

507 EVENTS ENTERTAINMENT

Greg Miller works with cast members of the Rochester Civic Theatre production of "Almost, Maine" on the set.
Ken Klotzbach Post-Bulletin



'Maine' play is 'Almost' like Minnesota

IF YOU GO

BY TOM WEBER
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What "Almost, Maine"

When Feb. 5 through Feb. 21; 7 p.m. Feb. 5 and 6, Feb. 11-13, Feb. 19-20, and 2 p.m. Feb. 21

Where Rochester Civic Theatre, 20 Civic Center Drive SE

Tickets \$24 adults, \$19 senior citizens, \$17 students; 507-282-8481

at the same exact time," Miller said. "All the scenes add up to love."

It's a **comedy with a twist**. "You laugh, you laugh, you laugh, and then you're touched or saddened by what happens," Miller said.

The large cast includes a number of RCT regulars, as well as a handful of newcomers. "When we sat down to read auditions," Miller said, "I thought, 'This is a **who's who of theater performers** in Rochester.' There are a lot of big names in there."

Included in the cast are **Sean Lundberg, Kayley Dahle, Katie Hawley, Amanda Ruggeri, Denise Ruemping, Mallory McKay, Angus Russell** and others who will be familiar to RCT audiences.

Given the many scenes, there are numerous set changes. "We're hope to make them quick enough, because this is a show that flows," Miller said. "But we also want to leave time for reflection."

Speaking of reflections, the residents of Almost, Maine, enjoy looking at the northern lights on winter nights — something we rarely see here in southern Minnesota.

"The only way to see the northern lights is to come to the play," Miller said.

Other than that, he described the sets using words such as "snow," "desolate" and "barren" — words with which most Minnesotans can certainly identify at this time of year.

Artists deliver a wake-up call

Rochester Art Center exhibit combines art, questions about social injustice

BY RYAN STOTTS
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Amanda Curreri thought the space was lovely. "To have the work get to have more air," she said.

It was her work she was referring to — the **first big, five-gallery show** the mixed-media artist from Cincinnati, Ohio, has had.

It took a team of support, she said, to make the experience happen. Inspired by a quote from **Emily Dickinson's** poetry ("The calmest of us would be lunatics"), the large scope, and space, was intended to inspire conversation; it allowed the people and the works to "talk."

"It really describes, I think, a feeling I get when I encounter **social injustice**," Curreri said of the quote.

“A lot of us grew up learning about these artists, this collective group action, and we all wanted to be Guerrilla Girls ...”

— Megan Johnston, Rochester Arts Center executive director

Going gorilla

She's not alone. Hundreds of people filled the art center, many from the community, but some from as far away as Fargo, N.D.; a busload from the Twin Cities came, too. And, most noticeably, a few women wearing **gorilla masks**.

The **Guerrilla Girls Twin Cities Take-over**, running through March, will include more than 30 arts and cultural organizations in the Twin Cities and surrounding cities. While it celebrates the Guerrilla Girls' 30th anniversary as an "activist art collective," it made its way to Rochester on Jan. 22. The project will include free exhibition openings and youth-oriented events at the **Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Minnesota Museum of American Art, Rochester Art Center** and **Walker Art Center**.

The tie-in was, in large part, due to the arts center's new executive director, **Megan Johnston**, who has a long history with the Guerrilla Girls, starting with a 2008 exhibition she helped organize as a curator in Portadown, Ireland.

"A lot of us grew up learning about these artists, this collective group action, and we all wanted to be Guerrilla Girls or we wanted to act like Guerrilla Girls," she said. "When I found out that the Guerrilla Girls were still around, I thought, 'I'm just going to go for it.' I emailed them and just said, 'Would you be willing to come to Ireland?'"

She staged an event with "the girls" again, albeit differently, in the Twin Cities in 2014. She wanted to change the way art institutes function, she said, how they collaborate and support one another. Not just a show, not just an intervention, but a non-hierarchical way of working.



Andrew Link / Post-Bulletin

Guerrilla Girls, using pseudo names **Kathe Kollwitz**, left, and **Frida Kahlo**, middle left, talk with artist **Amanda Curreri**, right, and her mother, **Linda**, during the opening reception for Curreri's "The Calmest of Us Would Be Lunatics" exhibition at the Rochester Arts Center.

And without over-simplifying it too much, that's how they landed in Rochester. The art center is **well-respected in the Twin Cities**, she said, and it's not seen as "just a provincial outpost."

'Friends now'

Why the Guerrilla Girls keep saying yes to Johnston, whom they refer to as their "unsung hero," works on several levels, but one of them is pretty straight forward.

"They're friends now," Johnston said.

Many local artists could be found wandering the halls of the art center, but so could out-of-towners such as **Sara Suppan**. She's been working on the project for a year and a half as the Minneapolis College of Art and Design's intern. That's meant researching what kinds of things the Guerrilla Girls have done in other places.

"I think the most important thing that's come out of this is just bringing all the gal-

eries and institutions together under kind of one roof," Suppan said.

She noted they've never seen **community involvement on this scale** before.

At a talk back, hosted by curator **Susannah Magers**, Curreri found herself between two of the Guerrilla Girls, whose masks, alas, rendered a lot of their important message inaudible. (Microphones, it seems, don't function well when shrouded in anonymity.)

Still, talk they did, specifically about the **under-representation of women and minority groups** in the art world, a problem too many people think was solved in the 1960s and 1970s; it hasn't been. The numbers, they said, are still abysmally low, especially amongst major galleries.

'Artists are prophets'

Something else was at the core of their message, and it has to do with how art students are still taught.

"Students are kind of sick of the kind of **commercial role**, the commercial aspirations of some of the arts' schools," one of the Guerrilla Girls said.

Finding a style, a gallery, identifying a collector; it's preparing them, she said, for depression and failure. They know they have to invent ways of living as an artist.

"Many are called, few are chosen," she said.

The starry crowd found the event exciting, which was certainly the case for Rochester Civic Theatre Executive Director **Gregory Stavrou**.

"Throughout history, we have always had dialogues through art," Stavrou said. "Why? Because all dialogue includes an emotional element. And, only through the arts can we express emotion, as opposed to describing it."

Artists, he said, **speak the truth when others cannot**; in the case of the Guerrilla Girls, they were talking about exclusion 30 years ago.