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Art galleries and museums unveil grand projects and tiny moments

By ALICE THORSON
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The spotlight shines on sculpture — of both the classic and transgressive kind — in Kansas City this fall.

- Three years ago, **Grand Arts** contemporary art space presented a giant, wind-ravaged American flag by William Pope.L at Municipal Auditorium. On Sept. 2, the gallery will present another sit-up-and-take-notice season opener: “**IOU/USA,**” a huge wall of cargo containers embedded with the letters IOU on one side and USA on the other, by noted sculptor John Salvest.

The location of the piece — in Memorial Hill Park near the Federal Reserve Bank, Liberty Memorial and World War I Museum — is crucial to its commentary.



June Ahrens' "Hiding in Plain Site" (2008), a response to Sept. 11, comes to the Kemper on Sept. 9.

“The placement of the project near a regional branch of the Federal Reserve Bank, one of the main components of national fiscal and monetary policy, comes at a time when concern about the United States’ ballooning federal budget and foreign trade deficits is a major part of the national conversation,” Salvest said.

Art collector Larry Meeker, a retired vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, was delighted to hear of the project.

“I think it’s a great opportunity to engage people in a conversation about what the Fed does and its role in money,” he said. “We need those conversations.”

- The **Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art** also headlines its fall schedule with a provocative sculpture.

Measuring more than 13 feet high and occupying more than 500 square feet of gallery space, New York artist Petah Coyne’s “Untitled # 1336 (Scalapino Nu Shu)” (2009-2010) is the

centerpiece of “**The Big Reveal**,” an exhibit of more than two dozen new acquisitions. It opens Sept. 23.

Scalapino is a reference to the artist’s friend, poet Leslie Scalapino. Nu Shu is an age-old Chinese writing technique reserved for women.

The Kemper purchased the work from Coyne’s recent retrospective at Mass MoCA, in North Adams, Mass., which took its title from the Flannery O’Connor collection of short stories “Everything That Rises Must Converge.”

“Scalapino Nu Shu” incorporates a craggy apple tree coated with black sand and populated with a fantastical assortment of taxidermied pheasants and peacocks. According to a blurb put out by Mass MoCA, O’Connor saw peacocks as symbols of renewal and the “eyes” of the Catholic Church.

Coyne had a strict Catholic upbringing, and her work often probes the church’s foibles, particularly with respect to the role of women.

Before “Nu Shu,” the Kemper will open its third “**Acquisitions in Context**” show on Sept. 9. The featured artist is June Ahrens, who creates sculptures and installations from broken glass and broken mirrors.

The exhibit marks the first showing of the museum’s 2010 acquisition “Still Standing,” a collection of broken and reconfigured glass jars displayed on a glass-topped metal table.

“Loss, pain, fragility and danger play a major role in my work,” the artist said.

The works in her Kemper exhibit reflect her response to 9/11 and include “Hiding in Plain Site,” an immersive installation incorporating a circular expanse of broken mirrors and a rotating light.

•The **Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art** has lined up a classic for its second exhibition in the Bloch Building lobby. This fall, Roxy Paine’s “Scumaks and Dendroids” will give way to an exhibit of more than 40 bronze sculptures by 19th-century master Auguste Rodin.

Opening Oct. 1, “**Rodin: Sculptures From the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation**” will include figures relating to his famous bronze doors, “The Gates of Hell,” for which the artist conceived “The Thinker” sculpture displayed at the Nelson.

The exhibit will also feature sculptures commissioned as public monuments and a series of isolated hands, famous for their expressive power.

Beyond sculpture

Although sculpture claims the limelight this fall, there’s plenty more to see.

•Fall brings three of Kansas City's top artists to the **Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art**, which will open an exhibit of the **2011 Charlotte Street Foundation award winners** on Sept. 9. New works by painter Ricky Allman, fashion designer Peggy Noland and ceramic artist Andy Brayman should make for a diverse and stimulating array.

Noland, who has designed outlandish costumes for bands and music videos and maintains her own unique fashion line, always has something new up her sleeve. Look for a surprise-filled video at the Nerman.

Through his paintings, Allman is dealing with his decision to leave the Mormon Church. His Nerman showing will feature an 8-by-13 foot canvas and 39 small paintings.

Brayman brings a strong strain of conceptualism to his ceramics projects, including a new series of vessels incorporating data from sensors that track the Missouri River's depth and flow.

•Come October, the focus will also be local at the Kansas City Art Institute's **H&R Block Artspace**, which will open "**Narrow Margins**," the 2011 faculty biennial, Oct. 14.

•KU's **Spencer Museum of Art** will celebrate the Kansas sesquicentennial with two exhibitions of American Indian art. "**Passages: Persistent Visions of a Native Place**," opening Sept. 10, will feature historical American Indian art from the museum's permanent collection.

