



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL JANAIRO/TIMES UNION

**“CATS FROM MY CHILDHOOD:** Muss, Blossom, Fluffy and Bob,” by Morgan Gesell Milders, is on display at ‘In-Organic,’ an exhibit featuring 16 artists who work with textiles.

# Connecting threads

## ‘In-Organic’ at Collar Works celebrates fiber arts

By **MICHAEL JANAIRO**  
Arts and entertainment editor

“In-Organic,” the exhibit at the relatively new exhibition space Collar Works in Troy, features 16 artists’ uses of textiles as a medium. Though the use of craft-based media for the creation of fine art is nothing new, it always already exists with a kind of ironic detachment from the more domesticated realm of knit, needlepoint and other crafts. Often, that can lead to things that are silly and a little creepy (and reminiscent of Mike Kelly’s work from the late 1980s), and the work at Collar Works doesn’t disappoint.

For example, the installation piece “Dumb Diesel” by Sierra Furtwangler uses a wealth of materials — secondhand T-shirts, glass beads, wood, wire, and plaster armature, rabbit fur, fiber fill, thread, carpet, acrylic paint and, yes, even secondhand stuffed animals — to depict an ape-like figure pinning a man who appears to be in such distress that his face is blood red and his white teeth jut out as if in midscreech. As if to emphasize the violence, torn bits of fabric radiate across the floor from the figures in a scattered mess that

suggests torn bits of flesh, that is the very fabric of the creatures.

Though not as apparently violent, Morgan Gesell Milders’ “Cats From My Childhood: Muss, Blossom, Fluffy and Bob” is one of the most successful pieces of the exhibition. On the wall appear to be the furs of four cats, but they are made out of latch-hooked yarn. The piece effectively combines not only the fuzzy softness of beloved memories, but also the horror of obsessive nostalgia. After all, who but the craziest of crazy cat people would ever skin their cats and hang the fur on the wall?

Another work of note is the sprawling “Material Bloom” by Drew Testa, in which spirals of braided fabric rise from the floor or just out from the walls to suggest uncontrolled and unexplained organic forms taking over a corner of the gallery space. Testa’s controlled chaos of these elements creates an interesting link to the Frankenstein dilemma of whether humans can control what they create, or if they are controlled by them.

Curator Jennifer Hunold, whose own fabric work has been shown with Furtwangler at Albany Center Gallery in spring 2010,

### At a glance

#### “IN-ORGANIC”

Collar Works is open by appointment or for receptions during Troy Night Out on the last Friday of each month. However, a closing reception will be from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, Sept. 16, and the film screening offers a chance to see “In-Organic.”

#### “HANDMADE NATION”

- **When:** 7 p.m. Friday
- **Where:** 444 River St., 3rd Floor, Troy
- **Admission:** Free, but reservations are needed via email
- **Info:** <http://www.collarworks.org>; [collarworksart@gmail.com](mailto:collarworksart@gmail.com)

has brought together a compelling collection that shows Collar Works is a gallery that should be on art-lovers’ radars. The show raises the question of whether fabric art has advanced in the last few decades or just become a more popular medium.

The other artists in the show are Bren Ahearn, Jennifer Andrews, Keith W. Bentley, Ali Della Bitta, Lindsay Chandler, Ben Cuevas, Sage Dawson, Tod Hen-



**“CENTRAL LANDFILL,** Smithfield, Rhode Island,” by Lindsay Chandler.

sley, Sara Jones, Aaron McIntosh, Hang Nguyen, Sonya Philip and Cathryn Sugg.

The exhibition, however, has limited open times. It was open for a reception Aug. 26 during Troy Night Out, and is open by appointment only. However, you have a chance to check out the show on Friday, when Collar Works will host a free screening

of “Handmade Nation,” directed by author, artist and curator Faythe Levine of Milwaukee. The documentary traces the growing trend of do-it-yourself art, craft and design.

A closing reception is also scheduled from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, Sept. 16.

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