

***Calamus* painting series on display at the Dobbs University Center**

Calamus, a series of 25 paintings by Oxford associate professor of economics Frank Maddox is on display in the Dobbs University Center Gallery and the Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Life. Dr. Frank Maddox is associate professor of economics at Oxford College. *Calamus* will be on display through October 27th, 2013 in celebration of LGBT History Month.



Explain the title of the exhibition. Is Whitman a special focus of your scholarly interest?

The Calamus poetry is a chapter of poems out of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass. I found the poems when I was thirty-one years old. The exhibit is based upon one of those poems entitled "These I singing in spring" in which Whitman encounters a cloud of spirits of friends dead and alive—to the gay spirits he gives the plant calamus (common name is sweetflag) as a token. The canvases in the rotunda are intended to evoke a cloud of spirits of the gay men who have informed my development and understanding. I photocopied sets of the Calamus poetry for visitors of the exhibition to take home.

I was thirty one when I first found the Calamus poems and now I'm fifty-six. Whitman was forty-one when he started to write them. So the show is also a reflective exercise for me. This is best demonstrated by the two large canvases over the switch-board. All the figures are of Whitman. The young man is the image of Whitman used as a template for his earlier edition of the Leaves of Grass. The older men are a montage of photographs that Thomas Eakins took of Whitman as an old man. Liberace and Little Richard were important characters from my childhood. I danced with Rock Hudson at bar in West Hollywood about a year before he died. Curt Hummel and Barney Frank are two of my current gay heroes and mentors. So the paintings span my life.

What gave you the idea to do this series?

I'd been doing clay sculpture for several years and decided to return to painting-- I love the human form and tried doing a portrait of Whitman—it's Whitman as an old man in the show; that was the first canvas. I so enjoyed painting it that I started finding other folks who I wanted to paint. I was painting Gore Vidal when he died—that was a powerful moment for me. At first I had no intention of creating so many canvases

What medium did you use for these paintings? How long did this series take?

All the paintings are oil on canvas—I've been at work for almost two years on this show.

You are also a sculptor. Why did you choose painting to express yourself in this project?

I love sculpture because mass, weight, and volume are easy to capture in clay. However I wanted to return to painting to try to bring these qualities to my paintings and of course to include the vocabulary of color.

How and why did you select these particular subjects?

I picked subjects who were important in my development as a gay man and for whom I could find good images to work from. The internet allowed me to find archival photos with ease... several of the paintings are montages from multiple images of an individual.

Are there any of these paintings that are especially meaning to you?

Keynes is important to me because he's an economist. James Baldwin and Gore Vidal were the most important authors I found who addressed gay themes.