

Greenhut's 2014 Portland Show is a great exhibition of Maine painting

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By Daniel
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“The Portland Show” at Greenhut Galleries has become one of my favorite recurring art events in Maine. It’s an invitational show with a simple premise: new paintings and sculpture with an eye to Portland.

In a typical curated show, a curator picks every work for the show. In a typical juried show, a juror who is not affiliated with the host institution creates the show only from amongst the works submitted. In most invitationals, artists are invited to select their own work or create something new. For Greenhut’s “Portland Show,” artists are asked to create new work for the exhibition.

art review

7TH BIENNIAL INVITATIONAL PORTLAND SHOW, 2014, featuring the works of 50 Maine painters and sculptors

WHERE: Greenhut Galleries, 146 Middle St., Portland

WHEN: Through April 26

HOURS: 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday

INFO: greenhutgalleries.com, (207) 772-2693

Additional Photos



"Silver Street" by Roy Germon Images courtesy of Greenhut Galleries



"Americanization" by John Whalley



"Monument Square" by Joel Babb



"Dirty Martini" by Ben Lambert



"Nocturne (Fort Gorges)" by Tom Hall

This is an unpredictable approach. By leaving it to the artists, the gallery often doesn't know what's coming until it arrives for installation.

But the "Portland Show" puts the onus back on the artists to have their work succeed amongst a rather lofty cloud of their peers. Many are confidently situated gallery artists, but many others see this as a tryout, and others still were invited because of the high quality of their work. The parameters are the same for all the artists, so it has more of a competition feel than most juried shows – and that adds a little zing to the air.

Despite the coherence of the content, the show is something of a visual circus. It's a lot of strong and varied work in a relatively small space. But that only makes the show feel larger and more exciting. The sheer number of works by the 50 artists (many have several pieces) makes you unable to look at every piece equally and more likely to focus on your favorites.

I was particularly pleased when a painter friend not familiar with the artists of Maine went through the show and picked out two he thought rose to very top: Tom Hall and Roy Germon. Not only do I agree, but I have written about these two as my favorite painters in Maine. Germon has a pair of works on view, but his small and seemingly humble "Silver Street" is a masterwork of mark making. Germon's economy of strokes shows off the poetic brilliance of his brush. He doesn't hide behind bravado – quite the contrary, in fact – but instead shifts the logic of the work from stroke to rhythm to the balance of forms and then to compositional structure – and back again. Germon's understated "Silver Street" is an absolute gem.

Despite its size and near monochrome charcoal black surface, Tom Hall's 18 x 14 inch "Nocturne (Fort Gorges)" is a powerhouse. Hall takes the condensed dark values of night and intensifies them with seemingly innumerable tar-thick layers of glazed paints. The canvas becomes electric in high relief against the gallery wall, but with an evenly dark image requiring you to use a settled, slow eye like picking out shapes in the dark. Hall then shifts your perception between the scene and the painting; gloss and matte distinctions of the paint and the directions of his strokes compete with the things depicted. It is a genuinely great painting.

My favorites, however, are many in number. John Whalley's ragamuffin scout-hatted immigrant boys holding flags and misspelled letter signs that read "AMEIRCA" is no less fascinating for its unparalleled pencil virtuosity than for its endlessly intriguing scene.

Ben Lambert's ceramic wall sculpture of a shrimp taking the year off in a martini is both exceptionally comic and cutting. It's about the missed shrimp season, but the commentary (every work – except one – has an accompanying comment) is clear that Lambert's moral is deadly serious. Quietly, the comic beaver chewing away at the life preserver becomes humanity destroying its own habitat. It is work of extraordinary – and biting – wit.

Joel Babb's highly realistic view down onto Monument Square is by far the best of the 10 or so high-focus landscapes. It's an exciting and well-painted composition.

Judy Taylor's chorus line of retro beach ladies in swim caps is wonderfully loose, but the Portland postcard feels like an unfortunate late addition. The image currently on the gallery's website doesn't include the card – and it's a better painting without it.

Lori Tremblay's well-lit American flags in the night sky over a curving skyline is an exquisite nod to Grant Wood's 1931 masterpiece "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere."

Other notable works include Philip Frey's jaunty pop-color oil tanker, Rob Sullivan's tonal gray foggy pier, Ann Lofquist's realist and giant yet understated scrabble-pathed domestic skyline, George Lloyd's supremely sophisticated and energized abstraction of a storefront, Daniel Minter's elegant and enigmatic pair of vertical canvases, David Driskell's tiny encaustic with its deliciously eye-popping red, and Linden Fredericks's exquisite "study" of sunflowers in a community garden under fading crepuscular light.

My favorite wall label quip is also the shortest. Accompanying Roger Prince's terrifically fun bronze "West End Dog Walker," it reads: "Everybody needs a constitutional."

Despite a few flawed paintings and the overwhelming of the gallery space by the work, Greenhut's 2014 "Portland Show" is one of the best shows of Maine painting I have seen in long time.

Freelance writer Daniel Kany is an art historian who lives in Cumberland. He can be contacted at: [\[email protected\]](#)

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