

ARTBEAT

A year you had to see

12 memorial exhibits from around the SouthCoast



Don Wilkinson

This has proven to be another robust year for the visual arts in the SouthCoast.

For the most part, the most intriguing defied convention. Among the very best were this admittedly subjective top 12:

12.) "Into Infinity: Art by Milton Brightman" at the New Bedford Whaling Museum. A local favorite, the curmudgeonly Brightman's intimate exhibition of haunting landscapes, moonlight snowstorms and self-portraits with canine companions walking in the woods never fails to dance on the edge of the sublime. The only problem with the show: there wasn't enough of it.

11.) "Witness to Conflict: The Art of Documentary" at the Dedee Shattuck Gallery. In an era in which the leader of the free world challenges the veracity of journalism itself, "Witness..." reinforced the importance of an unflinching press. The show featured photography and audio recordings that were necessarily discomforting, focusing on war-torn Mosul, vanishing rainforests, Mexican drug wars, and night vision explosions over Iraq. The documentation-artists were Andy Mills, Kipp Wettstein, Emily Pederson and James Razko.

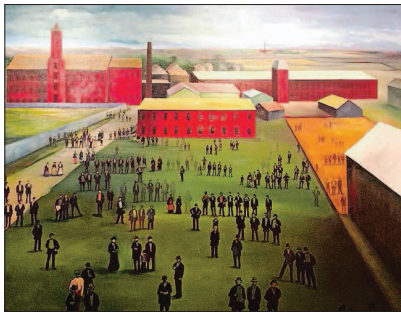
10.) "Francisco Rapoza: A Retrospective" at the Frederick Douglass Gallery at

Gallery X. Rapoza was born in New Bedford in 1911 and passed away in 1984. His work includes traditional nautical scenes, portraits, landscapes and enthralling curiosities involving the Biblical Noah, mermaids and other themes. His daughter Nina Fay (and her partner, the aforementioned Brightman) curated the show, shining a much needed light on the sadly underseen talent.

9.) "Mark Phelan: The Cartography of Impossible Spaces" at the Co-Creative Center. It was a relatively large exhibition of paintings focusing on an attempt to navigate an inhospitable nether-land between the living and the dead. Studied with geometry and personal iconography, his paintings are emotional, cerebral and muscular... all at once.

8.) "Bill Seaman: Suspended Sentence" at the University Art Gallery at UMass Dartmouth. The least visual of all the visual art exhibitions this year, the Duke University professor covered the walls, doors, staircases and elevators with black vinyl text. And it was a wink-wink-nod-nod gift to art students, historians, critics and semioticians, referencing Duchamp, Magritte and others, while pointing out the beauty of plumbing, fire extinguishers and the hum of fluorescent lights.

7.) "Umberto Crenca and William Schaff" at Groundwork. Nearly eight dozen works of the two Rhode Island artists, done in a variety of media, were displayed in the alternate space and much it was disturbing in both subject matter and timeliness. As curated by Jessica Gregoli,

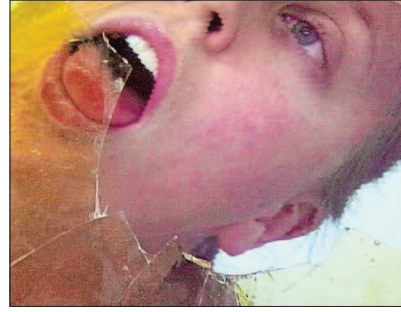


Cutler Mill by Deborah Baronas

the show produced a visceral response as the viewer made sense of a Pinocchio-nosed president, skeletal horses, lost warriors, and Old Testament cherubim.

6.) "Ten Years After..." Works by Adrian Tio Diaz" in the Heritage Gallery at New Bedford Art Museum / ArtWorks! Printmaker and former dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts at UMass Dartmouth presented an exhibition of vibrant screenprints, linocuts and mixed media that practically glowed with color. Digging deep into the mythology of the Taino, the indigenous people of the Caribbean, Tio offered up lizards and hummingbirds as magical creatures and convinced us to believe.

5.) "Mouthfeel" at the CVPA Campus Gallery at UMass Dartmouth. Curated by Australian art historian, Megan Fizell, the video exhibition was an ambitious attempt to make visual what is not: the actual physical sensation of food, drink (or



Lick by Elizabeth Willing

magic realism to John Borowicz's more-real-than-reality-itself portraits, and from Kathleen Volp's pre-Columbian / action figure hybrids and Kari Straka's alien ceramic works, everything was delightfully out of whack.

3.) "The Labia Series: A Fresh Look at the Feminine" at the S&G Project Gallery at the Hatch Street Studios. A series of wall-mounted three-dimensional works by Kate Rego was certainly a "fresh look." Considering the subject, there was nothing pornographic nor clinical. With great glee, Rego reinvented the most intimate part of a woman's body as a widow's dress, a holster, and a silly character. It's as if Judy Chicago and Jim Henson met for drinks and decided to work together.

2.) "The Art of Work, Textiles and the American Dream" at the Narrows Center for the Arts. Rhode Island-based artist Deborah Baronas displayed paintings, drawings and mixed

See them all

To check out images from all of the exhibits mentioned here, visit SouthCoastToday.com/Coastin.

anything else) in the mouth, distinct from taste and smell. There was certainly a note of the erotic (Elizabeth Willing's video of a woman relentlessly licking a pane of sugar glass until it dissolves) and a bit of the bizarre (video artist Hannah Raisin devouring a dozen red roses.)

4.) "Otherworldly" at the Grimshaw-Gudewicz Gallery at Bristol Community College. A six-person exhibition, curated by Standard Time contributor Catherine Carter featured her and five other artists, exploring territory that seemed just a step out of sync with the norm.

From Carter's use of spheres as portals to some otherplace to Deborah Barlow's soft focus cosmic mysteries, from Michael Hecht's quirky dives into

media works about the textile industry in the Narrows in Fall River, itself once a mill. It was a moving paean, unburdened by romantic notions. Textile work was hard work, dangerous and sometimes deadly. Baronas is a wonderful painter. And she never flinched.

1.) "The Unraveling" by Adrienne Sloane at the New Bedford Art Museum / ArtWorks! The smallest exhibition on this list is also the most powerful. Sloane's conceit was simple and elegant and political. She displayed a knit American flag in a vertical orientation on the wall. Over the course of time, she slowly unraveled the red, white and blue yarn to reveal a copy of the U.S. Constitution below it. Sloane made a clear point: the flag is the symbol, the truth lies below.

Don Wilkinson is a painter and art critic who lives in New Bedford. Contact him at Don.Wilkinson@gmail.com. His reviews run each week in Coastin'.



The Unraveling by Adrienne Sloane