The Art New England Museum Index

Number of objects in the Fitchburg Art Museum’s permanent collection: 7,000

Number of sculptures on the grounds of deCordova made of glass door knobs rejects from the Union Glass Company, which museum founder Julian de Cordova owned: 1

Number of kimonos at the Worcester Art Museum (the most ever made or commissioned by an art museum): 1

Number of wooden toothpickrs that make up Tara Donovan’s sculpture Untitled (Toothpicks) on view at the Wadsworth Atheneum, held together without glue or adhesives: 625,000

Number of window panes into which someone elegantly etched the names and initials of the Griswold family in 1844: 2

Number of hairs on the 20x lifesize, hand-crafted model of Bombay impiyates at the Bruce Museum’s “Big Backyard” science exhibit: 15,104

Number of museum founders buried under the front steps of the Clark Art Institute: 27

Number of years Provincetown Art Association and Museum managed the discrepancy between traditional Impressionist artists and experimenting Modernists by giving the “Moderns” and the “Regulars” separate walls to display their works: 10

Number of silver nutmeg graters held in the Lyman Allyn collection: 50

Number of contemporary photographs in the single largest donation in the Newport Art Museum’s history, which dramatically increased the number of photographs in the collection by women: 118

Year the Rose Art Museum became the first U.S. museum to exhibit video art with the exhibition Vision and Television: 1970

Year the Maine Museum of Photographic Arts became the only museum in Maine whose inception was crowdsourced via Kickstarter: 2010

Weight in tons of each of three forged steel blocks that make up Richard Serra’s sculpture 4-5-6, or display in the Paul J. Schupf Sculpture Court outside the entrance of the Colby College Museum of Art: 30

Number of Maine-connected artists exhibited at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art in 2020: 111

Number of Nike Air Jordan 5 sneakers that spilled into the Pacific Ocean in “The Great Shoe Spill of 1990,” later inspiring Andy Yoder’s installation, Overboard, recently on view at the Brattleboro Museum of Art: 61,280

Number of objects pulled from the Fleming Museum’s collection storage for use by faculty and Museum educators in instructing University of Vermont students during the academic year: 295

Number of Frank Lloyd Wright houses owned by the Currier Museum, which will be accessible to the public and preserved in perpetuity: 2

Number of nights that Cannupa Hanksa Luger’s piece Every One (#MMWQT Read Project), comprised of over 4,000 hand-formed and painted clay beads, was illuminated in the Hood Museum’s vitrine window during the pandemic: 392

Weight of the sculptures settled among the 140 acres of woods and trails at the Andres Institute of Art: 250 tons (approximately 500,000 pounds)

Number of faces on view in the Mattatuck Museum’s exhibition Face Like Mine: 225

Number of original Monet paintings the Pope family purchased for the Hill-Stead Museum during their lifetime: 9

Number of miles of LED lights contained in Valkyrie Mumbet, one of the MassArt Art Museum’s inaugural exhibitions by Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos: over half a mile

Number of virtual public programs run at RISD Museum since March 2020: 450

Number of entries by Paul Revere in the Liberty Mill Ledger, located at the Crane Museum of Papermaking: 2

Number of art kits distributed by the ICA to Boston Public School students to keep them creatively engaged during February vacation week: 3,400

Number of artist books by women at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum: 60

Museum Reset
Three Connecticut Gems Pivot, Partner, and Prevail
KRIStIN NORD

During what many of us will remember as our pandemic year, many Connecticut museums and arts institutions were shuttered to the public for months. As it turned out three of the stars in the state’s constellation had staff hard at work behind-the-scenes, stepping up virtual programming, and finding ways to expand their outdoor offerings. And now, many, as visitors are once again entering the museums proper, are making the most of completed renovations and expanded gallery space.

The Mattatuck Museum
The entrance to the Mattatuck Museum is gleaming these days from a $9 million dollar renovation designed to better serve visitors and staff, and a building that proclaims that it is truly one of the city’s treasures. While its former César Pelli-designed predecessor appeared fortress-tight, its new façade, courtesy of Ana Beha Architects of Boston, frames views of the majestic Waterbury Green with banks of windows on each of its three floors. Modern life is all around, whether it's people with timed tickets perusing the new galleries or the moving motion picture of commerce that can be seen out on the street. There are new classrooms, new gallery space, well-organized offices, a new gift shop, a state-of-the art performance hall—even a rooftop terrace.

