

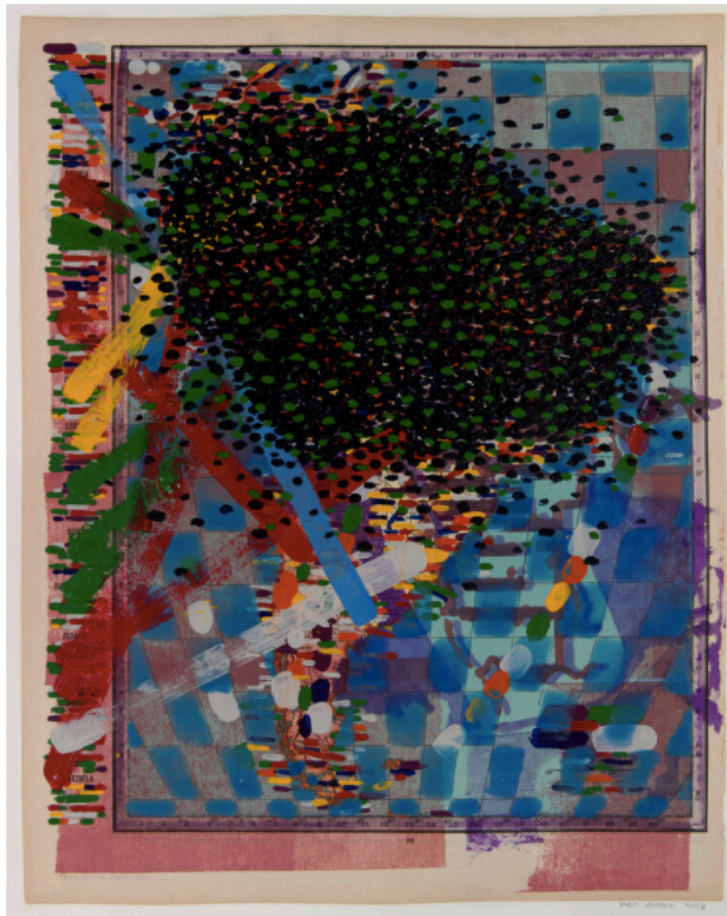
MMPA Antidote

OUR IDEA FOR THE ANTIDOTE TO THE VIRAL DISRUPTION HAPPENING IS THAT WE TOUT UPBEAT, POSITIVE, AND FORWARD-LOOKING POSTS THAT DIGITALLY FEATURE THE ART AND ARTISTS IN THE STATE OF MAINE.

MMPA Antidote was inspired by the need to share ideas, fraternity and make, while closed in and set apart. Nature, beauty, nostalgia, travel and work seem to be our themes for our first issue. We will morph and shift with the information and artwork we receive. We hope you'll investigate the links, share the images, and send us some your own. Be safe and get outside.

- MMPA Director Denise Froehlich

CATE WNEK'S INTERVIEW WITH DAN MILLS, THE DIRECTOR OF THE BATES COLLEGE MUSEUM. DAN IS ALSO AN MMPA BOARD MEMBER



Dan Mills, Amazon Region (with South American countries in nationalist colors. Nationalist colors represent the estimated number of indigenous nations and tribes at European contact marked with black, and the remaining number marked with green), 2018, acrylic, watercolor, and ink on map laid down on paper, 14 x 11 inches

Cate: How would you describe the importance of art right now?

Dan: *Life in the Time of COVID-19. Even this increasingly common way of referring to now, this precarious and unsure time, is taken from art, Gabriel García Márquez' 1985 novel Life in the Time of Cholera. Art is often the way people define and describe our world, people paraphrasing films and books and paintings, arts related phrases entering the lexicon, and so on. For artists, art is the way they make sense of the world, communicate, define the human condition, the time they/we live in, comment on political, philosophical, and spiritual ideas.*

While people are in stay-at-home mode, many fill their time engaging with art: films, poetry, novels, art books. Art is often how we define our moment—currently and historically. The 1960s: think Warhol's Soup Cans/Pop Art, the film Easy Rider, Jimi Hendrix' You Experienced/psychedelic music & art. The 1970s: Cindy Sherman's Film Stills/Pictures Generation, Judy Chicago's Dinner Table/Feminist Art, Punk/New Wave music, and so on. Sometimes in shorthand ways Warhol's "in the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes" (which seems prescient), in broader enduring ways: how punk and new wave transformed fashion.

