

## 'Pleased to Meet You!' SPA creates a world of fantasy

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ARTS CORRESPONDENT



*"Baba Yaga": Mike Turner of Northfield*

Enigmatic "Baba Yaga" of Slavic folklore fame peers out from her wooden mortar wielding her pestle. In spite of the suit and briefcase, someone stands out in the crowd at "Alien Bus Stop" — perhaps because of the tentacled hands and feet. Life-sized "Felix," a moss covered faun, holds his lamp and staff as he leans into the gallery. It's quite a crew at Barre's Studio Place Arts this month.

"Pleased to Meet You!" the Main Floor Gallery exhibition, opened last week. With diverse nonhuman characters — fantastic, intriguing, witty and thought provoking ones — the show includes work by 18 artists.



*"Welcome to the Club" (detail): Hannah Morris*

"Pleased to Meet You!" is in place for the art center's Big Artsy SPA Happening on Friday, April 20. The BASH is a major annual fundraiser for SPA's arts programming. With art, food, a silent auction and music, this year it features musical performance by Old Rocket, a southern old-time string band including Dana and Susan Robinson, and special guest Tom MacKenzie.

"Feast of Fools," a solo exhibition by Hannah Morris of Barre, brings further sets of characters to SPA's Third Floor Gallery. Morris is recipient of SPA's 2018 Studio Residency. Her exhibition features soft sculpture installations and collage-based gouache paintings.

"It's all about fun and stretching your imagination," explained Sue Higby, executive director of SPA, about the theme of "Pleased to Meet You!"

"We thought that characters that are not always in our lives would be fun and uplifting," Higby said. "And we always want a variety of artistic media. It makes a show texturally interesting to see the ways different artists tackle a subject. We have graphite drawings, resin sculpture, torn paper collage, metal hanging from the wall and more."

Mike Turner uses resin, fabric, wood, fur and other media to draw viewers into Baba Yaga's spell. Dressed in rags, elbow poking through her sleeve, kerchief frayed at the edges, she clutches her pestle with aged but still strong hands. Viewers need to bend down to look into Baba Yaga's face, a face lined with years yet pierced by alert eyes. She brings to mind tales of dark forests and old women with magical powers.



*"Pleased to Meet You"*

*Todd Logan of Essex Junction*

*"AO"*

Turner, who lives in Northfield, has been making custom fabrications since 1998, including for Walt Disney World and Universal Studios.

"Felix," by Kyle Sikora of Burlington, a mythological figure with features of goat and man, seems paused midstep in his prowling of the gallery. Like the Greek philosopher Diogenes, he holds a glowing lamp and is aided by his cane.

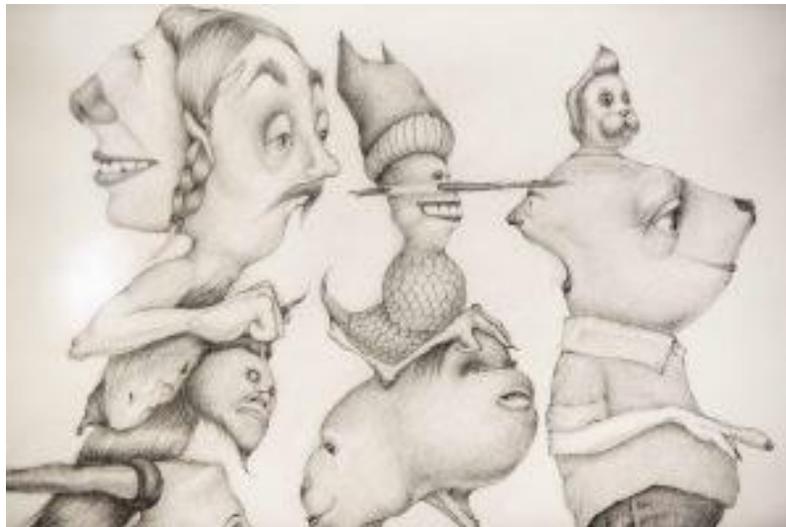
"The skull on his cane is a reminder of death. The fireflies in his lantern are the essence of life as their burning presence is his guide," Sikora noted.

"Blood Vessel" by Robert Millard-Mendez, a bright red piece in SPA's front window, is rich in symbolism. Millard-Mendez is considering imperialism in his current artwork, he noted, and also boats.

In "Blood Vessel," a three-mast ship balances above his fantastic creature's head. The boat is a caravel, the style of Portuguese vessel used by Christopher Columbus. As it sails, it is supported underneath by creatures and trappings that would not be seen at the surface. Its three legs stand on the backs of horses — European animals introduced to the Americas in the age of exploration. Its tiny arm holds a long gun. Sci-fi fans may also detect "War of the Worlds" references, Millard-Mendez noted.

In "Feast of Fools" Hannah Morris draws viewers into narratives that are unfolding. Her paintings and soft sculpture installations seem to capture a moment, with a sense that the events or situation will continue.

Climbing walls, waving pennants, lounging in a condo, leaping through space, Morris' soft sculpture figures fill the central portion of the gallery. Beautifully sewn, the figures are expressive in gesture rather than in their facial features — in fact, most barely have faces. They are an animated group.



*"Voyage": Teresa Celemin of Hinesburg*

"Survival Condo," a piece inspired by a New Yorker magazine article about nuclear fallout shelters built by the uber-rich, Morris' figures inhabit their post-apocalyptic digs. In "Surrender," each figure holds or waves a stick bearing a little white triangular flag.

"I like to take a slightly skewed angle," Morris said about the perspective she brings to her pieces. "It's like creating little mini-sets; like stages for performances."

"I mostly use fabric I've found or gathered or been given," Morris said. " I like transforming something into a new expressive being.

Morris brings layers of material and transformation to her collage/gouache paintings. She begins with collage from printed material from Vermont, South Africa, Brazil and elsewhere.

"I arrange, layer, paint over and ultimately refashion the narratives. A friend described my paintings as 'highly constructed ambiguity.' I'd add that they are trails of details, left for you to gather."

## **Studio Place Arts**

Studio Place Arts presents "Pleased to Meet You!" fantastical creatures and beings; the SPA Silent Auction; and "The Feast of Fools," painted collages by Hannah Morris, through May 12, at 201 N. Main St., Barre. 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](http://www.studioplacearts.com). A reception and BASH (Big Arty SPA Happening) will be held 7 to 9 p.m. Friday, April 20. Tickets are \$25, \$15 in advance