

IN THE GALLERIES

Newport art scene is already in full bloom

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Maybe it's the weirdly warm weather. Maybe it's just the way the planets are aligned. Whatever the reason, the Newport art scene seems to be emerging from its midwinter siesta a few weeks earlier than usual.

The Newport Art Museum, for example, is literally brimming with exhibits, including a larger-than-usual version of its annual members' exhibition. Other highlights include a pair of top-notch solo shows — one devoted to the dreamy, Surrealist-tinged paintings of Andrew Nixon, the other to the gritty industrial-strength works of sculptor Jerrold Ehrlich.

Meanwhile, two other Newport-area art venues — the Dorrance H. Hamilton Gallery at Salve Regina University and the Hunter Gallery at St. George's School — are doing some interesting things this month. At Salve, Providence artist Elizabeth Duffy has transformed the Hamilton Gallery, turning it from a typical white-walled gallery space into a kind of faux-Victorian parlor, complete with vintage furnishings and wallpaper.

At St. George's, painter Brian Shure is showing more of his crowd-filled streetscapes and urban scenes. But fans of Shure's previous work will find something new in this exhibit of mostly small-scale paintings and drawings: a sense of edginess and confrontation, as though Shure, a longtime RISD professor, were responding to the various anti-Wall Street "Occupy" movements that have sprung up in recent years.

Newport Art Museum members' exhibition

Packed with more than 200 artworks, the Newport Art

Museum's members' exhibition is the closest thing we have to a statewide showcase for local artists. And this year, it's even bigger than usual.

The reason: in contrast to previous years, when the best-in-show winners in each category were decided by a single juror, museum officials invited three separate juries to pick three separate groups of award winners. The move, which museum officials said was part of the museum's 100th anniversary celebrations — and which significantly increased an artist's chances of winning at least an honorable mention — prompted many more artists than usual to submit artworks.

For viewers, this the-more-the-merrier approach has several consequences — some good, some not so good.

On the plus side, there's literally something for everyone. Whether your tastes run to traditional portraits and landscapes or less conventional fare involving, say, a stroller filled with naked Barbie dolls (Linda Lee Butler's "Generation Gap") or a map of Rhode Island made with broken shower tiles (Jessica Regelson's "Map of Rhode Island"), you should have no trouble finding something that catches your fancy. The floor-to-ceiling installation in the Cushing Galleries is also fun — a visual adrenaline rush that can leave you feeling exhilarated one minute and a bit overwhelmed the next.

On the not so good side, the show is, as you might expect, more uneven than usual. As a result,



"Everyman at the Quarterpole," 2009, oil on canvas, part of a Newport Art Museum exhibit by Attleboro artist Andrew Nixon.

viewers will have to work harder than ever to find things that they like. The show's quirky jurying process is also a problem, especially since museum officials have so far announced only one set of best-in-show winners.

Among the award winners chosen by RISD Museum curator Judith Tannenbaum: Bonnie Jaffe, who won the overall best-in-show award for "Dressing," a charming behind-the-scenes photograph of a young girl dressing mannequins; David Barnes, who took top honors in the mixed-media category with a series of small, mug shot-like pencil drawings; and Allie Sabalis, whose delirious, toy-filled still life "Duck on a Bike" walked off with the show's photography prize.

The winners selected by the other jurors, Nancy Stula, director of the Lyman Allyn Art Museum, and George Slade, former director of the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University, will be announced later in the show's run.

Painting fans will also want to check out "I Am Here and You Are Not," a wonderful mini-retrospective devoted to the work of Attleboro painter Andrew

Nixon. The show, which has been handsomely installed in the museum's main Griswold House gallery, includes a number of the dreamily atmospheric landscapes for which Nixon is best known. But visitors will also encounter some less familiar pieces — notably a series of energetic (and nearly abstract) charcoal drawings and a group of sly, Surrealist-tinged figurative paintings.

On the other hand, there's nothing dreamy about the work of Jerrold Ehrlich, a Narragansett sculptor whose work is on display in one of the museum's upstairs galleries. Working also entirely with steel reinforcing bars — "rebar," for short — Ehrlich creates sculptures that manage to look both starkly industrial and surprisingly delicate.

The Newport Art Museum Members' Exhibition runs through May 13 at the Newport Art Museum, 76 Bellevue Ave. Hours: Tues.-Sat. 10-4 and Sun. noon-4. Admission: \$10 adults, \$8 seniors, \$6 students and active-duty military; age 5 and under free. Contact: (401) 848-8200 or newportartmuseum.org.

'Overlander' installation at Salve Regina University

The centerpiece of this thought-provoking exhibit is an actual Victorian-era carriage that the show's creator, Rhode Island artist Elizabeth Duffy, found and purchased online. Besides being a wonderful artifact (hopefully, it will go to a nice historical museum when its work here is done), the

carriage alludes to the history of Salve's Hamilton Gallery, which was originally part of a larger carriage house complex. Duffy, who teaches at Roger Williams University, has also added several other faux-Victorian touches, including a rug, drapes and some period furniture. The result is a quietly effective installation that deftly toggles between past, present and future.

Through March 14 at the Antone Academic Center, Salve Regina University, corner of Lawrence and Leroy avenues, Newport. Hours: Tues. and Thurs. 11-6, Wed. and Fri. 11-5 and Sat.-Sun. noon-4. Contact: (401) 341-2981 or salve.edu.

Brian Shure city scenes at St. George's School

At first glance, the dozen or so small paintings and drawings that Brian Shure is showing at the Hunter Gallery look like more of the same. Indeed, for the past few years, Shure has focused almost entirely on one subject: crowded urban scenes showing people walking, sitting, driving and generally going about their daily business. But look closely and you'll notice something new. In several of these new works the largely anonymous crowds that filled Shure's earlier works have been replaced by scenes of police and protestors — a clear, if muted, reference to the country's increasingly bitter social and political situation.

Through March 10 at the Hunter Gallery, St. George's School, 372 Purgatory Rd., Middletown. Hours: Mon.-Sat. 9-4. Contact: (401) 842-6679 or stgeorges.edu.

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