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ARTS

The Shortlist: Must-see Milwaukee exhibits opening or closing in April



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Where I'm from, April signals reprieve – pockets of warmth bathe blooming flowers in sunlight and rain.

In Milwaukee's arts scene, however, April means ramping up. From Gallery Night to Milwaukee Art Museum's annual [Art in Bloom](#), the city is budding with must-see shows.

Some honor the transient nature of spring – like the student shows celebrating 2026 graduates crossing the finish line. Other events give newcomers the opportunity to show their work for the first time this year.

With Gallery Night on the horizon, there are far more exhibitions than this limited roundup can capture. But to highlight a few, here's the shortlist of exhibits and events to check out this April.

Gallery Night

The quarterly event is back for the spring on April 17 and 18. With participating organizations across several Milwaukee neighborhoods, people can admire and purchase original art everywhere from the Third Ward and Walker's Point to the east side.

Need a news break? [Check out the all new PLAY hub with puzzles, games and more!](#)

Admission is free at all venues during event hours. Visit gallerynightmke.com for a full list of participating venues, an interactive map and parking information.

Check the Journal Sentinel and jsonline.com/arts in the coming weeks for a more in-depth preview of this spring's Gallery Night.

Art in Bloom at Milwaukee Art Museum

One of the Milwaukee Art Museum's most popular events returns this month.

From April 16-19, the museum will be filled with elaborate floral arrangements crafted by local designers and inspired by works in the museum's collection. Now in its 18th year, the annual celebration of spring features a Friday night floral fashion show and late hours on Saturday, with the museum staying open until 11 p.m.

In addition to this year's programs, you can meet me and my colleagues at Art in Bloom! Look for the Journal Sentinel table off Windhover Hall where we'll have a fun project and giveaways.

Tickets for Art in Bloom are on sale now and cost \$15 for museum members; \$40 for adults; \$30 for students, seniors, military and teachers; and are free for kids 12 and under. Tickets for the fashion show are sold out.

The museum will be open for Art in Bloom 10 a.m.-8 p.m. April 16, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. April 17, 10 a.m.-11 p.m. April 18 and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. April 19.

Senior Exhibition at Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design

In celebration of its senior class, the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design is hosting its annual senior exhibition – presenting the capstone works of 2026 graduates.

Lauded as a night when students “boldly challenge societal expectations,” the show opens on with a reception from 5 to 9 p.m. April 17 at the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, 273 E. Erie St, according to MIAD's website.

The exhibition, up through May 9, is an opportunity to peek inside the minds of emerging young artists, trained in Milwaukee, before they go off and make a name for themselves in the professional world.

Some of their pieces are already on view at the Charles Allis Museum, 1801 N. Prospect Ave, through April 26. Bringing a contemporary flare to the museum's historic walls, work by 50 graduates majoring in Fine Art and New Studio Practice has been up since March 18.

30x30x30 Exhibition at Var Gallery

The culmination of a thrilling creative challenge, Var Gallery's annual 30x30x30 exhibit returns for the 12th year on April 17. The juried show, now in its 12th iteration, challenges 30 artists to create 30 pieces in 30 days in January. The exercise, much like a sprint, is meant to invigorate an artist's year with an intense jolt of art-making. The fruits of their labor are then showcased in the spring exhibition.

Opening with a Gallery Night reception at 5 p.m. April 17, the show will be on view until June 7.

To learn more about the 30 featured artists, visit vargallery.com/upcoming.

"Snack Shop" at Kim Storage Gallery

Gabrielle Marie Stone almost opened a snack shop in her Chicago studio to turn a profit. Under the mounting pressure of a market where people weren't buying art, Stone figured it was a more stable way to bring money in.

Though she eventually landed a full-time job, that time in her life and practice inspired the title of her current exhibition. "Snack Shop" is on view now through April 10 at Kim Storage Gallery, 207 E Buffalo St., Suite 404.

The abstract painter explores materiality and expression through studies of color and material on unprimed canvases. Her pieces – at once serene, vivid, geometric

and even ominous – invite audiences into that experimentation.

"I want [the work] first and foremost to just kind of hit them with wonder," she told me over the phone.

Contemporary realism at Tory Folliard

Bringing a refreshing perspective to the world around us, contemporary realist painters are at the center of Tory Folliard's current exhibition.

"True to Life: Contemporary Realism," on view through April 4, showcases work by 11 living artists celebrating precision and technique through artful meditations on ordinary objects. In the vivid color of vegetables, the quiet serenity of a backyard porch, or the consuming mass of a cloud formation, these painters remind us of the beauty in the everyday.

Tory Folliard Gallery, 233 N. Milwaukee St., is open 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday and 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday. For more information, see toryfolliard.com.

MFA Thesis Exhibition at UW-Milwaukee

Master of Fine Arts candidates from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's class of 2026 are presenting their thesis projects at the Kenilworth Square East Gallery, 1925 E. Kenilworth Place, on view now through April 18.

Ranging in discipline and thematic focus, the show offers another glimpse into the minds of innovative young artists. Everything from digital fabrication and photography to jewelry and metalsmithing is explored.

Students have focused their work on several personal and global themes – reflecting on everything from memory and domesticity to the environment and identity.

Visit The Kenilworth Square East Gallery from 2 to 7 p.m. Wednesday through Friday or 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. You can also see the work on Gallery Night, with a reception from 4 to 7 p.m. April 17.

Anya Sesay covers arts and culture for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Send her story ideas, things to see and people to meet at asesay@usatodayco.com. Follow her on Instagram [@anyanicolette](https://www.instagram.com/anyanicolette).

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