

NC State University in Raleigh, NC, Offers Exhibition of Inflatables

NC State University in Raleigh, NC, will present *BLOW UP II: Inflation Contemporary Art*, on view at the Gregg Museum of Art & Design, The Historic Chancellor's Residence, from Nov. 4 through Jan. 28, 2024.

BLOW UP II: Inflation Contemporary Art explores the medium of inflatable art with figurative, conceptual, and abstract imagery. These large-scale inflatable sculptures, conceived by nine artists and art collectives, connote fun and whimsy, are familiar yet strange, and challenge the definition of art. Here, in an unusual feat, artists use air as an active tool in their work to subvert our perspective and surprise us.

Inflatables have a long history, dating as far back as the 18th century, and were initially perceived as innovative, if not magical, objects. Today, inflatables are often associated with happy memories. Lawn inflatables, bouncy houses, and party balloons are ubiquitous at holidays and celebrations. Water wings, inflatable inner tubes, and rafts conjure thrilling vacation memories. The awe-inspiring hot air balloon challenges our feet-on-the-ground perspective, allowing us to levitate and explore the land from above like a bird.



FriendsWithYou (Los Angeles, California), "Never Ending Story, Spider Man's Eye," 2019, ripstop nylon fabric, electric fan, 150 x 108 x 168 in.

The inflatable is also well-known for its effective marketing abilities. Who hasn't been drawn to the dancing street inflatable near the shopping center or the massive blimp with a scrolling electronic sign flying over a stadium? Plain and simple: humans are attracted to inflatables. However, what happens to our experience of large, art-filled objects – typically encountered outdoors – when we place them in an art gallery and play with their scale? The result is what you will find in *BLOW UP II*, the second iteration of Bedford Gallery's traveling inflatable exhibition.

This show's roster of artists includes: Nicole Banowetz, Sharon Engelstien, FriendsWithYou, Josh Harker, Susan Lee-Chun, Matt Ritchie, Lizbeth Rossof, Jen Stark, and Max Streicher – many of whom have never worked in the inflatable medium previously. The resulting artworks reflect various themes, including consumerism, pop culture, history, and even mortality. Some convey a surreal sensibility through oversized scale or an uncanny human connection, like Max Streicher's sculptures that appear to be living, breathing beings.

From the outset, the artworks in *BLOW UP II* appear fun and playful; however,

Craven Allen Gallery in Durham, NC, Offers Works by John Beerman

Craven Allen Gallery in Durham, NC, will present *John Beerman: Seen and Unseen/Paintings of North Carolina and Normandy*, on view from Nov. 11 through Jan. 6, 2024. A reception will be held on Nov. 11, from 5-7pm.

In *Seen and Unseen*, renowned painter John Beerman brings together new work created both at home here in North Carolina, and abroad in Normandy, France. "To see freshly, to discover something luminous below the surface of the commonplace is my challenge," says John Beerman. "By laying down paint on canvas, I try to represent a moment in time with its subtle order and its specific nuances of color and light."

Perfect lighting conditions can be fleeting, so Beerman will often revisit a location for days in a row at an appointed time to create small plein air studies. These studies are then taken back to his studio,



(Left), Lizbeth Rossof, "5 XI'AN AMERICAN WARRIORS", 2019, nylon fabric, dimensions vary. (Right), Sharon Engelstein, "Seeker", 2012, nylon fabric, forced air, 14 x 9.4 x 18.6 feet.

there is a touch of melancholy throughout the show as we are reminded that these objects live their full lifecycle every day. Once the gallery lights dim, the artworks deflate and await their resurrection the following day. There is an odd relationship with these inflatable objects as they too are dependent on air.

Another oddity is the unusual coupling of subject matter and media – for example, Josh Harker's sculpture, *Crania Geodesica*. Harker marries soft materials with a subject matter that is the opposite in reality – a hard, human skull. Through scale and medium, viewers are asked to reflect upon the fragility and importance of the skull. Artist Lizbeth Rossof's *5 XI'AN AMERICAN WARRIORS* series subverts cultures as she translates stone and Chinese history into portable American pop culture idols.

