



Made in China:

The Dharma Diaries
Amie Oliver's Journey to Tibet

essay by Kate Somers



The paintings, collage and photographs presented here were created during July of 2009 during an expedition to Lhasa, Tibet. Each work on paper is created on a 7" x 7" sheet of hot press Arches paper.

The photographs document our journey through China, a "Moving Cultures Project," organized by Metasenta founder Dr. Irene Barberis, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia and Dr. Isadora Jiang of Guangzhou University in China.

left: prayer flags flapping at 15,479 feet, near Tashi Dor monastery at Namtso Lake. (translation: Heavenly Lake) Namtso is the highest salt water lake in the world.

right: Dharma Diary: July 21, 2009; watercolor and graphite on 7" x 7" Arches paper

following spread from left to right: black and white photo of prayer flag shrine between Lhasa and Namtso Lake and Dharma Diary: July 5, 2009; watercolor on 7" x 7" Arches paper

for more information:

<http://metasentamovingcultures.blogspot.com>

<http://amieoliver.net>

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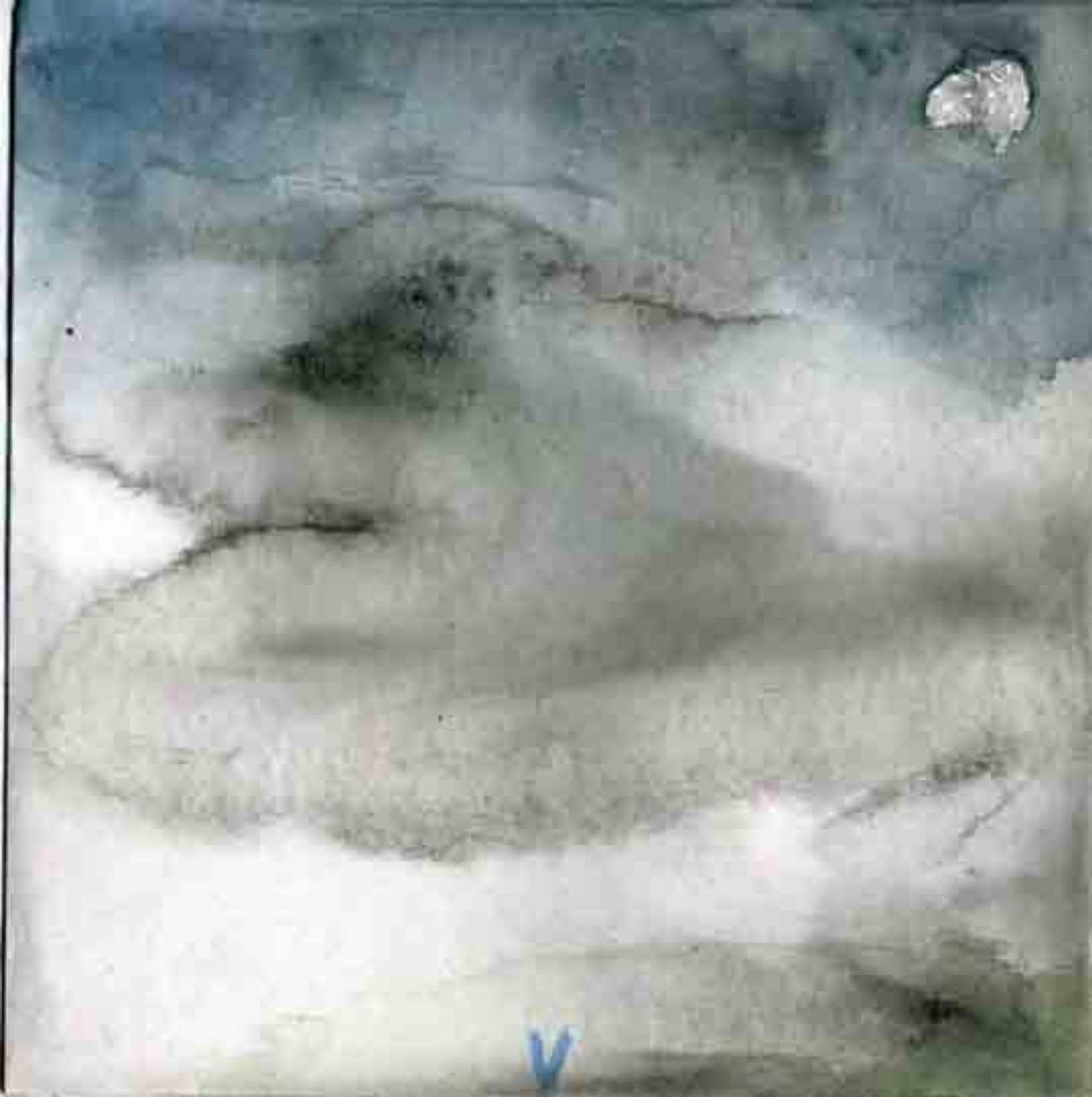
Made in China:
A Message With (and Without) a Bottle

