

ARTS&CULTURE

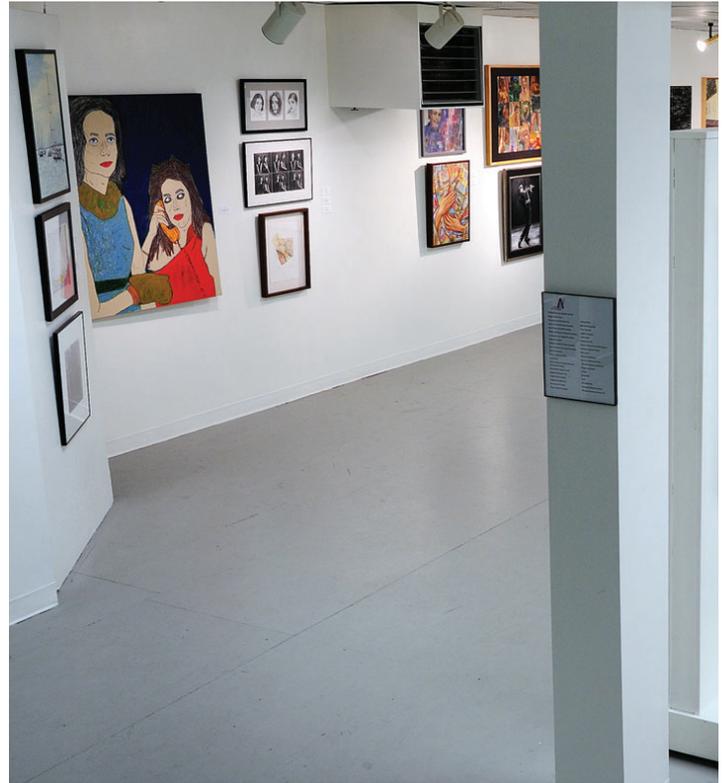
James Dye and his india ink drawing, "The Vault." Dye has been selected for the "Call and Response" exhibition in previous years. "Every time, it's amazing when you get picked," he said. "You always worry that it was a fluke before."

Partners *in* art

ArtsWorcester, Fitchburg Art Museum
collaboration a 'win, win, win' for communities



BY NANCY SHEEHAN
 PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICK CINCLAIR



There is a growing creative community that runs up and down I-190 between Fitchburg and

Worcester, fueled by a museum's respected collection, an active community arts organization and a Toyota mini-van.

A collaboration between ArtsWorcester and Fitchburg Art Museum benefits both groups and gives local artists a chance to include an all-important museum credit on their resumes.

"For two organizations to really collaborate and for it to be so mutually beneficial and so mutually enjoyable, it's just the best," Juliet Feibel, ArtsWorcester executive director said of "Call and Response," a program begun in 2012 that

has placed the best work of area artists in exhibitions at FAM.

The outlook is equally upbeat from the museum, which lends artwork from its collection to be displayed at ArtsWorcester to inspire artists in new directions.

"I just love that the Fitchburg Art Museum has another opportunity to show works in our collection," FAM director Nicholas Capasso said. "Artwork in museum collections does nobody any good if it's sitting in a dark closet. We like to actively show our collection as much as we possibly can."

The way "Call and Response" works is that each year a new theme is chosen, then FAM pulls 20 pieces from its collection that relate to the theme. The artwork is further winnowed down to 10 pieces that ArtsWorcester feels would be

most inspirational to its varied membership. (Anyone can join, \$55 a year.)

"We're looking for a range of mediums," Feibel said. "We're looking for a range of historical periods, different approaches that allow the artists to come into a big tent so that everyone can have something they can get traction with."

The FAM pieces are displayed at ArtsWorcester each fall as well as placed online after being professionally photographed by ArtsWorcester volunteer David Habercom. All of the organization's 600 member households are eligible to submit their take on the topic for a show at ArtsWorcester's Aurora Gallery in late fall. A juror from FAM then chooses 10 of the best works to be shown the following June in an exhibition that runs

through the summer, concurrently with FAM's annual Regional Exhibition of Art and Craft.

The collaboration shows the great trust that has developed between the two organizations. After the selection of works, Feibel goes to Fitchburg and the carefully bubble-wrapped pieces are loaded into the back of her minivan. Then she drives them back down I-190 to ArtsWorcester, where professional installer Tim Johnson hangs them for viewing.

"Once my engine light went on as I was coming down with a loan, which scared me," Feibel said. "It turned out fine. There was no problem but there is a certain sense of responsibility when I'm carrying 10 pieces from an esteemed museum's collection."



CLOCKWISE FROM FACING PAGE

- Carrie Crane with her piece, "Clustering Coefficient: Present-time in the Shifting Intertidal Zone," which incorporates scientific themes in an abstract presentation done with acrylic paint, polyester paper, glass and aluminum.
- The "Call and Response" exhibition, "Off The Grid," was on display at ArtsWorcester in December. Works from 10 of the artists will be on display at a Fitchburg Art Museum exhibition in June.
- Ceramic artist Jill Watts' work, "Dreaming of a House," was created in the Japanese tradition of raku.

This year's theme was "Off the Grid," an organizational technique anyone who took Art 101 in college is familiar with. The rigid geometry of a grid can be the foundation that lends symmetry and balance to a composition, which can be built upon it in ways more or less literal. The interpretation of the various "Call and Response" themes is completely up to the individual artist.

One-hundred and twenty-one ArtsWorcester members heeded the call last fall, producing an eclectic range of work from large abstract paintings to smaller sculptural pieces. Lisa Crossman, interim curator at FAM who served as juror for the show, said she was impressed by the quality of the submissions and the variety of interpretations on the theme.

