

Waterbury museum boosts its collection of women artists with five new pieces



Susan Grabel's "Confluence CCC-CFL004" is a gift of the artist to the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury.



Liliana Porter's "The Pop Duchess of Alba" is a gift of the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art to the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury.



Daisy Patton's "Untitled/Connie" is a gift of the artist and Enrique Suarez.



Janet Maya's "Temporal Axis" is a gift in honor of Mattatuck Museum Director Bob Burns.

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WATERBURY — Mattatuck Museum recently acquired what it calls five "significant works" by modern and contemporary women artists, which it says furthers its "commitment to collecting art that reflects a diversity of perspectives and voices."

Specifically, the works are by women and/or artists of color, a category of artist the downtown museum has been aggressively trying to acquire.

"The museum has, like most museums, been collecting the works of white male artists," throughout its history, Mattatuck Executive Director Bob Burns said.

When he arrived at the museum in 2012, Burns said he began seeking to include more women and people of color in the collection. Many U.S. museums have been trying to do the same, given research that shows only about 13% of museum collections in the country feature the work of women,

according to a recent report by Williams College. The same report found 85% of artists in the 18 American museums surveyed were white.

“Over the years, we’ve been primarily focused on representing our community,” Burns said, noting about 90% of the museum’s collection is by white male artists. “It’s still predominately male work. But in the last 10 years, we’ve really bumped up the number of women and people of color.”

Among the new acquisitions is “Embracing” (2002), an oil painting by the late Janice Hidemi Wong (1954–2023), gifted by her husband, Alan Wong, in memory of the artist.

“This deeply personal work reflects Wong’s lifelong exploration of identity, belonging and emotional connection,” according to a museum news release.

The museum also acquired a 1965 print by pioneering conceptual artist Liliana Porter, “The Pop Duchess of Alba,” a gift from the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art in New York. Porter’s work is known for blending humor, memory and socio-political commentary.

“We loved this piece in particular because she is an important 21st century artist,” Mattatuck Chief Curator Keffie Feldman said.

Another new work is “Confluence CCC-CFL004” (2017), a dynamic collagraph print by Susan Grabel that was gifted by the artist. Grabel’s work often focuses on the aging female body and feminist themes.

“The work itself is very three dimensional,” Feldman said. “Then you have these overlapping female figures running over what looks like an abstracted landscape. The thing about these women is that they are overlapping, so that the colors bleed into each other. She’s really talking about the importance of collective action and community — that we’re stronger together.”

Additional acquisitions include “Temporal Axis” (2020), a bold oil on canvas by Janet Maya, gifted in honor of Burns. Maya was represented in a Mattatuck solo show in 2021–2022.

“She’s very interested in representing women, but she is telling stories that are widely applicable,” Feldman said. “She uses symbolic stand-in for lots of different situations or scenarios.”

Finally, “Untitled/Connie” (2023) by Daisy Patton is a mixed-media portrait that reimagines personal and historical photography. The work is a gift from the artist and Enrique Suarez.

Burns said the museum is not averse to collecting the works of white artists.

“It’s not that we’re shutting them out,” he said. “We’ve been collecting young male artists since I’ve been here.”

He said the museum’s core collection is its Connecticut works. He noted he wanted the museum to include more art that reflected the people who live in Waterbury. According to U.S. Census data, the city’s population is 42% white, 26% Black and 14% Hispanic or Latino, with the remaining 18.2% born outside the country.

“It’s a pretty broad spectrum of people,” Burns said. “Reflecting them on the walls, to me, is us succeeding.”

The public will be able to see the new works as soon as next week.

Mattatuck Museum is at 144 West Main St. For information, visit mattmuseum.org.