

'Art Works!'

SPA exhibit requires you

VISUAL ART REVIEW by Mary Gow

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Montpelier artist Chris Jeffrey views his light installation that is part of his Color and Movement show in the third floor gallery at SPA. STEFAN HARD / STAFF PHOTO

BARRE — Crank it, drop it, spin it, rearrange it — it's time to get hands on at Studio Place Arts. "Art Works!" an exhibition that invites viewers to interact with art, opened last week at SPA. With installations and constructions by over a dozen artists, "Art Works!" welcomes — almost requires — involvement. From the flapping arms of "Ferdinand" to the fluttering snowflakes of "Flurry" to the immersive environment of "Dissection: SPA," this is a show that engages viewers.

"Art Works!" in SPA's main floor gallery is accompanied by two shows on the Barre art center's upper floors. "ArtCade" in the Second Floor Gallery features over a dozen Vermont artists' versions of Pinbox 3000, functioning cardboard pinball machines, whose framework is designed by Ben t. Matchstick and Pete Talbot of the Cardboard

Teck Instantute. A solo show by Chris Jeffrey, "Color and Movement" in the Third Floor Gallery, also draws viewers to move and get involved with his artwork.

"When people visit visual art sites, they always interact with art, often in contemplative and visual interaction. This exhibit allows viewers to have a tactile interaction," said Sue Higby, executive director of SPA.

Throughout the show, Higby noted, viewers turn cranks, arrange elements including stones and paintings, propel marbles, and experience the artwork with multiple senses.

"Tuyen My Nguyen's thread installation is a great example of an installation that alters the physical space. The viewer is fully engaged in the new geometry of the space created by the artwork. It's different in different light and at different times of day," Higby said.

In Nguyen's "Dissection: SPA," miles of thread are meticulously stretched across a portion of the gallery. Each taut line is actually three green and yellow threads that



Joe John: "Ferdinand" STEFAN HARD / STAFF PHOTO

together are reminiscent of the glorious chartreuse of spring leaves. Elements of the work recall the lines of suspension bridges.

"My interests are in human emotions and relationships plus their interactions with constructed spaces and natural environments," Nguyen explains in her artist's statement. "My awe in the at once simple and complex structures of the mind and physical environment (is) embodied in my work."

"Ferdinand," by Joe John, of Plainfield, with its Volkswagen engine block torso, relates to the automotive engineer Ferdinand Porsche, designer of the Volkswagen Beetle as well as other nifty cars. In John's sculpture, his figure's head emerges from one end of the engine block, legs from the other, and two pairs of arms reach out on the sides. When the viewer grasps "Ferdinand's" legs and rotates them, the outstretched arms flap up and down, perhaps flying.

Bruce Campbell's delicate steel wire assemblages have a jewelry-like quality. In "Flurry," four wire snowflakes are mounted on connected hinged arms. When the viewer turns the little crank, the flakes dance, moving together and apart. "Flight Study" of wire with stones recalls early flying contraptions.

In Maggie Neale's "Marine Docks," four square abstract paintings can be removed from the wall, individually rotated and rearranged. Algebra whizzes can figure out the possibilities. Without exhausting all of them, viewers can focus on the shapes and colors of the individual squares and explore different configurations.

"Monochromacy," by Cardboard Teck Instantute's Ben t. Matchstick and Pete Talbot, almost demands participation. Four white cardboard Pinbox 3000 game boards are combined into a single game with a desk bell mounted in the middle. Pull the plunger, shoot the marble into the fray, keep it going with the cardboard flappers, and with the chutes and slides, obstacles and runways, skilled, or lucky, players will ring the bell. Four potential pinball wizards can play at once.

"Monochromacy" is a great warmup to the second floor exhibit of Vermont artists' creative Pinbox 3000 boards. All of the artists started with the same setup available from Cardboard Teck Instantute, then customized them. From outer space to under the sea to a ceramic setup, the boards are diverse and imaginative, and a few are set up for gentle participation.



Maggie Neale: "Marine Docks" STEFAN HARD / STAFF PHOTO

Chris Jeffrey's "Color and Movement" also brings viewers into active involvement with his work. Shapes change as viewers move past and around his geometric constructions made of colorful strips of wood. In his fluorescent light installation that runs the length of a hallway, viewers are immersed in the work, and are invited to take selfies that can be posted with it.

"All of these explorations have as their focus my efforts to amplify and set apart color and light as separate entities which have their own power and beauty independent of anything else we may associate them with, which can profoundly affect us if we are open and present," Jeffrey explains in his artist's statement.

STUDIO PLACE ARTS

Studio Place Arts presents, through July 8, "Art Works!" in the Main Floor Gallery, "ArtCade" in the Second Floor Gallery, and "Color and Movement" in the Third Floor Gallery, at 201 N. Main St. in Barre. Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; noon to 4 p.m. Saturday; admission free; call 802-479- 7069, or go online to www.studioplacearts.com.