

Get your scare on with coffin races, haunted walks



The "Black Magic" team, including (from left) Rick Chase, David Tweedie, Kim Day (seated) as a "deceased" Jonathan Buck, Brian Maguire and Roger Lenor, compete in a coffin race during Bucksport's Ghostport festival in 2009.

BY SHELBY HARTIN
BDN STAFF

It starts with a coffin and four pallbearers. But this isn't a funeral march to the grave. On the contrary, it's a race to the finish line, and the coffin, inspected before the start, must be kept under complete control the entire time.

The event? Coffin races. Ghostport, a Halloween festival hosted by the Bucksport Bay Area Chamber of Commerce, will hold its seventh annual coffin race Oct. 17. The idea began with Leslie Wombacher, executive director of the Bucksport Bay Area Chamber of Commerce, who discovered something she had never seen before hosted by a small Colorado town similar in size to Bucksport. It's called Manitou Springs, and

its Emma Crawford Coffin Races draw more than 10,000 people each year, nearly doubling the town's population.

"I called Manitou Springs' chamber and introduced myself," Wombacher said. "I said, 'I'm from Maine, and I want to be like you.'"

The organizers of the race were happy to help and assisted Wombacher with putting together a set of rules for the race. Although the Bucksport coffin races have yet to draw as many people as Manitou Springs, Wombacher hopes to see more involvement in the event, especially because it's part of a much larger festival offering a number of festivities, including a pumpkin catapult.

For \$2, participants can launch a pumpkin straight into the water

on the Bucksport Waterfront from a trebuchet, which volunteers load.

"We have a boat to pick up the pumpkins to reuse them if they don't splat," Wombacher said.

Usually more than 100 pumpkins, donated from area farms, are hurled into the river and retrieved every year during the festival.

In addition to these two unique events, Fright at the Fort next door will set off fireworks, and the festival will hold a chili cook-off and a "trunk or treat" for children, among many other activities.

"Every year, we've added a little something," Wombacher said. "It's getting out of hand, which I love."

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Maine artists give biennial new energy

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — From supine video installations to a cornucopia of welded spikes to baskets woven by a Penobscot artist, the Portland Museum of Art's "You Can't Get There From Here" exhibition is a broad and edifying survey of Maine's current artscape.

For the museum's ninth biennial, which opened this month, guest curator Alison Ferris visited 50 artists in their studios. From Brooklin basket maker Sarah Sockbeson's intricate and colorful hand-woven vessels to University of Maine professor Owen F. Smith's video installation "Dreaming of Possibilities" to Lois Dodd's naturalistic oil paintings, the biennial is a diverse romp through Maine's creative landscape.

"What I love about the exhibition is that there are a lot of visual conversations happening in the galleries which I believe makes it a vibrant and engaging exhibition," said Ferris.

By focusing on the creative process, as much as the end result, the curator searched for a group of artists that were "as diverse as possible," while at the same time "creating an exhibition that had visual cohesiveness."

That cohesiveness is evident in the work of Sockbeson, who became interested in basket weaving while living on Indian Island. Her great-grandmother made baskets from trees, but the craft skipped a few generations. Sockbeson, 31, sought the help of tribal members to learn the trade.

"I have only seen one or two baskets made by my great-grandmother, but the old antique baskets do inspire me," said the artist, who "likes to infuse contemporary elements and colors, and create my own modern renditions."

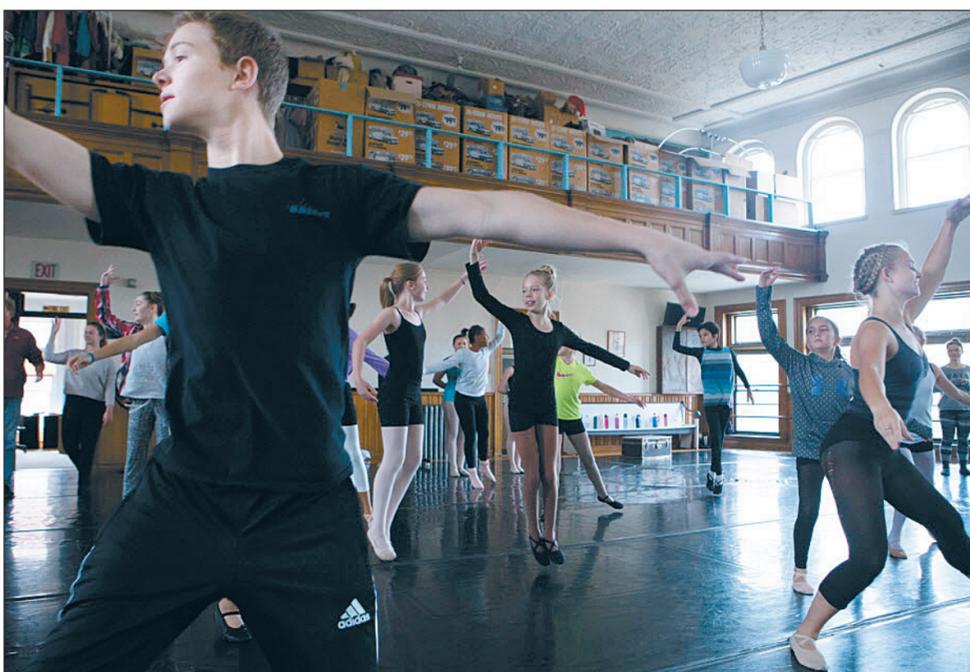
She starts with finding a brown ash tree and pounding the wood into splints. They are then scraped to a smooth surface and dyed and woven together on a block with sweetgrass and wood.

