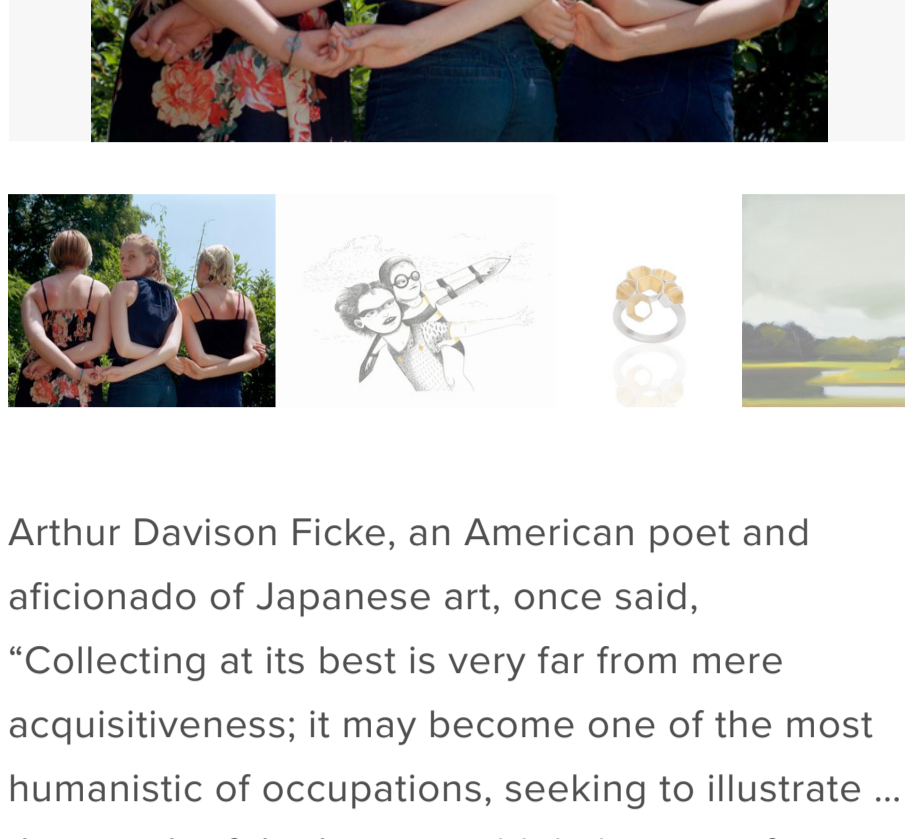


CALLING COLLECT

October 1, 2019

Words by Allison Paige

MECA's summer art show aims to keep art and an arts education in reach.



Arthur Davison Ficke, an American poet and aficionado of Japanese art, once said,

“Collecting at its best is very far from mere acquisitiveness; it may become one of the most humanistic of occupations, seeking to illustrate ...

the march of the human spirit in its quest for beauty.”

This June, **Maine College of Art (MECA)** will hold COLLECT, its annual summer art show, giving all interested buyers a chance to try their own hand at this most humanistic of occupations.

The annual art show began in the late nineties as a one-night auction and has since expanded into the dynamic three-day art event and fundraiser it is today. COLLECT showcases the best of MECA’s affiliated artists in a wide variety of mediums from paintings, photography, print, and sculpture to furniture, jewelry, ceramics, and textiles.

Isabelle O’Donnell, director of alumni relations and special events coordinator, notes, “By including artists at varying stages of their career, from current students to alumni, emerging as well as established Maine artists, we’re able to offer work at a wide range of price points, from a \$40 ring or ceramic mug to a \$10,000 painting. Showing a range of artwork allows for a diverse appeal and a more inclusive look at who is making art in Maine.”

COLLECT art show is held in MECA’s Institute of Contemporary Art, encompassing all three rooms of the gallery on the ground floor of the Porteous Building. “It’s installed salon style,” says O’Donnell, “so it’s a great opportunity to see this really beautiful range of work on display.”

At the heart of MECA’s summer art show is a message of inclusion. “A big part of it is wanting to be really accessible to people who are interested in the arts,” O’Donnell continues. MECA hopes to attract both seasoned and novice collectors, and its mission to raise funds and support participating artists is an extension of this value—that an education in the arts should be within reach.

Up to 300 artists will be featured in this year’s event. The artists selected submitted between one and five works to be considered by the COLLECT curation committee and have the option of donating half or the entire proceeds of their sales to MECA’s student scholarships.

“COLLECT is an exciting opportunity for young artists to show alongside established and emerging artists in the community,” explains Leah Igo, director of marketing and communications.

“For many students, this is their first opportunity to show work outside of a student setting and in a reputable gallery. The proceeds from the sale benefit MECA’s Student Scholarship Fund, which enables the next generation of artists to pursue their talents via financial aid opportunities.”

Rockland-based painter Connie Hayes, alumna (’80) and former faculty member, whose artwork has raised funds for MECA since the mid-1970s, agrees: “Scholarships for students are essential to support the aspirations brought to life in the arts. Recognition through scholarships validates the risks of stepping into a field only an enterprising individual with imagination can chart.”

“MECA provides financial assistance to 100 percent of our students,” O’Donnell confirms, “and we’re only able to offer this thanks to events and opportunities like COLLECT, and the contributions from our generous community.”

Jewelry designer and alumna Cat Bates (’09) says, “I was able to earn my degree at MECA largely because of the quality of the scholarship I was awarded. As I want my work to be enjoyed by a wide range of people, I want MECA to be a viable option to all, with the determining factor for prospective students being their dedication to the pursuit of artistic knowledge and the quality of their work, not how much money they or their parents make. I am proud to make MECA accessible to more individuals by participating in this small way.”

Dietlind Vander Schaaf, a painter, MECA staff member, and past organizer of COLLECT, remarks, “MECA is a jewel in downtown Portland. Having an art school in the center of the city serves as a catalyst for creativity in the region. I also benefited from scholarships as both an undergraduate and graduate student in Maine, which made it possible for me to work less and focus more on my studies. Participating in the annual art sale at MECA enables me to pay some of that generosity forward to the next generation.”

By raising funds for students, COLLECT stays true to MECA’s goal to provide accessibility to an education in the arts. And likewise, by holding a vibrant, diverse, three-day art show open to the public, MECA strives to reach as many in the community as possible.

Keith Haring, one of the country’s most recognized contemporary artists and certainly one of our most accessible, once said, “Art is for everybody.” The idea is simple yet profound. Anyone can make it, anyone can enjoy it, and as O’Donnell reminds us, “Anyone can collect.”

COLLECT Summer Art Show takes place in the Institute for Contemporary Art at MECA, 522 Congress Street, Portland, June 27–29, and is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

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