

NETWORKS 2008: A COLLABORATION

Newport Art Museum
76 Bellevue Avenue
Newport, Rhode Island

5 Traverse Gallery
5 Traverse Street
Providence, Rhode Island

AS220 Project Space
93 Mathewson Street
Providence, Rhode Island

Through January 18

Through January 11

Exhibition concluded

“NetWorks 2008: A Collaboration” is an ambitious exhibition spread across three diverse venues in Rhode Island where the artwork and stories of 19 influential Rhode Island artists have been celebrated and documented through a triad of gallery exhibitions launched and supplemented with video and photographic portraits of the participants. This unique exhibition and historical document is the result of a partnership amongst the Newport Art Museum; the artists; celebrated Rhode Island art collector Joseph Chazan, MD; Umberto Crenca, artistic director of AS220 (Providence’s renowned alternative art space); and 5 Traverse, a private gallery in Providence.

In the elegant setting of the Newport Art Museum’s Cushing Memorial Galleries, distinguished Rhode Island artists Howard Ben Tré, Toots Zynsky, Salvatore Mancini, Jonathan Bonner, Jacqueline Ott, James Watkins, Elizabeth Pannell, Timothy Philbrick, Mark Freedman, Denny Moers, Ruth Dealy, Umberto Crenca and Walter Feldman hold court with artists newer to the local art scene, or flourishing in its well-formed underground. These include Angel Quinonez, Xander Marro, CW Roelle and the artists who photographed and filmed them, Richard Goulis, Scott Lapham and Lucas Foglia. It’s an ambitious undertaking, finding the kernel of common ground that unites this group and translating that into a cogent exhibit experience.

The component of the wider project that best illustrates this goal is the lasting document of photographic and video portraits of the artists themselves. The stills were tackled by Lapham and Foglia, and, at their best, center the personalities of each individual in a space that informs their work and narrates their story. In Foglia’s portrait “Umberto Crenca,” the joyfully non-hierarchical catalyst sports dark glasses scrawled with the words “Not Art,” as he stands before the blank canvas of a paint-splattered wall, his muscular arms crossed confrontationally.

While on display in small format at the Museum, both still and video portraits were highlighted specifically at

the AS220 Project Space in December. There, the portraits found visual acuity in a more focused gallery presentation. In an environment stripped of all but the documentary components, the viewer could absorb the overarching theme of the three shows’ implied artist network as a unified whole with a human face. Foglia and Lapham’s portraits have since moved to the Providence City Hall Gallery, where they’ll remain on view through January 31.

The well-curated retail arm of this exhibition hung at Providence’s 5 Traverse Gallery in December, offering the audience an informed opportunity to follow in Chazan’s footsteps by bridging the gap between art appreciation and patronage.





years and this is where we begin.”

The methods, provenance, subject matter and format of the presented artwork span a baffling spectrum for the uninitiated. This ranges from the finely honed craft of Timothy Philbrick’s celebrated furniture, to the more conceptual theatre of Xander Marro’s mixed-media enterprise. Within the Newport Museum’s exhibition, works selected from various points in the artists’ careers function more often as random sampling than retrospective.

Rhode Island is a state where resources are best described as “DIY,” and the creative mind must find solutions for the gaps in what elsewhere typically constitutes a rich base for creation and commerce. This wealth of local minds and sheer often results in unusual collaborations that wouldn’t sprout as organically in other regions. A prime example of this is the friendship between Chazan and Crenca, who developed the exhibition.

An avidly hands-on art collector, physician and educator, Chazan has for the last three decades been a major advocate and friend to the Rhode Island art community. In addition to their strong record of arts patronage, Chazan and his late wife, Helene, developed lasting friendships with many of the artists they collected. Crenca founded AS220 in 1985 as a non-profit enterprise to provide an unjuried and uncensored forum for the arts. The organization describes itself as “part incubator and part bazaar” with the aim of building “new audiences and infrastructure for artists to stimulate the cultural mulch in Rhode Island.”

Aptly put. Entering the Newport Art Museum’s octagonal, parquet floored gallery is a bit disorienting. It is uncommon to find such a diverse representation of work displayed together in the museum environment. As Crenca explains in the video component of the project, “We’re not saying these are the best artists in Rhode Island or even that this is a broad sampling of Rhode Island artists. But these are a lot of the artists that Joe (Chazan) has collected and supported over the

In the museum environment, this poses certain risks. The work selected to represent venerated artist and educator Walter Feldman spans more than 40 years of his career, merely skimming his endeavors in sculpture, painting and drawing. The emotion behind Feldman’s work was better served at 5 Traverse. There, his 1979 paper and gold-leaf compositions “Untitled” and “The Holy 6,” framed on antique leather Encyclopedia Britannica covers, spoke for themselves without the static of competing messages and mediums.

Conversely, in the case of emerging artist CW Roelle, whose intricate, bent wire drawings are recognizable anywhere, the museum environment offers a refreshing opportunity to appreciate his mastery of a unique material in a lofty setting. Given central placement in the second gallery, Roelle’s monumental “Both’ she replied” is simply breathtaking, with its universe of narrative subtext rendered in seemingly unbroken whorls of black wire.

While admittedly tricky to navigate, “NetWorks” layered scenarios set up infinite opportunity for dialogue and comparison amongst artists, friends, medium and venue. This catchall exhibit arrangement could not easily exist anywhere else, and that is the triumph of Rhode Island’s “NetWorks” experiment.

As Crenca noted: “The artists of Rhode Island have had enormous influence on shaping (our) larger



LEFT PAGE: Lucas Foglia, Umberto Crenca, 2008, chromogenic print.
 LEFT: Scott Lapham, Angel Quinonez, 2008, digital print from color film.
 ABOVE: Richard Goulis, China, 2008, plastic, acrylic, wood, glass, ceramic, water, DVD video.

community. The more conscious we are about documenting (our) community of makers, the more likely that this community will be sustained, and in fact, grow. Today, maybe more than ever, it is essential that our artists are heard. Our quality of life is dependent on it.”

The project’s excellent documentary videos, overseen by “NetWorks” artist Richard Goulis, and produced individually by Goulis and nine local filmmakers, will find a wider audience when aired on Rhode Island’s PBS. One of the most impactful components of the wider “NetWorks” project, these videos are best enjoyed outside of the gallery setting, where one can absorb the rich, individual artists’ stories at their own pace. The show catalogue, produced by AS220, includes all 15 videos on DVD.

Meredith Cutler

SPACE 242

The Last Drive Gallery South of Hamilton Passover Final Fridays 2008



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 by Kristen Mills



February/March
SWEET MEATS
 by Jennifer Lewis
 New Works by Amanda Clark

Gallery Hours

Fridays
 6:30-8pm
 & by Appointment

(starting
 January 30,
 2008)

Opening Reception
 Friday, January 30, 8-9pm

Opening Reception
 Friday, February 27, 8-9pm

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