"I have a responsibility to honor my ancestors that have practiced the art of basketry long before I was alive. It's immensely satisfying to know that I am able to perform this tradition in nearly every way it was practiced years ago," Sockbeson said. "Weaving is the closest thing to having a spiritual connection with the past."

The exhibition spans traditional materials like ash and birch bark, but also includes technology and yoga mats. Smith, who heads up UMaine's new media program, takes over a corner of the first-floor gallery and invites viewers to lie down and look up.

"Each of the four videos are a

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Haley Williams (right) and Nathan Williams rehearse the party scene of "The Nutcracker" at Robinson Ballet in Bangor. The siblings play the characters Clara and Fritz, who are brother and sister.

Siblings in step

BY SHELBY HARTIN
BDN STAFF

When Haley Williams was in second grade, she went to see her first production of "The Nutcracker." Wide-eyed and mesmerized by the dancers who seemed to float across the stage, she was taken in by falling snowflakes, glittering lights and magic of the production.

As a child, Williams knew Clara — the female lead character in the ballet featuring Pyotr Tchaikovsky's compositions — as a small, dark-haired girl.

Now, for children in Greater Bangor, Clara is a graceful, blonde young woman: Williams. Her real-life brother, Nathan Williams, is their Fritz, Clara's brother.

Haley Williams, a 19-year-old student at the University of Maine, isn't your "typical" dancer. She didn't begin dancing until she was about 8 years old. It was the magical "Nutcracker" performance that led her to ask her mother if she could take classes, to which her mother replied, "let's sign you up." Her brother, who is a sophomore at Brewer High School, started soon afterward.

The siblings have danced in Robinson Ballet's "Nutcracker" as Clara and Fritz, the on-stage sister and brother, for three years. This season's "Nutcracker" will be their fourth.

But it was uncertain what would happen with the roles when Haley Williams started college.

"I didn't know if I was going to continue 'The Nutcracker' when I went off to college, and Nathan was the one who convinced me to keep doing it," she said. "He was part of the reason why I came back. When you spend that much time investing in each other and the company, when you spend that much time learning from each other, it's hard to let go."

Lori Williams, Haley and Nathan Williams' mother, said the playful characters of Clara and Fritz reflect their own relationship as brother and sister. Because the two have been

Robinson Ballet's 'The Nutcracker' is a bit of a family affair

dancing for so long, ballet has become an important part of their family dynamic.

"We have a family ballet culture," Haley Williams said. "It's something that we all can appreciate."

The Williamses aren't the only ones who see dance as a family affair.

Next door, at Thomas School of Dance, home of Bangor Ballet, 12-year-old Sophie Wirta and 13-year-old Elise Dudley are never alone in their journey as young dancers. Their mothers, Marnie Wirta and Cindy Dudley, are always close by. But it's the way they help that makes them a unique part of their daughters' ballet experience.

Marnie Wirta and Cindy Dudley are part of a core group of women who create the costumes for the Bangor Ballet performances.

For Sophie Wirta and Elise Dudley, ballet is an integral part of their lives — even at home, where they use kitchen counters and tabletops to stretch and where the glitter from their mothers' costume-making seems to permanently coat most surfaces.

"I really couldn't imagine it any other way," Elise Dudley said.

Marnie Wirta was never a dancer herself, but Sophie Wirta's love for dance was always apparent.

"I like how if I'm having a bad day I can show my emotions through dance," Sophie Wirta said.

Cindy Dudley, however, was a dancer when she was young and hoped one of her own children would express an interest. Elise Dudley

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'Where Do Fairies Go?' author asks

Maine illustrator, writer release book

BY SARAH WALKER CARON
BDN STAFF

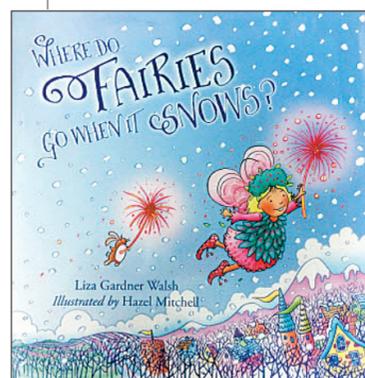
Though fairies are often most closely associated with warmer months, when the land blooms and blossoms, a new picture book imagines them in a different time of year: winter.

"Where Do Fairies Go When it Snows?" by Liza Gardner Walsh and illustrated by Hazel Mitchell, both from Maine, is a storybook that explores what might happen to fairies when winter sets in. The whimsical tale offers many suggestions from hibernation to living in fairy houses beneath the snow, all with vivid, colorful pictures to delight youngsters.

Walsh, who also is author of "Fairy Garden Handbook" and "Fairy House Handbook," dreamed up the concept for the story.

"I was taking a walk in the winter through the snow, and I found a perfect little hollow in a tree, and I thought that would be good fairy house," said Walsh. "I started to wonder, 'Are there fairies in the winter?'"

Walsh, who was teaching preschool at the time, asked her students what they thought. Their responses helped her shape the idea into this project, her first picture book.



"The process of writing it was very different," said Walsh. "With a picture book you have to think, is there enough for the illustrator to work with?"

And that's where Mitchell came in. Walsh and Mitchell actually met three years ago at a children's book event in Camden, where Mitchell was giving out postcards with fairy artwork on them. Walsh, who's written a number of fairy-related activity books, liked the style and wanted her to work on this book.

"It was just a perfect marriage of my portfolio and her manu-

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September 29 – November 15 / MCA Invitational Glass Exhibit: This showcase of handmade fine glasswork includes Tandem Glass, Atlantic Art Glass, David Jacobson, Gola Glass and Hope Murphy. Visit www.commonstreetarts.org for more information