

Transition

Decade of Decision, 1989-1999 Sprague Electric >> MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA will host a temporary exhibition of the photographs, found objects, and archival materials gathered from its Marshall Street mill complex by local artist, firefighter, and community volunteer Christopher Gillooly. The exhibition will be installed in a yet-to-be renovated space adjacent to the historic guardhouse (soon to be home of A-oK Berkshire Barbeque), open to public view during regular MASS MoCA hours from July 21 through December 2.

The years between the departure of Sprague Electric Company from Marshall Street and the eventual opening of MASS MoCA were full of optimistic promises and daunting challenges, both for the North Adams community and for the planners and volunteers working on the nascent museum concept.

After winning a keystone state grant in 1988, a major recession and changes in state political leadership stalled funding for nearly 8 years, forcing museum advocates to turn to private support while they re-calibrated the core idea, developing a multi-year, phased approach that would eventually incorporate an ambitious performing arts program, a roster of changing exhibitions and newly commissioned works (instead of a fixed, permanent display of Minimal Art), and a robust commercial real estate initiative. During that time of fund-raising and re-conceptualization, many of the abandoned buildings slowly fell into disrepair, even as the small museum staff staged galas, concerts, and “pop up” exhibitions to illustrate the site’s dramatic potential.

“Reviewing Chris’ photographs was startling to me,” said Joseph Thompson, MASS MoCA’s founding director, “capturing both the stark reality of a seemingly interminable birthing process, but also the beautiful textures, light, darkness... and sheer drama of the place, and the process. There was a time when if anything needed to be lifted, moved, staged, cleaned, repaired, or Scotch-taped together to make some event or the other happen, Gillooly and fellow volunteer Carroll Sugg were the guys we turned to. It’s a joy to show a small glimpse of his time and work here during what was MASS MoCA’s experimental incubation phase.”

Gillooly documented these interim years, both through his own photographs taken on the fly as he undertook volunteer work across the campus, and through the salvaging of historic documents, archival materials, and objects gathered from the 16-acre, 28-building factory complex, some of which he re-cast as found-art sculpture. A small selection of Gillooly’s photographs and archival materials is presented in a still un-renovated space that intentionally recalls the feeling and condition of the factory campus prior to its conversion to a center for contemporary visual and performing arts in 1999.

On July 28, a 3:30 pm reception with the artist will celebrate the exhibition (and also mark the kick off of the Bang on a Can Marathon performance, presenting a series of new music performances from 4pm to 10pm on July 28.)

“This exhibition is as much a testament to the former Sprague employees and the North Adams community that came together in support of MASS MoCA as it is an ode to the bricks and mortar, industrial artifacts, and collective memories that make these mill buildings so hauntingly raw and beautiful.” Christopher Gillooly

About MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA is one of the world’s liveliest (and largest) centers for making, displaying, and enjoying today’s most important art, music, dance, theater, film, and video. MASS MoCA’s 250,000 sq. ft. of gallery space includes partnerships with Laurie Anderson, the Louise Bourgeois Trust, Jenny Holzer, Anselm Kiefer with the Hall Art Foundation, Sol LeWitt, and James Turrell.

Gallery admission is \$20 for adults, \$18 for veterans and seniors, \$12 for students, \$8 for children 6 to 16, and free for children 5 and under. Members are admitted free year-round. The Hall Art Foundation’s Anselm Kiefer exhibition is seasonal and is currently on view. For additional information: [413.662.2111](tel:413.662.2111) or visit massmoca.org.

Hours

From June 23 through September 3, MASS MoCA’s galleries are open seven days a week — from 10am to 6pm Sundays through Wednesdays and from 10am to 7pm Thursdays through Saturdays. MASS MoCA is open from 11am to 5pm, closed Tuesdays through June 22.

About ArtCountry

ArtCountry is nestled in the Berkshire hills of western Massachusetts and at the foot of the Green Mountains of southern Vermont with art and music all year round from four incredible museums — MASS MoCA, The Clark Art Institute, Williams College Museum of Art, and Bennington Museum — and the unparalleled Williamstown Theatre Festival, all less than three hours from New York and Boston.