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P R E S S R E L E A S E

**For Immediate Release, Thursday, May 25, 2000**

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**Natural Histories: New Work by Todd Murphy**  
**June 2 - August 13, 2000**

**CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA (May 25, 2000)**—Second Street Gallery presents its summer exhibition, **Natural Histories: New Work by Todd Murphy**, the first solo show in Virginia of this nationally acclaimed local artist.

Since moving to central Virginia in 1997, Murphy has been mining the region's rich Jeffersonian heritage, blending a long-time fascination with animals and natural history museums with the genealogical mystery that surrounds Thomas Jefferson, his slave Sally Hemings, and their descendants. His paintings and sculptures are symbolically fragmented and theatrical; they function as open narratives that explore issues of identity, ancestry, loss and fundamental questions of being in the world.

**Natural Histories: New Work by Todd Murphy** is organized by Second Street Gallery. The exhibition is sponsored by Bill Chapman and Shannon Worrell Chapman and is presented in conjunction with **Hindsight/Fore-site: Art for the New Millennium**, an areawide exhibition that examines Jefferson's influence on local history sponsored by the Bayly Art Museum, University of Virginia.

The installation features monumental pieces made especially for this exhibition, mixed-media works on canvas that wrap around the main gallery. In multiple panels Murphy layers photographs, Plexiglas, and paint to create dramatic passages of light and dark reminiscent of nineteenth century painters Thomas Eakins and George Stubbs. Also on view are intimate "specimen sculptures," as he calls them, altered scavenged materials that mimic case displays of insect collections. "What I am ultimately working towards is creating a giant museum of natural history," Murphy explains, "A sort of false, ambiguous thing that crosses in and out of real history."

Murphy is drawn to Jefferson's empiricism and his interest in the classification of the natural world. He is also intrigued by Hemings, given that there are no images of her

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and little information on her life. She offers the artist a chance to construct his own visual histories, mythological traces that for Murphy are continually evolving. In both, the artist sees a broader picture, where controversies about race and lineage give way to natural history, and where the search for origins speak to all organisms, human and animal.

Todd Murphy was born in Chicago and raised in Atlanta. He has a BFA from the University of Georgia and currently lives and works in Staunton, Virginia. Fresh from a solo show at the prestigious High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Murphy is represented in Charlottesville by Les Yeux du Monde Gallery.

**PLEASE NOTE: There will be an opening reception for the artist on First Friday, June 2, from 5:30-7:30 pm.**

Second Street Gallery is located **on the first floor of the McGuffey Art Center**, 201 Second Street NW, just off the **Downtown Mall** in Charlottesville. The hours are Tuesday - Saturday, 10:00 - 5:00, Sundays, 1:00 - 5:00 and admission is free. **For additional information**, please call (804)977-7284, or visit the gallery's website at [www.avenue.org/ssg](http://www.avenue.org/ssg).

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