



DICHOTOMIES: Carol Crawford

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mixed media constructions by
Carol Crawford

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The body of work illustrated in this catalog was created in 2017 - 2018
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Carol Crawford
Tel: 718-793-0214
Email: carol@ccenvironments.com
Website: www.carol-crawford.com

INTRODUCTION

The body of work illustrated and discussed in this catalog was displayed in a solo exhibition at Atlantic Gallery, 548 West 28th Street, Chelsea, New York City, N.Y., in November, 2018. Individual works have been shown in various group exhibitions in the New York Metropolitan area in 2017-2018.

The inspiration and impetus to create these particular mixed media constructions came from a concern with the political events and unrest that has affected so many people throughout the world, and made life untenable for millions caught in war, genocide, and general unrest. Artists are like litmus paper: they absorb feelings and images, and are moved to present what I call visual metaphors of events and surroundings. It is a gift generously shared; and, hopefully, welcomed by those who view it.

The curious circumstance that brings about this sharing is often a dichotomy: that is, what is presented as a distillation of events often occurs at a time and place and in circumstances utterly different from those that are depicted. Two opposing events can be happening at the same time in different places in the world, and come together visually in juxtaposition because an artist has plucked them out of time and memorialized them.

The breakdown of actual human interconnection in today’s digitally dependent society is frightening. Visualizing this impersonal living experience and imagining its reconciliation with the human need for physical relevance and interconnection has inspired me to create a new body of work. My reaction to these dichotomies is made tangible in the constructions in this exhibition.

Carol Crawford, October 2018

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PRESS RELEASE BY NORMA HOMBERG
DIRECTOR OF THE PLAXALL GALLERY; LONG ISLAND CITY, N.Y.
ART CONSULTANT AND CURATOR

Atlantic Gallery proudly presents *Dichotomies*, a solo exhibition by New York-based artist Carol Crawford on view from November 4th through November 24th, 2018. Showcasing the staggering range of Crawford’s mixed media constructions, *Dichotomies* features works combining original and archival photography, painting and drawing on transparent layers and wood. These constructions investigate our current tumultuous socio-political moment by creating visual metaphors that express the

contradictions between human conflict and human resilience. Crawford notes that she “...strives to understand an issue so she can create these metaphors and express their universal meanings, without being an illustrator or a journalist.”

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ARTIST’S STATMENT

A friend once asked me, “Why did you become an artist?” After some thought, I replied, “To invent and to communicate.” I need to explore the psychic as well as the tangible boundaries between reality and illusion, and use whatever technology and materials I can to bridge the difference. This means that the inherent properties of mediums and materials used in any work must be investigated to distill their symbolic values and associations.

The making of art, I believe, is akin to giving birth: it is like a continuous surge of energy in which the artist lives, taking in from the surrounding environment, and giving back to it. It is my conviction that gestation of

a work of art and gestation of new life grow out of the same universal biological need. Having done both, I can say with conviction: It is powerful.

I have been passionately concerned with addressing human issues and relationships in visual metaphor throughout my career, both through figurative art and, since 2009, through layered works that deal with double meanings and associated ideas.

“Unlike windows that painters were once advised to emulate with their own frames, these constructions are more like doors through which one can pass to enter the landscapes they contain.”

[Arnold Berleant, PhD.: excerpt from his catalog essay for CITY VISIONS, solo exhibition of mixed media constructions, performances and performance installations by Carol Crawford, QCC Gallery, Queensborough Community College, CUNY]



TRANSIT

24"h x 36"w x 4"d, mixed media construction, 2018

A mixed media construction combining original and archival photographs, painting and drawing, on layers of wood and Plexiglass. In this work, I show the transit of refugees by trains: 1930's Holocaust victims waiting for trains on the platform, and Syrian refugees in 1942 escaping by walking broken train tracks beneath the present-day reconstruction of a NYC subway tunnel. Human freight, from different places and times, in a transitional moment.



ODE TO PALMYRA

24"h x 30"w x 4.5"d, mixed media construction, 2018

The revered and protected ruins of an ancient Roman city in Palmyra, Syria, is depicted at the moment of its destruction by ISIS in 2016. The pictorial imagery sets in opposition our desire to preserve ancient culture with the human compulsion toward violence. Bright blooming flowers emerge from mortar explosions to suggest a lingering hope for rebirth from the rubble. The beautiful restored Roman amphitheater was largely destroyed, an act called a “war crime” by UNESCO. Another name for this kind of violence is “cultural genocide”.

What does it mean to a people to lose forever those objects and places through which they built their cultural legacy and maintain their historical memory?





