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Doug Norris  
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## Review: Picking out a cornucopia of gallery highlights this fall

By Doug Norris/Features Editor Independent

A new installation at the University of Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay Campus, portraits of Cold War Afghanistan and an eclectic sampling from Hera Gallery artists on the road in Providence are among the exhibitions worth a scenic drive this fall ...

We begin on the bay, where URI's Graduate School of Oceanography looms above the shoreline in a collection of disparate buildings and research laboratories. The university has been seeking more cohesion in its Narragansett Bay Campus landscape, and earlier this year it took a major step in that direction when a public artwork commissioned by the school and the R.I. State Council on the Arts through the Allocation for Art for Public Facilities Act was unveiled in the lobby of the Ocean Science and Exploration Center.

The act recognizes that art in public places creates a more humane environment, and the resulting installation, a stunning sculpture by Cliff Garten titled "Schooling," is a testament to the power of public art to transform settings into distinctive places that foster identity and community, invite reflection and add graceful notes of beauty and aesthetic to otherwise impersonal environments.

"Schooling," a sculptural installation appearing in front of a white wall and cast in LED lighting that gives off a sense of bioluminescence, is an energetic and dynamic work, as well as a sublime marriage of art and place. Suspended by fine aircraft cables at various heights, the sculptor's labor-intensive layered forms repeat, hovering in proximity, becoming a funneled mass of more than 200 individual elements suggestive of a school of fish. The work shimmers and glows in tones ranging from blue to silver, changing in appearance depending on the time of day or night, the quality of the light and the angle at which it is viewed.

Garten, an internationally recognized artist with a reputation for creating evocative site-specific works that integrate man-made landscapes with their surrounding environment, has succeeded here in bridging the nautical focus of the institution that calls the Ocean State its home with the mission of the university in charge of navigating the education of its students.

"Schooling," with its allusion to the habits of both fish and students, is artfully considered and expertly rendered. The ventilated shapes are abstract enough to appear as either fish or vessels (inverted ship hulls). Between the torpedo-shaped pieces of brushed aluminum that make up each individual sculpture are marbles that appear in form and color as pearls, holding it together. Curved cut-outs within each piece give it the quality of semi-transparency; the holes capture the glimmer of the LED lights, evoking the diaphanous quality of marine life. The repetitive nature of the work suggests fleeting movement in a realm of constant motion, and its position aiming at the bay conveys a feeling of eternally forward progress.

Garten's elegant design, an homage to the oceaneering spirit of the state's residents and university, is an inspired and welcome permanent addition to Rhode Island's art landscape. The artist will return to Rhode Island to talk about the sculpture on Wednesday, Oct. 12 at 3:30 p.m. in the Fine Arts Center on the Kingston Campus, followed by a reception at 5 p.m. in the lobby where the sculpture is located, the Ocean Science and Exploration Center on the Narragansett Bay Campus. The event is open to the public.