

Museums spotlight women and local artists



At her studio in East Hampton, artist Audrey Flack speaks about women artists getting the recognition they deserve. Credit: Gordon Grant (video in link, below)

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By **Mary Gregory**Special to Newsday

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Due to the pandemic, museums everywhere have had to find new ways to exhibit art and connect with audiences while keeping everyone safe. Two major exhibitions dedicated to women artists at the Nassau County Museum of Art had to be postponed from July to November last year.

Meanwhile, the Long Island Museum's annual members show opened on time, but online only. It's a tale of two museums and how they're adjusting.

Women making art

Through April 25th, works by dozens of women artists fill the entire Nassau County Museum in two groundbreaking exhibitions. They range from 19th century oils by Impressionist Mary Cassatt to a 2020 multimedia installation created specially for the show by Bridgehampton photographer, Laurie Lambrecht. It took navigation and negotiation, but thanks to grants and gifts of PPE from the community, the exhibitions finally opened.

"Heroines of Abstract Expressionism," on loan from guest curators, Rick Friedman and Cindy Lou Wakefield, fills one gallery with a celebration of mid-20th century works from iconic artists like Lee Krasner, Hedda Sterne, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, Elaine de Kooning and Helen Frankenthaler, all pioneering women who lived and worked on Long Island. "I've never seen such power on these walls," said museum director Charles Riley. "It's almost like these things are smoldering, like they're on fire."



East Hampton artist Audrey Flack, here in her studio, is one of the women whose work is on display at Nassau County Museum of Art in Roslyn. Credit: Gordon M. Grant

On the second floor, "FEM," a separate superb survey of contemporary work, presents rich, varied voices of international women reflecting on cultural, environmental, political, gender, emotional and physical realities through art.

Bridging both eras is East Hampton artist, Audrey Flack. She's presented in "Heroines" through an early abstract painting, but better known for her luminous, allegorical photorealist paintings and powerful sculptures that celebrate female strength and beauty, all of which are highlighted in the 2019 documentary about her, "Queen of Hearts." Flack was inspired by the Old Masters, influenced by the Abstract Expressionist generation, and influential to those who came after her, including many of the artists in "FEM."

Like the rising acknowledgement for women artists, the exhibitions didn't arrive without struggle. Riley redesigned the show to run leaner and found new ways to reach audiences. "We have this lovely time ticketed approach, and everybody who comes in basically has a private museum," he explained. You can also see works on the website or take a video tour narrated by women who work at the museum. The exhibitions feature some of the most renowned women artists of the modern era, from Käthe Kollwitz to Louise Nevelson, Kara Walker, Judy Chicago, and Shirin Neshat. Said Riley, "It's a ravishingly beautiful show that's also an immensely powerful show, and the conjunction of power and beauty is one way to say 'Look what women can do, have done, and will do.'"

'Transforming Crisis Into Art'

In Stony Brook, The Long Island Museum faced different challenges. Its 14 buildings made it impossible stay fully open while adhering to pandemic guidelines. So, executive director Neil Watson brainstormed with staff, and they came up with a hybrid approach, opting for partly open, and partly online. They switched to virtual educational and Alzheimer's programs, left the gates open for people to enjoy the grounds, and reopened some buildings when they felt it was safe. "The things we've learned are things that will outlast the pandemic," said Watson.

This year, they decided on a virtual LIMarts member exhibition. "Every Day: Transforming Crisis Into Art" is online through mid-February. 72 local artists, about two-thirds of whom are women, share glimpses of their days as artists this year in works as individual as they are. Eileen Palmer of St. James created a mosaic imbued with tenderness. "Just Breathe," is an abstracted image of lungs comprised of twigs and her grandmother's porcelain flowers. Paul Edelson, Mary Waka, and others found inspiration in domestic scenes, while many turned to Long Island's landscape for inspiration.

Watson hopes to share the online show with other museums, giving the artists wider exposure. "Artists are our heartbeat. I always want to keep them at the forefront and see what more we can do for them," he said. "Good things come out of the darkest times."

WHAT "Heroines of Abstract Expressionism" and "FEM"

WHEN | WHERE Through April 25, 11 a.m.-4:45 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday, advance timed ticket entry required; Nassau County Museum of Art, 1 Museum Drive, Roslyn Harbor

INFO \$15, \$10 age 62 and older, \$5 students and ages 5-11, free age 4 and younger; 516-484-9338; nassaumuseum.org

WHAT "Every Day: Transforming Crisis Into Art"

WHEN | WHERE Through February 14th on the Long Island Museum's website and the LIMarts Facebook page

INFO Free; 631-751-0066; longislandmuseum.org

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