

Julie Heffernan

**TBO** **THE TAMPA  
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## Review: University of Tampa exhibit examines human response to natural disasters

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March 1, 2018

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Julie Heffernan, *Standing My Ground*, 2016. Oil on canvas. Heffernan's solo exhibition, "When the Water Rises," is on display at the Scarfone/Hartley Gallery at UT. Courtesy of Catherine Clark Gallery

Hurricane Irma was an eye opener of human response in the face of a natural disaster. Supplies were depleted, the roads were jammed with cars attempting to flee, and many had to leave their homes and sleep next to strangers in shelters. Afterward, some people were without power for a week or more and had to camp out in their own homes.

Those notions of preparation, exodus and refuge are explored in Julie Heffernan's exhibition, "When the Water Rises," on display at the University of Tampa's Scarfone/Hartley Gallery through Saturday.

Inspired by Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy, New Jersey-based Heffernan's large scale paintings depict a planet where things have gone very wrong, though the environments are deceptively beautiful. The narratives portray a great flood, and the masses who had to flee for safety, but the only way to survive is retreat up to the trees, or to build floating fortresses. Heffernan makes no bones about her views on climate change, and carves the names of people she sees as perpetrators against the environment in the trees of her lush landscapes.

In *Camp Bedlam*, mattresses stacked among and atop fallen trees lead up to a house, above which tables and more mattresses go higher still to other ramshackle shelters in the treetops, with sheets billowing down dramatically. Groups of people are dotted around the structure, where a number of scenarios are happening. Two men appear to be wrestling on the roof while a trio of onlookers watch. But right beside them, a woman lounges against a mattress and below them, people sit in a circle paying cards. A group of shadowy figures perches high above everyone in the treetops, while others sleep on the ground underneath the structure, giving the impression of homeless people under an overpass. Broken, discarded televisions explode on the shore, and bright orange construction cones, a motif Heffernan repeats in many of the paintings, seem to indicate a notion of danger, or warning.

Heffernan's style is not only reminiscent of classical paintings; her incorporation of female nudes as self-portraits nearly furthers the genre. But rather than stuck in repose as the object of the male gaze, Heffernan's figures navigate this tumultuous world as nurturers, gatherers and protectors. She wields a rope and a bunch of glass bottles tied to a stick in *Self-Portrait as Standing My Ground*. She's high in a tree, branches splintering around her, head peeking out from green and amber leaves. Above her are great nests of fruits and flowers she's collected for her treetop sanctuary, which she appears ready to defend.

#### **When the Water Rises**

The exhibition remains on display through Saturday. Artist Julie Heffernan will be at the closing reception from 7-9 p.m. on Friday. The Scarfone/Hartley Gallery is on the campus of the University of Tampa, at 310 N Boulevard. Free. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday-Friday and 1-4 p.m. Saturday. (813) 253-6217. [ut.edu/scarfonehartleygallery](http://ut.edu/scarfonehartleygallery).