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CONTEMPORARY *Collections*

INTRODUCTION BY SARAH GIANELLI

There are more than 35,000 museums in the United States that, together, see upwards of 850 million visits each year. Museums play an essential role in cultural and social life by collecting, preserving, researching and interpreting the roughly one billion objects, living specimens and historical records in their holdings. In doing so, they enrich our lives, offer multifaceted platforms for learning and serve as public spaces where diverse communities can come together over a shared appreciation and curiosity.

When we think about American museums, it is likely the iconic institu-

tions that house historic treasures and cutting-edge modern art from around the world, that come to mind. The Met. The Smithsonian. The National Gallery of Art. The American Museum of Natural History. The MoMA. The Getty, and so on.

However, there is an exciting uptick in exhibitions of contemporary realism across the country, especially at mid-size, regional museums that are consciously turning their attention to showcasing emerging and established artists working in the genre today. And many of them feature works that are also available for purchase. *American Art Collector* has been following this trend, and the more

exhibitions of this kind we look for, the more we find.

In that spirit, we bring you this special section highlighting some of the best museums for lovers of contemporary realism. Keep these institutions on your radar so you can experience museum-quality exhibitions of contemporary realism. In doing so, not only might you discover a new artist you'd like to have in your collection, but you will be supporting the vital role museums play in our individual lives, and society and culture at large.

The **Bo Bartlett Center** is an 18,425-square-foot interactive gallery



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1. Exterior of the **Bo Bartlett Center**, Columbus, GA. 2. **The Bo Bartlett Center** houses the Scarborough Collection of 14 monumental paintings by Bartlett, as well as his complete artistic archive. Courtesy The Bo Bartlett Center, Columbus, GA. 3. **Fort Wayne Museum of Art**, *All That's Borrowed*, 2023, colored pencil on Coventry Rag paper, 50 x 38", by Clio Newton. Museum purchase with funds provided by the McMurray Family Endowment Fund. © Clio Newton. Image courtesy of Forum Gallery, NY.

space at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia. The center serves as a cultural hub for visual arts, offering a broad range of arts experiences. It has a two-fold mission—community outreach to encourage diverse participation and a national mission to partner with other institutions to provide innovative exhibitions and deepen understanding of art. The center houses the Scarborough Collection of 14 monumental paintings by Bartlett, as well as his complete artistic archive. As part of the College of the Arts' Corn Center for Visual Arts, the Bartlett Center is helping establish a national and international presence for the university's arts programs.

Established in 1921 the **Fort Wayne Museum of Art** in Fort Wayne, Indiana, holds a collection of 8,600 works of American and related art from all eras. The museum has renewed its commitment to contemporary realism with recent purchases including Clio Newton's *All That's Borrowed*, 2023, and exhibitions such as Gabriela Gonzalez Dellosso's major



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4. The Modern Gallery at the **Gibbes Museum**, Charleston, NC. Credit: MCG Photography. 5. **High Museum of Art**, *Heavy (Weight)*, Portrait of Benjamin Gasinga Gaspard Rwanda, 2019, oil on Belgian linen, by Papay Solomon. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, gift of Vicki and John Palmer in honor of Michael Rooks, 2021.184 6. **High Museum of Art**, *Extension Cord*, 2023, oil on linen, by Eunnam Hong. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, purchase with funds from John Auerbach, 2023.79. 7. **Museum of Art – DeLand**, *Conscious and Unconscious*, oil on panel, by Carrie Ann Baade. Courtesy Museum of Art DeLand, DeLand, FL.

retrospective in spring 2024. Selections from the museum’s realism collection, including this work by Newton and others by Maria Tomasula, Rebecca Campbell and Gary Erbe, will be shown in an exhibition opening in April 2025. “The FWMoA recognizes the long tradition of representational artwork and its influence on the American imagination,” says museum vice president Amanda Shepard. “Its practitioners have held a steady hand throughout the various movements of art history, using their consummate skill to interpret our culture.”

“Contemporary realism serves as a beautiful connection between the past

and the present, offering a unique lens through which we can better understand the world,” says Angela Mack, president and CEO of the **Gibbes Museum of Art**. “Home to one of the foremost collections of American art from the 18th century to the present, the Gibbes Museum’s collection of contemporary realist works not only showcases the incredible skill of today’s artists but also prompts viewers to engage deeply with the nuances of modern life...With historical, modern and contemporary works, we are committed to engaging people of every background and experience,” Mack continues. “Set in the heart of downtown Charleston,

South Carolina, the Gibbes is a Southern museum with a global perspective, where art and reality converge in powerful and meaningful ways.”

The **High Museum of Art** in Atlanta has recently been acquiring work by contemporary artists to bridge the past with the present, among them Caroline Walker, Keita Morimoto, Papay Solomon, Caleb Hahne Quintana, Aaron Gilbert, Issy Wood, Henni Alftan, Amoako Bofo and Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe. Michael Rooks, the museum’s senior curator of modern and contemporary art, says, “One of the interesting aspects of realism today is that rather than capturing the appear-



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ance of contemporary life on the surface of things, Millennial and Gen Z artists often seek to represent the complex interiority of their generations as well. Consequently, you'll find that the best contemporary realism is characterized by psychological tension, like in the work of Eunnam Hong, while also being meticulously well-crafted."

