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Gallery Profile: Hall Art Foundation

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"The volcano series" by Olafur Eliasson

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From 2011 to 2012, the **Hall Art Foundation** (HAF) transformed four circa-1800 farm buildings in Reading, Vt., into 6,000 square feet of exhibition space for contemporary art. Many barns around New England have been repurposed, a few of them for similar functions. But to say this space is like other restored barns would be incorrect; it is unlike any.

Perfectly manicured grounds highlight three pristine, color-coordinated barns and a farmhouse. The cow barn with its magnificent silo presides over the farm buildings, as it has for two centuries, and the stone farmhouse — featuring the sneaked ashlar stone-laying technique, an architectural rarity elsewhere in the U.S. — still commands attention. Works of art require consistent humidity and temperature, so all the buildings have been retrofitted for climate control, and security cameras lurk overhead.

Even if you know what to expect inside, the Hall Art Foundation's collection is surprising, notable and sometimes challenging.

HAF exhibits postwar and contemporary art from its own collection and that of founders Andrew and Christine Hall "for the enjoyment and education of the public," according to the foundation's website. In addition to operating this space, HAF has an exhibition partnership with the **Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art** (Mass MoCA) in North Adams, Mass., to present a long-term (seasonal) installation of the art of Anselm Kiefer. The foundation has also partnered with the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England, to present contemporary and postwar art, and has an active loan program.

Together the HAF and Hall collections comprise some 5,000 pieces by several hundred artists, including Richard Artschwager, Georg Baselitz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joseph Beuys, Judy Chicago, Eric Fischl, Kiefer, Malcolm Morley, A.R. Penck, Ed Ruscha, Nancy Spero and Andy Warhol, among others. The collection is large not only in number; the scale of some works is monumental.

For example, in the current installation, Baselitz's neo-expressionist paintings measure, on average, 100 by 100 inches.

Baselitz is considered one of Germany's most celebrated living artists, and HAF offers a rare opportunity to see works he created in the past decade, including many of his "inverted paintings" where the figures are literally upside down. Twelve "inverted" paintings, along with a wood-and-oil-paint sculpture called "Dunklung Nachtung Amung Ding" (121.5 by 47 by 49 inches), require significant space, both vertical and horizontal. For this exhibition, that space is a former cow barn with post-and-beam architecture and high ceilings. It's hard to envision an environment better suited to exhibiting Baselitz's work.



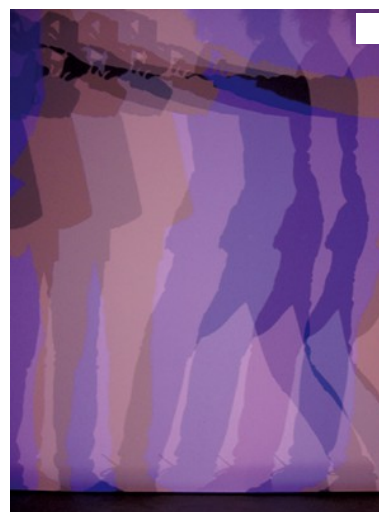
Barn at HAF

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Neil Jenney's work is on view in the farmhouse. Just beyond the entryway, his paintings, with their lively primary colors, seem poised to leap from the walls. Jenney came to prominence in the mid-1970s. At the time, his deliberately broad brushstrokes and brown, green, yellow and blue palette prompted curator Marcia Tucker to dub his work "Bad Painting." Jenney's provocative, intentionally primitive-looking paintings were his reaction to the rising prominence of conceptualism and photorealism in the art world. Forty years later, his work, which is credited with helping to reestablish figurative painting, still evokes a strong reaction and inspires questions about the nature of art.

This season, HAF introduced Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson with a selection of his wide-ranging sculptures, photo series, optical devices and works on paper, along with "Waterfall," an outdoor installation.

Like Jenney with his "bad paintings," and Baselitz, whose work literally turns a convention of painting on its head, Eliasson defies a rule — namely, the idea of artworks as autonomous objects. His disparate works provide opportunities to muse over their meanings even as they physically engage the viewer in an environment of color, movement and light. For example, "Your uncertain shadow (growing)," an interactive work from 2010 employing colored halogen lamps, is playful and fascinating, and its simple construction reveals how it works while retaining its magic.

"Your uncertain shadow (growing)"
by Olafur EliassonIMAGES
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Docent-historian Susan Piccoli began a recent group tour outdoors with a close-up look at Eliasson's 7-by-6-by-10-meter "Waterfall" (from 2004), which is made of scaffolding, wood, foil, aluminum, a pump, hose and water. Viewers' perspectives on the work change, literally and figuratively, depending on their proximity to it. From a 10-meter metal scaffolding, water appears to cascade down a series of aluminum "shelves," just as water breaks over rocks in nature's waterfall. Up closer, as their depth perception changes, viewers find their perception of the waterfall as "real" is also altered. "Waterfall" is a marvel of an idea connected to the natural world and configured by technology with a bit of Eliasson's trademark wizardry.

Two other buildings, the horse barn and the pole barn (the latter was originally used to store farm equipment), currently exhibit Eliasson's work in other media, including chromogenic photographic prints. "The volcano series" (2012), with 63 C-prints, and the "Spring puddle series" (2004), with 12 C-prints, suggest openings into other worlds. "Concentric mirror" (2004) is like a trip to the hypnotist; the concentric circles on its surface are mesmerizing. Many of Eliasson's works seem like elaborate inventions; all of them are inventive.

HAF closes for the season at the end of November and, according to director Maryse Brand, will open "with an entirely new group of exhibitions in early May 2015." (One exception: "Waterfall" will remain onsite and rise again in the spring.) Consider that a directive to get there this fall while the current work is on view.

Hall Art Foundation, 551 Route 106, Reading. Open to the public through November 30 on Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays by appointment. "Waterfall" only on view through November 2. All visits are docent-led. Free.
hallartfoundation.org