

‘Whir, Clank, Beep’: SPA artists move in unimaginable ways

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By Mary Gow Arts Correspondent



Eli P. Livingston: "Fossil Fuel", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo

Machines on the first floor — fanciful, futuristic, historic, cautionary — from a fossil-fuel dinosaur to abandoned millworks to technological overload. There is even a hand-powered drawing machine — try it!

A fantastic mythological world unfolds on the second floor as hundreds of ink-drawn figures stand on and hang from shelves and pedestals in an immersive site-specific installation.

On the third floor, a softer medium reigns with fiber artwork — quilted, felted, knit, hooked and more.

Another trifecta of art exhibitions has just opened at Studio Place Arts in Barre. Every one of SPA's three galleries offers a lot to discover.

"Whir, Clank, Beep," in SPA's Main Floor Gallery, features artwork from 30-plus artists exploring simple, complex, real, and imagined machines. In SPA's Second Floor Gallery, in Kenny Harris's "Envisivivarium," hundreds of mythologically inspired beings stand in groups interacting with each other and viewers. "Transformation: Material, Environment, Us," in the Third Floor Gallery, features fiber artwork by 16 members of the Vermont Surface Design Association. The exhibits are up through March 4.

"Whir, Clank, Beep" is co-curated by artists Michael Ridge and Janet Van Fleet, both members of SPA's board of directors. SPA's exhibition committee decides themes for the group shows, planning a full year ahead. The theme for "Whir, Clank, Beep" was suggested by Ridge.



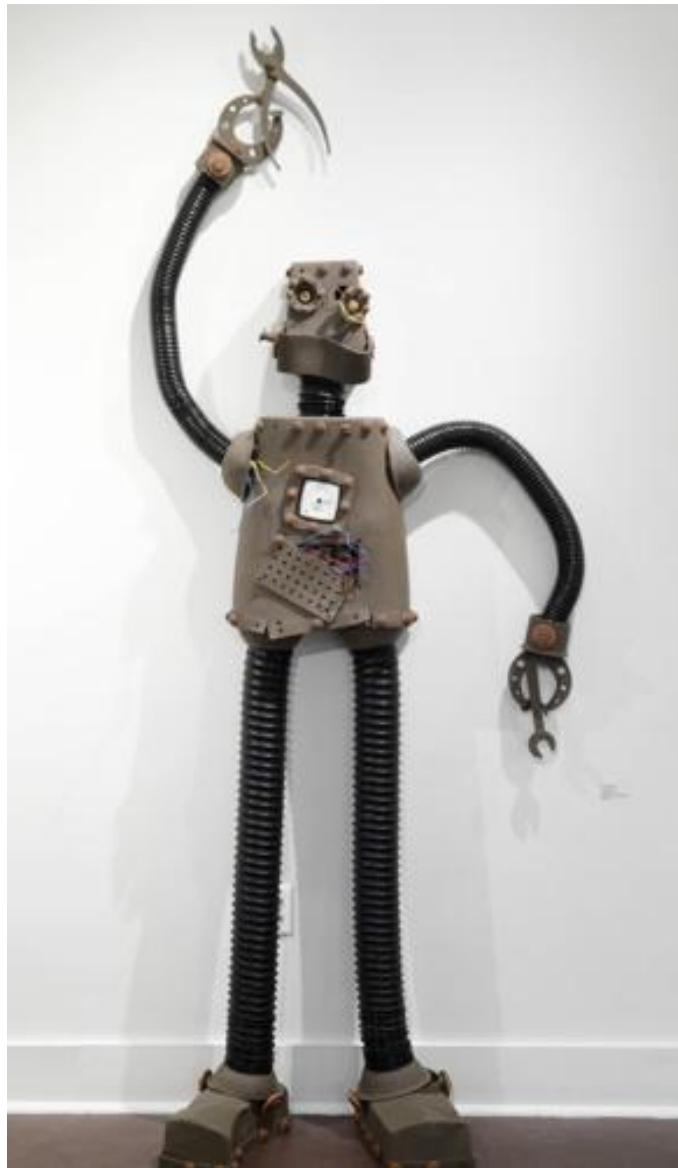
Altoon Sultan: "White Pipe", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo



Julia Pavone: "The Wheels Just Won't Stop Turning", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo

“As humans we are surrounded by machines all the time in our daily lives — computers, mundane items around our homes like toasters and microwaves. We have vehicles, and may need medical equipment. Think of Vermont’s agriculture and outdoor industries that are reliant on machines. I think it’s really exciting to see how different artists interpret those machines around us,” said Ridge.

