

MODERN, MEMORABLE AND MOVING:

ART AT HALL

BY ANITA RAFAEL

Works by artists Levine, Kruger and printmakers Sidhu and Swainston fill Hall Art Foundation's galleries.



COURTESY HALL ART FOUNDATION

Hall Art Foundation in Reading, Vermont

NOW through December 2024, the artworks of two visionary women are contrasted in remarkable and intriguing exhibitions at the evermore popular modern art galleries at Hall Art Foundation in the village of Felchville. A third exhibition now on display also at Hall, titled *Doomscrolling*, is the creation of two New York City artists whose woodblock prints seize the most newsworthy moments from 2020 and after.

Felchville, the charming “downtown” of the town of Reading, is a quick 10-minute ride west of the Windsor exit off I-91, or, coming from the base of Okemo Mountain, it is 20-minutes northeast along scenic country roads. Named for the Felch families who were settlers with Welch roots, Felchville remains rural. But is not isolated. Hall Art Foundation's buildings neighbor a respectable town hall and post office building, an excellent farm-style country store, a fine public library, the historical society's museum, and the homes of many year-round residents.



Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Love is something you fall into)*, 1990, photographic silkscreen on vinyl, 64" x 156"

“TAKE YOUR TIME. ENJOY LOOKING AT SOME ARTWORKS IN THE GALLERIES, THEN POP OUTSIDE AND WALK THROUGH THE GROUNDS TO TAKE IN THE SCENERY AND OUTDOOR SCULPTURES.

Paintings, drawings, prints, and sculptures by Sherrie Levine are being displayed in the 19th-century stone farmhouse, while the bold, graphic works of Barbara Kruger are on exhibit in the historic cow barn of the former Lexington dairy farm. The exhibition *Doomscrolling* is in the former horse barn. Fifteen years ago these spaces, as well as a nearby dwelling, were utterly transformed floor to ceiling into modern art galleries when visitors and Vermonters alike were first introduced to the fabulous collection of contemporary art belonging to Andrew and Christine Hall. On the outside all of it quite intentionally looks a lot like an old Vermont farm, but on the inside, the trademark of the Hall exhibitions is that the art is high energy, highly exciting. This summer’s shows are no exception.

SHERRIE LEVINE (b. 1947; Hazelton, Pennsylvania) lives in New York City. She had her first solo show in a storefront gallery in SoHo in 1977, and from then on it became somewhat clearer to many viewers where she was headed in her career: the installation was titled *Shoe Sale* and was a display of 75 identical pairs of shoes that she had bought at a San Jose thrift shop.

Described in the art world as “an appropriator,” Levine openly takes everything and anything within her reach and embraces it as her own, whether found, ready-made, or pre-made. It could be a photograph of a photograph, a photograph of a painting, posters, bookplates, or comic books, bits of burl wood, a plumbing fixture (think Duchamp), or, yes, thrift shop shoes. The installation of Levine’s work at Hall consists of about 25 works from many of her most acclaimed series.



Sherrie Levine, *Lead Knot: 2*, 1987, metallic paint on plywood in artist’s frame, 52" x 42"

BARBARA KRUGER (b. 1945; Newark, New Jersey) lives in New York City and Los Angeles. A few years ago, she was included in *Time* magazine's annual list of the "100 Most Influential People." The commentary about her work and presence was written by Professor Hal Foster of Princeton University; he wrote: "For more than four decades Barbara Kruger has produced the most trenchant examples of feminist art, superimposing witty texts on purloined images, hoisting the everyday assumptions of patriarchy and plutocracy on their own petards. She has done this seriously playful work at every scale, from matchbook covers to giant billboards, and across many types of media..." (A petard is a firecracker-like explosive.)