An artist statement I drafted years ago has proved relevant to my work in general, but in particular to present the "Moving Cultures" Project:

"Primary to my aesthetic is an experimentation with media. The power of symbols, objects and a vocabulary of human form are the language of this dialogue. Timeless imagery and modern iconography motivate me to create art that embraces conflict, revision, passion, reason, beauty and discovery.

As a hill walker and traveler, journals and agendas are a big part of my creative process. Hence, my work catalogues the passing of time and experience, and possesses an inherent motion. I like to think of it as a mobile museum/library, which I could take on my bicycle, or float down the Yellow River if I wanted to... a message with and sometimes without - a bottle."

Perhaps I am an escape artist. My approach to art-making has often been to let the media steer the course and to act as navigator when the situation necessitates. The choices made often allow me to take another path when it might challenge or stimulate my curiosity more than the one I am on. Most adventures in art and travel require a trip through hell to achieve a little taste of heaven... is this escapism, masochism or fatalism?

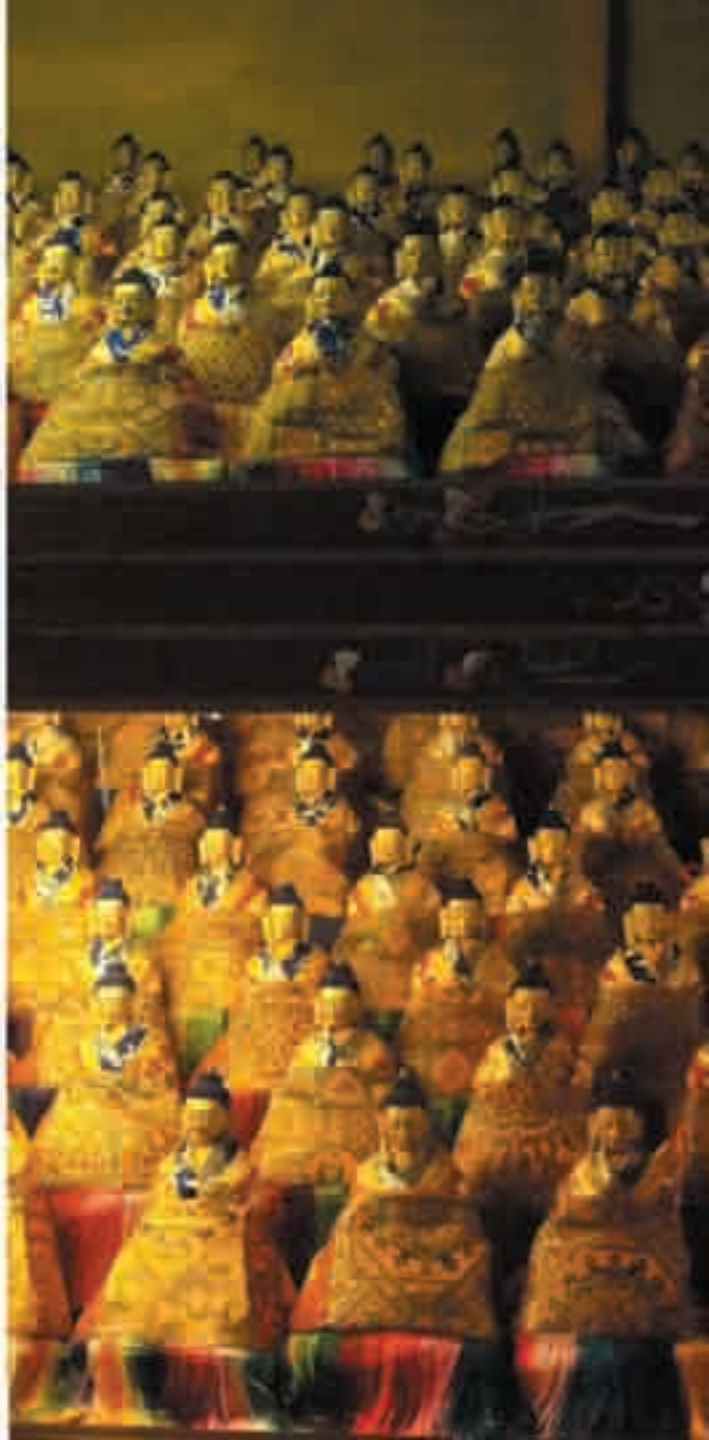


I've been fortunate in my journeys that I've met compelling artists like Dr. Irene Barberis, from Melbourne, Australia at the Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris in 2006. It seems we're both cut of sail cloth and divide our time between our studios, home and the gulf stream. She is a skilled navigator and introduced me to Metasenta's "Moving Cultures" Project in China, a project she conceived and co-directed with Dr. Isadora Jiang from Guangzhou, China.

