

Visual Art Review: Gone fishing at SPA

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Stefan Hard / Staff Photo

Susan Bull Riley's oil painting, "Red Pants on Winooski" in SPA's main gallery.

Trout, salmon, trout, a school of perch, deep sea fish, fantastic fish, even fish that got away – and quite a few fishermen – are all welcoming spring in downtown Barre. As anglers head to favorite streams and brooks, an aquatically inspired exhibition has just opened at Studio Place Arts.

“Gone Fishing,” with paintings and sculptures by 23 artists, runs through May 15 in Studio Place Art’s Main Floor Gallery. Upstairs, in the Third Floor Gallery, sweet foods are in focus in “Sweet Images”, Michael Heffernan’s solo show. Artwork and crafts donated for SPA’s annual fundraising silent auction are in the Second Floor Gallery.

The shows are in place and the auction culminates on Friday, May 8, with the art center’s annual “BASH: Big Arty SPA Happening.”

“Fishing is one of those wonderful subjects. It’s about the natural world and also about camaraderie and about being at peace, doing beautiful things out in water,” said Sue Higby, executive director of SPA.

That fish and fishing are dear to many artists’ hearts is clear in the SPA show. Paintings, photographs, sculpture, papier-maché fish, fish collages, unique handmade flies, compositions with textiles and yarn all connect to the beauty and allure of watery life.

“I’m a watercolorist who loves fly fishing or perhaps a fisherman who loves to paint watercolors,” says David B. Tibbetts in his artist’s statement. “Rivers, rocks, and the constant change of water are exciting stuff to me.”

Tibbetts’ connection to the water and its life runs strong in the show. Viewers are transported to

moments on streams and lakes through many of the works.

In Tibbett's watercolor "Moonlight Jump" a shimmering Atlantic salmon leaps from the water. His black and white, "Heading Out" captures a moment with two fishermen in their canoe.

Jack Rowell of Braintree has a trio of photographs in the show. In "Larry Tracy on the Margaree," the acclaimed guide, namesake of the L.T. Special fly, is on the water in one of New Brunswick's legendary rivers. Tiny ripples in the water's surface radiate out around a fisherman in the early morning light in Rowell's quiet "Fish On – The Inland Sea." Taped to the back of that serene scene is a picture taken later that morning – of Rowell and his very substantial catch. Higby will turn the photo around for viewers to see.

Paired with Rowell's photographs are "Freestyle Classic Salmon Flies," created by Judd Levine of Marshfield. With brilliant feathers and handmade hooks, each one of these exquisite pieces is displayed in its own shadow box frame. Levine will be at SPA crafting freestyle salmon and trout flies at the May BASH.

A dense swirl of fish seems to be descending in a vortex together in "Fish Murmurations" by Just Rick of Bethel. Hundreds of individual fish, each one an illustration cut from a book, form this collage school.

Another school of fish – brilliant yellow ones – swims out from the wall in "Breakfast (Yellow Perch)" by James Lockhart of Elmore.

Overhead, at the SPA entrance, painted wooden fish with leather fins swim through the air – a blueback trout, chain pickerel and smallmouth bass. The fish and a loon were all crafted by Sonny and Rhoda Sweatt of Craftsbury Common. A book on display shows the Sweatts' workshop and process.

Along with the show's native species, many non-native fish and some imaginary, or not yet discovered, fish also swim through. Ted Ceraldi's fanciful "Bottom Feeder" and Michael Smith's "what's the best tuna?" with fowl in the fish are among them.

Two flights upstairs from the fins and gills, in SPA's Third Floor Gallery is Michael Heffernan's solo show, "Sweet Images." A visual feast of doughnuts, cinnamon rolls, waffles, Heffernan's paintings take an up close look at these foods.

"My images of food are not meant to be still-lives but an exploration of how mundane forms can expand meaning and understanding," Heffernan explains in his artist's statement. "... The grids and spirals and targets of late modernist painting are, in my paintings, looser organic structures that allow me to play more with the paint."

The big bright canvasses with butter dripping through the squares of waffles, swirls of cinnamon rolls, and sprinkles scattered over frosted doughnuts draw viewers into these very sensual foods.

Studio Place Arts

Studio Place Arts presents "Gone Fishing," artwork gone fishy, through May 15, at SPA, 201 N. Main St. in Barre. Also in exhibit are: Second Floor: Silent auction, through May 8, art for bidding; Third Floor: Michael Heffernan, through May 30, "Sweet Images"; 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.

Big Arty Spa Happening (BASH), \$25, \$15 in advance, will be held 7 to 9 p.m. Friday, May 8.