

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Tuesday, April 12, 2016

CONTACT: Cathy Keefe, [ckeefe@amherst.edu](mailto:ckeefe@amherst.edu)

## Contemporary Artists Revive Exquisite Corpse for Mead Exhibition

Amherst, Mass. — On April 14, the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College revives the “Exquisite Corpse” with the exhibition “Unimaginable By One Mind Alone: Exquisite Corpses from the William Green Collection of Japanese Prints.” Possessing an extensive collection of Japanese prints, the Mead commissioned four contemporary artists and an artist collaborative to respond to some of the collection’s partial prints in the spirit of the Surrealist game known as the “Exquisite Corpse.”

The Mead’s rich Japanese print collection was the gift of William T. Green, founder of the Ukiyo-e Society of America (now the Japanese Art Society of America). Mr. Green was a man of modest means who purchased Japanese prints voraciously, often in combined lots. As a result, nearly 200 of the over 4,000 prints in the Green Collection are “orphaned,” fragmentary panels that Bradley Bailey, the show’s organizer, says are “like an incomplete sentence begging to be made whole.”

Scottish artist Paul Binnie completed two polychrome woodblock prints for the exhibition, working in a technique virtually identical to the artist of the original print he responds to. “I decided to draw on the styles of both the original prints and my own interests,” he says. One of his prints, he notes, “is rather humorous.”

Humor is in keeping with the original spirit of the Exquisite Corpse. The game dates to 1925, when a group of Surrealist friends — including André Breton, Yves Tanguy, Man Ray, and Jacques Prévert — played a word game, in Paris, in which they took turns writing the fragment of a sentence that the next person, without seeing the previous contribution, would complete.

It was Prévert who put down the phrase “The Exquisite Corpse,” to which was added “will drink the new wine.” Soon, someone suggested playing the game with drawings instead of phrases. “From then on,” poet Simone Khan wrote, “it was delirium.”

The game caught on, eventually inspiring art and theories now regarded as touchstones of Surrealism, emblematic of explorations of the unconscious and the creative potential of collaboration. The Exquisite Corpse was, in Khan’s words, “unimaginable by one mind alone.”

Each artist’s contribution to the show is distinctive. American artist Ely Kim responded with a pair of digital prints. Japanese artist Akira Yamaguchi contributed ink-and-watercolor drawings. American photographer Gregory Vershbow drew, he says, “on my own continuation of the image by hand and colored the drawings in Photoshop. . . . After printing the images, I then photographed the prints (along with a reproduction of the original) on expired, hand-processed 4x5 color-positive film.”

The UK-based design team Studio Swine, founded by Japanese architect Azusa Murakami and British artist Alexander Groves, responded with a mixed-media sculpture. “We took a quite instinctive approach,” to the commission, Groves says. “The driving interests in our work are materials and form, so turning a flat print on paper into three-dimensional form and in different materials was really exciting.”

Bailey, a former curatorial fellow at the Mead who holds the position of associate curator of Asian art at the Ackland Museum of Art at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, allowed each artist to select one or more designs from the Mead’s collection and extend them into full compositions. They were given complete freedom to create anything they could imagine, Bailey says, “as long as their creations were connected to the lines of the original print, a guideline taken from the Surrealists themselves.”

Yamaguchi calls the opportunity unique. “It was the first time I created a work with the prerequisite that my work would be displayed together with the original. I tried to judge the personality of the earlier picture, and from there, link my piece iconographically,” so that “a slight sense of a leap between the works would emerge.”

“Unimaginable By One Mind Alone” runs from April 14 through July 24. The public is invited to an opening reception on Thursday, April 14, at 6:00 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

The exhibition was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Charles H. Morgan Fine Arts Fund, the Collins Print Room Fund, the Mead Art Acquisitions Fund, the Templeton Photography Fund, the Hall and Kate Peterson Fund, and the Wise Acquisition Fund.

## **ABOUT THE MEAD ART MUSEUM**

Situated in the vibrant Five Colleges academic community (including Amherst, Hampshire, Smith and Mount Holyoke Colleges and UMass Amherst), the Mead serves as a laboratory for interdisciplinary research and innovative teaching involving original works of art. The Mead's exhibitions reach a wide and growing audience, drawn from a region that encompasses Boston, Hartford and the Berkshires. An accredited member of the American Association of Museums, the Mead participates in Museums10, a regional cultural collaboration. For more information, including a searchable catalogue of the collection and a complete schedule of exhibitions and events, please visit [amherst.edu/mead](http://amherst.edu/mead). Admission to the museum is free.