**On the Seen**

Seven Vermont art shows we loved in 2018

By NELS BIXLER, RAYCHEL, ELIZABETH JONES, AMY LILY & RACHEL POLSTON

Vermont cartoonist laureate Alzheimock is a versatile queer iron, a reputation she confirmed with her song-ramin strip "Diyors to Watch Our Feet". She followed that up with her widely reviewed graphic memoir "Run Home: A Family Tragedy," which was later adapted into a Tony Award-winning Broadway musical. Blechel, also a MacArthur Fellow, has done her adopted home state proud. This retrospective at the University of Vermont functioned as a sort of Blechel Excalibur. It supplied news and hue-plucked fans alike with ample context for a range of archival materials, including early drawings and ephemera. The original 1988 comic that spawned the Blechel Test Cheek. A Blechel-designed 1995 Pride parade shirt. A larger-than-life self-portrait of present-day Blechel showing her cat's litter box. Of course.

"THE FABRIC OF EMANCIPATION"

Rockefeller Museum, Burlington, January 20 to May 30, rockefellermuseum.org

A patchwork of fiber-based arts, the show spanned quilts to applique to fashion design. Apply for the Rockeby mission, it uncovered techniques and successive language of the African diaspora experience in the U.S. Both pre- and post-Emancipation Proclamation.

Among the eight participating was Shadrick McCollum, a self-proclaimed "sher panther" who also appeared in the recent national touring exhibition "We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85". At a time of new energy and revaluation of history, the show offered an important marriage of historically marginalized voices with a traditionally marginalized medium, while still balancing both.

"THE SHOW WAS A PERFECTLY ANXIOUS REFLECTION OF MODERN ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSITIONS"

"IN THE GARDEN"

Pizzagalli Center for Arts and Education, Stonyburne Museum, March 17 to August 26, stonyburnemuseum.org

This exhibition provided a welcome blurt of botanical beauty, particularly as it launched during Vermont's longed-for summer. And the nonsensical title did little to prepare viewers for the thoughtful provoking complexities in this selection of works that spanned five centuries.

To be expected were 19th-century folk-art paintings and floral-embraced greens. Less so was the enchanting addition of Richard Sage's whimsically invented contemporary textile work "Four Seasons in the Garden of Tolerance," in which humans and fantastical creatures peacefully coexist. The generous sampling of metalwork by prodigious American craftsperson Marie Zimmerman's (1879-1972) was a revelation. As installation claiming the entire back wall, "Marie Zimmerman's" set kaleidoscopic patterns of leaf insects against vivid yellow paint. A metal sculpture gracefully honored a young trans woman murdered in California.

If prominent portraits, "The Garden" planted ideas about tolerance, acceptance and purpose in the natural world.

"HYPER FLORA, JOANNE CARSON"

HighTimberland, Bennington, July 5 to August 17, hightimberlandart.com

If Hallmark greeting cards are any indication, humans enjoy thinking of flowers as perfect and pure offerings from nature, signaling love, beauty and sometimes ephemeralism. This vibrant exhibition at Art Macks's consistently excellent gallery space, however, took another tack. Carson, a painter and sculptor based in Shoreham and Brooklyn, presents the plant world as anthropomorphized, in your face and tending with aggressive energy.

Hybridity and interactivity are of key interest to Carson, who often gives her botanical subjects legs and renders them in a style grounded in the traditions of both cochfistic and haldoscopic bathing culture. Mutants in form and function, her flowers and floral scenes are right at home amid the present-day realities of genetic engineering and climate change. The show was a perfectly anxious reflection of modern environmental transitions.