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Harry A. Atwell, Circus Photographer

April 19 to June 29, 2008 | Mayer Gallery

The Chazen Museum of Art is pleased to announce two spectacular circus-themed exhibitions: *Ringmaster: Judy Onofrio and the Art of the Circus* in Brittingham Galleries VI and VII, and *Harry A. Atwell, Circus Photographer*, in the Mayer Gallery. Both exhibitions will be on view April 19–June 29, 2008. The Chazen will also host a special weekend of circus celebrations, featuring performers, music, and food, on May 9 and 10. Information about these events and other exhibition-related programming follow.

Exhibitions

Ringmaster: Judy Onofrio and the Art of the Circus. Judy Onofrio's life-sized sculptures of extraordinary performers, animals, and circus acts will be exhibited alongside examples of banners, posters, and carvings—drawn from the Circus World Museum collection—that have inspired her work. Onofrio's glittering constructions are carved, molded, painted, and assembled from wood, fiberglass, beads, ceramic shards, and collected objects. With Onofrio as ringmaster, these materials take form as contortionists, acrobats, and magicians of yesteryear who once again twist, soar, and cast spells for audiences. In addition, a documentary of the 1920s and 30s Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and a filmed interview with artist Judy Onofrio will be available in the *Ringmaster* exhibition.

Harry A. Atwell, Circus Photographer. Forty-two black-and-white photographs by Harry A. Atwell (1879–1957) survey his significant career photographing the golden age of America's tented shows. Atwell, a prominent Chicago publicity photographer, was hired for his first circus assignment around 1910 to travel with the Ringling Bros. Circus. Over the next forty years he amassed more than 5,000 negatives, now in the collection of Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Atwell's images of roustabouts, Big Top crowds, sideshow performers, and center-ring stars capture "Circus Day," when shops, schools, and factories shut their doors so that all could enjoy the fleeting pageantry of the traveling shows.

Visit [Judy Onofrio's](#) web site.

Visit the [Circus World Museum](#) web site.

Circus Celebrations on May 9 and 10

"Ringmaster: Judy Onofrio," Artist talk. Friday, May 9, 6 p.m., rm. L140

Free admission

Before the gala begins, Judy Onofrio will speak about her dramatic sculptures, which create a fantasy world of transformative and exciting stories. The wonder and spectacle of the circus have fed her imagination since childhood, and the arts of circus promotion have inspired her artwork. Onofrio will discuss these sources as well as many of the sculptures in the exhibition.

BIG TOP GALA for *Ringmaster: Judy Onofrio and the Art of the Circus*

Friday, May 9, 7–9 p.m.

Admission: \$8 members, \$12 nonmembers

Follow the Grand Gavioli Band Organ music and enter the Chazen for a Big Top evening with ringmaster David SaLoutos! Aerial acrobats and mindbending contortionists (plus more!) from Midnight Circus, strolling entertainers, Professor Stich's Original Baraboo Circus Band, refreshments and circus treats, cash bar. One night only!

[Make your reservations!](#)

CIRCUS DAY: A Family Event. Saturday, May 10, 12–4 p.m., Paige Court

Free admission

LIVE! Cheney and Mills, Cycropia Aerial Dance, Truly Remarkable Loon, and others will delight visitors with performances, activities, and a chance to try out circus acts. Plus Big Top snacks and exhibition tours. Circus Day will be a fun-filled afternoon for all. (Children ages 4–12 years old should be accompanied by an adult.) [Schedule](#) for the day.

Sponsors

Generous support for these exhibitions and events has been provided by: Big Top Level—[Culver's](#); Center Ring Level—[MG&E](#); 77 Square, Ringmaster Level—[Alliant Energy Foundation](#), [American Family Insurance Co.](#), [Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission](#) with additional funds from the American Girl's Fund for

Children and the Overture Foundation, and *Famous Footwear*. Additional generous support provided by the Chazen Museum of Art Council, *Isthmus*, *TheDailyPage.com*, *Madison Magazine*, *CUNA Mutual Group*, *Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin*, Brittingham Fund, Hilldale Fund, and Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin.

