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Creative Collisions

The conjunction of Alice Neel and Erastus Salisbury Field might seem at first to be either curious or accidental. Why put together such dissimilar artists—both portrait painters to be sure, but separated by a century and working in such different styles? Field’s work is “traditional.” It uses dark pigments, records surfaces, and renders faces with a mask-like similarity. Neel’s work is conspicuously “modern.” It uses bright colors, a strong calligraphic line, probes the psychology of the sitter, and sometimes presents us with confrontational subject matter.

There is indeed something arbitrary in bringing together these two artists. As Curator Jamie Franklin and I sat in my office two years ago, we realized we had access to significant collections of both artists’ work. What if we put them together as an exercise in “compare and contrast,” as a way to illuminate the differences while revealing underlying similarities?

Jamie’s installation accomplishes this brilliantly. I am profoundly moved by the lineup of three paintings of mothers and children, two by Field flanking Neel’s astonishingly great *Ginny and Elizabeth*, depicting her daughter-in-law and granddaughter. First I notice the mothers’ eyes, then their faces and hands, then at last the little babies. These are both artists of the human condition, yet so very different!

But in a deeper sense there is nothing accidental in our putting together these two painters, indeed, it is emblematic of the new direction taken by the Bennington Museum. Visitors find this a challenging museum, because of the way old and new, traditional and modern, collide. We don’t have a wing dedicated to modern and contemporary art, for example. Thus the paintings of Grandma Moses were next to the recent conceptual work of 26-year-old artist Angus McCullough much of this summer. You might view this as a drawback, but we have decided to embrace this fact and even celebrate it. For isn’t this clash of dissimilar things one of the characteristic features of contemporary life? Isn’t the mashup the defining artistic form of the age?

I believe a museum like this, that collects traditional and modern, history and art, is uniquely poised to inspire creativity. Past and present meet in our galleries, sometimes in messy fashion, but out of the spark of that collision the future is born. This, I believe, is the role of a museum in its community: to bring past and present together in lively confrontation, to arrange these creative collisions that lead to new innovation. This is the enormous potential a dynamic museum offers to Bennington and to Vermont.

The new Bennington Museum—Get into It!

Robert Wolterstorff
On August 2, models who posed for Norman Rockwell while he lived in Arlington, VT (1939-1953) held their annual reunion in the Paresky Wing of the Bennington Museum. This event drew over 300 visitors to the museum. Among those celebrating their reunion where (left to right) James Edgerton, Jr. (Jim) and his dad James “Buddy” Edgerton, both former models for Norman Rockwell. Mary Doyle Keefe was present to sign prints featuring her as “Rosie the Riveter.”

The reinstallment of the Grandma Moses Gallery presented a wonderful opportunity to host a Moses Family Reunion on March 22, 2014. (Above left to right) Megan Weir and her daughters with Sue Aiken, Megan’s mother and great-granddaughter of Grandma Moses. Many members of the Moses Family gathered to experience the new installation of paintings from the museum collection as well as four additional paintings now on loan from private lenders.

Events

(Above left to right) On April 25, Bennington Museum hosted Dr. Mariko Silver and guests during her installation weekend as incoming President of Bennington College; Petie Palmer enjoyed the Bennington Modernism Gallery with one of Bennington Museum’s trustees, Arnold Ricks; Dr. Robert Wolterstorff, Executive Director of the Bennington Museum and Dr. Mariko Silver, President of Bennington College. Photography courtesy of Bennington College.

On July 11, the second annual Summer Party was held. (below, from left to right, then bottom left) trustee Patricia Guerrero and Consie West; Tony Marro, Bob Guarino, Tricia Bitteker, Jack Leonard and Jackie Marro; Andy and Suzanne Buchsbaum, Executive Director Robert Wolterstorff, with Tom and Rita Dee.
Inspired by the quilt that brings visitors to the museum from around the world, the *1863 Jane Stickle Quilt* is comprised of 169 five-inch blocks, each in a different pattern, surrounded by a unique scalloped border, together containing a remarkable total of 5,602 pieces.

**Postcard Perfect Bennington** – With over 800 postcards of the town of Bennington in the museum’s collection, it was challenging to select only 41 for this exhibition. Many photographs that were taken by Frederick D. Burt, a prolific photographer in the area in the early 1900s, were made into postcards by local shopkeeper Ernest T. Griswold. See what was sent to family and friends in days-gone-by when Bennington became a town bustling with tourists.

**Alice Neel/Erastus Salisbury Field: Painting the People** – This “creative collision” features the stunning work of two acknowledged masters of the portrait as art who lived 100 years apart. Nineteenth-century itinerant painter Erastus Salisbury Field’s work is “traditional” using dark pigments, and resulting in similar faces. In contrast, 20th-century master Alice Neel’s work is “modern” using bright colors, and often delves into the sitter’s psyche. Yet, the resonance with each other’s work is remarkable. This exhibit beckons the viewer to reexamine the relationship between Modernism and its romantic notions of the “folk” in order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of these great artists and their work. See related events on page 11.