My struggles to overcome the limitations of working in the high altitudes of Tibet were met at each turn with the grace, beauty and faith of the indigenous people and the astounding landscape. Working in these conditions requires a commitment to my process and a willingness to suspend judgment.

I chose to work in water-based media for this record of my journey because it requires a "call and response" which demands time for each layer to dry as well as an intuitive response to each result. This method of documenting my experience was balanced by the use of a digital camera and an open, spontaneous eye to the mysteries of Tibet. The sacred and the profane overlap here, as in most ancient cultures of constant conflict and resolution. One day I hope to return to Tibet when its inherent truth and beauty are as celebrated as its current conflicts are glaring..

Amie Oliver
August 2009





Reflections:

I was skeptical about the proposition from the outset: the expectation that a group of artists from Australia, China, the UK and the US could produce a gallery exhibition after days of train and bus rides across China and Tibet. How could work with merit and resonance be made by a group of sleep and oxygen deprived artists on the fly and in just a matter of days? In the comfort and familiarity of one's own studio, yes. But on the move, without personal or physical space, with constant interruption, and mind and body often compromised by altitude sickness?

Dharma Diaries by Amie Oliver proved me wrong. I first saw it from a distance as the artist was installing the work in Lhasa at the gallery. What struck me almost immediately was an aura of preternatural calm around the space in which the artist worked. The rest of the gallery was a bee-hive of activity from more than a dozen installations going up simultaneously and yet the artist seemed oblivious to the chaos. The quality of her focus and attention shut-out all that jostling commotion around her. She was in her own zone.

