

Westchester AND THE REGION

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Letting the Art Move You

By LISA W. FODERARO

Towns Made For Gallery Strolls Before the Crowds Of Summer Check In

EVEN before it opened six years ago in a former Nabisco cracker box factory, Dia:Beacon, the largest museum of contemporary art in the country, had set in motion a cultural makeover in this once-barren river city. The mere anticipation of its arrival turned empty storefronts into gleaming galleries and craved residents of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and other artistic enclaves in New York City to relocate here.

In the years since, Beacon has solidified its reputation as a destination for art in much the way that Hudson, N.Y., transformed itself into a mecca for antiques.

The sudden bloom of spare white spaces, in which art is front and center, has been joined by cafes and shops, making Beacon

an attractive place to contemplate the creative process and while away an afternoon or evening. In fact, Beacon has followed the lead of other towns in the Hudson Valley by designating one Saturday a month — in its case, the second — as a day when galleries stay open late and live entertainment.

To appreciate how a single institution can jump-start a whole town, start your visit at Dia:Beacon. The institution, by modern ge-

omists like Andy Warhol, Richard Serra, Donald Judd and Dan Flavin, sprawl across vast galleries, which total more than a quarter of a million square feet. With the arrival of spring, the museum stays open later since it relies on rows and rows of skylights to illuminate the galleries — until 6 p.m. starting in mid-April, as opposed to 4 p.m. in winter.

Children especially seem to appreciate the playfulness and strangeness of some of the works. In “North, East, South, West,” by Michael Heizer, which conjures two giant depressions in the floor of one gallery, their simple geometric voids plunging 20 feet. Serra’s “Torqued Ellipses” are lofty walls of rust-bored steel that curl inward, tilting this way and that. The ones that invite the viewer to step along a narrow path to the center are particularly disorienting, but pleasantly so.

The museum’s excellent bookstore — long

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OLD IS NEW Beacon offers antiques along Main Street, top, and galleries like Fovea Exhibitions, above.



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on books and short on gifts — is a nice way to end your museum tour before going gallery-hopping.

It is a short drive, or a half-mile walk, to Beacon’s mile-long Main Street, which runs from Route 9D, not far from the Hudson River, toward Mount Beacon, whose gentle dome can be seen in the distance. The two ends of Main Street clearly pulse with the most creative energy, flanking a still-gritty, rather dull stretch that gives a sense of Beacon, *pe-die*.

On the western end of Main is a collection of noteworthy galleries, among them Fovea Exhibitions, Van Brunt Gallery and Hudson Beach Glass. Housed in an understated gray brick building, Fovea is a nonprofit education

Between the Hudson and Mount Beacon, a city reborn as a haven for art.

organization dedicated to photojournalism. It gives the dictionary definition of the name right on its door: “a small depression in the retina, constituting the point where vision is most clear.” On view through May 3 is an exhibition called “Hard Rain (From Memory to History)” by Anthony Suozzi, the veteran Time magazine photographer and Pulitzer Prize winner, showing some of his images of conflict from the past 25 years.

A few doors down is the Van Brunt Gallery, which in December relocated from the other end of town to 137 Main Street. A recent show included a luminous landscape bordering an abstraction and a painted assemblage incorporating bits of wood evocative of a picket fence. In the current exhibition, the owner, Carl Van Brunt, invited six artists — four photographers and two painters — to contribute works that re-

ONLINE: ON THE TOWNS

For a slide show of the East End of Long Island; Beacon, N.Y.; Kent, Conn.; and Lambertville and the surrounding area in New Jersey: nytimes.com/westchester

late loosely to the quadricentennial of Henry Hudson’s historic voyage. The “Quad Show,” which Mr. Van Brunt described as a “postmodern vision of the Hudson Valley,” will be on view through April 27.

Across the street, Hudson Beach Glass, which occupies a beautifully renovated former firehouse, features handmade art glass, both sculptural and functional — from undulating bowls and elaborate light fixtures to jewelry and mobiles. Among the more beguiling objects recently on display were intricate glass pumpkins in unusual colors (purple was my favorite), each topped with a sinuous green stem. An adjoining studio frequently offers glass-blowing demonstrations.

Before venturing to the other end of Main Street, stop in at the Muddy Cup coffeehouse, with its Victorian-inspired chairs in brushed gold and red velvet, for a cup of hot “white” chocolate and a lemon square. Or try the Chill Wine Bar, a new restaurant with a light menu.

More galleries, gift shops and restaurants await in the shadow of Mount Beacon. In a weathered brick building covered with vines, Go North: A Space for Contemporary Art recently featured the work of an Estonian multimedia artist, Marko Mäestamm, whose show, “Another Day With My Family,” explored the relationship between the artist and his family, the family and society, and public versus private through a mix of photographs, sculpture and video.

If you are inclined to linger — perhaps it is the second Saturday of the month — visit the Piggy Bank Restaurant, a lively barbecue restaurant in a former bank building. It is one of the few businesses that stratted into town well before Dia:Beacon opened its doors.

Beacon: Visitors’ Guide

Beacon is close to Interstate 84 in Dutchess County and is a stop on Metro-North’s Hudson Line. Information as the city’s many galleries can be found at beaconarts.org. Hours vary. Some are open week-ends only; others midweek to Monday; many expect to extend their hours during warmer weather.

Museum and Galleries

DIA:BEACON 3 Beekman Street, Beacon, N.Y.; (845) 440-0100; dia.beaconarts.org. The museum has an excellent bookstore, and a cafe offers a small but fresh selection of salads, soups, sandwiches, yogurts and baked goods. Admission: \$10; \$7 for students and seniors and free for children under 12.

FOVEA EXHIBITIONS 143 Main Street, Beacon; (845) 765-2109; foveaexhibitions.org.

VAN BRUNT GALLERY 137 Main Street, Beacon; (845) 838-2995; vanbruntgallery.com.

HUDSON BEACH GLASS 162 Main Street, Beacon; (845) 440-0068; hudsonbeachglass.com. Gallery is open every day; glass-blowing demonstrations are offered on most days, but best to call ahead.

GO NORTH: A SPACE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART 409 Main Street, Beacon; (845) 242-1051; goorthgallery.com.

Restaurants

CHILL WINE BAR 173 Main Street, Beacon; (845) 765-0885. Wine and tapas bar serving paninis and other light dishes.

MUDDY CUP COFFEE HOUSE 129 Main Street, Beacon; (845) 440-8555; muddycup.com. Sandwiches, soups, quiche, baked goods and coffee.

PIGGY BANK RESTAURANT 1445 Main Street, Beacon; (845) 838-0028; piggybankrestaurant.com. Traditional barbecue (chicken and ribs), burgers and a good selection of salads, from goat cheese to grilled salmon.



GALLERY MAGNET Above, the Van Brunt Gallery on Main Street in Beacon. At left, Dia:Beacon, the contemporary art museum that opened six years ago and has helped attract artists and galleries to the city.