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THE JANE COSTELLO WELLEHAN COLLECTION

TRANSCENDENT ART FOR THE 'FREEWAY' OF LIFE



The Lewiston native left artworks collected over her lifetime to Bates College. A new exhibit pays tribute to Maine art of all types and to Wellehan, a passionate art advocate who saw its significance.

By BETH HERMAN
SPECIAL TO THE SUN JOURNAL

Museum visitors describe "An Adventurous Spirit: The Jane Costello Wellehan Collection" as "earthy," "electric," "unexpected," even "transcendent." In many ways, this describes the life of the collector herself.

The 70-piece exhibition at the Bates College Museum of Art features Wellehan's collected artworks by 45 mostly contemporary Maine artists. Distinct from the region's standard, idealized fare of beaches, boats, barns and bridges, the six-decades-old collection also represents some of Maine's uncharted, unexplored, weathered and complex places, both literally and from the artists' perspectives.

Plain air painter Neil Welliver's (1929-2006) woodcut "Islands Allagash," exemplifies this. Referencing the process as much as the result, Welliver once said, "To paint outside in the winter is painful. It hurts your hands. It hurts your feet, it hurts your ears. . . . The paint is rigid, it's stiff, it doesn't move easily. But sometimes there are things you want and that's the only way you get them."

Like Welliver, Wellehan pursued the things she wanted with the same discipline and determination. A lifelong advocate and perennial student of the arts, her interest was far more than purely aesthetic. She went on ceramics and glass-making tours, took

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TOP: CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: "Picture Window," Linden Frederick; "Yellow Flowers," Florence Dreyfous; and Vase, Warren MacKenzie. LEFT: "Strong Woman," Daniel Minter.

IMAGES COURTESY OF BATES COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART



MARK LAFLAMME

Talk of the town

CLEAR EYES, FULL HEARTS, CAN'T LOSE

Got a random email from some company or another extolling the many benefits of hiring a life coach. I read it, too. I mean, who needs a life coach more than I do? I can barely dress myself. I was about to sign up, but when the company refused to issue me Coach Taylor from "Friday Night Lights," I washed my hands of the whole thing.

I ALWAYS FEEL LIKE SOMEBODY'S WATCHING ME

Russ Dillingham's drone videos are starting to freak me out. His recent footage, of workers at the top of the Lewiston City Hall tower, made me want to hurl, but it's not that. Every time I'm outside doing something embarrassing, I get the idea that Russ' omnipotent drone is spying on me from the black sky above. And believe you me, I do a lot of embarrassing things outdoors. I gotta start wearing a fake nose and mustache.

I'M ESSENTIAL!

So, I got a check from the government which is, I'm told, a reward for going to work every day over the past year. I don't really get it — isn't my regular paycheck meant to serve that purpose? But whatever. Money is money, and it sure is uplifting to be declared an essential worker. To celebrate, I think I'll call in sick for a solid week and go out and get absolutely crocked. It's what the government would want, I think.

THE REAL WORLD NEEDS A HYPERSPACE BUTTON

Oh, thaaaaaanks, AARP. While idly web surfing in my never-ending quest for high knowledge and philosophical perfection, I came across a free game of Asteroids on the AARP website. So much for intellectual bliss. I spent the next six hours shooting at rocks and ducking spaceships, drooling, muttering to myself and sitting in my thickening fith as the battle raged. Not my finest hour, surely, but at least I did come upon one great revelation: I still suck at Asteroids. I didn't even get to put my initials up on the board for the rest of the world to see. Too bad. When I was a boy, I made an art out of turning three simple letters into something that sounded absolutely filthy.

