

ART REVIEW

# Vibrant colors illuminate Rockland galleries

Brighten up your life by seeing these shows at Dowling Walsh and Caldbeck galleries.

By JORGE S. ARANGO

The Rockland art season is exploding with color. And I don't mean spring blossoms. Four current shows traffic in bold, vibrant palettes.

Three are at Dowling Walsh: "Kevin Xiques: This Is for You" (through May 27), "Elizabeth Osborne: Verdant" and "Robert Hamilton: Feeding the Fishes" (both through June 24). The other, "Morris David Dorenfeld: Tapestry Master" (through May 29), is at Caldbeck. Warning: Bring your sunglasses!

Entering Dowling Walsh is like striding into a room awash in light. Elizabeth Osborne's works, which occupy the center gallery, are mostly about light and its multifarious spectrum of effects. They're also about paint and color, obviously, but more as vehicles to investigate the luminosity that defines color and illuminates space. Osborne's colors feel literally like manifestations of light.

Mostly we are graced with Osborne's landscapes, a subject that has persisted throughout her long and restless career (she's 87). Osborne has explored a variety of techniques and genres, including watercolor, oil and acrylic – all variously applied to paper, canvas and panel – as well as still life, figuration and near abstraction.

Some works revel in the viscous quality of paint applied with a brush, allowing calligraphic gesture to convey impressions of a landscape. "Purple Hills," for instance, is little more than a series of half-arc strokes of colors indicating the humped shapes of a range. The foreground mound is lilac, and the others proceed through deeper hues of purple, eventually arriving at an orange sunset sky. "Cliffs" repeats these same forms at lower right, beyond which the background is wavy horizontal strokes of graduated greens and blues suggesting sea or sky.

In the 1970s, Osborne began pouring thinned-out paints directly onto unprimed canvases she laid flat on the floor. The ones that astonish most in this show, such as "Hillside Autumn" and "Garden Tea Hill," have this quality, which resembles watercolor in the way hues bleed out and into one another, even when she uses oil or acrylic paint. It is this work that feels most like pure light.

The yellows and fuchsias in the foreground of "Hillside Autumn" portray bushes against a blue structure, but look almost like luminous clouds of vaporuous gasses or colored smoke because Osborne has so diluted the oils that they appear more as washes of color, conveying a mottled

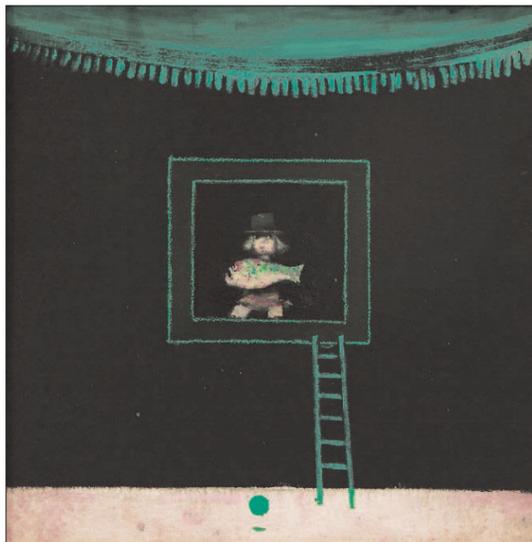


Photo courtesy of Dowling Walsh Gallery  
Robert Hamilton, "Fish Girl"

IF YOU GO

**WHAT:** "Kevin Xiques: This Is for You," "Elizabeth Osborne: Verdant" and "Robert Hamilton: Feeding the Fishes"  
**WHERE:** Dowling Walsh, 365 Main St., Rockland  
**WHEN:** Through May 27 (Xiques) and June 24 (Osborne and Hamilton)  
**HOURS:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday (Sunday by appointment)

**ADMISSION:** Free  
**INFO:** 207-596-0084, dowlingwalsh.com

**WHAT:** "Morris David Dorenfeld: Tapestry Master"  
**WHERE:** Caldbeck Gallery, 12 Elm St., Rockland  
**WHEN:** Through May 29  
**HOURS:** Noon to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, and by chance and appointment  
**ADMISSION:** Free  
**INFO:** 207-594-5935, caldbeck.com

quality of evanescence. The same with "Garden," where spiky flowers (I'd guess delphiniums) are rendered in thinned-out acrylic, allowing the bright white of the canvas to glow out from underneath the colors so that the colors themselves emerge as effulgences of pink light.

