

The art of love: 6 works that embody deep affection are on display at Maine museums

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Humans have been making art about love for as long as they have been making art.

With Valentine's Day approaching, the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram asked six museums in Maine each to identify one piece, currently on display, that embodies love. The works they chose made for a diverse group and respond to the theme in its many forms, both vast and specific. They speak to romantic love, a mother's love, love for oneself. They are grounded in love of place, of community, of craft.

You can see all of these works right now – whether you visit on a date, with a friend you care about or on a day dedicated to yourself.



“家/Home” by Hong Hong. Photo courtesy of Hong Hong and the Center for Maine Contemporary Art.

“家/Home” by Hong Hong

Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockland

Hong Hong created this piece on a windy day.

The artist, who lives and works in Massachusetts, starts her paper pulp paintings in outdoor baths that collect bits of the surrounding environment. A close observer of “家/Home” will see a feather here, a leaf there.

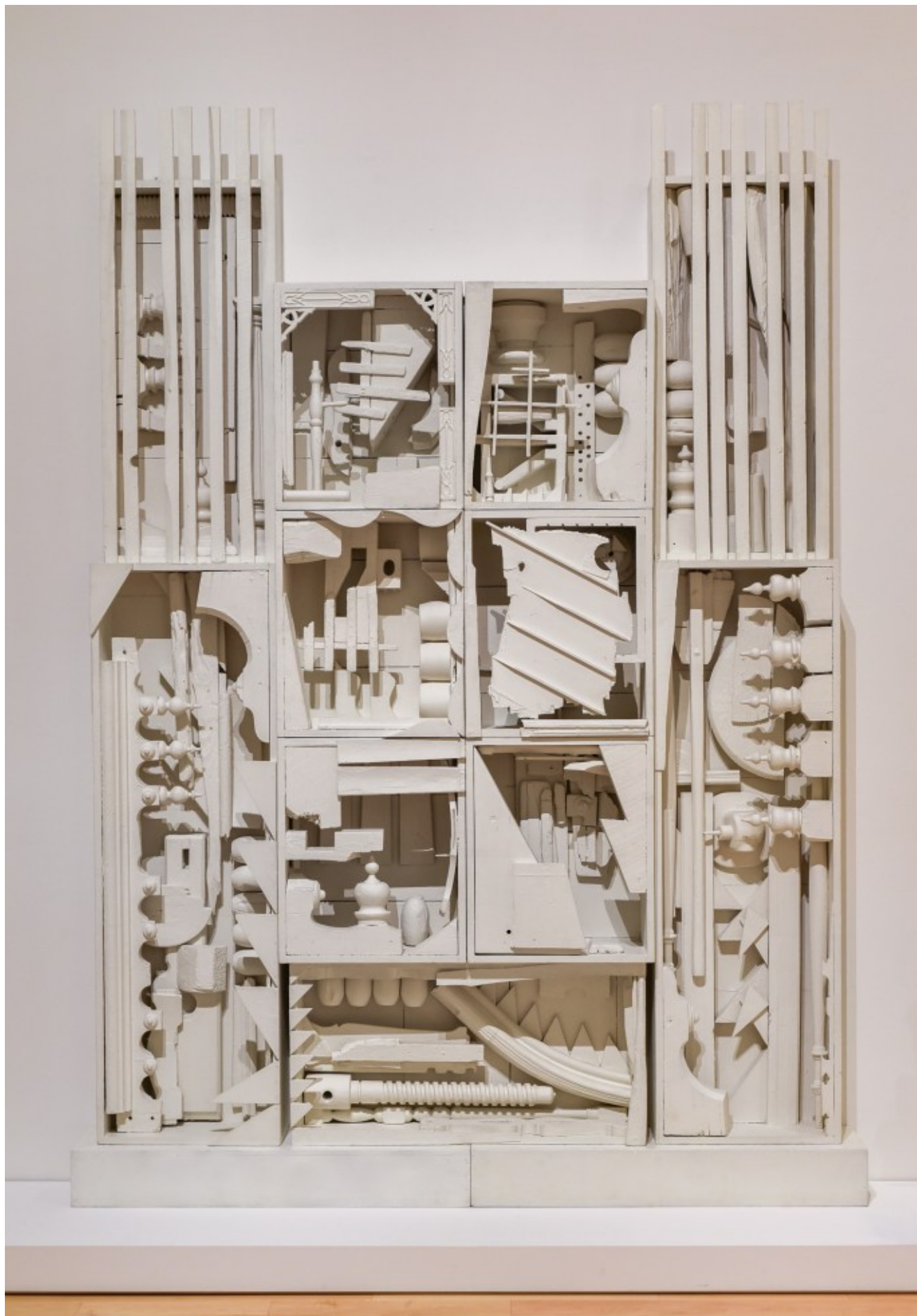
“That was the way the wind moved across the pieces when it was settling,” said Tessa Greene O’Brien, guest curator at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art. “I love that this is a record of a moment, of a weather pattern, of a time of year, of a particular place. That is such a smart way to reference love and the way that you love a place, the way that you love the foliage and the wind.”


