FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dates: October 18 through December 6, 2019
Opening Reception: Friday, October 18, 5-8PM
Summer Hours: Wednesdays through Fridays, 1-5PM
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Detroit, MI, October 2, 2019 – The James Pearson Duffy Department of Art and Art History is pleased to present Arrivals | Departures: Work by Jeffrey Abt, 1989–2019 at the Art Department Gallery, October 18 through December 6, 2019 with an opening reception on Friday, October 18, 5-8PM. This event is free and open to the general public.

This exhibit surveys work Jeffrey Abt produced during his time as a professor in the Duffy Department of Art and Art History, Wayne State University, from 1989 to his retirement in 2019.

The exhibit’s title, Arrivals | Departures, refers not only to Abt’s passage through Wayne State, but to the beginnings and conclusions of several bodies of work sampled in the show, as well as to underlying concerns that run through several of them. From the beginning of his time in Detroit, as seen in the earliest piece in the exhibit—Museum of Absence, Abt has explored various facets of museum culture. These include transience, which may seem paradoxical because museums are commonly perceived as permanent and unchanging, and museums as viewing machines.

Questions of transience are considered in two bodies of work: The Gallery view series and the Wandering Gallery project. The Gallery view series contains views of museum interiors—at such institutions as the Art Institute of Chicago, Detroit Institute of Arts, and Metropolitan Museum of Art—from which works of art have been removed. Evidence of change remains in the voids left by works taken from galleries for loan to other institutions, conservation, or study. Depending on how long those works were on display, or the nature of the installations, their absences can become present in distinctive and evocative ways. The Wandering Gallery project is based on a much less visible aspect of museums—the behind-the-scenes, never-ending cycle of unpacking and packing, installation and de-installation, and documentation and interpretation associated with changing exhibitions. Two of the works in this series are self-contained mini galleries designed to receive viewer comments, possess their own travel records and means of conveyance, and sometimes reveal the wear and tear of their transportation. Wandering Gallery project (summer 2007) brings these ideas down to a personal level, translating the structure and hardware of an airline-style, carry-on roller bag into a portable artwork. The concept of artworks designed to travel and thus incorporating in their creation the means of their preservation and display, also present in Wandering Gallery project (workspace), aims to make visible the often-invisible dynamics of the temporary exhibition as an intimate and brief encounter.
Two other bodies of work, the *Museum* series and the *Wishing Collection*—along with selected individual pieces, consider museums as viewing machines. The *Museum* series investigates the visual parallels between galleries and sacred spaces, particularly religious sanctuaries. These include environments intended to foster contemplation, whether for the purposes of inspecting artworks or spiritual introspection: interiors so large they dwarf visitors, the uses of natural and artificial light, and the articulation of architectural expanses to guide a visitor’s attention. The pieces in the *Wishing Collection* and related works evince the collection, close study, classification, and depiction associated with museums since the seventeenth century as centers of learned inquiry.

The exhibition concludes with a sequence of self-portraits that reflect many of the foregoing concerns; and the beginning of a new series of works extending reflections on transience and travel into the realm of migration.

**Biographical sketch:**

Jeffrey Abt is Professor Emeritus in the James Pearson Duffy Department of Art and Art History of Wayne State University. He has a BFA degree from Drake University and he studied at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem before completing an MFA at Drake. Abt pursued curatorial and exhibitions work at the Wichita Art Museum, the Special Collections Research Center of the University of Chicago, and the University’s Smart Museum of Art, before coming to Wayne State. He’s an artist and writer, his artwork is in museum and corporate collections throughout the United States, and he has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in America and abroad. Abt’s writings include the books *American Egyptologist: The Life of James Henry Breasted and the Creation of His Oriental Institute* published in 2012 by the University of Chicago Press and *Valuing Detroit’s Art Museum: A History of Fiscal Abandonment and Rescue* published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2017.
Wandering Gallery project (summer 2007), oil over panel and other materials, 2008 (open, 57" x 24" x 12")
Wandering Gallery project (summer 2007), oil over panel and other materials, 2008 (closed: 22.25" x 16" x 8")