



- Cover
- News
- Music
- Lazy I
- Film
- Theater
- Art
- Sports
- Lifestyle
- Dish
- Books
- Culture
- 8 Days
- Heartland Healing
- Hoodoo Blues
- MoJoPo
- News of the Weird
- Television
- Letters

**Home - Art**

**Paint the Town**



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**Paint the Town**

Big exhibits and names to look for in Omaha's 2008 art scene by Sarah Baker

As one of the best years in recent Omaha art history comes to a close, the future looks bright. It is impossible to predict what's down the road, but there are some sure bets for 2008. I'll also take a few guesses, for good measure. So first, the sure bets.

Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum opens its requisite blockbuster, *Elegance of the Qing Court: Reflections of a Dynasty through its Art*, in March. The Qing Dynasty began in 1662 and endured more than 250 years. During its heyday, the dynasty possessed technology, art and sophistication beyond imagination. The show includes more than 200 works of porcelain, metal, lacquer, textiles, ivory and jade produced under the supervision of the court and the Imperial workshops. A highlight: An 18th-century, eight-panel, carved, red lacquer screen, recently acquired by Joslyn. It will, for the first time, be placed in context with other Qing Dynasty decorative arts.

Joslyn's second big show of 2008 is its long-touted retrospective of Omaha artist Steve Joy's career. *Steve Joy: Uncreated Light 1980-2007* opens in June and explores Joy's past and present work. He's known for wall pieces using gold leaf, wax, rich color and geometric proportion.

Lincoln's Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery — without director or curator as the new year begins — still has good-looking shows planned. *Art Farm @ Sheldon* opens at the dawn of 2008. It explores art in a rural context. *Art Farm* is a non-profit art residency program situated on a 40-acre working farm in Marquette, Neb. Work in the show includes architectural models, renderings, diagrams and drawings as well as an installation of an old farm building in the Sheldon Great Hall. *Art Farm* repurposed the building into a video lounge with a modern interior. Lectures, performance pieces and panel discussions are scheduled around *Art Farm*.

*Elizabeth King: The Sizes of Things in the Mind's Eye* opens at Sheldon in July. The exhibit is a mid-career retrospective of King's sculptures, films, animations, installations, drawings and photographs. King often combines meticulous figures with stop-frame film animation in installations that blur boundaries between real and make-believe. The work reflects diverse interests: early clockwork automata, the history of the mannequin and the puppet, and a host of literature's legends.

Nebraska native Keith Jacobshagen shows *Journals of the Days* in October. He explores the Midwest's varied landscapes through combinations of small sketches and journal entries about his artistic process.

Another sure crowd-pleaser is *Opera Omaha's* collaboration with Omaha artist Catherine Ferguson on *Aida*. Following in the footsteps of the smash-hit collaboration with Jun Kaneko, *Opera Omaha* commissioned Ferguson to design costumes and sets for its production of the operatic classic. The show debuts in April.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's International Quilt Study Center opens in March. The glass and brick structure, designed by New York's Robert A.M. Stern

Architects, will hold more than 2,300 quilts — the world's largest collections. It's also home to a study center dedicated to the research, preservation and display of quilts created by cultures worldwide. Stay tuned for what is sure to be a grand opening celebration.

Some smaller shows made my list of 2008's big hitters. In April, Hot Shops Arts Center will host the Collaboration of Skateboarders & Artists. It's the curatorial debut for artist William Cody Nolen, who gathered a group of artists interested in a chosen medium and extreme sports.

I'm looking for big things from many new Omaha galleries: Pulp, Paparazzi by Appointment, The Moving Gallery, Dundee Gallery and Nomad Lounge's artist-in-residence program.

The Bemis Underground, now an established art venue, opens its season Feb. 1 with a group show featuring some new faces and some familiar, drawn together by curator Ashley D'Avignon Goodwin. Curators for the rest of the season include Dan Lowe and Monica Yoo, Bryce Speed and Eric Wilson-Lopez, Matthew Carlson and Phillip Faulkner, George Sisson with Jake Gillespie, and Susan White.

It will be interesting to watch what happens upstairs at the Bemis in early 2008, especially with the departure of Assistant Director Jeremy Stern and Communications Coordinator Julie Wright. No 2008 Bemis shows were listed online at the time of publication; stay tuned for updates.

What will the year bring for Omaha transplant Dan Siedell — former Sheldon curator, now a professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha — and Tom Trenelone, local architect and founder of Design Alliance Omaha? Here's hoping Siedell brings his curatorial touch to some collaborations around town, maybe even the Bemis. Trenelone has a culture-filled schedule slated for DaOMA, including a lecture by Thom Mayne in April. My prediction: '08 is DaOMA's year. The city's ready.

Finally, some artists I'll be keeping my eye on: Renee Ledesma Hoover, who showed her strongest work yet at the Paparazzi By Appointment gallery in December; Andrew Hershey, whose work stood out quietly in 2007 in Select Cuts and in the Bemis Auction; Skyelar Hawkins, whose show at the Moving Gallery was innovative and creative; and Leslie Iwai, whose Nebraska Now! show at Kearney's Museum of Nebraska Art later this year looks to be challenging and thought-provoking. But enough with predictions. It's the surprises I look forward to anyway. Happy 2008 art lovers.

04 Jan 2008

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