

About the Artists

Nicole Cherubini was born in Boston, MA, and resides in Brooklyn, NY. Cherubini received her BFA in Ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1993, and her MFA in Visual Arts from New York University in 1998. Past exhibitions include The Project Space at Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA; *Make it Now: New Sculpture* in New York at the Sculpture Center (NY, NY); *Irrational Profusion* at PS1/MoMA (Long Island City, NY); and *Environments & Empires* at the Rose Art Museum (Waltham, MA). She is currently on view in *Dirt on Delight* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, which will travel to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN.

She is represented by Smith-Stewart and D'Amelio Terras in New York City and in 2008 had concurrent solo exhibitions at those galleries. She is also represented by Samson Projects in Boston, MA, and Michael Janssen in Berlin, Germany.

Taylor Davis was born Palm Springs, CA, and raised in Washington state. She attended The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, and Tufts University in Medford, MA, where she earned a Diploma of Fine Arts and a BS of Education, respectively. She worked independently for several years before attending Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College receiving an M.F.A. in Sculpture.

Davis lives and works in Boston, where she is an Associate Professor at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, co-chair of Sculpture at Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College, and as a visiting faculty member in the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University.

She was included in the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial in 2004. Her work is in the permanent collections of The Fogg Art Museum at Harvard, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, as well as in numerous private collections. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Samson Projects and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and Triple Candie, New York City. Her work has also been featured in group exhibitions at Exit Art and White Columns in New York City.

She is represented by Samson Projects in Boston, MA.

Davis, Cherubini Solo Exhibitions

2007

Samson Projects at the New Arts Dealers Alliance Fair (NADA), Miami, FL, December 5–9, 2007

2009

Davis, Cherubini: in Contention, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA, February 5–April 5, 2009

Davis, Cherubini, Museum 52, New York, NY July 2009

Group Exhibitions

2009

Mutual: On Collaboration, Organized with Kate McNamara, Samson Projects, Boston, MA, December 19–January 31, 2009

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Davis, Cherubini: In Contention

MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

February 6-April 5, 2009

Davis, Cherubini: In Contention

All artworks are collaborations. Even the most solitary, inward-turning genius takes part in some conversation with the larger field of “art.” One cannot make any decision in the studio in a vacuum, as it is only the traction of one artwork in relation to other creations that allows one to move at all. A relationship to other artists’ objects is therefore intrinsic to calling any new works of art into being, and that relationship is paramount in the collaboration known as Davis, Cherubini.

Taylor Davis and Nicole Cherubini are both established sculptors who are making important contributions to the field today. Since 2006, they have been making works together under the name Davis, Cherubini—their two surnames separated by a comma (to read more like a list than as an independent author). As independent artists they share a way of working with materials and forms derived from functional arts. In many cases, Davis’s works appear to have been built by a woodworker, while Cherubini often works with vessel-like forms and uses clay and other materials to conjure iconic images of pots.

Although Cherubini and Davis are colleagues—they both show at the Boston gallery Samson Projects—they did not know each other until 2006. A discussion about their mutual love of eccentric American art potters George Ohr and the Brothers Kirkpatrick led them to consider what they were quietly learning from each other’s works. The idea of a joint project came up during their first meeting over dinner in Boston’s South End, where Davis’s studio is located and Cherubini grew up.

A collaborative process developed quickly. One artist makes a work as an opening volley, as an invitation and a challenge for the other. The rules of engagement evolved more intuitively rather than through debate. Only one round of exchange per sculpture is performed; one starts, the other finishes. Cherubini explains, “There are numerous conversations, pictures, and changes a sculpture endures. We want to view how the other sees these forms. We want to understand more about the ‘thing’ we have passed on.” And as Davis says, “It has to do with trust. Nicole can make it happen. I can

make it happen. There is a deep pleasure in relinquishing the ‘It’s done’ to another person.” The artist who completes the piece titles it.

The artists’ efforts in each piece can be somewhat traced via materials but in the course of the collaboration their methodologies have become increasingly mixed. Davis tends toward smoother geometric forms, while Cherubini embraces more expressionist surfaces and biomorphic forms. Yet it is the point where materials meet and a new wholeness is achieved that the work of this third author Davis, Cherubini is born.

The name Davis, Cherubini invites confusion since “Davis” is not uncommon as a first name and a viewer might think of Davis Cherubini as a single person as it is easy to miss a comma that makes their moniker read like more like a list than a proper name. Among the many choices to put between their names could have been the word “and,” a plus sign (+), or the underused, elegant ampersand (&), all of which have been used by other collaborative teams. Some teams use full names, last names only, first names only, or family names. There are the group affiliation names, and attempts to give authorship to fictional new beings.

The comma solved many of their problems. Since each work is a manifestation of a sequence of events that occur diachronically, using a name that is sequential in spirit makes poetic sense. This is true even if Davis, Cherubini does not literally describe the specific sequence of events—meaning that the works that Nicole begins and Taylor finishes are still Davis, Cherubini and not Cherubini, Davis.

The first implication of a name that is “like a list” is that it is neutral and uninflected, that no decisions have been made based on aesthetic grounds. In shopping and to-do lists there is no premium on order; items are not usually arranged for alliteration or rhyme. The sculptors’ names are in reverse alphabetical order, the arbitrariness mirroring the central fact of the artworks’ creation: in each work someone must go first and someone must finish but the order is less crucial than the coexistence and viability of the two voices—that both authors remain forever visible in the works.

One of the traditional arguments for the radical potential of collaboration is that by avoiding the “product-line” nature of the art world, in which artists’ names serve as brands, other more meaningful dialogues are allowed to blossom.

In any collaboration that occurs over years, there may be said to be a third author that the two artists struggle to bring into existence. Yet they both claim that when they start a work they don’t know what a Davis, Cherubini should look like, and discover that through their process.

This exhibition’s title, *Davis, Cherubini: in Contention* might indicate a struggle between Davis and Cherubini, but neither sees it that way. While completing the works is often difficult, neither sees their collaboration as a contest or a war. Davis sees the hand-off of a started work as occurring at times of impasse.

Cherubini defines “contention” as, “What is given is to be contended with—it needs to be addressed for all of its qualities—and then needs to be made into something new.”

Davis, Cherubini: in Contention is a case study of the role of collaboration in general, whether explicit or implicit. These artists reveal the thought processes of all artists who understand that the solitude of the studio is an illusion. By giving their discussion a concrete public iteration, Davis and Cherubini allow us to consider the way works of art are generated. Still, this could risk being no more than an “Exquisite Corpse”-like parlor game if they were not receiving some very powerful fuel to bring into their own works for future use. It promises to be fascinating to watch how this relatively brief infusion of the work of one into the other will alter their creative trajectories over time.

Adapted from the catalogue essay by Bill Arning as published in *Davis, Cherubini: In Contention*, Cambridge: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2009.