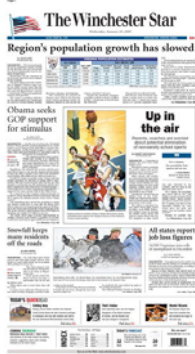


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# 'Garnet Jex: Harpers Ferry Landscapes' opens at MSV

By Val Van Meter  
*The Winchester Star*

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WINCHESTER — "I can't think of another collection of paintings that is quite like this one of a town."

Corwyn Garman, exhibitions manager for the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, sees Garnet Jex's years of painting Harpers Ferry, W.Va. as a treasure for both the town and the Shenandoah Valley.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, this Washington, D.C. artist made many trips to the West Virginia town on its rocky outcrop where the Shenandoah empties into the Potomac River.

In the early 1960s, Jex gave 17 of his works to the community at Harpers Ferry. Those pictures and one more of his works, will be the next exhibit at the MSV's Changing Gallery, beginning Friday and extending to May 4.

To complement "Garnet Jex: Harpers Ferry Landscapes," the museum will offer two special programs.

Its Galleries at Night event will present a lecture by consulting Conservator of Fine Arts Amy Fernandez Byrne from 7 to 9 p.m. April 11. She will talk about the conservation treatment given to the Jex paintings to ready them for the exhibit. Garman said this is the first time the group of paintings has been exhibited outside Harpers Ferry.

On April 20, Geraldine W. Kiefer, assistant professor of art history and art at Shenandoah University, will present a lecture at 2 p.m. on "Harpers Ferry, American Sublime: The Art and the Place."

Her talk will cover how this town was depicted in American and European landscape art between 1840 and 1940.

She has created this presentation in collaboration with students in her History of Photography class at SU.

Jex's paintings, said Garman, take you back in time to Harpers Ferry at the end of its life as an industrial site, prior to its becoming a tourist destination.

"It was an early American industrial site," said Garman, who spent many hours in the town, researching the places Jex painted. In 1859, it was the military army at Harpers Ferry that attracted John Brown to stage his famous raid.

Jex (1895-1979) lived and worked in metropolitan Washington, D.C. and supported his family as a professional artist. During his career, he served as the staff artist for both the Army Medical Museum and Nature Magazine.

Garman has one of his Nature covers, of a Triceratops dinosaur, in the exhibit.

Jex's painted landscapes for his own enjoyment, but he put his own spin on that usually bucolic genre.

"He loved capturing industry," said Garman, who pointed to smoking stacks of a smelting operation and the steam funneling from a train at the old station.

Jex's style is an interesting transition, Garman added.

"He uses modern colors and impressionist technique." There is something about Jex's paintings that "strikes you as being classic," he said.

Jex was part of a group of "plein air" artists who preferred to paint from nature, outdoors, who formed the Landscape Club. They must have been adventurous souls, Garman said.

He points to one of a series of winter scenes, from the famous "Jefferson Rock," where the rock and everything else is covered with snow.

"No fences," Garman points out, as there are today to keep folks from falling off Jefferson's



Jillian Lichliter, education assistant at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, checks the light on one of Garnet Jex's works while exhibitions manager, Corwyn Garman, adjusts it for the opening this weekend. (Rick Foster)

### Events Calendar

January 2009						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

### Upcoming Events

- 1/28 [FCALL Registration](#)
- 1/31 [Powhatan School Camp Fair](#)
- 1/31 [Super Saturday](#)
- 1/31 [Travel Soccer Tryouts](#)
- 1/31 [Winter Carnival](#)

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Rock. "They liked to go off to extreme places."

The exhibit includes Jex's description of driving to Harpers Ferry in 1928, which was an adventure in itself.

As part of readying the exhibit, Garman went to every spot Jex depicted in these paintings. Some of the buildings are gone, but many remain.

Garman also enjoys the "characters" Jex includes in his landscapes, like children and chickens and horse drawn carts.

"It gives you the intimacy of photography," he noted.

Education Assistant Jillian Lichliter, who helped research and hang the exhibit, is impressed with the way Jex leads you into and through his paintings. A line of smoke from the chimneys of houses draws the eye into the center of the painting where the broad Potomac carries the viewer up and on.

"There isn't a lot of scholarship on Jex," said Garman. "There aren't stacks of books."

But, he said, this lesser known American Impressionist is gaining a fan base.

"One of his paintings of Waterford recently sold for \$25,000."

And, touring the Changing Exhibit Gallery, watching Harpers Ferry move from spring to summer, fall and winter, from Shenandoah Street to High Street, Garman guarantees, "If you are not familiar with the town, you will be when you're through."

The Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, including its Glen Burnie Historic House and Gardens, is at 901 Amherst St. in Winchester. It is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday, with 11 gallery rooms, a Tea Room, and a museum store. Admission is free to members.

For non-members, the adult combination ticket to visit the house, gardens and museum is \$12: senior and youth combination tickets are \$10. Gallery admission only is \$8 for adults and \$6 for seniors and students. The museum galleries are open free of charge on Wednesday mornings from 10 a.m. to noon.

For information, call 888-556-5799 (toll free) or visit [www.shenandoahmuseum.org](http://www.shenandoahmuseum.org).

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