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Seven Museums, Each Offering a Deadly Sin

By SUSAN HODARA

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In one of her poems, Emily Dickinson called sin “a distinguished precipice.” With a coming group of art exhibitions, museumgoers can stand on that precipice and look all the way down.

In an unusual collaborative endeavor, seven cultural institutions in New York State and Connecticut are planning coordinated shows, each addressing one of the seven deadly sins. Visitors can explore the transgressions in works ranging from Old Master paintings and prints to contemporary site-specific installations.

The series, titled “The Seven Deadly Sins,” is the first joint programming effort by the Fairfield/Westchester Museum Alliance, a consortium of eight institutions established in 2009 to share resources. Alliance members participating in “The Seven Deadly Sins” are the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, the Bruce Museum, the Hudson River Museum, the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, the Katonah Museum of Art, the Neuberger Museum of Art and Wave Hill. (The eighth institution, the Barnum Museum, is closed for renovation.)

For the public, the Alliance makes immersion in sin a bargain. Members of any Alliance museum receive free admission to the other museums, and nonmember visitors who buy



“Sweet Reflections” (1886), Gabriel Schachinger, oil on canvas, from the Woodmere Art Museum, bequest of Charles Knox Smith. Credit Rick Echelmeyer

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admission to one Alliance museum can download a pass for free entry to the other museums on the same day.

So what's in store? For now, only one of the sin shows is open. "7 Deadly Sins: Lust" is upstairs at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, its overt contents foreshadowed by a warning that no one under 18 is permitted inside. Curated by Livia Strauss, the museum's co-founder and director, "Lust" features painting, photography, sculpture, installation and video by 13 artists including Catherine Opie, Cindy Sherman and Bruce Nauman. All manner of sexual desire is on display. Some pieces are disturbing, like Amy Bennett's "Doubling Over," a tiny painting of what appears to be a violent encounter on a bed. Others are irresistibly funny, among them George Condo's canvas "Little Joe," in which a devilish-looking naked man is unabashedly aroused.

"Lust" is a small show; downstairs, the galleries are filled with "Love: The First of the 7 Virtues," a companion exhibition that greets museumgoers with Robert Indiana's iconic sculpture "Love." The show considers multiple angles of the emotion while simultaneously suggesting its permeable border with lust.



"Yes to All" (2004), Sylvie Fleury, gold-plated trash can. Credit Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech Gallery

The other sin exhibitions will open in June and July. At the Hudson River Museum, the multimedia artist Adrien Broom is delving into envy. In her multifaceted installation, a "Web of Envy" will ensnare symbols of the sin familiar from fairy tales, like Snow White's poisoned apple. Photographic portraits will portray envious storybook characters, and eight-square-foot "Storytelling in a Box" sets will hold re-creations of envy-based scenarios.

The Bruce is opting for a historical perspective of its sin. "The Seven Deadly Sins: Pride" will present artwork spanning five centuries by artists including Albrecht Dürer, Honoré Daumier and Paul Cadmus. Rare books, master prints, paintings, drawings and a peacock made with fake fingernails, false eyelashes and Swarovski crystals will offer a gamut of interpretations of hubris, vanity and arrogance.

At the Neuberger, guests will find, among other objects, a gold-plated shovel, a gold-leafed McDonald's cup and a 19th-century chaise covered in gold lamé. They are part of the exhibition "Greed: GOLD," originally assembled as "GOLD" by the Bass Museum of Art in Miami. The show displays works by 21 contemporary artists: sculptures, prints, installations and video that are either about gold or made with gold.

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Farther north, the Katonah Museum will be tackling gluttony with “Emilie Clark: The Delicacy of Decomposition,” an installation that comments on consumption and decay. It will contain an arrangement of Ms. Clark’s family’s preserved food waste, delicate watercolors that echo the moldering fare and an interactive “Research Station” equipped with a microscope, drawing pad, and jarred and stuffed specimens.

As a public garden with an eye to nature, Wave Hill will illuminate the sin of wrath with an exhibition investigating climate change and natural disasters. “Wrath — Force of Nature” will include selections by 12 contemporary artists, many of them painters, whose work depicts tsunamis, floods, rising sea levels and other ramifications of an endangered earth.



“Emilie Clark: The Delicacy of Decomposition” (installation elements, 2015), Emilie Clark. Credit Anna Beeke

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“Sloth,” (installation element, 2015), Mats Bigert and Sina Najafi. Credit Mats Bigert and Sina Najafi

Rather than a thematic display, the Aldrich’s contribution is a cheeky concept that will enable visitors to experience firsthand the sin of sloth. Mats Bigert, of the Swedish artist duo Bigert & Bergström, and Sina Najafi, editor in chief of Cabinet magazine, are collaborating on a multi-channel video installation so guests need not travel to the other museums. Instead they will be able to laze on Bob-O-Pedic recliners at the Aldrich and see the other exhibitions on monitors there. Besides the shows, each museum will host a Sinful Weekend of programming. In addition, the Alliance is partnering with another institution, the Jacob Burns Film Center. The center has organized “Deadly SINema,” a weeklong series of seven sin-infused films. Several screenings will be followed by discussions with artists and curators from “The Seven Deadly Sins.”

Does this predominance of sin mirror greater immorality in society today? Bartholomew Bland, deputy director of the Hudson River Museum, doesn’t think so. Mr. Bland’s longstanding fascination with the idea of sin was the seed for the collaboration. “Sin isn’t more prevalent,” he said. “We’re just more accepting of it. It’s more explicit, more visible, more in your face.”