

Marblehead*Current

MAA's 'Variations' exhibit bridges styles and states with artistic flair

April 24, 2024

The Marblehead Arts Association is hosting its annual "Variations" exhibition, a showcase of diverse styles and mediums by artists across the United States.

The show, which runs until June 16, features 172 curated pieces, including paintings, photographs, sculptures and mixed media works.

"Variations 2024" was opened to artists nationwide, a decision that has significantly elevated the caliber of the submissions.

"The exhibit initially started many years ago as a regional exhibit, open to non-MAA artists," explained Larry Dunn, a representative from the MAA. "A couple years ago we decided to make it a national call, and it has really raised the level of the work."



People explore the MAA's new 'Variations' exhibit at the King Hooper Mansion. CURRENT PHOTO / WILL DOWD

This year, the MAA received an unprecedented 837 submissions from artists in 26 states, with entries coming from as far as Hawaii and Alaska. The final selection was chosen by a panel of three judges: Lydia Peabody, a curator of modern and contemporary art at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem; Karen Haas, the Lane Curator of Photographs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Ariel Zaccheo, a curator at the Museum of Craft and Design in San Francisco.

"The whole point of 'Variations' is that nothing is fundamentally unique; it's different. Each piece stands alone, but together they make a cohesive exhibition," said Xhazzie

Kindle, the MAA's director of operations. "You have to experience it all, from the ballroom to the tavern, to really absorb what this exhibition is about."

The exhibit is divided into three main categories: fine art, which includes paintings, drawings and mixed media; photography; and 3D craft. The works are distributed throughout the galleries of the historic King Hooper Mansion, with each room loosely themed around subject matters such as landscapes, seascapes, figurative art and architecture.

Kindle noted that this year's exhibition features a significant amount of abstract art compared to previous years.

"It was really interesting to me, the abstract art that just kept coming in," she said.

Kindle estimates that around 500 individual artists submitted works for consideration. The exhibit saw an increase in 3D art submissions this year, with approximately 44 pieces out of the total 172 falling into this category.

"Circles" by Marblehead's Judy Schmid earned first place in the fine art category. The abstract painting features bold, expressive brushstrokes in deep shades of blue, red and black, creating a sense of dynamic movement and energy. The composition is dominated by two abstract shapes that suggest an opening from one realm into another, inviting the viewer to interpret the imagery.



'Circles' by Marblehead resident Judy Schmid won first place in the fine art category with its bold brushstrokes and dynamic composition. COURTESY PHOTO / MARBLEHEAD ARTS ASSOCIATION

In the photography category, Heather Pillar of Brewster earned first place for her tender photograph "Morrie's Massage," portraying Morrie Schwartz, the subject of Mitch Albom's best-selling memoir "Tuesdays with Morrie." The black and white image captures a quiet moment of the elderly Schwartz receiving a massage, conveying a profound sense of human connection and care.

In the 3D craft category, Dan Falby's ceramic sculpture "Cabin" earned first place. The abstract piece is composed of multiple undulating, ribbon-like forms layered and intertwined in a gradient of blue, green, pink and yellow hues. The sculpture subtly evokes a sense of a small rustic structure.

Jim Murphy, MAA president, emphasized the importance of “Variations” in drawing visitors to Marblehead.

“People come for the art and the architecture because it’s a 300-year-old building,” he said. “The exhibit is a way for us to show Marblehead to new people, and to bring in visitors who will support our local businesses.”

The “Variations” exhibit is the result of nearly a yearlong process, with planning for the next show beginning immediately after the current one opens.

“Literally, the day after ‘Variations’ opens, we’re immediately thinking about the next one,” said Kindle. “It’s a massive amount of work because it’s 850 pieces we’re looking at, and our judges had to narrow it down to what can fit in this building.”

All of the artworks in the exhibition are available for purchase, with the MAA taking a 40% commission on each sale. The proceeds help support the organization’s mission of promoting and preserving the arts in the community.



This black and white photograph, titled ‘Morrie’s Massage,’ by Heather Pillar of Brewster, claimed first place in its category. The image captures a serene moment as Morrie Schwartz — the inspirational figure from Mitch Albom’s book ‘Tuesdays with Morrie’ — received a massage. COURTESY PHOTO / MARBLEHEAD ARTS ASSOCIATION

The exhibit at 8 Hooper St. is free and open to the public, with gallery hours from noon-5 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday.

Will Dowd
+ posts