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Fault Lines' at SPA:

There are walls ... and there are walls

by Mary Gow Arts, Correspondent



Susan H. Wilson, Putney: "Hands and Voices (2019), clay, mixed media. Josh Kuckens / Staff photo/

Walls are prominent in the news lately — big walls, beautiful walls, walls that one can see through. In all their forms, walls divide.

Walk into Studio Place Arts and come face to face with a wall. It is big — floor to ceiling across the gallery. It is beautiful — the patterns perceived in its grid of taut black lines of tarred twine change as one moves position. Visitors easily see through it to the gallery on the other side. It does what walls do — it prevents people from moving freely through the open gallery space. It requires visitors to size it up and move to the sole opening to access the rest of the room.

This wall also brings to mind the toll of obstruction. Human hands — babies to adults — reach through it, grasping small sections of line, opening spaces to see but not pass through.

Tuyen My Nguyen's site-specific installation, "threadbarrier," with hands by Georgia Landau, is among the powerful artworks in the exhibition "Fault Lines" at Studio Place Arts in Barre. "Fault Lines" features over 25 artists and artwork in incredibly diverse media — crocheted cabbage to cartoon panels to shattered marble to tiny installations inside cosmetic compacts — considering current topics in the fractures and fault lines in the world today.

The "Fault Lines" theme transitions to geologic inspiration and layered artwork in the exhibitions in SPA's two upper floor galleries. Ceramic and fiber artist Deborah Goodwin's "Tectonic Plates and Topographic Tiles" features sculptural stoneware inspired by geologic forces. In Diane Sophrin's "Present Continuous: Commentary and Form," morsels of poetry chalked on wetted paper are layered in assemblages exploring concepts of variability and impermanence.

Thought provoking and memorable, artwork in "Fault Lines" offers social and political commentary.

"It's a show for the times," explained Sue Higby, SPA executive director, who curated "Fault Lines."

The window of SPA gives an introduction to "Fault Lines." A red fabric body lies sprawled on the ground in Janet Van Fleet's "Slain," beneath Karpuska's stainless steel sculpture "Transparency?" with its disoriented "truth" spelled out in topsy-turvy letters. Pria Cambrio's "Dysfunctional Blanket" (1976-2019) — red white and blue, with crocheted stars that don't quite fit together — drapes overhead.

Throughout the show is a range of intimate and cerebral explorations of discontinuity.

In "My Home is My Fortress," by Barbara Scotch of Montpelier, a tuft of wool cushions the inside of a bird's nest. A revolver nestled in it points out. A panel with antenna and the exposed guts of a home security system fortify one side.

"And they all cook with cabbage ..." by Eve Jacobs-Carnahan of Montpelier reflects on immigration. A lovely light green head of cabbage, its curved leaves covered in delicate crocheted skin, sits amid an array of recipes.

Jacobs-Carnahan in her artist's statement notes that fault lines of immigration status and national origin are not new in America. Her family's history includes immigration from Eastern Europe to Minnesota, a destination for many new Americans of the early 1900s.

“Regardless of their country of origin, it’s likely they all ate cabbage: a common food of common people. Whether cooked as Irish colcannon, Russian borscht, Polish sweet and sour cabbage rolls, or British coleslaw, it shared a core ingredient. Food may be one response to fault lines,” Jacobs-Carnahan said.

Susan Calza’s “One Backyard” considers the profound tragedy of displaced people. Her multi-media piece includes a small photograph of the body of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi, found washed up on a Turkish beach in September 2018, after his family’s unsuccessful attempt to flee Syria to seek asylum in Canada.

Anne Leeds’ “Compact Art” includes three tiny pieces, each one housed in a cosmetics case. In “Institutionalized Racism,” instead of flattering colors in the eye shadow box, each indent includes a photograph of a young black man killed by police in the United States. The tiny “Mass Shooting” compact startles with its shattered glass.

“The title ‘Compact Art’ is a play on both the size of the pieces (little works on big issues) and on them being constructed in makeup compacts (commentary itself on our cultural obsession with beauty and youth),” Leeds says in her artist’s statement. “The transparent wording is meant to draw viewers in to their own reflection in the mirror — asking them to form an opinion about the issue at hand.”

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Studio Place Arts

Studio Place Arts presents “Fault Lines,” artists explore the current political climate and the resulting fractures in institutions and elsewhere, through June 29; Deborah Goodwin, “Tectonic Plates and Topographic Tiles,” second floor gallery; Diane Sophrin, “Present Continuous: Commentary and Form,” third floor gallery, at SPA, 201 N. Main St. in 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.