Because the Sky is Blue
October 2, 2026 – January 17, 2027
Opening Reception: October 2nd, 4 – 7 pm

Clémentine Adou, Wilfrid Almendra, Bo Bartlett, Vija Celmins, Selena Kimball, Ryosuke Kumakura, Glenn Ligon, Sharon Lockhart, Matthew Metzger, Julie Poitras Santos, Miao Wang

Rockland, ME – The Center for Maine Contemporary Art (CMCA) is thrilled to announce *Because the Sky is Blue*, a rich examination of critical histories of painting and the status of painting as a critical practice in our present moment. Setting works by well-known artists strongly associated with Maine alongside a mix of fresh voices from outside the region, it reflects CMCA's renewed commitment to advancing and enriching artistic discourse through ambitious thematic exhibitions. Organized by CMCA Curator Grant Wahlquist and accompanied by an illustrated publication, the exhibition runs from October 2, 2026 – January 17, 2027.

"This is an exhibition of paintings that do many things at once," explains the exhibition's curator, Grant Wahlquist. "Many of them are monochromes, or at least they seem to be at first. Look closer, and these paintings may tell you they are also many other things: skyscapes, windows, screens. Other paintings resemble *trompe l'œil*, but nonetheless have much to say about abstraction, framing, and other modernist concerns. This is also an exhibition of sculptures, prints, collages, and a film that nonetheless trespass on painting, and may in fact *be* paintings when viewed from the right perspective. The formal complexity of these artworks—the way in which they inhabit multiple histories of painting, multiple media, multiple genres—mirrors their roots in psychological and political difficulty. These artworks hold diverse, sometimes conflicting emotions, and ask us to look closely and long enough to bear witness to their affective intricacy."

The exhibition's catalyst is painter **Bo Bartlett**'s "Blue Sky Paintings," which the artist began following the events of September 11, 2001. Generally painted in a single day and looking only in one direction, these are representational paintings with no subject. With careful attention what appear at a distance to be monochrome or color field paintings reveal themselves to be attempts to accurately portray the color and conditions of the sky. Consistent with the artist's usual approach, they are set in gold-leafed frames, which given their subject matter recall windows and suggest the art historical tradition of *trompe-l'œil*.

In CMCA's largest gallery, Bartlett's paintings will be set alongside a suite of works on canvas by **Sharon Lockhart** that hover between photography and painting. Lockhart experimented with the early photographic process of cyanotype to create works in which many hours of diffuse sunlight create an intense experience of darkness. Nearby, **Selena Kimball** presents an installation of her ongoing project "Atlas of Air," a series of

collages of the “empty” spaces of air and sky in images from the cover of the New York Times (often of drought, fire, and other catastrophes). Also nearby, **Miao Wang** presents a new installation of multiple sheets of synthetic paper to which repeated applications of thin washes of pigment have been applied. The cumulative effect of repeated engagement with each sheet poetically and conceptually expresses the ways in which the passage of time marks our memories and bodies.

The center of CMCA’s largest gallery will feature a new installation by **Wilfrid Almendra**, generously supported by an Etant donnés award, a program of Albertine Foundation and Villa Albertine. “We are so grateful for this support,” explains Wahlquist. “The program’s mission of strengthening ties between France and the U.S. in the field of contemporary art is dear to my heart. Moreover, we believe it is essential that Maine’s artists be exposed to and contextualized by international practices, and thanks to Albertine Foundation and Villa Albertine we can do that in this exhibition.” Almendra’s installation, composed of cathedral glass, dried flowers, and other materials will be accompanied by additional sculptures, all of which demonstrate the artist’s commitment to exploring the poetry of everyday objects, vernacular architecture, and the dream of working-class comfort.

