

MOVIE REVIEW

McDORMAND wows in the expansive 'Nomadland.' E6



AUDIENCE

Deep Water/E6

Sunday, February 21, 2021

Maine Sunday Telegram

SECTION E



Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer

David Jacobson rebuilds a glassblowing furnace at Waterfall Arts in Belfast. The studio, slated to open in June, will be Maine's only community glassblowing studio. Its furnace and ovens will be powered by used vegetable oil collected from local restaurants, as well as electricity.

Heart of glass blowing

A new studio in Belfast aims to become home to affordable classes for Mainers interested in giving glassblowing a go.

By **BOB KEYES**
Staff Writer

Glassblower David Jacobson had been toying with moving from Montville to Belfast when the pandemic forced his decision. An artist and teacher who depended on a steady flow of people through his studio to take glassblowing lessons, Jacobson was uncertain how to proceed amid a worsening and vexing public health crisis that wiped out all his classes.

With a void in his business, he sensed opportunity. Late last summer, he closed the studio that he built in 2013, packed up and headed to the cool coastal city with a built-in arts scene. "I figured, this might be the time to do it," he said.

This spring, Jacobson and another Maine glass artist, Carmi Katsir, will open Maine's only community glassblowing studio at Waterfall Arts, the innovative community arts center that operates in an old elementary school in Belfast. In an added twist, the hot ovens in the studio will be powered by a furnace that runs on used vegetable oil collected from local restaurants,



Photo courtesy of David Jacobson

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Vase by David Jacobson.

'Or' tells a condensed, comedic history of 17th century England

Three actors portray a wide range of characters in the Winnepesaukee Playhouse production, streaming through Portland Stage.

By **STEVE FEENEY**

Do you prefer plays that give you something to think about? Or are a few good laughs enough to draw you in? Portland Stage has imported a play that artfully balances serious and silly in a highly entertaining way.

The Winnepesaukee Playhouse production of the Liz Duffy Adams 2009 play "Or," which was performed *al fresco* in Meredith, New Hampshire, last year, was "reconstructed" to fit Portland Stage's indoor stage. A performance from a brief in-person run of the play in Portland is available to stream online through the end of the month.

Telling the fictionalized story of Aphra Behn (1640-1689), an aspiring playwright and former spy whose life and art called into question all manner of stuffy period norms, "Or," presents a condensed history of late 17th century England.

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THEATER REVIEW

WHAT: "Or," at Portland Stage
REVIEWED: Streaming online (through Feb. 28)
TICKETS: \$25 (discounts available)
CONTACT: 207-774-0465; portlandstage.org

ART REVIEW



Photo by Elizabeth Ruskin

"20 Walks-Baldface," by Lin Lisberger

Maine Jewish Museum reopens with exemplars of art and craft

The first exhibition at its renovated Congress Street home features 10 artists and makers.

By **JORGE S. ARANGO**

A fire last May at the Maine Jewish Museum forced the institution to find other exhibition space at the former Nissen Bakery building on Washington Avenue in Portland. But now, with repairs and renovations completed, it is back home on Congress Street. The inaugural exhibition, "Mixing It Up" (through March 19) certainly lives up to its name. Organized by resident curator Nancy Davidson and ceramist and art collector Elizabeth Ruskin, it has no particular discernible theme and ranges far and wide.

If there is any curatorial focus at all, it is the way it navigates a path between art and crafts. I served for some years as chair of a wonderful philanthropic organization called the Craft Emergency Relief Fund+, and our trustees pondered what constitutes craft and what constitutes art ad nauseum. Having also edited a maga-

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MECA holds second Resilience Week to promote social change

The Portland art college has organized nine events, beginning Monday, including a film screening and a walking tour.

By **BOB KEYES**
Staff Writer

Maine College of Art will host its second Resilience Week beginning Monday, dedicated to the school's mission of racial, sexual and gender inclusivity.

"Through Resilience Week's programming, we provide a network of support for those committed to fostering change here at MECA," said Margaret Brownlee, the college's officer of diversity, equity and inclusion. "By organizing these workshops and events, we encourage students, faculty, staff, and community members to engage in conversation about global diversity, racial justice, and inclusion. Our goal is to carve out space where Black, Indigenous, people of color don't just survive – they thrive."

Resilience Week begins with a community conversation on "How To Be An Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi on Monday and a virtual screening of the film "Daughters of the Dust" by Julie Dash on Tuesday.

"Promoting a culture of social change, racial justice, and inclusion at MECA is one of the top priorities of our 2020-2027 Strategic Plan," President Laura Freid said in a statement. "We are committed to a world enriched by the creativity of artists and designers whose diverse perspectives are recognized and celebrated. The breadth of events and

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GLASS

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as well as electricity. Traditionally, glassblowers burn though a lot of propane or natural gas to power their furnaces, and the industry is seeking green alternatives as it reckons with its energy consumption. Running a burner with something other than fossil fuel was essential to Waterville Arts' interest in the project.