Cate: Can you speak to why you chose this field? How has it impacted your life?

Dan: *I did lots of things while growing up, including making art and being around visual and performing arts (my parents were educators, painters and involved in theater and music). I never gave it much thought as a boy, it was just around me /what I did. And when it was time to really think about what I would do with my life, everything else peeled away but art. It was the only thing that drove me to work, explore, that deeply challenged me. From that point on, I tried to have my studies and every work, volunteer, experience related to art.*

I studied art. I met and married artist Gail Skudera (mixed media textile artist who had a solo show at the MMPA in 2016), direct the Bates College Museum of Art (since 2010, and two other academic museums over the last 25 years), have a studio in a building in Lewiston, and exhibit fairly frequently. It hasn't simply impacted my life, it dominates my life!

Cate: What has touched or especially inspired you recently?

Dan: *As a director/curator, I tend to be all in on the projects we are working on, and I'm pleased to be in a position to develop an exhibitions program full of artists and curatorial projects that I find inspirational, that support the academic mission of Bates and that I think students and the cultural community will also find inspirational. We recently closed two, Vanessa German: Miracles and Glory Abound, a sculptural installation and performance by this extraordinary Pittsburgh based African American artist, and Ralph Eugene Meatyard: Stages for Being, fascinating and mysterious small format photographs from the 1960s and 70s by the late photographer, and gratifying for me as I've loved his work since an undergrad.*

We've received a gift of works by Ashley Bryan, the amazing nonagenarian who has lived on Little Cranberry Isle much of his life. While he is widely celebrated as an illustrator and author, Ashley is a wonderful painter and printmaker, puppet maker, and sea glass window maker. It is truly inspirational to see the breadth of his creativity across disciplines.

I continue to be moved by the work of Marsden Hartley. As you know, the museum holds the Marsden Hartley Memorial Collection, including over 100 drawings, a few paintings, and photographs, works by other artists, ephemera, and other of his possessions. Scholar Gail Scott has been researching our holdings, and it has been fascinating to learn more about these works. The museum has partnered with the Vilcek Foundation in New York, to organize Marsden Hartley: Adventurer in the Arts. The Vilcek's stunning collection of mostly paintings that span his career compliment our collection wonderfully, and shed new light/tell a story about this wandering artist from Maine. Did you know he didn't live in the same place for more than a year his entire adult life?

We were planning to open a retrospective by gonzo artist/illustrator Ralph Steadman this summer—the only location it was to travel to in New England and well beyond—but we had to cancel it due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Very painful! We were going to present over 70 works including illustrations from Fear and Loathing in LA and other projects he collaborated on with the late Hunter S. Thompson, + illustrations from children's books and classics, political cartoons, and some additional works he and I selected in his studio in Kent, England last fall. Ralph is in his 80s, and is still making terrific art, that is funny, edgy, touching and inspiring.

Cate: Do you see this period leaving a permanent change in the ways that art can be shared by artists appreciated by the public?

Dan: *I'm just thinking that we're all spending so much time communicating through our virtual world, that rather than thinking everyone is going to want to do everything online, I think people will be desperate for some tactile, physical, real interaction with people and things. I do think there's no way to replace direct experience with works of art, at least those that exist in the physical world. One of the great joys of leading a museum is seeing the way this experience affects people—especially students, who often light up, witnessing a light going on when a connection is made or something is understood as a result of viewing the actual artwork they may have read about or seen a reproduction of in their studies.*

There are some amazing artworks being made today that are "born digital", and experiencing these works is best on a screen, projected, or the platform they were conceived for. And there are artworks as experiences, which engage the public, and may be conceived for specific time and place and experience. These suffer in this time as well. Most art objects are conceived to be experienced in person, the best way to do so is in a museum, gallery, or the physical space they were conceived for.

I am definitely experiencing screen fatigue. Spending more time working remotely, attached to, working and largely interacting with people through a screen, is not conducive to making me want to spend my cultural and leisure time also looking at the screen. So many institutions and people are moving whatever they do, be it art or whatever, to be something to be experienced on the computer. It's understandable. I really crave the experience with spaces, people, travel, etc. When we end up on the other side of this, as a result of this, maybe we will all appreciate these things more. Maybe we will all want the museum and gallery experience more, the other cultural things that are best experienced in person. And if we took these things for granted, maybe we won't anymore.