer, which is projected onto a screen in the gallery.

"It's really going to go local to global," said Robinson. The exhibit focuses on everything from vulnerable places in Plymouth, to a more general exploration of resilience, all the way to international students across the globe.

The global engagement office filmed interviews with international students about environmental resiliency in their home countries. Student coordinator Frank Pattiasina worked in the video clips, which feature students from Finland, Nepal, Vietnam, and Germany. These videos play on a screen at the exhibit.

Jane Bjerklie-Barry said that she hopes the videos will help students understand what's going on in the world, as well as provide a unique opportunity for international students.

She said this level of interdisciplinary studies is somewhat unique to the American higher education system. She said she hopes that by engaging in these sorts of activities, "they are experiencing or engaging in a level of interdisciplinary and experiential learning that they would otherwise not ever get."

The exhibit is going to evolve over the course of the semester as classes complete more work. The 39 little woodblocks will soon be replaced by students' miniature paintings in the style of Jason Mitcham, accompanied by animations looping on four monitors.

Robinson considers the exhibit a clusters project. She said it could serve as a model for future collaboration. "Before we named it clusters, that's what we were doing," she said.

Robinson said cluster projects like this one accomplish two major things, "working across disciplines, but also connecting outside of your learning at the university to the larger world."

Her main goal for the exhibit is to empower people to be resilient. "I don't want it to feel like the doom and gloom," said Robinson. "I hope that you come away with a feeling that every person, every animal, every plant has it innate to be resilient."

"I think the word resilience has a lot of hope in it," she said. "I think it has a lot of energy and empowerment."

The exhibit, Resilience: An Inter-disciplinary Exploration Featuring Jason Mitcham and PSU Students, will be on display at the Karl Drerup Art Gallery in the Draper and Maynard Building until Dec. 9. Visit <http://www.plymouth.edu/gallery> for more information.



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