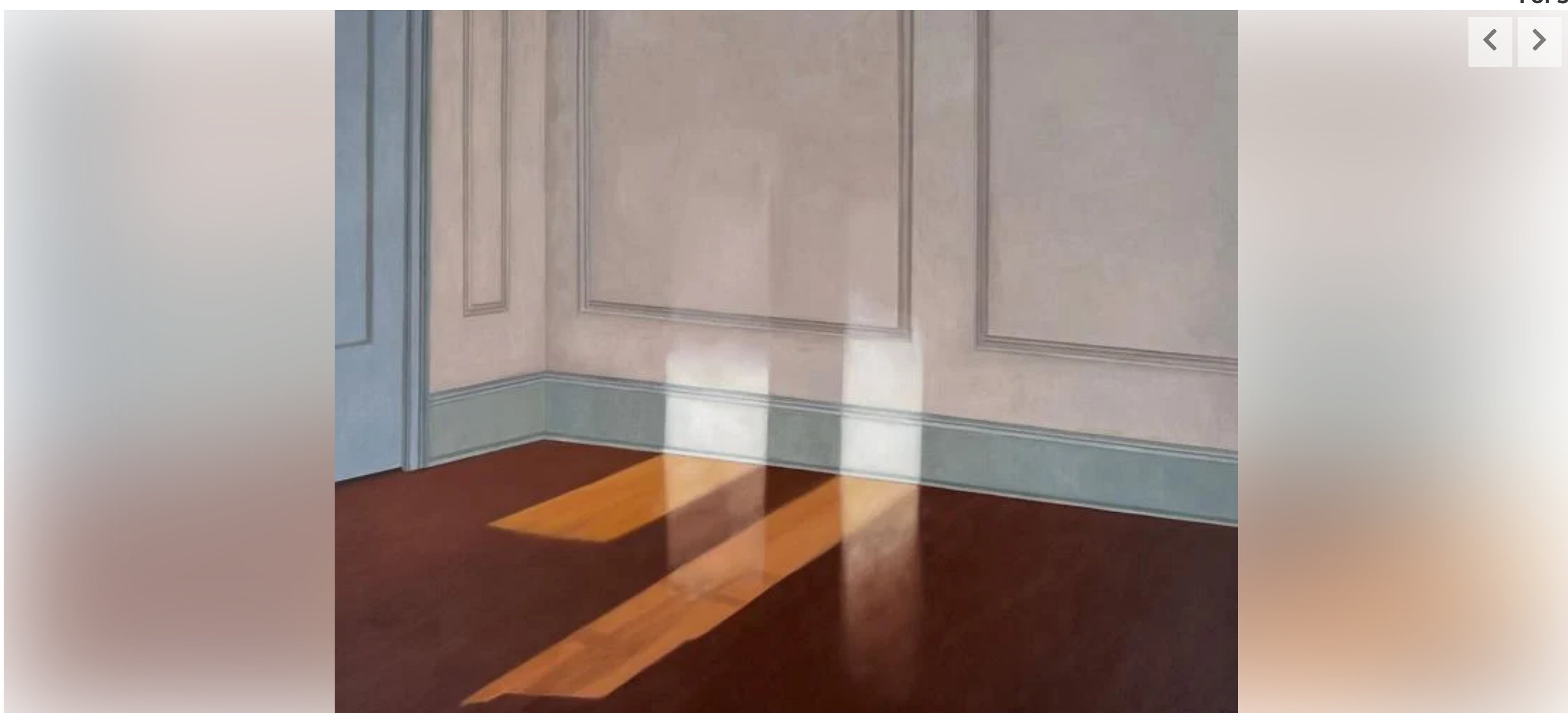




HiLo Art

## 'Home' and 'Mustard Seeds': Two Knox County Exhibits

by Alan Crichton    Nov 14, 2023



"New York Story — Morning," a 2022 oil on canvas by K. Min.

As the cold and dark get deeper, and we finally have to admit we're in for the long haul, "home," and all its connotations, comes into its own. Warmth, soft lights, intimacy, the changing patterns of outside and inside, we know the look and the changes. So, it's just right that the Caldbeck Gallery has extended its "Home" exhibit through the end of November.

Curator Melanie Essex says she wants to "consider 'home' not only as a place/refuge/interior but as a muse — an essential element of an individual's creative identity and process."

In the 32 works by 14 artists, the muse is at work. Here are a few of the many treats I saw.