A human-sized robot-like figure seems to wave visitors into the gallery. “MILIAMP,” by John Brickels, of Lowell, Massachusetts, has one arm raised overhead and holds a wrench in the other. The needle of a milliampere meter pulses on its chest.



John Brickels: “MILIAMP”, Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo

A trio of welded steel “Rockets” by Matt Neckers, of Eden, seems to float overhead. “Electric Bitters: 1899-1959,” an installation by Roger Weingarten, of Montpelier, invites viewers to take in its lights, colors and unexpected forms from a trio of soda fountain-style stools.

Tina Escaja’s spider-like wood and wire robot-poem/sculpture “Hexapod@ ‘A tu semejanza /mi Imagen’” is engraved with segments of a poem in the original Spanish and in English.

Escaja’s choice of a leggy arachnid for the piece, she explains in her artist’s statement, is to “accentuate anxiety and removal between species, thus complicating the already ambivalent relation between humans and technology, ultimately questioning its binary foundation.”

A resin sculpted hot-rod dinosaur with big fins, tires and an internal combustion engine by Eli P. Livingston, of Brooklyn, New York, stands on a pedestal, jaws open. Nearby, Kathleen Kolb’s oil painting of loggers at work, “Loading in Deep Snow,” a loader transfers a lengthy log in its jaws.

With a low-tech device, “Barre X23 Drawing Camera,” by Joe John, of Plainfield, viewers can trace their face as seen in its mirror to create a self portrait. Portraits of those who wish may be displayed in SPA’s Quick-Change Gallery.

In three watercolors, John S. Dimick, of Guilford, considers machines and machine shops of the past. With his layers of color, light and shadows, and his accuracy in how these belts and pulleys and presses worked, he draws viewers into now dormant but once industrial spaces.

Walk into Kenny Harris’s “Envisivarium” and find that you are in familiar but not exactly recognizable company. Harris’ figures — all black ink on white paper in similar style — range from a couple of inches to nearly a foot tall. They have tails, tentacles, antlers, horns, top hats, manes, scales, beaks, fins, hooves, claws and more. Many are anthropomorphic, some perhaps extraterrestrial. One looks a little like Sponge Bob Square Pants.



Details from "Envisivarium" by Kenny Harris, JIM LOWE/Staff Photo

"I remove myths from their cultural contexts, stylistically uniting them through similar form, line, material and composition ... By removing the identifying cultural cues found in these legends, characters like Quetzalcoatl and Zmey Gorynych can be placed within the same cultural realms as each other, even though their origins are disparate in time and space," says Harris in his artist's statement.

The figures, Harris notes, "welcome the viewer engaging the audience in a conversation of imagination and creativity."

The elegant curved designs of the late Judy Dales' quilted works greet viewers at the top of the stairs in SPA's Third Floor Gallery in "Transformation: Material, Environment, Us." Dales, of Greensboro, who died in October 2022, was a member of the Vermont Surface Design Association. "Three" with its trio of fluid shapes almost dancing in front of the burgundy background, "Happy Daze" with abstract forms almost bursting with joy, and the others show Dales' extraordinary composition and her preeminence in curved seam design.

Along with Dales' lovely pieces loaned by family for the exhibition, there is much more.

Leslie Roth was inspired by the rebound of the natural landscape in Yellowstone Park resulting from reintroduction of wolves there for her "Linchpin," a gray wolf of knitted yarn, wood, polymer clay and stuffing.



Cari Clement: "Overspill" from "Transformation: Material, Environment, Us", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo

A knitted expanse unrolls like a scroll in Eve Jacobs-Carnahan's "The Committee Process." Knitted hands clutch and poke through — some hands are tied. With a pulley and lines, viewers can unroll the Jacobs-Carnahan's piece.

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