

Nassau County Museum of Art in Roslyn Harbor opens 'Other Worlds Than This'

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Egyptian Blue Faience Wadjet Eye Amulet, Ptolemaic Period c. 323-30 BCE is a real sight at Nassau County Museum of Art, Credit: Merrin Gallery, New York

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They're creepy, and they're spooky, mysterious and artful, and right now they're filling the Nassau County Museum of Art in Roslyn Harbor with a supernatural vibe. Through Nov. 6, the exhibition "Other Worlds Than This" brings together a rare group of paintings, sculptures, photographs and textiles from across the globe and thousands of years to see how art confronts great mysteries. Look for beauties, beasts, things that might go bump in the night, amulets and alchemy, all expressed by some of the world's great artists.

"It's such a fun show," said museum director Charles Riley who organized the exhibition with associate curator Jennifer Haller. "It's perfect for Halloween."

The museum's holdings of Surrealist art led to the idea, Riley explained, and some of the first pieces visitors encounter are masterworks of that era. Leonora Carrington's "Bird Bath" shows two black-cloaked figures giving a bath to a big red bird perched in a small, talon-footed tub. One sprays its beak; the other holds a towel and the whole effect seems like a scene that could fit right into a Tim Burton film. Riley noted that kids and experts on Surrealism alike love the work.

Other prominent Surrealists like Man Ray, Rene Magritte, Kay Sage, Giorgio de Chirico, Dorothea Tanning and Salvador Dalí fill the gallery with curious landscapes and imaginary visions. "There's nothing like a Dalí to take you away into a kind of weird cinematographic trance," said Riley with a chuckle.

WHAT "Other Worlds Than This"

WHEN | WHERE Through Nov. 6, 11 a.m.-4:45 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday, Nassau County Museum of Art, 1 Museum Drive, Roslyn Harbor

INFO \$15, \$10 ages 62 and older, \$5 students and ages 4-11, free children younger than 4; 516-484-9338, nassaumuseum.org



Leonora Carrington's "Bird Bath", center right, along with other masterworks of Surrealism fill one gallery in the Nassau County Museum of Art's "Other Worlds Than This" exhibit.

xlothe221010 Credit: Nassau County Museum of Art

A HAUNT FOR LOCAL ARTISTS

The surrealists lead into a group of Abstract Expressionist works by artists including William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb and Robert Motherwell, all of whom lived on Long Island, and had worked with the surrealists, borrowing some of their ideas. "When you look at these Abstract

Expressionists," Riley explained, "what you see is a version of Surrealism, but then more abstract. They took it a little further."

Also in the exhibition are works by contemporary Long Island artist Audrey Flack, who often takes inspiration from Old Masters and adds modern, feminist twists. Her 2022 "Starfall (Melancholia)" riffs on Albrecht Dürer's "Melencolia I" created in 1514. Dürer's woodcut expresses the artist's brooding temperament through the figure of a female angel. Flack takes the same figure, relaxes her features, bathes her in golden starlight and places her in a resplendent garden, seemingly co-opting Dürer's metaphor to tell her own story about the artist's life. A group of Dürers hang nearby.

But the exhibition presents much more than pictures. There are ancient Egyptian amulets, stargazer sculptures from the Olmec civilization of Mesoamerica, Chinese jade carvings from the Shang Dynasty (1600-1100 BCE), and a collection of ceremonial robes and blankets from Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Laos and China that are meant to protect and bless the wearer.



Audrey Flack's "Starfall (Melancholia)," made this year, responds to Albrecht Dürer's "Melencolia I" from 1514. xlothe221010 Credit: Hollis Taggart Gallery

PHOTOS IN THE SUPERNATURAL SPIRIT

One collection is stopping viewers in their tracks, as they did more than a century ago when they were made. Spirit photography (also sometimes called ghost photography) began as part of the Spiritualism movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Haller gathered a group of these rare works.

"It was interesting to see the techniques that photographers used," she said. "Even with something as simple as just smudging a negative you would get these really fantastic results that look like something from out of this world."

"In these spirit photographs," added Riley, "at one point you're looking, and it's a woman looking at a mirror. And then another point you're looking at it, and it's a skull, and it's creepy. So much of this show does that one-two. One, it's the real world we know, and two, it's the spirit world."

From Shamanism to Minimalism and a family-themed Día de Muertos celebration on Nov. 5, "Other Worlds Than This" has something for everyone. "This is an amazingly global show and it's got a range of 3,000 years," said Riley. "All cultures seem to have this role for the artist as an in-between this world and that world. It's amazing. A lot of the stories are very similar and with the same message — that there are other worlds. And then who is going to be our guide and take us to these other worlds but the artist who has a vision?"

By Mary Gregory
Special to Newsday