Located just north of Orlando, **Museum of Art – DeLand** hosts several rotating exhibits, gallery talks, receptions, educational programming, master artist workshops and special events throughout the year. In recent years, they have presented major exhibitions of artists at the fore-

front of contemporary realism, including a sweeping retrospective of works by Andrea Kowch in 2023; as well as a solo exhibition of work by William Entrekin; and a group show featuring works in the museum's permanent collection by Cheryl Bogdanowitsch, Larry Cahall, Kris Lewis, Richard Frank, Judith Page, Phil Parker, Frank Rampolla, Elsie Shaw and Hiram Williams. On view now through November 24 is *Mirror Worlds* showcasing contemporary realist Carrie Ann Baade. Look for coverage of the exhibition in the next issue of *American Art Collector*.

When Michigan's **Muskegon Museum of Art** opened in 1912, contemporary

realism was central to its collecting and exhibitions. "Today, the MMA continues to feature realism, with the Bennett Collection...comprising a major part of our identity," explains Art Martin, the museum's director of collections and exhibitions. "The Bennett Prize, a biennial grant and exhibition that offers \$50,000 and a solo show to the winning artist, enters its fourth iteration in 2025, and the MMA has acquired the paintings of several of the finalists since 2019." The museum also recently hosted *Visions: 16 Detroit Artists*, that celebrated the city's realist art. Each year, MMA also presents its *Michigan Contemporary Art Exhibition*,

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a juried show featuring landscapes, still lifes and figurative works by artists from around the state. Martin adds, “As we look to the next century, contemporary realism will be a continuing focus of our program.”

New Salem Museum and Academy of Fine Art in New Salem, Massachusetts, hosts an ever-changing display of paintings, drawings and sculptures carefully

curated from an international roster of esteemed historic and contemporary artists. The *NSMA Painting Competition* invites artists globally to showcase the finest in contemporary realist painting. With an Acquisition Award of \$25,000, the competition stands as a testament to the enduring allure and expressive power of representational painting. “The beauty of

this collection resonates throughout every corner of the building,” says museum director Michael Klein. “Our owner and curator, Laura Barletta, has previously led several large-scale interior design projects, yet this one is her most personal endeavor. As director, I am honored to work alongside a collector who not only appreciates some of the finest works in contemporary



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8. Muskegon Museum of Art, *Winter Coats*, 2017, oil on panel, by Mary Henderson. Gift of Steven Alan Bennett and Dr. Elaine Melotti Schmidt, 2019.4. **9.** *The Bennett Prize, Rising Voices 3* exhibition featuring works by Shiqing Deng and Rona S. Harris at the Muskegon Museum of Art, Muskegon, MI. **10.** Interior view of New Salem Museum of Art featuring a work by Jeremy Lipking. Courtesy New Salem Museum of Art, New Salem, MA. **11.** Sandwich Glass Museum, hot-sculpted iguana, chameleon and ruby octopus, sizes vary, by Isabel Green. Courtesy Sandwich Glass Museum, Sandwich, MA. **12.** Exterior of the Sandwich Glass Museum, Sandwich, MA.

realism but also possesses a visionary sense of what should be shared in the public sphere.”

Located in the heart of historic Sandwich, Massachusetts, the **Sandwich Glass Museum** is a must-see destination for anyone interested in the art and science of glassmaking. With exhibits spanning over three centuries of glassmaking history, previous contemporary exhibits have featured Ed Branson, Aron Leaman, Jenn Violet, Caterina Weintraub, Mariel Bass and Robert Dane. The museum gift shop features unique

handmade glass from contemporary glass artists, and its galleries are filled with beautifully crafted glass pieces from 19th-century artisans. Visitors also have the opportunity to watch live glassblowing demonstrations and learn about the various techniques used to create these stunning works of art. In addition to upcoming historic exhibitions, the museum will host a *Summer Special Exhibition* in 2025 featuring renowned glass artist Josh Simpson. Visit the museum website for details. ●

FEATURED Museums

BO BARTLETT CENTER

921 Front Avenue, Columbus, GA 31901
(706) 507-8432, www.columbusstate.edu/bartlett-center/

FORT WAYNE MUSEUM OF ART

311 E. Main Street, Fort Wayne, IN 46802
(260) 422-6467, www.fwmoa.org

GIBBES MUSEUM OF ART

135 Meeting Street, Charleston, SC 29401
(843) 722-2706, www.gibbesmuseum.org

HIGH MUSEUM OF ART

1280 Peachtree Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30309, (404) 733-4400, www.high.org

NEW SALEM MUSEUM AND ACADEMY OF FINE ART

37 S. Main Street, New Salem, MA 01355, (413) 658-2098,
www.newsalemmuseum.com

MUSEUM OF ART – DELAND

600 N. Woodland Boulevard, DeLand, FL 32720, (386) 734-4371
www.moartdeland.org

MUSKEGON MUSEUM OF ART

296 W. Webster Avenue, Muskegon, MI 49440, (231) 720-2570
www.muskegonartmuseum.org

NORTON MUSEUM OF ART

1450 S. Dixie Highway, West Palm Beach, FL 33401, (561) 832-5196
www.norton.org

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SANDWICH GLASS MUSEUM

129 Main Street, Sandwich MA, 02563, (508) 888-0251
www.sandwichglassmuseum.org