

“Celebrate!” local art with SPA

By Mary Gow

The Times Argus, November 13, 2014

BARRE — Fanciful chicken sculptures, dog paintings, sublime landscapes, bold abstracts, stunning birch bark creations, dazzling handcrafted jewelry — there’s a lot to see at Studio Place Arts these days. With its “Celebrate!” show, SPA presents an important wide-ranging annual exhibition and also serves as art and craft emporium.

“Celebrate!” — SPA’s members’ show — opens this week. This annual exhibition and sale features work by over 75 SPA member artists. Altogether, hundreds of one-of-a-kind artworks and crafts are on display and for sale on SPA’s three floors of galleries. With an opening reception Saturday, “Celebrate!” runs to Dec. 27.

“This is a local art exhibit that goes beyond the parameters of most gallery shows in the area because of the vast variety and number of artists and works,” said Sue Higby, executive director of SPA. The main gallery alone, she notes, includes, “textiles, vases, ornaments, paper items, jewelry, sculptures, paintings.”

The exhibition is an annual opportunity for SPA members, artists of all levels, to display their works in this vibrant gallery. Juried thematic exhibitions are held at SPA the rest of the year; for this show, any SPA artist member, from student to the acclaimed, can have their work included. As a community arts center, SPA is a resource for art making, art learning, and art exhibition. True to its name, “Celebrate!” does exactly that.

“We celebrate the creative impulse that arises out of everybody. Art is not some kind of thing that only special people can do. Art is something that everybody does,” said artist Janet van Fleet, one of SPA’s founders. “This is an opportunity to be a part of the exhibition, to be the person on the wall as well as the person who looks at what’s on the wall.”

With the open nature of “Celebrate!” there is always a huge variety of artwork for the show. In just three days, Higby and van Fleet organize the arrivals into a cohesive show — a show that is visually exciting, has interesting relationships between the varied pieces, and honors all the diverse art.

This year, for much of the two-dimensional work, Higby and van Fleet opted to curate by color. Hot colors are on the second floor: a flaming red hot rod, a girl with flaming red hair, and crimson sunsets are among the paintings that heat up this gallery. Cool colors are on the third floor: a blue pond in a calm landscape, the wild sky above a Maine forest, and the lovely deep azure of a narrow leaved gentian all converse with each other. Black and white is in the hallway, drawing viewers into the narrow space.

SPA’s main floor gallery has paintings and photographs across the spectrum — pieces of various sizes that integrate with the textiles, ceramics, sculptures and other art and crafts there. Fish sculptures dangle from trees; fabulous silks shimmer in the light; extraordinary ceramics and polished wood bowls and handmade books line display shelves.

Along with offering the opportunity to see such diverse work, “Celebrate!” is also a terrific shopping experience. Everything here is unique. Prices range from \$5 to hundreds of dollars. Proceeds go to the artists with a small amount to SPA to help support its important work in the community. With every piece — painting or glass tile or ceramic toad house — the artist’s hand and that personal connection is part of it.

Whether seeking a piece under \$20 for a Yankee swap, or a painting to transform part of a home, or bright new ornaments, or a thoughtful gift for any of a range of friends or loved ones, the variety at SPA is likely to satisfy.

Kristin Schuyler’s fanciful little sculptures have a sense of humor. “You Never Know – It Could Fall” is the title of a bright blue chicken looking warily heavenward. Another chicken, apparently mid-cluck, is called “As I Was Saying.” Her sheep, dogs, and hanging ornaments also have abundant wit and charm.

Glass by Chris Jeffrey, of Barre, comes in many forms including luminous fused glass earrings. Showing the flexibility of his medium, he has reshaped familiar bottles, flattening them into small serving or knick-knack trays. His fused glass soap dishes, about 4 inches square with colors streaked and patterned through, are only \$10 each.

Mark Catman’s exquisite birch bark creations are museum quality pieces. Using bark and spruce root, his fishing creel, backpack, purse, and bowls have remarkable details — birch lining, contracting panels, handsome stitching. Rob Frasciola’s burl and wooden bowls bring natural formations and sculpture together. Heidi Broner’s miniature dog paintings resonate with canine owners.

Now in its 15th year, this holiday season, SPA has a lot to “Celebrate!”

Studio Place Arts

Studio Place Arts presents “Celebrate!” Nov. 12-Dec. 27, 201 N. Main St. in Barre. Hours are: (Nov. 12-29) 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, noon to 4 p.m. Saturday (closed Nov. 27); (Dec. 2-20) 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday; (Dec. 22, 23, 26 and 27) noon to 4 p.m. (closed Dec. 24-25); call 802-479-7069, or go online to www.studioplacearts.com. A free public reception will be held 4 to 6 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 15.