HOMELAND

18"h x 24"w x 2"d, mixed media construction, 2017

Aleppo, Syria has been devastated by bombing for over 6 years. I created this reincarnation of its destruction by combining a photograph by Zein Al-Rifai / REX / AP, from the NYTimes, with photographs I took in Creedmoor Psychiatric Center, Queens, now a largely abandoned hospital complex. The homeless man is in New York City. The wire mesh tacked onto the frame references the raw, unrepaired buildings of Aleppo, and is sharp and hurtful to the touch...the waters shown pouring in from the lower right are lively and bring color; the old man solemnly awaits his fate between harm and survival.





PHRAGMITES: IN THE SWAMP

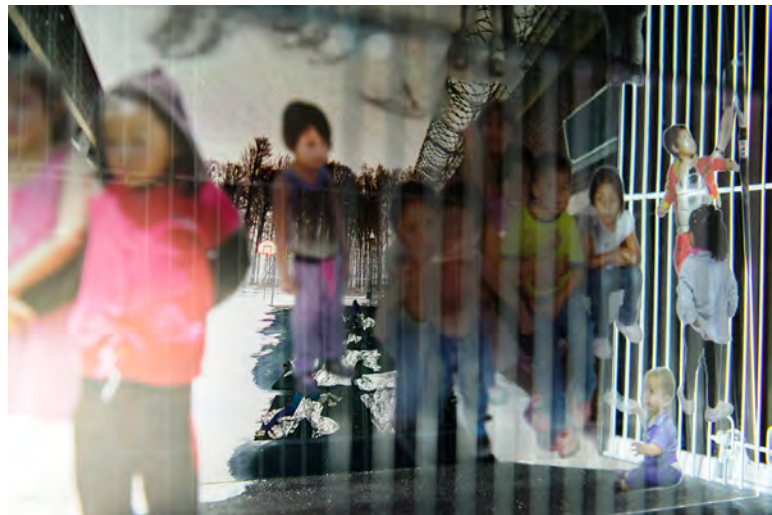
13"h x 37"w x 3.5"d, mixed media construction, 2018



The site is a debris-laden, weed-infested shoreline in Staten Island along a street devastated and abandoned after Hurricane Sandy in 2012. I photographed the area extensively for a study undertaken by my students in Sustainable Design in Spring 2013 at Pratt Institute. Phragmites are invasive weeds that grow up in vulnerable flooded areas...deceptively beautiful with their waving plumage on top but deadly at the roots when they get control. They became a perfect metaphor for what politically followed the election of 2016. President Trump's hair, face and mouth are semi-hidden in the phragmites and the dirt of the road. The Golden Toilet installed in the midst of the swamp is the one formerly on display at the Guggenheim Museum, and the artifact, which the Museum proposed as an alternative loan to Trump's White House instead of the famous work of art, which the museum refused to lend him.



Migrant children taken from their families at the Mexican border and caged. I've used a common birdcage to "frame" the work as a symbol of how the government's separation of children from their families has become needlessly cruel and routinized. The tombstone-like shape at the back of the cage includes a photograph of the ICE detention center in Buffalo NY, one of the places to which children and families have been shipped. The children sleeping in foil wrappings are at the McAllen Center in Texas, known as "Ursula," opened in 2014, the largest immigration processing and detention center run by the Border Patrol and the Customs and Border Protection Agency. Suspended on a transparent plate above images of today's displaced children are archival photos of Holocaust children in Auschwitz, awaiting their fate. Do we take responsibility for what has been allowed to happen?



ARE THESE CHILDREN YOURS?

24"h x 17.5"w x 11.5"d, mixed media construction, 2018



BEYOND THE WALL

20.5"h x 42.5"w x 6.5"d, mixed media construction, 2017



Any wall, anywhere--- Berlin, a Polish ghetto, the death camp at Auschwitz, the Mexico-San Diego border--- illustrates the evil and the tragedy of regarding people who are different or from somewhere else as “The Others”...less than human...and the imagery illustrates the alternate human desire to break down such barriers. I used delicate exfoliated Sycamore bark to simulate a “wall” as a visual blockade into my work, requiring the viewer to exert effort to peer around in order to understand what is happening inside. Sycamore trees or swamp maples, which are frequent street trees in Forest Hills and Staten Island, have bark that peels seasonally. They also have shallow root systems that cannot always prevent them from being toppled by unusually strong wind.

The protections people put in place for themselves sometimes grow into barriers that must be eliminated by concerted human effort to maintain a healthy environment.