**Patsy Santo: A Growing Collection** – As we celebrate the work of self-taught artists, Pasquelle (Patsy) Santo cannot be overlooked. Catapulted to national recognition in the 1930s - 1940s, (along with another famous artist, Grandma Moses), Santo was a local talent whose paintings often reflected small-town Vermont in all its splendor. A Swiss critic compared Santo’s *Ready for Battle* to the famous play *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder. This exhibit also recognizes the recent gift of six of Santo’s paintings to the museum by Tom and Jennifer Fels. Doubling the museum’s collection, the paintings included in the Fels’ gift are on view for all to enjoy.

**“Reflections” – The Festival of Trees** – This year’s theme features wonderful creations incorporating objects from the museum collection that are reflective or encourage us to reflect on times gone by. Over 20 community-created vignettes fill the galleries.

**Regional Artists Exhibits** – Every twelve weeks throughout the year, a regional artist has their work displayed in the museum’s Regional Artists Gallery. To close out 2014: Jonathan Brand, through October 19, and Margaret Kannenstine, October 25 through December 30.
The Ins and Outs of Museum Loans – Part II

In the last issue of Inside Bennington Museum, I wrote about how incoming loans have been used to reinvigorate our display of the museum’s permanent collection. In this issue I will address the other side of the coin— the importance of lending objects from our collection to other institutions. We consider every loan request carefully, balancing the risks in allowing an object to travel and the downside of not having it on view for our visitors here against the potential benefits, which include making the object accessible to a much wider audience, increasing the museum’s visibility, and enhancing scholarship and appreciation of a particular artist’s work.

Bennington Museum is caretaker of the largest public collection of paintings by Anna Mary Robertson Moses, better known as “Grandma” Moses. This self-taught painter was arguably the most famous living artist in America during the 1950s. With over 40 paintings and needleworks by Moses, as well as large numbers of related artifacts such as her kitchen apron-cum-artist’s smock and many of her art supplies — including brushes, tubes of unused paint and Mason jars of glitter — the museum frequently gets requests for loans of this material. We are happy to accommodate these requests whenever possible. Notably, the museum lent nine paintings and a number of other artifacts to the most recent major retrospective of the artist’s work, Grandma Moses: Grandmother to the Nation. This show was organized by and premiered at the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, New York, in May 2006, and then traveled to museums across the country, including the Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California, and The John and Mable Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida. The negotiations and arrangements for this large scale loan had been executed immediately prior to my arrival at the museum. In thinking back on that, I am thankful that my predecessor, Stephen Perkins, set an excellent example of a curator who was happy to share our collections with other accredited institutions and their visitors. This coming November we will be sending another group of Moses’ paintings to the Huntsville Museum of Art, in Huntsville, Alabama, to share the artist’s work with new audiences in an exhibition, Grandma Moses: Visions of America, November, 2014 through March, 2015. It is encouraging that Moses’ work continues to inspire new generations with her message of “honesty and hard work, which in her mind made America great,” as the curators at Huntsville have put it.

Other recent loans include an early nineteenth-century musical tall case clock made in Rutland and two paintings of sunset-tinged landscapes by another local self-taught artist, John Lillie. Lillie was a lifelong resident of Dorset and a founding member of the “Dorset Painters” which eventually evolved into the Southern Vermont Arts Center. Bennington Museum has three excellent examples of Lillie’s work in its collection and two were lent to a retrospective of his work at the Dorset Historical Society for the entirety of 2012. Our musical tall case clock (colloquially known as grandfather clocks) made by Nicholas Goddard, a renowned early clockmaker from Rutland, is considered one of the master works of the Bennington Museum collection. Nevertheless, we decided it was important for it to be included in a once-in-a-lifetime exhibition, Keeping Time: The Musical Clocks of Early America, October to November, 2013, at the Willard House and Clock Museum in North Grafton, Massachusetts. Early musical clocks of American origin are extremely rare and this groundbreaking exhibition included a quarter of the 140 known examples, ALL in working order, playing tunes on the hour. In return for the loan, the Willard House and Clock Museum had one of the country’s leading experts in early clocks restore our Goddard clock’s works, so that it can now play its bright and cheery tunes again for Bennington Museum visitors. Loans of this nature are a win-win for all involved.

—Jamie Franklin, Curator

1. Alice Neel (1900-1984), Harley and Andrew, 1963, (detail) Oil on canvas, 48 x 34 inches. Estate of Alice Neel, © Estate of Alice Neel
2. Patsy Santo (1893-1975), Silo Filling, 1940 (detail). Oil on canvas. Gift of Tom and Jennifer Fels
We are so grateful for the generous gifts in every form that we receive from our donors, members and volunteers—thank you! We rely on your support, which allows Bennington Museum to continue moving forward, to stay relevant in our rapidly changing world.

There are many ways to be engaged with the museum. Our Annual Fund is continuing to grow in size and importance. We offer many levels of membership, our events are not to be missed, and the educational programing for children and adults is captivating and challenging. If you have time, consider becoming a volunteer.

