

## SPA's 'Botanical Blitz' offers winter refuge

By Mary Gow Arts Correspondent

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Nikolas Kotowich: "Baltimore Oriole", *Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo*

A bee alights on the cap of an acorn on a fallen oak leaf — the delicate cap and guest sit surrounded by acorns, their nuts made of pastel felt and marbles. Beech branches with orbs of green leaves hang overhead, moving gently with air currents. A delicate purple iris stitched on Shibori-dyed silk exults in spring. Birds sing, frogs croak, water gurgles over rocks.

"Botanical Blitz" in the Main Floor Gallery of Barre's Studio Place Arts welcomes visitors to an oasis of plant, insect and animal-inspired art — a blast of the natural world of warmer months. With two- and three-dimensional artwork by 35 artists "Botanical Blitz" is a balm for winter days.

In SPA's Second Floor Gallery, color and shape intersect in "Making My Mark: Recent Monoprints by Lois Beatty." Beatty is a longtime artist member and board member of Two Rivers Printmaking Studio in White River Junction.

These two shows and "20 Years of SPA!" in the Third Floor Gallery continue to March 7. A public opening reception will be held 3 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 25.

"We have described 'Botanical Blitz' as a refuge from winter and I hope it serves that purpose," explains Sue Higby, SPA's executive director. "We look forward to having visitors sit beside the sculptural tree in the gallery to view the botanical art, listen to nature recordings, and perhaps leaf through a seed catalog."

With soothing forest sounds in the background, "Botanical Blitz" takes visitors to layers of the natural world through a variety of media — collaged sunbathed daylilies to carved walnut tree-burrowing ants (whose kin actually burrowed through this walnut trunk) to an endearing fabric and knit patchwork opossum.

Purple cosmos painted with pigments made from petunia and rose petals and chards, a profusion of brown-eyed Susans, and stoneware sunflowers are among the spectacular blooms in the gallery. Vegetables make a good showing, including airborne carrot, squash and turnip. But the show is not rows of marigolds and legumes.

Some artists take viewers underground to worms and larvae, as in Janet Van Fleet's "Look Up, Look Down," with its array of painted discs. Others go to the water, where a frog peers out in Lynda Knisley's collage "Breaking the Glass Ceiling." Pollinators make strong appearances. The arboreal realm arrives in works as diverse as Fern Strong's sculptural rug

hooking "Maple Tree" and Emiko Sawaragi Gilbert's mobile branches.

Ornithologist and artist Nikolas Kotowich of Hinesburg has two watercolors in the show, "Baltimore Oriole" and "Bachman's Warbler." In each piece the birds, with their distinctive and recognizable characteristics, zero in on their chosen meal — a spider for the now extinct warblers. A landscape stretches across the bottom of each painting, evoking the species' home territory, also offering a quiet narrative of human activity on that habitat.

In Lynn Ocone's botanical print, "Flora I" on cotton linen, the viewer is drawn into layered patterns of leaves and needles. The organic forms repeated through her processes of folding and dying may bring to mind patterns of stained glass windows or motifs of Anatolian rugs.

Lois Beatty's monoprints in her exhibition in SPA's Second Floor Gallery draw viewers into layers of shape, pattern and color. Ribbon-like lines cut through some forms revealing what lies below, in some evoking a stream-like sense of a watercourse that has cut through the surface.

While Beatty's early professional career focused more on painting, collage, and paper pulp painting, she was drawn to monoprints more than two decades ago.

"I was drawn by the ability different print techniques gave me to work themes and expand my vocabulary for mark and surface. I am drawn to monoprints' fluidity and spontaneity — my prints are layered and painterly — and recently have incorporated solarplate etching and collagraph into my work. My images are informed by reality, referring to landscape, still life, botanical and human form. I try to exploit the biomorphic possibilities of metal, bone and stone," Beatty explains in her artist's statement.



Lois Beatty: "Looped II", *Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo*

## **Studio Place Arts**

Studio Place Arts presents "20 Years of SPA!" through March 7, a celebratory exhibit, Third Floor Gallery; "Botanical Blitz," works that depict the plant, insect and animal worlds, Main Floor Gallery; Lois Beatty, "Making My Mark: Recent Monoprints," Second Floor Gallery, at SPA, 201 N. Main St., Barre. 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](http://www.studioplacearts.com). A public opening reception will be held 3 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 25.