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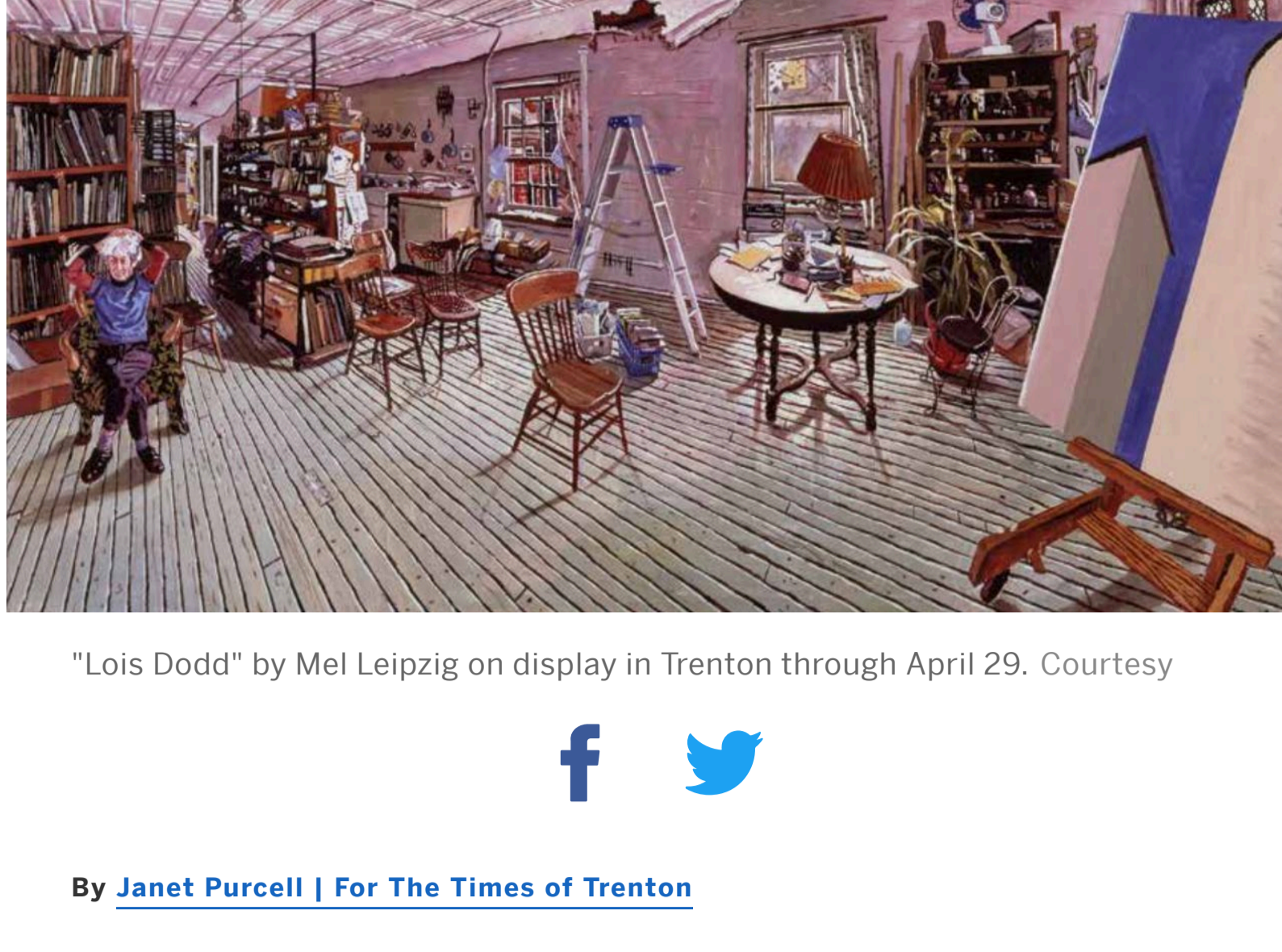
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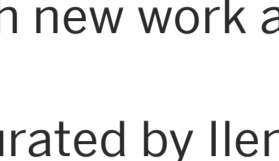
The Times of Trenton