I realized how that same zone of space had been created within each work when I examined each page of her visual diary more closely. Each work is quietly itself, distinct from its neighbor. Oliver processed her environment and responded to it in her art-making simultaneously, in real time, every day of our 21 day journey across China and Tibet. Sometimes in the work you see the obvious silhouette of a mountain that may have whizzed by the train or bus window, or you will feel the sky blue breeze in the air

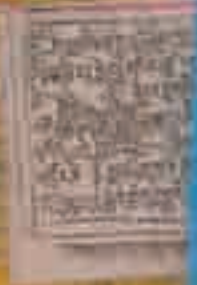
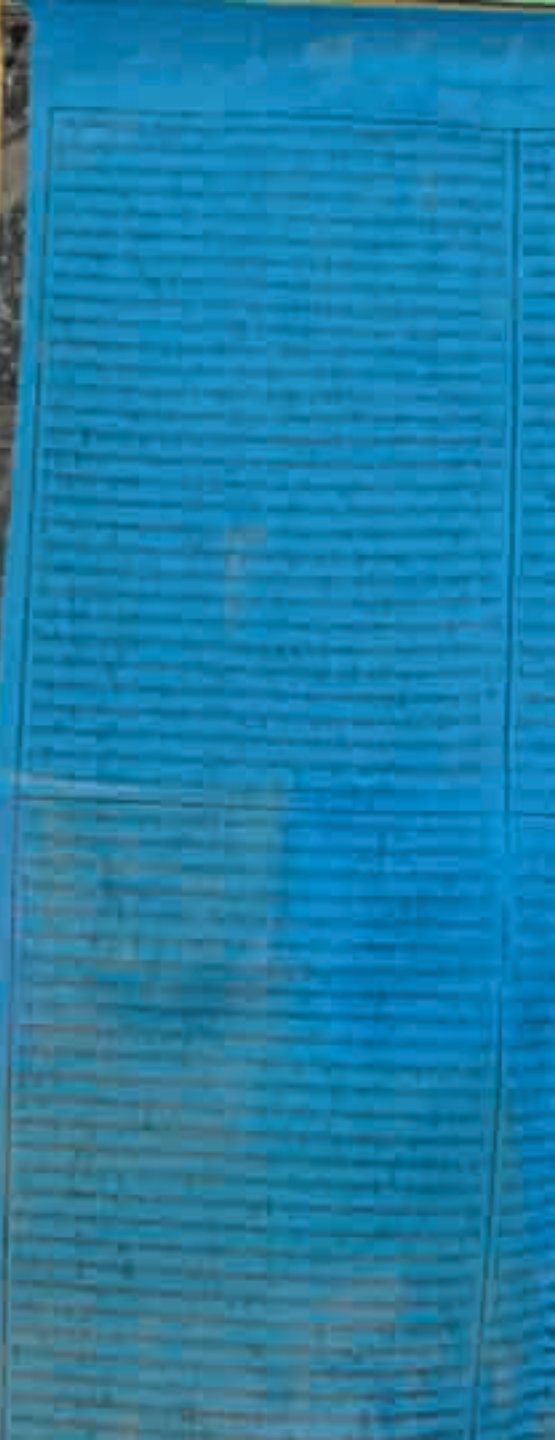






一棵孤立的树在风中摇曳。













blowing through the prayer flags. But it isn't just the surface of the passing world that Oliver has captured in this work.

Within the artist's more abstracted pieces and nonobjective compositions, the viewer is treated to a visceral sense of how that particular day passed. It is as if each work on paper has a different temperature. Those of us on this arduous trip with Amie experienced these changing temperatures, literally and figuratively: the hot day climbing the monastery steps in full sun and the cool day by the crystalline lake waters; the discomfort on a hot bus on a bumpy road whose constant sound track was a nattering tour guide; and the transcendent feeling standing in front of a blissed-out over life size Buddha in a meditation hall. The confluence of shifting impressions is captured in these works.

How do you paint the fatigue of travel and lack of personal space? Or the mild paranoia that envelops you when seeing and feeling the bars of a repressive regime? Or a timeless landscape imbued with a palpable spirituality? These experiences and visions have all flowed out from Oliver's paint brush, laid out as calendar days, tracking our footsteps as we moved through the landscape physically and emotionally.

