



Elizabeth Hare of Boulder, Colo., browses her way through the “Cow Barn” gallery at the Hall Art Foundation in Reading. The Hall is open to the public each Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. through November 28. Rick Russell Photo

Hall Art Foundation rebounding nicely from COVID shut down

Now offering popular self-guided tour option

By Tom Ayres
Senior Staff Writer

READING — The internationally acclaimed Hall Art Foundation in Reading is nearing the midway point of its ambitious 2021 exhibition season, rebounding with aplomb from a pandemic affected year that saw its galleries shuttered and programming canceled for all of 2020.

“It has just been wonderful to have visitors coming through the galleries again, interacting with the art, and to have art on the walls again. It has been absolutely great to renew that connection,” said Maryse Brand, Director of the Hall Art Foundation, in a phone conversation last Friday.

The Hall Art Foundation mounts its exhibitions of post-World War II and contemporary art in three spectacularly reimagined barns and a converted historic farmhouse on a former



“Deep Blue,” currently the principal exhibition at the Hall Art Foundation in Reading, was curated by Brooklyn- and Maine-based artist Katherine Bradford, whose own solo show, “Philosopher’s Clambake,” is running concurrently with “Deep Blue” at the Hall. Jeffrey Nintzel Photo

dairy farm in the heart of the Reading village of Felchville. A contemporary sculpture walk also wends its way through the former farm site. Returning and new visitors alike will find that the Hall campus has been expanded with a new reception center, additional exhibit space, and café, all housed in a 19th-century, clapboard-style home.

The principal group show now on exhibit at the Hall

— titled “Deep Blue” and curated by Brooklyn and Maine-based artist Katherine Bradford — takes its inspiration, in many respects, from the trials and tribulations of the past year-and-a-half, ranging from the pandemic to the tumultuous U.S. Presidential campaign, with all of its folly, fanaticism, faith, and fear mongering.

The show is a meditation on ‘blue’ in all of its contexts,” said Docent Supervisor Lisa Kaija as she led a visitor through the Bradford-curated exhibition of “deep blue” works drawn from the 5,000-plus-piece collection of the foundation and its founders, philanthropists Andrew and Christine Hall. “It took shape in the wake of November 2020 and the election,” Kaija added. The “blue” theme, Kaija’s colleague on the Hall docent staff, Marie Anderson, pointed out, even extends to the music that is playing in the reception center and café when visitors alight there. In

a playful take on the fabled mixtape of the 1980’s, the musical selections airing in the visitors’ center - all chosen by curator Bradford - range from Miles Davis’s “Kind of Blue” to Joni Mitchell’s “Blue” album to classics from the American jazz, blues, and singer-songwriter canons.

In a press release announcing the opening of the “Deep Blue” group show last spring, the Hall Foundation expounded upon the many themes touched upon by the exhibit. “Katherine Bradford examines ‘deep blue’ both visually as a color, but also as a phrase that can describe more abstract concepts such as mood, the

natural environment, music, and even a region’s political landscape. Like all of us, Katherine Bradford has been

ence,” Brand noted. For her part, Bradford has written that she “heard a newscaster use the phrase ‘deep blue’ in describing an area of the United States and, being a painter, I immediately felt the force of that phrase, both visually and politically. It was very reassuring to hear and to picture.”

More than 70 renowned postwar and contemporary artists are featured in “Deep Blue,” including Judy Chicago, Leon Golub, David Maisel, Alice Neel, Raymond Pettibon, and Andy Warhol. The group show curated by Bradford is complemented by a showing of Bradford’s own paintings in one of the three barn exhibit spaces. Titled “Philosophers’ Clambake,” the solo showing by Bradford includes more than a dozen works created by the 78-year-old painter over the course of the past 12 years, most of which were drawn from the Halls’ sizable holdings of the artist’s work, with the remainder selected from her personal trove by the artist herself.

The challenging of curating and installing two new, principal shows



“Memory Bank,” a carved, polychromed sugar maple sculpture, will go on exhibit Saturday, Aug. 28, at the Hall Art Foundation in Reading as part of a solo show by Vermont sculptor Clark Derbes from Charlotte. Photo Courtesy of the Hall Art Foundation

IF YOU GO

Open now through
Thanksgiving weekend

544 VT Route 106 in Reading
Museum hours are 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
each Saturday and Sunday

Admission is \$10 and the predominant
tour model is self-guided

Patrons interested in a docent-guided
tour of the Hall site should book
that option online in advance. Hour-
long, docent-led tours will resume
on Saturday, Aug. 7, at 10 a.m. and
continue each Saturday and Sunday at
that time through the season’s end.

For tickets, guided tour details,
and more information, visit
hallartfoundation.org

impacted by the events of the past year and her choice of works and their interpretation reflects that experi-

Classicopia chamber music returns to live concerts

Classicopia, the Upper Valley's award-winning chamber music organization, finally returns to live concerts with "Broadway Violin" on the weekend of Aug. 13-15. Violinist Timothy Schwarz and pianist/Artistic Director Daniel Weiser will perform exciting arrangements of some of your favorite Broadway songs from the 1920s to the 1980s, including works by Gershwin, Rodgers, Bernstein, Sondheim, Webber, and many more. Weiser and Schwarz started their professional collaboration as the Upper Valley Duo and served under that name as the 1996 U.S. Artistic Ambassadors with an epic tour to eleven countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, including Syria, Pakistan, Egypt, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

There will be three venues to see the show:

1) On Friday, Aug. 13 at 7:30 p.m., they perform a special House Concert at the Hanover home of Al and Marilyn Austin-Nelson. Seating is limited and reservations required. \$35 per person, includes great food and drink as well.

