

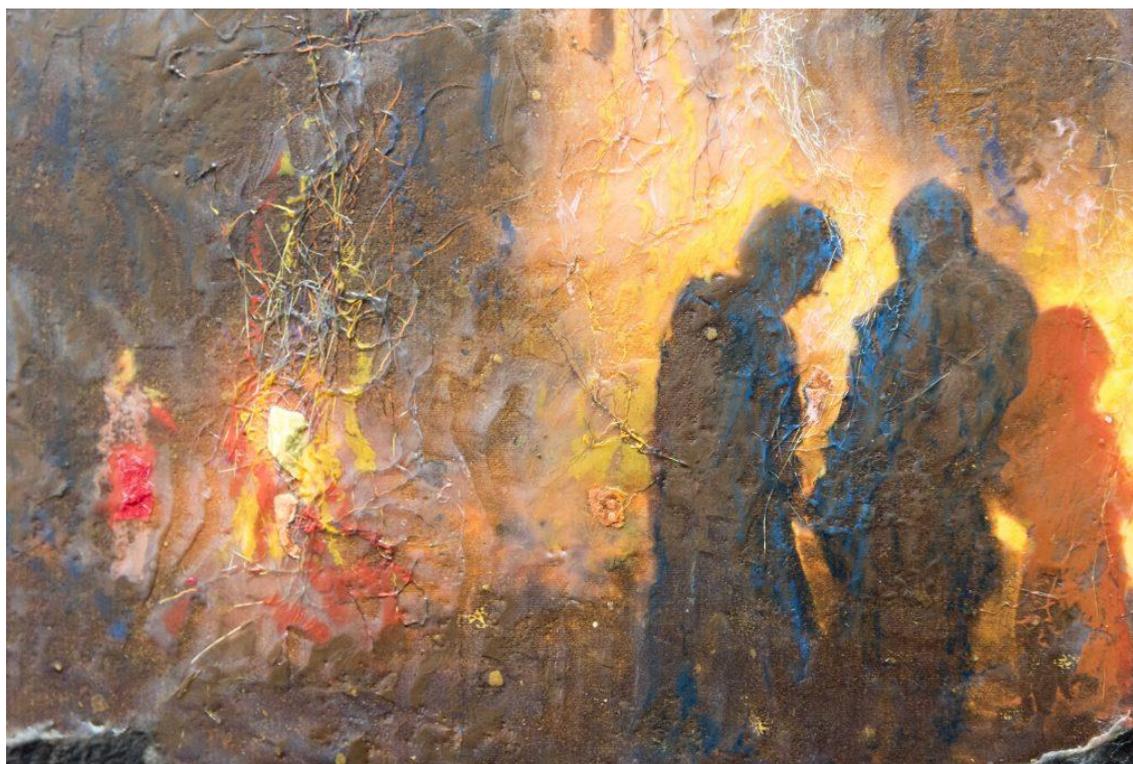
# Scorched' at SPA: Art sizzles in summer heat

Visual Art Review

*Mary Gow / July 14, 2018*

By MARY GOW

ARTS CORRESPONDENT



*Stephanie Gordon, Piermont, N.H.: "Bonfire #1-3," encaustic, mixed media on panel. (Josh Kuckens / Staff Photo)*

While the worst of the summer's first heat wave has passed outdoors, the Main Floor Gallery at Studio Place Arts is "Scorched" and will be through most of August. From the "Gates of Hell" to the combustion of fireworks to stunning ceramics fired in intense heat, the new exhibition at SPA feels the burn.

Three new exhibitions opened at Studio Place Arts this week: "Scorched," a group show in the Main Floor Gallery, features work by 28 artists, all considering effects of heat and fire; a solo show of portraits by Nitya Brighenti, "Storm: Nihilists, Anarchists, Populists and Radicals," is presented in the Second Floor Gallery; and "Ode to Common Things," with Julia Pavone's found object paintings, is featured in the Third Floor Gallery. All three shows run to Aug. 24.

"The idea of 'Scorched' is that the works either have a narrative that is related to fire and scorched earth or that the media are fire based. It could be, for instance, singed hair, it could be explosives like fireworks, it could be ink made from fermented soot," said Sue Higby, executive director of SPA.

"We have beautiful examples of ceramic work, in some cases vessels fired in wood fires. We have artworks with burned paper, burned paper with melted wax, lots of charred wood. Every kind of conceivable fire-based medium is here in the show," Higby said.



