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Pamela Joseph, Selected works from *The Hundred Headless Women Cutting Board Wall*, 2001–2013, pyrography on wood, 91 x 96 in., Courtesy of the artist.



Yale “Side Show” exhibit details the bizarre

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By Farrah Duffany Record-Journal staff

NEW HAVEN — Come one, come all to see the Side Show exhibition at the Yale School of Art with displays of banners, pictures of people, props, and more from actual carnival sideshow “freak shows”.

The show investigates the “intersection of fine art” with the “historical popular entrainment world of the carnival sideshow,” curator Lisa Kereszi said.



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"It's a display of human oddities, something a lot of artists are interested in," Kereszi said.

The exhibit is open until March 20.

Sword swallows, tattooed people, bearded women, the fat lady, people who would put nails in their noses or people born with abnormalities are just a few of the "freaks" featured in the sideshows.

Upon entering the gallery, located on 32 Edgewood Ave. in New Haven, museum goers are greeted with a

two-headed calf, which Kereszi said was often popular. Animal anomalies were also featured in sideshows.

On the biggest wall of the gallery is a banner created by David "Snap" Wyatt who was "most famous for his side show banners."

"This would hang as an advertisement at a sideshow," said Kereszi as she pointed to the banner with sword swallows that read "Freaks, All Alive."

Artist Riva Lehrer, of Chicago, creates images and portraits of people with disabilities, or "unusual bodies" she said.

One of her pieces hanging in the exhibition is of Mat Fraser, a British actor and performing artist who has phocomelia, a rare birth defect that typically effects the arms. Fraser has shortened arms and his hands begin about where his elbows are.

"It's a large black and white drawing of a nude man and short arms and standing in front of the circus tent wall," said Lehrer. "He sat for me originally in 2006. He's one of the most famous freak show performers in the world."

Fraser was also featured in the popular TV show, "American Horror Story: Freak Show."

Near the image of Fraser is a photo of William Durks, who was known as the "Man with Three eyes."

The nickname came from Durk's birth defect called frontonasal dysplasia. His face was distorted and he had an extra semi-eye and an extreme cleft palet.

No one wanted to hire him because of his looks.

"He didn't have any money until he joined the sideshow," Kereszi said. "He made money at the sideshow and people paid to see him."

Artist Pamela Joseph also has a piece in the show at Yale from a selection from "The Hundred Headless Women Cutting Board Wall."

The piece is of wood-burned images of women. These are women who were like the ones in acts and sideshows who were "sawed in half or pierced with knives" Joseph said, but were always smiling.

"The exhibit at Yale is an important documentation of the world of freaks, people who are different from us but who have great stature and dignity," said Joseph. "In today's turbulent world, it is ever more important to try to be accepting of others, whether it is of their physical challenges, their color or their religion. I feel that sideshows with their colorful banners, and performances were an early form of public art and should be recognized as a valid art form."