

Visual Art Review

‘Violaceous’ & ‘An Exuberant Journey’: The color purple and Anne Sarcka at SPA

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Frederick Rudi: “Purple Portraits #10 Cotton Duck”, Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo

Popping with purple and ebullient in exuberance, Studio Place Arts presents a vibrant pair of exhibitions for this long-awaited May. The two new shows, “Violaceous” and “Anne Sarcka: An Exuberant Journey,” opened last week and continue to June 15.

Studio Place Arts’ Main Floor Gallery is awash in purple with “Violaceous” with works by more than 50 artists spotlighting the color purple. Purple radishes, purple abstracts, purple rain, purple skies, and so much more — viewers see why blended red and blue is so many people’s favorite color.

Bold color also prevails in SPA's Third Floor gallery in "An Exuberant Journey," a solo exhibition by Anne Sarcka of Montpelier. Her large format, bright acrylic paintings, most landscape-inspired, fill the upstairs gallery. The exhibition extends into Sarcka's airy studio with collage, self-portraits, some sculpture and other works.



Lian Brehm: "Jacovanda beckons", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo

In SPA's Second Floor Gallery, the annual "Art It Up!" silent auction just launched. Every year artists donate works to support SPA programs — more than 60 pieces this year, including paintings, photographs, mixed media, textile art. Several pieces of brick art are featured — artists' creative reuse of bricks from SPA's flood damaged foundation of SPA.

The color of lilacs, amethysts, and plums, purple can be loaded with meaning — royalty, bravery, femininity, spirituality. Purple paint, made with magnesium, was used in Neolithic art in French caves. Tyrian purple dye, made from snail mucus, was prized for centuries — Alexander the Great and Catherine the Great both favored it.

An intergalactic purple-pink cloud glows in Chris Groschner's mixed media collage, "Metro Cookeville in the River of Time," that goes into space and down to earth. Interlocking gears set in a James Webb or Hubble Telescope photograph lead to a

three-dimensional brass framed box with a surreal little village and landscape collaged inside, as time seems to be ticking down. Amid the thousands of stars, the huge wispy cloud, visible in the infrared glow of gas and interstellar dust, attests to cosmic change — the genesis of new stars or the remnants of old ones.



Chris Groschner: "Metro Cookeville in the River of Time", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo

In Monica DiGiovanni's "Mindstream: Acceptance" in Sumi ink, gouache, pigment and watercolor, the artist turns to purple to look internally, with layers of loops and curving lines.

Her "Mindstream" paintings, DiGiovanni says in her artist's statement, "wind through the visual field of my unconscious. The lines vibrate and meander into and next to each other, overlapping to accentuate the space underneath until it may be completely obscured. With a brush in hand and a color palate that helps me see what I feel, I can rest in peaceful wonder and slow down the complexity of lived experience, stepping back to observe without shutting down."

Purple's royal tradition makes an appearance in Anne Davis's little acrylic painting "Her Purple Majesty" with her familiar tuxedo cat Gabby in cloak and crown. Mary Taponga's mosaic "Prince," with countless tiny tesserae, recalls the late musician and his famously favorite color.



Leslie Fry: "Purple Haze", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo

David Hurwitz's "Walnut-Purple Taffy Mirror" reflects from its mirror framed in luscious curves — like those broad ribbons formed in stretching old-fashioned, salt-water taffy.

Adelaide Tyrol, of Plainfield, also a botanical and natural history illustrator, has three avian subjects in the show. Her "Royal Sun Angel," only 4¾ inches from tip of beak to tip of tail, with shimmering purple plumage, is an endangered South American hummingbird.

While one color dominates in the Main Floor Gallery, it is a vibrant multi colored world on SPA's third floor, with Anne Sarcka's "An Exuberant Journey."

Sarcka, who lives in Montpelier, has had a studio at SPA for several years — a glorious airy third floor corner with a massive wood easel in the center and light streaming in through tall windows. Sarcka and artist Maggie Neale share the studio.



Anne Sarcka: "Mountain Melodies", Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo

Now a nonagenarian, Sarcka grew up in Cuttingsville. She credits her family with nurturing her interest in art. Her father's family emigrated from Finland to Proctor to work in the marble quarries in the 1890s. When her grandfather was blinded in a work accident, her father, a young teenager then, went to work. Encouraged by the Italian sculptors, he moved into sculpture himself.

Two pieces in Sarcka's studio speak eloquently to this family tie: a lamb by her father, and a sculpture, her first, which she carved while in college at Antioch. Her father sent her this block of stone and tools.

During Sarcka's early artistic career in New York City in the 1950s, she taught art and studied art. Earning her master's degree at the Columbia University School of Social Work, she became a community organizer in the war on poverty.

Sarcka has lived in Montpelier since the 1970s and has served as director of the Vermont Commission on Women and as program director at the Vermont Arts Council. Her creative practice through the years included longtime participation in Billy Brauer's life drawing class and Cameron Davis's acrylic painting class at the University of Vermont.

The exuberance of Sarcka's life and creative journey radiate in her work. In "Sunset over the Capitol" the sky is on fire in orange, even reflecting from the golden dome. In "Moment of Truth," the viewer is practically in the boat with a yellow-slickered fisherman landing a splashing fish.

"I am drawn to a vibrant palette and love playing with colors and seeing how they interact," Sarcka says. "I often draw inspiration from the natural world and also enjoy sloshing paint on canvas without any particular intention and seeing what shows up and where it leads."

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