

From Chicago to Maine

Dowling Walsh Gallery welcomes Tony Fitzpatrick

TURNOUT TONY FITZPATRICK OPENING

by Justin Franz

Photography Amanda Kowalski

Tony Fitzpatrick's tough and progressive artwork utilizes a long-forgotten hobo alphabet to tell the story of a group of rough-and-tumble rail-riders who found themselves looking for work and a life after the Civil War. That work was featured at the Dowling Walsh Gallery in Rockland this spring, and to kick things off, a reception was hosted on Friday, May 28—an event in stark contrast to the stories featured on the walls. Over 100 people streamed through the gallery, getting a chance to talk with Fitzpatrick, who has become well known in the Chicago, New York, and New Orleans art scenes. According to Jake Dowling, gallery curator, it is unusual for them to feature the work of artists from outside Maine, but this won't be the last time. "It takes our gallery to a new level," Dowling says. "We're becoming a venue for nationally known artists." However, Dowling says, those who call Maine home will still be taking center stage in the years to come. A blog entry from the artist himself about his time in Maine:

I just got back from Maine—Rockland, Maine. One of those beautiful, bucolic towns that Edward Hopper, Robert Henri, and three generations of Wyeths found so seductive. It isn't hard to see why. The air is clean and you can smell the Atlantic Ocean on the light breezes anywhere in this town. It is lush and green and there is a brittle, yet sweet, edge to its citizens who describe their weather as, "Nine months of wintah...and three months bad sleddin'."

They are tough, self-reliant Yankee stock who are always aware that the landscape is friend and enemy, and that the land gives and gives. This is a fishing town; the best lobster you've ever eaten, Pemaquid oysters that are a tad salty and deliciously briny, served up with a cocktail sauce that has a bit of a kick to it.

Best of all, are the people...a great many of them from somewhere else who have to prove their mettle to be considered Mainers. Maine is a proud state. During the Civil War, the fighting Maine lost more men than almost any other state, despite there being pockets of southern sympathizers in towns like Camden. The Maine fighting men were ferocious and defiantly Yankee. The Maine sense of humor is a contrary one. You have to be able to take some ribbing to fit in there. They are a no-bullshit kind of culture. The lobster men are for real, no-shit, tough guys. Cock off to one of them at your own peril. "You'll be wearin' yah ass for a hat" if you wise-ass one of the denizens of the Time Out; a road-house style joint right on the water, favored by lobster men and the heartier townies.

Up the road a bit is Camden. There is a store that sells the only thing I collect well: carved and painted wooden birds. The store is called The Duck Trap and there are all manner of carved songbirds and waterfowl. The two older women who run the place can tell you about every carving in the place. I bought a couple by a 92-year-old



1. Mary Dowling. 2. Gallery owner Jake Dowling with artist Tony Fitzpatrick. 3. A guest holds a catalog of Fitzpatrick's hobo-alphabet-inspired art. 4. Mary Larson enjoys the art as late afternoon shadows stretch across the floor. 5. Darlene Cocke.



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guy who just whittles them and paints them with a regular pocket whittling knife. Stan Sparre, is the gentleman's name, and when you get one of his birds you know that someone who genuinely loves birds made this thing. They are not perfect; no truly beautiful thing is. They are approximate and rendered and cut the way he sees them. They are his birds and I know how that goes.

My show went beautifully. It was installed with care. The young dealer, Jake Dowling, and his wife, Mare, gave us a beautiful preview and a lovely opening and the people of Rockland, Maine, could not have treated me better.

Afterward, both nights, we retreated to one of those great

Irish bars that had the best food I've ever had in a saloon—great oysters, lobster rolls, and haddock—a joint called Billy's Tavern in Thomaston, Maine, owned and presided over by two generations of the Burke men—Billy, the father, and Chris, the son. Billy reminded me so much of my father that the first night I spent most of the night on the back lot of the place talking to him and watching the other patrons play bocce. Yeah, it's that kind of place. It always has a great quartet of jazz guys and in the backyard you can play bocce and smoke and have good conversations. And for a saloon,

nobody was drunk. It isn't that kind of place, as odd as that may sound.

I got up this morning and boarded the plane home, back to my city of bricks and iron and cruel boundaries. It is home and I love it for its imperfections as well as its graces; but once in a while, I can imagine a life somewhere else: where winter isn't as brutal, where the differences between have and have not are not so bitterly apparent... where wrought-iron fences are erected to keep the precious things in, rather than the feared things out. There are churches everywhere in my city and everyone believes in god and nobody believes in each other. This piece is about that thought.

—Tony Fitzpatrick, May 30, 2010, from his blog at tonyfitzpatrick.wordpress.com **MH+D**

6. Jake Dowling talks with Johanna Stinson and Mark Rixson. 7. John and Dottie Hughes take a break. 8. Artist Colin Page talks to another visitor during the show. 9. Artist Connie Hayes enjoys a glass of wine while reading up on Fitzpatrick's work.

For more information, see Resources on page 108.