

# LIFE

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"Baobab," wire coat hangers, by Oki Fukunaga

**The New Hope Arts Center shakes things up a little in its annual sculpture exhibit.**

# Form and motion

By **GWEN SHRIFT**  
STAFF WRITER

**T**he most topical line about the New Hope Arts Center's "Sculpture 2015" exhibit is, "How about those coat hangers!"

It's not a reference to the hospitality side of things, but an appreciation of Oki Fukunaga's airily sketched, deeply explored and mathematically precise works executed in — that's right — black wire coat hangers.

Fukunaga studies identical elements and transforms them by means of orderly arrangements. In the 2013 show, his medium was tiny bricks of cast iron, from which he composed small supernatural characters.

This time, he plays with the tension between microscopic and macroscopic, offering what he calls "hanger crystals," huge but light structures in which the forms of the hangers mirror and visually spring apart from each other in a welter of symmetrical angles.

Next to Florence Moonan's petrified vegetables, which play a part in works based on old phonograph records, Fukunaga's hangers are among the least usual materials in an exhibit that does not lack for creatively combative elements.

Around the room, the viewer perceives solid and massive objects, as well as those that play on insubstantiality; those executed of single materials and those in mixed media; humorous works and deadly serious ones; restrained color and lavish texture; themes that are lyrical and themes that are subversive; sculptures that recall the classical and sculptures that draw on the mythical; organic forms and abstract forms.

"Resistance," electric-fired stoneware and underglaze, by Renée Weiss Chase

"The Crystal Lady," bronze and crystal, by Judy Sutton Moore

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"Red Queen," wooden furniture components, by Adam Capone

## Stalwart cetacean takes a whale of a trip

By **GWEN SHRIFT**  
STAFF WRITER

Writers everywhere, myself included, oohed and aahed recently over the revelation that Varvara, a well-traveled whale, swam a record 13,987 miles in about five months a few years ago.

This is one of those wonderful, feel-good stories that can take one's mind away from sickness, social unrest and world politics, which is why I like it so much, even though Varvara could qualify for dual Russian-Mexican citizenship, apparently, which must have a controversial angle to it

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somewhere.

Also, the habits of whales are very mysterious during those times they are not hanging around whale-watching boats or deep-sea-going nature photographers. So researchers make every effort to invade their privacy in the name of science, which is the American way, although some of the researchers also spying on Varvara were Russian.

You may complain about clandestine surveillance of your phone

conversations. This is nothing compared to what a whale has to put up with.

A few years ago, scientists "fired a small satellite tracking tag into Varvara's blubber," according to an informative website, learner.org. Like many scientific experiments involving animals, this sounds cruel. However, unlike Moby Dick, the only other whale that I have studied to any great extent, Varvara did not seek vengeance against the guy who harpooned her.

Perhaps a satellite radio is basically painless when blasted

into body fat. There are plenty of humans around that I would like to see become research subjects if a study of the issue were ever attempted, hopefully by whales.

Unless you believe Herman Melville, there really is no downside to getting close to a whale if you are a scientist holding a satellite-tracking-tag gun. Even if they fall off a boat, "humans do not resemble or taste like any of the foods whales are used to consuming," and "most whale species have throats that are fairly small and incapable of swallowing large objects such as

humans," according to whale-facts.org.

So the scientists were able, at virtually no risk of becoming whale chow, to learn that from November 2011 to February 2012, Varvara swam from Sakhalin Island, over by Japan, down to Baja California, off Mexico, then found her way back by a slightly different route. Among other things, this suggests that Varvara has an unusually efficient sense of direction in open water, which whales were not thought to possess.

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# Sculpture

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Bonnie Shanas pares down the human form, which many sculptors express solidly, in wire mesh constructions such as “The Flirt II” that hint at the full dimensions of their subject matter. They entice the eye through the medium, as well as to its surface. It’s a technique that satisfies and also begs for monumentality in future works.

At the opposite end of the material scale resides Judy Sutton Moore’s “The Crystal Lady,” a gleaming, stylized bronze form crowned by glittering green chandelier components. This is fun on a grand scale.