Fritz Rudi, Marshfield, Vt.: "Fire Starter" (2018), acrylic on canvas. (Josh Kuckens / Staff Photo)

From the potential for fire to full-out flames to destruction and creation, artwork in the show runs the gamut. Fritz Rudi's large acrylic painting of a twisted piece of paper, light gently reflecting from its curves, titled "Fire Starter," considers the combustible material before the flames. In Paul McMillan's "Self Portrait with Bolo" the subject sits in a classic portrait posture, wearing jacket and button-down shirt, and bolo tie. His brown eyes peer out through a mass of flame.



Rob Millard-Mendez, Evansville, Indiana: "Early Morning Fireships" (2018), wood, paint, hardware. (Josh Kuckens / Staff Photo)

Several encaustic works are in the show – a medium well suited to the theme as encaustic painting involved building up layers of pigmented wax. The encaustic works selected for the show also relate to the theme in subject, as in "Bonfire #1," "#2" and "#5" by Stephanie Gordon.

"The depth and luminosity created by the use of layers of semi-transparent wax are well suited for painting the flickering, mysterious qualities of firelight," Gordon explains in her artist's statement. "It seems extremely appropriate to me to use heat itself as a method for creating these paintings of people interacting with fire."



Jason Mallery, Montpelier: "Book in Hand" (1990), photo, acrylic, collage. (Josh Kuckens / Staff Photo)

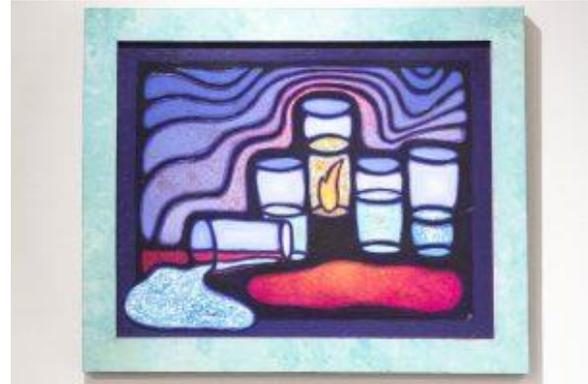
Alexandra Bottinelli's "Cosmology #1" and "#2" bring together encaustic and found objects, evoking a sense of the stirrings of the universe. Lia Rothstein uses soot, gunpowder, and fireworks to draw on handmade paper, encapsulating them with encaustic in "Combustion II" and "Combustion IV".

"In this series of work, I am exploring the delicate circuitry and disintegration involved in brain function/dysfunction," Rothstein explains in her artist's statement. "Working with incendiary materials, explosive, transient, transformative and unpredictable, I hope to illustrate the neural complexity, temporality, and fragility we all share."

Mixed media pieces include Janet van Fleet's "Range" with its four panels, each one including a stove knob on a metal square. Each square is pressed with words where you might find gradations of heat. The first one, "high low" is followed by "boil fry," "live die," "laugh cry."

Nitya Brighenti's portraits of Russian thinkers in "Storm: Nihilists, Anarchists, Populists, Radicals – Mid-19th Century Russia," connect nicely to Barre's history and local anarchism. The show is especially fitting for the upcoming Heritage Festival.

Brighenti's subjects – Bakunin, Nechayev and Kropotkin among them – were prominent in the "movement of ideas" against Czarism. The portraits are alive with intensity, especially in their eyes. Brighenti's series invites revisiting these thinkers, their theories, and this period of history.



Michael Smith, Underhill: "rise and fall" (2014), acrylic on masonite. (Josh Kuckens / Staff Photo)

Julia Pavone's "Ode to Common Things" brings together painting and household objects – objects that were once familiar. A rotary pencil sharpener, a wall-mounted can opener, wooden thread spools are among the artifacts that take on a new aesthetic in her work. Their function as well as form are at play in the work and in their dialogue with her painting.

In Pavone's "Thank-You Andy" a pair of can openers relate to a pair of painted Campbell's Tomato Soup cans.

"With this body of work, I pay homage to Pablo Neruda whose poem 'Ode to Common Things' was the seed of inspiration for these paintings," Pavone says in her artist's statement.

**Studio Place Arts** 201 N. Main St. in Barre. Hours are: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; noon to 4 p.m. Saturday (except July 18; expanded hours July 28 during Heritage Fest); call 802-479-7069, or go online to [www.studioplacearts.com](http://www.studioplacearts.com).