

artscope

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16TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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UPS, PLS DEL.
To the President
New Britain



STORIES TO TELL: FRANK ARMSTRONG'S AMERICA

NAWAMA'S CHANGING LIVES, CHANGING FUTURE | RACE X ETHNICITY X IDENTITY
AT WAM | THE ART OF LANGUAGE AT FOUNTAIN STREET | NEWPORT BIENNIAL |
CORNERED: BRETT ABBOTT AT NEW BRITAIN & KATHERINE FRENCH AT CATAMOUNT

March/April 2022

Free or \$5.99 mailed copy

"A DYNAMIC CONTINUUM"

On February 15, Brett Abbott became the new Director and CEO of the New Britain Museum of American Art; during his first week in office, Artscope Magazine's Suzanne Volmer exchanged questions and ideas with him as he was stepping into the job.

SUZANNE VOLMER: Welcome back to New England. Congratulations on becoming the new Director of NBMAA.

BRETT ABBOTT: Thank you.

SV: Your background includes a Master's Degree from Williams College and then onward to Stanford and Museum Leadership training at The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. It's a combination of influences that makes me think of the exhibit "Now Dig This!" that originated from The Getty's Pacific Standard Time Series that I saw at Williams College Art Museum. I wonder what cross-pollination, inclusive of your museum directorship at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth, Texas, do you plan to bring to New Britain Museum of American Art?

BA: Museums are unique gems, each and every one of them. And what works for one institution may not always transfer to another. But you are absolutely right that I carry with me important lessons from each context...ideas

that may have application here. PST is a great model, something that could definitely be considered in the years ahead for the greater Hartford region. There is such a rich history of the arts in this area that I suspect plumbing that in combination with other regional institutions could be quite fruitful and meaningful.

SV: Previous NBMAA Director Min Jung Kim and current serving curator Lisa Williams demonstrated visionary commitment in 2020/2021, sustaining a focus on collecting and showing women artists, formalized in a series of exhibitions created in honor of the anniversary of women's suffrage. This series situated NBMAA as a compelling destination for groundbreaking artworks by contemporary American women artists. Will you continue to vigorously support and make inroads in this direction of acquisition and presentation?

BA: That was a terrific initiative. It was one of the things that caught my attention and attracted me to the Museum's program when I was first considering the opportunity of moving here. I agree it has positioned the Museum well, and there is no doubt work to be done to continue in that spirit in

CORNERED

**BRETT ABBOTT
ASSUMES NEW BRITAIN
DIRECTORSHIP**

**NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF
AMERICAN ART**
56 LEXINGTON STREET
NEW BRITAIN,
CONNECTICUT

**THE POETRY OF NATURE:
HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL
LANDSCAPES FROM THE
NEW YORK HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

THROUGH MAY 22

**PERMANENT COLLECTION
INSTALLATION | MODERN
AND CONTEMPORARY
MASTERWORKS FROM THE
NBMAA: 1950S TO TODAY**

THROUGH MAY 31





TOP: Jervis McEntee (1828-1891), *Over the Hills and Far Away*, 1878, oil on canvas. New-York Historical Society, Gift of Richard T. Sharp.

BOTTOM LEFT: Thomas Chambers (1808-1869), *Lake George and the Village of Caldwell*, ca. 1843-1860, oil on canvas. New-York Historical Society, Thomas Jefferson Bryan Fund.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Louisa Davis Minot (1788-1858), *Niagara Falls*, 1818, oil on canvas. New-York Historical Society, Gift of Mrs. Waldron Phoenix Belknap, Sr. to the Waldron Phoenix Belknap, Jr. Collection.

the years ahead. It's an important statement in the art world, and I will absolutely support continued growth in that area.

SV: In terms of your signature on content development and institutional holdings, how might you want to shape NBMAA moving forward?

BA: One of the most exciting parts of a long-range vision for this institution is taking full advantage of being incredibly well positioned on a beautiful Olmsted-designed park. I see the possibility of extending the excellence of our galleries into the outdoor spaces surrounding the buildings...spaces ready for inspired leisure, lingering and life-making. The Museum could engage in place making by using its special

relationship with artists to craft environments. And I can imagine outdoor commissions punctuating the exterior...blending seamlessly into the park as a sort of outdoor gallery, energizing the area, drawing audiences into the Museum itself.

