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A VOYAGE ON THE CAPE: CAPE COD MUSEUM OF ART AND MILLER WHITE FINE ARTS

by Sawyer Smook-Pollitt



Cape Cod Museum of Art: Henry Francis Walling, "Map of the Counties of Barnstable, Dukes & Nantucket, Massachusetts," Boston: D. R. Smith and Co., 1858. Photo by Sawyer Smook-Pollitt

The Cape Cod Museum of Art is on a voyage. That is how the museum's Director of Art, Benton Jones, described the post COVID-19 world for the 40-year-old institution.

The Cape Cod Museum of Art is hosting three exhibitions that explore the past, present and future of artistic expression in the Cape Cod area: "Vision 2021," "cARTography: Envisioning Cape Cod," and "Inspirations from the Dennis Conservation Land Trust" by the Printers of Cape Cod.

Each of these exhibits gives an entirely different experience.

“Inspirations” gathers 34 prints, selected by juror Sarah Holl, that draw inspiration from the natural beauty of the Dennis Conservation Land Trust. The pieces range from abstract works that represent the land through a feeling, to detailed landscapes.

Next, “cARTography,” curated and designed by Samuel Tager, tells the visual story of Cape Cod’s history using maps from the collection of David Garner.

These maps are not art in the traditional sense. They were not designed to be appreciated for their aesthetics. They are, first and foremost, utilitarian. However, despite their intended use, now in 2021, they tell a story of man’s relationship to land over time.

Some early maps represent Cape Cod as an incomplete jumble of land masses and islands, barely useful in a modern setting. Later maps chart towns and villages with illustrations showing where natural resources can be found. Later still are maps that divide the Cape into modern counties.

But European maps of the New World don’t tell the whole story. “cARTography” reminds visitors that European colonists were not the first to chart these lands. “Landscapes and People of the First Light, 11,000 Years Ago on Cape Cod,” by artist and cartographer Mark Adams, uses a small room in the rear of the gallery to superimpose modern landmasses over what the coast of North America looked like 11,000 years ago. Coupled with murals of Native American constellations, this room shows that land — and how we view it — is ever changing.

If “cARTography” finds beauty in representations of the past, then “Vision 2021” looks boldly ahead. Artists Josephine Burr, Niho Kozuru, Christine Kyle, Michelle Lougee, Lois Russell, Warren Seelig, Mo Kelman, Joyce Schutter and Erin Woodbrey explore their chosen mediums in unconventional ways. Each artist pushes boundaries in their own mediums.

Christine Kyle’s encaustic works layer wax over ceramic, giving her pieces a fleshy, lifelike quality. Erin Woodbrey’s “Fragment Series” hardens the soft and flexible forms of clothing by covering fabric in ceramic and firing the pieces in a kiln, burning out the cloth and leaving only a cast behind.

Meanwhile, a short drive down the road, the Miller White Fine Art Gallery, in South Dennis, presents a voyage of its own. Deborah Forman, multimedia artist and photographer, is showing “A New Reality,” a body of work that stems from her time self-isolating during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Although Forman may have been safe at home in Massachusetts, her photos tell a different story. Taken before the pandemic, while on trips across the world, Forman’s photos escape the constraints of quarantines and bring viewers to the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum in Boston, the Louis Vuitton building in Paris, and Casa Loma in Toronto.

“A New Reality,” is Forman’s first foray into digital art. It is playful yet precise with a strong emphasis on color and design. Forman’s photos offset the familiar in a way that makes viewers question what exactly they’re seeing.

(“Vision 2021” is on display until November 14. “cARTography: Envisioning Cape Cod” is on display until October 3, and “Printmakers of Cape Cod” is on display until December 12. The Cape Cod Museum of Art is open Wednesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and on Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. and is located at 60 Hope Lane, Dennis, Massachusetts. For more information call (508) 385-4477. “A New Reality” is on display until September 17 at Miller White Fine Arts, 708 Route 134, South Dennis, Massachusetts. Miller White Fine Arts is open by appointment, contact srdanton@gmail.com or call (508) 360-4302 to schedule a time to visit.)