



Noyes
Museum of Art
STOCKTON UNIVERSITY

Education Guide

January 15 – March 25, 2018

Without Papers

Jim Dessicino, Artist

Artist Talk:

Third Thursday, January 18
5:30 - 6:30pm

Free Opening Reception:

Third Thursday, January 18
6:00 - 8:00pm



Drag My Body, 2016, Atlantic City beach sand, plaster, burlap

Jim Dessicino's quest to discover his family's history has resonance in this day and age when our stories are so often fragmented and lost in the process of immigration and migration. The exhibition *Without Papers* is dedicated to the memory of his grandmother, Alfreda Dessicino, who was reluctant to tell him anything about his roots because she didn't want him to move away to Italy. In 2016, upon moving into her former home, Dessicino felt as if his whole identity changed after discovering her letters, linking his ancestry to specific towns and people in Italy.

We met Jim Dessicino in early 2016, as we were planning exhibitions to explore the waves of immigration and migration that have brought diversity to southern New Jersey. As a South Jersey native with roots in Italy, Dessicino's story is one of many that compose the rich history of our region. The *Without Papers* sculpture exhibition incorporates his personal introspection and discovery, all the while looking at the big picture: Why is it that immigrants are viewed as unwelcome "others"? Dessicino explores his connection to Italy and how, as an undocumented worker—literally "without papers"—he was not able to reside in the land he wished to call home. Jim Dessicino's journey invites us to pause to contemplate our own preconceptions.

Since 2005, I have had a great desire to know my family history, but my grandmother, Alfreda Dessicino, was reluctant to tell me anything. She rightly feared that I would run away and move to Italy. She had a problem with Italy that she never explained. All I knew was that she had visited once in 1973 and upon returning to the United States, "kissed the ground and promised never to leave her beloved country again." I

asked her for family documents for years, but she promised me that she didn't have any others than the paper that said her father Antonio Privitera came to Ellis Island from Italy.

In 2015, Alfreda's dementia progressed to the point where I could no longer pester her with my family inquiry. She had to move out of her home that she treasured and move in with my father in Florida. Her house sat abandoned for over a year. In May of 2016, I lost my studio space in Philadelphia to gentrification. Displaced and with a studio full of art, I hesitantly asked my dad if I could move into grandmom's house. When I moved into the house, I discovered fifty letters addressed to my great grandfather Antonio Privitera as well and my grandmother's 1972 correspondence with her cousins in Sicily and a whole pile of official documents that finally could link my ancestry to specific towns and people in Italy. It felt as if my whole identity was changed, or fleshed out, and that part of me that was always

wandering aimlessly trying to discover my purpose could finally start to see the meaning of it all. My grandmother withheld these papers from me, because she didn't want me to leave. She wanted me to move into her house, and she got her way, she always did. She passed away in January 2017, without knowing that I had found the papers, or was producing this show in her former home and hair salon.

— Jim Dessicino

www.jimdessicino.com



Between the End and Where We Lie, 2017, Atlantic City beach sand, plaster



Baggage Claim,
2016-2017, gypsum
cement, paint, fiberglass

The Noyes Arts Garage of Stockton University:

www.artsgarageac.com 609.626.3805

The Noyes Museum of Art of Stockton University:

www.noyesmuseum.org 609.626.3420

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