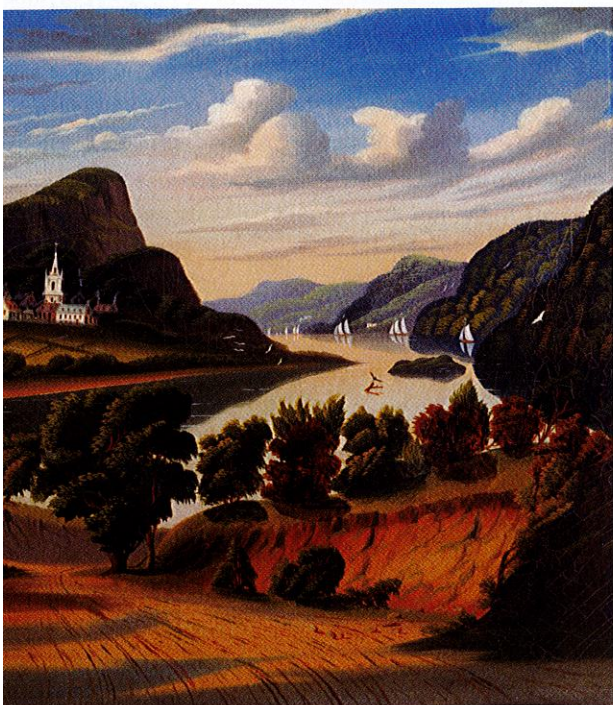
Pairing art and nature is already in the DNA of the building with its windows on the park. I [also] love what the Museum has done with partnership at the Delamar hotel and loans installed around the region.

Inside our walls, one area of potential development might be in the realm of photography, which is my own curatorial specialty. The stellar collection of paintings and sculpture here could pair wonderfully with photography in a focused [exploration] of historical and contemporary aesthetics.

OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT: New Britain Museum of American Art Director Brett Abbott in the back stacks of the museum examining a large format Cindy Sherman photograph.

OPPOSITE PAGE RIGHT: New Britain Museum of American Art Director Brett Abbott.

SV: Have you a short list of artworks you'd like to bring forward and for what reasons?



BA: I intend to do a thorough review of the collection and its development opportunities with the staff and board in the months ahead. My understanding of what acquisitions might have significant impact will evolve over time. And it strikes me there could be an opportunity to acquire work by additional important artists of color from the 19th century, including Edward Bannister and Robert Duncanson, not yet represented in this esteemed collection. Likewise, from the 20th century, Norman Lewis and Elizabeth Catlett could be of interest.

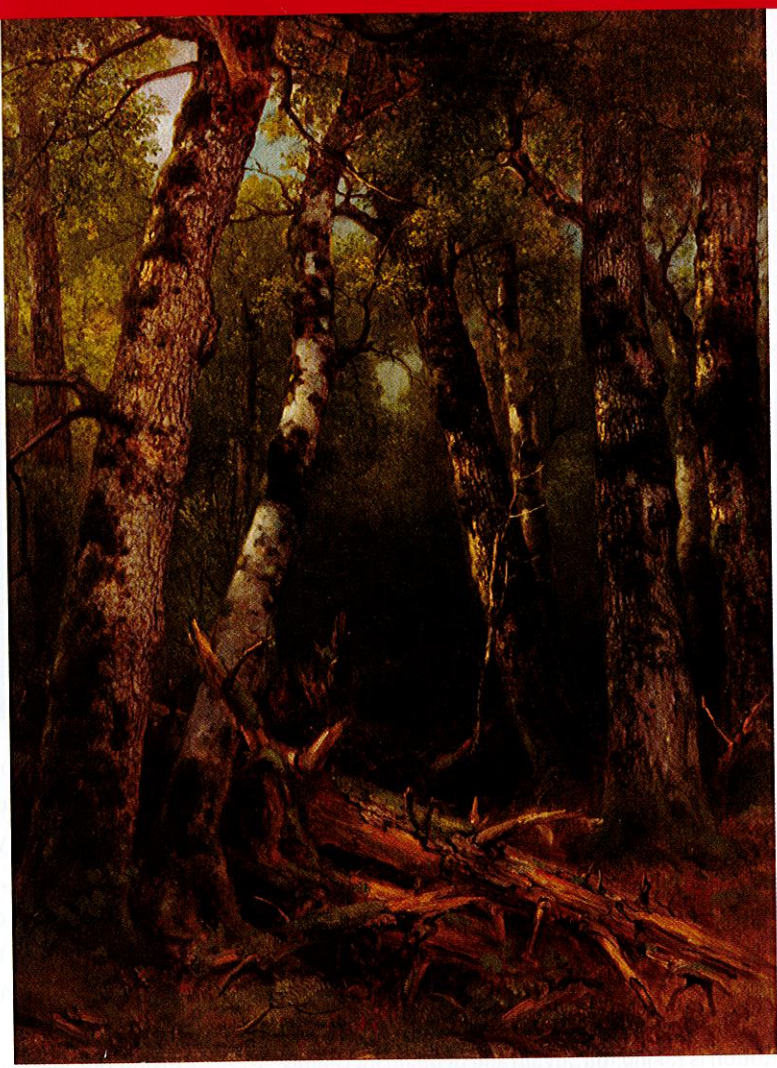
SV: What do you consider to be the important issues of today?