Fine Arts: ‘Painting the Moon and Beyond,’ an exhibit of works by Lois Dodd and friends on display in Trenton

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“Lois Dodd” by Mel Leipzig on display in Trenton through April 29. Courtesy



By Janet Purcell | For The Times of Trenton

Twenty-five years ago Trenton City Museum mounted a retrospective exhibition of New Jersey artist Lois Dodd’s work. Now she’s back again with new work and old friends.

The current exhibition, curated by Ilene Dube, honors Trenton artist Mel Leipzig who Dube credits with bringing the exhibiting artists together. “He truly is where it all began,” Dube said.

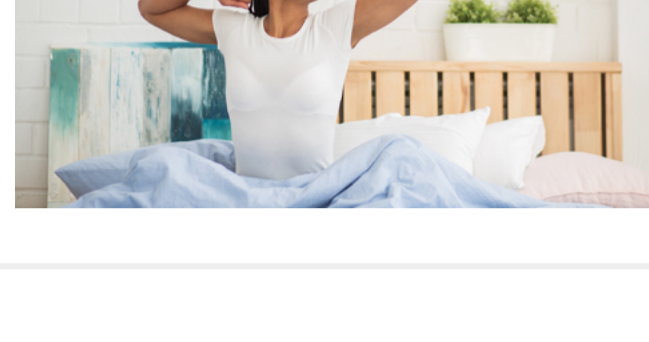
Featured in the museum’s entry foyer is Leipzig’s large painting of Dodd in her New York studio. It was that painting that sparked Dube’s interest in knowing more about Dodd who, Dube said, “played a significant role in the downtown gallery scene of 1950s New York and who ... was a catalyst of a group of artists who would go outside in the wee hours to paint, capturing the ethereal magic of Maine at night.” Included in that group, and whose works are in this exhibit, are Elizabeth O’Reilly -- a longtime friend -- as well as Jeff Epstein and Dan Finaldi. “It was Leipzig who introduced Epstein to Dodd, and Dodd who introduced Finaldi to Leipzig,” Dube said in her remarks at the opening of the exhibit.

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As is always the case at Ellarslie, careful attention was paid to how the exhibit is presented. It opens in the Thomas Malloy Gallery with an informative and entertaining video conversation with Dodd you should be sure to watch and with a collection of the night paintings. There you will see a fine example of Dodd’s understated approach to her subject in her oil on Masonite “Rockgarden Inn, Randy’s Shed at Night.” Her buildings are devoid of detail as are the sky and ground upon which and under which they exist. She wanted to convey light and did so successfully by painting flat planes of deep darkness, then mid tones and finally a wall of stark white. Direct and dazzling.

You’ll find the night paintings of each of her friends in this gallery also. Finaldi brings subdued color into his “Fall Full Moon” as a yellow-warmed moon hovers in gray-toned blue sky over a dark silhouetted tree line. O’Reilly shows bright color reflections of city lights in a body of water leading viewers to “Night at Third Street” and Epstein takes viewers to a pair of metal ladders standing against a wall where light coming through windows reflects on the ladders and their dangling cables.

There’s quiet drama in this large collection of night paintings that range from moon portraits to buildings and backyards cloaked in darkness. And then when you move to the large central gallery it’s like the sun came up! You move from a wide variety of tonal grays to Finaldi’s painting of “Lois Dodd’s Garden” that brings forth every shade of green imaginable. Dodd’s “Back Building” shows the ravages of time as it stands unabashedly in full light and O’Reilly’s “Snow and Pink Path” portrays the light of a winter day, while Jeff Epstein captures the misty light of a moment in time in his “Spare Car, Foggy Morning.”

