

FOR IMMEDIATE

RELEASE

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**THE DAVIS MUSEUM ACQUIRES COLLECTION OF PAINTINGS FROM
RIA BRODELL'S CELEBRATED *BUTCH HEROES* SERIES**



WELLESLEY, Mass. – The Davis Museum at Wellesley College recently acquired fourteen magnetic works from Ria Brodell’s series of portraits, *Butch Heroes*. These meticulously researched and beautifully rendered historical paintings depict transgender individuals throughout history. In these small portraits, Brodell addresses issues of gender, sexuality, and spirituality across centuries and geography through the depiction of queer individuals about whom generally little is known.

“I am delighted to mark this important milestone, and to welcome Brodell as the first openly trans artist in the Davis Museum’s collections,” said Dr. Lisa Fischman, Ruth Gordon Shapiro ’37 Director of the Davis Museum. “Students are enormously intrigued by the content of these paintings, by their painstaking detail, and by the historical research that has gone into their production, and I like the idea of introducing our visitors to stories of LGBTQI lives

previously hidden or obscured.”

As a young non-binary trans person, Ria Brodell lamented the lack of role models for gender nonconforming and queer people. As an adult, they (Ria’s preferred pronoun) engaged this issue through *Butch Heroes*, a project exploring the struggles and successes of queer people throughout history. After graduating from Boston’s School of the Museum of Fine Arts in 2006, Brodell began research by mining second-and first-hand accounts of the lives of queer people from across geography and time. As Brodell has stated, they chose subjects: “...who were born female bodied, who had documented relationships with women, and whose gender presentation was more masculine than feminine.” The intimate format was inspired by an aunt’s collection of prayer cards, which feature holy figures paired with associated narratives or prayers. Through this format, the figures become exemplars for the LGBTQI community, while highlighting the singularity of their lives. For example, in *Mary de Chaumont en Bassigni c. 1580 France*, Brodell portrays a woman who was hanged because her

marriage to another woman was discovered. In the painting, there are several intricate details in the background that create the story around the subject.

Butch Heroes will be featured in the Davis galleries for the 2017–2018 academic year, with a rotation of seven works each semester. The individual narratives were researched and written by the artist. This acquisition is made possible with the support of Louis Wiley, Jr., and the Nancy Gray Sherrill, Class of 1954 Collection Acquisition Fund.

About the artist

Ria Brodell is a Boston-based artist known for creating works of art that addresses issues of gender identity, sexuality, religion, and contemporary culture. Brodell studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and received a BFA from Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, and an MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts/Tufts University. Brodell has had solo and group exhibitions throughout the US and has been featured in several local and national art trade publications. More information can be found at: <https://www.riabrodell.com/>

ABOUT THE DAVIS MUSEUM

One of the oldest and most acclaimed academic fine arts museums in the United States, the Davis Museum is a vital force in the intellectual, pedagogical and social life of Wellesley College. It seeks to create an environment that encourages visual literacy, inspires new ideas, and fosters involvement with the arts both within the College and the larger community.

ABOUT WELLESLEY COLLEGE AND THE ARTS

The Wellesley College arts curriculum and the highly acclaimed Davis Museum are integral components of the College's liberal arts education. Departments and programs from across the campus enliven the community with world-class programming— classical and popular music, visual arts, theatre, dance, author readings, symposia, and lectures by some of today's leading artists and creative thinkers—most of which are free and open to the public.

Since 1875, Wellesley College has been the preeminent liberal arts college for women. Known for its intellectual rigor and its remarkable track record for the cultivation of women leaders in every arena, Wellesley—only 12 miles from Boston—is home to some 2,400 undergraduates from 49 states and 58 countries.

Image credit:

Ria Brodell, *Mary de Chaumont en Bassigni c. 1580 France*, 2015
gouache on paper, 11 x 7 inches
Courtesy the artist, and Davis Museum at Wellesley College

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