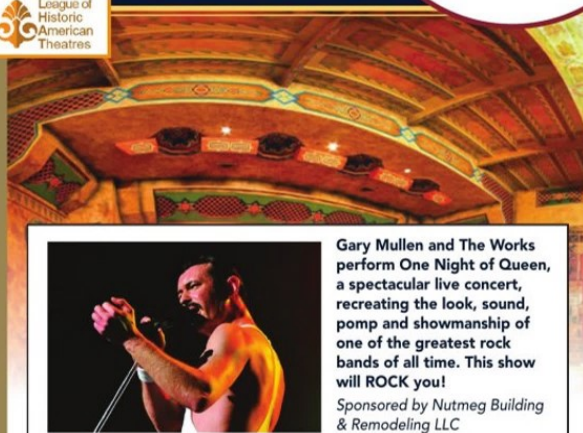


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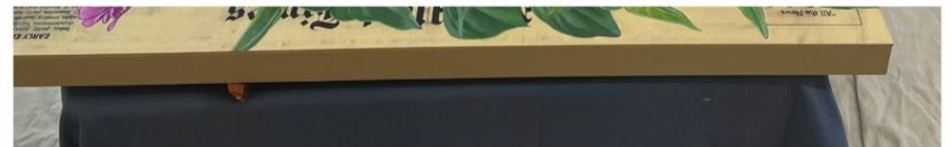
**ON THE COVER** Water  
cascades off the tail of a  
humpback whale. PHOTO BY  
BARB DUNN

# in the spotlight

ARTS | ENTERTAINMENT | CULTURE



**INTERESTING TIMES** BY Catherine Christiano





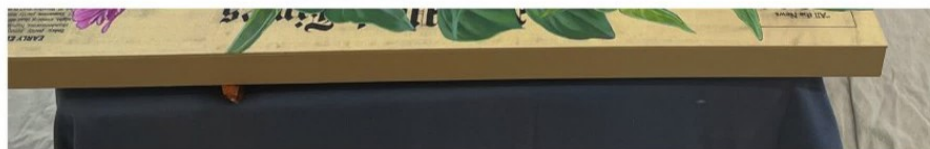
# in the spotlight

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PHOTO BY CATHERINE CHRISTIANO

INTERESTING TIMES BY Catherine Christiano



in the spotlight



## Interesting

IN HER WORK, ARTIST CATHERINE CHRISTIANO  
JUXTAPOSES PAINTED FLORA WITH NEWSPAPER FRONT PAGES

BY PHIL HALL

For many years, people assumed the expression "May you live in interesting times" was an ancient Chinese curse. However, there is no scholarly evidence to support that claim—indeed, there was no record of it being uttered until 1936 when British statesman Sir Austin Chamberlain repeated it as a statement made to him during a visit to China.

For Old Lyme-based artist Catherine Christiano, the national politics of recent years could be seen as the embodiment of the supposedly ancient curse. In her exhibit at New London's Lyman Allyn Art Museum entitled *Album of Flowers | Interesting Times*, Christiano juxtaposes the tumult of contemporary society with the seemingly chaos-free existence of wild flowers that bloom throughout all political climates.







# times

"The idea for it came back in 2015 when I was looking to work larger, with a series of works that I had done to incorporate newspaper imagery with still life," Christiano recalled. "I developed this idea called *Album of Flowers*, which is a traditional concept that has existed throughout art history where artists pair flowers with the different months of the year, and I thought it would be interesting to do a series of paintings based on a year, but using newspaper content from each month of the year for the background."

Christiano noted that back in 2015, there was the potential for a seismic shift in political history.

"There was an election year coming up and it looked probable that Hillary Clinton would be running," she continued. "At that time, there had not been a woman candidate from one of the major political parties, and it looked like there was a possibility that she could be our first woman president. So, when January came around, I started collecting editions of *The New York Times*, and I saved them all the way through the year."



*Album of Flowers | Interesting Times* at New London's Lyman Allyn Art Museum marks the first solo exhibit by Old Lyme-based artist Catherine Christiano.

## in the spotlight



**ABOVE** The artist in her Old Lyme studio. PHOTO BY SOPHIE CHRISTIANO

**BELOW** For the series, the artist created 36-inch by 36-inch newspaper collages for her backgrounds, including articles about the mundane as well as historically important and catastrophic events. PHOTO BY CATHERINE CHRISTIANO



Of course, a very different history was made on Election Day in 2016 and Christiano found herself at a crossroads.

"And at that point, I was thinking, 'Well, should I just set this idea aside or should I pursue it?'" she said. "After about a month or so, I decided that it still would be an interesting project to work on."

In creating *Album of Flowers | Interesting Times*, Christiano juxtaposed painted seasonal flora with a collage of content taken from *The New York Times*' front pages.