O’Brien included this piece by Hong in “Let the World In,” an exhibition that explores themes of openness, observation and material integration. She was thinking about the ways artists engage with and open themselves to the world around them. This piece reflects those ideas both literally and figuratively.

It is large – 10 feet tall and 12 feet wide – and extends onto the floor. Hong made one panel outdoors to reflect the external environment and the rest indoors to reflect an internal and more subjective state. Hong incorporated colorful paintings she made as a child, mythological maps, the outlines of her mother’s shadow and her own. In the center panel, she re-created a childhood portrait of her mother. On another, she wrote a poem.

“Making subtle, nuanced work about love is challenging,” O’Brien said. “It can come off as saccharine or sentimental. I think she has a light touch in all of these big things that I think is brilliant.”

“Let the World In” features seven artists and is on view through May 5. The CMCA is open this winter from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. For more information, visit cmcanow.org or call 207-701-5005.





“Dawn’s Wedding Chapel II” by Louise Nevelson. *Photo by Andrew Witte and courtesy of the Colby College Museum of Art.*

“Dawn’s Wedding Chapel II” by Louise Nevelson

Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville

“Dawn’s Wedding Chapel II” is white like a bridal gown or a wedding cake. But Elizabeth Finch, head curator at the Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville, said she doesn’t believe Louise Nevelson was thinking about a traditional marriage when she made this sculpture.

“She herself had been married and divorced,” said Finch. “I don’t think this piece is necessarily about a typical wedding. It’s about, in a sense, marrying her art to the world.”

Nevelson was born in 1899 in what was then Russia and is now Ukraine. She came to Maine as a child, grew up in Rockland and made her career in New York. “Dawn’s Wedding Chapel II” is on loan from the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York for an exhibition titled “The World Outside: Louise Nevelson at Midcentury,” organized by the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth, Texas.

Nevelson is best known for striking sculptural constructions, usually in black. The first white piece she ever did was “Dawn’s Wedding Feast,” a large installation she made for an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1959. Nevelson used components of that bigger piece to create the smaller one that is now on view at Colby.

Finch quoted what Nevelson wrote about “Dawn’s Wedding Feast” in her autobiography: “... so it is early morning when you arise between night and dawn. When you’ve slept and the city has slept and you get a psychic vision of an awakening. And therefore, between almost the dream and the awakening, it is like celestial. ... Because the world is a little bit asleep and you are basically more alive to what’s coming through the day.”

“There’s a kind of romance in all of this,” Finch said. “You feel the allure, and you feel the dedication of this particular artist and how much she wanted to give to the world.”

“The World Outside: Louise Nevelson at Midcentury” is open through June 9. The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. On Thursdays from September to May, it stays open until 9 p.m. For more information, visit museum.colby.edu or call 207-859-5600.



