

New York's 'Home' show is where the Maine art is

● Sixteen emerging contemporary artists with significant Maine ties exhibit their work in a high-profile Brooklyn space.

By **BOB KEYES**

Staff Writer

Several young artists from Maine are making their New York debut this weekend.

The artists, whose work represents the leading edge of contemporary visual arts in Maine, are part of the just-opened "Home" exhibition at a Brooklyn gallery with a reputation for exposing emerging artists to the larger New York art world.

The exhibition also will expose Maine art in a new light, says guest curator Bruce Brown.

"I want to send a message that young Maine artists are current and that landscape painting is not just what we are all about," says Brown, curator at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art in Rockport where many of the artists have shown regularly.

Among Mainerers, the "Home" show in New York has created an exceptional buzz. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of Maine artists and contingents from the state's various arts communities, including Maine College of Art, the Maine Arts Commission and the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, made the trek to New York this weekend for the opening reception and a series of parties afterward.

As a gesture of support, Gov. John Baldacci issued a "Contemporary Maine Art Outreach Day" proclamation, citing the exhibition and the arts in general as catalysts to raise Maine's national profile and boost the economy.

The exhibition opened Saturday at DUMBO Arts Center in Brooklyn and will remain on display through March 14. Coincidental to the DUMBO show, Lewiston artist William Pope.L will open his "eRacism" exhibition in metro New York, as well. The exhibition, which began at the Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art in 2002 before touring nationally, will be at Artists Space in Soho beginning Saturday and currently is on view at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

"Home" includes the work of 16 artists, all of whom have significant Maine connections and most of whom live here year-round.

A dozen of the artists are younger than 35, and nearly all are considered object makers - they create their conceptual work using common, everyday materials.



Aaron Stephan included this imprint of his own torso in the "Home" exhibit.

"HOME"

What: Exhibit featuring the contemporary artwork of Maine artists

When: Through March 14

Where: DUMBO Art Center, 30 Washington St., Brooklyn, N.Y.

Information: (718) 694-0831

On the Web: www.dumboartscenter.org

'HOME'

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There's only one painter in the bunch, Katherine Bradford, who lives in Brooklyn and summers in Maine.

Among those showing are John Bisbee of Harpswell, Diana Cherbuliez of Vinalhaven, Aaron Stephan of Portland and Pia Walker of Liberty.

Jill Dalton, who lives in Portland, has two pieces in the show: "Messenger," a mechanical bird sculpture, whose wings move with a trigger function; and "Journey," a metal structure that elevates a nest.

"I think one aspect that's exciting to me is that there are so many Maine contemporary artists together in one space, and they are being presented to another area that probably isn't fully aware of the entirety of the art scene here in Maine," says Dalton, who operates the Portland gallery Filament on Munjoy Hill.

"A lot of the work that is going on here is pretty radical and not seen by the rest of the world unless they come to a little neighborhood gallery."

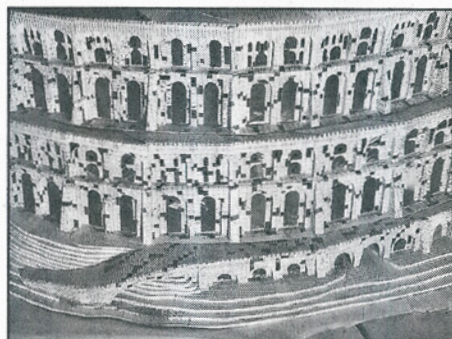
Brown settled on the "Home" theme after detecting a thread of domesticity running through the work of the artists in the group. Some of the pieces speak to the notion of home as a physical structure, others use the theme to suggest a physical body. In other pieces, home is conjured through the notion of relationships.

Examples include Erica Hansen's wedding dress made from salt and

AUDIENCE

PARTICIPATING MAINE ARTISTS

Melonie Bennett, Gorham; **John Bisbee**, Harpswell; **Astrid Bowlby**, Philadelphia; **Katherine Bradford**, Brooklyn, N.Y.; **Eric Brown**, Brooklyn, N.Y.; **Diana Cherbuliez**, Vinalhaven; **Jill Dalton**, Portland; **Lauren Fensterstock**, Portland; **George Ferrandi**, Brooklyn, N.Y.; **Erica Hansen**, Vinalhaven; **David McQueen**, Brooklyn, N.Y.; **Danica Phelps**, Brooklyn, N.Y.; **Celeste Roberge**, Florida and Maine; **Sean Ryan**, Vinalhaven; **Aaron Stephan**, Portland; and **Pia Walker**, Liberty.



In her piece "Why Buildings Fall Down," Vinalhaven artist Diana Cherbuliez created a fortress-like structure from folded layers of crossword puzzles pulled from The New York Times.

Image courtesy the artist

fish net. Stephan immersed himself in sculpted molds to make an imprint of his torso. In his foray into new media, Bisbee made a one-hour video that is centered around his coastal home. Cherbuliez created a fortress-like structure from crossword puzzles from The New York Times. She calls her piece "Why Buildings Falls Down."

In his curator's statement, Brown wrote, "Home is one of life's most resonant human experiences which define in significant measure who we become. ... Together, the 16 artists in 'Home' offer their audience an

opportunity to engage in a dialogue on a theme that resonates deep within us all."

The exhibition continues a natural relationship between Maine and New York artists that has existed for generations, while strengthening the Maine scene by linking it with the larger art world, says Oliver L. Wilder, president and CEO of the Center for Maine Contemporary Art. That outside connection is essential, he adds, because insular arts communities tend to collapse with time. By linking with external influences, ideas are exchanged and art evolves, he

says.

"The market for Maine art is expanding, and the exchange of ideas between Maine and the rest of the country and the rest of the world becomes richer," Wilder says.

The location of the New York show is significant. DUMBO – an acronym that describes the industrial neighborhood "down under the Manhattan Bridge overpass" – is considered a leading gallery for new work and important new artists.

The gallery grew out of the DUMBO Art Festival, an annual fall event in which hundreds of Brooklyn artists open their studios to the public.

Michael Wilson, who runs the gallery, said DUMBO hosts five or six shows a year, almost all of which are curated by guests. While the themes vary, the one constant is DUMBO's requirement that Brooklyn artists be included in the exhibition. The idea is to link artists from elsewhere with those from Brooklyn, Wilson says.

In the case of "Home," it was easy to find Brooklyn artists with connections to Maine, Brown says. Bradford summers in Maine. Danica Phelps grew up in Rockport. Eric Brown graduated from the University of Southern Maine.

DUMBO, whose board of trustees includes author Norman Mailer, is known for its influence. Its shows draw wide interest, especially for the openings.

Unlike most New York galleries, DUMBO is open on Mondays, which enables other gallery owners and operators to see new work. That feeds directly into the gallery's goal of

showcasing emerging talents.

That goal dovetails nicely with the mission of the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, says Brown. "I love making introductions. That's the adrenaline of this show. For most of these artists, it's their introduction to New York, as well as my own," he says.

Besides that, he loves the DUMBO space. It's an older building, similar in feel to the Rockport gallery where Brown is used to working.

"I love the space because it's so much like our own – undulating floors, heavily beamed ceilings and posts. The difference is we're a wooden building in Rockport and they're brick. But the spirit of the place is so much like ours."

While Brown has no plans to bring the show to Rockport – most of the artists have shown there recently – he will take it to the University of New England's Westbrook College Campus on Stevens Avenue in Portland beginning in May.

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