

## Tom Slaughter: *Icon Alphabet*

Artist's joyful imagery to fill MASS MoCA's Hunter Theater Mezzanine Gallery



Tom Slaughter  
*Untitled (Blue windows)*, 1989  
 Flashe paint on canvas  
 Courtesy of Hannah and Nell Jocelyn

NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS — Covering an interior wall visible to visitors approaching MASS MoCA's postindustrial museum lobby (as well as to those in its galleries), **Tom Slaughter's** joyful imagery unfurls across a 140 ft. stretch in the first-ever exhibition designed by his daughters Hannah and Nell Jocelyn and son-in-law Jim Mezei. The expansive ***Icon Alphabet***, on view beginning **January 12**, celebrates Slaughter's lifetime creating bright, playful imagery drawn from his paintings, prints, wallpaper, and billboards. This is the first exhibition focusing on Slaughter's bold personal visual vocabulary since his death in 2014.

Tom Slaughter's drawings, paintings, and cut-paper illustrations present objects and scenes from the artist's life in New York and coastal Long Island. For Slaughter, the very familiarity of these images made them ideal subjects: "Icons.... these are my alphabet. I draw them over and over until they are part of my language. Sunglasses, bikes, hats, boats, buildings... they are all just part of an excuse to make images."

*Icon Alphabet* will combine Slaughter's work as an artist and illustrator across media — "I paint, draw, cut paper, use a computer, and even an iPhone — it's all the same hand."

Slaughter's images are quintessentially modern, their subjects rendered with deft vividness and graphic punch. The simplicity of Slaughter's forms and the artist's use of primary colors suggest ties to Henri Matisse's cut-outs, or Alexander Calder's mobiles. He once quipped: "I use primary colors, mostly because I never did take a painting class. The colors worked well enough for Calder and Lichtenstein." Calder saw his abstract mobiles as "sketches" for "a system of the Universe, or part thereof," and believed that "Secondary colors and intermediate shades serve only to confuse and muddle the distinctness and clarity." This clarity likewise characterizes a modernist approach to architecture and design, which rejected excessive ornamentation in favor of a unified, streamlined whole. Slaughter's own work pares down each "icon" to its most essential characteristics, making the visual language of modernist design

accessible to young people and adults alike through his prints, posters, children's book illustrations, and even wallpaper designs.

The artist's exhibition at MASS MoCA runs concurrently with an installation of Tom Slaughter's works at The Artist Book Foundation, (also located on the downtown North Adams, Massachusetts museum campus). The Artist Book Foundation will publish the first-ever monograph of the artist's work in spring 2019.

## **About the artist**

Acclaimed for his playful prints, paintings, and designs, Tom Slaughter (1955 - 2014) illustrated 11 children's books including *Boat Works* and *Do You Know Which Ones will Grow?* which was named a 2011 Notable American Library Association book of the year. He worked as a printmaker in collaboration with Durham Press for 25 years. His editions are included in the collections of MoMA and the Whitney Museum of American Art. His work has been the subject of over 30 solo exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Vancouver, Germany, and Japan.

## **Sponsorship:**

Major exhibition support is provided by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, the Barr Foundation, and the Mass Cultural Council.

## **Images**

High-resolution images are available through this link: <http://bit.ly/2BKL7L4>

## **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 show cases a changing roster of temporary exhibitions as well as long term installations in collaboration 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 closed for the season. For additional information: [413.662.2111 x1](tel:413.662.2111) or visit [massmoca.org](http://massmoca.org).

## **Hours**

MASS MoCA is open from 11am to 5pm, closed Tuesdays through the end of June. From the end of June through August, 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.