

# Rubens Is Seeded First As the Fall Shows Beckon

By **BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO**

**I**NTERESTING art exhibitions seem to pop up all over Connecticut each fall like rabbits from a magician's hat. This season is no exception, with an abundance of quality shows scheduled throughout the state. Several stand out, and one or two may even have you champing at the bit.

The spotlight of the moment belongs to the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, punching well above its weight with an ambitious loan exhibition of oil sketches by the 17th-century Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens. It is the first exhibition in this country devoted exclusively to the artist's oil sketches and will tour nationally from here.

As to trends and tendencies, worth noting is the quality of contemporary art exhibitions across the state. The Aldrich Museum in Ridgefield, Art-space in New Haven, and Real Art Ways in Hartford are all presenting strong fall shows. And these three cocky little spaces have even begun collaborating on statewide projects.

Meanwhile, a number of museums are expanding. The Aldrich has just completed a new \$8 million building; the New Britain Museum of American Art has embarked on a \$26 million expansion, while Yale University Art Gallery is about halfway through refurbishing its signature Louis I.

Kahn building. Even the once-hyped, quietly-shelved expansion plans for the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford appear to be heating up again.

But it's still the exhibitions — not glitzy buildings — that draw crowds, at least in Connecticut. Heading the fall bill, after Rubens, is a mighty-sounding exhibition at the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme examining the influence of 19th-century French Barbizon School and Impressionist painters on the American Impressionists. Although the list of works has not been made final, the draft checklist is impressive.

The decorative arts are also well represented. "Livable Modernism: Interior Decorating and Design during the Great Depression" at Yale looks at some of the ways Modernism was introduced into American homes, while "Fusing Traditions: Transformations in Glass by Native American Artists" at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum in Mashantucket introduces new American Indian studio-glass artists.

Among other exhibitions, landscape rules the roost. The Yale Center for British Art is reviving the tepid if occasionally brilliant work of the 19th-century landscapist Alfred William Hunt, while both the New Britain Museum and the Gallery of Contemporary Art at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield are presenting landscape-related fall shows. Even Laura Carton's pornographic cut-



A vanity and ottoman from 1934 designed by Gilbert Rohde will be on display at Yale's art gallery.

and-pastes at Real Art Ways might be regarded as landscapes.

Here is a sampling of what the museums are offering this season.

## Bruce Museum

If you visit one exhibition in Connecticut this fall, make it "Drawn by the Brush: Oil Sketches by Peter Paul Rubens." Opening Oct. 2, this exhibition explores the central role oil sketches played in Rubens's creative process. Examples of different kinds of sketches grace the show, from swift, breezy studies of live models used by the artist and his assistant when completing larger commissions, to more polished display pieces for potential patrons. There are also sketches for works of art in other media, including prints, sculpture, or tapestry designs for weavers. This is top art nosh.

Information: (203) 869-0376 or [www.brucemuseum.org](http://www.brucemuseum.org).

## Wadsworth Atheneum

This museum possesses the largest art collection in the state, which it taps regularly for exemplary historical and contemporary exhibitions. This fall it will present "Ballets Russes to Balanchine: Dance at the Wadsworth Atheneum," showcasing selections from its unrivaled Serge Lifar Collection of set and costume designs, most of them for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. All told there will be more than 80 works of art, nearly 25 costumes and loads of archival and photographic material. The show opens Sept. 25.



Brent Sikkema Gallery, New York

Work by Shahzia Sikander will be on display at the Aldrich.

## The New York Times

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By Benjamin Genocchio

Sept. 5, 2004

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Alongside this exhibition is "Contemporary Art: Floor to Ceiling, Wall to Wall," a jaunty survey of 70 of the museum's important contemporary works, including new gifts. Among the gifts is "Golf Typhoon" (1995) by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, which is 20 feet tall and weighs 1,800 pounds. This giant set of golf clubs is in the open-air Gengras Court, accessible through the museum cafe. The show opens Oct. 31.

Information: (860)278-2670 or [www.wadsworthatheneum.org](http://www.wadsworthatheneum.org).

### Aldrich Museum

This boutique museum on the Westchester-Fairfield county border is presenting "Shahzia Sikander: Nemesis," an exhibition of recent animations, drawings and a site-specific installation by the Pakistan-born, New York-based Conceptual artist. Ms. Sikander's tranced-out, trippy artworks tinker with the conventions of traditional miniature painting, combining formal slickness with imaginative flair. The show opens Sept 19.