Elisa Jensen's six interior paintings, loosely brushed and near abstraction, are filled with the rich color contrasts of dark interiors played against the structure of window mullions and open doorways that break incoming daylight and night lights into familiar sensations of indoor quiet. "Quietude," "Backyard Blue Hour," "Light in the Green Room," these titles say it, too.

In K. Min's large painting, "New York Story — Morning," an elegantly paneled, pale blue room is completely empty but for two sharp bands of bright sunlight cutting across a warm, highly polished wooden floor to hit and race up the wall, simultaneously reflecting straight down and fading quickly away. You had to have been there, and K. Min was.

Gideon Bok's "Mom/Mrs.Honey/Being There" is full of daily life in the studio, everything in process, coming and going. There are careening walls that exaggerate the room's space, a big green couch, chairs of all kinds, windows like paintings and paintings like windows. There are pots and pans and LP record sleeves slung around the floor, a guitar amp, a three-part sound system, a blue disco ball up by the ceiling. There is a "Sisterhood Is Powerful" fist on a round sign next to a wisp of a skeleton nearly dissolved in the far window's light. All of this is in a fluid time/space that's brush-drawn and full of the joy of paint. And woven into a rocker in the foreground, watching it all unfold, is Mom/Mrs. Honey herself, a beautiful presence, on the edge of being there.

There is so much of the muse at work in this show, and it has been carefully hung with themes appearing among the constellations of images. Home as nestling, as nurturing, as fun, as peace, music, and especially home as an art in itself. Much to look at that words just can't say.

We are fortunate that this show has been extended until the end of November. Take a look over the holiday.

"Mustard Seeds," a solo show by E. Saffronia Downing at Thomaston's Interloc Projects through Nov. 18, is one of the most unusual and interesting exhibits in the Midcoast this season. Downing is a ceramicist in the widest sense, but her work literally digs deep into the entire world of clay.

From its ancient geology and geography, its cropping "wild" out of the ground in every corner of the globe, in stratified riverbanks, exposed road cuts, clay's malleable and plastic qualities accompany us as we move through the world. Downing points out that the thousands of bricks in the great buildings of Chicago were built of clay found directly underfoot.



This exhibit is conceptual and material, as well as aesthetic, and what initially might appear as a dry survey map of impossibly plain stuff begins to grow into a subtle beauty.

One separately walled space presents an archive of raw clay, "ethically foraged" in small batches, described, and sent to Downing by clay enthusiasts from across the United States. The artist presents each small lump, ball, or tablet in its own simple pinch pot, part of a collective grid related to the sender's location and foraging story, each inviting the viewer's extended gaze and understanding.

In "Mustard Seeds," a clean-lined, rectangular floor installation, Downing arranges her collection of wild-foraged, glazed, fired, and over-fired clay fragments in its various possible consistencies, its hues and marks of knuckles, tools, hands in earth. Low on a nearby wall, a text handwritten with a crayon made of local Presumpscot river clay, brings the viewer near the ground to read closely and then find nearly each fragment described. The physical involvement of viewing becomes part of the aesthetic environment, as well.

Downing has hand-built individual sculptures in the form of large colorful pitchers, pots and vessels, each a concept from the potter's library of forms, each embedded with more and more "mustard seeds" of the clay process. These large, stand-alone pieces seem to rise up embedded with the tangled semi-chaos of their chunky base matrix and present themselves with an immediately understandable rough beauty.

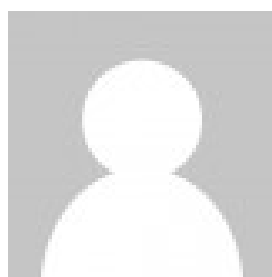
Downing recently said, "Let the vessel form trace relations between the container and the tiny things that ask for containment. The tiny bits are the building blocks of the new thing."

Downing's work raises awareness of the processes and labors involved in how things are created by individuals with their hands gratefully in the world's basic dirt, millions of years old, the vast, largely unrecognized stuff underfoot from which we make our worlds.

Caldbeck Gallery, 12 Elm St., Rockland. Hours through Nov. 30: Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 4 p.m.; Saturdays through Mondays, by chance or appointment.

Interloc Projects, 153 Main St., Thomaston. Hours through Nov. 18: Thursday, Nov. 16, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Friday, Nov. 17, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and Saturday, Nov. 18, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

*Alan Crichton is a cofounder of Waterfall Arts in Belfast and an artist from Liberty.*



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