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Focus on Autism Spectrum Disorders: Annual Symposium and Art Show Features Winchester Artist John M. Williams

Cambridge, MA - Winchester artist, John Williams, announces his participation in an upcoming exhibition that will begin April 1, 2015 and run through April 30, 2015 at Lesley University (University Hall Atrium, 2nd Floor). The exhibition -- **3 Artists** -- including art by Jessica Park and J. B. Finnerty, coincides with the start of **Autism Awareness Month** and is part of Lesley University's annual event featuring artists with autism. Williams, an exceptional artist and speaker, relates the interpretation of his art as a metaphor for living with autism. He will be speaking at Lesley University in Cambridge, Mass on April 11, 2015 at 2:00 pm at the University Hall Amphitheater, 2nd floor, along with Dr. Anthony Gengarely, Professor Emeritus, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. The opening reception will be held April 11, 2015 from 5-8 pm in University Hall. It is free and open to the public.

Describing his artistic process in creating his collages, Williams says: "The world for me is a chaotic place. Thoughts and images swirl around endlessly in my head. Art allows me to channel my energy, organizing many disparate elements into a unified and coherent image. By marrying my artistic vision with my passion for history, I seek to present a new perspective on my subjects. Their eyes are the focus of my work, usually looking directly at the viewer—something that is hard for me to do in real life. Through exploring the emotions I imagine my sitters felt, I get more in touch with my own."

Williams will be discussing his process of starting a piece where he first researches his topics and then creates his portrait collages using hundreds of small pieces of cut paper that collectively bring to life striking subjects full of emotion. Interesting background vignettes that pertain to the subject's story or topic often surround the portraits. Williams has a special interest in the U.S. Civil War; however, he works with other worldwide historical topics and people such as the War in the Pacific told through the soldier's eyes or the history of Iran told through the eyes of the last Shah. Williams spends significant time researching his subjects in order to better understand their character. This insight is unveiled in his collages such as through the worn face of President Abraham Lincoln and through the glowing mother's love in Sacagawea.

Williams is excited to share his exhibition during Autism Awareness Month in hopes to bring to the forefront people living successfully with autism. "I hope my artwork can inspire others with autism to focus on their strengths and develop their creative talents. I never imagined I could produce art people would value or learn to speak in public. If I can do it, so can others with encouragement and support."

Williams earned a Bachelor Fine Arts from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell in 2008. He was originally trained as a sculptor but later transitioned to collage. Williams is currently a resident of Massachusetts. His work has been shown in New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Florida and New England. He is featured in a recent book, *Drawing Autism*, published by Akashic Books in April 2014. For details on purchasing or commissioning art with Williams, please visit his website at johnmwilliamsfineart.com. For details about the exhibition at Lesley University, please visit <http://www.lesley.edu/EventDetail.aspx?id=20822> or contact Elizabeth Stringer Keefe (ekeefe@lesley.edu).

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