Alongside Ms. Sikander is "Bottle: Contemporary Art and Vernacular Tradition," exploring the use of the bottle (as a material or subject) in contemporary art. Artists include Joseph Beuys, Dove Bradshaw, Bethany Bristow, Tony Feher, Phil Frost, David Hammons, Mona Hatoum, Damien Hirst, Whitfield Lovell, Josiah McElheny and Barry McGee, among many others. Who would have thought bottles were so popular?

Information: (203)438-4519 or [www.aldrichart.org](http://www.aldrichart.org).

### Florence Griswold Museum

This attractively situated museum presents mostly Impressionism-related historical exhibitions with a strong educational focus. From Oct. 9, it will offer "A Matter of Style: The Influence of French Art on the Old Lyme Art Colony," examining the steady influence of French Barbizon and Impressionist artists on the American Impressionist painters living and working in Old Lyme a century ago. The exhibition theme isn't new, but the pictures are so beautiful it doesn't much matter. Brand-name artists include Renoir, Corot, Pissarro, Daubigny, Hassam, Rook, Cazin, Ranger and Metcalf.

Information: (860)434-5542 or [www.flogris.org](http://www.flogris.org).

### Yale Center for British Art

This richly endowed museum with a focus on English art will present "The Poetry of Truth: Alfred William Hunt and the Art of Landscape," starting Sept. 18. The show contains around 65 watercolors, drawings, sketchbooks and oil paintings by Hunt, a talented if largely overlooked British painter of the second half of the 19th century. It's not clear whether this show will do much to rescue his reputation.

Alongside the look at Hunt is "The Beauty of Life: William Morris and the Art of Design," an exhibition that examines Morris's pre-eminent place in the history of 19th-century design.

The show features 200 works drawn from the center's collection and from the Huntington Library in San Marino, Calif., which has the largest collection of Morris materials outside Britain.

Among the highlights are designs for stained glass, wallpaper, textiles, embroidery and tapestry, dozens of drawings, rare books and manuscripts. The show opens Oct. 14.

Information: (203)432-2800 or [www.yale.edu/ycba](http://www.yale.edu/ycba).

### New Britain Museum of Art

On view through Nov. 28, "Seeing Is Believing: American Trompe l'Oeil" presents a hearty survey of around 60 paintings, sculptures, decorative art objects and illustrations by American artists that play tricks on your eyes.

Highlights include an ultrarealistic painting of Chianti grapes by George Henry Hall, featured recently in a similar-themed exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, as well as contemporary works by Duane Hanson, Wendell Castle, and Michael Theise.

Information: (860)229-0257 or [www.nbmaa.org](http://www.nbmaa.org).

### Sacred Heart University

The Gallery of Contemporary Art here will start its 15th season with "It's for the Birds" a kooky-sounding exhibition mustering the works of 50 artists, architects, designers, and landscape architects inspired by, wait for it, birdhouses.

Yes, you heard right. Bound to be batty, artists include Alison Spear, Hugo Moro, Rosemarie Chiarlone, Susan Weiner, Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquadt. The show opens Sept. 19.

Information: (203)365-7650 or [www.sacredheart.edu](http://www.sacredheart.edu).

### Real Art Ways

Besides having the funkier hours (Tuesday-Thursday and Sunday, 2-10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 2 to midnight), Real Art Ways has the Real Room, a space dedicated to showing the funkier young and emerging artists around.

Starting on Oct. 21, the focus will be on Laura Carton, who downloads pornographic images off the Internet then digitally deletes the figures, leaving behind strange and disturbing interiors.

The works, outputted as photographs, are all about fantasy worlds.

Information: (860)232-1006 or [www.realartways.org](http://www.realartways.org).

### Artspace

Have you ever watched television, read a magazine, or visited an art gallery and thought you were being conned?

Starting Nov. 13, this contemporary art center is presenting an exhibition of works that try to trick, lure, charm, seduce or enchant the viewer with promises of something -- only to leave him or her disillusioned by the truth.

Titled "Enchantment," the show features the work of a dozen nationally regarded artists, including Sarah Emerson, Koichi Enomoto, Fred Fleisher and Kathleen Bitetti.

Information: (203)772-2709 or [www.artspacenh.org](http://www.artspacenh.org).

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