“You Showed Me Love” by Rachel Gloria Adams and Ryan Adams. Photo by Tara Rice and courtesy of the Farnsworth Art Museum

“You Showed Me Love” by Rachel Gloria Adams and Ryan Adams

Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland

The words painted on the outside of the Farnsworth Art Museum are a line from the Frank Ocean song “Pink + White.”

“That is a nod to our first date. It was playing over the speakers there,” Ryan Adams said in a video the Farnsworth made about the mural. He looked at his wife, Rachel Gloria Adams, and smiled. “And I don’t know about you, but in that moment, I was like, ‘Oh, this person is going to be here for a while.’”

Jaime DeSimone, head curator at the Farnsworth Art Museum, said this space had previously hosted murals but had been dormant for some time, and the Portland couple brought it back to life when they painted the wall in 2023.

The result marries their styles and talents – Rachel’s eye for color and her quilt-like patterns, Ryan’s signature gem-style lettering.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/y0HWwfGXXfw>

“We both bring to the table different elements that we respect and we want from each other with our own work, so it’s really a true partnership,” Rachel Adams said in the video.

The initiative coincided with the Farnsworth’s 75th anniversary.

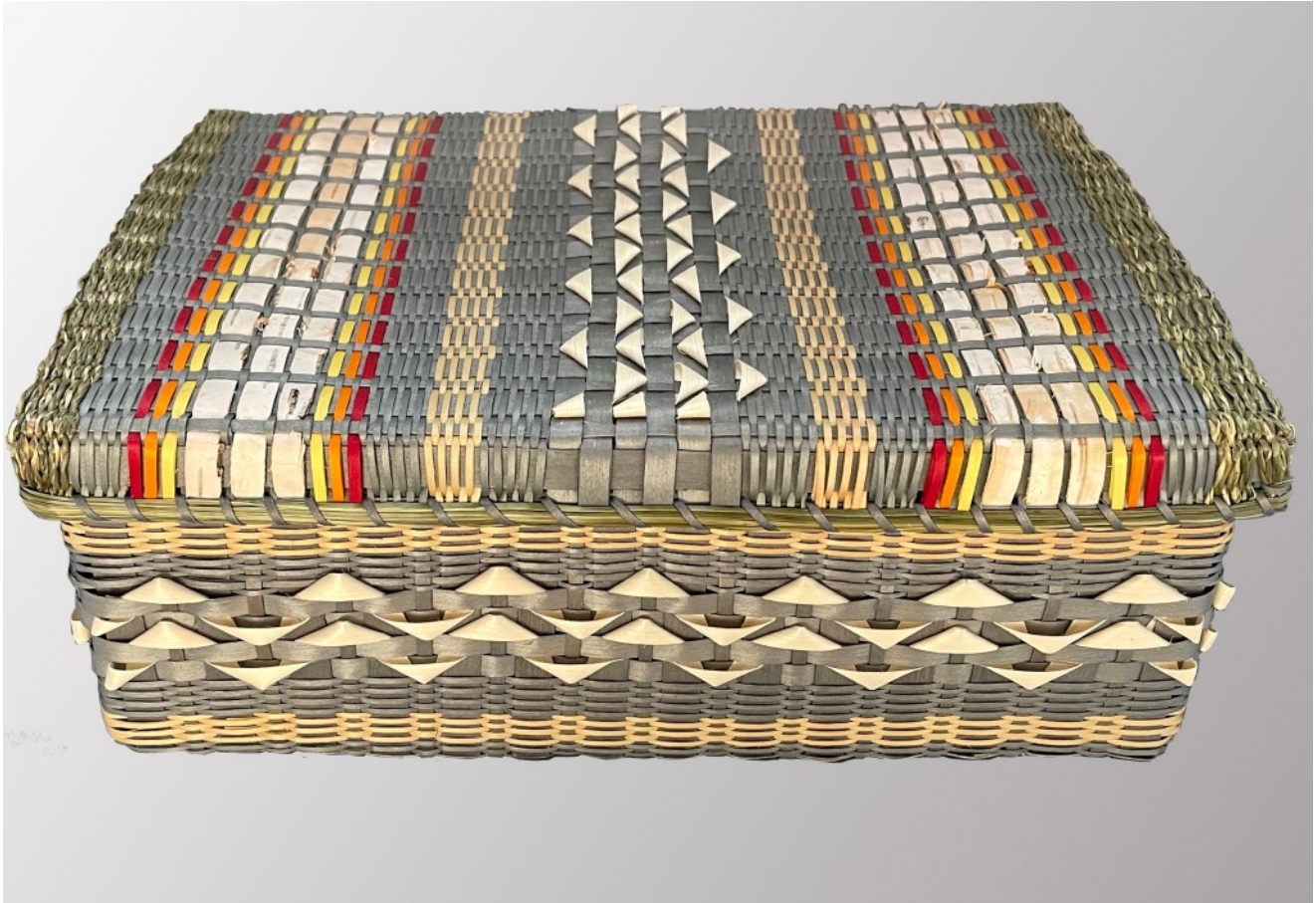
“I sometimes think about if we had a piece tucked in the corner of the museum what that impact would be versus literally painting the entire façade of it,” Rachel Adams said. “It’s such a mark on the town now. There’s no denying that we’re here.”

