Being there, doing that

A dozen exhibits to check out now at museums around New England

BY MURRAY WHYTE | GLOBE STAFF

MASSACHUSETTS

YAYOI KUSAMA: LOVE IS CALLING When the Institute of Contemporary Art opened one of the beloved Japanese artist's even more beloved infinity rooms, it was with the promise that it would be here long enough to satisfy every selfie-seeker for a significant radius: a year and a half, starting in September 2019 and ending in February 2021. We all know what happened next: Six months into the show's run, the pandemic closed the museum down, and even when it reopened, "Love Is Calling" stayed shut because of its social distancing-unfriendly close confines. Good news: As of Oct. 16, the room is finally open again, this time through the end of next year. Given 18 months of pent-up demand, there will inevitably be lines. But after everything, won't lineups almost feel like a triumph? Through Dec. 31, 2022. Institute of Contemporary Art, 25 Harbor Shore Drive. 617-479-3100, www.icaboston.org

COLOR | JOY | ERIC CARLE The sweet and lovely world of Eric Carle has been a refuge for generations of children — the instant name recognition of "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" translates planet-wide — so when the much-loved children's book illustrator died earlier this year, it was only natural that his namesake museum would hold a memorial exhibition in his honor. This show presents more than 70 original pieces, both from Carle's beloved books and otherwise: Four brightly colored banners made for an opera production drape from the ceiling. Through March 6. Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, 125 West Bay Road, Amherst. 413-559-6300, www.carlemuseum.org

LOVE STORIES FROM THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON Don't let the syrupy premise dissuade you from seeing this show, which imports dozens of works from one of the world's premiere portrait collections. Spanning eras and media — from the Renaissance to present day, painting and photography both — the exhibition will bring in more than 100 important works by the likes of David Hockney, Lee Miller, George Romney, and Mary Beale. And yes, coupling predominates: from Mary Wollstonecraft and Percy Bysshe Shelley to Paul and Linda McCartney. Nov. 13-March 13. Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St., Worcester. 508-799-4406, www.worcester-art.org

LIGHT, SPACE, SURFACE: WORKS FROM THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART In the 1960s and '70s when their East Coast peers were hard at work dismantling the ruling orthodoxy of Abstract Expressionism with intellectually confrontational movements that included Minimalism, Conceptualism, and every manner of performance, West Coast artists were primarily concerned with what the still-unspoiled Californian milieu had to offer: space and light. Working with the nature of perception itself, artists including James Turrell, Larry Bell, Doug Wheeler, and Judy Chicago used workaday materials and unremarkable spaces to manipulate light and bend the visual field to make reality itself seem strange. This show assembles dozens of works from LACMA's collection to offer a clarifying view of a significant cultural upheaval on the left coast. Nov. 23-March 20. Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy, 180 Main St., Andover. 978-749-4015, www.addison-gallery.org

MAINE

CLIFFORD ROSS: SIGHTLINES If the notion of digital art stirs little more in you than confused indifference, I'm sure you're not alone. The rapid advance of technology has far outpaced its use in the making of what could be seriously described as art, though there are exceptions, and Ross is one of them. Less enamored of the technology itself than the idea it captures — rule one for successful art, or anything else — Ross brings the eye of a serious observer to an array of media spanning traditional photography to complex algorithmic digital animation, with the simple magic of nature always at the fore. Through Jan. 9. Portland Museum of Art, 7 Congress Square, Portland, Maine. 207-775-6148, portlandmuseum.org

THERE IS A WOMAN IN EVERY COLOR: BLACK WOMEN IN ART With more than 60 works of art spanning some 400 years, this exhibition examines how Black women have been portrayed in American art over centuries with a mind to establishing their presence in the American canon. The
effort has its work cut out for it, with women of color perhaps the most marginalized and least represented group in American history; this exhibition both spotlights that ugly fact and highlights the importance of representation. Through Jan. 30. Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 9400 College Station, Brunswick, Maine. 207-725-3275, www.bowdoin.edu/art-museum

CENTER FOR MAINE CONTEMPORARY ART The first of this month marked a complete slate change for this small-but-mighty Maine museum, where you’ll find some of the most free-thinking and innovative contemporary exhibitions in New England (Wade Kavanagh’s room-filling installation of undulating lumber in 2019 remains one of the most memorable for me). Four fresh shows spanning sculpture, photography, painting, and video fill the airy dockside galleries, making it a more than worthwhile journey. Through Jan. 9. Center for Maine Contemporary Art, 21 Winter St., Rockland, Maine. 207-701-5005, www.cmcanow.org

CONNECTICUT

CARLA KNIGHT: NAVIGATOR Knight’s work uses an irreverently complex pictorial language that borrows equally from the symbolic runes of ancient cultures and the imaginative fancy of science fiction. “Navigator,” the first museum survey of her career, offers an expansive view of her overarching visual ease — of signs and symbols that suggest language, mathematical equation, and even maps (hence “Navigator”) but reveal nothing beyond the visual pleasure of sharply made graphic aesthetics. Knight says her work is inspired by “the mysteries and absurdities of life,” both of which she pokes at, but ultimately leaves intact. Oct. 17-May 8. Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 258 Main St., Ridgefield, Conn. 203-438-4519, thealdrich.org

STEEL, STRING, SPIT BITE: SELECTIONS FROM THE LEWITT COLLECTION The best artists are almost always the best art viewers — and if they can afford it, collectors, too. Sol LeWitt could and was all of the above, which makes showing his collection, as the New Britain Museum of American Art will do starting next month, an instructive view not only into his mind but American art itself. LeWitt, the originator of Minimal and then Conceptual art, was a generator of innovative, disciplined thinking about art with few peers. But his collection — more than 4,000 works — spanned every media and showed a lively affection both for artists with whom he might have shared a sensibility (Jessica Stockholder, Adrian Piper) and those with whom you’d assume he had none (Shirin Neshat, Lynda Benglis). Nov. 11-March 18. New Britain Museum of American Art, 56 Lexington St., New Britain, Conn. 860-229-0257, www.nbmaa.org

RHODE ISLAND

RAID THE ICEBOX NOW WITH PAUL SCOTT: NEW AMERICAN SCENERY Can it be that this groundbreaking series at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum is finally drawing to a close? It would appear so, and it ends one of the most engaging rounds of institutional circumspection I can recall. In 2019, the museum embarked on a reinvigoration of a 1969 Andy Warhol project, in which the artist pulled things from the vaults and left them propped facing the wall in stacks. It was a sly critique of how museums both assign significance to works of art and then summarily forget about them as new collections grow in every direction. The reprise, started more than two years ago, ends with Paul Scott’s wry inquiry into the museum’s collection of late-19th-century blue Staffordshire ware, the first decorative porcelain to be

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mass-produced. A fad that faded, Staffordshire ware ended up in deep storage, and its decorative scenes of American landscapes were left to gather dust. Scott’s “New American Scenery” series revives the porcelain tradition, but with scenes more true to his time: the post-industrial landscapes of North America. *Through Dec. 30, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, 20 N. Main St., Providence. 401-454-6500, www.risdmuseum.org*

Inside Yayoi Kusama’s Infinity Mirror Room “Love is Calling” at the ICA in September 2019.

A detail of “Fantastic Universe (More Than You Know),” from “Karla Knight: Navigator”; Clifford Ross’ “Light Waves IV,” from “Clifford Ross: Sightlines.”