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The Intersection of Art and Public History: Schmucker Art Gallery's Newest Exhibit

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Abstract

“Pray For the People Who Feed You’: Voices of Pauper Children in the Industrial Age” is the newest exhibit to be featured in the Schmucker Art Gallery at Gettysburg College. The exhibit was curated by Gettysburg College senior Rebecca Duffy ’16, and is the culmination of her three semester International Bridge Course (IBC) program. At its opening on Friday, October 2, Duffy discussed her experiences with the IBC program and the process she went through in putting together this unique project [*excerpt*].

Keywords

The Gettysburg Compiler, Civil War, 150th Anniversary, Gettysburg, Civil War Memory, Sesquicentennial, Gettysburg College Schmucker Art Gallery Exhibit: “Pray For the People Who Feed You’: Voices of Pauper Children in the Industrial Age”, Art, Public history

Disciplines

Art and Design | History | Painting | Public History | United States History

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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

The Intersection of Art and Public History: Schmucker Art Gallery's Newest Exhibit

October 12, 2015

By Jeff Lauck '18

[“Pray For the People Who Feed You’: Voices of Pauper Children in the Industrial Age”](#) is the newest exhibit to be featured in the Schmucker Art Gallery at Gettysburg College. The exhibit was curated by Gettysburg College senior Rebecca Duffy '16, and is the culmination of her three semester International Bridge Course (IBC) program. At its opening on Friday, October 2, Duffy discussed her experiences with the IBC program and the process she went through in putting together this unique project.



Grist For the Mill, by Minna Citron. This painting, currently in the “Pray For the People Who Feed You: Voices of Pauper Children in the Industrial Age” exhibit at Schmucker Art Gallery depicts two impoverished children reading about the world events unfolding around them.

Duffy is an Art History and History double major with a minor in the new Public History program. In designing her project, she wanted to incorporate elements of each of her areas of study. Duffy was also influenced by her work as a [Pohanka Intern](#) at Petersburg National Battlefield and Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. The [International Bridge Course](#) program at Gettysburg College offers students the opportunity to work with a faculty mentor over a three semester period, with the middle semester being conducted through the study abroad program.

Together with her faculty mentor, Associate Director of the Civil War Institute Dr. Jill Oglie Titus, Duffy designed her own IBC program that would compare museum exhibits on poverty in the United States and the United Kingdom. In the United States, Duffy studied the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in Manhattan. During her semester abroad in the United Kingdom, Duffy spend extensive amounts of time at the Workhouse Museum in Ripon. At both museums, she shadowed museum staff, conducted interviews, and researched the history of poverty interpretation and its modern incarnation. She especially focused on how poverty was interpreted for school groups that visited these museums. After she had finished her three semesters of research, Duffy then began to consider how she herself would interpret her findings.

She finally settled on curating an exhibit in the Schmucker Art Gallery that would have something to do with her research. According to Duffy, curators are faced with an interesting “chicken or the egg” dilemma when deciding the pieces and the theme of an exhibit: curators can either choose a theme and pick out pieces that fit that theme, or design a theme around the pieces they acquire. For Duffy, the inspiration for her theme came out of a passage in the second chapter of Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*, in which Oliver’s bosses tell him: “I hope you say your prayers at night and pray for the people who feed you.” From this quote, which provides the name of the exhibit, Duffy was inspired to focus her exhibit on impoverished children that lived during the Industrial Age in the United States and Britain.

Once she had a theme, Duffy began to search for pieces to include in the exhibit. With the help of Carolyn Sautter, Molly Reynolds, and Amy Lucadamo from Musselman Library Special Collections and Lauren Roedner of the Adams County Historical Society, Duffy was able to curate books, prints, paintings, and lithographs to display. Duffy then began setting up the exhibit and interpreting the items for the public.

One of Duffy’s goals in creating the exhibit was to provide a historical context for poverty in the hopes of launching a discussion about its modern form. Duffy’s exhibit serves to challenge the traditional narrative that surrounds the impoverished, which suggests a notion of the “deserving poor,” where some paupers deserve their misfortune while others deserve the support of a wealthy beneficiary to lift them out of poverty. Such a narrative is present in Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*, which can be found in the exhibit. Duffy challenges the exhibit’s viewers to question their own views on poverty, but also question the perspective laid out in the displays themselves. Duffy told the audience at her gallery talk that “I’m not telling you what to think, but asking you to reconsider what you think.” She welcomed the viewers to take part in a democratic dialogue about poverty and its historical and contemporary interpretations. Viewers can experience the exhibit and take part in this dialogue at the Schmucker Art Gallery until October 24, 2015.

<http://gettysburgcompiler.com/2015/10/12/the-intersection-of-art-and-public-history-schmucker-art-galleries-newest-exhibit/>