For "**Heartland Reverberations**," the museum has invited five contemporary artists — Norman Akers, Bunky

Echo-Hawk, Chris Pappan, Ryan Red Corn, and Dianne Yeahquo Reyner — to show works that speak to "issues of place, identity and relocation." It opens Oct. 15.

On the fun side

Some of the season's exhibits come with a little something extra.

•Kansas City artist Judith G. Levy has spent years preparing a series of faux documentary videos in which she interviews the "descendants" of Huckleberry Finn, the Lone Ranger and Hansel and Gretel. The results are funny and provocative, touching on issues of race, sexism, homosexuality and immigration, while exposing just how subjective — to the point of total fabrication — the construction of history can be.

Including detailed family trees related to each interview, her exhibit, "**The Last Descendants**," opens Sept. 16 at the Urban Culture Project's **Paragraph Gallery** downtown.

•Beginning Sept. 10, the Nelson will be passing out 3-D glasses for visitors to **Bloch Building Project Space**, which will be screening renowned dancer Bill T. Jones' "**After Ghostcatching**" video, made in collaboration with the digital art collective OpenEnded Group.

Using digital technology, the group captured the dancer's movements through sensors attached to his body. The results are magical.

"Computer programs transform Jones' fluid movements into ribbons and tracers of streaming light and color that seem to fill the space," curator Leesa Fanning said, "extending toward gallery visitors wearing 3-D glasses."

Nelson spokeswoman Kathleen Leighton pointed out that the glasses are "not the cardboard ones, (but) the real ones."

"I understand you feel as if the colors are brushing across your forehead," she said.

- The **Kemper at the Crossroads** also has a show with a twist. Beginning Oct. 7, visitors can watch ceramic vessels in the museum's Jeanne Quinn exhibit crash to the floor in her piece titled "**A Thousand Tiny Deaths.**"

"She creates vessels and puts balloons inside," the museum's Margaret Keough explained. "As the balloons age, they crash to the ground."

- Animated skeletons and skulls will enliven the **Nelson** in mid-October when the museum will mark the Day of the Dead with an exhibit of prints by popular Mexican cartoonist and satirist **Jose Guadalupe Posada** (1852-1913), known for his scenarios featuring animated skeletons (calaveras). The Mexican Consulate is lending the prints.

In addition to the show, which goes on view Oct. 19, the museum will hold a Day of the Dead celebration for families on Nov. 6. The Mexican Consulate, the Guadalupe Center and the Mattie Rhodes Art Center will be partners in the festivities, which will include dancing and music and a community altar in Kirkwood Hall. The museum invites people to bring photocopied photographs of people who have died for the altar.

- And make plans to add to your art collection on Oct. 22, when the **Nerman Museum** holds its annual "**Beyond Bounds**" auction of works by local, national and international artists. The event has gained a reputation for affordable treasures.

This year's theme is "brilliant," and the auction will feature works by more than 157 artists using brilliant yellow mediums.

American masters

Rounding out the season is a roster of one-person shows by well-known American artists.

- On October's First Friday, the **Belger Arts Center** will open an exhibit of well-known ceramic artist **Richard Notkin**. Large tile murals that explore themes of nuclear destruction and man's inhumanity to man will be the mainstay of the show, which will also include ceramic sculptures and vessels borrowed from local collectors.

•On Oct. 15, the **Nelson** opens “**To Make a World: George Ault and 1940s America,**” organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

“(Ault) is a great vehicle to look at and think about how America and American artists handled the great upheaval of World War II,” said Margi Conrads, the Nelson’s curator of American Art.

Ault forms the core of the show, she said, and around him are works by Charles Sheeler, Andrew Wyeth, Rockwell Kent and others.

“It’s an important group of American artists being affected by World War II ... trying to make sense of it for themselves, for their art and for their audience and trying to grapple with the absolute horrors of the era,” Conrads added.

“The pictures quiver between realism, an edgy surrealist aspect and breathtaking beauty with unsettling undercurrents.”

•An exhibit of prints by leading American artist Romare Bearden also opens Oct. 15 at the **Nelson**. Organized by the Romare Bearden Foundation in New York, “**Impressions & Improvisations: The Prints of Romare Bearden**” will feature more than 75 works traversing the artist’s characteristic themes, including black female beauty, Southern life, jazz and blues, and African motifs. One section of the exhibit will explore the artist’s many printmaking processes, which ranged from etching and photo-etching to lithography and screenprinting.

•An exhibit of works by **Brett Weston** (1911-93), son of the famed photographer Edward Weston and a highly accomplished photographer in his own right, will be presented in the **Bloch Building** photography galleries at the Nelson-Atkins, beginning Nov. 23. The exhibit looks at Weston as an exemplar of the modernist aesthetic, open to the possibilities of abstraction in the world of everyday things.

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