

'Drip!' at SPA: Celebrating our need for water

By Mary Gow Arts Correspondent

The Times Argus/Rutland Herald, April 2/3, 2022



Work by Alissa Faber, Credit: Jeb Wallace-Brodeur

“Water, water, everywhere, Nor any drop to drink,” wrote Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798 in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” recounting the parched seafarers’ plight while becalmed in uncharted equatorial seas — their thirst unslaked as they floated amid undrinkable abundance.

At “Drip,” a new exhibition up through April 30 at Barre’s Studio Place Arts, viewers are also surrounded by water — and drawn to consider the present and future of this life-sustaining resource.

An immersive cascade of silk cyanotypes, glass bubbles floating to the ceiling, a raft installation reflecting on survival, abstract paintings evoking plastic waste fouling the depths, a print series reminding viewers that our human bodies are about 60% water, are among the installations and two-dimensional artworks exploring water quality issues. “Drip” features works by 18 artists.

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This diverse thought-provoking show is especially timely as 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of the passage of the United States Clean Water Act.

“Drip” is accompanied in the upstairs galleries by solo exhibitions, “Of Fire and Rust” with encaustic and mixed media artworks by Deborah Barnwell of Plainfield, and “City Scenes,” urban drawings by Charles Lysogorski of Shelburne. “Art Fur Animals,” with graphite drawings and prints by Jamieson C. Gallas of Barre fills the Quick-Change Gallery (through April 6).



Julia Pavone: “When Will It Be Too Late”, credit: Jeb Wallace-Brodeur

“Drip” exposes viewers to a variety of beauty and problems associated with water quality.

“The show is intended to get people to slow down and experience different aspects of water quality issues through the eyes and work of some very skilled artists,” said Sue Higby, executive director of Studio Place Arts.

“Here we are in beautiful Vermont and many of our water quality problems are still in need of help.”

Kate Ruddle’s powerful installation “Adrift,” with wooden raft, ropes, stones, fills the front portion of SPA’s Main Floor Gallery. For “Adrift,” Ruddle reflected on Théodore Géricault’s groundbreaking 1819 painting “The Raft of the Medusa” and events that inspired it.

When the Medusa sank in 1816, with a shortage of lifeboats, about 150 survivors crowded on a makeshift wooden raft. Starvation, murder and cannibalism reduced their number to 13 in less than two weeks. Political favors appointing unqualified ship officers and lack of leadership were causes of the tragedy.

“I became especially interested in moments where thoughtfulness unraveled ... This seems a foreboding metaphor for a divided political atmosphere dealing with an escalating environmental crisis, where there is a decided lack of leadership, disinterest, and miscommunication for the common good,” says Ruddle.

Renee Greenlee invites viewers to immerse themselves in our watershed via long silk cyanotype curtains hanging from the SPA ceiling in “Safe Passage.” The silks evoke flowing water and are also created with Lake Champlain basin waters.

Cyanotype, one of the oldest photographic processes, is made by treating a surface with iron salts, exposing it to ultraviolet light and washing it in water, creating deep blue images.

“I create cyanotypes of our local watershed, bringing a blue world to light,” says Greenlee in her artist’s statement.

Kathryn Peterson’s “Travel and the Global Warming” installation with a beachy setting — flipflops, sunglasses, and a video — examines environmental impacts of tourism. Peterson’s video looks closely at Puerto Rico and climate change issues there.

Drinking water is a focus of works including Julia Pavone’s “When Will It Be Too Late?” a faucet flowing with twisted metal and Larry Bowling’s “Drinking the Kool-Aid,” a glowing burst punctuated with small tiles of chemical elements — mercury, lead and nitrogen.



Deborah Barnwell: “Travelling Light”, credit Jeb Wallace-Brodeur

In SPA’s second floor gallery are Barnwell’s abstracts, “Of Fire and Rust.”

“I have always found my inspiration in the organic: stone, bone, water line, the patterns and textures of everyday life. These elements become the springboard for my work,” says Barnwell in her artist’s statement.

Barnwell notes that after a catastrophic house fire, now, “working with fire allows me to gain some control over an unpredictable element and bring beauty out of chaos.”

Dark sepia lines in her work are fire lines, from which she develops her work, adding elements, colors, beeswax and resin.

The third floor gallery transports visitors to New York streets and subways and pulsing urban life. Lysogorski's "City Scenes," mostly charcoal and graphite drawings from the late 1970s and early 1980s, breathe the people and energy of the city.

People sit on curbs under streetlamps. Crowds jostle in subway cars. A man holding his head slumps at a barroom table. With a few lines, Lysogorski captures postures and gestures that speak volumes. In his drawings, you practically hear city cacophony and feel the grittiness of city air. Taking time with the images, their narratives unfold.



Charles Lysogorski: "City #180", credit: Jeb Wallace-Brodeur

In SPA's tiny Quick Change Gallery, sensitive graphite drawings by Gallas of dogs, cats, and other creatures fill the walls. Pet owners will recognize expressions that convey moods and expectations. Gallas includes a couple of works of larger fauna including a face-to-face moment between bull and matador. Gallas's "Art Fur Animals" exhibition is a creative fundraiser for the Central Vermont Humane Society.