

# A look back at the visual arts in 2010

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Our area is not a major art center, yet this year we made big news nationally when our state museum opened its new building, funded by the state's Legislature, with its amazing gift of 31 original Rodins. The jury is still out on Thomas Phifer's exterior of gray aluminum panels, but just about everyone agrees the interior design and the arrangement of the art are superb.

Although we are not an art destination the economy has affected our commercial galleries just like it has in the larger metropolitan cities. Collectors are finding it hard to buy because their disposable income has shrunk and when collectors disappear, even galleries with longevity cannot survive indefinitely. In 2010 we lost four long-standing galleries: Jane Tyndall, Somerhill Gallery, Turning Point Gallery and Bill Hester Fine Arts. They will be missed.

On the upside, Outsiders Gallery, a small boutique with its focus on outsider art, opened in Durham, and Frank, an artists' cooperative, opened in Chapel Hill.

Cooperatives may be the way of the future; two in Hillsborough, Gallery of Arts and Artists Cooperative, have been around several years and LabourLove at Golden Belt, a small commercial gallery which opened 20 months ago, announced they will be "transitioning to a collective gallery model" in February. The Frank has help from the city and their landlord and a strong base of member artists and should be able to hang on. If LabourLove negotiates similar support, a strong committed artists' membership and some concessions from the landlord, they should also have the staying power needed.

Looking back over the year there was no shortage of good exhibits, several coming out of Golden Belt's Room 100. Three which deserve mention, although the focus is history rather than art, are at Raleigh's Museum of History and will be there through January and beyond: "The Real George Washington"; "Down Home, Jewish Life in North Carolina"; and Behind the Veneer: "Thomas Day, Master Cabinet Maker."

Below are my choices for the best exhibits of the year.

n Nasher Museum of Art: "Lines of Attack: Conflicts in Caricature." Art students and their professor researched the political cartoons of two eras--Louis Philippe, King of France, 1830-1848, and George W. Bush, 2001-2009. Both men were the butt of political satire and, although 150 years apart, their failures were similar.

n Lee Hansley Gallery, Raleigh: "The Paul Hartley Legacy: Featuring Works by Former Students at East Carolina University during Hartley's Tenure." Over a period of 37 years Hartley taught some 3,500 students who teach and make art in every corner of our state. His influence on the art of the state is incalculable.

n Frankie G. Weems Art Gallery, Meredith College, Raleigh: "Titus Brooks Heagins: "Desire and Otherness." The Durham artist photographs people who are different, geographically, culturally or socially and, as we look at their images, dares us to question our capacity for tolerance and openness.

n Golden Belt, Room 100: "Down the Rabbit Hole: Installation by Tama Hochbein." Hochbein continually pushes her medium. Here she cuts and layers digital photographs to recreate Alice's topsy turvy world.

n Durham Arts Council: "Lori Waxman, 60 wrd/min art critic: a performance." A published art critic set up a performance piece in which she invites artists to show her their work and, in return, promises a thoughtful critique published within a quick time frame. She did as promised in front of the artists and all on-lookers. Watching her work was, itself, a beautiful experience.

n Golden Belt, Room 100: "Necessary Fictions." North Carolina's population is 4.5 percent Latina and Latino, and in this exhibit, the first in our area, these highly trained artists address their problems as outsiders. Their message is universally American; every one of us descended from ancestors who were at one time outsiders.

n LabourLove Gallery, Golden Belt: "Look Away Dixie Land: paintings by Dave Alsobrooks, McArthur Freeman, II, and Titus Brooks Heagins." Two black artists and one white artist address racism through Confederate Flags, portraits of black and white women and paintings packed with cartoon figures.

n Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University: "The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl."

Old fashioned records made into sculptures, images of records painted on canvas and sounds coming from them prove vinyl is alive and well despite iPods, YouTube and iPhones. Through Feb. 6.

n Perkins Library, Duke University: "Book + Art." Handmade books, by women about women's issues, in the shapes of objects like a cigarette pack, satin

underwear and a folded paper concertina. Through Jan. 9.

n N.C. Museum of Art: "The Art of Norman Rockwell." As an illustrator for the Saturday Evening Post, he helped build the myth of America as a middle-class paradise. Turns out he was so much more and toward the end of his life drew pictures that proved he understood the problems of our diverse nation. Through Jan. 30.

n Durham Art Guild: "56th Annual Juried Show." Instructed to address global problems, the juried artists proved they can use the power of their art to bring important issues into focus. Through January 23.

n Through this Lens Gallery, "Capturing the Artistic Muse: photographs by Wojtek Wojdyski." The photographer looks over the shoulder of the painter and we look over his shoulder and see a painting evolve.

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