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EVENTS

Century of talent from Ohio celebrated at Riffe Gallery

Melissa Starker, For The Columbus Dispatch

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According to art historian William Gerdts, “Of all the states between the East and West coasts, it was Ohio that developed the greatest and most continuous artistic tradition before 1920.”

That statement resonated with Charlotte Gordon, artistic director of the Southern Ohio Museum, as she traveled the state to select works for “A Century of Ohio Watercolor.”

Created to celebrate the Ohio Arts Council’s 50th anniversary, the exhibit is on view Downtown at the Riffe Gallery.

“For the anniversary show of Ohio Arts Council, I wanted to show how Ohio rises above,” Gordon said.

Through a remarkably

diverse selection of works within a single medium, “Ohio Watercolor” illuminates the evolution of styles over time and pays tribute to some of the artists who broke out of the regional scene to influence others and receive national attention.

Among them are Alice Schille and Roy Lichtenstein, the latter represented by comical, pistol-packing 1952 portrait, *The Sheriff*. In addition, space is made for talented, little-known artists such as mid-20th-century Milledgeville painter Mabel Mason De Bra.

The collected pieces also illustrate how Ohio watercolorists captured the state’s development and reflects the reigning art movements of the past century.

Represented by two works, including the charming 1916 street scene *White Houses*, Schille had a hand in establishing modernism in Ohio through her painting and teaching. Her influence can be seen in *Landscape*, a soft,

dreamy piece from 1920 by Ray Kinsman Waters, one of her students.

Clyde Singer represents American scene painters with *The Onlookers*, a bustling, whimsical view of a line of men transfixed by a shop window. Dwinnell Grant lends his own approach to the geometric abstract style of Kandinsky in two airy, colorful and totally absorbing 1938 paintings.

The growth of the state through the past century is depicted in Ralph

Fanning's *Union Station Shipyards*. The 1927 piece presents a dense scene of train cars and curving rail lines in which almost everything above the ground level is obscured by robust clouds of smoke. But at the center, literally on the horizon, a skyscraper under construction stands as a sign of the future.

Other illustrations of progress are more overtly opinionated — as with Hughie Lee Smith's *Industrial Scene*, a 1930 work that gives a sense of isolation and neglect to the view from a porch; and Moses Pearl's *Cleveland* from 1960. The elements of the industrial labyrinth he depicts curve inward, seemingly ready to consume the individual who steps into it.

The body of historic works gives way to a healthy section of art by contemporary Ohio watercolorists, including rising talents Laine Bachman and Cody Heichel.

Other recent highlights include Christopher Leeper's *Corner*, which recalls the cinematic quality found in the work of photographer Gregory Crewdson; and *Shield Bug* by Lane Raiser. The Shawnee State University professor lent a near-obsessive attention to detail to his work before his untimely passing in 2014.