

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

still lives

Works by susan c. dessel

October 1 - November 7, 2009

Opening Reception October 1, 2009 6-8pm



Charles E. Culpeper Gallery Abrons Art Center-Henry Street Settlement.

The Charles E. Culpeper Gallery at Abrons Arts Center-Henry Street Settlement is pleased to present *still lives*, featuring the works of artist Susan C. Dessel. Her curious hand-wrought toothbrushes are about much more than good oral hygiene. The exhibit encapsulates Dessel's voyage from cemetery to gallery, presenting a portrait of women occupied with health, beauty, hardships, love, and aging.

The exhibit is based on the lives of the 6 women who, with 4 men and 13 children, in 1654 established the first Jewish community in Manhattan. Jews were buried in the 3 small, unassuming cemeteries (Chatham Sq. on the Lower East Side, and W. 11th and W. 21st Sts. in New York City) of the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue from the 1650s until burials were banned in Manhattan in 1851. Dessel's installation succeeds in giving voice and dignity to these women and their female descendants as it speaks to possibilities and challenges faced by immigrants yet today.

Unlike ensuing waves of immigrants, the arrival of these women in Nieuw Amsterdam was unplanned: the result of piracy, and intervention. Dessel's work reflects particulars from their lives and continuity in concerns and dreams shared among immigrant groups since then.

Journalist Amy Stone wrote "As an artist she [Dessel] continues to mine materials the public has yet to feel comfortable with". ("Feminist Funerals", Lilith Magazine Summer 2009)

Dessel celebrates rather than memorializes, making the work accessible to viewers regardless of cultural traditions or backgrounds. The seeming quiet of her work prods us to value memory and use it as a tool. The artist's choices of materials in *still lives* (which include cow bones & horsehair) contextualize historical realities that continue to impact our national dialogue. The artist believes "art gives people freedom to contemplate things they might not feel comfortable talking about".

Since opening in 1893, Henry Street's services to immigrants have included arts and culture. Dessel's contemporary conceptual pieces tie us to those who came first and those still arriving on our shores.

This exhibit is made possible in part with public funds from the Manhattan Community Arts Fund, supported by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and administered by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. Additional support by Henry Street and Jeffrey Ruhalter of Jeffrey's Meat Market.

Exhibitions at Henry Street are made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts, the Institute of Museum Services, a federal agency that offers general operating support to the nation's museums and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

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Abrons Arts Center is FREE, open to the public. Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 9am - 10pm & Sunday 10am - 6pm. Closed Mondays. Location: 466 Grand Street (at Pitt street). The Culpeper Gallery is located on the ground floor.

By Subway: F train to Delancey, D or B to Grand St., J or M trains to Essex Street. Walk south to Essex, turn left on Grand. Walk 4 ½ blocks to 466 Grand.

For more information contact: (212) 598-0400, ext. 202. [Henry Street Settlement directions.](#)

Artist susan c. dessel is a recipient of a 2009 Manhattan Community Art Fund Award from the NYC Dept. of Cultural Affairs/Lower Manhattan Cultural Council & a 2008 Emergency Grant from the Foundation For Contemporary Arts (NYC). Her installation *OUR BACKYARD: A Cautionary Tale*, named among the Top Ten Art Things 2006 by contemporary art blogger Brentt Burket and Barry Hoggard of ARTCAL, was censored by the L.B.I. Art Foundation (2007, NJ). She received her MFA from Brooklyn College (2006), BFA Hunter College (2003). For more information about the artist please go to desselstudio.net

Image: Photographer Robert Puglisi.

