

Search

subscribe • like • follow

Home About Us Advertising Editors And Contributors Support The Arts Fuse

The Arts Fuse

Est. 2007
Boston's online arts magazine
Powered by 60 expert writers + critics



Dance Film Food Literature Music Television Theater Visual Arts Commentary Interview Preview Review
Judicial Review

Aug
19
2013

Fuse Visual Arts: HarborArts "OccupyING the Present" Brings Boston Harbor to Life

Featured, Review, Visual Arts

Add comments

The Boston Harbor Shipyard is a nifty setting for public art, redolent of old-school fisherman and maritime work. Its fading grandeur of weatherbeaten, brick buildings, crumbling facades and stern signage sometimes rivaled the formal artwork.

OccupyING the Present, An Exhibition of Temporary Site-Responsive Art. At the Boston Harbor Shipyard and Marina, East Boston, MA, through September 22, 2013, open dawn to dusk.

By **Margaret Weigel** (Photos by Weigel).

Once upon a time, merchants, fisherman, immigrants, and the occasional mermaid transformed the sleepy colonial city of Boston into a hub of maritime activity. As the demands of the global economy shifted, the Boston waterfront first grew quiet, then polluted, neglected, and abandoned for decades. Today, while tourists meander along the new Harborwalk in search of culture at the new ICA, a meal at the Barking Crab, or a glimpse of Whitey Bulger at the Federal Courthouse, the city's historic connection to the sea is obfuscated by corporate monoliths and the overly deliberate designs of well-meaning urban planners. Once again, the harbor means money.

The East Boston-based collaborative arts organization HarborArts would like to shift your attention from the sea's views back to the sea itself as an entity under siege. HarborArts' mission is to "protect and preserve our oceans and waterways by helping each of us to understand the issues and solutions facing our blue planet." The collective seeks out large-scale sculptures and public art installations produced from natural and salvaged materials by artists around the world, which are then displayed on the grounds of the Boston Harbor Shipyard (located on East Boston's Marginal Street.)

HarborArts regularly augments its approximately two dozen permanent works with additional art. What enticed me to visit the Boston Harbor Shipyard a recent Sunday afternoon was the public art show **OccupyING the Present**, 16 site-specific works by Boston-area artists around the

In Brief



Fuse Music Feature: A Tribute to Fenwick Smith, Flutist Extraordinaire

For classical music lovers, the opening of the concert season was, for 35 years, synonymous with flutist Fenwick Smith's annual recitals.



Fuse Coming Attractions: What Will Light Your Fire This Week

Arts Fuse critics select the best in film, music and theater that's coming up this week.



Fuse Feature: Haiku Inspired by HFA's "Noir All Night"

Fuse film critic Betsy Sherman has written a series of haiku inspired by an all-night marathon of film noir screenings.



Fuse Commentary: Do Boston's Mayoral Candidates Support the Arts? Who Knows? — An Update

Those who champion the arts need to realize that talk is cheap — we have to fight to get a place at the political table.



Fuse News Television Review: "Glickman" — A Rousing Sports Biography

Before he was a broadcaster, Mary Glickman was one heck of an athlete, a youthful hero in New York known as "the Jewish Red Grange."

themes of impermanence, change, and creative thinking.

But first, before I continue, when was the last time you visited East Boston for an art show? When was the last time you visited East Boston, period? Excluding trips to Logan Airport that is? The last time I went to East Boston was to check out a used car. That was in 1989. A lot has changed in the last 25 years or so, but East Boston still seems as close — and as hospitable — as Mars in the eyes of many Boston/Cambridge/Somerville-centric culture maven. This critic pleads guilty as charged and swears that the intoxicating combination of the shipyard, the ocean, and the art has persuaded me to change my ways.

The *OccupyING the Present* show, the brainchild of local artist and art critic **Elizabeth Michelman**, features a broad mix of eclectic offerings, some of which hewed closely to the show's themes and others that somewhat veered off course. The Boston Harbor Shipyard is a nifty setting for public art, redolent of old-school fisherman and maritime work. Its fading grandeur of weatherbeaten, brick buildings, crumbling facades and stern signage (a favorite is "Every machine in this building is dangerous.") sometimes rivaled the formal artwork. The kind folks cleaning the Whole Bean food truck in the shipyard extolled the virtues of the neighborhood ("It has gentrified, but not too much!"); happy diners munched meat pies at **KO Pies**, a new café in the shipyard.

A few pieces are designed to engage with the neighborhood — any neighborhood, really. "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow — The Children's Chair Project" by Jamaica Plain artist Gail Jerauld Bos, for instance, greets the visitor outside the shipyard (and again in the shipyard) with a constellation of colorful wooden chairs affixed to a fence (and a wall).



The artist's statement explicitly draws parallels between children and nautical elements — children of immigrants, children as buoys bobbing in uncharted waters — that seemed tailored for the environment, even if the work does not. The bold colors of Jerauld Bos's installation, though, were a welcome contrast to other work that engages with its object of contemplation in a simple, straightforward manner, featuring an aquatic color palette of blues and greens and rolling lines.

