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Peep Show

For 10 years, the Racine Art Museum has been putting on a sweet annual exhibition.

By **LINDSEY ANDERSON**





The 2018 International Peeps Art Exhibition featured 126 entries. Right: Peppy the Peep Flamingo, by Diane Kamm of Mount Pleasant.

They don't melt in acid. They're impervious to boiling water. And even if you drop them in a vat of phenol – a protein-eating chemical lethal to humans in small doses – their waxy eyes still float to the top of the solution like buoys bobbing in an ocean of technicolor goo. Peeps are nearly indestructible.

For the last 10 years, the Racine Art Museum has been encouraging artists to take advantage of that fact by incorporating the marshmallow chicks and bunnies into saccharine sculptures and dioramas. Every April they display the results, and award prizes to some of their favorites, at an annual International Peeps Art Exhibition.

About 60 people, (sorry, *peeps*) submitted artworks made out of or depicting Peeps for the exhibition's inaugural run. And organizers expect to see around 130 submissions for the exhibition this year, which runs from April 11-28.

"The show has always been popular with audiences," says Jessica Zalewski, the RAM's marketing and publications manager. "It typically accounts for about 8-10 percent of our total annual attendance. And we're hoping that this will be our biggest show yet."

How did they come up with the idea? "We were having another one of those

World Peeps

IN 1953, when Pennsylvania candy confectioner Sam Born and his employees began manufacturing Peeps, it took them 27 hours to create one. Now it takes just six minutes, and they produce enough each year to circle the globe, twice.

hideous winters," says Lisa Englander, who oversees the RAM's guest experience and retail division. "It was cold and gray, and we thought that we should do something to cheer people up. I called the company that makes Peeps, and they said that they released them around Valentine's Day."

Englander figured that ambitious artists who wanted to stock up on Peeps in February would still have plenty of time to turn them into marshmallow-y masterpieces by April.

She and her colleagues experimented with their own creations before announcing the show. "We would never ask the public to do anything we wouldn't do ourselves," she says. "But they're not easy to work with – they dry out quickly. Some people prefer letting them get really hard so that they can drill into them."

Others prefer to use more conventional materials to depict the candy chicks. One such artist is Nick Schroeder, who began taking classes at Cream City Clay after retiring two and a half years ago. He entered the exhibition for

the first time last year and estimates that he spent about 20 to 25 hours on his submission – a ceramic sculpture depicting Peeps lined up in front of a target reminiscent of a Jasper Johns creation. The result, *Pop Art Peeps*, won him a second-place prize, and he's hoping to wow the judges again this year.

"I can't say exactly what I'm doing yet," he says. "But I was at the RAM over the summer, and I found something in their permanent collection that inspired me. The museum is an incredible resource." ●

A PARTIAL LIST OF THE PUN-TASTIC TITLES AT THE 2018 SHOW: *Jurassic Peep*, by Alexandros Tsioutsopoulos and Aden Weisser • *Two Peeps in a Pod*, by Diane Clark • *Let My Peeps Go*, by Marc Wollman • *Pass the Peeper*, by Sharon Nyman • *We Come in Peeps*, by Jolie Collins