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2007 Fall Museum Guide

Autumn's Art-Exhibit Listings Include Rodin, Mir, Pollock, Cranch

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Art endures because it has a unique ability to educate us and make us feel something all at the same time.

Those willing to risk opening themselves to new experiences and different worlds come away enriched and hooked on the encounter.

The fall offers a chance for folks to view the Christmas celebrations of Jamaican slaves in the 19th century and the blood and guts world of 20th century American pulp.

From a house that seems an optical illusion to the deceptive way light and darkness mix to create shadow, there is more on display than any one person can hope to see.

And so we offer this guide to help you out. We offer a best bet, a chance to go deeper and, every now and again, recommend that you double back to a show you might have skipped.

Sept. 27-Oct. 3

BEST BET: "Art and Emancipation in Jamaica" at Yale Center for British Art.

The abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 is commemorated in this exhibit, which features works from Yale's collection as well as a number of paintings lent from public and private collections in Jamaica.

Some of the works from private collections have never been exhibited before.

The exhibition gathers drawings and prints depicting life on a Jamaican sugar plantation and images used by the anti-slavery campaign.

The heart of the exhibit is the lithographic series "Sketches of Character, In Illustration of the Habits, Occupation, and Costume of the Negro Population in the Island of Jamaica," made by Jewish-Jamaican-born artist Isaac Mendes Belisario.

Belisario's works were published in 1837-38 and were the first detailed depictions of Jonkonnu, the Afro-Jamaican masquerade performed by slaves during Christmas and New Year's.

The exhibit opens today and runs through Dec. 30.

DOUBLING BACK: "Rodin: A Magnificent Obsession" at William Benton Museum of Art at the University of Connecticut.

Oct. 4-10

BEST BET: "Christopher Mir/MATRIX 157: Dreams, Memories, Reflections" at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

Christopher Mir has a unique painting style. He combines images from found photographs into works that nod in the direction of collage and straddle the line between the tradition of American landscape painting and surrealism.

Mir collects photographs from magazines, books on national parks, calendars and the Internet and uses them as a starting point for his compositions. He then layers his canvas with these images. This creates work that seems familiar at first glance but upon further study takes on a disjointed, dream-like quality.

Mir's interest in Native American traditions is also evident as is his love of archetypes. He returns again and again to images and motifs from earlier paintings leaving us to ask ancient questions. Who are these people? Why are they here? Why are we here?

DIGGING DEEPER: "Jackson" at Contemporary Art Galleries at the University of Connecticut.

The life and legend of Jackson Pollock is explored. His painting style is examined but also his destructive personal behavior and his alcoholism.

Works by contemporary artists influenced by Pollock are on display, along with excerpts from "Pollock," the movie about the painter's life. The exhibit runs from Oct. 8-Nov. 30.

Oct. 11-17

BEST BET: "At Home and Abroad: The Transcendental Landscapes of Christopher Pearse Cranch" at Lyman Allyn Art Museum.

Cranch is one of those names that has disappeared into the vapor of history. Other than scholars of Transcendentalism, poetry fans or those who have seen his caricature of Ralph Waldo Emerson, portrayed as an enormous eyeball, Cranch's name is not as well-known as some of his friends.

But Cranch had a 50-year career as a landscape painter and was friends with some of America's most brilliant people, including Emerson.

This exhibit studies Cranch as a Hudson River School artist but also a man of ideas who was part of a movement that offered a fundamentally new way of looking at the world. His paintings of nature are not static but celebrate the activity of the natural world in the same way Emerson and Henry David Thoreau did in their writings.

DOUBLING BACK: "To Catch a Thief" at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. Children's author Walter Wick's puzzle to go with the "Fame and Fortune: Five Centuries of European Masterworks" exhibit. The exhibition and the puzzle ends Dec. 9.

Oct. 18-24

BEST BET: "Magic Façade: The Austin House" at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

The Austin House may be the original urban legend. Shortly after legendary Wadsworth director A. Everett "Chick" Austin built this house in 1930, tales began to spread that the house was nothing more than a façade. That it was a flat house.

Not true. The house was 86 feet wide and only 18 feet deep, but it was a real house, where Chick and Helen Austin lived. The house was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1994.

This exhibit focuses on the significance of the house's architecture, its interior design, and its history as a

gathering place for leading international figures in the arts in the 1930s, a time when Gertrude Stein, Salvador Dali, George Balanchine, George Gershwin, Le Corbusier and Alexander Calder gathered with the Austins.

Oct. 25-31

BEST BET 1: "Shadow Show" at Real Art Ways.

Perhaps no word in the English language does a better job of evoking its meaning than the word "shadow." The range of associations with the word and idea of shadow, from comforting companion to a place where all hope vanishes, is explored in this show featuring 16 artists from Connecticut, Rhode Island and New York.

The exhibit, which opens Oct. 26, includes painting, sculpture, video, new media, installation and performance art. The show runs through Dec. 30.

BEST BET 2: "The Robert Lesser Collection of Pulp Art" at New Britain Museum of American Art.

Playwright and writer Robert Lesser is also a passionate collector of pulp paintings, comic books and comic-character toys. He began collecting in the 1950s and now has more than 750 examples of this art work. This exhibit, which opens Oct. 26 and runs through Dec. 30, presents this art, which was once thought to be too base to appear in a museum.

The pulp-art style, which exploded in the 1930s, combined the style of Norman Rockwell with content focused on unsettling images of violence, racism, sex and crime. Much of the artwork created in the pulp style was destroyed by publishing houses after they were used as covers for magazines or novels. But a handful have survived to offer us a glimpse at the unguarded thoughts of our public consciousness.

Nov. 1-7

BEST BET: "Works by Ori Gersht" at Yale Center for British Art.

In 2005, Gersht made a series of trips to Ukraine, where he composed a photographic work titled "The Clearing." This exhibit grew out of that work.

Gersht made the trip to the village of Kosov, where his father-in-law, Gideon Engler, was born. During World War II, Engler hid for 2½ years as the Nazis searched for Jews in the village. Gersht's work is said to evoke both the Nazi atrocities but also the strength of those who resisted.

At the same time, it works as an evocative portrayal of Europe's ancient woodlands.

DIGGING DEEPER: Andrew Stevens, the curator of prints, drawings and photographs at Chazen Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin, lectures on "Japanese Woodcuts: Tradition of Transformation." The lecture is Nov. 7 at 5 p.m. at the Center for the Arts Cinema at Wesleyan University. A special viewing of the exhibit at Davison Arts Center will follow.

Nov. 8-14

BEST BET: "Martin Luther King Jr.: Life, Times and Legacy" presented by the Amistad Center for Art and Culture at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

The exhibit explores the social issues of the civil rights era and recognizes King's contribution by examining the art that was created in response to the political and cultural pressures and opportunities of the late 1950s and 1960s.

King's legacy is examined through contemporary works that explore the themes of race and injustice in America. These works ask visitors to compare and contrast the climate of today with the that of King's lifetime and asses the progress of a people and a nation. The exhibit opens Nov. 14 and runs through April 29.

Nov. 15-21

BEST BET: "Kambui Olujimi" at Real Art Ways.

Olujimi, a New York artist, has focused recently on multimedia presentations based on the life and songs of Nina Simone, who saw racism and had the temerity to call it racism.

Olujimi's show has picked up many of those themes and has used Simone's aching vocals to augment photographs and films. It will be interesting to see what Olujimi does in the Real Art Ways space. His show opens Nov. 15 and runs through Dec. 16.

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