



NEWS RELEASE

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Alfons Gallery Photography Exhibition Focuses on Childcare Center Messaging
Ciurej & Lochman spotlight disparities between childcare's promises, economic realities

Milwaukee, WI, January 6, 2018 – A new exhibition at Milwaukee's Alfons Gallery will shed light on the dichotomy between the exterior messaging of childcare centers in Milwaukee and the reality faced by families in finding quality, affordable care.

"Watch Me Grow: Childcare in America," featuring works by Barbara Ciurej and Lindsay Lochman, includes large-format printed photographs as well as installation pieces that speak through visual metaphor to this serious social issue.

The exhibition opens with a reception on Sunday, January 21, from 1:00-3:00 p.m., and will include a talk by the artists at 2:00 p.m.

Since 2009, Ciurej & Lochman have been documenting the exteriors of childcare centers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They were drawn to the vernacular hand-painted graphics, the inventive naming, and the pop culture characters on the facades. The colorful messages on these storefronts are an amalgam of advertising, academic aspiration, incentives, Christian ethos, and pop culture iconography, presenting lively masks that hide economic realities.

There is, however, a disparity between the aspirational promises of childcare centers and the enormous barriers working families face in obtaining quality, affordable care for their children.

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“We could not ignore that these facilities represent the unintended consequences of complex social issues and policies surrounding how we care for our children,” Ciurej & Lochman have stated. In response, they constructed and photographed allegorical scenes addressing these barriers. They found inspiration in art historical traditions of 19th century sublime landscape painting and apocalyptic film, which, through the depiction of terrifying forces, expose vulnerability and precarious existence.

The titles of the photographs are taken from signage found on childcare centers, and call attention to the chasm between good intentions and thwarted realities. “Watch Me Grow” spotlights the gap between how poor and wealthy families are able to serve and care for their children. It also is a commentary about how businesses that cater to children, from some childcare facilities to manufacturers and advertisers, gloss over, manipulate and deform the truth about these unequal childhoods.

Ciurej & Lochman believe that “as a nation, we are in denial about the obstacles facing working families and the lack of resources committed to caregiving. Instead, we consume a set of timeworn myths about childhood to calm our nerves.”

Valerie J. Christell, Alfons Gallery’s Director and Curator, said, “Through their collaborative, photographic vision, Ciurej & Lochman engage the viewer with apocalyptic, metaphorical statements alongside photographs of colorful childcare centers. Together they speak to serious social issues occurring behind hopeful facades.”

“Watch me Grow: Childcare in America” is supported by the non-profit Economic Hardship Reporting Project (www.economichardship.org) which commissions journalism that aims to change the national conversation around both poverty and economic insecurity. The exhibition will be on view through March 18, 2018.

About Alfons Gallery

Alfons Gallery is located at St. Joseph Center, 1501 S. Layton Blvd. (27th Street and Greenfield Avenue) in Milwaukee. Free parking is available in the lot that is accessible on 29th and Orchard (Alexia Circle entrance). For more information on Alfons Gallery, please email vchristell@sssf.org, call 414-385-5273, or visit the Gallery’s website at www.sssf.org/gallery. Gallery hours are Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday 12:00-3:00 p.m., and by appointment.

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Alfons Gallery – Watch Me Grow – 3-3-3

Alfons Gallery's mission reflects the local and global work of the School Sisters of St. Francis. Exhibitions explore cultures and advocate for social justice, peace and the environment through the artistic vision. Special events aim to both educate and inspire viewers about our world and the impact every individual makes in it.

About The School Sisters of St. Francis

The School Sisters of St. Francis are an international community of Catholic sisters who unite with others to build a just and peaceful world. Founded in 1874, they now have sisters, associates, staff, donors and volunteers actively working to address the needs of those who are poor and marginalized by society. For information about the School Sisters of St. Francis, please visit www.sssf.org.

Images from “Watch Me Grow: Childcare in America” appear on the next page. High-resolution images of individual pieces will be furnished on request.

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Selected images from *Watch Me Grow: Childcare in America*



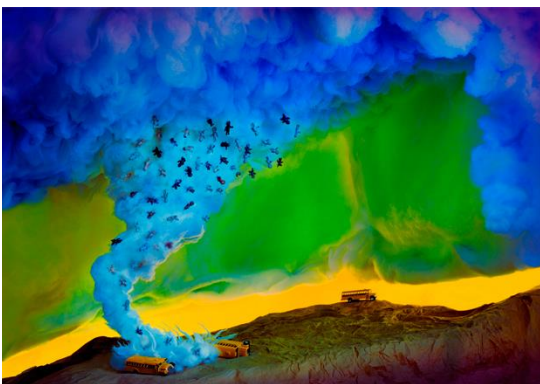
Watch Me Grow



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