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LIFE IS NEVER STILL

Artists' works show emotion, intensity at Five Points

BY TRACEY O'SHAUGHNESSY
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

Still life should never be completely still. A good still life should simmer with an emotional intensity, bristle with the power of suggestion.

The new exhibition of still lifes at Five Points Gallery includes artists who do that, although the overall presentation is mixed.

In its attempt to broaden the definition of still lifes, the gallery has so stretched the genre as to be almost unrecognizable as such.

It nevertheless has puckishly assembled a group of 15 artists who play with classic definitions of still life with results that range from commendable to clever.

The 15 artists represent the classic techniques of the still life — drawing, painting, and photography — as well as contemporary methods, including sculpture, ceramics, found materials and interactive installation.

In the latter category, Eric Forstmann's "Movable Breakfast" encourages viewers to participate in assembling a puzzlike sculpture that includes pieces of a breakfast table. The assemblage juts out from the wall like a shelf on which sit a variety of items — a box of Froot Loops, orange juice, fruit — that sit in slots that allow them to be rearranged.

Forstmann is a skilled trompe l'oeil artist, known for his precise iterations of apples, pears, tomatoes, even wrinkled shirts. This is a different sort of riff for him and brings a frisky edge to this traditionally sober genre. Viewers can move the butter, cantaloupe, mugs and muffins into different "still life" arrangements.

In that same vein, Peggy Dembicer's painstakingly precise images of Red Rose Tea and cigarettes are sprightly takes on familiar themes. Her "Light'n Up" appears to be a trompe l'oeil painting of a package of Marlboros. Come closer and it's clear that the "painting" is actually bead work tapestry, accented by a series of strings that hold matches. Below sits a ceramic ashtray, complete with a pack of matches and a cigarette — also fashioned of colored beads.

Dembicer does much the same with "My Cup of Tea," a beaded tapestry of a carton of Red Rose Tea, surrounded by a field of tea tags, assembled like an array of stamps around the central beaded image. It's a delightful riff that throws the viewer off balance.

But there are more standard still lifes here, as well, including Brian McClear's inspired paintings of hardware tools, some of which look anthropomorphic in his images, and others of which are just wonderful juxtapositions.

An apple that unfurls its skin toward a glistening plane is artfully done, while a soldierly looking pair of bolt cutters, standing sentry in front of a slice of barbed wire, draws uncomfortable associations. Below the bolt cutters McClear has painted a folded American



Brian McClear, 'Welcome Home.'

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Eric Forstmann 'Movable Breakfast.'

flag. The image is called "Welcome Home," and suggests a perilous form of self-enclosure.

Other artists, like Linda Pearlman Karlsberg, are more traditional but symbolic in their still lifes. Karlsberg's image "Bound Bird," a drawing of a songbird tethered to a

bolt by a strap, is a powerful depiction of strength and fragility, freedom and confinement.

Lastly, Nancy Lasar's free-flowing pastel canvases might be poorly identified as still life, but it really doesn't matter. Lasar continues to explore relationships between line and space, gymnastic glyphs and severe geometries, with economy and ingenuity. Her swirling graphite dances with her graceful pastel colors to create compositionally enchanting canvases.

Lasar has always been judicious in her placement of firm objects — mugs, pitchers, vases — with more organic forms — insects, flowers, plants — but she's grown even more economical in her paintings, letting the canvas make a statement of its own. Her large "Strings and Things," an image of coiling, serpentine flowers lunging out of their vessels toward a free-spirited, delicately charged atmosphere, is a restrained statement on the pleasures of abandonment within the confines of rootedness.

Still life? No, Lasar seems to answer. Life is never still.

THE *list*

Here are a few things to think about today

Big prizes in Palace's raffle

The Palace Theater's annual raffle is underway and promises the lucky first prize winner a dream vacation to Cabo San Lucas.

Tickets are available online at palacetheater-ct.org, by phone at 203-346-2000, or in person at the box office, 100 East Main St., Waterbury. The drawing will be June 15 at 10 a.m.

Proceeds benefit the nonprofit performing arts organization's Annual Fund.



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Wisdom House in Litchfield will offer a 'Self-Care Saturday: Connect, Reflect and Project.'

Take care of yourself

Wisdom House in Litchfield will offer a "Self-Care Saturday: Connect, Reflect and Project" retreat Feb. 10 from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Yoga instructor Gabriele Davis, who has done several Self-Care Saturdays at Wisdom House, will lead participants through exercises to recall and gently release events of the past year, then anticipate the coming year by focusing on expansiveness and generosity.

Participants should wear comfortable clothes and bring a journal along to record their thoughts. Activities will involve use of a mat, which will be provided.

The \$60 cost for the program includes lunch. After Saturday, the fee increases to \$75.

To register call 860-567-3163 or email programs@wisdomhouse.org

Mattatuck part of the show

The Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury will again participate in Bank of America Museums on Us Weekends this year.

Bank of America Museums on Us Weekend, on the first Saturday and Sunday of each month, and allows for free general admission to the Mattatuck Museum for Bank of America and Merrill Lynch cardholders with a picture ID. Each card is valid for one general admission, but not for special exhibitions, ticketed shows or fundraising events, and cannot be combined with other offers.

This month's Museums on Us Weekend, this Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 5, is the last chance to see several exhibitions, including "Connected: Relationships with Machines" by Andrzej Zielinski, "Painting With a Camera: Jerome Sedlock," and "Fantasy Trains: Alexander Shundi," which all close Feb. 11.

IF YOU GO The exhibit runs through Feb. 24 at Five Points Gallery, 33 Main St., Torrington. Five Points will hold an artists' conversation in the gallery on Feb. 9 at 6 p.m. Gallery hours are Thursdays through Mondays, 1 p.m.-5 p.m., and by appointment. There is no admission charge. For information, visit www.fivepointsgallery.org.

BLUE MOON!

Look up! Early Wednesday there will be a full moon, a total lunar eclipse, a blue moon and a supermoon — all at the same time.



REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN ARCHIVES

The International Space Station streaks along the night sky as the blue moon rises over Waterbury and the Republican-American tower on Aug. 1, 2015. The blue moon will appear again early Wednesday morning.

WHAT MAKES THE MOON LOOK FULL? Like the Earth, half the moon is illuminated by the sun at any one time. The moon orbits around the Earth; as a result we see different amounts of the lit-up side. A full moon is when we see its entire lit-up side. This occurs every 29.5 days, when the moon is directly opposite the sun relative to the Earth.

WHAT'S A LUNAR ECLIPSE? The moon's orbit is tilted by about 5 degrees relative to the Earth's orbit. So, most of the time the moon ends up a little above or below the path Earth follows as it revolves around the sun.

WHAT MAKES IT A BLUE MOON? There are two different definitions of blue moon. The first is any time a second full moon occurs in a single month. Because there are 29.5 days between two full moons, we usually only end up with one per month. With most months longer than 29.5 days, it occasionally works out that we have two full moons, but this is rare — literally once in a blue moon. The second definition of a blue moon states it's the third moon in a season in which there are four moons, which happens about every 2.7 years.

A SUPERIZED SUPERMOON Finally, to add the cherry on top, this will also be a supermoon. The moon's orbit is not perfectly circular, meaning its distance from Earth varies as it goes through one cycle.

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