Seeing the interrelatedness of this community of artists is what this exhibit is all about and the final gallery affirms that. Dodd and her friends all painted one another. You’ll see her “Jeff Painting at the South End of Rockland” and you’ll see Epstein’s “Lois in the Barn,” a head and shoulders portrait of Dodd. Her look is so intense you just know she was painting at the time Epstein captured her. O’Reilly’s portrait of Dodd is done in a high-key palette where Dodd, seated outdoors, becomes one with her environment. And then there’s Finaldi’s “Mel Painting Under a Full Moon.” Leipzig, who brought them together is right there at his easel at the open threshold of a lighted room behind him, in his full-length paint splattered garb, working on a portrait presumably of one of the other painters there that night.

In her remarks at the exhibit’s opening, Dube spoke of the camaraderie with like-minded individuals of artist communities saying “They provide a space where individuals can nurture, encourage, and support each other.” She added, “Such communities of artists have been part of Lois Dodd’s life since her early years at Cooper Union and Skowhegan, through the days at Tanager Gallery she cofounded in New York in 1952.”

Dube rightly describes Dodd as a pioneering woman artist who has had more than 50 solo exhibitions since 1954, “a time when female artists didn’t receive the opportunity and recognition of their male counterparts.” Her work is in the permanent collections of Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Farnsworth Art Museum, and Portland Art Museum, among others.

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Leipzig captured the essence of Dodd so well in that painting of her in her studio that you see when you enter this exhibit at Ellarslie. In his signature style, he shows her seated off to one side, seemingly deep in thought. It’s a no frills kind of space, filled with books, art tools, scattered empty chairs awaiting friends to stop by, and the promise of more good art to come.

IF YOU GO:

- **WHAT:** Painting The Moon And Beyond
- **WHERE:** Trenton City Museum at Ellarslie, 229 Parkside Ave.
- **WHEN:** Through April 29, 2022. Hours, Noon to 4 p.m., Friday and Saturday; 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday
- **CONTACT:** 609-989-1191. info@ellarslie.org.

