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2017 Mohawk-Hudson Regional exhibit smart, cogent

Now on display at Albany Institute of History & Art

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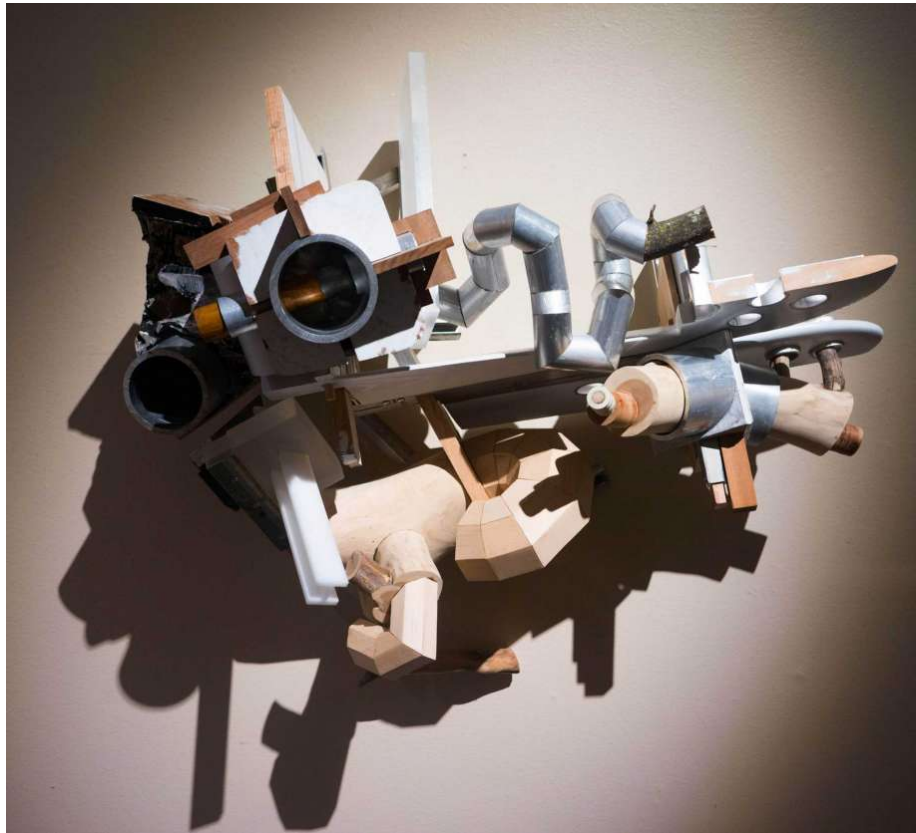


IMAGE 1 OF 19

Paul Mauren, Speak to Me, 2016 (wood, aluminum, plastic, glass).

Hush. The new Mohawk-Hudson Regional is here, and it's a classic, contained, stately affair.

But we should ask, is it really possible to tame the "Mohawk-Hudson Regional"? The 2017 version of this annual survey of area artists says yes. There are a mere 32 artists included, out of 268 who submitted, and the installation at the Albany Institute of History & Art is smart and cogent. It's quite beautiful.

We might also ask, is taming the monster such a great idea? This finely tuned exhibition is a contrast from the occasional bedlam and discordance of some earlier years. But at what price?

For those who don't follow closely, what most of us call "the Regional" rotates between three institutions: The Hyde, the University Art Museum, and the Albany Institute. And every year, there is a new juror, a welcome wild card in the process of selecting artists within roughly 100 miles of Albany.

This year's arbiter, Jack Shear, is known for his connections to the collecting and art museum world. His choices naturally show a good eye and good taste. In a flash of brilliance, he even altered the Sculpture Court, turning the familiar figural marbles away from the viewer.

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More Information

If you go

"2017 Exhibition by Artists of the Mohawk-Hudson Region"

Where: Albany Institute of History and Art, 125 Washington Ave., Albany

When: through Sep 3

Hours: Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Thursday, 10 a.m.–8 p.m.

Sunday: Noon–5 p.m.

Admission: Members: Free. **Adults:** \$10. **Seniors:** \$8. **Students:** \$8.

Children 6–12: \$6. **Children under 6:** Free

Info: 463-4478

Through the four main gallery areas of the Regional itself, there is dependable work that expands well. Certainly, the finely tuned geometric wall-mounted explosions made of wood, metal and plastic by Paul Mauren are exquisitely controlled amid their chaos and dysfunction. Across the room, Gerald Wolfe's equally geometric objects, hanging like less-resolved models of Mauren's own work, also exude an essential physical presence.

The sublime, unexpected, amorphous cast-aluminum blobs by Jake Fallat, however, are really off-the-charts here. Painted bright pink, they are igneous mistakes, remnants of an extraterrestrial visit. Someone might say they amount to making something out of nothing, but Fallat had the focus and formal certitude to pull it off.

In another gallery, narrative paintings and objects start with two confident art deco-inspired sculptures, like maquettes for a long-lost Rockefeller Center frieze. Continuing around the room, find an art brut-ish triptych of animal shapes, a pair of grids of varied textile revisions of a photograph of a building, and three large illustrative paintings that rise above their storylines with playful, painterly technique.

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Then there is a thankful spot of humor, first in a row of small (tiny!) paintings called "Costumes for Adult Films" by Jackson Bryant, followed by his hilarious screen-printed "White Male Crying Towel." They should be selling those in the gift shop.

The largest gallery is the most precious, focusing on landscape in all its brooding delicacy. At one end is a wall-to-wall white-chalk-on-black drawing of dense woods by Richard Barlow. It's nothing if not impressive. Elsewhere are really fine photographs of extraordinary trees, careful oil paintings of clouds at sunset and heavy charcoal drawings of more woods. All of this is comfy stuff, nothing to shake you up. Luckily the curious, close-up collage portraits of wild animals by T. Klacsmann are complicated by a helicopter overhead or an ominous faraway factory.

In a room devoted to photographic figure studies and interiors, there is some derivative artifice and straining for effect. Rising above, however, are two simple posed portraits of male nudes by Ray Felix. A feeling for the figure and for character merge within deliberate, mundane surroundings, and they work in their deceptively simple intentions.

The 2017 Regional has plenty of pretty, well-made pieces. But what I find most exciting in art — inventive, analytic, daring, subversive, cross-cultural or even good old deeply moving art — is in short supply. Luckily, the ever-engaging color deconstructions by Richard Garrison remain vital. Mame Kennedy's beautiful metallic-glazed stoneware objects, like ballistic telephone pole insulators, defy easy description. And Tatana Kellner's wall of rough-hewn black-on-white posters with political commentary is a welcome relief.

William Jaeger is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.

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