“Just being unapologetically ourselves is where I hope we have some sort of impact, especially for young kids of color that are coming into this world, being able to show that there is space for us and we can create space for us and hopefully carry it forward,” Ryan Adams said.

The mural will be on view until 2025. The museum plans to engage new muralists every two years to create site-specific designs on that wall. But DeSimone acknowledged that this piece will be missed when the time for change comes.

“It’s become quite beloved,” she said.

The Farnsworth Art Museum is open during the winter from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. For more information, visit farnsworthmuseum.org or call 207-596-6457.



“Pasokos (Sturgeon) Basket” by Theresa Secord. Photo by Theresa Secord and courtesy of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art

“Pasokos (Sturgeon) Basket” by Theresa Secord

Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick

While Theresa Secord worked on this basket, she sent regular updates to curator Cassandra Braun at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art. Sometimes the email was just one line: “I just did the coolest thing!”

“She would send progress photos, and the energy and excitement and enthusiasm she had for making baskets, even though she’s been doing this for decades, was so palpable,” Braun said. “It just became really clear that this was something she loves doing, and I feel that was really embodied in this really, really powerful work.”

Secord is a traditional Penobscot basketmaker and the founding director of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance. The museum commissioned this piece from her last year. “Pasokos (Sturgeon) Basket” is part of a series exploring the flora and fauna of native species that have become critically endangered in Maine. Overfishing, pollution and industrialization decimated the sturgeon population. Atlantic sturgeon that hatch in Gulf of Maine rivers are

