The Word Barn
Exeter, NH
thewordbarn.com

The Word Barn is nothing short of an idyllic New England setting. Run by Ben Anderson and his wife Sarah Alcott Anderson, the couple dreamed up a live-work scenario fit for a modern-day Robert Frost. For Sarah, a poet and teacher, and Ben, a concert promoter, the property is a fusion of both of their talents, woodsmithing and music fanaticism, making The Word Barn’s venue for musicians and authors alike. When the couple isn’t hosting live shows, they provide nature programming, host writing workshops, harvest honey, raise chickens, and rent the space for corporate retreats. Attached to the property is also an apartment that serves as an Airbnb.

The Word Barn was hard hit during the pandemic yet Ben and Sarah quickly transformed their locale into a virtual destination and created a series of online workshops and music residencies. With the warmer weather last year, they began hosting outdoor events on a piece of their property they now call The Meadow. According to Ben, the response was overwhelming, and a strong indication of community support. Live music under a starry night with the occasional surprise visit by a food truck—summer bliss. Who knew this place could become even more magical?

Watch for The Word Barn’s continuing outdoor concert series and Sarah’s long-awaited book of poems called We Hold in to What We Can, published by Loon Press. — Jennifer Manasso

Between Worlds: Delia Martin at the Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center
Brattleboro, VT
Through May 2022
brattleboromouseum.org

Sometimes there is so much joy it cannot be contained within a space or hung on a wall. The Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center (BMAC) has installed acclaimed artist Delia Martin’s Between Worlds on the outside of BMAC—glowing digital reproductions in the large window bays across the front and side of the museum. Each piece, on average, is about 6 x 5.5 feet. I encountered the panels for the first time while running an errand. Initially rushing to my destination, the panels caught me by surprise, inspiring me to turn the car around and go meet them.

In some ways, it’s not fair to call this an exhibition or installation, it’s an experience. Whether you’re walking around downtown Brattleboro or driving by, the Black girls within these large panels invite and demand a moment of pause, contemplation, and joy.

In addition to the vibrant oranges and blues within the pattern of Wild Pansy, the energetic geometrics in Star Children, or the interplay of color and soulful gaze in Soul Mate, something else surfaces for the viewer. Martin’s Black girls engage you directly in a way that carries forth the question, “Are you the viewer or are you being viewed?” And so the dialogue begins.

For Martin’s work—which is focused on correcting the ways that Black girls and women have been historically marginalized—this question is key and shifts the power dynamic. It’s also clear that these figures unapologetically take space, inviting the viewer to stop and engage with this experience of seeing and being seen. As a Black woman within this time when there are many moments of national tragedy and repetitive trauma, standing on the lawn at BMAC, as I have at different moments, experiencing Between Worlds felt like receiving permission to experience joy. It was also an emotional moment and an answer to a question that I have been asking myself of late, “What does it mean to matter as a Black woman in America?” It means streets marked with “Black Lives Matter” within a system that has not yet caught up with the meaning of those words, and yet the murals speak to the power of art to heal, soothe, and spark joy within and outside ourselves.

Each viewer will be impacted by the experience of being with this art in open space. You’ll be present on the lawn in front of the BMAC yet also transported, emotionally and intellectually, by these vivacious women. What will you discover between these worlds? — Shanta Lee Gander

Beyond Function: Eben Blaney
at Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens
Boothbay, ME
July 14-October 17
mainegardens.org

Eben Blaney is a master in the medium of wood. Contemporary in style, with a distinct nod towards the mid-century modern...