Bob Burns, the museum’s director and CEO, has set a lively pace in recent years with the museum's exhibition rotations, and upcoming excursions will be tapping into what amounts to the region's untold stories. Expect to find the Mattatuck move beyond an earlier truncated vision of Waterbury history to include what is known of its original Indigenous settlements. Expect as well that there will be exhibits that look at the contributions of women and people of color, and to curated exhibitions highlighting work of the region's diverse immigrant populations. The region has a compelling and evolving tale to tell—of the extrusion of brass and the manufacturing of rubber, of the making of clocks, and the clattering of machines in a great variety of factories. It's a place that has supported tool and die makers and mill workers as well as artists. Its museum tells vibrant stories through its galleries and brings this story up-to-date through contemporary art that once again reinforces that this place was built—and remains—a city rich with many cultures. Take a seat at the capacious quarter sawn oak desk inside the archives, perhaps at work on a research project, separated by another.
glass wall overlooking the museum’s main gallery for local history. Or rest after your visit at the main floor’s sunlit computer bar, imagining as this writer did, Waterbury high school young people performing Harold Hanson’s Song of Democracy with The Waterbury Symphony—a wonderful choral experience for students new to classical music. Its full-throated music homage to the Walt Whitman poem would do the Mattatuck’s performance hall justice; just as would a jubilant wedding or a bracing jazz series on its rooftop terrace on a summer’s night.

Hill-Stead Museum
When Hill-Stead closed its historic house to the public in spring 2020, its leadership went into brainstorming mode. Some ideas had been percolating already, yet now there was renewed urgency. How might the people who love art in general, and Hill-Stead in particular, know that the Farmington, CT, museum remained alive and well? Dr. Anna Swinbourne, the museum’s executive director and CEO, looked with renewed purpose and open-mindedness at its beautiful grounds. She quickly welcomed walkers for extended hours to its hiking trails, and had staff develop plans for what proved to be a successful summer art camp for children. Then Swinbourne reached out to the region’s performing arts organizations, most of which had been forced to cancel seasons. Would they be interested in partnering with Hill-Stead for an outdoor performance series? Twenty-three of them, from

The Hartford Stage to Real Art Ways said a resounding “yes!” and its nascent From the Porch series took off. Its Sunken Garden Poetry Festival, an annual staple, served up salve and ideas as it championed new voices.

New audiences had discovered that Hill-Stead was there for them, and was multi-faceted. Art lovers over the years had savored the historic home’s interiors, with its Manet, Monet, Whistler and Degas paintings, yet the fixed stipulations in founder Theodate Pope Riddle’s will kept these riches removed from general consciousness. There is a remedy arriving with the completion of a new gallery and interactive media center that will open up countless programming possibilities. It’s part of a $6.9 million capital improvement project, designed by Centerbrook Architects & Planners on the footprint of the original carriage barn, that will further Hill-Stead’s draw as a major arts destination and is a spectacular example of the adaptive reuse projects this Connecticut firm is known for.

In the years ahead, as the museum digs more deeply into its extensive archives, there will be exhibitions that look at Pope Riddle as a visionary who challenged established norms. An exhibition is in the works to look at her wealthy industrialist father Alfred Pope’s collecting habits, that began with the family’s Grand Tour of 44 European cities in the late 1800s and which he later winnowed with an ever-discerning eye. In the family history, we are telescoped into Connecticut’s late 19th and early 20th centuries’ Gilded Age; with Pope Riddle forging a trail as a self-taught master builder, later becoming a staunch suffragette. There is revelatory material to be mined.
Florence Griswold Museum
From March 2020 to March 2021, 4,600 people, by Museum estimates, took the temporary closure of its Kriebel Gallery and historic home in stride. They visited its beautiful grounds in Old Lyme and found ways to generate their own encounters with art and nature. Many strolled along the paths of the museum’s Artist’s Trail that winds through the 12-acre property and hugs the Lieutenant River. Some took in the museum’s stunning flower garden, and savor the birds and butterflies in happy profusion. The trail itself afforded look-offs where modern day amateur artists could paint en plein air, or simply take in the same vignettes that had captivated the Tonalists and American Impressionists who had summere at Miss Florence Griswold’s boarding house in the early 20th century.

When the Kriebel Gallery reopened, it did so with a flourish—marking the 20th anniversary of the arrival of the Hartford Steam Boiler Collection, a gift that vastly expanded the institution’s scope and mission. The paintings encompas scenes from Connecticut’s colonial settlement through the 20th century, prompting the museum’s young scholars to extrapolate works for a series of exhibitions that feel fresh and cutting edge. Director, Rebekah Beaulieu, whose Ph.D. is in American studies, and her cadre of curator scholars are challenging what may have been our assumptions about the art we’ve viewed in traditional settings. New fields of art criticism are deconstructing these venerable works in ways that make them accessible and relevant; limited visitors admitted to the galleries have made it possible to engage on a much deeper level with these paintings, and to spend time with their scholarly wall text. And this revisiting of history has continued, with a masterful 10-lecture series by leading arts historians that consider gender, race, and ethnicity as well as the ecological concerns that have been part of the American experience before they actually had a name. Old Lyme is well-known for its early leadership in the environmental movement, and its feels right that the Florence Griswold should be adding ecocriticism to its intellectual tool kit. As the world continues to battle this pandemic, all around us historic battles of nature vs. human development, and the costs of human consumption, continue. The museum’s staff has been inviting us to take

in the beauty that is all around us even as they would have us pause and reflect upon issues that have seemingly reached a tipping point.

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