The Schengen Agreement, signed in 1985 and solidified through the European Union, enabled peoples to move freely across national borders between European countries. In 2015, however, as the flow of desperate immigrants increased to tens of thousands, Bulgaria and Hungary built walls along the Turkish and Serbian borders, followed by Slovenia, Macedonia, then Austria and France. Soon even welcoming countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Belgium tightened border controls. In the United States barrier walls are being built at the Mexican border, and even our reliably peaceful border with Canada has been questioned. Restrictions and retaliation have suddenly increased against ethnic, racial and religious “Others”. Fear and malice have once again replaced tolerance and understanding. It is time for some serious exfoliation!



My photographs of Mammatus clouds



ALEPPO SPRING

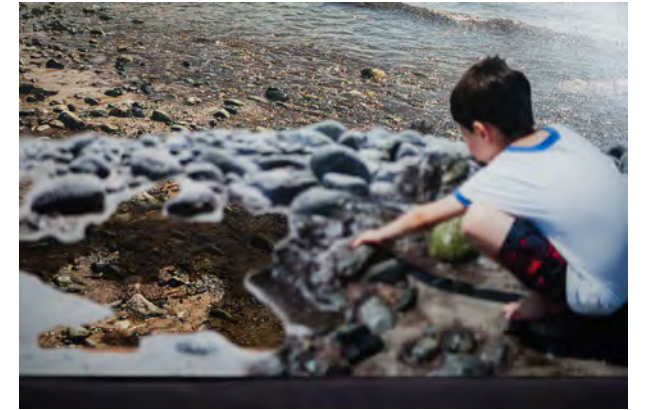
24"h x 31"w x 2.5"d, mixed media construction, 2018

Ruins of a bombed street in Aleppo are overlaid with my photograph of a cherry tree in full bloom; the fiery sky is in reality a strange and uncommon orange cloud cover called mammatus (breast-like) which I photographed when it occurred in my neighborhood. Mammatus clouds are generally harmless, but eerie; they are most often associated with anvil clouds and severe thunderstorms or found under clouds of volcanic ash. In this composite image the hidden danger of the devastation beneath the flowers is heightened by the dark figure of a running man and a ruined bicycle in a pile of rubble. The open gate is not for those trapped in the dark.



BOY ON THE SHORE

13"h x 37"w x 3.5"d, mixed media construction, 2017



Depicts an ordinary, pleasurable day at a beach: a little boy is playing with beautiful rocks washed up on the shore; families are socializing as they stand in the water; parents are watching their children.

At the horizon, barely in sight, is an overturned boat of refugees, with survivors frantically swimming toward what they hope is safety; and the body of a lone Syrian toddler lies washed ashore. No one is aware of what is happening elsewhere in the world of land and seashore so very far away.

Alan Kurdi's body washed ashore near the Turkish resort of Bodrum on September 2, 2015, after the raft carrying his family overturned, his father survived. The image of this particular child has become iconic of all children lost in the migration across the Mediterranean. On 24 May 2017, a triple-decker wooden boat tipped over, around 30 miles off the Libyan coast, throwing more than 700 refugees into the water. Over 600 of them, almost all from Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan, including 150 unaccompanied children and 10 pregnant women, were rescued in the incident; rescuers had to break open the ship's hold to free those locked below deck. At least 33 people, including children, died in the incident.



TITANIC

24"h x 30"w x 2"d, mixed media construction, 2017

More than two miles beneath the North Atlantic, in total darkness, lies the hulking remains of the Titanic, which sank, largely because of human negligence and arrogance, on April 14, 1912, with about 1500 people still aboard. The ship's remains were discovered by a French, English and American expedition in 1985. In a layer, an inch and a half beneath the dark image of the ship, the viewer can look into the heart of the work and see another place from the same time---a 1912 train station in which people are just learning about the disaster: how could a ship claimed to be so modern and unsinkable have perished?

It is a lesson we all must heed: without understanding and great care we can lose everything we value and take for granted.





BY SEA

12"h x 12"w x 2"d, mixed media construction, 2017

More than 1.5 million refugees have made the dangerous journey from North Africa by raft and boat to the shores of Greece, Italy and, most recently, Gibraltar. According to 2018 data from UNHCR/ The United Nations Refugee Agency, approximately 20% of those that set out have died or disappeared trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea from Libya, the highest proportion of deaths recorded on the crossing. As countries like Italy block these boat people, fewer rescue vessels are willing or able to prevent deaths at sea.

UNHCR, is a United Nations program with the mandate to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people, and assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country.



