

More summer art shows to see – out west, up the coast and close to home

Make an old Victorian house in Norway, two galleries in Rockland and a South Portland frame shop your July art destinations.

Posted
July 7

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Brenda Free, "Reservoir" Photo courtesy of Caldbeck Gallery

At Caldbeck, "Yours and Mine, Images Deciphered: Brenda Free" (through July 28) is a little jewel of a show. All the work, even when their themes are ostensibly terrestrial (such as "Camp") convey the ever-shifting quality of looking at reflections in the ripples of a watery surface. This perspective is not surprising, considering that Free has lived on a boat for many years that travels between the Maine coast and Bonaire in the Leeward Antilles. So, when we look at a painting like "Reservoir," we understand it to be the reflection of a tree on the water's surface, not the tree itself.

But Free is after more than just the visual representation of that liquid quality. She is interested in it as a condition of the nature of her (and by extension all) reality, which is perpetually morphing and never allowing us to stay too long in a state of stasis. Trying to fix anything in place and time is ultimately hopeless. She achieves this by applying layers of paint, scraping away at them, scratching and adding textures (in a few she appears to use mesh to create crosshatches that further activate the surface).

This layering conjures the sense of ceaseless movement. Pulled into these shifting currents of paint are symbols that arise out of some personal system of hieroglyphics. We don't know what they signify, but we can feel how the personal narrative they articulate gets swept up and carried along by forces much greater than anything she can control. And we, too, get pulled along as our eyes move across and up and down within the frame. The compositions, for the most part, offer us no place to settle, which, because of their beauty, happens not to be disorienting at all, but rather sublime.

