

Art review: The other outstanding art shows of 2017

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Maine is a great beat for an art critic: I am never at a loss for an interesting show to write about. In fact, my lament is that I can't write about enough of the shows. I'll go years without writing about some of my favorite venues and artists. Typically, it's a question of timing: I try to write only about shows that I have seen while they are open to the public and that the readers still have time to see after my review comes out. That is why I generally don't review short shows, pop-ups or performances. (This year's exception was Daniel Minter's great "A Distant Holla" at the Abyssinian Meeting House in Portland.) And it means that during the busy seasons like the summer and fall, I don't get the chance to write about shows I would have liked to cover were they not in the thick of a competitive season.

This past year had particular depth, so while I want to mention a few high points that made it into this column, mostly I've highlighted venues that didn't get my ink but that I had very much hoped to fit in.

Leading the list is the Farnsworth Museum of Art's celebration of the 100th anniversary of Andrew Wyeth's birth. I wrote instead about the incredible Marguerite Zorach show, since it was a unique opportunity to see and savor the extraordinary and so far underappreciated career of a great American woman artist. But Wyeth is worthy of a conversation on many levels: He drives the art world crazy (artists in particular) because the average viewer can sense the greatness of his works (but not theirs). Wyeth's role in American culture is not just an open question, but an open wound. His status seems so simple, but it never has been, and undoubtedly never will be. And that, probably more than anything else, is why he belongs in conversations about other historical greats like Manet, Picasso, Goya and Dali.



The Frank Brockman Gallery in Brunswick.

A related bright point is the new gallery Rachel Walls Fine Art in Cape Elizabeth. Walls specializes in Marguerite Zorach's daughter, Dahlov Ipcar. I imagine I will be writing about a Walls' Ipcar exhibition soon enough, but I should have liked to have written, for example, about Ipcar's illustration work – for which she was best known in her long career – in "Stories" at the Portland Public Library's Lewis Gallery, a show that came down on Dec. 23.

Three photography shows at the Portland Museum of Art led my list of best exhibitions in Maine in 2017, and I wrote about two of them, including the stellar Nan Goldin exhibition. But my favorite was the collection of Judy Glickman Lauder, and I simply couldn't fit it in. It was a small but intense show that put a few regional talents, like Tonee Harbert and John Goodman, next to greats like Sally Mann and Minor White.

I did write about shows at many of Maine's leading art museums, and it certainly was a great year for the Colby College Museum of Art, the largest college museum in America and quite arguably the best one as well; the stellar and ever-better Bowdoin Museum of Art, which is only growing under the leadership of the co-directing Goodyears; the exquisitely curated Bates Museum of Art; the ever-edgy (and handsome) University of Maine Museum of Art; and the Ogunquit Museum of American Art, which has found excellent footing under new director Michael Mansfield. The Art Gallery at the University of New England and Maine Jewish Museum also stepped up their games with another solid year of impressive programming. This past year saw particularly excellent exhibitions at all of these leading museums, and with



"Eastern Trail Overlook," by Roy Germon, acrylic on panel, 18" x 18"

With their robust seasons, the Center for Maine Contemporary Art and the Maine College of Art's Institute of Contemporary Art helped complete the impression that contemporary art in Maine is on its way to taking the lead over more traditional approaches.

Most of the review opportunities I missed were at galleries. I think the year's most beautiful show anywhere was the late-season ceramics exhibition at Corey Daniels Gallery in Wells. Courthouse Gallery in Ellsworth might have had the most successful year of any Maine gallery, especially with high-energy shows by artists of the new generation of traditional Maine painting: Colin Page, Philip Frey, Linda Packard and others. While Icon Contemporary in Brunswick, Elizabeth Moss Galleries in Falmouth, Able Baker Contemporary in Portland and the George Marshall Store Gallery in York earned ink, I would have just as much liked to have written about other shows around the state. Leading the way are Nancy and Bob Barnes and Joel Janowitz at Watson Gallery in Stonington. But I also lament missing Roy Germon at Littlefield Gallery in Winter Harbor, Tanya Fletcher (among others) at Ocean House in Cape Elizabeth, BUOY in York, Gleason in Boothbay, and Mark Little's reboot of the Frank Brockman Gallery in Brunswick, particularly his exhibitions of the work of Michel Droge and Ben Potter.

We have good reason to look forward to 2018: The Harlow Gallery in Hallowell has moved into bigger and better digs; the Union of Maine Visual Artists curated exhibitions at CTN Gallery in Portland have added energy to the First Friday scene; Speedwell Projects in Portland is new and worthy; Common Street Arts in Waterville is on the way up; and among dozens of other worthy venues, the L.C. Bates Museum has been as quirky and fun as ever.

This was a great year for Maine's art audiences. And we have no reason to expect any less in 2018.

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