"Some artists seemed to have responded directly to individual artworks from FAM's permanent collection such as Berenice Abbott's photograph 'New York at Night' or Marc Chagall's lithograph 'Jerusalem Window,'" she said. "Other artists' works represented unique engagements with the idea of the grid."

Noted artist and longtime ArtsWorcester member Carrie Crane was among the 10 artists whose work was selected for the June exhibition at FAM. Her piece, "Clustering Coefficient:

Present-time in the Shifting Intertidal Zone," incorporates scientific themes in an abstract presentation done with acrylic paint, polyester paper, glass and aluminum. Crane drew lines representing high tide marks along the coast of Maine as they are now and as they will be with global warming. The lines are annotated by complex patterns formed at the water's edge by clustered barnacle colonies, which are threatened under current climate-change predictions.

Crane said her inspiration was a study on loan from FAM of a galloping horse and buggy by pioneering English photographer Eadweard Muybridge. The several spoked round images in her piece connect with a recurring element in Muybridge's series of 24 photos, which are arranged in grid-like strips of six. "When I saw that, I went, 'Oh, I know what I can do with this,'" Crane said. "It was the grid and the individual images that make it up and the circles of the wagon wheels. They come out in my piece."

While a main goal of the "Call and Response" program is to give deserving artists their first museum credit, Crane already has several. So why does she still answer when the call goes out? "I do it because I think it's such a great idea," she said. "So





ABOVE: Fitchburg Art Museum director Nick Capasso has been impressed by the “Call and Response” program. “I just love that the Fitchburg Art Museum has another opportunity to show works in our collection. Artwork in museum collections does nobody any good if it’s sitting in a dark closet,” he said.

RIGHT: ArtsWorcester executive director Juliet Feibel came up with the concept for the “Call and Response” program with Jean Borgatti, curator of African art at Fitchburg Art Museum. PHOTO BY CHRISTINE HOCHKEPPEL



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much of my work is a response to some other image that I start with, so the idea of ‘Call and Response’ just fits right into my process in the first place.”

Multi-award winning artist James Dye also has shown in museum settings before, including “Call and Response” exhibitions at FAM in previous years. So what was the draw to submit his drawing this time? “Every time, it’s amazing when you get picked,” he said. “You always worry that it was a fluke before.”

Dye’s winning, highly intricate drawing includes gargoyle-like figures whose demonic demeanor is softened by a certain haplessness, as well as other plant and animal forms

that look almost familiar but have a not-quite-earthly twist. They sit in a gridwork of tiny boxes like scientific specimens captured on an expedition to a neighboring world.

“Just the idea of a grid, it seemed like such an odd concept to build a piece around at first, then I started thinking about it and was ‘Alright, that’s my restriction. Let’s see what I can do with it,’” Dye said. “It gave me more structure than maybe I usually put in things.”

Ceramic artist Jill Watts’ work, “Dreaming of a House,” also was selected to be shown at FAM this summer. The smallish hand-built structure, which was fired in the smoky, venerable Japanese tradition of raku,

was constructed of clay slabs with roofs and walls elongated, foreshortened, shrinking and stretching at crazy funhouse angles.

“I just was relating to the fact that whenever I dream of a house it’s not usually my house and if it is my house there are 27 extra rooms, the floors aren’t straight and the ceiling’s falling in. And somehow there are fish and animals and who knows what else in the house,” Watts said.

The exhibition at FAM will mark her first museum stint since she participated in a

student show many years ago at Worcester Art Museum. Watts attended the reception at ArtsWorcester last fall at which the winners were announced, but she wasn’t expecting to hear her name. She started to leave before the announcement and it fell to Feibel to try to retain her without letting any secrets out.

“Juliet kept saying ‘You have to stay’ and I’m saying ‘I’ve got

to go make pottery," Watts said. "She goes 'I have to ask you something later.' I was thinking, 'she's acting a little strange but OK, I'll stay.'"

Then the announcement was made.

"I was just so surprised," Watts said. "I was just floored and very excited because it's such a nice museum."

The concept for the "Call and Response" series came about when Feibel was introduced to African art expert Jean Borgatti at a local gallery opening about five years ago. "She's a curator of African Art at Fitchburg and we here at ArtsWorcester very much want to show a range of art and we came up with this idea on the spot," Feibel said. "Within an hour's conversation and a glass of wine we had this model."

FAM was between directors at the time but when the first "Call and Response" show was ready to open at ArtsWorcester in the fall of 2012, Capasso, a longtime curator at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, had just been hired for the FAM directorship.

"Actually, my third day at work as the director I went to the opening of that show at ArtsWorcester," he said. "Jean had described to me what it was and what was going on but I was a little overwhelmed by the response. I had no idea that a hundred artists were going to be responding to this."

Ensuing shows have only enhanced that first impression. "It's been highly successful and a great collaboration and we're going to continue it," Capasso said.

Feibel describes the joint venture as a "win, win, win" — for FAM, ArtsWorcester and local artists.

"Fitchburg's collection gets exposure in parts farther south to a larger metropolitan audience," she said. "We in turn are bringing artists up there. We have created an arts community that runs along the axis of 190. Go to an opening at Fitchburg Art Museum and you see all these people from the Worcester arts scene up there because that's now part of our orbit. By the same token, you come here and we have so many more Fitchburg area artists that come down now because we've created a real ongoing exchange."

The FAM phase of "Off the Grid" will open with the museum's 82nd Regional Exhibition of Art and Craft on June 23 and will run through Aug. 13. A theme for the sixth edition of "Call and Response" will be chosen in June. 

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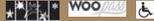
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