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State-of-the-art in North Adams

By Niece Regis | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT SEPTEMBER 27, 2014



NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

A Sol LeWitt installation at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams.

NORTH ADAMS — In the northern Berkshires, one can be forgiven for seeing everything in terms of art. With world-class museums in North Adams and Williamstown, it's no wonder

artists and galleries have flocked here, and even hotel decor and destination dining have aesthetic appeal.

To see cutting-edge contemporary and experimental art, visit the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams. Housed in the former state-of-the-art Sprague Electric Co. plant, the 13-acre campus of Mass MoCA includes enormous galleries that accommodate large-scale and complex installations, a bookstore, restaurants, and shops.

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Current exhibitions, on view through the fall until various dates in 2015, include “The Dying of the Light: Film as Medium and Metaphor,” featuring work by six artists who use light-sensitive rather than digital formats; “Teresita Fernández: As Above So Below,” a series of immersive, interconnected installations whose scale shifts from miniature to panoramic; and “Mark Dion: The Octagon Room,” a room filled with objects that investigate the blurred boundaries between art, society, and history.

On my recent visit, I discovered an installation of sculptures and paintings by German artist Anselm Kiefer in a separate, 10,000 square-foot building. A collaboration between Mass MoCA and the Hall Art Foundation, the long-term, seasonal exhibition will be open spring, summer, and fall through 2028.

Not to be missed, and worth visiting again and again, is the three-level, eye-popping, “Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective,” featuring 105 large-scale wall drawings — rendered by more than 60 artists and art students in a six-month period — that span the artist’s career.



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Mass MoCA also offers a comprehensive performing arts roster of more than 75 events, including music, avant-garde theater, contemporary dance, film and video, dance parties, and cabaret.

Because of Mass MoCA's presence here, artists have set up studios and live-in lofts in nearby industrial buildings. Their fine arts and crafts can be found in local galleries, including, on the museum campus, Hudson's, a salon-type display of fine art and antiques, jewelry, Persian rugs, and collectibles. On Main Street, PRESS is a hybrid studio, gallery, and teaching lab for letterpress printing; MCLA Gallery 51, run by the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, exhibits work of artists from around the world along with student and faculty shows; and the member-run North Adams Artists' Co-Operative Gallery offers curated shows of 40 artists. On nearby Union Street, the Eclipse Mill is a four-story former textile plant that is home to potters, painters, musicians, and other artists. Its gallery is open weekends May through December.

There are three kinds of art at PUBLIC eat + drink in North Adams: Fine art on walls, edible art on plates, and drinkable art — work with me here — on tap in the form of a rotating craft beer program. Open for lunch and dinner, we sampled crafty margarita flatbread, symmetrical and colorful blackened catfish tacos, and a sculptural pulled pork sandwich.

Sleepy? For an artsy place to rest your head look no farther than the Porches Inn. Adjacent to Mass MoCA, this 47-room inn offers retro-industrial granny-chic ambience in a series of restored Victorian row houses. In addition to the double bed with super-sleek white linens, sage green beadboard, cushy armchair, soaking tub, and a 1950s era table lamp, our room had two Gainsborough paintings on the wall. Mind you, they weren't any run-of-the-mill works; they were one-of-a-kind, authentic Paint by Number Gainsboroughs. Still, they lent a certain tongue-in-cheek symmetry to an art-filled Berkshires getaway.

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