BY LAND

12"h x 12"w x 2"d, mixed media construction, 2017

Starting this century, around 2015, thousands of families and individuals have trekked across Turkey and Asia Minor into Eastern Europe; barriers have been erected by Hungary, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Slovenia, Austria, and France; crossings are increasingly restricted in previously welcoming Scandinavia and Germany... but still they come. With sneakers and cell phones, back packs and bedrolls; they are trying to enter a safer land...all over the world and now in the United States. It is the relentless fear-driven outcasts meeting the relentlessly fear-driven and reluctant hosts who guard against The Stranger.



IN STRANGE WATERS

24"h x 30"w x 2.5"d, mixed media construction, 2017

There is much we cannot know if we do not look for it, out of sight, out of mind? Out of sight, imagination thrives!
Unique creatures and environment courtesy Hieronymus Bosch, from his 1515 Garden of Earthly Delights.

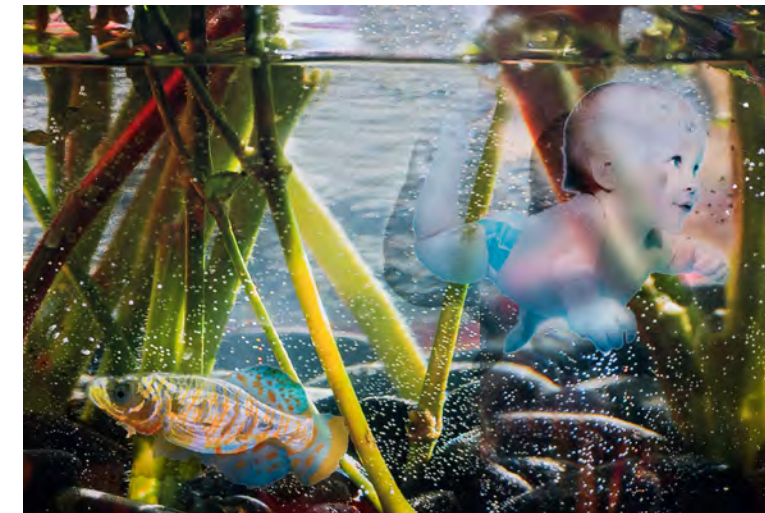


LOVE APPLES

24"h x 30"w x 2.5"d, mixed media construction, 2017

In a real 21st century garden ripe tomatoes provide a relaxing environment for creatures from the fantasy world of Hieronymus Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights", 1515
[a sense of humor is a saving grace...]





THE SECRET LIFE OF FLOWERS

25"h x 31"w x 5"d, mixed media construction, 2018

We know that both babies and fish can swim underwater! I imagined this fantastic aquatic scene while gazing into a glass vase of flowers. I combined painting and photography in transparent layers. Swimming underwater with your eyes wide open is painful in a chlorinated pool...but how wonderful to see everything when the water is full of life! Like skin diving with a good mask on and an underwater camera! [mine is a Nikon...]





INTO THE NIGHT

35"h x 50"w x 3,5"d, mixed media construction, 2017

Flight photographs: traveling west, a glittering night city seen below through a break in the morning clouds; all is real in an unreal juxtaposition
Clouds are amazingly diverse and beautiful...I cannot photograph and paint them enough!



CITY OF DREAMS

16"h x 39"w x 4"d, mixed media construction, 2018

Floating skyscrapers, glittering in misty layers of clouds; a mysterious urban landscape based on my flight photographs and views of the rising glass towers of Long Island City and Manhattan as you drive west toward the East River.