The paintings are unabashedly beautiful, especially when they are nearly abstract, such as "White Water." It depicts the rapids as nothing more than streaks of white over darker turquoise and brown streaks (indicating the depths of the water) and eventually dissolving into turquoise dots (bubbles from the rapids' foam). Had it been untitled, we might have mistaken it for the Northern Lights or another celestial display.

Self-taught Kevin Xiques has traveled far since I juried one of his paintings into a show at River Arts several years ago. That work was not quite abstract, exhibiting a personal iconography of forms that felt powerful, even if they were illegible to the viewer. He was heading further into abstraction, he told me, and I encouraged him not to lose the iconography completely. Xiques agreed that this visual language felt natural and eventually hoped to settle on a happy medium between form and abstraction. Viola! This marvelous show is exactly that.

There's one particular form Xiques repeats throughout various paintings to great effect. Pulling

a wide brush along the surface, he simultaneously oscillates his wrist back and forth laterally, creating a scalloped fan texture. (Imagine a coiled vacuum cleaner tube with this scalloped fan texture between the coils.) The more water in the paint, the more transparent or translucent the texture becomes, so it can also appear like a segmented insect (i.e.: a caterpillar), the aforementioned tubing, or bacterial spirilla.

Xiques blends this technique with many other textures: drips, splatters, washes and brushstrokes that appear anywhere from dry-brushed wisps to assertive brush marks. The results are surfaces that teem with swirling, surging, intertwining lines, conveying an energy that is urgently and insistently alive.

There is also profound depth to these paintings, which we perceive through the dense layering of these marks. A work like "Just Give Me One Second" is a painting atop three or four other paintings. We're drawn helplessly into it, spinning dizzily into its vortex. Additionally, Xiques has expanded his palette from a predominance of blues and reds to lime greens, lemon yellows, bright tangerine and deep persimmon red-orange.

Xiques' is such raw talent that we can't help but wonder where it might lead. At the moment, the sky's the limit.

I've never been a fan of Robert Hamilton's work. I recognize and appreciate

his imaginativeness and the slightly surreal way his scenes unfold before our eyes. But with their candy colors and whimsicality, there has always been something sweet about these prosceniums seen through theater curtains, his rolling tableaux, his circus animal acts and his quirky titles.

Some works here are interesting, especially when they incorporate darker hues and blacks, suggesting something less innocent about them, or when they are a bit more loosely and messily painted. The latter gives them a quality of folk art, with all the untrained – and unrestrained – vitality that implies (though, of course, he was a well-educated painter and teacher).

One such work is "Fish Girl," which depicts a ladder leading up to a box in which the title character holds a fish. It's almost entirely dark green and black. The association I brought to it is Marina Abramovic's 2002, 12-day performance piece, "The House with the Ocean View," in which she lived in three boxes suspended above the ground with ladders whose rungs were made of upturned knives.

Hamilton could not have been contemplating this in 1995, the year he painted "Fish Girl." But this association opened me to a new appreciation for what I recognize might have been, for Hamilton, a subtle critique of the performative nature of life. In a way, everyone – not least of all artists – is constantly performing tricks for others, viewed on a stage by audiences who expect something clever or magical or scary. It's a lot of pressure, and perhaps a bit of whimsy here is appropriate, if not necessary.

PAINTING WITH FIBER

The Maine art world lost Morris (Morrie) David Dorenfeld this year, an artist trained as a painter at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League in New York. Dorenfeld completely changed direction when he discovered, in 1967, a century-old maple loom in the barn of a house he had bought with his life companion, Robert Francis David, in New Hampshire.

"It was beautiful, like a piece of sculpture, even though mice had eaten all the heddles and it was covered in bird droppings," he told Christopher Brewer Williamson, author of the gorgeously, recently published "The Tapestries of Morris David Dorenfeld: Paintings in Fiber," available through the gallery. "It caught my imagination."