The three-dimensional pieces, *On the Road to Dharma* and *Days and Nights of Dharma*, the slippers and pillow respectively, are not technically part of the "Dharma Diaries". They do not represent a solitary day during the 21 day journey but, for this viewer, they reference powerful realities that many of us confronted on the trip. Is it possible that the throw-away train slippers have been transformed into poignant stand-ins for those for whom each day is





a difficult journey on one's fated path? Are the Tibetan people free to follow the course of their spiritual lives? One must note the faded Tibetan paper on the inner sole (soul?) of the slippers, and the Chinese newspaper print on the outer sole.

The throw-away airplane pillow, *Days and Nights of Dharma* floats like a cloud on a gallery wall. But indeed, it is stuck to the wall. Most pillows suggest a state of rest and repose. But what if one's dreams have never been met? What if by laying one's head on a pillow, all that is accomplished is the marking of day into night? Could this be the course of the Tibetan people? Or possibly, does it refer to those of us on the trip as we marked the days off on this difficult trip? Or, the artist herself, who has referenced the passage of time in her earlier work?

It is remarkable that Amie Oliver produced this beautiful and provocative work under the most challenging of conditions. A seasoned traveler, she is a talented, confident artist with a work ethic that knows no boundaries.

Kate Somers
August 2009



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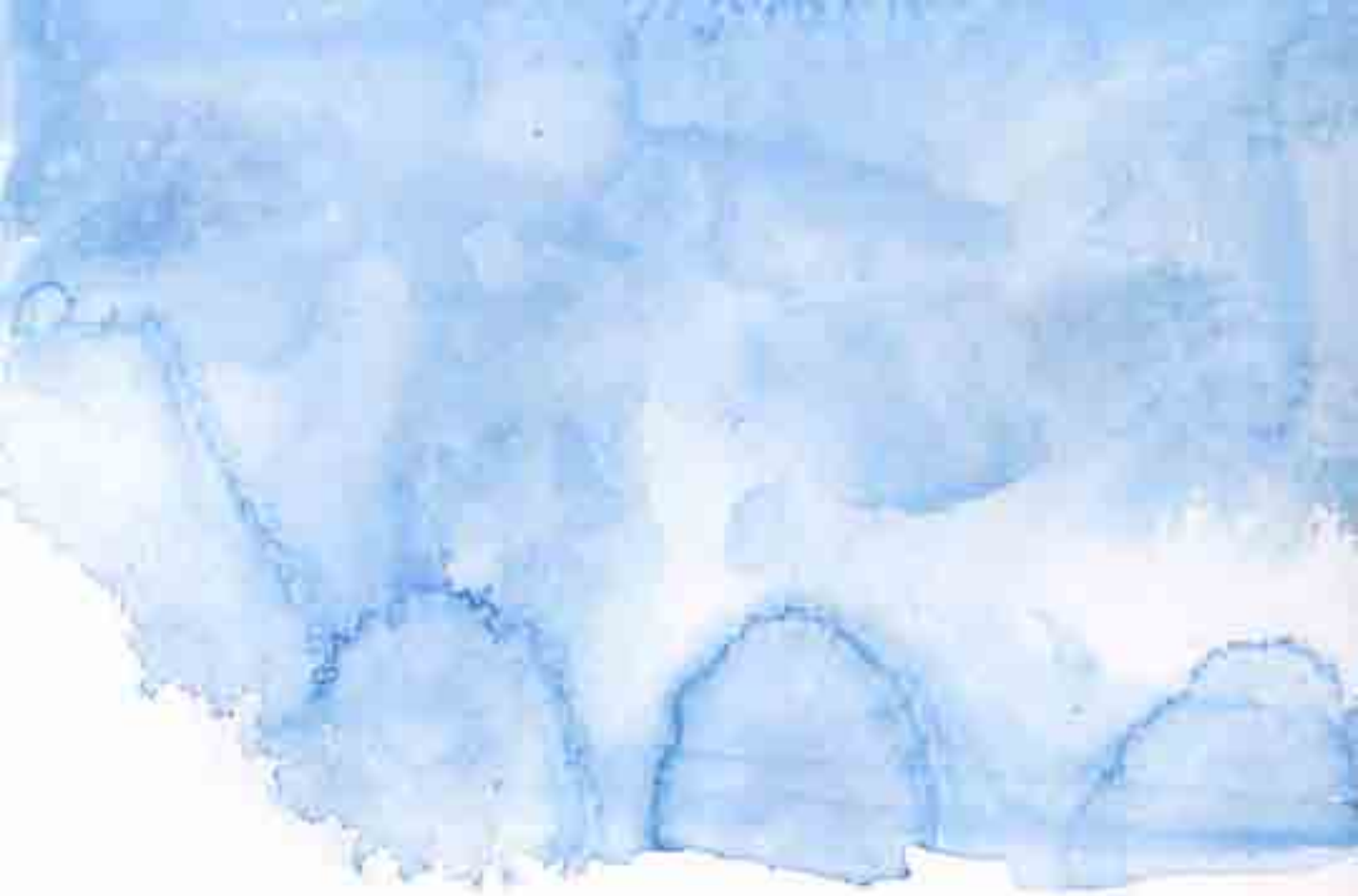
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Contributor's Bios

