

Creative Drive

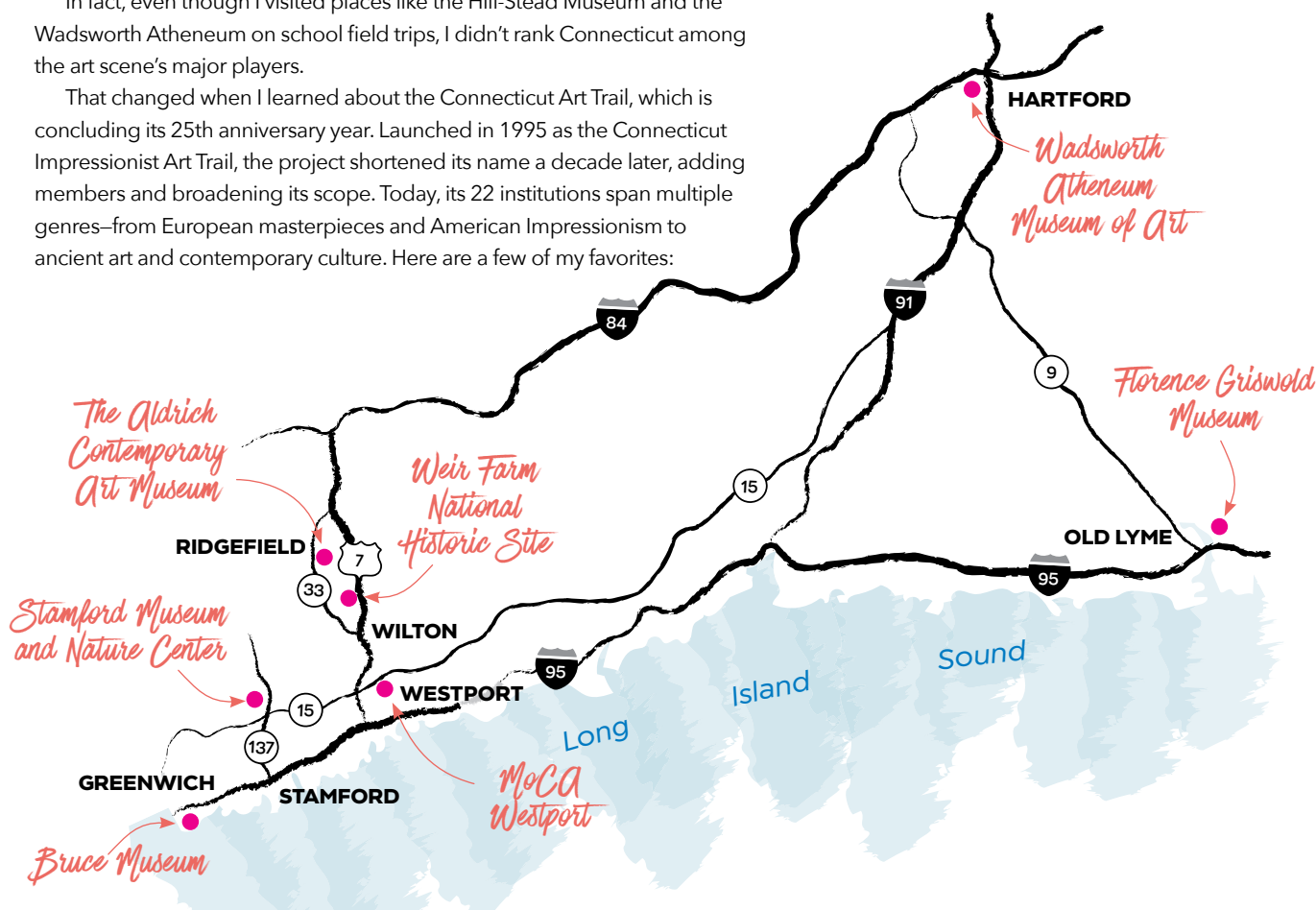
Connecticut museums band together to present a cultural road trip

By Gina DeCaprio Vercesi

When my three now-teenage daughters were little, I frequently packed them into the car and drove 25 miles from our home in Tarrytown, New York, to the Stamford Museum and Nature Center (SMNC) just over the Connecticut border. We'd watch playful river otters frolic in the pond, visit the animals at Heckscher Farm, and romp through the whimsical Nature's Playground. Even so, I never realized that SMNC's vibrant collection of more than 20,000 pieces made it one of the Nutmeg State's most celebrated art venues.

