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EXPLORING THE CURRIER INSIDE OUT: ANDREW WITKIN, AMONG OTHERS

Currier Museum of Art • Manchester, NH • currier.org • Through May 11, 2014

In approaching Andrew Witkin's huge installation at the Currier Museum, everyone wants to know, where's the beginning? The exhibition runs throughout the museum—extending through all three levels. There's no beginning, no end. It's one of the ways Witkin defies museum conventions.

In the entry gallery, visitors find a birch ladder (designed by Witkin) exhibited with a historic birch Shaker rocker, a maple highboy (dug out of storage), and three holes cut into the gallery's walls. Though puzzling, an observant viewer soon will notice a pattern. The rectangular shapes in the slatted-back rocker repeat those formed by the highboy's drawers, slats in the ladder, and even holes in the plaster. Though visitors expect art to be categorized by artist, period, medium, or aesthetics, here it is organized by shape. Witkin asks, isn't this as valid as any other curatorial decision?

Throughout the museum, the artist questions: What makes one object more important than another? What's inside this work that we can't see? How do curatorial decisions affect the

public's opinion and the way they look at art? In the Henry and Hylda Silver Gallery—in the museum's old section built with arches and columns to resemble a Renaissance palazzo—Witkin moved in a dozen or so plywood chairs created by New Hampshire furniture master Tom McLaughlin. The chairs sit snugly next to one another, imitating the closeness of the salon-style hanging of the paintings.

At first, the chairs look identical. Then the observant visitor sees differences. Some chair backs are aligned left, some right, some centered. Witkin reminds us that individuality exists within a cohesive group, as with the paintings on the wall. While some of the chairs face the paintings, others face the corridors or the atrium. Where one looks, and what one decides to be art—paintings or architecture—is ultimately conditioned by personal preference.

This ambitious project began more than two years ago, when Nina Bozicnik, the



Currier Museum of Art second-floor American gallery with plywood furniture designed by Witkin and New Hampshire furniture master, Tom McLaughlin, and based on Currier collection objects, 2014. Courtesy of the Currier Museum of Art.

Currier's then curator, invited Witkin to dig through museum archives and come up with a project. The artist emerged with this multifaceted, collaborative installation that not only acknowledges the museum's behind-the-scenes complexities, but challenges curators, museum administrators, and visitors to look closely, to think differently.

—Debbie Hagan