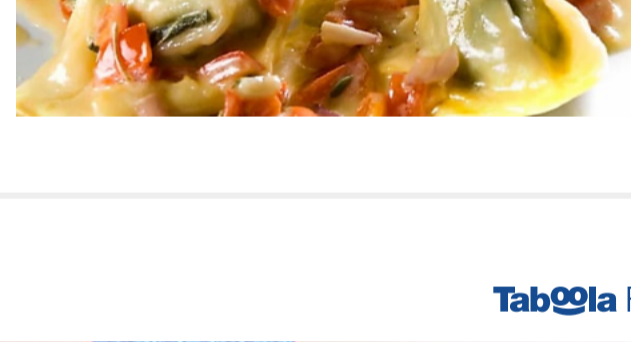
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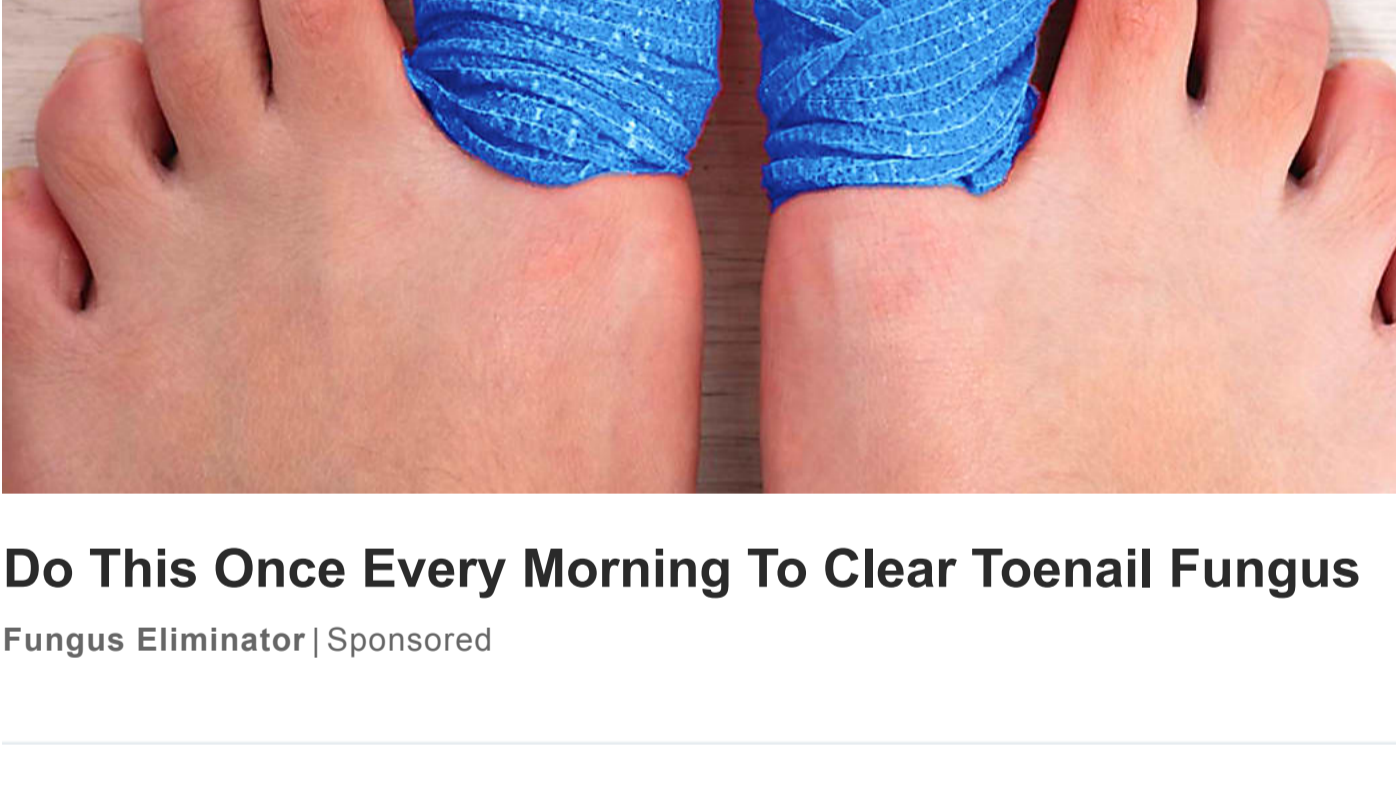
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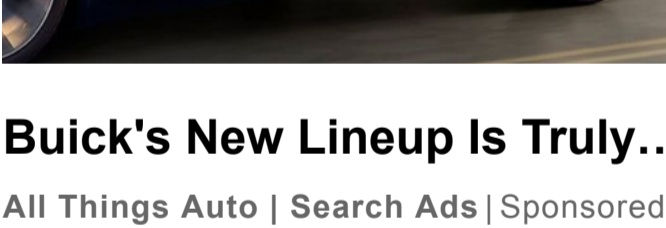
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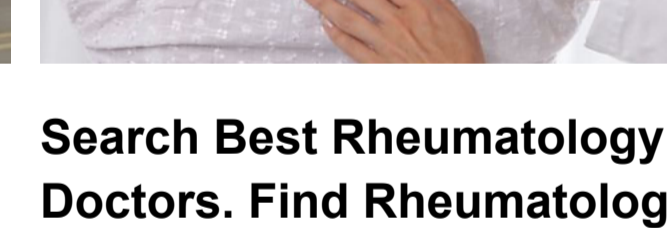
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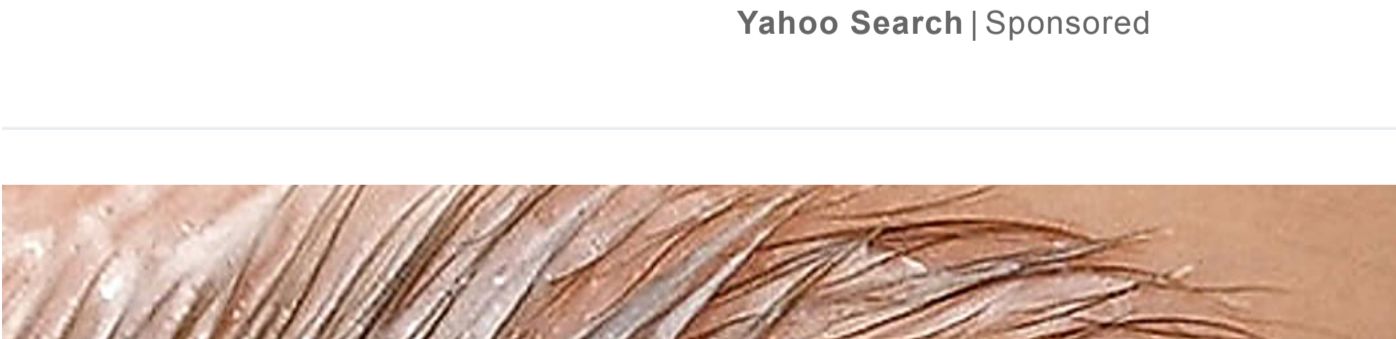
