

Plastic flora display promotes eco system

By David Delcore, *The Times Argus*

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Stefan Hard / Staff Photo

A portion of the art installation "In Our Hands" by Shannon Lee Gilmour is seen in the windows of a former bridal shop at 75 North Main St. in Barre. Gilmour's large-scale sculptures use post-consumer plastics to depict endangered plants.

BARRE — Super-sized flowers don't typically figure prominently in downtown window displays during the holiday season, but the ones that recently sprouted in a vacant Barre storefront are anything but typical.

They are large-scale sculptures of endangered plants produced with repurposed plastic scraps by local artist Shannon Lee Gilmour, and unless a tenant comes knocking for the ground-floor space that most recently housed a bridal shop, they will be a tantalizing reminder of spring for much of the winter.

Fresh off her residency at Studio Place Arts (SPA), Gilmour is the

woman behind the environmental art and architecture exhibit that includes her flowers in the foreground and a backdrop of plastic-filled four-gallon water bottles that she has taken to treating as life-sized Lincoln Logs.

That was the thrust of Gilmour's SPA-sponsored project "Evolving Symmetry" — one that saw her construct a full-sized bus stop out of a few four-by-fours and dozens of the plastic bottles filled with a six-year collection of primarily non-recyclable plastics.

Those plastics ranged from the tiny plastic hangtags that attach the price tags to clothing you buy at a

store to a shredded queen-sized inflatable mattress. You could throw those items away, and while you can't recycle them, they do fit in the wide mouth of the familiar four-gallon bottles, referred to as "carboys," that Gilmour believes can be used to construct everything from bus stops and garden sheds to cabins and small houses.

Gilmour proved it with the bus stop she erected in a tiny second-floor studio at SPA and may again later this winter if the space most recently occupied by Everything Bridal remains vacant.

SPA Executive Director Sue Higby isn't pulling for that, but after arranging for Gilmour to take her show on the road, she said it could grow later this winter if the space in what was Barre's original Town Hall is still available.

According to Higby, she worked out the win-win arrangement with building owner Brad Ormsby.

The idea is simple — Gilmour gets a high-profile location for a project that attracts attention to the vacant building in the hopes that she will be forced to dismantle the installation — "In Our Hands" — and move on.

"That's the hope," said Higby, who views the arrangement as one of the practical links between the arts and the business community.

Higby said the exhibit is expected to remain through the end of the year and will actually expand in January if the space is still available.

That means the flower sculptures Gilmour created with post-consumer plastics won't be going

anywhere during a season that is otherwise dominated by evergreens, poinsettias and mistletoe.

"The idea is to pique curiosity," Higby said, suggesting Gilmour's large-scale sculptures of the Dwarf Water Lily and *Diapensia* (both endangered in Vermont) and the American Lily of the Valley (endangered in Kentucky) will be jarringly — and she believes interestingly — out of season.

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