In fact, even though I visited places like the Hill-Stead Museum and the Wadsworth Atheneum on school field trips, I didn't rank Connecticut among the art scene's major players.

That changed when I learned about the Connecticut Art Trail, which is concluding its 25th anniversary year. Launched in 1995 as the Connecticut Impressionist Art Trail, the project shortened its name a decade later, adding members and broadening its scope. Today, its 22 institutions span multiple genres—from European masterpieces and American Impressionism to ancient art and contemporary culture. Here are a few of my favorites:





Theodore Robinson, *Autumn Sunlight (In the Woods)*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 21 3/4 inches. Florence Griswold Museum; gift of the Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company.



Willard L. Metcalf, *Café at Biskra, Algiers*, 1887. Oil on panel, 10 1/2 x 16 inches. Florence Griswold Museum; gift of the Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company.

Florence Griswold Museum

When Florence Griswold began taking in boarders to help pay the debts on her family home, she couldn't have imagined the seminal role the stately Georgian house would play in the development of American Impressionism. But New York landscape painter Henry Ward Ranger's 1899 stay heralded the Lyme Art Colony's birth. The museum retains its turn-of-the-century glory, and visitors can tour the gallery, lush grounds, and original house, where beautiful landscapes painted as gestures of thanks by the many artists who boarded there cover the dining room walls. 96 Lyme Street, Old Lyme; (860) 434-5542; florencegriswoldmuseum.org. Adults, \$10; closed Mondays.

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25

Happy Anniversary

Commemorating 25 years of the Connecticut Art Trail, "Made in Connecticut" is up through February 7, 2021, at the **Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art** in Hartford.

The collective's first collaborative show features work from each of the member museums and is curated by James Prosek, current artist-in-residence at the Yale University Art Gallery. Items include a Fitch Phoenix, a one-of-a-kind, never-produced car built by John Fitch, who helped Jim Vaill create Lime Rock Park racetrack. Adults, \$15. Closed Mondays through Thursdays; free through November 25. 600 Main Street, Hartford. (860) 278-2670; thewadsworth.org.

WHAT TO SEE

The museum's rotating exhibitions are in the Kriebler Gallery: **"Expanding Horizons: Celebrating 20 Years of the Hartford Steam Boiler Collection"** and **"Centennial of the Lyme Art Association Gallery"** are both on display through May 23, 2021.



Bruce Museum

In 1908, wealthy textile merchant Robert Moffat Bruce deeded his hilltop home overlooking Greenwich Harbor to the town for use as a natural history and art museum. Four years later, the Bruce Museum held its first art exhibition. Today, The Bruce is on the cusp of a major expansion: A new building set to open in fall 2022 will more than double its size. In the interim, two galleries feature traveling exhibitions. *1 Museum Drive, Greenwich; (203) 869-0376; brucemuseum.org. Adults, \$10; free on Tuesdays.*

WHAT TO SEE

"She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms": Emily Mason's brightly hued, abstract paintings and prints; through March 21, 2021.

"Fun No Fun": Children's book illustrations by famed New Yorker cartoonist James Stevenson; opens December 12.



Genesis Belanger,
*Abundantly Empty the
Ceaseless Void*, 2020.
Plywood, wool fabric,
stoneware, porcelain,
58 x 60 x 16 ½ inches.
Courtesy of the artist
and Perrotin.

