

# Art review: Artists explore themes of euphoria, home in two Portland shows

---

[pressherald.com/2023/03/19/art-review-11/](https://www.pressherald.com/2023/03/19/art-review-11/)

By Jorge S. Arango

March 19, 2023



Rachel Adams, "Send Off" *Courtesy of Ryan Adams*

Two shows up through early April ask us to reconsider the plurality of possible meanings behind the concepts of "euphoria" and "home."

## IF YOU GO

---

**WHAT:** "Euphoria"

**WHERE:** Alice Gauvin Gallery, 43 York St., Portland

**WHEN:** Through April 2

**HOURS:** 2-6 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, and by appointment (contact [\[email protected\]](#))

**ADMISSION:** Free

**INFO:** 207-805-1707, [alicegauvingallery.com](http://alicegauvingallery.com)

---

**WHAT:** “Journey Around My Room”

**WHERE:** Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art & Design, 522 Congress St., Portland

**WHEN:** Through April 9

**HOURS:** 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday (until 7 p.m. Thursday)

**ADMISSION:** Free (donations welcome)

**INFO:** 207-899-5029, [meca.edu/about/institute-of-contemporary-art](http://meca.edu/about/institute-of-contemporary-art)

At Alice Gauvin Gallery, the artist couple Ryan and Rachel Gloria Adams have curated a pop-up exhibition titled “Euphoria” (through April 2). Their choices make plain that what elicits, according to Miriam Webster, “a feeling or state of intense excitement or happiness” is highly subjective.

The Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art & Design presents “Journey Around My Room” (through April 9), which will surprise – and at times possibly discomfit – viewers, as it rarely hews to the treacly old adage “Home Sweet Home.” Instead, it questions our nurturing assumptions about the sanctuary and sanctity of home.

For “Euphoria,” the Adamses prompted 17 artists, plus themselves, to respond to the definition of euphoria as explained above. All but two created new work for the show. It won’t surprise many that the first impression as one pans the room is of unbridled, eye-popping color. There’s nary a monochromatic work on the walls. But as we begin to consume the art on view, what becomes clear is that euphoria takes infinite forms.

Right away, for instance, we get the beautiful, yet restrained work of Will Sears. A naturally softspoken and quiet person, Sears finds joy in structure and order, two characteristics not usually associated with euphoria. But as we sit with his work, we begin to intuit the profound pleasures of exacting mathematical construction, and a meticulous (dare I say obsessive?) coloring and assembling of minute wood parts as tiny as tesserae.

Or there are the Adamses’ own works. Rachel Gloria’s is a pattern-based abstraction of flower petals floating in water that commemorates the intimate sibling bond she witnessed during a nautical celebration of life ceremony for the family matriarch. The painting represents new territory for this artist, the fluid yet consistently pattern-based beauty of which moves – movingly – from a focus on decoration to an exploration of depth.



Ryan Adams, "Beat The Odds" *Courtesy of the artist*

The embedded message of Ryan's black-on-black painting is "Beat the Odds." This might seem a pale consolation prize for actual euphoria. But as a Black artist – or simply a Black man living in contemporary America – it feels like an ebullient achievement. That should give us all pause.

Our more familiar concept of euphoria, however, is well represented in many works. The one-name Portland-based artist Chel contributes a jubilantly abstract expressionist composition whose excitement of color, gesture and line seems to burst forth from the canvas. In Biddeford artist Hannah Hirsch's "Afterglow," the lingering euphoria of lovemaking is so uncontrollable that it cannot even be contained in a single shaped canvas, but splits off, like cells ecstatically replicating themselves, into smaller auxiliary paintings that are nevertheless unmistakably connected to the larger work.



Leon Benn, "Ancient Future" *Courtesy of Grant Wahlquist Gallery*

Leon Benn, without a doubt one of Portland's most talented and imaginative recent arrivals, offers "Ancient Future," a hallucinatory painting that looks like Yves Tanguy on mushrooms. The Tanguy reference is not arbitrary. Though Tanguy's surrealist paintings dealt mostly with sea forms, the composition of "Ancient Future" resembles Tanguy's "Mama, Papa Is Wounded." But in Benn's work, it looks like nature has tripped (literally) into a state of such wild intoxication that it is showing off most shamelessly, with psychedelic Northern Lights and a heat that emanates so intensely off the surface that it threatens to scald the viewer. To paraphrase Estelle Reiner, director Rob Reiner's mother in the famous orgasm scene of the 1989 comedy "When Harry Met Sally," I'll have what he's having.

There is the euphoria that springs from the fearlessness of youth and its blustery naiveté (Holden Willard's painting of bird-flipping, tattoo-exposing, inebriated buds); erotic euphoria (Bee Daniel's lesbian kiss against a background of floral fertility); the euphoria induced by extreme activities (Kelly Rioux's watery blue tripartite composition referencing the transporting and healing power of cold-water swimming during the Alzheimer's demise of a relative), and on and on.

Works will or will not resonate with you depending on how closely aligned you are with each artist's view of the transformational state of the show's title. But in the end what comes through is how personal and unique each individual's experience of euphoria can be.

