

Published in *The Times Argus*, January 21, 2016

Celebrating the Center for Cartoon Studies' 10th

by Mary Gow



Stefan Hard / Staff Photo A frame from a 1973 Little Orphan Annie comic strip. The strip was created in 1924 by Harold Gray.

Beetle Bailey and the troops at Camp Swampy, indefatigable detective Dick Tracy, Archie's girlfriends Betty and Veronica — original art of these cartoon classics and contemporary cartoons and graphic novels, including Alison Bechdel's "Fun Home" and Colleen Frakes' "Tragic Relief," bring their visual stories to Barre's Studio Place Arts this winter.

Decades of cartoon art — from strips that started in the 1920s to current work — are in SPA's Main Floor Gallery in "From the Center for Cartoon Studies Archives," a show celebrating White River Junction-based CCS' 10th anniversary. Original inked panels and pages by legendary and new cartoonists give viewers a close-up look at the hands-on creation of cartoons. The work at SPA is drawn from CCS' extraordinary

and extensive collection of original artwork and books.

Along with the cartoon exhibit, solo shows by Athena Petra Tasiopoulos of Barre and Andy Frost of Madison, New Hampshire, open in SPA's second and third floor galleries. "Beyond ..." by Tasiopoulos features her ethereal mixed media collages, re-inventions of vintage photographic portraits. "Paintings on the Tour for World Peace" includes new work by Frost — bold and whimsical abstract portraits.

All three shows continue to Feb. 20. The exhibitions' opening reception is 3 to 5 p.m. Saturday.

The cartoon show at SPA is one of several CCS exhibits and events being held around the country to celebrate the Center's first

decade. With its Master of Fine Arts program and dynamic curriculum of art, graphic design and literature, CCS has forged a prominent role in the cartooning world.

“The SPA show offers a cross section of what is happening at CCS,” said Michelle Ollie, CCS president and co-founder. “You get a historical look at work created decades ago and see its legacy. You also see the impact of CCS — the quality and level of work coming out of CCS.”

On the historic side, the SPA show includes some remarkable gems. Ernie Bushmiller’s “Nancy” is there, the mischievous little girl with distinctive round hair, who made her first appearance in 1932. In this strip, her buddy Sluggo learns about royal ancestors. Chester Gould’s “Dick Tracy,” who debuted in 1931, takes on archvillains Mole and Pouch.

Mort Walker’s “Beetle Bailey,” dating from 1950, is one of the longest running comics still produced by its original cartoonist. In the example at SPA, Sarge has a “Lard of the Rings” dream – obsessed by the power of donuts. In two pages of “Betty and Veronica” those best friends and worst enemies, Don DeCarlo offers a quick view of how an idea becomes a visual story.

“It can seem that cartoons just show up in the newspaper and books. But all the work that goes into making that story, that strip, that panel, is a labor of love,” said Ollie. “In the show you see the original work and all that goes into that one page.”

The lines and ink straight from the artists’ hands are on display at SPA. Editors’ blue pencil notes and other markings are on many of the sheets. Much of the original artwork

is paired with the printed page and books produced from it.

An original page from Alison Bechdel’s “Fun Home” is accompanied by her famous graphic novel. The musical theater adaptation of “Fun Home” on Broadway earned five Tony Awards for the Vermont cartoonist. Bechdel, a MacArthur Genius Fellow, is an advisor to CCS students.

An impressive range of work by CCS alumni and faculty are in the show. These include Joseph Lambert’s “Annie Sullivan and the Trials of Helen Keller” and Colleen Frakes’ “See You Space Cowboy.”

To facilitate viewers’ enjoyment of the range of publications, including many from CCS’ studio, SPA has reading tables and seating scattered through the gallery.

In SPA’s second-floor gallery, in “Beyond ...,” Tasiopoulos’s ethereal compositions draw viewers to her subjects. Tasiopoulos’ pale colors, geometric elements and other hand painted and drawn embellishments, transport the faces and nudes of vintage photographs to another realm.

“My imagination is continuously lured by the mystery of forgotten photographs. It is as if my subjects exist in an interesting sort of limbo — simultaneously trapped yet saved within the photograph. I find myself feeling compassion for them. By reinventing the portrait, I aim to disjoint my subjects from an antiquated identity, allowing them to transcend the constraints of time and place,” Tasiopoulos explains in her artist’s statement.

Andy Frost’s “World Peace” paintings were inspired when he saw “Las Meninas,” Picasso’s take on the Velasquez original. Frost’s subjects, bright abstracted faces,

similar to each other in style and tone, are named for family members and celebrities — Matilda, Aretha, and others.

“I have become very attached to my brave troupe of fellow warrior tricksters, harlequins, musicians, dancers, jugglers and wacky ‘Ambassadors for Love,’” said Frost,

The thought behind the series of work, Frost said, is “Why are you doing your art? I’m doing it for world peace. By titling them the ‘Tour for World Peace,’ it brings the concept to the forefront and I let my viewers make connections between art and peace and the things we choose to do with our lives.”

Studio Place Arts

Studio Place Arts presents “From the Center for Cartoon Studies Archives,” through Feb. 20, at SPA, 201 N. Main St. in Barre. Also on exhibit are Athena Petra Tasiopoulos’ mixed media works in paper, and Andy Frost’s paintings on the “Tour for World Peace.” 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. A public artists’ reception will be held 3 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 23.