Katherine A. Somers was awarded degrees in art history from Rutgers University and George Washington University. She has been an independent consultant in the fine arts since 1995 and is currently curator for the Bernstein Gallery and Bernstein Annex Galleries at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University; consultant to the Princeton University Art Museum in Campus Arts and the Borough of Princeton on public art.

As an experienced curator and consultant to numerous corporate and public collections, Somers has also acted as a consultant to artists' estates, which included art historical research, cataloguing, restoration and development for exhibition, Internet auctions, and book publications. She most recently contributed an essay to "Daily Bread", an artist book by Lisa Salamandra, due out in October 2009 by Cheminements Editions.

Amie Oliver was awarded an MFA from Bowling Green State University (Ohio) with a full teaching assistantship. She arrived in Virginia from New Orleans in the late-eighties to teach art and design at Longwood College. Oliver maintains a studio in Richmond, VA where she is adjunct faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Visual Arts Center of Richmond. Her creative life is enriched immeasurably by husband writer Harry Kofatz, Jr.

Oliver exhibits her paintings in solo exhibitions from coast to coast in the United States. Her art work has been included in exhibitions in China, France, Germany, Scotland, South Korea, Turkey and Tibet. She has been awarded fellowships and residencies at the Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris, the Moulin a Nef in Auvillar, France; the Oberphalzer Kunsterhaus in Bavaria, the Vermont Studio Center and the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. Her work is included in numerous public and private collections. Visit <http://www.amieoliver.net> to view Oliver's complete bio.



Amie Oliver / Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2009 Giorgi Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2008 Dow Museum, St. Augustine, FL
- 2007 Project Space Gallery, Part Zero, Richmond, VA
- 2005 Virginia Center for Contemporary Art, Virginia Beach, VA
- 2005 Visual Arts Center, Portsmouth, VA
- 2004 and 1994 Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris, FR
- 2003 Flippo Gallery, Randolph Macon College, Ashland, VA
- 2003 Mario Villa Gallery, New Orleans, LA
- 2002 Meridian Museum of Art, Meridian, MS
- 2001 Isaac Desgado College, New Orleans, LA
- 2001 1708 Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2000 Wilkesboro Art Gallery, Wilkesboro, NC
- 1999 Coincidence Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 1999 University of Maine, Farmington, ME
- 1998 George E. Orr Museum, Blois, MS
- 1998 Alternative Space, New Orleans, LA
- 1997 Delta State University, Cleveland, MS
- 1996 Hurt Gallery, Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, VA
- 1994 Bienville Gallery, New Orleans, LA
- 1994 Bedford Gallery, Longwood College, VA
- 1993 Broadway Arts, Asheville, NC
- 1990 Hampden-Sydney College, Hampden-Sydney, VA
- 1987, 1989 and 1990 Bienville Gallery, New Orleans, LA

For a complete bio please visit amieoliver.net



