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‘Rock – Paper – Scissors!’: Imagination unleashed in new SPA exhibits

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Stefan Hard / Staff Photo Barre sculptor Giuliano Cecchinelli II's "A Cut Above" in marble, vintage scissors.

Rock breaks scissors. Scissors cut paper. Paper covers rock. Simple? Not really.

Three new exhibitions open at Studio Place Arts this week. In “Rock – Paper – Scissors!” in the main floor gallery, 20 artists bring their creative expression to the materials and theme of the eponymous hand game. SPA’s upstairs galleries feature two solo exhibitions — “Fact and Fiction” with sculptures and drawings by Margaret Jacobs of Enfield, N.H., and “Remembering Our Future Death” with collages by Michelle Saffran of Moretown.

The three shows work together especially well. Saffran’s stitched and cut photographic collages in the Second Floor Gallery take the paper theme in a new direction. Some of the elements in Saffran’s work — floating seedpods and milkweed — in turn connect to Jacobs’ abstractions of the natural world in her metal sculptures.

“Artists used all of the materials listed and they engaged in the idea of the game, too,” said SPA Executive Director Sue Higby about “Rock – Paper – Scissors!”

The “Rock, Paper, Scissors” game and exhibition both offer depth and surprises. A competition

between two players using three hand positions, the game has straightforward outcomes — win, lose, or tie. According to a Chinese text from the 1600s, a variation of the game was played during the Han Dynasty, 1400 years earlier. In 19th century Japan, it gained great popularity and the modern hand signals replaced earlier ones.

While the outcomes seem unpredictable, it turns out that psychology and patterns can give a player an edge. A little research into these patterns, in fact, gave the art auction house Christie's a win over Sotheby's in the consignment of a Japanese collector's \$20 million Impressionist paintings in 2004. The collector couldn't decide which to hire, so left it to the game. Christie's scissors cut Sotheby's paper.

Scissors also seem to cut paper in a striking piece exhibited in SPA's front window — "A Cut Above" by Barre sculptor Giuliano Cecchinelli II. The flawlessly smooth sheet of paper curls away above the clean slice by the metal shears. In a playful and thought-provoking twist, this paper is rock — white marble.

Three boats square off on a chess board-like sea in Robert Millard-Mendez's installation, "Standoff." Each of the grey wooden boats has a sail, flag, rudder, in the shape of its respective hand gesture — the fist rock, flat hand paper, and two fingered scissors.

"The fun toy-like quality of my work is set in ironic counterbalance with a certain amount of dark humor," said Millard-Mendez, a frequent contributor to SPA shows who teaches at the University of Southern Indiana. "The primary aim in my work is to illustrate and analyze concepts that I find enthralling."

Paper and rocks come together in *Folded Bend in the River*, a five-piece installation by Janet Fredericks of Lincoln. The individual pieces were created in part directly in the New Haven River, as she used lithography crayon underwater, recording the flow over the rocky riverbed.

Susan Calza of Montpelier brings scissors and paper together in her *Devas and Demons* series. Maggie Neale of Montpelier incorporates all three elements and the competition in her "Rock Game – Collection Dispersal."

"Remembering Our Future Death," an installation, comprises several collages by Michelle Saffran. "Flow 2014," a long photographic collage that stretches the length of one display wall, connects images including of a coyote.

"Remembering Our Future Death' brings together my current reflections on the subjects of memory and death. Earlier stages of my art practice treated these two subjects as discrete and separate from one another. I failed to see their connection, perhaps I wasn't ready," says Saffran in her artist's statement. "The physics of non-linear time explains that all time, past, present and future exist simultaneously in the present moment. Applying this line of thought to memory leads me to the idea that memory may extend back to a time before this lifetime while at the same extend forward into future lives."

"Fact and Fiction," by Margaret Jacobs, features metal sculptures and drawings. Her pieces are

displayed on platforms and hooks that she designs for them.

“I use steel, pewter and pigmented beeswax to create visual narratives that explore the relationships between man, the environment and the created object. My scale is small both to convey intimacy and to force the viewer to engage closely with the work,” says Jacobs in her artist’s statement.

“Conceptually, my artwork focuses on the current state of our environment and the points of intersection with my family heritage and culture in the contemporary world,” she explains.

“Ultimately, my goal is to have the viewer recognize an abstraction of the natural world and, after being drawn in, realize that it alludes to a deeper meaning, often sadness, humor or sometimes both.”

Studio Place Arts

Studio Place Arts presents “Rock - Paper - Scissors!” through April 4, at SPA, 201 N. Main St. in Barre. Also on exhibit are: “Remembering Our Future Death,” collages by Michelle Saffran; and “Fact and Fiction,” sculptures and drawings by Margaret Jacobs. Hours are: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; noon to 4 p.m. Saturday; call 802-479-7069, or go online to www.studioplacearts.com. A public opening reception will be held Saturday, March 7, 5 to 7 p.m.