

Rock solid — in and out of SPA

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Stefan Hard / Staff Photo

Barre artist Giuliano Cecchinelli, II's granite sculptures "Loaf" and "Sap from a Stone" are seen in the foreground of the annual stone show on the main floor of SPA.

From a gravity-defying belt sculpted from a single piece of Danby marble, to a bread knife — a real bread knife — slicing through a granite loaf, to a steel and marble “Wanderer” who seems to stand on tiptoe poised to glide off in any direction — the sculptures at Studio Place Arts show off the extraordinary innovation and creativity of Vermont stone carvers.

“Rock Solid – In and Out” opens at Studio Place Arts in Barre this week. With its “In and Out” theme, beyond the impressive main floor gallery show with works by over two dozen artists, the event also draws attention to outdoor granite sculpture in downtown Barre.

Two exhibits in SPA’s upstairs galleries also open this week — the vibrant installation “Bills. Bills. Bills.” by Beth Haggart and “Who Makes Community” with charcoal drawings by Marie LaPre Grabon accompanied by interviews of the subjects by Mary-Ellen Lovinsky.

“Rock Solid,” presented annually by SPA since 2000, always features a diversity of works. These include creative pieces by some of the outstanding artisans who work in this area in the granite industry. While their commissioned pieces are usually destined for distant locations, at the SPA show, the community gets to see some of their innovations, new directions, and more personal creations.

“I don’t think I’m bragging too much when I say that you’ll see some of the best carving that’s available in this country,” said Sue Higby, executive director of SPA, about this year’s “Rock

Solid” show. “I am thrilled that the artists in this region want to show their beautiful work here.”

“There are any number of different qualities that people enjoy in artwork – from raw technical skill to beautiful composition to imaginative use of the material to humor,” said Higby, noting that this show has it all. “There are some beautiful, humorous, unusual ideas in the show. It’s all over the map.”

Danby marble, Barre gray granite, slate, Champlain black marble, verde antique, limestone, and river stones are among the Vermont materials in the show. Stone from farther afield is there, too.

“Cinch,” the gravity-defying piece displayed in the SPA front window, was sculpted by Kevin Donegan of Hinesburg. Its subject is a belt given to him by his father. The belt is in the shape of a loose loop, buckle side up in the air, the tail lightly curling up at the end.

“Deepening Spirit” by Jeanne Cariati of Montpelier is irresistibly touchable. Carved of translucent Italian alabaster, light passes through its smooth deep organic swirls.

Giuliano Cecchinelli II of Barre has created a series of pieces created from river stones. A tap and bucket hang from one in “Sap from a Stone.” In “Scoop,” a plastic ice cream spoon has somehow scooped a ball of black granite from its block.

Bibliophiles will likely be drawn to Heather Ritchie’s shapely bookends. The well-proportioned pairs are available with or without books. Ritchie, of Plainfield, is also the sculptor of “Coffee Break” located in front of Barre City Place, one of the stops on the “Rock Solid — In and Out” Art Stroll.

For the “Out” part of the show, SPA has Art Stroll maps at the gallery and on their website, along with information about eight granite sculptures. The works span over a century — from the 1899 Robert Burns to this year’s four new additions — “Coffee Break,” “Unzipping the Earth,” “Gargoyle Bike Rack” and “Colonel Isaac Barré.”

Besides sculpture, “Rock Solid” also includes other stone-inspired work. Matt Larsson of Waterbury Center has two striking gold-toned Van Dyke brownprints in the show, including a dramatic image of Mount Mansfield. Multimedia artist John Douglas of Burlington has three pieces in his computer-generated imagery series, “Rox.”

In SPA’s second-floor gallery, Haggart has created an expansive installation from window envelopes — the kind that bills come in. Brightly painted — and some with color peeping through the windows — the envelopes are transformed in Haggart’s assemblages.

In “Who Makes Community,” in SPA’s third-floor gallery, LaPre Grabon considers people in her Hardwick community. Her portraits range from a high school student to a 94-year-young friend. Mary Ellen Lovinski, herself a subject of one of Grabon’s drawings, interviewed and wrote accompanying pieces about each subject and their connection to the artist.

Studio Place Arts

Studio Place Arts presents "Rock Solid: In & Out," through Nov. 1, at SPA, 201 N. Main St. in Barre. Also on exhibit are: Second floor: "Bills. Bills. Bolls," installation by Beth Haggart; Third floor: "Who Makes Community," charcoal drawings by Marie LaPre Grabon, interviews by Mary-Ellen Lovinsky. 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. A public reception will be held Friday, Sept. 19, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.