"We really wanted it to be sustainable," said Waterfall Arts Executive Director Kim Fleming. "We're environmentally responsible, so we said, 'Let's figure this out.'"

Jacobson donated all of his gear, and Waterfall Arts secured about \$50,000 in grants to convert the former fallout shelter in the school's basement into a 1,000-square-foot, two-workstation glassblowing studio, with ovens for annealing, fusing and slumping, as well as handheld tools and other equipment necessary for working with glass while it is hot and after it cools. The studio likely will open in June, with classes, workshops and demonstrations for beginners and those who want to expand their skills, and for use by experienced glassblowers.

"This is a hands-on maker space, and we're pretty excited," Fleming said.

The timing is good, despite the pandemic. Glassblowing is a hot trend. The Canadian reality show "Blown Away," filmed in a huge hot shop in Hamilton, Ontario, is popular on Netflix and in its second season, profiling glass artists as they compete for best-in-glass bragging rights and \$60,000. The general curiosity about glassblowing fits into larger DIY trends across society, as people demonstrate a desire to disconnect from their dependence on digital devices and reconnect with the art and craft of creating something beautiful and original — maybe even magical — with their hands, said Chris Battaglia, who handles publicity for Waterfall Arts.

Because of the cost of equipment, glassblowing has remained somewhat out of reach for people who are casually curious or interested in dabbling. There are private studios across Maine where people can take lessons, like the one Jacobson operated for almost a decade, and Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle operates one of the most prestigious hot glass studios in the Northeast. But lessons and tuition are expensive. The studio at Waterfall Arts will make it easier for people who want to give glassblowing a try, Battaglia said.

"There is just a lot of good energy around this project," he said. "A lot of people seem to be interested, and I think it will open doors for a lot of cool partnerships."

Working with blown glass is a dramatic, physical experience, involving hot ovens and open flames, malleable materials, and industrial-style tools that demand dexterity and hand-to-eye coordination. Working with hot glass also requires precision in technique and timing, almost like a dance, and often involves working in tandem with another artist. As with any art form, successful projects come with many failures, and failures in glass are announced with loud crashes.

The glassblowing studio at Waterfall Arts will serve newcomers, emerging and established artists, Fleming said. It will give experienced artists who lack their own studio a place to work on projects, experiment and grow, while providing a platform for others to get into the field or expand their interests. The role of the studio, she added, will be to serve the needs of the community as those needs and the community itself evolve. Newcomers can expect



Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer

Seen through doors on a newly constructed wall, David Jacobson repairs part of a glassblowing furnace in a basement room at Waterfall Arts in Belfast.

to make a vase, bowl or drinking glass, Jacobson said.

Waterfall Arts is still working out its pricing and structure for classes and open studios and wouldn't give a general cost range, but Fleming said it would be priced so people can afford it. In addition to classes taught by Jacobson and Katsir, there will be one-day and weekend workshops, demonstrations with artists from Maine and around the country, and open studio hours when people can reserve equipment for their own projects, all conducted in a pandemic-safe environment. "Glassblowing is inaccessible in Maine for the majority of the public, and it's very expensive if you can be a part of it," Fleming said. "That is about to change. We are going to offer affordable glassblowing, and we will have scholarships available for people who cannot afford it."

In addition, Waterfall Arts has begun conversations with Belfast High School about offering glassblowing to students as soon as this fall. Only a handful of high schools in the country offer glassblowing. Community glassblowing studios are also uncommon. There's one in New Hampshire and another in Boston. Community studios powered by vegetable oil are less common, Fleming said. "As far as we can tell, we will be the only sustainable glassblowing studio in the Northeast. The closest is in North Carolina," she said.

The glassblowing community is wrestling with the fossil fuel dilemma. Some studios have stopped operating entirely, while others have converted to electricity and other fuels. Jacobson researched his options, talked to studios that have converted to vegetable oil, and began asking businesses in Belfast about collecting their used oil. Sherian Swindell, co-owner of the Only Doughnut of Maine in Belfast, was glad to offload her soy shortening.

The doughnut shop, which opened in the fall, burns through about 220 pounds of shortening per week for its fryers and expects to increase that amount to about 280 pounds a week when the shop receives new fryers this winter. Swindell stores discarded oil in large drums behind the store, and offers the oil to a local farmer who uses it for lubricating farm equipment and for mixing in with his animal food.

After the glassblowing studio is up and running, Waterfall Arts will get first dibs, she said.

"They had this amazing donation of glassblowing



Left and below: Work by Carmi Katsir. Katsir, a second-generation glass artist, will teach at the Waterfall Arts studio.

Photo courtesy of Carmi Katsir

up outside. "I could see the sparkle of the glass in the sun, and I thought, 'What is that?' I knew I needed to learn how to do that," he said.