2) On Saturday, Aug. 14 at 7 p.m., they play at the Fairlee Town Hall in a program sponsored by Fairlee Community Arts along with a gift from Anne and Bruce Taylor. It is the first annual "Bev Hodge Memorial Concert" honoring the amazing woman who helped run Farmer Hodge's Dairy Farm for so many years before she passed away earlier this year. Seats are \$20 for adults and free for children under 18.

3) On Sunday, Aug. 15 at 1 p.m., the concert is at First Congregational Church of Lebanon with its wonderful acoustics and great Steinway grand piano. Seats are \$20 for general or \$15 for Church members. Free for children 18 and under. Discounts available if you pre-buy seats online.

For more information on the concert and to buy seats for any of the shows, please visit: classicopia.org/concert/broadway-violin/



The Hall Art Foundation, located on Route 106 in Reading, is open now through Thanksgiving weekend on Saturday and Sunday. Photo Provided

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at the Hall during a time of significant pandemic-related restrictions were considerable, Brand noted. "Much of the work was done virtually," Brand explained. "Because of the timing of when the exhibitions were being planned and trying to keep everybody safe, that was the way we had to do it. It was all virtually, by phone, or via email. There were some digital models of the exhibit spaces that were passed back and forth, and then we did the installation using FaceTime and video walk-throughs. It was the first time we've installed a show that way. It was a very different way of doing things. But I think it worked out well."

The COVID-induced changes in the Hall's curatorial and installation processes aren't the only ones in effect during the art foundation's 2021 exhibition season. The galleries and grounds, which prior to this year were only open for docent-led tours on a scheduled basis each Saturday and Sunday, are now principally open for self-guided tours. Brand, in fact, expects that the self-guided tour option will lead to greater numbers



Anabel Wold, Kyle Butler and Luke Gilson, all of Brooklyn, N.Y., look at untitled works by Anish Kapoor, left and Oliver Mosset, right. Rick Russell Photo

of people finding their way to the Hall's gem of an art museum in the small, rural Vermont community of Reading.

"In the past, we have had about 2,000 visitors per year. But that was with our previous visitor model, which was the docent-led tours, which people had to book," Brand offered. "What we have found this year, now that we have implemented a self-guided model, is that we are getting a lot more visitors. I wouldn't be surprised if we end up with higher attendance this year because of the self-guided format being perhaps a bit more popular."

The self-guided option is greatly enhanced by the Hall's creative use of digi-

tal technologies within the exhibit spaces. Hold your cell phone up to a small, unobtrusive QR code near a painting or group of works and you can access an audio recording or video in which curator Bradford discusses the aesthetics of those works and why she chose them for the "Deep Blue" or "Philosophers' Clambake" shows. Cell phone users can also take advantage of their hand-held devices to call up descriptions of individual works on exhibit, as well as curatorial, biographical, and other information about the artists themselves. Printed information is also available in binders in each exhibit space. Therein rests one of the things this visitor found most interesting and, indeed, enticing about the Hall's curatorial approach: there are no labels, curators' or artists' statements mounted next to or under each work on exhibit.

None. "We find that wall text can be visually distracting. People spend more time reading the wall labels than they do looking at the paintings," Brand commented. "The idea behind the QR codes and the additional printed information that is available in the galleries is to still provide didactic, background information about the art works that are on view, while seeing to it that

it doesn't come at you at the same moment as the actual art works do." The approach, Brand agreed, also enables visitors on self-guided tours to access the art and interpret it for themselves, choosing to have their observations of the works mediated by someone else only if they wish.

While the Hall Art Foundation has flipped to a self-guided tour model this season - and for future seasons to come - Brand said that docent-led "highlight" tours are still preferred by some patrons. To that end, the museum is bringing back the guided tours, by reservation only, at 10 a.m. each Saturday and Sunday beginning this Saturday, Aug. 7. "There are those patrons who prefer going on a tour with one of our docents, who are educators, super smart and knowledgeable about the exhibits," Brand averred.

There is one more exhibition space to be savored at the Hall this season. Enconced in a small gallery within the Hall reception center is a show that continues a commitment to showcasing Vermont visual artists that the Hall instituted in 2018 with a "Made in Vermont" group show. Instead of a showing of multiple Vermont artists this year, the Hall is focusing on solo shows by two artists. Now through Sunday, Aug. 22, the Hall is showcasing works by West Burke-based artist Terry Ekasala, who is known for creating expressive abstract paintings and works on paper. Ekasala's solo outing will be followed by an exhibition by artist Clark Derbes from Charlotte, who is known for creating dimensional and illusionistic sculptures carved from blocks of wood. The Derbes show will open at the Hall on Aug. 28.

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