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SPA descending into ‘Chaos’

By Mary Gow



Stefan Hard / Staff Photo

The main gallery at SPA is full of works for the current “Chaos” show. In the foreground is “Dark Matter” in painted spruce by Craftsbury artist Ted Ceraldi. Overhead is a collaborative ceiling piece by eight artists.

Perplexed — energized — fearful — curious? How do you feel when facing chaos? Do you want to put it in order, enjoy its disorder, explore what chaos means to you?

For the next month, chaos reigns in the main gallery of Studio Place Arts. “Chaos: Pandemonium, Disorder, and Turbulence in Art,” an exhibit that opens this week, features sculptures, paintings, mixed-media works and a huge collaborative installation. About two dozen artists are represented in the show.

Things are more orderly in SPA’s upstairs galleries with three new shows. Two emerging young artists’ works are on the second floor: “Spring Loaded” by Leah Sophrin and “Color of Expression” by Katy Sudol. Robert Waldo Brunelle Jr.’s “Walking Home” is in the third floor gallery.

“Chaos” lives up to its name in the main gallery. The artwork is not just conventionally displayed — it tumbles down the walls and hangs overhead, suspended from the ceiling. There is a playful side to much of the pandemonium, but there is also thought-provoking disorder.

“Chaos Ceiling Installation,” stretching from the front window to the back of the gallery, includes elements by eight artists. It takes advantage of a SPA feature that was designed into the space: hooks at 1-meter intervals, anchored into the beams.

“I’ve been waiting for 13 years to have something that hangs from all those hooks,” said sculptor Janet Van Fleet, founder of SPA. “Chaos seemed to be just the thing.”

For the installation, Van Fleet said, “We invited artists to bring a chaotic piece of their own creation with their own materials, bearing in mind that it was going to go up and be attached to the ceiling, not hang down more than 3 or 4 feet.”

Saturday the eight artists brought their pieces together — from Mark Lorah’s cardboard creation, with an enginelike presence and tentacles that stretch out and connect to other artists’ elements, to Lars Hasselblad Torres’ almost ghostly T-shirts. Van Fleet’s textile piece, which includes a lime green pillow and puffy red elements, coincidentally has the same colors as Ben Matchstick’s structures; they ended up near each other.

“They came on Saturday, and we started putting it up. We changed it around a lot. Even though it is supposed to be chaotic, it is also supposed to be engaging,” said Van Fleet. In the end, rather than creating order, “it is collaborative chaos, things bumping into other things, a community of chaos.”

Standing on the floor, Paul Calter’s “Rota Fortuna,” a large wooden dodecagon, is backed with tarot card images. When the wheel spins, money, playing cards, and little plastic skulls rattle and slide through its compartments. Calter, of Randolph Center, is a professor of mathematics as well as an artist — and some mathematical chaos seems at play here.

“Sowing Good Will,” by Carolyn Enz Hack, of Thetford Center, unfurls across the back wall of the gallery. In this huge delicate piece, Hack has brought together streamers of geometrically cut and folded kozo paper, chicken wire and tiny mirrors. Gradations of color flow from its center line.

“It is filled with that dynamic energy, sort of springing forth,” said Sue Higby, executive director of SPA. “This is a piece that requires viewing both close up and at a distance.”

Two pieces from Arthur Schaller’s collage series, “Forces from Above,” are exhibited.

“The pictorial space in each work consists of an overhead realm which is disorganized, active, mechanical, slightly sinister and possessing a force which acts upon, disrupts, and modifies a lower more peaceful realm, which by implication is in or is about to be in a state of flux,” Schaller says in his artist’s statement.

“Everyone who views the show will have some sort of bond with several pieces for reasons that are highly personal,” said Higby.

The three shows upstairs at SPA also offer a lot.

Brunelle’s “Walking Home” is a collection of autobiographical paintings, of Brunelle as a child walking through his hometown of Rutland. Victorian mansions, churches, cemeteries, vacant lots are there, with young Brunelle in different seasons, walking alone with his thoughts.

Abstract geometric drawings and paintings by Sophrin are on exhibit in her “Spring Loaded” show. Also on the second floor are portraits by Sudol. In her “Color of Expression” series, the palette of her wood slab paintings connects directly to her subjects’ relationships or persona — a loving couple in lavender “Tenderness,” an exuberant girl in orange in “Glee.”

Studio Place Arts

Studio Place Arts presents “Chaos: Pandemonium, Disorder and Turbulence in Art” (Main Gallery), through Feb. 22, 201 N. Main St. in Barre. In the Second Floor Gallery are “Spring Loaded” by Leah Sophrin and “Color of Expression” by Katy Sudol; in the Third Floor Gallery, “Walking Home” by Robert W. Brunelle Jr. The public reception is 4 to 6 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 8. For more information, call 479-7069 or go online to www.studioplacearts.com.