He later earned his bachelor's degree in art with a focus on glass from the University of Minnesota, but glassblowing remained more an interest than a career. He made his living drawing cartoons, moving to New York in 1985, where he drew a daily newspaper cartoon for The Journal News in White Plains, and worked for the New Yorker, New York Times and Washington Post and was syndicated by United Media. All the while, he kept his interest in glassblowing as a hobby.

He moved to Maine in 2003 and continued cartooning for newspapers and magazines until 2013, when he fulfilled an early dream and opened his own glass studio in Montville. All was going well until the pandemic shut him down, prompting his move to the coast and this turn in his career.

Katsir, who lives in Montville, teaches glassblowing at Hidden Valley Camp in Freedom. He is a second-generation glass artist. His father, Dani Katsir, is an established glass artist in Michigan, and Carmi Katsir has been making glass art since he was 5. He is 36 now. He and his wife moved to Montville six years ago, from San Francisco. "We were working really hard and part of the rat race," Katsir said. "We decided we wanted more space and more control of our lives, so we moved to Maine to live year-round."

Katsir loves teaching and sharing those moments of magic when people make their first object from hot glass. "It's something they never forget, and I am looking forward to many of those moments," he said.

Jacobson shares that sentiment. That moment always reminds him of the afternoon at Kent State, when the sparkle of glass in the sun caught his eye and piqued a creative curiosity he is still exploring. "I teach people to make things for themselves," Jacobson said, demystifying the magic as something tangible and within reach.

"The majority of people will say, 'I have no talent, I can't do it.' I tell them, 'That is not true.' And they always leave excited and elated that they have worked on something in 3D, created something new, and accomplished something challenging and something fun."

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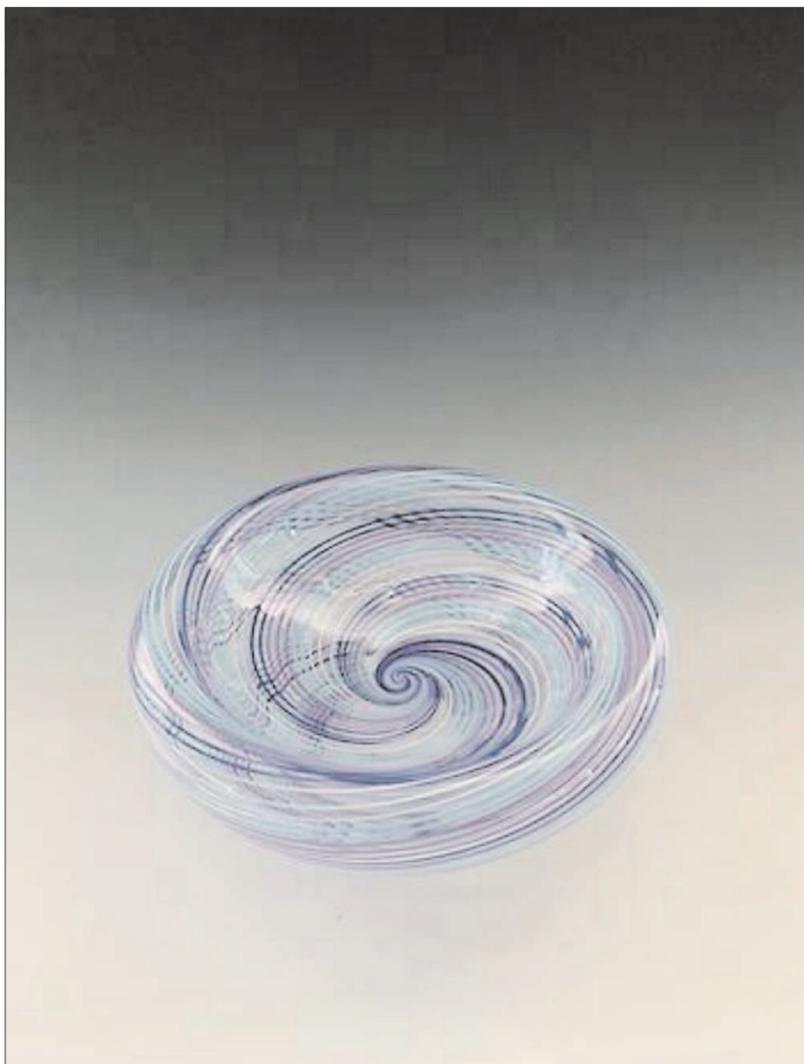


Photo courtesy of Carmi Katsir



Katsir, right, and Tim Biggs frame a wall in a basement room.

Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer

studio equipment, and I was trying to figure out something creative to do with the massive amount of oil we go through in a week," Swindell said. "I

am so excited they are doing this, and so is the community. They are an asset to Belfast and to Waldo County in general, so anything we can do to help,

we're all in favor of."

Jacobson, 68, got hooked on glass as a freshman at Kent State University. It was spring semester, and the glassblowing studio set