BA: I would say, first and foremost, that museums aspire to be relevant, impactful, diverse places that people want to visit; places where people are enriched and places that contribute to healthier and more fulfilling lives, that support the economic development of a region. Places that explore and preserve the artistic legacy of the past to enlighten the present, and inspire the future, bringing people together rather than dividing, welcoming rather than excluding... serving as a center of a community's cultural life.

Within that context, social responsibility and its relationship to the art world is an important topic today. Our field has a lot of work to do in its representation of the full spectrum of American creativity. Issues of diversity are [a priority] for many collecting institutions around the nation. The NBMAA is absolutely committed to addressing them in its work going forward.

Environmental issues, too, are ones that I think will be increasingly important to focus on...the NBMAA's strong collection of Hudson River School paintings are a platform on which to foreground and explore that issue.

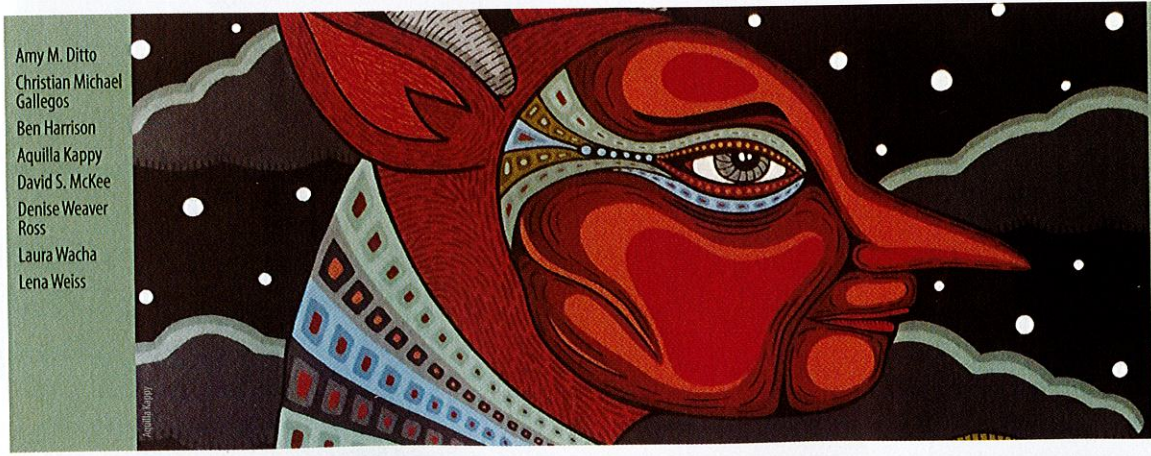
SV: What do you see as the museum's role in developing cultural discourse?



BA: I think it's incumbent upon museums to diversify their collections and address omissions of the past with works by women and artists of color, thoughtfully balanced amid long-term collecting initiatives. We must aspire [institutionally] to showcase the plurality of America as an essential part of our collective strength and distinction as a nation.

Asher B. Durand (1796-1886) *Study from Nature: Group of Trees*, 1855-1857, oil on canvas. New-York Historical Society, The Louis Durr Fund.


SV: What are your thoughts about continuing to position NBMAA as a destination for audiences beyond the region?



- Amy M. Ditto
- Christian Michael Gallegos
- Ben Harrison
- Aquilla Kappy
- David S. McKee
- Denise Weaver Ross
- Laura Wach
- Lena Weiss

VIVID: A Sampling of Today's Albuquerque Art Scene

April 9th – May 6th, 2022
Attleboro Arts Museum
86 Park Street, Attleboro, MA
www.attleboroartsmuseum.org

 **ATTLEBORO ARTS MUSEUM**

BA: When you think about it, there are a lot of general museums out there. But there are not that many museums with a special focus on the American scene. NBMAA can be known nationally as a focused contributor to studies of American creativity, a stand-alone museum devoted to plumbing the power and significance of that field, past and present, all the time, shining brightly in that realm.

