

**EXPERIMENTAL**

# The Buzz

An Invitation to a Conversation

Issue 44, January 26, 2018, Rockland, Maine



**WRFR**



## Arts Capital of Maine: Who Do You Serve?

By **Becca Shaw Glaser**

In the 22 years since I got my first driver's license, I've lived in Maine, Illinois, Ohio, Vermont, Missouri, California, Oregon, and, for nearly ten years, New York State. In all this time, in all these places, I didn't encounter a single issue resulting from keeping my driver's license registered in Camden, Maine.

Until I moved back home to Rockland last year and tried to get into the



Farnsworth. On both occasions, my companion and I were met with what felt like suspicion when we said we lived in Rockland. We were told we needed hard evidence to prove our Rockland residency, which permits free entrance to the museum.

I asked, "Isn't it enough to say our street addresses?" It was not. After searching in vain to try to find leases and mortgages in our phones, after stating our addresses, and me making a bit of a fuss, we were begrudgingly "permitted" entrance, with the exhortation that I had better get my license changed to prove I lived in Rockland, for next time.

Now, I'm a white, (mostly) straight, class-privileged, entitled and empowered, able-bodied, (semi!) well-kempt, English-as-a-first-language-speaking person who grew up here. Yet I was received with suspicion by a gatekeeper of art.

What type of reception might someone without my privileges be given?

And would that Rockland resident, like me, have insisted they be allowed in? What about the many people who, for any number of reasons, don't have the proper hard evidence—such as teenagers, or people who are technically homeless yet staying locally with friends or relatives? Would they be turned away? Would they ever return?

It's great that the Farnsworth gives free admission to Rockland residents—but I would love to see the policy updated so that locals are greeted with implicit trust.

Let me be clear. This issue is much bigger than the Farnsworth. Rockland is at a pivotal moment of impending escalating gentrification—the process by which poorer people who have lived here a long time will be pushed out by richer people. The arts institutions and artists (like myself) are often at the forefront of the gentrification process, intentionally or not. Therefore, each local arts organization—the galleries, museums, and other institutions—must make a choice. Do they cater primarily to tourists, people with second homes, people with money, or will they commit to fully engaging with the local community as we work to address wealth inequality and trauma?

In the same community which is being ravaged by addiction, with many children living in poverty, in which on any given night people are looking for a safe place to sleep, and in which the AIO food pantry is seeing 50 people per morning, someone can cross the street from the Farnsworth to the Dowling-Walsh Gallery and buy a \$400,000 painting. This is not just an arts problem, but one of capitalism. Still, each arts institution needs to consider the role it will play in relationship to gentrification.

We need our local organizations, art-based and not, to spend more time on local community building, on addressing the class divide, on working in solidarity (rather than "charity") with people who are struggling to eat, or dealing with substance abuse disorders, domestic violence, sexual assault, and other traumas and forms of oppression in our community. They can do this by having sliding scale options, by having community forums for people to talk about what they would like the organizations to do and be, and by making sure they are consistently asking themselves the questions: who do we serve? Who do we work with? Whose views are represented here, and whose are not? How do we work with the community to improve it, both by inviting in more diversity, and including those who live here, at the very heart of our organization?

**Becca will join us on the Rockland Metro show at 5:00 pm Wednesday** to talk about art and gentrification in Rockland (among other things.) You are invited to join us by tuning in to **WRFR at 93.3 fm in Rockland, 99.3 fm in Camden, WRFR.org, or Maine Coast Television.** You are also invited to **join us in our Gay Street studio** for the on-air conversation, and to stay for (or come for) a pot-luck dinner symposium afterwards. For reservations, contact Robert Lichtman.

### Your ad could go here for just \$12.

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No pay, but it's fun.

To join the Buzz team, call Joe at 596-0731.

## Buzz Us!

Around Town listings, contact:

Robert Lichtman: 701-5164,  
robert@thebuzz.me

Writers, artists, &c. contact:

Joe Steinberger: 596-0731,  
joe@interhuman.org

For ad sales (& a chuckle) contact:

Chuck Gifford: 975-2088, gowrfr@gmail.com