



A PATHWAY TO REVITALIZATION

Fitchburg's Water Street Bridge Public Art Project
Meets Sculptor Gillian Christy

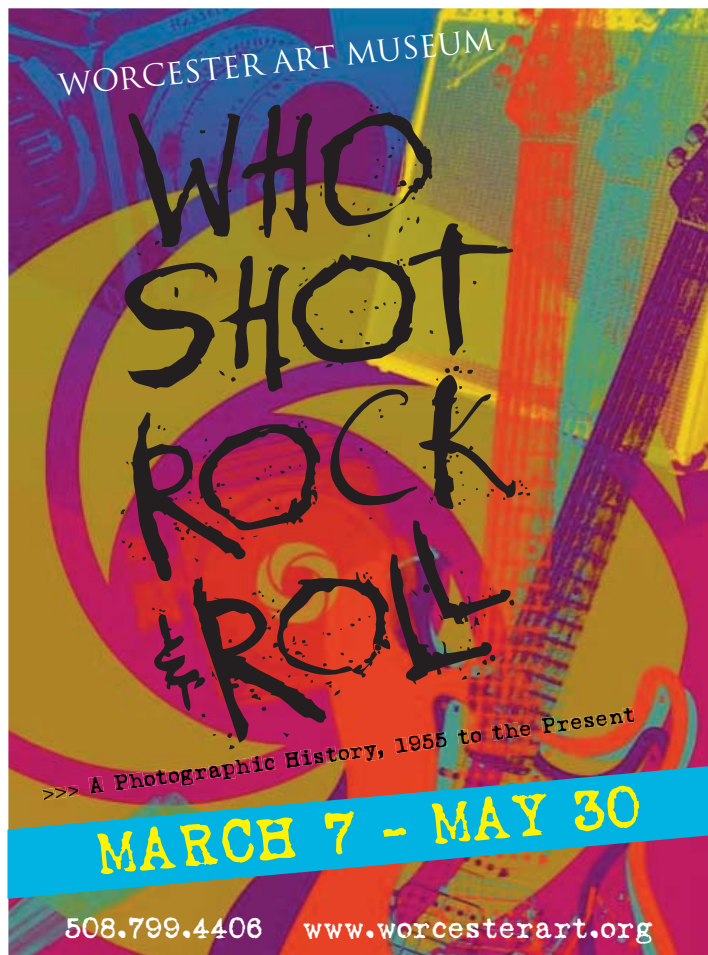
Two years ago, the Fitchburg Cultural Alliance (FCA) set out to revitalize the North Central Massachusetts city through three major goals: create a central arts location on its Main Street, update its 10 year old cultural walking map and bring a public art project to fruition.

Thanks in great part to a Massachusetts Cultural Council-administered John and Abigail Adams Arts Program Grant, which provided seed money for the groundwork, the FCA offices now share downtown space with Rollstone Studios' galleries and retail space. An updated walking tour allows residents and visitors to identify 14 nearby homes, churches and commercial buildings designed by 19th century architect H. M. Francis. And this summer, The Water Street Bridge Project will be realized.

"When you come into Fitchburg via Water Street (Route 12 North), it's not all pretty buildings that greet you," FCA President Jennifer L. Jones said. "We thought, wouldn't it be nice to beautify the bridge and use it as a destination point and a way to bring people into the city?"

A call for proposals yielded 19 applications. Each artist visited Fitchburg for interviews before sculptor Gillian Christy of Providence was selected. "She was above the rest with what she could offer the city in regards to design," Jones said. "She had worked in metal and with this type of project."

Christy's proposal included a 250-word statement of interest, her resume, a letter of recommendation and 10 images of her previous work. Christy's past projects include her "Day to Day" installation at Rhode Island's T.F. Green Airport; the Providence-based "Kiosk Project"; "Wave Traveler" at Waterplace Luxury Residences; and "Embrace," also known as The Smokestack Project at



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the Plant, which earned her an "America's Best Public Art" award from the Americans for the Arts Public Art Network.

Immediately upon being awarded the project on May 15, 2009, Christy began an intense period of getting to know the city. She met with community members, visited prospective installation sites, discussed her ideas with Fitchburg Arts Academy students, took a trolley tour, became an active member of Rollstone Studios, participated in the city's Forge-in Blacksmith Festival and held a solo exhibition at Fitchburg State College.

Once the bridge site was selected, Christy shared her design ideas through community and rotary club meetings and two lectures at Fitchburg State. "The people that I have spoken with are genuinely thrilled to see the bridge become something of beauty," Christy said. "They are also proud of Fitchburg and their home and are eager to share meaningful ideas and imagery."

"We just loved her," Jones said. "She spent so many days — long days — eight-to-twelve-hour days — here meeting with so many people. She stood on the bridge and asked people about the bridge and how they looked at the city, talking to people from a homeless man who lived under the bridge to those of us in the town's cultural organizations."

Jones said Christy's respect for Fitchburg shows in the final design, which took an aerial view of how the city's train tracks and the Nashua River intertwine and translated this in a way that honors the city.

Additional funding for the Water Street Bridge Project was secured through a grant from the Boston-based New England Foundation for the Arts; the NEFA website serves as a bulletin board for announcements of cities looking to install public art. (Another source of funding for public art projects is the National Endowment for the Arts.)

The bridge currently holds a banner announcing the upcoming installation, which Christy calls "Pathways." The banner was created by decorative painter Anne Condon Gianocola of nearby Lunenburg, a founding member of Rollstone Studios. As the Water Street Bridge is state-owned, The FCA must work with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation on the final details of the installation. If for some reason an agreement can't be reached, Jones said, the Alliance has a backup plan.

Jones said Christy's visits to the city and the way she went about getting ideas from its people was very important to Fitchburg and the Cultural Alliance. Her positive and inclusive approach has been instrumental in advancing the project this far. "There's always been a skepticism here," Jones said, "an 'It ain't happening in my lifetime' attitude. That's why I can't wait for this work to go up."

| Brian Goslow

LEFT PAGE: Gillian Christy, *Water Street Bridge Project*, portion of proposed installation sketch handout, digital image over photograph; sculpture will be stainless steel, black and teal powder-coat.



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The job of the artist is always to deepen the mystery.
- Francis Bacon