Donald Sultan’s colorful, contemporary still lifes—flowers, lemons, butterflies, playing cards, and dice, to name a few—are recognizable to many, with his artwork represented in collections around the world. The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Tate Gallery in London, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo all have examples of his work. What you may not know is that Sultan is an Asheville native. Noting his important connection to the region, the Museum is excited to announce a generous gift from the artist of a suite of prints and a painting, as well as the loan of a sculpture that will debut with the reopening of the Museum. Big Yellow Poppies, a painted aluminum sculpture, will bring a bright, golden presence to the Museum’s rooftop sculpture terrace.

“We are very thrilled to have Poppies as the first installation on our rooftop sculpture terrace,” says Executive Director Pam Myers. “An artistic homecoming such as this could not come at a more important time for the Museum.”

As we install art in the Museum’s plaza, atrium, and rooftop sculpture terrace in anticipation of our grand reopening, we’re offering Museum Members exclusive behind-the-scenes access to artists and curatorial staff! Watch your email for dates, details, and registration information.

As we get closer to reopening the Museum, we’re seeking volunteers to play an active role in its success. Options include staffing the Welcome Desk or Museum Store, as well as assisting with special events and education programs. Volunteer benefits include increased knowledge in the arts, and opportunities to meet new people and develop valuable skills. There are many ways you can be a part of the Museum team! • Visitor Services • Museum Store • Special Events • Education Programs

For more information, go to ashevilleart.org/volunteer.

94% of people who volunteer say it improves their mood, and 76% say it lowers their stress levels. (source: happify.com)

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As we look forward to our grand reopening events, we’d like to recognize our Opening Celebration sponsors who make this monumental time for the Museum extra special with their generosity:

• Opening Celebration Gold Sponsors: Wells Fargo and Beverly-Grant
• Opening Celebration Silver Sponsors: Jill and Joe Lawrence
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ONE MUSEUM. TWO PHOTOGRAPHERS-IN-RESIDENCE. THREE QUESTIONS.

RALPH BURNS

With more than 45 years of experience as a documentary photographer, Ralph Burns still managed a lot of firsts with this residency in which he took formal portraits of workers. "I have never done 'studio photography' before, nor have I used strobes to any extent, not recorded any project digitally (or even fully in color), and portraits were new for me. But, I figured, why not?" However, this project is not his first with the Museum. He’s had two solo exhibitions here, a number of group exhibitions, and his work is part of the Collection.

Asheville Art Museum: How do you feel about the Museum opening, having documented the project since the beginning?

Ralph Burns: I’m excited to see what occurs in these exhibition spaces over the next few years. The galleries are truly superb—and suffused with an incredible atmosphere. I am very fortunate.

Was there anything in particular you were trying to say with these portraits?

I had nothing that I was “trying to say.” For me, photography, and much of what I think of as visual art, exists mainly to be viewed. I try not to freight my photographs with imposed or didactic meanings. I try to share them right out of the camera, right off the surface of the film. I want the viewer to look at them that way, and to be free to see what it is they see, and to feel what it is they feel (and besides, I always learn more that way).

What do you find special about photographing this project?

I was struck not only by the immensity and complexity of the construction project itself but also by the number of workers and trades onsite. It also struck me how invisible all these men and women were. These people who seem to move about in the shadows of our culture while building and holding together everything we have. It was then that the idea for this project came to me. It was clear to me that I had to photograph as many of them as I could. I couldn’t have foreseen how much these men and women would give me—how many firsts with this residency in which he took formal portraits of workers. "I have never done ‘studio photography’ before, nor have I used strobes to any extent, not recorded any project digitally (or even fully in color), and portraits were new for me. But, I figured, why not?" However, this project is not his first with the Museum. He’s had two solo exhibitions here, a number of group exhibitions, and his work is part of the Collection.

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WHAT IS IT ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHING ARCHITECTURE (AND THE PEOPLE INVOLVED) THAT YOU LIKE MOST?

I try to capture the feeling of the buildings and the energy of the people who work within them. We connect with photography, like we do with art, through our emotions. People have to feel something about an image in order for it to work. I ask myself, “What is the drama, the heart, the soul, the story going on in this scene? What about this image is going to make people connect with it?” I love looking for that angle and telling the story.

What do you find special about this project?

This was an intimate project for me because I was given exclusive access to a building as it was being built and to the people who were building it. I was very aware that I was stepping into their workplace, and I wanted to respect that. I’d ask myself how I would feel if a stranger were photographing me at work. The advantage to a zoom lens is that I often photographed them without them knowing it. Even then, I only took the shots that I felt honored their work. It has been a privilege to document this for posterity. I hope that people look back 100 years from now and say, “Wow, that’s how they did it back then.”

DAVID HUFF

You wouldn’t know from looking at his images that David Huff only found photography midlife. If you’ve seen a candid photo of the new Museum or the building process shared through our print or online media, there’s a very good chance Huff was the person behind the lens. His innate ability to connect with people instantly comes through when you meet him and in the presence of his work. (It doesn’t hurt that he came with his own construction helmet and vest!)

Asheville Art Museum: How do you feel about the Museum opening, having documented the project since the beginning?

David Huff: This new space is going to raise the bar for arts in Asheville, and that’s something. The modern design itself is a beautiful addition to Asheville’s architecture. There is so much light! The neutral palette is going to be a real draw. This is going to be a very cool place to visit and view art.

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MEMBER MOMENTS

“...one of the spaces in the old Museum. The thrill of walking into that room, surrounded by Mr. LeWitt’s precision artwork painted directly on all the walls, was overwhelming.”

—LaDene H. Russell Newton, Members since 1994
Collectors’ Circle members since 2008

“A few years ago we agreed to help sponsor a Sol LeWitt installation in one of the spaces in the old Museum. The thrill of walking into that room, surrounded by Mr. LeWitt’s precision artwork painted directly on all the walls, was overwhelming.”

—Kristina Aaronson, Member since 2017

Have a Member Moment to share? Email igrossman@ashevilleart.org with your meaningful Museum experience, and you could see it in the next issue of Profile!