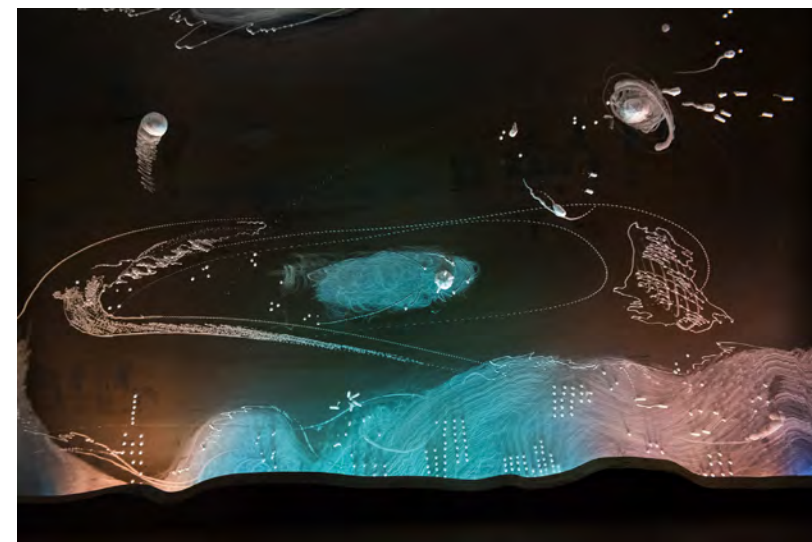
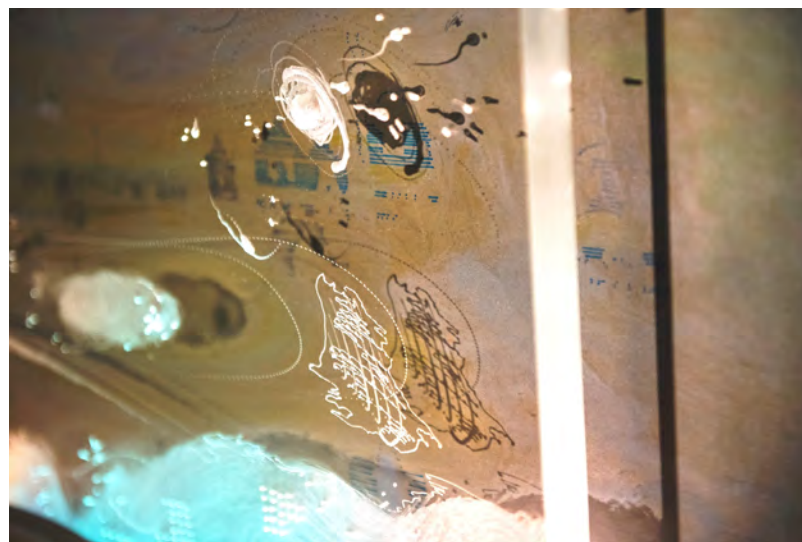


CLOUD CITY

24"h x 26"w x 7"d, mixed media construction, 1999/2018

A fantasy place in the clouds, amid trajectories of stars and mysterious journeys of the imagination; lighting from beneath $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick plexiglass makes edges and engraved graphics glow.

This was originally a total experiment in three-dimensional fantasy; Dremel tools and drills used to draw freely and create opaque light pockets; fine-bladed jigsaw created free-form wood shapes; interior lighting structure rebuilt in 2018





DREAM HOUSE

13" h x 50" w x 3.5"d, mixed media construction, 2018

Revisiting the setting of a beloved place; imagining those who spent many happy summer days and nights within, shadows of the past. Photographing a reflection of a reflection, through a window in late evening on the Damariscotta River in Maine. The window is printed on Plexiglas above a raised block on which interior colors and forms are painted to suggest the private, intimate life inside a house; they enhance the deep hues in the semi-transparent photograph as if the interior of the work itself was lighted.



ARTIST’S BACKGROUND

Carol Crawford's work in fine arts draws upon her broad background in documentary photography, filmmaking, printmaking, art history and theater set design. It is enriched by her work as an interior and environmental designer.

Carol received a B.F.A. in painting from the University of Buffalo, the city of her birth, and a Master’s degree in art history from Columbia University with a specialty in African sculpture. Following post-graduate



work in lithography at Pratt Graphics Art Center and the Bob Blackburn Studios, Manhattan, she set up a printmaking studio in the San Francisco Bay Area, taught lithography at Stanford University, and art history and design at Foothill College. After returning to New York City, she taught art at Queens College and

Queensborough Community College and was Acting Director of the QCC Gallery. Since 1998 she has been a faculty member of the Interior Design Department at Pratt Institute, where she received her M.S.I.D.

in 1995, and where she has taught both graduate and undergraduate courses, emphasizing sustainable design. Since 1997 she has been principal designer in her own firm, CAROL CRAWFORD ENVIRONMENTS, Inc., and is a Certified New York State Interior Designer and L.E.E.D. AP. She has frequently written on issues of environmental design and sustainability for newsletters and magazines in her field, and is deeply involved with the arts in Queens. She is currently President of the Board of Directors of LICArtists, Inc., a non-profit artists’ advocacy organization.

Carol's creative work and public art projects have been recognized by numerous grants and awards; and have been shown in solo and group exhibitions in galleries and museums in the U.S., Canada, Japan and Europe. She has been a member of Atlantic Gallery since 2008, and designed its new premises in the Arts Landmark Building, 548 West 28th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan, in 2012. She is an author, arts and design contributor, photographer, interior designer, printmaker and filmmaker and her work has been featured in the New York Times, Newark Star-Ledger, Asahi Shimbun, INTERVIEW and other publicaions. Over the course of her storied art career she has produced more than 30 solo exhibitions and her work is held in international collections across the US, Europe and Japan

Carol Crawford’s work as both a fine artist and an interior designer can be seen on line at www.carol-crawford.com

