

MEDIA RELEASE

University Galleries of Illinois State University is pleased to present *Witnesses: James Welling / Chris Welsby*. The exhibition will be on view March 1 through March 31, 2024. All events are free and open to the public.

Witnesses comprises recent work by two artists, the photographer James Welling and the filmmaker Chris Welsby. Throughout the exhibition, images of the natural world and of human constructions abandoned within it have been processed or manipulated in ways that disturb a viewer's simple delight in what is being represented. Botanical studies, landscapes, and views of weed-eaten structures are corrupted in these artworks by slight but consuming indications of each artist's method. Borrowing its title from a quote by the 18th-century German playwright Friedrich Schiller, the exhibition deals with the modern problem of a lost oneness with nature, and with the difficulties inherent in trying to regain it.

Schiller wrote in 1795 that artists and "poets are everywhere the *guardians* of nature." But where, as in modern life, they "can no longer completely be this, and where they have already experienced within themselves the destructive influence of arbitrary and artificial forms, they will appear as nature's *witnesses*." This exhibition's 15 works demonstrate how, given our troubled contemporary relationship with nature, abstracting it can be a perverse but necessary means of witnessing nature most ethically.

Welling and Welsby began their respective careers in the early 1970s, the one in California, the other in London. Welling was trained at the California Institute of the Arts at a time when many young artists were beginning to metabolize the lessons of conceptual art from the previous decade and to integrate them with other, less wholly cerebral approaches to artmaking. Welsby, a member of the influential London Film-Makers' Cooperative in the 1970s, developed as a young artist in the milieu of Structural/Materialist Film, an avant-garde movement that emphasized the reliance of any moving image's meaning upon the physical stuff with which it was made and presented.

For each artist, a sensitivity for the productive tension between a pure artistic idea and the necessity of transmitting and transmuting it through some medium has been, for decades, predominant in his work. *Witnesses* shows that the different ways Welling and Welsby emphasize the processes of depiction in their work can be considered at once to effect and to countervail a lost authenticity in humans' relationship with the natural world.

Witnesses: James Welling / Chris Welsby is organized by Troy Sherman, Curator at University Galleries. This exhibition and programming are supported by University Galleries' grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Artist biographies

James Welling (b. 1951) is a photographer. Since the 1970s, his varied and exploratory practice has melded the challenges of conceptualism with a deep sensitivity for the medium and the history of

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photography. Associated in the 1980s with the Pictures Generation, his work has been exhibited widely, including in a 2009 exhibition about that movement at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY) and, in 2000, in a career-spanning survey exhibition organized by the Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus, OH). He was Professor in the Department of Art at the University of California, Los Angeles from 1995 to 2016, and currently teaches at Princeton University in the Visual Art Program. He lives in New York City.

Chris Welsby (b. 1948) is a filmmaker. For more than 50 years, he has been making films, videos, and moving image installations focused on themes of environment and ecology. His work has been shown widely, including in screenings at Light Cone (Paris, France), Doc Films (Chicago, IL), Anthology Film Archives (New York, NY), and the National Film Theatre (London, UK), as well as in exhibitions at the Tate Gallery (London, UK), the Serpentine Gallery (London, UK), the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, France), and the Musée du Louvre (Paris, France). He retired in 2012 from Vancouver's Simon Fraser University, where he had taught in the School for the Contemporary Arts since 1989. He lives on Gabriola Island, off the coast of British Columbia.

Events and programming

All events are free and open to the public.

- Friday, March 22 at 6:00 p.m.
Independent drawing hour
- Tuesday, March 26 at 12:00 p.m.
Artist lecture by Chris Welsby
- Thursday, March 28 at 1:00 p.m.
Poetry reading and all-ages artmaking workshop, presented in collaboration with Normal Public Library. Registration is required.
- Field trip program, curator-led tours, and workshops available by appointment throughout the exhibition. Reimbursements are available for K-12 schools or community organizations to offset the costs of transportation. Please contact University Galleries at gallery@ilstu.edu or (309) 438-5487 to schedule an appointment.

University Galleries

University Galleries, a unit in the Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts, is located at 11 Uptown Circle, Suite 103, at the corner of Beaufort and Broadway streets. Parking is available in the Uptown Station parking deck located directly above University Galleries—the first hour is free, as well as any time after 5:01 p.m.

You can find [University Galleries](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#), and sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](#). Please contact gallery@illinoisstate.edu or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to these exhibitions.