In fiscal year 2014 we launched a new giving society called the Leadership Circle for donors at the $1,000 annual level and above. To thank them for their generosity, special events and opportunities are planned for Leadership Circle members throughout the year and we will be tapping them for their ideas and feedback. If you are able and want to increase your involvement in the museum, please consider joining the Leadership Circle!

We know we have to earn your support, and are grateful for your gifts at any level, which truly have an impact. We consider each and every gift a “thank you” from the community, and evidence that there is excitement out there about what we are doing here. Please continue to give and give generously. We are just getting started!

Donations listed represent cumulative giving throughout FY 2014, including Annual Fund donations, major gifts, grants, sponsorships, donations in support of publications and collections, event support, gifts to the endowment, bequests, and memorials. Cumulative totals include both cash and in-kind gifts.

—Jeanne Conner, Director of Development

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Bennington Historical Society

The Bennington Historical Society’s mission is to research the history of Bennington and surrounding communities and share our insights with the public. We hope to foster a greater understanding of our common heritage.

Our members conduct oral history interviews, and collect and transcribe diaries, letters, and other documents that provide insights into life in and around Bennington. Recently, the society has produced a series of educational DVDs on topics related to local history, including baseball in Bennington and postcards from Bennington.

Bennington Historical Society meetings are normally held the third Sunday of each month from 2:00 to 4:00 pm in the Ada Paresky Education Center located on the second floor of the Bennington Museum. Each meeting explores a wonderfully interesting topic on the history of Bennington and the area. Watch for details!
Thank You!

Everything at the Bennington Museum is the result of your support. We thank our members, donors, and volunteers for providing the time, effort, and financial support that are vital to the existence of this very special institution. Gift amounts include both cash gifts and in-kind gifts made during our fiscal year July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014. Many thanks to all our donors for such generous support!

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The Development Office prepared this list and has taken great care to ensure that the entries are complete and accurate. We apologize for any inaccuracies, should they exist, and ask you to call our attention to any omissions or errors. If you have questions, or want to change your recognition, please contact Jeanne Conner, Director of Development at 802-447-1571.
Calendar

Programs and Events

Sunday, October 5
2:00 p.m.

**Gallery Talk – Where Folk Art and Modern Meet** – Have you seen the exhibit *Alice Neel/Erasmus Salisbury Field: Painting the People* yet? This “creative collision” features the stunning work of two masters of the portrait as art. Join Curator Jamie Franklin as he guides you through the exhibit and the intersection of folk art and modernism, adding a wonderful dimension to the viewing experience. Open to the public and free.

Friday, October 17
6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

**Annual Members’ Dinner** – Enjoy dinner at the museum with fellow Bennington Museum members and special guests. Join us for the presentation of the annual Woltersorff and Board of Trustees Chairperson Edie Sawitsky, and a curatorial presentation by Jamie Franklin.

Saturday, October 18
3:00 to 4:30 p.m.

**Meet the Artist** – Join us to welcome Willard Boepple and discuss his exhibition, *The Sense of Things: Sculpture by Willard Boepple*.

Saturday, October 25
3:00 to 4:30 p.m.

**Regional Artist Peggy Kannestine** opens her show *Nocturnes: Variations on a Theme* in the Regional Artists Gallery. Enjoy recent works reflecting colors and emotions evoked by sunset, dusk, and night.

Sunday, November 2
4:00 to 5:30 p.m.

**Piano Concert** – Works created by renowned pianist and composer Lionel Nowak (1911-1995) will be performed by Marc Peloquin in the Paresky Wing. Sponsored by the family of Lionel Nowak, this concert is free and open to the public.

Saturday, December 6
7:00 to 10:00 p.m.

**“Reflections” – Festival of Trees Annual Gala and Silent Auction** – The highlight of the Bennington holiday season. Join us for an evening of music and conversation, delectable savory and sweet foods, fine wine and signature drinks created for the occasion. Take part in the silent auction offering a variety of spectacular gifts – just in time for the holidays. $85/person; $70/person for reservations made and paid for before November 14.

Saturday, December 13
10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

**“Reflections” – Festival of Trees Family Day** – Admission to the museum is only $3 - for everyone! Children who bring a personal care product for the Wall of Thanks are admitted free. Children’s Shopping Boutique, crafts, photos with Santa and so much more. Great shopping for adults in the museum’s gift shop.

**Thursday**
1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

Ending
November 2

Alice Neel/Erastus Salisbury Field
Painting the People

Erastus Salisbury Field (1805–1900), Sarah Elizabeth Ball, ca. 1838 (detail)
Oil on canvas, 35 1/8 x 29 1/4 inches. Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts. Photograph by Petegorsky/Gipe

Looking Ahead …

August 31 through October 13
October 5
October 17
November 28 through December 30
December 6
December 13
March 28 through June 21, 2015

Jane Stickle Quilt
“Where Folk Art and Modern Meet” Gallery Talk with the Curator
Annual Members’ Dinner
“Reflections” – at the Festival of Trees
Festival of Trees Gala
Festival of Trees Family Day

Alcohol in Vermont:
Creation to Consumption,
Tolerance to Temperance

For additional event information, see page 11.