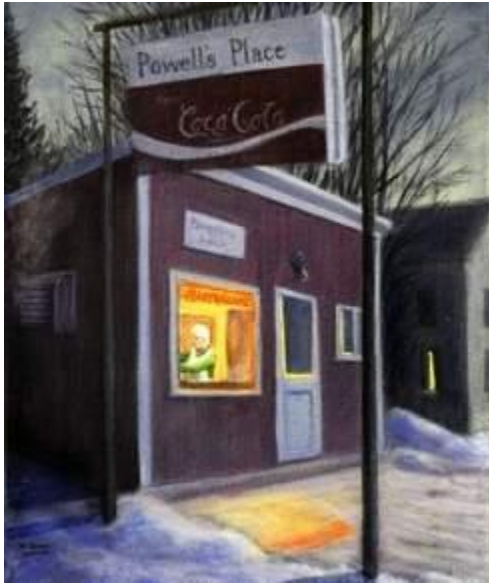


The Nitty Gritty: Exposing the other Vermont

by Mary Gow

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Stefan Hard / Staff Photo

South Hero artist Robert J. Towne's "6 AM" in acrylic on SPA's main floor.

Three trunklike lengths of white pine, each with a whorl of truncated branches, stretch from floor to ceiling near the entry to Barre's Studio Place Arts. Rocks — big irregular rocks — hang down on thin chains, others lie on the floor.

The "Stone and Trunk Installations" by Berlin artist Brian-Jon Swift set the mood for SPA's new main gallery exhibit, "The Nitty Gritty."

"The Nitty Gritty" and two solo exhibitions on SPA's upper floors by artists Anne Cummings and Jeneane Lunn open this week and run to April 5. The opening reception and a gallery talk with Heather Ritchie, creator of Barre's new public sculpture, "Coffee Break," are this evening, beginning at 5:30 p.m.

"All three shows are connected by the thread that they're showing things that we don't always see," said SPA Executive Director Sue Higby. "In 'The Nitty Gritty,' you'll see art that tells different chapters of the Vermont story."

"The Nitty Gritty" offers authentic views of the state, not bucolic or idealized ones. Working Vermonters, the Moran Power Plant in Burlington, untidy roadsides, and dams and bridge supports are among the artists' subjects. Paintings, photographs, a raw and compelling quilt, and

installations and sculptures are in the exhibition.

“Show us the industrial buildings, the quarries, the tools and equipment, and the people who have left an indelible imprint. Show us rural and urban; expose our region via a different lens,” read SPA’s call to artists for this show. Artists responded with all that and more.

In “Main Street, Winter,” an oil painting by Heidi Broner, of Montpelier, a pair of construction workers in yellow reflective safety vests sweep back the slush on a snow-edged sidewalk. The men, Higby explains, worked on the Main Street reconstruction in Barre — a project that everyone at SPA experienced firsthand as the construction steadily progressed by the front door.

The interior of the empty Moran Power Plant with its vast spaces, peeling paint and steel I-beams is the subject of three paintings by Katharine Montstream, of Burlington.

“There is something incredibly satisfying about painting something that is not inherently beautiful,” says Montstream in her artist’s statement. “The Moran Plant offers a challenge in all its grit and mass.”

“End of Oil,” by Mark Heitzman, of Barre, from a distance looks like a circular map of the Earth with continents and seas, but seen from an unfamiliar angle. With a closer look at the graphite drawing, two hex bolts trigger the recognition that it is actually an incredibly detailed drawing of the rusted top of an old oil barrel. Layers of corrosion, not land masses, are its topography.

Throughout the gallery are several vignettes, small groups of art dealing with similar subjects. The roadside grouping features Meg Miller’s charcoal drawing of a dramatic manmade feature, “Interstate Cut.” Michael Lew-Smith’s photograph “Alternators” captures the waste of brightly colored discarded car parts. In Alexis Doshas’ photograph “Road Closed in Winter,” the sign on a remote stretch of road is pockmarked from its use as a firearm target.

“Warm Quilt, Cold Draft” is an especially powerful piece by Grace Amber, of Chelsea. A figure in a cozy flannel nightgown has a traditional-style quilt folded up around her. Like Janus, she has two faces. Patches with smaller images are laid out around her in a disquieting array.

The two exhibits upstairs in SPA offer other Vermont perspectives.

“Carbon Footprint Portraits, Local Food, and Climate Change Eco-Art” features works that Cummings, of Westford, created from postconsumer waste. Her portraits, landscapes, food studies, even a spring trillium, are all made from litter — beer boxes, candy wrappers, newspapers, coffee cups and more. Sliced and torn into strips and pieces, these scraps of litter are transformed by Cummings.

In “Lights of Home,” on the third floor, Lunn opens her Northfield home — room by room — to viewers. Her home studio, kitchen, entry with ascending staircase are all shared in these intimate oil paintings. The lights in her home — on a table top, next to the chair where she’s curled up reading, even the sconce in the bright guest bathroom — draw the viewer into her space.

STUDIO PLACE ARTS

Studio Place Arts presents “The Nitty Gritty,” through April 5, at SPA, 201 N. Main St. in Barre. Also on exhibit are: “Carbon Footprints Portraits, Local Food, and Climate Change Eco-Art” by Anne Cummings (second floor gallery); and “Lights of Home” by Jeneane Lunn (third floor gallery). Hours are: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; noon to 4 p.m. Saturday; call 479-7069 or go online to www.studioplacearts.com. A public reception will be held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. today, with an artist talk by “Coffee Break” sculptor Heather Ritchie at 5:45 p.m.