

Castellani Art Museum reopens doors with 5 new exhibitions

BY KAREN CARR KEEFE

Saturday is a very big day in the local art world.

The Castellani Art Museum is reopening to the public with five new exhibits and a completely revamped gallery. The museum on the Niagara University campus was closed to visitors more than a year ago due to COVID-19, and NU used the gallery as a distance classroom.

The artwork being introduced this weekend ranges from a 300-year retrospective of Niagara Falls imagery, to Salvador Dalí lithographs, to paintings and sculptures acquired by the gallery in the past 10 years.

In between are collections of artful, colorful quilts and a showcase of contemporary mixed media artworks by more than 65 WNY artists.

“It feels fantastic; it feels energizing to reopen,” Interim Director Michael J. Beam said.

“We can’t wait to see our visitors again. We miss our members; we miss working with the community,” said Tara Walker, senior manager of marketing and public relations. “We just can’t wait to open our doors this Saturday.”

The museum is open weekends throughout the summer of 2021. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays and 1-5 p.m. Sundays. Admission is free – and the CAM is air-conditioned.

“It’s just going to be exciting to see the museum filled with life again – to see people enjoying the works of art that we’ve put on display for them,” Walker said.

Beam said a lot of work has gone into the reopening.

“These past months – a year-and-a-half – all of us on staff, everyone has stepped up and gone over and above to do projects that have been on hold for a while. The time being closed to the public ... we were able to launch a whole bunch of exciting projects,” he said.

Beam said a website revamp that includes visual access to the collection was a huge project overseen by Registrar Mary Helen Miskuly, assisted by Folk Art Curator Edward Millar and Walker.

He also noted the development of the museum’s YouTube channel, as well as a new membership program Walker launched.

“We’re working on getting our long-term members and our long-term supporters back into the loop ... so it’s very exciting to be reopening,” Beam said.

He noted the staff of five people has taken on extra duties to accomplish the vision of the gallery. Beam still is curator of exhibitions and special projects as well as interim director. A search is underway for a permanent director.

The fifth staff member is Barbara Borkowski, who is in charge of weekend and special events.

“We all are doing so many things – really turning a negative, which had been the COVID pandemic and the situation of being closed, to a positive – where we took that time to say, ‘What can we accomplish, what can we do?’ ” Beam said.

There is a new reception desk – the first big new construction project in the museum for the past 30 years. COVID-19-related manufacturing delays had an early impact



The exterior of the Castellani Art Museum on the Niagara University campus. (Photos courtesy of the Castellani Art Museum)

on construction, but it’s nearing completion.

Beam said reopening has always been a moving target, with chang-

ing state guidance on protocols for halting the spread of the coronavirus.

SEE CAM, continued on Page 24

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