

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

The Inquirer

Galleries: For galleries, it's the season to indulge

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More and more, it seems, galleries and curators have decided it's worth pulling out the stops in summer, doing the quirky shows they've always wanted to do and damn the torpedoes. Luckily for restive gallery-goers, there are a few of these around this month.

Inclined to images of early Philadelphia? The Free Library's Parkway Central Library is brimming with photographs, prints, and paintings of this city, but you might not be aware of its collection of works by Augustus Kollner (1816-1906), a German-born painter and printer who moved to Philadelphia in 1840 and spent the rest of his life and long career here.

"Kollner's View: Philadelphia and Beyond in the 19th Century," organized by Laura Stroffolino, curator of the library's Print and Picture Collection and displayed in the Print and Picture Collection Hallway Gallery on the library's second floor, gathers an extensive group of watercolors and prints by Kollner that were given to the library by William Logan Fox in 1946 in memory of his father, J.M. Fox, who had collected them.

Here are such familiar views as that of the Schuylkill as seen from the east with the Girard Street Bridge in the near distance (in 1844, before Kelly/East River Drive existed); a warehouse on Darby Creek and the Fairmount Water Works, both from 1888; and a steep incline on Manayunk's Tower Street as seen in 1896.

I assumed a view titled *Near Gray's Ferry, Phila., The Hamilton Mansion*, painted in 1879, must be the house and estate of William Hamilton, which became the Woodlands Cemetery in 1840, but it looks so entirely different today I wondered whether Kollner had painted the house from the back. *At Germantown, Phila.*, a watercolor painted in October 1884, shows a stately house at 4811 Germantown Ave. that's still standing - I stopped to stare on my way home from the show - but its once-rural surroundings are long gone. Kollner's paintings are sublimely beautiful, as was much of Philadelphia in his day.

History detectives are invited to find and photograph Kollner's scenes and post them to Facebook or Instagram tagged #KollnerThenAndNow. Follow the Print and Picture Collection on Facebook and Instagram, which is posting the results as they come in (don't bother with 4811 Germantown Ave. and Tower Street - they've already been posted).

Backward glances

Two summer group shows are tinged with nostalgia, too.

Ginny Kollak, curator of exhibitions for the Berman Museum of Art at Ursinus College, has concocted the lovely "Wayfarers," featuring paintings and sculpture that have a definite Ray-Ban, Coppertone, saltwater-taffy vibe.

Cynthia Dagnault's series of circular oil paintings capturing the changing sky over Marfa, Texas, makes one think of the sculptures by the town's most famous former resident, Donald Judd (simultaneously gorgeous and orderly), while Miles Debas' gestural oil paintings play off Rousseau and Dali.

Evan Roberts' sculptures derive their materials and their look from everyday stuff you might find at the Home Depot or Lowe's - mirrors, hoses, chain-link fence, and the like - and then, with some humor, attempt to defy any useful function.

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Huge paintings are always exhilarating, but Alex Echevarria's *Life's a Beach* is a funny, modest work that makes me think of early David Hockney. A wild, painterly, but sharply circumscribed "ocean" meets sand (ungessoed canvas), which meets a striped beach towel with a book and a New Yorker magazine on it.

Gareth Long's lenticular print *Untitled (Les)*, of bars of Lifesavers colors on a white background that appear to move as you walk by, also channels Donald Judd.

Laurel Sparks catches the ephemeral nature of summer in her glittery, pastel paintings incorporating jingle bells and rhinestones, as does painter Dona Nelson, in a very different manner, with her large, freestanding *New Jersey Sunset*, a riot of oranges, from 2003 - and a terrific addition to this show.

James Oliver Gallery has its most polished show to date. If you can stand to walk the four flights of stairs on a hot day - hey, it could substitute for that nasty aerobics class or, worse, weeding - you'll be amply rewarded by "Pivotal," vivid color photographs by Nadine Rovner, Mark Havens (featured in the New York Times "T" Magazine in July), and Martin Buday.

Rovner is showing her latest lush images of teenage and 20s angst, informed by filmmakers like Douglas Sirk. Mark Havens is represented by his romantic color photographs of the 1950s and '60s architecture common to Wildwood, Buday by his cheerful pictures of everyday oddities reminiscent of William Eggleston.