"It's what's happening in nature, paired against what is happening in the world of man," she said. "It places the still life directly within the social context of the time."

Christiano subdivided her series into 13 panels representing the 12 months of 2016 plus January 2017. The inclusion of the 13th panel as a postscript was to demonstrate what Christiano described as "the continuity of time—it's about also how time continues and the calendars repeat year after year. And it also enabled me to include the inauguration."

Each panel measures 36 inches by 36 inches and the artist worked with Photoshop to create the newspaper collage, and then transferred the imagery using a process called acrylic gel transfer.

"The panels don't have any paper in them—they're acrylic," she said. "The backgrounds are from printmaking and then the paintings are done in oil on top of it."

In bringing the floral aspect to her work, Christiano wanted to offer a stark difference between the vibrancy of the flowers and the static nature of the newsprint.

"I wanted to paint the flowers as if they're alive and growing and not clipped and arranged in a vase," she said. "With the internet, we have access to a lot of archives and museums, and I was drawn to the Chinese and Japanese artists and how they leave a lot of air around their floral paintings. They're creative—they're a bit more poetic feeling and lyrical."



## MORE AT THE LYMAN ALLYN MUSEUM

Catherine Christiano's exhibit, *Album of Flowers | Interesting Times*, runs September 10 through November 6 at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 625 Williams Street, New London; [lymanallyn.com](http://lymanallyn.com). The museum is open Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m.

Other exhibits on view include *Sol LeWitt: Artist and Collector at Play* through October 16, and an ongoing environmental art project called *Poetry of the Wild Installation*. Next month, the exhibit, *America's Instrument: Banjos from the Jim Bollman Collection*, opens October 8 and features more than 40 banjos from an unparalleled private collection.

In addition, the museum hosts several ongoing exhibits, including *Louis Comfort Tiffany in New London*, a look at Tiffany's life and work; *American Perspectives*, which explores American arts in New London County and beyond; and *Playthings of the Past* for younger visitors, a hands-on exhibit with toys, books, games and dolls from many cultures and many eras of history.



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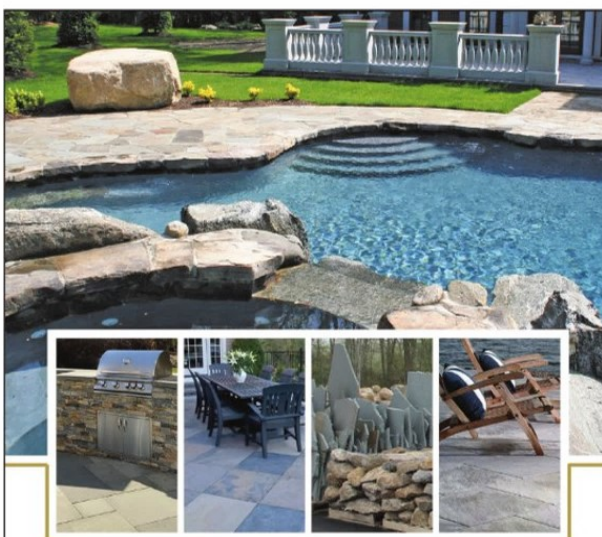
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## in the spotlight

*Album of Flowers | Interesting Times* marks Christiano's first solo exhibition—her work has been included in presentations by several regional museums and university galleries, including the New Britain Museum of American Art, and she has exhibited with the George Billis Gallery in Westport and Los Angeles. From 2013 to 2019, she was an active member of the itinerant artist cooperative group Gallery One.

Within Old Lyme, she has been a prominent figure in preserving the past through art—she designed the seal for the town of Old Lyme and illustrated the 2006 memoir, *Poverty Island*, written by Neri A. Clark and published by the Old Lyme Historical Society.

At the moment, Christiano does not have plans to bring *Album of Flowers | Interesting Times* to another venue after the exhibit closes in November, and she is using her near-future to expand her craft and explore new horizons.

"I'm taking a worksheet workshop in Japanese painting techniques, and if the borders remain open, I'm supposed to be going to Japan in the fall," she said. "And I want to take in what I see there. I'm thinking about creating another series of works as well—I'm still working that out in my mind on what exactly I want to do." 



**"It's what's  
happening in  
nature, paired  
against what is  
happening in the  
world of man."**

..... CATHERINE CHRISTIANO .....

**ABOVE** Christiano photographs flowers in bloom in her Old Lyme garden for her art series *Album of Flowers | Interesting Times*, on display at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum through November 6. PHOTO BY SOPHIE CHRISTIANO

**LEFT** The painting "Crocuses | March 2016" on the easel in Christiano's studio. PHOTO BY CATHERINE CHRISTIANO