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Kay WalkingStick, "Night." 1994, oil on canvas, 36.25 by 72.25 inches, Montclair Art Museum

# The satisfactions of collecting

MAM prepares for exhibits on nature, a special gift to the museum, and Warhol's cars

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OF THE MONTCLAIR TIMES

We are all curators.

We may collect birdbaths, action figures, records – or art – but whatever it is, home is where we do our curating: adding, culling, cataloging, and displaying.

Museums are a grander expression of that impulse. Montclair's own art museum came into being when two collectors joined forces in 1914, and for nearly a century, the Montclair Art Museum, at 3 South Mountain Ave., has been a destination for students of American and Native American art, and a wonderful place to spend an afternoon.

The museum is getting ready for a three new shows, opening in May and September of this year and February 2011, that are based on its permanent collection and celebrate the joys of collecting on many levels.

Times are tight, and a cynic might characterize collection-based shows as a sort of artistic "pantry night," serving up what's already in the cupboards.

But if you talk to Gail Stavitsky and Twig Johnson, MAM's chief curator and curator of Native American art, or to Lora Urbanelli, the museum's director, you don't get a sense that they are just making do.

They're excited, and their conversation is liberally peppered with the word "fun."

In the last 20 or 30 years the art world

has been enamored of the blockbuster show, said Urbanelli, and MAM was no exception, enjoying every minute of its 2009 exhibit, "Cézanne and American Modernism."

"We whetted everyone's appetite with that notion of the major Hollywood experience of an art show," Urbanelli said. "It can be really exhilarating.

"But the permanent collections on which so many museums are founded are often true gems that get overlooked in all that hubbub."

MAM's trio of shows begins with "Engaging with Nature: American and Native American Artists (A.D. 1200-2004)," which runs from May 16 to Sept. 25.

On Sept. 26, "Living with Art: Works from the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection" will open.

And next February, the Andy Warhol painting in MAM's collection, "Twelve Cadillacs," will anchor an exhibit about cars.

"Engaging with Nature" places landscapes from the two traditions in MAM's collection side by side, so as to create a visual dialog between Native American art and American art on the topic of nature.

Stavitsky said the exhibit grew from the curators' desire to show "Abandoned Ritual Place," a 2001 clay, wood, sand, and plaster sculpture by Charles Simonds that was hidden from view during the Cézanne show last year. They had missed it and wanted to show it again.

The two curators discussed the theme and each chose works from her own area of expertise. They pooled their choices, whittling down from the many they would show if only they had room, and found some pleasant juxtapositions, like the two winter landscapes they proposed: Johnson suggested "Snowball Shadows," a 2001 lithograph by G. Peter Jemison, and Stavitsky a 1945 gouache by Charles Burchfield.

"Gail and I always have a good time working together," Johnson said. She also enjoyed bouncing ideas off Gary Schneider, MAM's director of education who, with an eye to younger museum-goers, connected the winter scenes to the idea of shoes: A pair of child's moccasins dating from the 1890s, and arctic socks made of woven grass around 1900 will be shown next to the winter landscapes.

"When we talk to kids, we'll ask, 'What would you wear?'"

"Everything has so many stories to tell, it's really fun to take these works [and ask] what's the new thing they're going to illustrate?" Johnson said.

"It's important too because Native American art is part of American art, bottom line. It's really nice to have it shown with the rest of the collection and not have it as 'the other,'" she said.

## THE VOGELS

Coming in September is a show that celebrates collecting, and two fascinating collectors.

After their marriage in the early 1960s,

Herbert and Dorothy Vogel, a postal clerk and librarian, lived on her salary and collected art with his.

They collected so much that their bed was eventually lifted off the floor by the art stacked underneath it, Urbanelli said.

The collection of minimalist and conceptual art reached close to 5,000 objects, and in 2008, the Vogels made a gift of "The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States."

One institution in each of the states was given 50 works from their collection. MAM was chosen to receive New Jersey's gift.

The Vogels collected work by artists who were at one time very well known, said Stavitsky, though now, "None of them are household names," she said. "The household names are the Vogels."

According to the conditions of the gift, all the works must be shown together, and that is the case at MAM, but the show will also include an informal recreation of the Vogels' living room.

"People can sit down in a setting where some of the work would be hung," Stavitsky said. The Vogels have been involved in creating the room, she said. "It's been a lot of fun."

The Vogel show is "a fun way to introduce the notion of collecting," Urbanelli said.

## WARHOL AND CARS

In February 2011, MAM will open an exhibit it has tentatively titled "American Icons: Andy Warhol and Cars," and

scheduled to run until July 2011.

Warhol was famous for his many collections; his cookie jars, for example, ran into the hundreds. Urbanelli described him as "a maniacal collector." He also loved cars, and they appear throughout his work.

Stavitsky had been thinking for many years about doing a car-related exhibition, and it bothered her that MAM's Warhol, "Twelve Cadillacs," a major work, had never been borrowed by other museums.

When the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh contacted Stavitsky to offer a prepackaged show, she mentioned her interest in the theme of automobiles in Warhol's work. She gave them a wish list, and the Andy Warhol Museum is lending MAM a number of his works, including drawings from the 1940s, fashion illustrations from the '50s, as well as a BMW art car, movies, and archival works.

"It's going to be the first examination of this theme throughout his whole career, and a way of putting our painting on the map," Stavitsky said.

She added, "I couldn't resist. They made an offer of letting us set up a room with Andy Warhol's silver clouds, these helium-filled pillows you can bat around. They float in the air. Fans circulate air so you can play with them, like you're in the middle of a happening."

"Let's have the full Warhol experience here," she said, laughing.

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