

Famous & Family: Through the Lens of Trude Fleischmann

Fairfield University Art Museum, Bellarmine Hall Galleries, Fairfield, CT • fairfield.edu/museum • May 2–July 26, 2025

Trude Fleischmann (1895–1990), an Austrian, Jewish photographer whose early practice centered studio portraits, was part of the robust Viennese avant-garde in the 1920s and 1930s, photographing dancers, actors, and other creatives. As *Famous & Family* essayist Heike Herrberg shares, Fleischmann even photographed a young Hedi Kiesler, who “eventually became world-famous [as an actress] in Hollywood under the name Hedy Lamarr.” Fleischmann’s images also were featured in Austrian and German-language publications about fashion, society, and culture. According to the show’s catalog, after Hitler came into power in 1933, many German Jews flocked to Vienna, yet by 1934 democracy had crumbled there, and Fleischmann observed that some Jewish clients had gone missing. Realizing the gravity of the situation, she left Vienna and, with the help of her former student, friend, and lover, Helen Post, made her way to the U.S. in 1939, opening a portrait studio in New York City. Fleischmann photographed intellectuals and cultural icons in the U.S. as well, including Marian Anderson, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Albert Einstein, who, writes Herrberg, Fleischmann found enchanting: “That was such an experience!” Fleischmann still raved years later. “You can’t imagine that: This great man was so unpretentious and tolerant!”



Trude Fleischmann, *Helen's Hands with Cigarette and Ashtray*, ca. 1940, gelatin silver print. Courtesy of Peter Modley. © Trude Fleischmann.

Co-curated by Carey Mack Weber and Barbara Rosenberg, Fairfield University Art Museum’s *Famous & Family* is the first solo museum exhibition of the photographer’s work to be presented in the United States. It will include more than one hundred, thematically arranged black-and-white photographs along with ephemera loaned to the show by the artist’s family and friends. The subjects include portraits of Europeans and Americans as well as landscapes and cityscapes in scenic Europe, bucolic images of Maine, a handful of fashion photos, poetic details from daily life—the artist’s hands holding a cigarette, her shadowy silhouette on a rock formation, an ethereally lit milkweed plant in Connecticut—and never-before-exhibited photos of family and friends that are on loan from the Fleischmann and Cornides family collections and the family of Helen Post (1907–1979). Taken as a whole, the exhibition promises to be a compelling portrait of an impactful artist whose career was launched in a Vienna portrait studio approximately one hundred years ago, and who is arguably, writes Weber, “one of the most accomplished female photographers of the 20th-century.” — Terri C Smith

The Carrier Bag Theory: Visual Artists Re-envision the Container

Nave Gallery, MA • navegallery.org • Through May 11, 2025

This imaginative and innovative exhibition features a variety of “carriers” inspired by Ursula Le Guin’s essay, “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction.” In her essay, Le Guin expands anthropologist Elizabeth Fisher’s idea that the first cultural device was a container, rather than a weapon. Curated by Michelle Lougee, this exhibition is part of the first month-long Gather Fiber Symposium.

Using horse chestnut husks, Ann Wessmann creates a nine-foot graceful sculptural container, *Gathering #9*, which hangs from a circular wooden frame. She laboriously threads each husk onto waxed linen thread. *Wrapping Air in Cloth*, by Nirmal Raja, presents her empty porcelain bundles that are evocative of an ancient way of carrying belongings in a simple cloth. Intimacy and wonder combine in these ceramic forms, originally of burlap which has been burned away.

Two felted hands holding a tiny woven paper container pouring out long strands is a magical piece entitled *Spilling Secrets* by Kristina Goransson. Touches of gold leaf are part of its allure. Using post-consumer plastic, Michelle Lougee has also woven a carrier bag decorated with colorful and transparent bottle caps and various bits of salvaged plastic.



Gathering #9, 2023–2025, Horse Chestnut husks and waxed linen thread, Variable—approximately 9'4" (h) x 5' (w) x 5' (d). Photo: Will Howcroft.

Jodi Colella’s *Ova* is an installation of twenty to twenty-five bulbous shapes created in ceramic and fiber. Each egglike vessel is formed by lacing two domed halves together, a union of opposites. Each has a mouthlike portal which the artist feels alludes to an interiority held by women. *Supply*, by Cori Champagne, features plastic water pouches in pockets of a fashionable women’s jacket of reformatted khaki pants—thereby becoming a functional carrier to meet the changing needs of an eco-future.

Merill Comeau, initiator of the Gather Fiber Symposium, shows a monumental collage over seven feet high, composed of repurposed textiles and hand stitchery called *La Cadie Diaspora*. Her work is a carrier bag full of accumulated acts of survival and diaspora.

The diversity of the exhibition is rich in references as well as materials. It’s a powerful tribute to a talented cadre of women artists who are using fiber as a major source of artistic expression. There is a sense that we are all woven into the human fabric of this exceptional work. —B. Amore