The couple settled in Maine in 1978. Though he eventually decided to buy a contemporary vertical loom, the one Dorenfeld disassembled and brought here had changed his art practice forever. Interestingly, Dorenfeld was a good



Photo courtesy of Dowling Walsh Gallery  
Elizabeth Osborne, "Purple Hills"

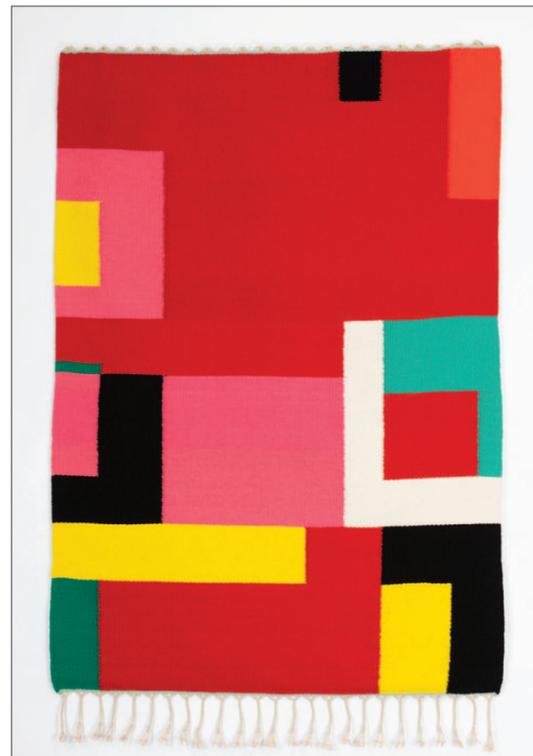


Photo by William Thuss  
Morris David Dorenfeld, "Tapestry #139 B.D. I REMEMBER EVERYTHING," 2018, wool, weft, linen, warp, 68 x 467 inches



Photo courtesy of Dowling Walsh Gallery  
Kevin Xiques, "More Please"

friend of painter Robert Hamilton, so it's illuminating to see Hamilton's show at Dowling Walsh before viewing Dorenfeld's tapestries, which display a kindred love of super-saturated color.

What struck me like a lightning bolt when I walked into Caldbeck was the clarity, purity and confidence of Dorenfeld's color. We can discern his early painting influences. Mark

Rothko's forms – though more cleanly geometric – are there. Hans Hofmann's blocks of color appear, though there is never an expressionistic background from which they pop out in Dorenfeld's tight, rigorously interlocked grids. Philip Guston is especially present in terms of color sensibility.

But we also see the spirit of Piet Mondrian. As with Mondrian, the compositions are so thoughtfully structured that moving a single element would destroy the harmony of relationships between colors and forms. I can't imagine Dorenfeld's series "Boogie Woogie" was titled without awareness of Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie Woogie," which embodies New York's jazz era and that music's syncopation, an enthusiasm for which these artists shared.

The tapestries that boast bright rectangles of color against dark grounds also recall the aerial city nightscapes of fellow Maine painter Yvonne Jacquette, who died last month.

Today we recognize the weavings of Anni Albers and Sophie Taeuber-Arp as art, rather than craft. This was a barrier Dorenfeld also found hard to breach. But as this show illustrates, it is an arbitrary, irrelevant distinction.

Jorge S. Arango has written about art, design and architecture for over 35 years. He lives in Portland. He can be reached at jorge@jsarango.com.

## MOZART & BRAHMS

TUESDAY  
MAY 23  
7:30 PM

Goldstein

Classical Season Sponsor: Harcourts Media Sponsor: Portland Press Herald Maine Sunday Telegram pressherald.com

TICKETS at [PortlandSymphony.org](http://PortlandSymphony.org) | Merrill Auditorium

**Close the 2022-23 mainstage season with Mozart's Piano Concerto in C minor, Brahms' Fourth Symphony, and a piece by contemporary composer Brian Nabors. Featuring acclaimed pianist Alon Goldstein, you won't want to miss this season finale!**

Eckart Preu, *Music Director*  
Alon Goldstein, *piano*

**IN-PERSON TICKETS:**  
Starting at \$26\*

NABORS: *Pulse*  
W.A. MOZART: *Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor*  
BRAHMS: *Symphony No. 4 in E minor, op. 98*

\*Plus applicable service fees. Artists and programs are subject to change. This concert will be filmed for release on PSO TV.

PSO

# DO THIS

A weekly guide to Maine adventure, entertainment, and fun for every day of the week.

pressherald.com/dailydothis

P

pressherald.com