CMCA’s Bruce Brown Gallery will feature three paintings by **Matthew Metzger**, including two works from his series “On Holiday,” which questions the politics of “covering” in both music and painting through images of gardenia blossoms (an iconic adornment worn by Billie Holiday). Metzger’s work will be joined by a new work from **Glenn Ligon’s** series “Blue (for JB),” which builds on his paintings of excerpts from James Baldwin’s essay “Stranger in the Village” and reflects the artist’s longstanding interest not only in Baldwin’s text but also in citation, legibility, and abstraction. Three “Black Screens” by **Clémentine Adou** repurpose and transform flat screen TV cardboard packages through a repetitive process of applying black-tinted varnish, almost-but-not-quite erasing the landscapes, portraits, and other images advertising the products within. The sky features in three ravishing mezzotints of stars in the night sky by **Vija Celmins**, and two “Night Windows” by **Ryosuke Kumakura**.

Finally, CMCA’s Guy D. Hughes gallery will feature Lockhart’s *EVENTIDE*, a meditative single-shot film set on the coast of Gotland, Sweden. In the film, a series of six people gradually enter the frame one by one, searching the shoreline for something unknown with the aid of handheld lights. Their seemingly solitary movements occur as early evening turns to night. Filmed during the Perseid meteor shower, stars emerge and the occasional satellite streaks across the sky. Lockhart’s film is accompanied by a site-specific mural in CMCA’s Marilyn Moss Rockefeller Lobby by **Julie Poitras Santos**, a selection from a larger poetic text reflecting on the loss of a beloved mentor.

“This is an exhibition about the state of contemporary painting and the status of painting as a critical and conceptual practice,” concludes Wahlquist. “It is also an exhibition about something older than art itself: the sky. Omnipresent, unremarkable, potent, sublime, divine, and occasionally frightening, for thousands of years artists have turned their eyes upwards, searched for something, and transformed that experience into art. This is an exhibition about what happens because the sky is blue.”

Artists

Clémentine Adou (Paris, France)
Wilfrid Almendra (Marseille, France)
Bo Bartlett (Columbus, Georgia and Wheaton Island, Maine)
Vija Celmins (New York, New York)
Selena Kimball (New York, New York and Brooksville, Maine)
Ryosuke Kumakura (Rockport, Maine)
Glenn Ligon (New York, New York)
Sharon Lockhart (Los Angeles, California)
Matthew Metzger (Chicago, Illinois)
Julie Poitras Santos (Portland, Maine)
Miao Wang (Chicago, Illinois)

Acknowledgments

Because the Sky is Blue is supported by the Roxanne Quimby Foundation, the Susanne Marcus Collins Foundation, Harriet F. Hubbard, generous donors to CMCA’s Suzette McAvoy Exhibition Fund, and Etant donnés, a program of Albertine Foundation and Villa Albertine. The exhibition’s catalogue is supported by the Dorothea and Leo Rabkin Foundation.

Villa Albertine | AMBASSADE DE FRANCE AUX ÉTATS-UNIS
Liberté Égalité Fraternité

Exhibition Related Programs

Because the Sky is Blue will be accompanied by a robust group of public programs presented by Grant Wahlquist and CMCA’s Director of Education Rori Smith, including artists talks and workshops for children and adults. CMCA will also co-present a series of related screenings in partnership with Rockland’s Strand Theatre. Programming schedules will be announced at a later date.



Bo Bartlett
Blue Sky, September 11, 2012, Wheaton Island, Maine, 2012
Oil on panel, framed
18 x 18 inches (unframed); 25 x 25 inches (framed)
Courtesy of the artist and the Bo Bartlett Center, Columbus, Georgia

About CMCA | cmcanow.org

Located in downtown Rockland, Maine, CMCA is a contemporary arts institution presenting year-round exhibitions and educational programs for all ages.

- Location: 21 Winter Street, Rockland, ME, 04841.
- Winter Hours (Nov. 1 – May 24): Wednesday - Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm, Sunday 12 to 5 pm.
- Summer Hours (May 26 – Oct. 31): Monday - Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm; Sunday 12 to 5 pm.
- Closed Federal holidays.

Admission is $10; seniors 65+ and students with ID are $8; children under 18 are free; CMCA members are free. For more information, please contact Grant Wahlquist (gwahlquist@cmcanow.org, 207.245.5732).