Justin Long and Adam Capone, both of whom work in found materials, offer ever more refined works — Long in metal farm implements that uncannily suggest the grace of birds such as a great horned owl, and Capone in the components of old furniture that turn utility to the service of fantasy in a series of characters based on the works of Lewis Carroll.

Among Capone’s pieces is “White Rabbit,” a jaunty creature who proves a wrecked piece of wood can convey an alert expression. It’s cousin to another rabbit sculpture in Capone’s solo show on view at the Sidetracks Art Gallery near the arts center.

Works that depend on organic forms or materials offer food for thought, in Moonan’s case especially. The artist found that sliced vegetables dried on a windowsill “shriveled into beautiful organic shapes and eventually became hard as stone,” she says in an email explaining part of the material used in two related works: “LP1501” and “LP1306.”

She combined the rock-like substance with acrylic, modeling paste and old phonograph records to sculpt mystical, ancient-looking discs that evoke ceremonial objects found in ancient tombs.

Judith Rosenthal’s “Winter Flowers” and “Sprouting Bulb,” in porcelain paper clay, are among the most accomplished works shown in any local sculpture exhibit within this writer’s memory. They are, of course, contrived — but in a way that seems to complete the natural processes of their subject matter.

Georgette L. Veeder masterfully manipulated bittersweet vines and her signature handmade paper in “Last Chance,” which raises a point about the environment and larger human issues, as well.

Renée Weiss Chase offers some captivating small works that comment on fashion in a very tactile manner, using electric-fired stoneware to compose surreal dresses such as “Resistance,” which is covered with pierced extruded plugs, and “Protected,” which is pierced



“The Unknown From Below,” bronze, by Dana Stewart

and spiked. These are expressions of personality, life roles and emotion for which any woman who has ever had to dress up should be grateful.

Who knows what danger lurks in the human psyche, or the equally fearsome depths of the ocean? Michael V. Pascucci and Dana Stewart, both of whom work

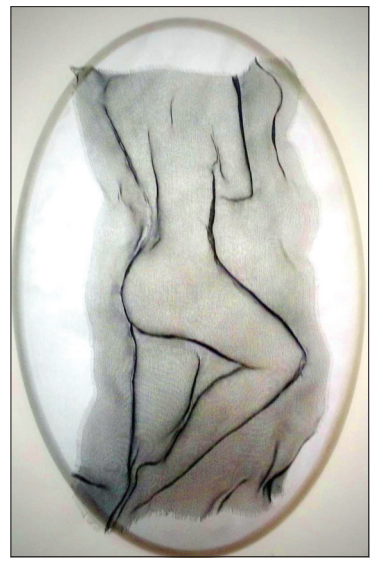
in bronze.

The exhibit is notable for the relation in theme between Pascucci’s angular, Greek-referenced works in his *Jocasta* series, and the rounded, witty creatures of Stewart, who took a shark as inspiration for one of the works shown here.

Jocasta was a queen from ancient Greek mythology who

because of dreadful misfortune unwittingly married and bore children to her own son. The fear of sharks needs no explanation. While Pascucci’s subject and composition is analytic and unsmiling, Stewart gives us a funny fright with “The Unknown From Below.”

This work is a fluid, ascending



“The Flirt II,” wire mesh, by Bonnie Shanas



“White Rabbit,” wood furniture components, by Adam Capone

cone of bronze topped with the gaping muzzle of a ferocious predator. It is about serious nature, but not too serious.

At first glance, one might take Barney Stone’s kinetic work, “The Tool Box,” in similarly light-hearted fashion. It is, after all, a set of old hand tools that go to work by themselves when you lift the lid.

Or you could view it as an expression of a larger truth about art: Its practitioners’ mission is to bring a medium to life and tell a story, from slow awakening to visual climax. This is what “The Tool Box” does, and “Sculpture 2015” is just the place for it.

“Sculpture 2015” is on exhibit through May 24 at the New Hope Arts Center, 2 Stockton Ave. (second floor), New Hope. Hours: noon to 5 p.m. Friday through Sunday. Information: 215-862-9606; www.newhopearts.org.