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

When it sold the last of its permanent collection in 2003, The Aldrich became one of the few contemporary art museums in the country to focus solely on exhibitions. It continues to help launch the careers of emerging artists while presenting major exhibitions of established artists and innovative, thematic group shows. *258 Main Street, Ridgefield; (203) 438-4519; aldrichart.org. Adults, \$12 (third Saturdays free); closed Tuesdays.*

WHAT TO SEE

"Somebody's Child": Rudy Shepherd selected 25 watercolors depicting victims of police violence from his ongoing "Portrait" series; through November 29.

"Twenty Twenty": An exhibition of works on paper by seven artists documents the tumult of the recent election season; through March 14, 2021.

"Genesis Belanger: Through the Eye of a Needle": The first major U.S. solo museum exhibition by the New York-based sculptor; through May 9, 2021.

MoCA Westport

Anchoring the Westport arts community for more than 50 years, the Westport Arts Center went through a significant expansion in 2019 and emerged as the Museum of Contemporary Art. MoCA Westport's two galleries spotlight works by global and local artists, while The Academy offers an immersive arts education experience for all ages. MoCA Westport usually hosts an annual series of classical and jazz performances. *19 Newtown Turnpike, Westport; (203) 222-7070; mocawestport.org. Adults, \$8; closed Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays.*

WHAT TO SEE

"World Peace": Works by multiple artists that span decades and media examine the intersection of gender, race, and class, as well as art's role in social activism; through January 17, 2021.

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Stamford Museum and Nature Center

Set on 118 wooded and pastoral acres, the Stamford Museum and Nature Center is home to an educational farm, an art museum, and miles of hiking trails. Art lovers should focus on the galleries, which are housed in a gothic mansion built in 1929 for fashion designer and department store mogul Henri Bendel. Museum holdings include everything from Native American artifacts to late-19th-century American art and specimens that depict New England's natural history. 39 Scofieldtown Road, Stamford; (203) 977-6521; stamfordmuseum.org. Adults: \$14.

WHAT TO SEE

"Détente": Vivid compositions made by artist and naturalist Christopher Marley using collected and reclaimed plant and animal specimens, through January 10, 2021.

"Global Garden: Resonant Beauty": Connecticut artist Patricia Laspino's contemporary orchid paintings explore the connection between art and science, opens January 29, 2021.



Weir Farm National Historic Site

Pioneering American Impressionist Julian Alden Weir spent the summers between 1882 and 1919 on this bucolic, approximately 70-acre property in Ridgefield—the only National Park Service unit dedicated to American painting. Weir, along with his artistic friends and family, found inspiration in the light-filled landscape, complete with rolling fields, dappled woodlands, and a picturesque pond. 735 Nod Hill Road, Wilton; (203) 834-1896; nps.gov/wefa. Free.

WHAT TO SEE

The Weir home and artist studios are closed November to April, but visitors may wander en plein air as the artists themselves once did—the grounds are open sunrise to sunset year-round. Brochures featuring self-guided walking tours are available from a kiosk outside the visitors center.

Art in the time of COVID

Carey Weber, volunteer president of the Connecticut Art Trail and executive director of the Fairfield University Art Museum, notes that while member museums have worked hard on implementing new protocols to make visiting safe, not all are open. "With regard to those of us who are still closed, you can stay home in your pajamas and enjoy some really great virtual programming." The art trail's website provides information about upcoming #VirtualTrail offerings at member museums. ctarttrail.org.

Discount opportunity:

In-person visitors should consider the Art Trail Passport, which provides one-time admission to each of the trail's 22 museums for \$25.

Delamar properties in Greenwich, Southport, and West Hartford make excellent bases for exploring different geographic regions of the trail. Guest rooms and public spaces at these art-centric boutique hotels display works from their own collections and on-loan from local galleries and museums. *Rates start at \$239. delamar.com.*

Gina DeCaprio Vercesi previously wrote about Quebec skiing in *Northern New England Journey*.