

Visual Art Review

'Marked' at SPA: Themes, symbols and concepts in tattoo & graffiti art

Published in *The Times Argus & Rutland Herald*, Mar 21, 2026, by Mary Gow, Arts Correspondent



Orah Moore: "Passing by the Railcar, Barre", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur, Staff photos

A rusted Green Mountain Railroad Company boxcar stands on a siding. Its proprietary yellow stenciled letters GMRC are crisp, while much of its aging metal side is covered in graffiti — bubble style white throw ups peeling off along with underlying paint, angular tags of their writers — APB was especially prolific.

In this color photograph, a smartly dressed woman with a leather valise walks by the railcar between the tracks. This photograph, from Orah Moore and Barbara Flack's series "The Traveler," is layered on a larger photograph in black and white of the same

car, which in turn is extended beyond its frame by graphite drawing, with a wider view of tracks and car and landscape. Note that ABP's tag transitions in the graphite to a different personal mark — OMM.

Orah Moore's "Passing by the Railcar" is among more than 40 works in the group exhibition, "Marked," in the Main Floor Gallery at Studio Place Arts this spring. In "Marked," with two- and three-dimensional work, 32 artists explore themes, symbols, and concepts found in tattoo and graffiti art. The exhibition is organized by artists Athena Petra Tasiopoulos and Leslie Roth and SPA Executive Director Sue Higby.

SPA's Second Floor Gallery features "Brimming," a dual exhibition with painted and collage portraits of imagined women by Mary Hill of Underhill and monoprint and mixed media flora by Elizabeth (Betsy) Chapek of Underhill Center. The tiny Quick Change Gallery features linocuts by Camille Castellini.

"Book Lab: Collaborations" fills SPA's Third Floor Gallery with work by 10 women book art artists. Book art uses the concept or structure of a book to bring content and form together — pages in some fold out like an accordion, compositions combining folded and rolled hang from the ceiling. A piece recalling chain letters, once widely spread through post, takes on its eponymous form.



Marcia Vogler: "Chain Letters", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur, Staff photos

Graffiti and tattoos, markings of a body or place are considered in “Marked.” Both have ancient precedents. Pompeii’s famed inscriptions, roughly 11,000 of them from 79 C.E, are among them. Tattoos have been found on mummified human skin from the fourth millennium B.C.E.

M.F. Cardamone of Penn Valley, Pennsylvania, considers graffiti in “Philly Love” and tattoos in “Rose of No Man’s Land.” Cardamone, passionate about nature and ecology, and especially drawn to native plants and their histories, juxtaposes plants, images and words in mixed media compositions.

Cardamone’s artist’s statement notes that, “exploring a plant’s ecology and the culture where it grows is a recurring theme in my work.”



M.F. Cardamone: “Rose of No Man’s Land”, Jeb Wallace-Brodeur, Staff photos

The artist, who lives in Philadelphia, a city with a rich graffiti tradition, found a small tree growing from a crack in the pavement. In “Philly Love” Cardamone brings one of its leaves together with graffiti “Love,” recalling the city’s name.

In Cardamone’s “Rose of No Man’s Land,” along with the central red rose (roses have long been subjects of tattoo art) are marks like the tattoos of a man now known as Ötzi who lived before 3000 B.C.E and has been found to have 61 tattoos, their ink believed to have been manufactured by fireplace ash or soot. A temporary dragon tattoo from the artist’s collection is among the other elements in this work whose title comes from a 1918 song that pays homage to nurses on World War I.



Kerin Anjali Rose: "As above, so below...a koan", ", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur, Staff photos

Rosalind Daniels, of Cabot, references the 3,000-plus year tatau (tattoo) rite of passage tradition of Polynesia, in particular the Samoan Islands, in “Pacific Tatau.” Daniels’ textile piece includes printed fabrics of Samoa, Fiji and Tonga — some that were hand-printed for her when she was a Peace Corps volunteer there.

In “Protection” by Poppy Gall, of Morristown, two extended hands and wrists are marked with stitched patterns. The designs in this mixed media work with paint, collage, and

stitching, connect to the ancient sicanje tattoo tradition of the Western Balkans, where children, especially girls, would be tattooed with Christian crosses, and other symbols including suns, moons, seedlings and more.

Expressions and styles of graffiti writers abound in the exhibition.



Susan Parente: "Hearts and Soul", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur, Staff photos

"TRESPASS THIS PROPERTY" and "POSSESSION OF PAIN(T) PROHIBITED" are both by NTEL, a graffiti writer, muralist, designer, fine artist based in Cassville, Missouri. NTEL's artist's statement notes that the pieces feature, "various textures, gestures, shapes, and techniques that are synonymous with NTEL's style and street arts culture. These abstractions are weaved together with signage encountered by the artist while trespassing in areas like tracksides and on federal property."

The signs warn graffiti creators of the risks of trespassing and expressing themselves. Also in the compositions are a monarch butterfly, hermit thrush, and dormant and dying plants that may evoke a sense of fragility and life cycles.



Wesley Turner: "Contraband", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur, Staff photos

"Brimming" on the second floor, with works by Mary Hill and Elizabeth Chapek, feels like spring. This new body of work by Hill with detailed collaged women's portraits grew out of her study of collage and her evolving creative practice during the COVID pandemic. Hill builds up delicate layers of sketching and watercolor wash as her women take on their character — a sideways glance, an expressive lidded eye, with fabulous hair and millinery.

In Chapek's monoprints and monoprint combined with colored pencil and collage, her luminous organic subjects include leaves and flowers. With flowing lines, her works encompass both realism and abstraction.



Mary Hill: "Ingrid's Wish", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur, Staff photos

"Book Lab: Collaborations, the third-floor exhibition, features individual and collaborative work of this book art group of 10 women who began meeting and sharing techniques and skills in 2016 — a decade ago.

Book arts have properties of books — paper and binding. They may feature text and images or may be sculptural. Printmaking, papermaking, typography, cutting may all be elements of a book art piece. Book art pieces are often intended to be tactile as well, and white gloves are on hand at SPA for pieces that may be touched.

In "Red Spot" by Marilyn Gillis, with printmaking and papercutting, viewers follow a roving red dot through the black and white images on its accordion style pages. In "Embolden," three suspended pieces by Dorsey Hogg, pages from discarded books are folded into intricate spheres and geometric marvels, their material responding to air movement around them.



Dorsey Hogg: "Embolden", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur, Staff photos

mgow@gmavt.net