Summer Newsletter 2006

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The Sound Lab Foundation lecture committee is pleased to announce that documentary filmmaker Ric Burns will give the annual Sound Lab Lecture at Connecticut College on the evening of Wednesday, October 4. Burns is known in southeastern Connecticut for his acclaimed American Experience film about the life and work of playwright Eugene O’Neill, some of which was shot on location at the Monte Cristo Cottage, childhood home of O’Neill on Pequot Avenue in New London, and which incorporated many images borrowed from the Sheaffer-O’Neill Collection in Shain Library.

Burns is the director/producer of many films but perhaps he is best known for his award-winning New York: A Documentary Film, a seventeen and a half hour epic which appeared in eight episodes from 1999 to 2003, and is considered by many to be a masterpiece of the documentary genre. Burns has been producing historical documentaries for nearly twenty years, including his collaboration with his brother Ken Burns on the memorable PBS series, The Civil War that aired in 1990. The Burns brothers may perhaps be credited with bringing the historical documentary genre into the mainstream of popular culture.


Burns’ talk at Connecticut College should be of interest to students of contemporary filmmaking and to aficionados of the life and work of Eugene O’Neill. The event is free and open to the public and will take place at 7:30 p.m. on October 4, in the Ernst Room of the Blaustein Humanities Center.

End paper illustration for Pre-Raphaelite Ballads (1900) by Helen Marguerite O’Kane

For many years the Special Collections department at Connecticut College has collected representative examples of work in the book arts, and over time we have built substantial collections of the fine printing produced by William Morris’s Kelmscott Press, Leonard Baskin’s Gehenna Press, Barry Moser’s Pennyroyal Press and many others less famous. Even in the age of electronic communication and mass market publishing the arts of fine binding and letterpress printing — the books arts in general — are by no means dead. In fact, it could be said that the Internet has given the books arts more exposure and that developments in technology have encouraged more people to become interested in the art of the book. At any rate, at Connecticut College we continue to acquire interesting specimens of fine printing as well as artists books, and these examples are used by students in design studies classes.

In the past the library has acquired several examples of Boston book artist Laura Davidson’s work but this year we were able to buy one of her limited editions, number 7 of 20 copies of Rome, from her “Travel Guide Series” printed in 2003. When she came to visit earlier this year Davidson explained that she loves to travel and has always been fascinated by travel guides. She collects old maps, Baedekers and interesting illustrations that eventually she incorporates into her artists books. Rome is bound into thick wooden boards that have been painted to emulate the red cloth covers of the Baedeker guides. The text and the maps have been scanned from an 1893 Baedeker and then overlaid with linoleum block printed illustrations. Each page of Frankfurt white paper was dyed in Lavazza espresso coffee to convey an appropriately antique and Italian impression.

Book artist Mary McCarthy, who exhibited her African-themed work in Shain Library in 2005, came by recently to show some of her latest work, including an interesting project with artist Betsey...
WHAT'S NEW IN THE CHU ROOM

The academic year 2005-2006 has been a very busy time for the Charles Chu Asian Art Reading Room with no fewer than four new exhibitions, culminating in the current show "Painting as Living Natural World through the Eyes of Charles Chu" which will run through September 29. This is the first time that a retrospective of the work of Charles Chu has been shown in the room in Shain Library that was named in his honor. This exhibition was curated by Ning Qiang, Chu-Nh.lab.Nic Associate Professor of Art History who is Professor Chu's successor as Curator of the Chu-Griffis Collection. Professor Chu has played many roles at Connecticut College: as an influential professor of Chinese language and founder of a department; as an artist in the traditional Chinese style: as an art collector and donor of the Chu-Griffis Collection of Asian art; as the curator and tireless promoter of the collection and its place in the curriculum. Now that professor Chu has retired from his role as curator of the Chu-Griffis Collection it is fitting that we take a look at his work as an artist.

In Chinese painting there is a long tradition of the artist as scholar. Charles Chu takes his place in this tradition as an artist and collector of Chinese art in the Chu-Griffis Collection. In 1991 he published what says "It's a baby thing," or "it's a baby Owls," or "it's a baby Owls by Charles Chu (1991)

in the chu room

The force of tradition seems to be very strong in contemporary Chinese art despite the violent attempts to break with the past during the Cultural Revolution and the strong influences of international culture that prosperity has brought to the new China. Many young artists continue to interpret traditional themes. This was very apparent in the two exhibitions of new art from China that were shown in the Chu room during the past year.

The extraordinarily vivid flower and bird paintings of artist Li Weihong lit up the entire room during the dark days of early December. Li Weihong teaches art in Xi'an and lives and works in Beijing. She accompanied her traditional Chinese style; as an artist in this tradition before him, she is inspired by their study of the ancient Buddhist paintings from such as "Acad" and the long-hand-scroll of "The Connecticut river." But they mirror but do not replicate reality. Such as "Acad" and the long-hand-scroll of "The Connecticut river." But they mirror but do not replicate reality. She is considered to be the most successful artist in this tradition before him, she is inspired by their study of the ancient Chinese art in the Dunhuang Caves. In April Professor Chu and his friend and collaborator Toby Griffis spent many years building the Chu-Griffis Collection, which now numbers around two hundred items, and during that time they collected examples of some of the finest Chinese artists of the 20th century. The current curator's job is to continue the collection at a time when the market for Chinese art has become extremely expensive and thus it is harder to compete with private collectors and large museums to acquire interesting work. Professor Ning's solution to this problem is to make a virtue of necessity by drawing upon his connections with artists and art historians in China to find interesting new artists who are willing to send their work to New London to be shown at Connecticut College. Thus, the Chu-Griffis Collection acquired two works by Li Weihong and one work each by Gao Shan and Wang Feng. In this way the Chu-Griffis Collection will grow and the Chu Reading Room will continue to have very interesting new exhibitions.