

BUFFALO

"BEYOND/IN WESTERN NEW YORK: ALTERNATING CURRENTS" MULTIPLE VENUES

Is it possible to stage a regional art show engaging enough to attract outsiders? Buffalo has been wrangling with that challenge since 1934. Held for decades at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, the annual regional show was transformed into a biennial in the '60s. In 2005, the last time the exhibition was mounted, it was made a quinquennial and redubbed "Beyond/In Western New York"; it included central New York, southern Ontario, and parts of Ohio and Pennsylvania. The latest, quite excellent iteration retains this geographical compass, with a small group of curators (led by project director John Massier of the Buffalo nonprofit Hallwalls) visiting studios and selecting 100 artists for 25 venues and public spaces.

New is the invitation of 10 or so international figures. Among these, Mark Dion and Dana Sherwood were the most alert to locale, installing a vitrine on the lawn of the Historical Society filled with merrily decorated cakes shaped as landmark local buildings—Buffalo's crown jewels. It hurts to watch the surrogates literally crumble, as cakes are wont to do. Visitors weary of the same-old, same-old biennialism will discover, however, that it is the regional artists who shine, along with the venues—some of them really lovely old industrial and civic spaces. Don't miss, for example, the Art Deco gem City Hall, where McCallum and Tarry have created an installation in the two-story observation deck. There you get the bonus of a spectacular view of the downtown waterfront. The Brooklyn-based husband-and-wife team garnered attention in 2008 at Prospect.1 New Orleans for their grisaille paintings of heroes of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in which the image on canvas, taken from news sources, is doubled in a screenprinted scrim placed directly over it, producing a lenticular effect. The Montgomery paintings reappear here, along with a new series depicting Buffalo activists from the '60s and '70s—a subject close to the heart of Jacqueline Tarry, who grew up in East Buffalo during that era.

The Albright-Knox presents 19 artists, the largest number of any venue. Buffalo-based Joan

Linder meticulously renders a life-size colored-ink drawing of a University of Buffalo anatomy-lab office; across the gallery are more full-scale drawings of human specimens in various stages of dissection. Ohioan Randall Tiedman contributes a group of vast industrial landscape paintings on paper, magnificently gloomy, pierced intermittently by cold light: dark fantasies from our ruined heartland. Across Elmwood Avenue, at the Burchfield Penney Art Center, a masterful, oddly suspenseful multichannel wall projection by Carl Lee (one of 10 participants here) shows, simultaneously, three different views of a local home as it is dismantled by a giant backhoe (*Last House*, 2010). In an adjacent gallery is a wall-size grid of well-wrought photos—of dispiriting domestic interiors and of houses on fire—by Jean-Michel Reed, who might well be the Weegee of arson. To offset all this urban pessimism, there is a high-spirited, at times very funny multimedia installation nearby by Julian Montague: faux '50s design books, diagrams, photographs and giant banners having to do with spiders and architecture. All three artists live in Buffalo.

Within a darkened makeshift space constructed inside the downtown ex-church that accommodates Hallwalls, Canada's Christian Giroux & Daniel Young contribute a 35mm film projection, *50 Light Fixtures* (2009). A small, empty room flashes light and dark in this beautiful, spare film—which adduces both Minimalism and Home Depot—with the white walls shaded various pastels each time by a different ceiling-hung light. Go to Buffalo Arts Studio to see a humming half-telephone pole covered with pseudo wasps' nests by the Canadian collective TH&B, and a sublime video by Phil Hastings, of Fredonia, N.Y.,



Above, Phil Hastings: *Steadfast*, 2009, video, 7 minutes; at Buffalo Arts Studio.

Left, Joan Linder: *Where Death Delights to Help the Living*, 2010, ink on paper, approx. 10 by 15 feet; at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery.



CURRENTLY ON VIEW
"Beyond/In Western New York," through Jan. 16, 2011.

in which a stormy Lake Erie breaks repeatedly at eye level (this one has made it into my dreams); to Big Orbit Gallery, where a blank cardboard city—a pastiche of several locales amid clouds of dry-ice vapor—is one of three complex pieces by Toronto-based John Dickson; and to the Hi-Temp Fabrication building for three evocative installations, by Buffalo artists Bill Sack, JT Rinker and Michael Bosworth, all involving disused technology. Every venue has at least one work worth spending time with; for a complete list, go to beyondinwny.org.

—Faye Hirsch