Forging strategic relationships with other likeminded institutions around the nation can yield the opportunity to bring significant, exciting, and national caliber exhibitions in the field of American art to New Britain. Along the way, close collaboration with museums and civic structures in our own region can help strengthen the ecosystem of cultural attractions that draw museumgoers from afar, making this a noteworthy part of the country to visit.

SV: Typically, museum scheduling is developed about two years in advance. How do you envision your Directorship immediately showing its influence?

BA: In some ways, I hope and expect general visitors won't feel a dramatic shift as I take the helm of the directorship, and that's a good thing. Min did some exceptional projects during her time, as did Douglas [Hyland] before her, and Dona [Cassella] has led with a steady hand in the interim period prior to my arrival. At the end of the day, a museum is much more than its director. The creative forces of so many people contribute to the experience here. The welcoming, accessible, intellectually stimulating opportunity we offer visitors should feel more like a continuum than a shift.

Over time, you will see new inflections and priorities emerge. Some may come from my strengths and interests, like in photography or from my contacts in the field around the nation. Others might be ideas the community tells us they want more of...I hope to keep our galleries feeling fresh with frequent rotations from our stellar collection. I'm a big proponent of installations [connecting] past and present in a dynamic continuum through carefully chosen interjections of work by living artists in historical galleries. These are some of the near-term inflections you may notice.

While longer-term directions are percolating, I intend to focus on topics under the hood so to speak...administrative processes, talent development and efficiencies that position us for growth...holding conversations, not just with the staff and board also with community, civic leaders, artists and colleagues near and far. While I have ideas of my own, I believe in the importance of collective visioning.

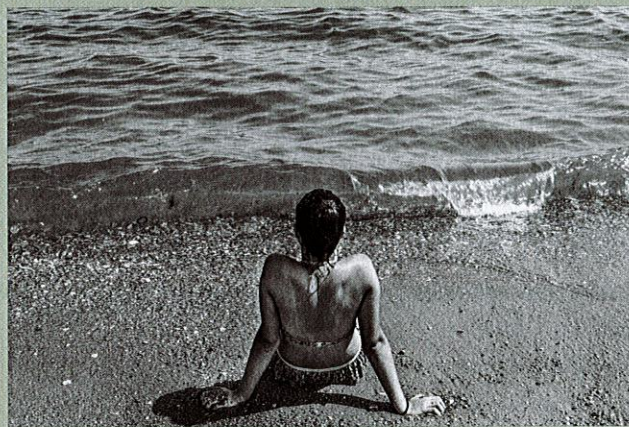
It's within the matrix of opportunities that emerge that we will chart our direction. I am deeply honored to be a part of guiding that conversation forward.

Noteworthy: This is NBMAA's 150th year. On view now: "The Poetry of Nature: Hudson River School Landscapes from the New-York Historical Society" through May 22 and "Permanent Collection Installation | Modern and Contemporary Masterworks from the NBMAA: 1950s to Today" through May 31, and five other fascinating installations of longer duration.

13 Ways of Looking at Landscape LARRY SILVER'S CONNECTICUT PHOTOGRAPHS

Walsh Gallery

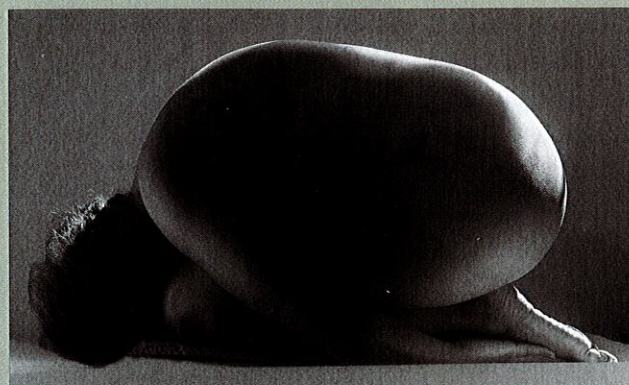
March 25 – June 18, 2022



Larry Silver, *Sitting at Water's Edge, Sherwood Island State Park, Westport, CT, 2014/2022*, archival inkjet print. Courtesy of the artist and Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York © Larry Silver

ADGER COWANS Sense and Sensibility

Bellarmino Hall Galleries
through June 18, 2022



Adger Cowans, *Egg Nude*, 1958, silver gelatin print. Courtesy of the artist and Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York. © Adger Cowans

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