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## Off The Beaten Path, 6 New England Exhibits Offer Art Without The Crowds

July 17, 2020

By [Pamela Reynolds](#) 



### 'Leon Benn: Gardening Techniques'

Grant Wahlquist Gallery | Portland, Maine

**Through Aug. 22**

Leon Benn paints plants and gardens the way someone might after nibbling on a certain type of mind-altering organic matter. His lush landscapes pulsate with vibrant, psychedelic color, rendered ever more vivid by his deft use of materials. The artist, who moved to Portland from Brooklyn about five years ago, first soaks his canvases overnight, washing them out the next day to achieve a uniform color base. From there, he uses a “faux batik” technique to prevent some areas of fabric from taking up paint. After stretching the canvas, he uses pastels, oil and acrylic paint to create tight and bright textured compositions reminiscent of the blazing rhythms of turn of the century Fauvism.

Benn says the paintings in the show started as a series of landscape drawings he made of bushes and shrubs leaning against Portland houses, fences and buildings.

“That’s how I interact with the landscape — finding these random, unknown spots,” Benn told the [Portland Press Herald](#) in April, when the show was originally scheduled to open. “I’m not looking for that traditional ‘romantic’ view; I’m just wandering around and stumbling onto these things that are often not regarded as beautiful.”

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Gardens come as natural subject matter to Benn, who once worked as a landscaper. They're also welcome subject for viewers, seeking respite from this summer's intense social and political heat.



Leon Benn, "West End Weeping Willow," 2020. (Courtesy Grant Wahlquist Gallery)