## **NOT-SO-SWEET HOME**

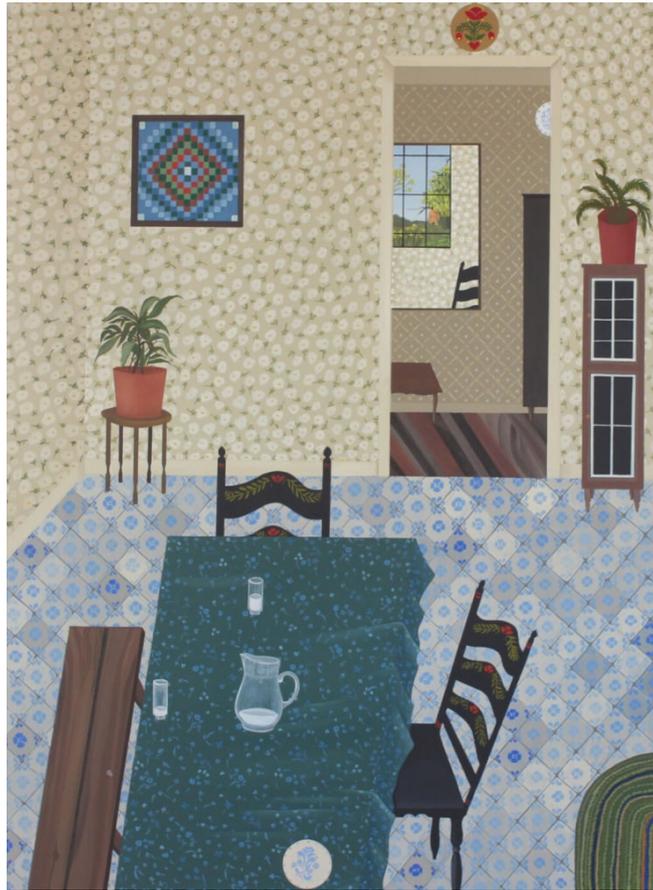
The inspiration for "Journey Around My Room" is a 1794 book of the same name, written by the French aristocrat Xavier De Maistre, who was under a kind of 42-day house arrest for participating in an illegal duel. The exhibition statement explains that "in playful ruminations about his space, (he) articulated every detail of his daily passage with excitement and attentiveness." It was a way, the text continues, "of making new, revitalizing his vision for the everyday, and constructing space through joyful attention."



Merik Goma "As I Wait, Untitled 1," #1 of 5, Digital C-Print, 30 x 60 inches *Courtesy of the artist*

However, "joyful attention" is not necessarily what will likely come to mind in many of the works on display. Behold the large-format photographs of Merik Goma, where home is a solitary place laden with sad memories and grief. "Your Absence Is My Monument, No. 2" depicts a woman in a rocker pensively staring out a window. A birdcage's open gate nearby indicates a bird (read: soul, a lover) that has flown away, while a vase of flowers has tipped over, leaving the blossoms it contained gasping for the water that gives them life. Clearly Goma is depicting loss, and offering the home space as cold comfort in which to process one's mourning.

In the more elusive "As I Wait," an androgynous adolescent sits at a table. His or her expression seems despondent. Is she or he waiting for a call from a current crush? Awaiting the drunken, and potentially violent, arrival of an abusive parent? Or is the sad, expectant glance representative of a more generalized loneliness due to disaffection and disassociation from the true self that has strayed away?



Anne Buckwalter "Two Glasses of Milk," 2022,  
gouache on panel, 40 x 30 inches *Courtesy of the  
artist*

There is something fascinatingly disquieting about the work of Anne Buckwalter. Her most innocuous canvas, at least superficially, is "Two Glasses of Milk," which depicts a room with a flattened, foreshortened perspective that recalls popular Maine artist Gail Spaien. Unlike Spaien, however – and far more provocatively – the more we look, the more we realize the bizarreness of the unrealistic angles, reflections and sense of interior and exterior. And as we zero in, we notice that outside a window a nude woman skulks behind a tree.

More in-your-face weird is what looks like a painting of a dining room. But in the reflections of two mirrors on the wall, we see the split image of two bodies in the midst of an act of oral sex. The table is sweetly set with a frosted bundt cake, a vase of tulips dropping their petals and, in the erotic context of this work, a knife that looks menacing despite its small size. Despite Buckwalter's innocent-looking style (informed by the folk art of her Pennsylvania Dutch ancestry), her work is sexually charged and consistently surprising.



Gideon Bok, "Mom/Liquid Swords/Ys/Being There,"  
2022, Oil on Linen, 49 x 44 inches *Courtesy of the  
artist*

Gideon Bok has obvious affection for the studio he obsessively paints and repaints, marking the passage of time by observing the constant morphing of objects, furniture, light and so on. His fidgety brushstrokes charge the canvases with ever-shifting energy. The presence of his mother knitting in a chair becomes phantomlike as he paints the ochre of the rug over her lower legs, making her appear simultaneously here and gone.

Like the partially submerged miniature architecture of James Casebere, Lori Nix and Kathleen Gerber construct dollhouse-scaled interiors and photograph them. But whereas Casebere's flooded palazzi and architecture is melancholy and quiet, Nix and Gerber's is compulsively jam-packed, littered with messy, cluttered details. There is stuff everywhere. Cleverly, to the left of "Living Room" we see the artists' process in the form of a miniature subway car under construction that will eventually be photographed too.

There are other works here that look at interiors and the objects and symbols contained within and outside of them. Some are odd, yet fondly cleave together various memories of home (Henri Broyard's quirky rooms assembled from snatched remembrances of various homes he lived in). There are also the fiber-based works of Oona Brangam-Snell, which begin as paintings of images and domestic objects which are joltingly taken out of their usual context (a lamp, a Venus fly trap plant, dandelions in the grass) and then woven into tapestries on a jacquard loom and embroidered.

Few of these works express Dorothy's sentiment in "The Wizard of Oz" that "there's no place like home." Or maybe, because of the personalness of their interior narratives, they do.

*Jorge S. Arango has written about art, design and architecture for over 35 years. He lives in Portland. He can be reached at: [\[email protected\]](#)*

© 2023