

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

New WAM exhibition highlights local artist Kat O'Connor, winner of the Sally R. Bishop Prize for Best in Show at the 2021 ArtsWorcester Biennial

Worcester, MA—June 27, 2022—Worcester artist Kat O'Connor, winner of the Sally R. Bishop Prize for Best in Show at the 2021 ArtsWorcester Biennial, will have a solo exhibition at the Worcester Art Museum opening on July 16. *Fathom: the Art of Kat O'Connor* features 30 paintings and drawings by the artist and is organized in collaboration with ArtsWorcester. The exhibition will remain on view through October 16.

The interplay of light and water has been O'Connor's primary muse and artistic focus for the past decade. In her recent body of work, which includes this year's Biennial winner, *Dreaming of Snell's Window* (2021), O'Connor explores the world above and below the surface of swimming pools. These almost other-worldly paintings show graceful, fluid portraits of women — diving, swimming, floating — from the unusual perspective of someone underwater. O'Connor's sensitively rendered portraits reveal the strength and character of each woman with whom she works.

In describing her creative approach, O'Connor says she seeks to explore the way realism can push into and through abstraction. "My paintings capture what happens in a split second of weightlessness, a momentary realism in which rip currents tear away at the abyss and produce images and shapes that were once imperceptible," she explains. This is evident in O'Connor's use of light; combining the experience of swimming with the abstraction of refracted light she incorporates that feeling of weightlessness into portraits.

"O'Connor is constantly pushing herself to explore new facets of her practice, and I am excited that her solo exhibition at WAM will premier two new bodies of work in addition to her award-winning underwater portraits." said Samantha Cataldo, WAM's Associate Curator of Contemporary Art. "In each, she expands her investigation of water as subject matter by exploring the preciousness of this natural resource and humankind's increasingly crucial relationship with it."

O'Connor attended Montana State University where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in drawing in 1990. She then went on to obtain a Master of Fine Arts degree in painting from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 1995. She has exhibited her work nationwide, including three solo shows, and won several awards, including a 2018 Mass Cultural Council Fellowship in Drawing and Printmaking and a 2017 Material Needs Grant.

Fathom: the Art of Kat O'Connor is a part of the Museum's larger commitment to presenting local artists while connecting to one of the main contemporary art organizations in the region, ArtsWorcester. The first 150 artists who submitted work to the 2021 ArtsWorcester Biennial received a Worcester Art Museum [membership](#), regardless of whether their work was accepted for exhibition.

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“This partnership between ArtsWorcester and WAM gives a regional artist an almost unimaginable career opportunity and raises the profile of contemporary art in Central Massachusetts,” said ArtsWorcester Executive Director Juliet Feibel. “Like Sally Bishop herself, and other Bishop Prize winners before her, Kat is both a great artist and a beloved teacher at WAM, which makes *Fathom* a particularly special chapter in our work together.”

About the Worcester Art Museum

The Worcester Art Museum creates transformative programs and exhibitions, drawing on its exceptional collection of art. Dating from 3,000 BCE to the present, these works provide the foundation for a focus on audience engagement, connecting visitors of all ages and abilities with inspiring art and demonstrating its enduring relevance to daily life. Creative initiatives—including pioneering collaborative programs with local schools, fresh approaches to exhibition design and in-gallery teaching, and a long history of studio class instruction—offer opportunities for diverse audiences to experience art and learn both from and with artists. For more information about the Worcester Art Museum, visit worcesterart.org.

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA, is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is \$18 for adults, \$14 for seniors 65+ and for college students with ID. Admission is free for Museum Members and children ages 0-17. On the first Sunday of each month, admission is free for everyone. Museum parking is free. Tickets may be purchased in advance at worcesterart.org.

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