GRAHAM CRACKERS: A GATEWAY SNACK

Many of you wonderful people have offered me tips, suggestions and support in these difficult days when finding chocolate graham crackers is next to impossible. One fellow even suggested a drastic approach as the Hannaford brand crackers remain elusive: "Try Keebler Deluxe Grahams instead," he said. Sure, buddy, I know how this goes. The first one's free, right? And then I'm on the hook for life.

mlafamme@sunjournal.com

IN A WORD

Compounds: when two words beat as one

"Oh, such are the dreams of the everyday housewife..." — Words and music by Chris Gantry, 1968

Recently I was watching a local newscast promoting an upcoming report about the problems of finding housing for a group of arriving immigrants. At the bottom of the screen was the caption, "No Where to Go." "That's strange," I thought, so I did some checking just to make sure that I hadn't missed a memo from the language people. I hadn't. "Nowhere" is indeed one word.

I also quickly realized just how easy it is, given our language's constant state of flux, to make such a mistake when dealing with compound words. For example, while "nobody" is



Jim Witherell

one word, "no one" consists of two. (Besides, no one should ever write "noone" because, well, it looks like it must be the British spelling of "noon.")

As the good people at Merriam-Webster (m-w.com) remind us, there are three kinds of compound words: hyphenated (such as "e-book" and "e-tail"), closed ("online" and "webcam") and open ("web site" and "web page"). And even some of these words

are open to debate.

The meaning of "everyday" as used in the song lyrics above has long been "used or seen daily; ordinary." But now, as is the case with a lot of words, the spelling of the other meaning of "everyday" — "daily or every weekday" (for instance: She bakes cookies every day) — seems to be shifting toward becoming one word.

So pronounced has been the pressure for a closed spelling of that other definition of "everyday" that the people who publish "Garner's Modern American Usage" have moved the word's potential to change to a closed spelling up to a level 2 on their 5-stage Language Change Index.

According to the folks at (m-w.com), "A good dictio-

nary will list permanent compounds, so commonly used words become a permanent part of the language."

"What is 'correct,'" says proofreadingpal.com, "is what is most commonly done. The more people use a word, the less likely they are to hyphenate it." And which words are currently being used more and more? That's right, the ones that have to do with technology.

For example, at one time "You've got mail" used to refer to "Electronic Mail," which contracted to "E-Mail," before being further shortened into the noun "Email" (with some people saying that, when used as a verb, "email" is lowercase).

"Some people believe that the hyphen in 'e-mail' is

antithetical to the free and speedy spirit of the information age," writes slate.com's Tom Scocca. "Some people believe that the unhyphenated 'email' looks faddish and lazy. I find both sets of people irritating."

And, not to be outdone, there's the whole phone-related brouhaha. While most people seemed to agree pretty quickly that "smartphone" was one word, the same can't be said for the cell-phone, which kept its hyphen intact for a long time before people finally relented and agreed with Merriam-Webster that the correct spelling is now "cellphone." (Oh, and that thing sticking out of the wall that we used to use every day — not "everyday" — is a "landline," one word.)

One website (web site?) says that compound nouns are usually one word, and gives the examples: "backup," "breakup," "checkout" and "payback." But then along come nouns that are also one word, such as: "firsthand," "aforementioned" and "commonsense." Confused? You could always just go with which ever... er, whichever... word comes up in your spell check — I mean spell-check.

Jim Witherell of Lewiston is a writer and lover of words whose work includes "L.L. Bean: The Man and His Company" and "Ed Muskie: Made in Maine." He can be reached at jwitherell19@gmail.com.



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photography workshops and reached out to Maine's celebrated and lesser-known legions of artists and artisans to learn how things were made. In some instances, her support helped build an artist's career. Her passion for the arts went to her core.

In an account written by collection catalog essayist Jessica Skwire Routhier, Wellehan was on oxygen and in a wheelchair the last month of her life. During that period she visited the Portland Museum of Art with eldest daughter Sheila Wellehan, where a color photograph by Elliot Porter caught her eye. Learning it was a dye transfer print, Wellehan vowed to investigate how he did it when she got home.

DETAILS

"An Adventurous Spirit: The Jane Costello Wellehan Collection" opened Nov. 5 and runs through March 19, 2022.

The Bates College Museum of Art is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with additional hours until 7:30 p.m. Monday and Wednesday throughout the academic year.

Check the website at bates.edu/museum or call 207-786-6158 for holiday closings.