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## VIDEO VIEW

# ‘Inherent Vice’ makes the most of a complicated plot

By LOU GAUL  
CORRESPONDENT

With Memorial Day right around the corner, big-budget summer sequels and reboots are lining up for lucrative warm-weather engagements.

That makes this a good weekend to discover “**Inherent Vice**” (DVD, Blu-ray Disc, Video on Demand; now available).

Director Paul Thomas Anderson’s brilliantly imagined film opened Jan. 9 and then immediately fell through the cracks despite being an incredible cinematic experience, though certainly not for everyone.

Joaquin Phoenix, Reese Witherspoon, Maya Rudolph, Josh Brolin and Benicio Del Toro star in this R-rated stoner comedy set in the era of peace, love and pharmaceuticals.

The story, which is based on Thomas Pynchon’s novel, follows a reefer-loving private eye caught in a kidnapping case.

If Cheech and Chong ever wrote a free-spirited mystery featuring Jeff Bridges as the Dude from “The Big Lebowski,” this striking work, which people seem destined to either love (put me in that category) or hate might be the result.

In an interview in the February issue of *Sight & Sound*, the respected British publication, Anderson, whose impressive

credits include “There Will Be Blood,” “Boogie Nights” and “The Master,” talks about the musician who inspired much of “Inherent Vice.”

“The film feel (is) kind of like a Neil Young song — like the melancholy of ‘Only Love Can Break Your Heart’ or ‘After the Gold Rush,’” the filmmaker says. “That’s an equivalent to what the book feels like to me.

“Amidst all these ridiculous gags, there’s a sentimental — in a good way — nostalgia, aching, look back (to the peace and love period).”

The readers of the cinema publication *Film Comment* certainly recognized the importance of “Inherent Vice.” They voted it the seventh-best film of 2014 (with Richard Linklater’s “Boyhood” in the No. 1 spot, followed by Wes Anderson’s “The Grand Budapest Hotel,” Jonathan Glazer’s “Under the Skin,” Alejandro G. Inarritu’s Oscar-winning “Birdman or The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance,” Pawel Pawlikowski’s “Ida” and Jim Jarmusch’s “Only Lovers Left Alive”).

Sources include High-Def Digest, imdb.com, amazon.com, Leonard Maltin’s “Movie Guide” and *Sight & Sound*: The International Film Magazine.

Lou Gaul is the retired film critic for Calkins Media.



FILE PHOTO

A gray whale surfaces for a look at some marine biologists off Sakhalin Island in Russia.

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The researchers found out a couple more things, including that they may have been wrong all along about the distinction between eastern gray whales and western gray whales, which has limited potential for humor, at least among non-scientists.

However, a lack of facts does not deter the fearless explorations of nature readers of *Life at Large* have come to expect. So I am perfectly comfortable speculating on what Varvara did on her epic journey that scientists were unable to discover.

It is next to impossible for any creature to travel nearly 14,000 miles and not run into anyone he or she knows. I think Varvara must have spent some time swimming along with her girlfriends, during which time they made critical comments about female whales who were not present. Also, they probably discussed the guy whales they were going to Baja California in hopes of meeting.

Varvara surely had to dodge the legendarily enormous pools of trash floating around in the Pacific, as well as cruise ships and smaller craft on three-hour tours. It is barely

possible she felt some turbulence from continental plates crashing together, since she swam close to the west coast of the United States for many miles.

I gloss over the Navy submarines on top-secret missions she undoubtedly encountered, except to note that if they were any good at their duties, their crews would pick up transmissions from Varvara’s satellite tag. It is also possible they mistook her for a Russian sub. In any case, we know she was not torpedoed, so she was able to make her way through the spy network.

One great unanswered question remains. Varvara is believed to have completed this strenuous journey without stopping to eat for five straight months. How did she do this?

I offer three hypotheses: (a) the whale packed a lunch the scientists were unable to detect with today’s available technology; (b) the only available food source was humans on three-hour tours who were washed overboard by rogue waves; and (c) Varvara was trying to develop a svelte figure in hopes of attracting a mate.

Clearly, she kept enough blubber to hold onto the satellite tag.

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Joaquin Phoenix stars as Larry “Doc” Sportello in Paul Thomas Anderson’s “Inherent Vice.”

