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WITH TWO WEEKS UNTIL IT CLOSES, 'AMERICAN GENRE' BECKONS FANS OF CONTEMPORARY PAINTING TO MECA'S INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Written by: Bob Keyes



Eva Lundsager, "Within Sight," 2016, oil on linen, 38 by 34 inches. Photo by Stewart Clemens/Courtesy of Eva Lundsager

With the goal of engaging the community in a discussion about the tradition of painting in contemporary art, Maine College of Art hosts a daylong symposium that will explore the power of painting.

The symposium, which is free and open to the public, will be Sept. 15 at the Institute of Contemporary Art at MECA and coincides with the closing that evening of "American Genre: Contemporary Painting," curated by Michelle Grabner, an art professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. A closing reception for the exhibition will follow the symposium.

“We want to create community around the exhibition,” said MECA painting faculty member Gail Spaen, who is showing one painting in the exhibit. “I am hoping students and cultural leaders and the community of artists and painters in Maine will join us for a rich conversation.”

Participants will discuss still life, landscape and portraiture as categories of painting that reflect American history and its value systems. Grabner will begin the morning session with an overview of the exhibition, and Marie Shurkus, a MECA art history professor, will deliver a lecture, “Contemporary Genre Painting: Animating the Intimate,” that will explore how contemporary genre painting can cause viewers to enter an imaginary realm that activates real emotions.

That afternoon, a panel discussion, “Painting as Common Ground” led by art historian and writer Barry Schwabsky, will explore genre and painting as systems that organize, interpret, translate and imagine history and experience. The five panelists are Sharon Butler, Angela Dufresne, Shara Hughes, Chris Stiegler and Roger White, who will share perspectives and insights. An audience Q-and-A will follow.

“American Genre: Contemporary Painting” is based on a trio of traditional painting genres – still life, landscape and portraiture – and includes 50 paintings by 50 American artists.

“Paintings have always been a way for people to understand the world, and this exhibition does just that,” Spaen said. “Maine is a place that holds a great painting history, and we have a great painting program at MECA. This particular show offers an opportunity for the public and for the students and for curators and other kinds of leaders in the art world to talk about what is happening now through the lens of painting.”

Grabner has associated with MECA for about a decade. She taught a summer program at the Portland college and, in 2015, returned to Maine to teach at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She also has curated an exhibition at the Colby College Museum of Art.

She met ICA at MECA director Erin Hutton and began a conversation about the exhibition.

With two weeks until the exhibition closes, Hutton hopes people who appreciate painting and contemporary art in general will stop in to see the show.

“It was very important for the ICA to host a painting exhibition,” Hutton said. “In the last two years since I have been here as director, we have had shows that engage all media practices, from video and performance and sculpture, but we haven’t had a painting show.

“I believe contemporary art needs to be available to everyone, and the ICA is free and open to the public. It’s a rich opportunity for people to come and experience contemporary art and contemporary painting and see



Hope Gangloff, “After Party,” 2015, acrylic and collage on paper, 101 by 78 inches. Photo courtesy of Hope Gangloff and Susan Inglett Gallery



Howard Fonda, "Untitled (the future as seen through the past/stolen, given, owned, not owned, self, not self)," 2017, oil and colored pencil on canvas, 56 by 44 inches.
Photo courtesy of Howard Fonda

the work that a lot of these artists are exhibiting all over the world."

WHAT: "American Genre – Contemporary Painting"

WHERE: Institute of Contemporary Art at MECA, 522 Congress St., Portland

WHEN: On view through Sept. 15; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday; open until 7 p.m. every Thursday and until 8 p.m. for First Friday

ADMISSION: Free

INFO: meca.edu/about/institute-of-contemporary-art

SYMPOSIUM: "On Genre: A Painting Symposium" will be Sept. 15 and is free; registration required by emailing ica@meca.edu

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// TRENDING:



BOB KEYES

Bob Keyes has written about the arts in Maine since 2002. He's never been much an artist himself, other than singing in junior high school chorus and acting in a few musicals. But he's attended museums, theaters, clubs and concert halls all his life, and cites Bob Dylan as most influential artist of any kind since Picasso. He lives in Berwick.