

Masterly graphics at SPA

By Mary Gow, Correspondent

The Times Argus/ Published June 12, 2014



Stefan Hard / Staff Photo Leesburg, Va. artist Ethan Cebulash's graphic project on SPA's main floor.

The Master's Degree Program in Graphic Design at Montpelier's Vermont College of Fine Arts draws students from around the country and Canada. In this low residency program, students telecommute most of the year, working intensively one-on-one with faculty mentors. For one week each semester, they are together on campus.

Beginning this week, in a first time collaboration, recent work by VCFA student graphic designers is being exhibited at Barre's Studio Place Arts in "VCFA@SPA" in the Main Floor Gallery. With posters, books, flags, even innovative flashlight making kits, the show features work by eleven designers.

Accompanying "VCFA@SPA," two other shows at SPA also opened this week and continue through July 12. "The Drawing Game" by the Hecht Family in the Second Floor Gallery features creations with contributions by 10 Hecht family members and other friends playing their variation of the "Exquisite Corpse" game. Recent collages, photographs, paintings, and an installation by Mark Lorah of Middlesex are in the Third Floor Gallery in his show "Anti-algorithmic."

The Graphic Arts Program is one of VCFA's newest offerings – its first master's degree students graduated last year. Many students already have undergraduate degrees in design and are working in that field. Besides expanding their experience, the VCFA program qualifies its

graduates for further career opportunities. Current students in the program range in age from their mid 20s to mid 60s.

“One of the things about our program that I think is really important is our strong focus on the personal,” said VCFA Graphic Arts Program Director Jennifer Renko. “One goal that we set early on is that we are educating the whole person. We call them ‘T-shaped designers.’ They have depth and breadth.”

Personal exploration is central to several of the designers’ works, including in a powerful set of posters by Fara Rizvi, now of White River Junction, born in Karachi, Pakistan.

“These posters are part of a larger series of geometrical form studies with personal reflection and typographic experimentation,” explains Rizvi in her artist’s statement/bio.

Bold brilliant circles illuminate one poster. A second poster features softer pastel colors and a diagonal composition. On a third poster, angular words in the Urdu language fit into a tightly geometric honeycomb in black and white.

Each of Rizvi’s posters features a few words from a disturbing letter from her father, the words and their shapes belonging to the overall design. Accompanying Rizvi’s posters is a book, “Reflections,” that she created, offering the viewer further insights into her thoughts and design approach.

Rachel Ramsay of Washington, Utah, already has her own design business. She also started a non-profit program, Girls Go Digital, to empower girls to become involved in technology.

Ramsay’s work at SPA includes Girls Go Digital materials she designed. A set of posters and badges features amiable characters with different talents and strengths. Girls can recognize their own interests in identifying with these characters – Ella the Owl designs, Kari the Bee makes things, Ada the Robot writes code.

One of Ramsey’s Girls Go Digital is here – a make your own LED flashlight. She thoughtfully sent dozens of copies so visitors to SPA can share in the fun.

Segun Olude, of Winnipeg, Manitoba, uses digital tools and graphic design as opportunities to communicate language and social structures of the Yoruba culture of West Africa. Ethan Cebulash of Leesburg, Va., created a series flag redesigns and graffiti flag posters exploring symbols of American patriotism. Darlene Towne of Bates City, Mo., reflects on consumerism and overconsumption with a series of posters connected to her own personal household purge.

Upstairs at SPA, the other two shows also offer much.

“The work in ‘Anti-algorithmic’ is my exploration of the interplay between codified structure and intuitive action, rational order and irrational knowledge,” says Mark Lorah in his artist’s statement.

Overhead, a huge installation composed of small cardboard boxes, “After the Jump,” can be experienced from many angles. Looking through it, following the red string that runs the length of the gallery, is especially cool.

“There’s something sort of sci-fi about it for me,” said Lorah.

A series of Lorah’s collages also explore the tension between natural form and imposed structure. Several striking photographs connect to this theme – close-ups of neon surveyor’s tape dangling from trees.

“The Hecht Family Drawing Game,” in the Second Floor Gallery. includes drawings done over about 14 years, from a game that three generations of this family, which includes Vermont artists Nicholas Hecht and Kristin Hecht Schuyler, have played since the 1940s. While the original Surrealists’ version of the “Exquisite Corpse” game involved drawing sections of the human body on folded paper without seeing what was drawn in the sections above the fold, the Hechts have not been constrained by human form. Wine bottles, sea creatures, capitol domes, and countless other forms become anatomical sections. Beyond sharing these Hecht creations, this show will likely inspire a lot of folding and drawing.

Try your hand at the “Drawing Game” 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday, with Kristin Hecht Schuyler and Pria Cambio (ages 6 and older; \$4 materials fee).

Studio Place Arts

Studio Place Arts presents “VCFA@SPA: MFA in Graphic Design Invitational, through July 12, at SPA, 201 N. Main St. in Barre. Also on exhibit are: “The Drawing Game by the Hecht Family” (Second Floor Gallery); and “Anti-algorithmic” by Mark Lorah (Third Floor Gallery). Hours are 10 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. The opening reception will be held 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Friday.