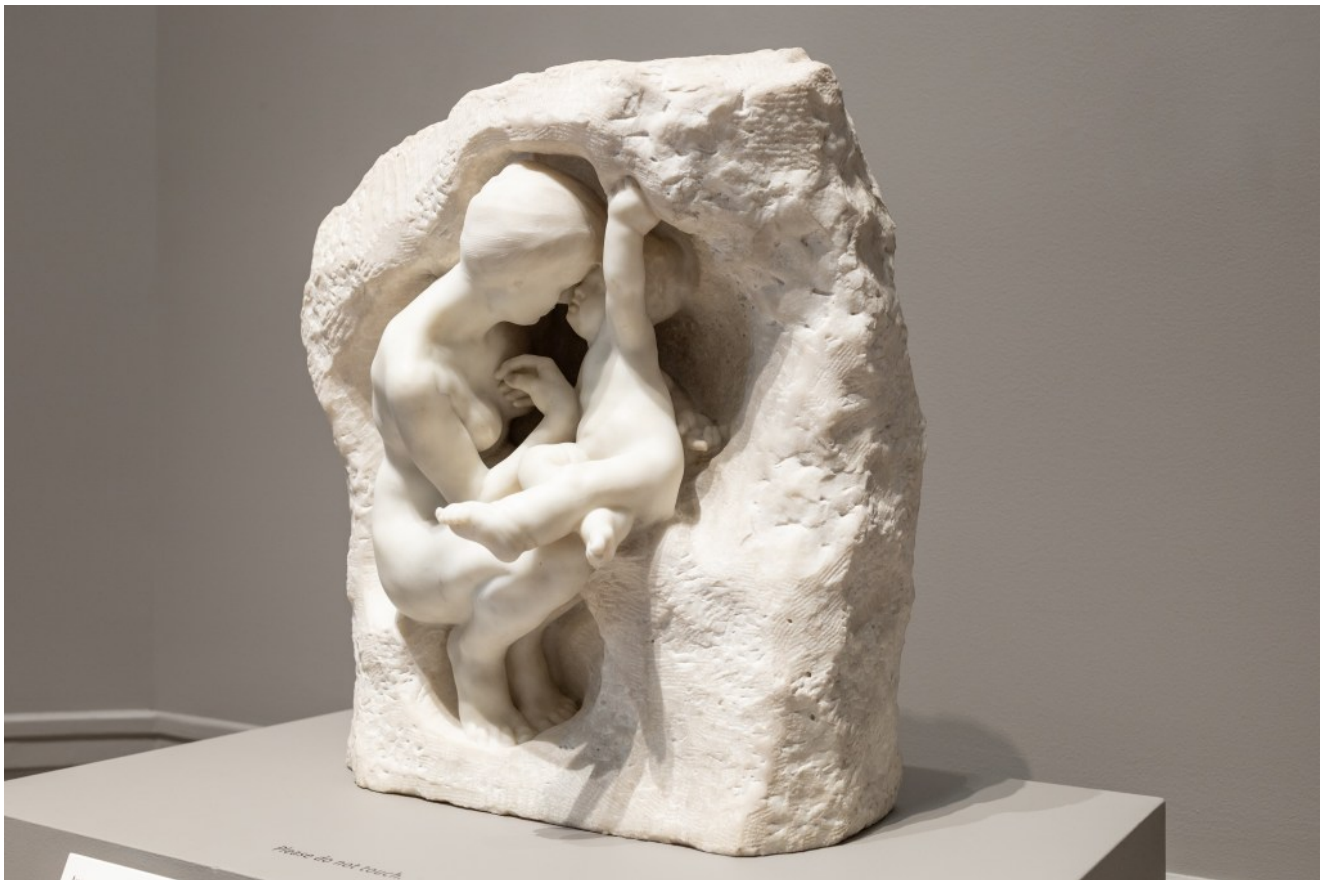
still threatened, but their numbers are making a comeback as a result of modern conservation efforts, and they can sometimes be seen jumping out of the Androscoggin River near the Bowdoin campus.

“It really is a love letter to the Maine environment and, in particular, the sturgeon fish,” said Frank Goodyear, who is the co-director of the museum with his wife, Anne Collins Goodyear.

Braun said the color of the basket emulates the gray of a sturgeon, and decorative curls mimic its scales. The artist used strips of birch to reference the birchbark canoes and wooden torches her ancestors used to fish sturgeon at night, and the top has red, yellow and orange accents for the flames. Secord also made the basket with a wooden mold that belonged to her grandmother, a shape that would have been used to hold stationery.

“I loved the fact that this basket really spoke to Theresa’s love of science, of basketmaking and art, of the land and waters that she is a part of,” Braun said.

“Pasokos (Sturgeon) Basket” is currently on view as part of the exhibition “Threads: Artists Weave Their Worlds,” which will be open through Oct. 13. The Bowdoin Museum of Art is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, and 1-5 p.m. Sunday.