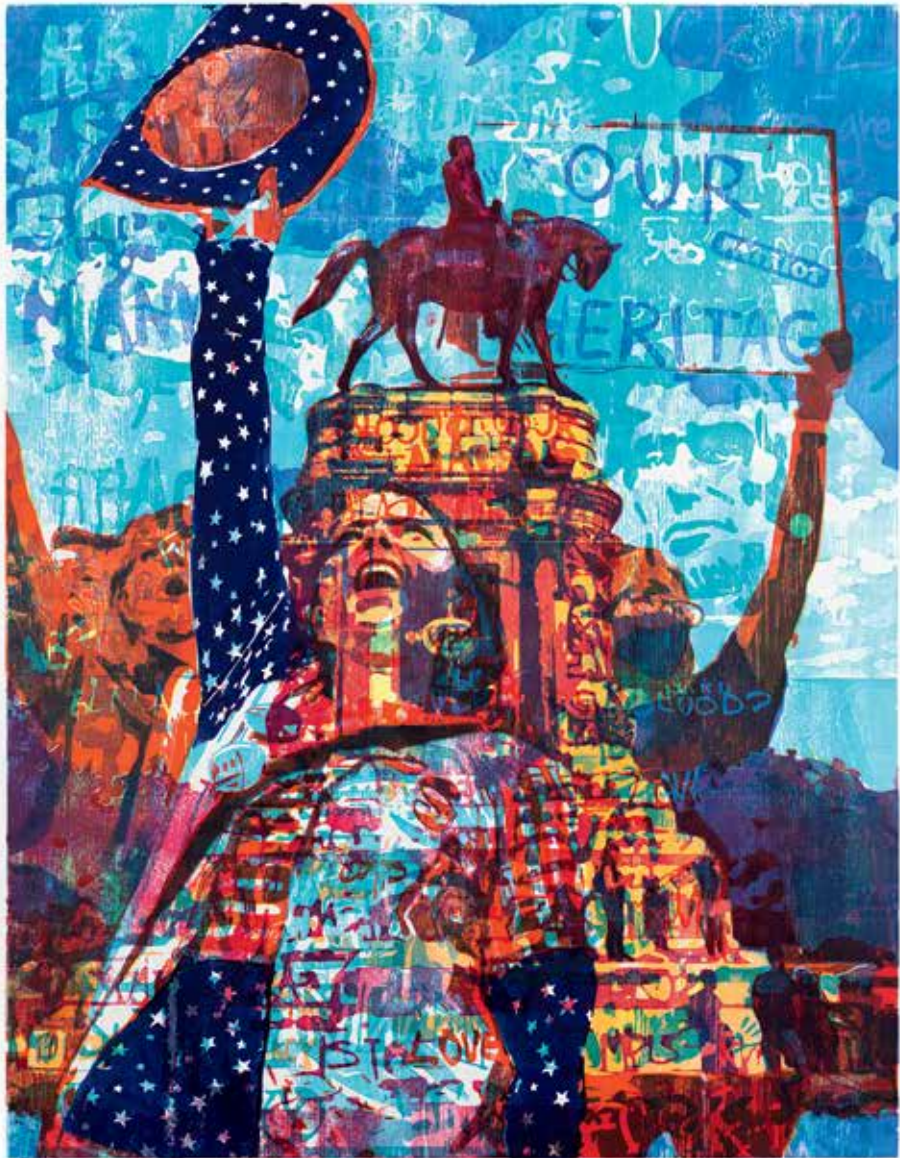
That is more or less the usual art speak that is so common in the art world, but Kruger's work is this: part graphics, part collage, part vocabulary, part repurposed photography, part multi-media, part consumer-ish elements. In other words, she combines bits of our contemporary culture into artworks that are solidly familiar, and at the same time, quite gripping. The installation at Hall Art Foundation includes more than a dozen of Kruger's works, which seen together, create a powerful impact on viewers.

The exhibition titled *Doomscrolling* in the horse barn gallery at Hall is called that because, like many of us, it is what the two artists, **ZORAWAR SIDHU**,

(b. 1985; Ludhiana, India and now living in New York City) and **ROB SWAINSTON**, (b. 1970; Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, and now living in Brooklyn, New York) were doing for much of 2020 and the months afterward. With scenes straight out of all our news feeds, Instagram, Twitter,

and Facebook posts, print media, and photographs they took, Sidhu and Swainston chose images that were colliding with the course of history and rattling our social expectations.

Whether *Doomscrolling* is an exhibition to always remember something important or to never



Zorawar Sidhu and Rob Swainston, *July 4, 2020-2021*, multi-color woodblock print on paper; 57½" x 45¼"

PAUSE FOR LUNCH AT OUR CAFÉ AND RELAX ON THE BANKS OF THE STREAM NEAR THE TABLES.

THEN HEAD BACK INTO THE GALLERIES TO SEE MORE OF OUR EXHIBITIONS.” MARYSE BRAND, DIRECTOR



JEFFREY NITZEL

Installation view of Jeppe Hein’s *Modified Social Bench #35* (2012) at Hall Art Foundation in Reading, Vermont

forget something toxic or to solemnly commemorate having survived it all is hard to say. Sidhu’s and Swainston’s work is about what we all saw all at the same time: Black Lives Matter protests, the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. capitol building in Washington, DC, and the months of peak pandemic. It is all there.

Using the technique of woodblock printing (carving into the gnawed, graffitied, and pock-marked plywood panels discarded after the BLM protests in New York City), Sidhu’s and Swainston’s exhibition consists of 18 prints. Layering the printing in color on color on color, the compositions are dizzying with emotion, even panic, in the same way that our addictive scrolling on our devices makes our hearts pound and our heads spin.

As Hall’s curators interpret the

exhibition: “The oldest printmaking technique and means of mass communication, woodblock prints have a historical legacy of being used to champion the voice of the people, fueling anti-authoritarian movements of social change for centuries.”

With renovations made since 2020, Hall Art Foundation’s site includes a bright reception area adjacent to a wonderful café. Director Maryse Brand invites visitors to “make a day of it” in Reading. She says, “Take your time. Enjoy looking at some artworks in the galleries, then pop outside and walk through the grounds to take in the scenery and outdoor sculptures. Pause for lunch at our café and relax on the banks of the stream near the tables. Then head back into the galleries to see more of our exhibitions.”

It is a benefit that gallery visits are self-guided so that visitors can take their time and go at their own pace; allow about 1½ hours to see all the galleries. By advance reservation, visitors may schedule a docent-led group tour or private gallery tours. The site is open Saturdays and Sundays, and entry times are on the hour from 11 am to 3 pm (to avoid crowding). All the galleries close at 4 pm. Admission is \$15 for adults and under 12, \$5. Tickets and tours are easily booked online.

Anita Rafael is a writer living and working in an 1840s carriage barn in Wardsboro, Vermont. Her new book For the Love of Vermont: The Lyman Orton Collection came out in 2023.

HALL ART FOUNDATION

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