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Go ahead, tell us a tale!

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Photo by Adam Cairra

“A Cautionary Tale” by Mary Liz Riddle of Westmore, and other artist books are part of the new exhibit “There’s No Place like Home.”

Maybe there is an imaginary, distant island or planet — or certainly the Studio Place Arts (SPA) gallery — where you will find a well-dressed toad driving a scarlet roadster or a cucumber and turnip marching together in a parade with a small lizard serving as the Master of Ceremony.

A small, brown bear guards his cookie jar upstairs at the Barre art center, perhaps to protect its delicious contents from the furry troll lurking about in the main floor gallery. An artistic menagerie of dinosaurs, monkeys, roosters, grandparents, children, vegetables, and fuzzy, unknown beings has taken up residence as SPA’s summer exhibit.

“Tell Us a Tale,” which occupies the first and second floors, includes artwork from published works by Vermont authors and illustrators, and artwork inspired by children’s books. There are more than 70 framed and sculptural works by 20 artists on display through July 6.

Visitors may enjoy reading “Dinosaur Train” on the bench in the gallery while viewing five original oil paintings by John Steve Gurney of Brattleboro, which he created for the story he wrote. “All aboard!” someone shouts from the pages of the book, a welcoming sentiment for your playful travels through the galleries.

Does our imagination, set into motion via the stories we hear during our childhood, serve as the “training wheels” that prepare us to pedal through life’s many challenges on our own two wheels? Fairytale scholar Janet C. Daniels will speak to this and other topics during her public talk at SPA at 4 p.m. Saturday, June 8.

“My dad read the entire series of Tarzan books by Edgar Rice Burroughs to my older brother and me,” said Sue Higby, SPA’s executive director. “I guess that explains everything.”

Fanciful, original watercolor paintings from Tracey Campbell Pearson’s “Bob” and “Where does Joe go?” and Eileen Christelow’s “5 Little Monkeys Wash the Car” and “Letters from a Desperate Dog” share the gallery walls with the somewhat more realistic paintings from Amy Huntington’s “Grandma Drove the Lobster Boat.” Some artists even don playful pseudonyms, such as “Maven Peck Peck” and “Polanshek of the Hills.”

There are outstanding examples of illustration from books written by renowned children’s author Katherine Paterson of Barre, including an original painting by Leo and Diane Dillon, an award-winning husband-and-wife team of illustrators. In addition, Paterson has shared a lovingly embroidered quilt, created by local librarians, to honor her first eight published books.

Upstairs on the third floor at SPA, another book exhibit includes 23 artist books, which only in several cases appear to look like everyday books. The “There’s No Place Like Home” show, presented by the Book Arts Guild of Vermont, includes artistically repurposed books and newly created ones.

They sometimes look like intricate origami, and other times present as accordions or a flip book, and several works spring into action as pop-up books; all are mini-installations that express the artist’s impression of what “home” truly means.

Taken together, the two major art exhibits at SPA explore a vast variety of books and stories, all inventive in content and form.

Studio Place Arts

Studio Place Arts presents “Tell Us a Tale” and “There’s No Place Like Home” June 4 to July 6, at SPA, 201 N Main St., in Barre. 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.

A public opening reception for the two exhibits will be held Thursday, June 6, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. with a book reading from 7 to 8 p.m. “Fairy Tales: A Constant Magic,” a lecture, will be presented by Janet C. Daniels at 4 p.m. Saturday, June 8.