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Brunswick Arts and Letters

Reviews of art exhibitions and books

Exhibition Review: Zig/Zag/Color: John Walker at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art (CMCA), Rockland, ME



John Walker, “From Seal Point,”
exhibition at the [CMCA](#) (June 24-
October 29)

What are those bulbous forms, and
to what end the zig zags? Saturated
in color, Walker’s large paintings fill
a main exhibition room at the CMCA,
delighting the eye and inviting
close-up views as well spaces for

viewing from afar. All of his work, states Walker in a wall text, is inspired by the
natural world—he never paints anything he has not seen. Making up is one thing,
but interpreting is another.

After one look at the rocky coastline of Maine, with its water (at turns churning, still
or undulating), or at the promontories (“necks”) that stick out, tongue-like, into
Casco Bay, the artist’s visual interpretations become, if not clear, then at least
emergent. Could those bulbous forms be necks, or the undersides of boats? Are the
zig-zags of various colors the bay waves, the rocky shoreline, or something else? As
a group, the works are linked by these repeating elements. In works with titles such

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as *Wait*, *Hush*, and *Drift*, verbs are suggested and/or commanded: we should be still; we should be quiet; we should watch objects as they move along the coast. Seen in the context of Walker's earlier paintings, however, new connections emerge.

If one hasn't had a chance to visit the coast, a perusal through Walker's 2015 exhibition catalogue, published on the occasion of his exhibition, "John Walker: Looking Out to Sea," (Alexandre Gallery, 2015) provides an array of paintings that precede the works created for CMCA. Paintings such as *Wake* (oil on canvas, 2014) or *Tidal Touch* (oil on canvas, 2014) integrate representational objects, as the titles suggest. Among other elements, fish and distant islands are interspersed with the zig-zags that also appear in the CMCA works. In the space of a few years, it seems, Walker has engaged and explored abstraction in ways that re-think (and even reject) the representational elements of the 2014 works. As a result, the viewer is motivated to look, look again, imagine the landscape and, perhaps, peruse the catalogue.

You'll find words not only in the catalogue, but also on the wall: mysteriously greeting the viewer in one of the first works on display is the word "Beano!". Silly, perhaps, to a non-Mainer, but it actually refers to Maine lore. When the game of Bingo was outlawed in Maine, Mainers played "Beano!" instead. Finding the old Beano cards in his studio when he moved in, Walker incorporated the word into his landscape. So the studio, too, is part of the landscape — of Seal's Point, of the mind, and of Maine history.

At the CMCA, inspired by Seal's Point, Walker re-visits a landscape, reveling in the abstraction of light, landscapes forms, depth, imagination, and history. Visit the show, and then visit the water. Your eyes and mind will be delighted.

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