

City-wide 'Summer Winds' celebration blows through New Bedford with art exhibits and installations

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, August 15, 2019, 1:38 p.m.



"Silver Current," a public art installation by Los Angeles-based Patrick Shearn and Poetic Kinetics at Custom House Square. (RICHARD GORMLEY)

NEW BEDFORD — When the breeze picked up in Custom House Square on a clear day last week, a great rush sounded overhead as thousands of iridescent strips undulated and eddied like a school of silvery fish, glorying in the sunlight.

"Silver Current," a public art installation by Los Angeles-based Patrick Shearn and Poetic Kinetics, is the linchpin of "Summer Winds," a citywide celebration of wind presented by Design Art Technology Massachusetts, or DATMA, a noncollecting museum that highlights the impact of new technology on art and design, and of art and design on new technology.

“Patrick got the material from a candy company,” DATMA executive director Lindsay Mis explained, gazing at the rustling silver ribbons. “They’re chocolate bar wrappers that were tossed because they weren’t up to snuff. Long rolls of shiny tape. A lot of his material is up-cycled.”

Poetic Kinetics’ installation recalls Janet Echelman’s aerial installation over the Rose Kennedy Greenway in 2015, which also incorporated netting designed with high-tech attention to wind speed and torque. “Silver Current,” lofting over a park that was once a parking lot, is smaller and lower to the ground than Echelman’s piece. Its effect is less celestial and more like a shimmering magic canopy.

Wind is an apt theme for a city built around a whaling port, and DATMA has collaborated with several New Bedford institutions for “Summer Winds.”

“De Wind Is Op!” an exhibition of 17th and 18th-century Dutch seascapes, is at the New Bedford Whaling Museum. The New Bedford Art Museum/ ArtWorks!, and University of Massachusetts Dartmouth have contemporary shows. More art is on view at the Buttonwood Park Zoo and along the Seaport Art Walk, and a “Winds of Change” mural by Greg Pennisten, presented by Superflat NB, just went up at the corner of William Street and Acushnet Avenue.

The New Bedford Ballet, the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra, the SouthCoast Film Forum, the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center, and more have or will present programming.

Art is nothing new in New Bedford. What’s new, especially in visual art, is exhibiting artists with star power. Shearn and Poetic Kinetics make installations all over the world. Megan and Murray McMillan, who have a small retrospective at the art museum that includes a new, weather-themed video installation, exhibit internationally. So does Spencer Finch, who has a show at UMass.

Founded in 2016, DATMA is the brainchild of founders Roger Mandle and his wife Gayle.

“My wife and I thought wouldn’t it be exciting to start a museum in New Bedford,” Mandle said. “What about creating an international facility, non-collecting, with connections with universities, schools, and public programs?”

The Mandles knew how to do it. Gayle is an artist and interior designer. Roger was president of the Rhode Island School of Design from 1993-2008, and before that deputy director and chief curator of the National Gallery of Art. Most recently, as president and chief museums officer at Qatar Museums Authority, he was charged with opening a Smithsonian-like family of museums.

The couple looked into buildings, including the New Bedford Armory and the post office, but the pieces didn’t come together.

“We realized we should prove ourselves first with exhibitions and programs before we find a space,” Roger Mandle said. They came up with a theme that tied New Bedford’s history to a burgeoning local industry. Last fall, Vineyard Wind, which aims to build the country’s first commercial-scale offshore wind farm off Martha’s Vineyard, signed a lease to use a heavy-lift pier in New Bedford as a staging area.

DATMA has descended on New Bedford at a time of cultural quickening. In 2017 and 2018, several new leaders took over local institutions — Amanda D. McMullen at the Whaling Museum and Ashley Occhino at the art museum; Dawn Salerno at the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum. DATMA hired Mis as executive director, and the city of New Bedford brought on Margo Saulnier as a creative strategist.

“Very smart young women are spearheading the arts and cultural scene down here,” said Occhino.

“The city is the first in the Commonwealth to create an arts, culture and tourism fund,” said Saulnier. “That fund is \$100,000 per year, and we’re in the second year of it.”

The fund underwrote a strategic plan, now being implemented, that includes creating a leadership group, the New Bedford Creative Consortium, which distributes grants.

That’s where Mandle came in.

“There was already a community of collaboration here, Saulnier said. “Roger contacted me, and I said come and present to our group, and everyone loved it and embraced it, and now you have this incredible series of events.”

Because “Summer Winds” has a large public art component, it’s hard to gauge exactly how successful it is; Mis is tracking visitor numbers at participating institutions. But a plan is already in place to follow up next year with light-themed programming. Like wind, light goes to the heart of New Bedford’s history — whale oil illuminated homes and businesses in the 18th and 19th centuries — and to a future reliant on renewable energy.

The year after that, the theme might be water, Mandle said. Meanwhile, the organization will keep its eye open for a building to set up shop.

“Eventually we need to have a home, because we want to show works of art and design,” said Mandle. “It’s probably a few years off. Unless someone comes forward and says they have a building they’d like to give us.”

Until then, and assuredly even after, New Bedford is DATMA’s canvas.

SUMMER WINDS

At sites throughout New Bedford into the fall. 774-264-3696, <https://datma.org/events/>

A selection of ongoing exhibitions:

SILVER CURRENT at Custom House Square through Sept. 30.

DE WIND IS OP! CLIMATE, CULTURE, AND INNOVATION IN DUTCH

MARITIME PAINTING at New Bedford Whaling Museum, 18 Johnny Cake Hill, through Dec. 31.

SPENCER FINCH at Gallery 224, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth CVPA Star Store, 715 Purchase St., through Sept. 12.

ELIZABETH KEITHLINE: (THE AIR) AS IT MOVES at UMass Dartmouth

University Art Gallery, 715 Purchase St., through Sept. 12.

SOME THINGS WE DO TOGETHER at New Bedford Art Museum/ArtWorks!,
608 Pleasant St., through Nov. 11.

BUTTONWOOD PARK ZOO PRESENTS SCULPTURE BY CHUCK HAUCK ,
Buttonwood Park Zoo, 425 Hawthorn St., through Sept. 30.

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