

## Easter Peep Show! Go Inside Museum's Art Exhibit Featuring and Inspired by Beloved Marshmallow Treat

Wisconsin's Racine Art Museum celebrates its 13th Annual International Peeps Art Exhibition with 162 entries — and Golden Peeps for the curated winning artists

By [Jeff Truesdell](#) April 17, 2022 09:00 AM



Peepzilla



"Peepzilla," created by Cremona Weisser

| Credit: Jon Bolton/Racine Art Museum

Ask around about [Peeps](#) — the sugary marshmallow treats that go into many an Easter basket this time of year — and love-'em-or-hate-'em opinions form as fast as those that greet the enduring (and, some might say, equally indestructible) Christmas fruitcake.

But the reception now greeting Peeps on display at the [Racine Art Museum](#) in Wisconsin is "over the moon," says Lisa Englander, the museum's director of guest relations. "When groups come in, we have to stop the

children from running. They're just so excited."

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"And then," she says, "about 10 percent of the people that come in say, 'Why didn't I think of that?'"

What Englander thought of in 2009 was a one-of-a-kind exhibit of curated artworks incorporating, or inspired by, the sticky sweet that, in its original and most familiar forms, resembles a tiny cushy-beaked chick or long-eared bunny in colors of fluorescent yellow, pink, purple or blue.

This year's [13th Annual International Peeps Art Exhibition](#) — on view [online](#), or in-person through April 23 — displays 162 entries, most from Wisconsin and Illinois but also from states as distant as Massachusetts and California. Artists who range in age from 3 to 90 submitted works that include paintings, quilts, photography and ceramics. Some are interactive; at least one is motorized.

Peeps Prince 

"People Rain," an homage to Prince, created by Julie Serbiak

| Credit: Jon Bolton/Racine Art Museum

But it's the ones that incorporate the actual marshmallow that stand apart, prompting a gentle cautionary note to visitors that reads, "Please do not touch or eat the works of art."

The inspiration for the show was as novel as the show itself.

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"I was depressed," Englander says of the moment she dreamed it up. "It was in the bleak winter after the holidays, and February, March in Wisconsin is bleak. And I walked into an aisle of my local drug store and saw all this kind of spring color. And that's when I came up with the idea."

Peeps Brite 


"Peeps+Brite," created by Ann Burke

| Credit: Jon Bolton/Racine Art Museum

"At first, I thought it was going to be scandalous, because it's the 'Peep Show,'" Englander adds. "We had to work our words around that. So it became family-friendly."

And while many Peep competitions and displays arise each spring (such as [this one](#) promoted by *The Washington Post* on TikTok), Englander knows of no other that comes with a museum imprint and curatorial selection.

That first year drew about three dozen entries. The number on display in later years has topped 200. Puns predominate. ("Hare-Do," "Candy Warhol," "Give Peeps a Chance" and, of course, "Peeples" magazine, to name a few.)

Peeps art exhibit 

Lisa Englander with the Racine Art Museum's Peeps exhibit

| Credit: Jeff Truesdell

Is there a pun Englander hasn't seen? "Leaning Tower of Peepsa — I've never seen that," she says.

But wit counts for a lot.

"One of my favorites this year is the Barbie doll in the phone booth with Peeps all over it, and you realize it's a salute to [Tippi Hedren](#) in *The Birds*, being menaced by the seagulls. Only this doll's being attacked by Peep chicks," says museum director Bruce W. Pepich.

Peeps-related art exhibit 


"Candy Warhol," created by Darcie Muckler

| Credit: Jeff Truesdell

"One year we had two versions of the [Psycho shower scene](#) executed in Peeps," Pepich adds. "Hitchcock shows up somewhat regularly."

When devising themes for other exhibits (the museum occupies space in a redesigned bank once robbed by John Dillinger), Pepich says he doesn't shy away from humor.

"What I felt was wonderful about the Peep proposal was, we're not an ivory tower," he says, "and this sort of makes it very clear to the public."

Peeps-related art exhibit 

"The Village People," created by Thea Errickson


| Credit: Jeff Truesdell

Glass artist Amanda Cosgrove Paffrath, of Racine, has participated almost every year, and makes the glass Golden Peeps awarded to curated winners in each of three categories: adult, young "peeples," and family/group/organization.

"It sort of takes the hoity-toityness out of art," she says. "It's a fun, whimsical way to get people like me, who are working artists, to work outside the box of our normal realm. And I think for other people, it gives them an opportunity to play with an object you could buy at Walgreens and turn that into something that's going to be on exhibit in a world-renowned museum."

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Danny Ferron, 51, is a film and TV actor and special effects makeup artist in Delaware Water Gap, Penn., who describes himself as a "Peeps artist extraordinaire." He says that being picked this year as a first-time exhibiter legitimized his passion for cell-phone photography of Peeps in dioramas among those who, he concedes, look skeptically at his pursuit. His entry, "Peeps in a Tub," placed them in a soap dish he filled with bubbles made from whipped cream, or maybe shaving cream (he can't remember which), "and the two little rubber ducks with the felt towels."

Peep Floyd 


"Peep Floyd: One More Peep in the Wall," created by Paul and Rob Madsen and Mike Meyer

| Credit: Jon Bolton/Racine Art Museum

"Especially during the pandemic, this has become my therapy," Ferron says.

Why photography? "Because photographs don't get mushy," he says, "and they don't melt."

Says Englander: "There are people who work with Peeps as a medium aside from the show. I didn't know about this. It's a whole cult-y thing."

Peeps-related art exhibit 

"Peep Zoom Meeting," created by Evelyn Vorwald

| Credit: Jeff Truesdell

The call for entries goes out each fall, with submissions due March 31; about 90 percent are walk-ins.

"We don't take everything. We can't," says Englander.

Size matters; one rejected piece was more than 4 feet long.

Peeps Ukraine 

"Peepidarity," created by Rebecca McGowa

| Credit: Jon Bolton/Racine Art Museum

And apart from horror films, other themes do emerge. In 2016 Trump portraits — "some were pro and some were con" — were a thing.

"Those were really good," says Englander.

Tributes to Ukraine made their appearance this year.

"I always get asked, 'Has this been done?'" she says. "And I say, 'Well, it's been done, but you'll do it differently.'"

It's a matter of consequence that food is prohibited as an element of the displays — which only begs the question, what is a Peep anyway, apart from a creative building block?

Englander doesn't eat them. Neither will Paffrath, the glass artist.

"I'm not a huge marshmallow fan," says Paffrath. "But I buy them for my kids' Easter baskets every year and the kids love them."

"I'm more of a chocolate than a marshmallow eater," she adds. "But I'm not a hater."