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[Creating something beautiful: Emerging artist Christopher Cyr](#)



- "The Night Ferry" by Christopher Cyr

Will Broaddus Staff writer [The Salem News](#)

When we are young, if we are lucky, we get to visit the worlds inside children's books.

Anyone who hasn't had that experience or has misplaced their copy of "The Wind in the Willows" may want to visit "Plaidcats," an exhibit of illustrations by Christopher Cyr at Endicott College.

"I've never quite let go of the imaginative, childlike attitude of, 'Let's explore these places, it's fun to think about,'" Cyr said.

A work like "The Night Ferry," which appeared in an exhibit at the Society of Illustrators in New York this spring, is characteristic of Cyr's imagination.

This picture of a beetle carrying creatures on its back through some underbrush creates a new world from a few familiar — if slightly embellished — elements.

"I did have an assignment going for a class, taking something natural and unnatural and fusing them in some way," said Cyr, 22, who studied illustration at Rhode Island School of Design. "I knew I wanted to do something involving a boat, and the bug idea — I'm not sure where it came from."

Looking at the picture, we can't help but wonder who these creatures are, where they are going and what they are leaving behind.

The notion of a night ferry, "which ran between England and France way back then," was something Cyr discovered online and stored away.

"At random one day, it popped in my head," he said. "I pulled all these resources and bits and pieces in, and had this whole little story that would take this bug from one side of this darkness to another."

The whole story isn't evident, but creating one that fits the action is what makes the picture fun to look at.

"I want to spark the imagination," Cyr said. "I'm trying to liberate the imagination."

Even though he can describe the sources of “The Night Ferry,” the picture is much more than the sum of its parts and represents an important moment in the development of Cyr’s style.

“It came out of almost a little breakdown, where I wasn’t sure what I was doing or where I wanted to go,” he said.

A course in Chinese brush painting gave him the discipline to capture what his imagination wanted to pull together.

“I had to follow the rules,” he said. “Within this set of rules, it was almost liberating. It helped me back into this Zen of creating something beautiful.”

That was around two years ago, when Cyr was still a student; all the work in his show follows this breakthrough.

Most of the works at Endicott are illustrations, like “The Night Ferry,” that were created using a hybrid of digital and traditional methods.

Cyr incorporated the Chinese brush stroke into Photoshop and uses that to color his illustrations, which he sketches by hand before scanning them into a computer.

“I like the physical stage,” he said. “It helps transition from brain to computer.”

Cyr loves the freedom and speed that digital techniques give him but uses them to create images that have a traditional feel.

“I try to create a sense of old fairy-tale watercolors, something Arthur Rackham would have created back in the day,” he said.

Rackham lived from 1867 to 1939 and famously illustrated an enormous number of literary tales, myths and stories for children.

He was one of many illustrators Cyr has studied and admires, which also include the Russian Ivan Bilibin, who also lived around the turn of the century, and the American J.C. Leyendecker, best known for his covers for The Saturday Evening Post in the early 1900s.

Cyr’s show also includes three-dimensional pieces, such as five stop-action puppets he created for a work of animation.

In addition to the Endicott show, he has works on exhibit in a cafe near his home and has several illustrations that will appear in upcoming issues of a children’s magazine.

“I’ve evolved into the style I’m in right now,” he said. “I had the realization one day, this is what I like to do — why not do it?”

IF YOU GO What: "Plaidcats: The Illustration of Christopher Cyr" Where: Spencer Presentation Gallery, Walter J. Manninen Center for the Arts at Endicott College, 376 Hale St., Beverly When: Through Thursday, Dec. 20. Reception with artist today from 5 to 7 p.m. Gallery hours: Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 2 to 4 p.m. Gallery and reception are free. More information: 978-927-0585 or www.endicott.edu