Every visitor must wear a mask and present a hard or digital copy of a COVID vaccination card or proof of a negative COVID test within the last 48 hours.

others. Dale Chihuly's undulating "Tango Red Persian, 2004" was purchased because it reminded her mother of the ocean, said daughter Mary Wellehan.

Mary Wellehan — a potter, former art teacher and the fourth of Wellehan's six daughters — said every piece of art was on display at all times for family, friends and guests in her mother's Portland home. It was considered livable art. Nothing was rotated or warehoused, as is a common practice for art collections. A grouping of Lissa Hunter baskets, for example, was informally placed above the bench where the family routinely tossed coats and cast off wet and muddy boots. "The dog would be on the bench," Mary recalled. "Nothing was off limits. I'd go in and lift off the lids of these beautiful ceramic pieces, trying to see if there was anything inside. It was tactile. Everything was at arm's reach. It was never, 'Don't touch that.' Lined with

art, the hallway was a freeway, with kids running up and down." Bates College Museum of Art Director Dan Mills, who first met the collector at a museum event in 2010, concurred. "It was important to Jane that the art be interactive — that the family gets to have some fun with it."

Ceramic kudos

Said to favor ceramics, Wellehan believed the craft was underappreciated. "The gift of her ceramics collection boosts the museum's holdings of works by contemporary ceramists," Mills said, among them Susan Dewsnap, Lissa Hunter, Paul Heroux, Sequoia Miller, George Pearlman, Warren MacKenzie and Jane Peiser. "With ceramics part of Bates' core studio disciplines, aspiring ceramists will be able to study these objects as a teaching and cultural resource."

Mills recalls Wellehan promising her artworks to the college more than a decade earlier, something she'd reaffirm to him at subsequent museum events. "In 2017, she decided it was time to move forward, inviting me to the house in Portland," he said. "There was art everywhere: up the stairwell, above the kitchen cabinets, in the little area between the kitchen and great room, over the bench. And she told me to choose," he recalled, "actually offering us all of it." Given her generosity and the significance of what he saw, Mills said the museum chose most everything. There were 90-plus acquisitions in all.

Provenance

Born in Lewiston in 1938, Jane Costello was the granddaughter of former Sun Journal publisher Louis Costello. In 1959, upon Costello's death, his son, Jane's father Russell Costello, helmed the paper the same year Jane married Daniel J. Wellehan Jr. of the shoe manufacturing and retail family. The union of the two prominent families made the young couple a kind of regional royalty. Graduating the following year from Bates College, Jane Costello Wellehan's Bates lineage can be traced back to paternal grandparents in 1898. A four-semester class "in Cultural Heritage" awakened my love for ancient cultures and religions, art and architecture," Wellehan wrote in a story for The Bates Student (newspaper) in 2017, explaining how it inspired a lifelong pursuit of the same.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: "3 Black Stripes, Red, White, and Gray," Tom Paiment; "Winter Sunset," William Thon; "Still Life Near Window," David C. Driskell; "Maine Pier," Maurice Freedman; and Vase Form, Susan Dewsnap

IMAGES COURTESY OF BATES COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART



Embracing her community, she served as a volunteer chaplain at Maine Medical Center and Mercy Hospital and on numerous nonprofit and corporate boards. These included Community Health Services, Sweetser, and Portland Ovarians, where she spent 29 years promoting the essential role of the arts in well-rounded communities.

Wellehan passed away in 2019, leaving her collection — plus an endowment to support acquisitions, internships and educational programming — to the museum. Her goal was to make art accessible to generations to come of students, faculty, staff and the public.

"Often a collection is stronger than the sum of its parts," said museum director Mills. "You end up making connections and seeing dialogue between works, and learning about the perspective of the collector. It's a wonderful gift to the college and to the state of Maine."

Said daughter Mary, "The spirit of what my mother chose was evident when I walked into the museum on opening night. There was so much joy represented in the art — in nature and in moments of her life. The way the museum has displayed the collection is powerful. It really honors these artists. We lived with it, but now it's elevated to such a beautiful tribute."