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**Shelf /Life: History, Biography & Fame
September 29–December 29, 2018**

NEW HAVEN, CT, Opening reception September 29, 4-6 pm— Featuring the artwork of Adger Cowans, Mary Dwyer, Patricia Fabricant, John T. Hill and Tom Strong, Thomas Mezzanotte, Aly Maderson Quinlog, Allan Rubin, Tina Sarno, Jean Scott, Catherine Vanaria, Brenda Zlamany and historic Biographies from the collection. Curated by Martha Willette Lewis

Andy Warhol famously stated that in the future everyone would have 15 minutes of fame, and with the Internet, his prophecy has been fully realized. One's moment under the spotlight also carries with it the idea of fading celebrity, a descent into obscurity. Many who were household names in their day are unknown or dimly remembered now. Many toil in obscurity or actively eschew the spotlight, choosing to remain anonymous.

Lives are adventures full of stories and relationships, and storytelling—perhaps our oldest art—is at the heart of any portrait. How did the subjects get to where they are, and what happened along the way? Everyone must cope with circumstances of birth, family, historic moment, cultural assets and hindrances. Obstacles become, in hindsight, episodes for developing strengths. We all come from somewhere, but that may bear little relation to where we are going.

The mechanics of the cultural vetting processes, and various biases relating to gender and race and class, mean that recognition based on merit or talent is by no means guaranteed, and that others may even snatch one's moment, stealing both the limelight and the accolades. Fairness has little to do with it.

At this particular moment in time, it seems appropriate to stop, take stock of the Institute Library's historic collection of biographies, filled with the memoirs of past illustrious figures, and to look at artists' depictions of real people, historic and contemporary, with a lens aimed critically at this disjuncture. Who is visible in our collective consciousness, and who deserves our admiration and accolades?

Shelf /Life features the work of 11 artists working in a broad range of media including assemblage, photography, printmaking, and painting that celebrates the varied lives of real individuals, catching them at a given moment or reimagining them in a new way. Join us at the art opening in the gallery upstairs at the Insitute Library, 847 Chapel Street, New Haven from 4-6pm on Saturday September 29th. (Curatorial statement: Martha Willette Lewis)

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