Then there is form. What exactly is Sharon Engelstein's large, pink, billowy sculpture? Engelstein has left her creature open to interpretation. Is it friend or foe? One could say the same about Matt Ritchie's rat inflatable. Is it cute or terrifying? Does it conjure up ideas of lab testing, or do you want to cuddle with it? Perhaps the idea is to evoke a sense of compassion for the misconceived and vulnerable.

Amusement is undeniably evoked by several of the works in *BLOW UP II*. The Los Angeles-based art collective, FriendsWithYou is known for their friendly, anime-like characters that ooze happiness as they smile back at you, and Susan Lee-Chun's enormous flamingos seem ready for a ride. The instant joy that is sparked when seeing everyday objects enlarged to an awe-inspiring scale allows viewers to revel in the hilarity and exuberance of these outsized and outlandish sculptures. Universal connections are built when we find familiarity in the absurd.

Holding our attention with wonderment and delight, *BLOW UP II* creates a spectacular, immersive environment that inspires deeper contemplation. By harnessing the power of air, the ideas and possibilities in art-making seem endless, and creativity takes flight.

BLOW UP II: Inflation Contemporary Art was curated by Carrie Lederer and organized by Bedford Gallery in Walnut Creek, California.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Museum at 919/513-7244 or visit (<https://gregg.arts.ncsu.edu/>).



Work by John Beerman where he spends months translating them into large-scale paintings. Experimentation and discovery are at the core of Beerman's artistic practice. Paint is applied and removed, layers are created, covered and then
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perhaps unearthed later. "I believe there is a life force in the materials I work with," says Beerman. Embracing the life and will of his materials and combining that with his own vision for a painting leads to the landscapes for which he is so well known.

Beerman has long had a presence on the national stage, and his work can be found in the collections of some of the most prominent American institutions, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Whitney Museum of American Art. Closer to home, his *Three Trees, Two Clouds* is an icon of the North Carolina Museum of Art's collection. This is John Beerman's fourth show at Craven Allen Gallery; he spent much of his career in New York, and now resides in Hillsborough, NC.

John Beerman is a landscape painter and North Carolina native and current Hillsborough resident whose work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. John received his degree from Rhode Island School of Design, and he attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

His 35-year career has garnered recognition at the highest levels of fine art. He has received several awards and fellowships, including the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Award and the Yaddo Artist Colony Fellowship. His work is in the collection of numerous museums across the country, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the North Carolina Museum



Work by John Beerman

of Art, Raleigh.

Among other public collections, his work is at the Duke University Cancer Center, the Duke Endowment, and the North Carolina Governor's mansion. He also has completed several public commissioned works, including an 85-foot mural for the Milstein Family Heart Center at New York Presbyterian Hospital in New York City and a painting for the UNC-Rex Hospital in Raleigh.

Craven Allen Gallery is located on Broad Street in Durham.

For further information check our NC Commercial Gallery listings, call the gallery at 919/286-4837 or visit (www.cravenallengallery.com).

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, Offers National Portrait Exhibition

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, will present *The Outwin: American Portraiture Today*, on view at the Ackland Art Museum, from Nov. 3 through Jan. 21, 2024.

Launched in 2006 to support the next wave of contemporary portraiture in the United States, the National Portrait Gallery's celebrated *Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition* is a major survey of the best of American portraiture. Held every three years, and now in its sixth edition, *The Outwin: American Portraiture Today* presents forty-two works - selected from over 2,700 entries - foregrounding the vibrancy and relevance of portraiture now. In addition to paintings, photographs, drawings, and sculptures, *The Outwin* includes video, performance art, and textiles, highlighting the seemingly limitless possibilities of contemporary portraiture.

Open to both emerging and established artists, this year's entrants were encouraged to submit work that moves beyond traditional definitions of portraiture and engages with the social and political landscape of our time.

The competition is endowed by and named for Virginia Outwin Boochever (1920 - 2005) who, for nineteen years, volunteered as a docent at the Portrait Gallery.

This exhibition has been organized



Work by Elsa Maria Melendez

by the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. The competition and exhibition are made possible by the Virginia Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition Endowment, established by Virginia Outwin Boochever and sustained by her family.

The Ackland's exhibition is supported in part by Caroline and Arthur Rogers.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Museum at 919/966-5736 or visit (www.ackland.org).

Check us out at (www.carolinaarts.com) or e-mail to (info@carolinaarts.com)