Several pieces in *OccupyING the Present*, and many in the permanent exhibit as well, are bold



View this article on [Readability.com](#)

Read: [NOW](#) [LATER](#) [PRINT](#)

@theartsfuse on Twitter

The Arts Fuse @theartsfuse 37m
A new and significant comment on the "Omphalos" story in Harvard Square: In a related story, being made public... [fb.me/2iPw03hIE](#)

The Arts Fuse @theartsfuse 2h
Fuse Music Critic Susan Miron writes about his year's Winner's Recital for The James Pappoutsakis Memorial Flute... [fb.me/1VlqqrE](#)

The Arts Fuse @theartsfuse 2h
Fuse Music Critic Susan Miron writes about his year's Winner's Recital for the James Pappoutsakis Competition at... [fb.me/N8G0wIzK](#)

The Arts Fuse @theartsfuse 2h
Have a great Labor Day weekend! Here are a few suggestions of things to do over the next few days from Arts Fuse... [fb.me/2Pyd2Mj05](#)

The Arts Fuse @theartsfuse 20h

Tweet to @theartsfuse

Tim Jackson

On film for
The Arts Fuse



From the Archives: Have you read these?

yet playful engagements with their environment; a few took my breath away, and one even prompted me to tear up a little. One of the most striking pieces, "Iscariot," a large, hulking sculpture of galvanized steel, light poles, and pipe by North Carolina artist [Trace O'Connor](#), is perched menacingly atop a building on the far end of the shipyard.

This sculpture, part of HarborArts inaugural exhibition in 2010, is a macabre North Star of all the work onsite. Its remote location, coupled with its tangle of tentacles and metal fabrication, evokes a sense of lurking danger and an appreciation of the mysterious alien landscape that is the ocean floor. O'Connor's artist statement is an exercise in opacity — all we learn is that he's inspired by patterns in Nature — so if you're wondering anything about the piece, such as why it is named "Iscariot," you might have more luck pondering some tree roots.



A more whimsical piece, "Natural Repetition: Boston Harbor Rockweek" from Newton's Wendy Wolf took the shape of oversized, white clumps of seaweed found on exterior warehouse halls throughout the shipyard. The clumps felt like vestiges of a long-ago flood or high tide, the aquatic version of solarized sea creatures, ghostly shadows clinging to the buildings as a testament to the past.

One installation easy to overlook is Liz Nofziger's "Sounding," a sound art piece whose construction incorporates bits and pieces of the shipyard. Hidden in the neglected land between two buildings, "Sounding" manages to capture the attention of a passerby, leading him or her, somewhat inexplicably, to a unexceptional crevice that is broadcasting hushed, subtle sounds that evoke the sea. The piece provides a remarkable experience.

The work "Birds of Passage" by B. Amore, Steve Israel (the founder and chairman of Boston HarborArts), and Ann O'Hara may be one of the semi-permanent works at the Shipyard, but it meshes perfectly with the current show's themes. The piece features a string of lightweight, metallic birds draped against a wall of brick and mortar. The mortar pattern against the wall resembles two continents (through the latter are not identifiable). The birds are embarking on their own continuous journey to points unknown. "The journey of immigration is an endless one and the struggles, challenges of victories apply to each new wave. WE are all sons and daughters of immigrants — birds of passage ourselves — as we move through our lifetimes." This was the piece that made me cry and still does as I type this.

Dance Commentary: Martha Graham On the Couch

Fuse Book Review: "The Amazing Bud Powell" — A Disappointing Study of a Jazz Legend

Fuse Concert Review: Joshua Bell and the Boston Symphony Orchestra/Marcelo Lehninger

Fuse Film Review: Running as a "Dark Horse" in the American Cinema

Fuse Book Review: "The Goddess Chronicle" — Needs Less Plot, More Imagination



Recent Comments – Join the discussion!

Fuse Commentary: MBTA Set to Demolish the "Center of the Universe" in Harvard Square (1)

Romolo Del Deo: Following up on the story The Arts Fuse broke last night about the destruction of "Omphalos," Geoff Edgers has finally ...

Fuse Book Review: "Scissors" — A Sharp Exploration of the Creative Process (1)

Roberta Silman: A thoughtful, absorbing review of a novel based on one of the great puzzles in American literature -- the fraught ...

Fuse Film Review: "Ain't Them Bodies Saints" — Superbly Simple Noir (1)

Jan: Jackson's review is on the money. Saw the film today on the strength of it and was not disappointed. Strong ...

Fuse Visual Arts Review: Heigh-Ho — Walt Disney's "Snow White" at the Rockwell Museum (1)

Steve Whitfield: What an incisive and adroit critique!

Susan Miron

On music for
The Arts Fuse



Monthly Archives

Select Month



I returned back to my home outside of Davis Square, enchanted by the HarborArts experience. I told my husband, "I want to live there." He scoffed. "It's so inaccessible; it's not near anything." But it is. And I strongly suggest you visit *OccupyING the Present* show presented by Boston HarborArts before it concludes its run in September and enjoy the magic that is public art, the Boston Harbor Shipyard, and East Boston, and the ocean, too often forgotten, right in our backyard.

Margaret Weigel is a longtime Boston area arts and culture critic focusing on public art and the delineation of public/private space, shifting definitions of art, games, and audience engagements.

1
 19
 0

If you enjoyed this article, you may also be interested in these:

1. [Fuse Visual Arts Review: COLLISION18:present — The Expanding Range of Cyberarts](#)
2. [Fuse Visual Arts Commentary: Boston Mural Stirs Controversy](#)