“Jeune mère à la grotte (Young mother in the grotto)” by Auguste Rodin. *Photo courtesy of the Portland Museum of Art*

“Jeune mère à la grotte (Young mother in the grotto)” by Auguste Rodin

Portland Museum of Art

The skin of the figures looks so supple that it seems almost impossible, while the rock of the grotto is rough and textured.

“That contrast is so powerful because it tells you about the process of working with rough marble to get it to look like this, what that requires,” said Shalini Le Gall, chief curator at the Portland Museum of Art.

This sculpture, carved from a single piece of marble between 1885 and 1891, is a testament to love of craft. French artist Auguste Rodin is considered one of the most influential sculptors of his time, and he often studied human emotion in his work. Maternal love was less common a theme for Rodin than romantic love, but this piece depicts a mother and child.

Le Gall said she loves the way the figures are intertwined and touching. It makes her think about how love – whether it is love of landscape or love of another person – can feel like losing yourself.

“The way for a moment you become unaware of your physical form, of your physical embodiment, and you allow that to intertwine and become part of something that is external to you, that feels really well captured here,” she said. “You’re looking at limbs, you’re looking at legs, and it’s not always clear how those two are intertwining and intersecting.”

This piece is a recent gift to the museum by Alex Mochary Kasser, and its installation was no small task. Marble is heavy, after all, and this sculpture weighs between 150 and 200 pounds. The staff had to use a small crane to place it in the gallery. ([See a video at @portlandmuseum on Instagram.](#))

“There’s arguments to be made for the weight of love,” Le Gall said. “If we’re thinking about that theme. Sometimes love requires infrastructure.”

The Portland Museum of Art is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. On Friday, the museum stays open until 8 p.m. For more information, visit portlandmuseum.org or call 207-775-6148.



The outside of "Post II" by multimedia artist Sarah Rowe. *Photo by Luc Demers and courtesy of the Bates Museum of Art*

"Post II" by Sarah Rowe

Collaborators: Kelli Blacketer, video art and disability consultant; JP Gurnett, videographer; Lyla Rowe, soundscape art; recorded by Shawn Foree

Bates Museum of Art, Lewiston

Multimedia artist Sarah Rowe was hospitalized with COVID-19 in 2020 when she first imagined this piece. She wanted to create a place for healing, a safe haven.

So she built a treehouse of sorts, painted with bright colors and illuminated with projections. She depicted Heyoka, a sacred clown or trickster of the Lakota who often inspires Rowe's work, as a whimsical figure with a horse head.

"I believe laughter and play are central to our healing and our connection," Rowe wrote about "Post II." "If we lose that sense of playfulness, if we lose our sense of humor, we've lost the battle. I feel like laughter is resilience, especially in Native culture. Laughter is so important,

especially when we're talking about these complex and disturbing histories that we've emerged from, and we're trying to reconcile. I believe having that playfulness keeps our work aligned with healing and reconciliation."

Rowe, who is of Lakota and Ponca descent and lives in Nebraska, is one of 12 Indigenous artists and two collaboratives who are part of the exhibition "Exploding Native Inevitable" at the Bates Museum of Art. Museum director Dan Mills and Indigenous artist Brad Kahlhamer curated the show.

Mills said "Post II" embodies love for him because both the piece and the artist who made it are warm and caring. Rowe collaborated with other artists to create the digital art and video projections, as well as a soundscape. She made sure that the space was wheelchair accessible and inclusive.

"She exuded all those very things that she aspired to have her work achieve," Mills said.

"Exploding Native Inevitable" is on view through March 4. The museum is currently open from 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday and Wednesday and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. When the show closes at Bates, it will then travel to Arizona, Nebraska and Utah. For more information, including a full program of events to accompany the exhibition, visit bates.edu/museum or call 207-786-6259.



The inside of "Post II" by multimedia artist Sarah Rowe. *Photo by Luc Demers and courtesy of the Bates Museum of Art*

Bestsellers: 'The Frozen River,' 'How to Know a Person'

Bedside table: Indian family drama over generations years captivates this reader

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