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ENTERTAINMENT

Couple's common artistic impulse on display in 'CONNECTED' at MWCC

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NEWS STAFF WRITER

GARDNER — When Dug and Dawn Haley Morton first met in Boston in 2005, they found they had a deeper connection than merely their love of art.

Mrs. Morton said that while walking around the city, the two found themselves often stopping simultaneously, each having caught a glimpse of the same interesting scene or pattern of colors.

"We're drawn to the same kind of things," said Mrs. Morton. In a written description of her work, she said "Our art met and fell in love, and we willfully went along with it."

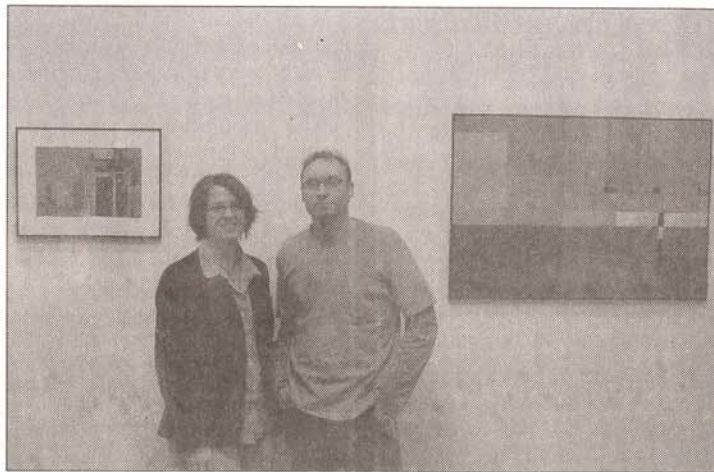
The couple, recently married, is now showing their work in the East Wing Gallery of Mount Wachusett Community College's Raymond M. LaFontaine Fine Arts Center. The exhibition, fittingly titled "CONNECTED, Partners Sharing a Life and an Aesthetic Vision," opened on Monday and will run until March 10.

"It's kind of the underlying tendencies that we (both) have that makes it interesting," said Mr. Morton, who's preferred medium is painting. Mrs. Morton's work, and passion, is photography.

The exhibit features several works from both Mr. and Mrs. Morton hung on opposite sides of the gallery. John Pacheco, an art professor and the gallery's curator, said their works sharing the same space will provide visitors with an understanding of the couple's common artistic impulses.

In a press release for the exhibit, he said "The pieces (and artists) speak clearly to each other. They create an elegant and articulate dialogue in the language of color and shape."

Mr. Morton said the exhibit was originally scheduled to be exclu-



News staff photo by Daniel Kittredge

Dug and Dawn Haley Morton pose with selections of their work currently on display at the East Wing Gallery of Mount Wachusett Community College's Raymond M. LaFontaine Fine Arts Center.

sively for his work. When the couple came to the gallery to take a picture for their wedding invitations, however, he said Mr. Pacheco urged them to stage a joint showcase.

"They both started on their own, but they work beautifully together," said Mr. Pacheco. "I think the work speaks for itself."

Mr. Morton, who graduated from Mount Wachusett in 1986, said he has shown his work across New England over the past 20 years, with many exhibits at the college's gallery.

As a student, said Mr. Morton, he was largely interested in impressionism. Modern and abstract art, he said, did not appeal to him.

With time, however, Mr. Morton said he began to be drawn to flat objects and geometric shapes. He also began to experiment with color combinations; while a student commuting to Franklin Pierce College, he said, he began to see the numbers on his odometer as representing colors.

"My whole viewpoint changed because of that experience," said Mr. Morton. His more recent work, he said, has been based in the interpretation of scenes and landscapes using unusual color schemes. His work in this exhibit, he said, is part of his "Disaster Series."

The paintings, said Mr. Morton, are his interpretations of disaster images he has seen in various media sources over the past four years. In a written description of his work, he said, "I felt that the scenes of chaos, whether by natural or human causes, tended toward very unusual juxtapositions of colors and shapes...Somehow, mayhem and beauty were concurrently present."

To represent that mayhem, said Mr. Morton, he glued a variety of papers onto wooden panels, creating a unique texture with bulges and swellings. He then painted his interpretations of the disaster scenes, using right angles and various color combinations to portray each scene's beauty.

Mr. Pacheco offered high praise of Mr. Morton's work, also noting that it has been shown at the gallery on several occasions. "(Dug's) work, I think, is some of the best work we've ever shown," he said.

Mrs. Pacheco's work, while done with a camera, is similarly based in finding beauty in the unusual. Having studied communications during her time at Endicott College and Fitchburg State College, she said her artistic epiphany came when she turned her focus from landscape photograph to more abstract pursuits.

"I kind of turned the lens inward," said Mrs. Morton. Rather than landscapes, she said, she began to focus on portraits. "I was trying to capture who they are, to see the beauty of people," she said.

Mrs. Morton said she then returned to her background in composition, but this time with an eye for "strange little scenes" - visual vignettes featuring unique textures and colors and highlighting her own sense of the scene's humor or drama. She said she refers to this personal style as "Dawn-o-matic" - capturing what her inner eye is inherently drawn to. "I love capturing something," she said.

The artists will hold a reception at the gallery from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Feb. 16. Those interested may contact Mr. Pacheco at (978) 630-9184. The gallery will be open for observation from 8 a.m. until 9 p.m. on Monday through Thursday, and from Friday from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m.

While the couple said they were unsure if the exhibit would lead to future collaboration or joint showcases, Mr. Morton said the experience has led to him to ponder taking his work in a new direction or, at least, beyond the bounds of New England. "I feel buoyed by this experience that maybe it's time to take it further," he said.

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