

STEVENSON

U N I V E R S I T Y

TO: Dr. April Morris
Chair, Department of Art & Archeology
and members of the Faculty Personnel Committee

FROM: Christopher W. Ernst, M.F.A.
Associate Professor, Film & Moving Image
Stevenson University

RE: Letter of Reference
Gary Cuddington

DATE: October 3rd, 2021

Dear Chair Dr. April Morris and members of the Faculty Personnel Committee,

I have been asked by Professor Gary Cuddington to provide a letter of support for his promotion to Associate Professor. I have worked closely with Professor Cuddington in several capacities as both an educator and an artist over the past five years, and I entirely support his promotion in rank.

I first met Professor Cuddington in the Spring of 2016 as he was organizing the intra-collegiate group show, *Impossible Dreams*, a multi-media exhibition featuring works from several local universities, including my own. Working together on a student-centered collaboration would turn out to be an appropriate start to our relationship, for in the time since I have repeatedly witnessed Professor Cuddington's dedication to integrating his art practice with his teaching and extended mentoring work, a hallmark of his pedagogy. For example, in Spring of 2017, he invited as a guest speaker to talk about the collaborative process with his Studio Art majors, and I was impressed with his efforts to provide opportunities for networking, collaboration, and the sharing of creative processes for his students, including extracurricular 'salon' style social events, intra-collegiate projects and collaborative endeavors. Such dedication is again apparent in Professor Cuddington's response to the challenge we all encountered in teaching during a pandemic over the 2020-2021 academic year. By implementing innovative technologies and hybrid approaches to remote learning with virtual "hands-on" art education practices, his students were still able to receive robust and engaging coursework during quarantine. As faculty who also teaches studio art courses, I am intimately familiar with the difficulty of teaching hand-on subjects remotely, and Professor Cuddington's pivot to remote learning represents an excellent model for high-impact practices.

I am equally impressed with Professor Cuddington's studio art practice, and I admire the fact that he pushes his work into spheres normally well outside of traditional figurative

painting. His work and style possess a markedly cinematic quality of narrative immediacy, one that resonates strongly with me as a filmmaker and artist working in the moving image medium. Over the past several years he and I have worked together on multiple collaborative projects within our respective art practices. One example of such would be our two-person exhibition at Hood's Whitaker Gallery, entitled *Thinning the Veil*. During the 2018-2019 academic year, we concurrently developed cross-disciplinary work for the show exploring notions of liminal space, perception, and the visionary supernatural. While the medium in which we work is not the same – I work with film and video and he with painting – our thematic interests and processes aligned very well, and I feel a kinship with his practice and concepts. From such experiences collaborating with Professor Cuddington, I have learned that he is a highly skilled and imaginative artist who brings to his work not only an impressive range of technical skills and a thorough knowledge of his field, but also a distinctive thoughtfulness and a dedication to pushing his craft to its limits.

Professor Cuddington's work deals innovatively with themes of process and form, owing as much to Smithson or Serra as it does to Vermeer, asking the question: how can the process be best reflected in the product? In such a way, his practice manifests itself as a latter-day form of Process Art, revealing each step of the work's development in the object itself, using its innate form and materiality to reveal the creative progression of the artist. Extending from similar themes of mysticism, mystery, nostalgia, and the occult present in *Thinning the Veil*, Professor Cuddington's more recent project "Idol Worship," engages esoteric themes from the Tarot to explore ideas of consciousness and behavior as they relate to his own neuro-divergence as an artist diagnosed with OCD and ADHD. This work is thematically prescient and engages with currents of non-traditional ritual, occult revivalism, mental health, and wellness that are very much in the forefront of today's cultural conversations.

It is my pleasure to write this letter of reference for Professor Cuddington and I wholeheartedly endorse his work as both an educator and an artist. I believe he meets the criteria for a faculty rank promotion and were I on his promotion committee I certainly would make a recommendation in the affirmative. You are welcome to contact me by email or phone with any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Ernst', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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