Related Exhibition Programming

“Circus, Circus: Repeat Performance in the History of Photography”

Tuesday, April 22, 7 p.m., rm. L140, Chazen

(gallery hours will be extended to 7 p.m.)

Lecture by Jill H. Casid, associate professor of art history and director of the Visual Culture Center, UW–Madison

Professor Casid will discuss Harry Atwell's work, other photographers' obsessions with circus subjects, and performance (as opposed to documentation) as part of photographic practice from its nineteenth-century origins through the present.

Charlie Chaplin's *The Circus* (1928) and short films

Saturday, April 26, 7:30 p.m.

UW Cinematheque, 4070 Vilas Hall, 821 University Ave.

In Chaplin's beloved classic *The Circus*, the Little Tramp hides in a circus tent to escape the clutches of the law and unwittingly becomes a clown sensation. Taken on by the ringmaster, the Tramp falls in love with a beautiful tightrope walker who spurns him for another. Seating is limited. Doors open at 7 p.m. Presented by Cinematheque in conjunction with the Chazen.

“Gilded Lions and Jeweled Horses: From the Synagogue to the Carousel, from the Sacred to the Secular”

Monday, April 28, 5:30 p.m., rm L140, Chazen

Lecture by Murray Zimiles, professor of art and design, SUNY Purchase

Professor Zimiles will discuss the migration of East European Jewish artisans and their woodcarving practices to the United States, comparing rare photographs of Eastern European synagogues with carousel horses produced in the New York area to show how artistic traditions were transformed and secularized. Sponsored by the Material Culture Program; cosponsored by the Chazen Museum of Art, the Department of Art History, the Folklore Program, the Conney Project on Jewish Arts through the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies, and the Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia (CREECA).

“The Odyssey of an Image: Circus Snake Charmer Becomes African Water Goddess!”

Thursday, May 1, 4:30 p.m., rm L140, Chazen

Lecture by Henry Drewal, Evjue-Bascom Professor of art history and professor of Afro-American studies, UW–Madison

This talk traces the history of a famous circus snake charmer from Hamburg, Germany, in the 1880s. Her popular image traveled through Europe and America and then to Africa where by 1900 it became a major icon for the water divinity called Mami Wata.

Gallery talk by curator Cassie Wilkins on *Ringmaster: Judy Onofrio and the Art of the Circus* and *Harry A. Atwell, Circus Photographer*

Friday, May 2, 6:30 p.m. Meet in Paige Court

(gallery hours will be extended to 8 p.m.)

Cassie Wilkins will discuss the circus as inspiration for the visual arts as she guides visitors through both exhibitions, which include primary material on loan from the Circus World Museum in Baraboo. May 2 is Gallery Night, organized by MMOCA.

“Wondrously Wild and Wicked: Circus Day USA”

Wednesday, May 7, 7 p.m., rm L160, Chazen

(gallery hours will be extended to 7 p.m.)

Lecture and book signing by Janet M. Davis, associate professor of American studies and history, University of Texas at Austin

One hundred years ago, the arrival of a circus was a major community event. Thousands of people watched the assembly of the ephemeral tented city, the free street parade, and the animal and human performers. This talk will explore the prominent role of the circus in shaping modern American culture and society. Janet M. Davis will sign copies of her book *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top* outside the museum shop. Cosponsored by the Department of Art History.

Drop-in tours of *Ringmaster: Judy Onofrio and the Art of the Circus* and *Harry A. Atwell, Circus Photographer*. Meet in Paige Court.

Tuesdays, April 29 to June 24, 3:30 p.m.

Exhibitions curator Cassie Wilkins will lead the May 6 tour. Other tours will be docent led.

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The Chazen Museum of Art is open Tuesdays–Fridays 9a.m.–5 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays 11 a.m.–5 p.m.; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to galleries and educational events is free. The museum is located on the campus of the University of Wisconsin–Madison and is accessible to wheelchairs from the Murray Street (north) entrance. Parking is available at the city of Madison's Lake Street and Frances Street ramps. Evening and weekend parking is also available under Grainger Hall with entrance on Brooks Street between University Avenue and Johnson streets. The Chazen will provide sign language interpreters for associated programs by three-week advance request to Anne Lambert, Curator of Education, weekdays, (608) 263-4421 (voice).