

PITTSBURGHERS OF THE YEAR

Ali & Jamie McMurtrie: Hometown Heroes to Haiti



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Exhibits

Zap the cold with the Black and Gold, welcome 2011 with eye candy on First Night and discover what's new at Westmoreland Museum.

By Mike May

"WHATEVER IT TAKES: STEELERS FAN COLLECTIONS, RITUALS AND OBSESSIONS": THROUGH JAN. 30

"If space aliens landed in Pittsburgh, what would they determine was the dominant culture that unified the populace? It could only be Steelers culture."

Go ahead—argue that if you like, but it's the premise behind "Whatever It Takes: Steelers Fan Collections, Rituals and Obsessions." And if you beam over to that exhibit, you may come away a believer, even if you don't get to consult any extra-terrestrials.

At press time, the Steelers' prospects for another Super Bowl victory seemed promising, so by this month, the City of Champions could be at fever pitch, making this show even more compelling. In fact, it would be fascinating to expand on the out-of-this-world ideas sparked in that question above. How about asking Stephen Hawking how much Steelers memorabilia one town can hold before it all collapses into that gravitational enigma of astrophysics: a black hole or, in this case, a black-and-gold hole.

Speaking of slightly eerie, "Whatever It Takes" can be found at Carnegie Mellon University's Miller Gallery, where you wouldn't expect to find a Steelers-related pop-culture show (not that there's anything wrong with that). Moreover, you might experience the uncanny feeling that you've entered a time or space vortex where the Mattress Factory, Andy Warhol Museum and Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum at the Heinz History Center have all converged.

"Whatever It Takes" is an amazing curatorial effort by Jon Rubin, an associate professor of fine art at CMU, and Astria Suparak, the Miller Gallery's director. Although larger, socio-economic types of questions arise here, basically this show, with its dash of OCD and affluenza, is a salute to the devotion and creative energy of the fans constituting Steelers Nation—which is not just Pittsburgh, not just Western Pennsylvania but a global village comprising a highly diverse population with



Denny DeLuca's Steelers room, "Whatever It Takes" exhibition photo.

a tribal mentality. (Just take a look at the map in the gallery showing the Steelers bars and fan clubs around the planet.)

There's so much here that it's impossible to describe even a small sampling. A few highlights: sculpture (a totemic "Black & Golden Calf"), painting and photography (photos of some amazing tattoos), fashion (a "Lost in Space"-style "SuperFan" costume), architecture (a detailed model of Heinz Field with Lilliputian fans), a Web show ("Yinz Luv 'Da Stillers"), videos and an interactive connection to a Steelers bar in Rome, and—last but not least—installation art via the exhibit's pièce de résistance: an entire man cave with bedazzling artifacts brought here and reassembled.

A particular favorite: I was especially enamored of a chess set (on view occasionally)—something I didn't expect to discover, although both games do have their similarities. This version of the ancient diversion pits the Steelers against the Arizona Cardinals, commemorating the 2009 Super Bowl. (It gets a bit awkward, though, when it comes to the traditional queen pieces, which are the two quarterbacks in this update.)

"Whatever It Takes" has been around for a while now, but if you haven't seen the show or need to recharge your fan batteries again, a visit might be the perfect pick-me-up for the January doldrums. The show is expected to be extended depending on the likelihood of another Steelers Super Bowl run. (Purnell Center for the Arts, Carnegie Mellon University, 5000 Forbes Ave., Oakland. Through Jan. 30: Tues.-Sun., noon-6 p.m. Free. Info: 412/268-3618, cmu.edu/millergallery)

FIRST NIGHT: DEC. 31

If you're reading this column early, you can still catch First Night, the New Year's Eve party in downtown Pittsburgh. Don't forget to include a visit to galleries in the Cultural District while you await the arrival of 2011. Among the venues open Fri., Dec. 31 at 6

p.m. are: August Wilson Center for African American Culture (980 Liberty Ave.; 412/258-2700, augustwilsoncenter.org), ToonSeum (945 Liberty Ave.; 412/232-0199, toonseum.org), SPACE (812 Liberty Ave.; 412/325-7723, spacepittsburgh.org), Wood Street Galleries (601 Wood St., 412/471-5605, woodstreetgalleries.org), Future Tenant (819 Penn Ave.; 412/325-7037, futuretenant.org) and 707-709 Penn Galleries (707 and 709 Penn Ave.; 412/325-7017, pgharts.org). Info is subject to change. For more info, visit firstnightpgh.org.

WESTMORELAND MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Something new for the New Year is the reinstallation of the permanent collection at Westmoreland Museum of American Art. The exhibition spaces are still basically the same—arranged by portraits, still lifes and landscapes, decorative arts, etc.—but now, there's 30 percent more of the collection on view.

In conjunction with the new look, look for a new publication, *Picturing America: Signature Works From the Westmoreland Museum of American Art*. It's written by chief curator Barbara L. Jones with contributors Judith H. O'Toole, director and CEO, and Harley N. Trice, a decorative-arts specialist and collector. The hardcover book (\$45) is available at the museum shop or online. FYI: It's been 32 years since there's been a book on the permanent collection.

If you hurry, you can catch two exhibits before they close on Jan. 9: "Associated Artists of Pittsburgh: Celebrating a Century of Art" samples artists who participated in the AAP exhibits of 1910 and 1911. "Remnants: Paintings by Joyce Werwie Perry" features work by the 2008 recipient of The Westmoreland Exhibition Award. (221 N. Main St., Greensburg. Wed., Fri.-Sun., 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thurs., 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Free admission with donation. Info: 724/837-1500, wmuseumaa.org)