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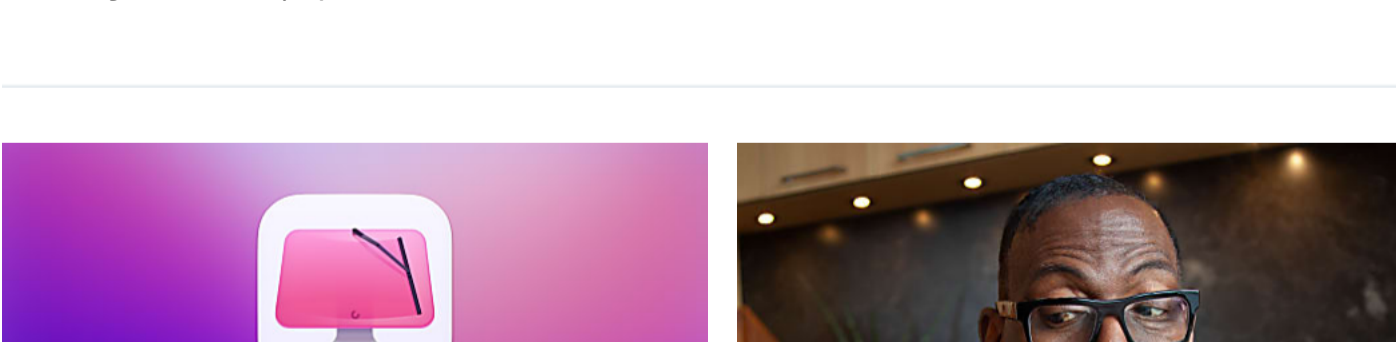
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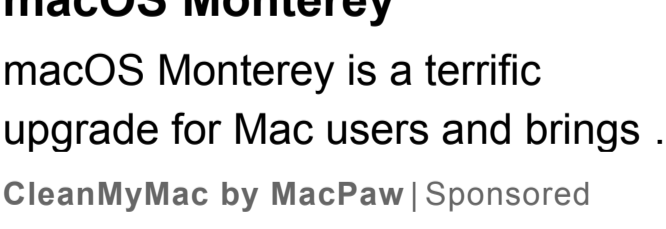
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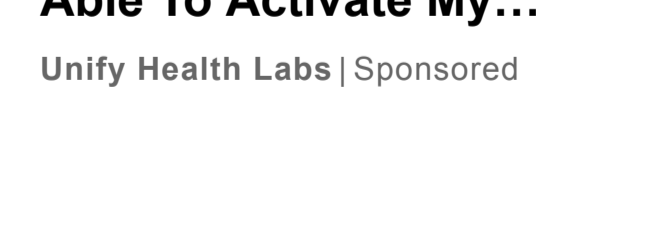
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