

THE BARRE MONTPELIER TIMES ARGUS ONLINE

Letter to the Editor/*The Times Argus*

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SPA's 20th anniversary

Studio Place Arts' miraculous 20-year history exemplifies a phoenix rising. Its history was beautifully described in this newspaper's recent articles by Mary Gow, as well as the three shows currently on offer, illustrated with a fine spread of photos by Jeb Wallace-Brodeur. They capture a moment in time for all of us to savor. A derelict building, some determined artists, an excellent staff and enough time, inspiration and track record has produced a local arts organization of which we can be enormously proud.

It has been an honor and privilege for me to be part of the arts scene here in central Vermont and across the state as an artist and former program administrator.

In its short life, Studio Place Arts (SPA) has burst out of its footprint and made an impressive impact on the region. Artists exhibiting their work represent the whole spectrum of those who make art, from the self-taught to the highly degreed. In the same spirit, classes are designed for all segments of our community.

The artists who rent SPA's studios work in such various mediums that a walk-through during the opening of a show is a journey of surprises. I am one of those lucky people. Being surrounded by so many adventurous artists is an inspiration.

Barre's granite sculptors have a home here; the annual Rock Solid show is among its most attended and appreciated, giving sculptors an opportunity to exhibit work they do on their own time. Some have worked in the sheds for decades, some are descended from generations of sculptors; they have long since carved their way into our hearts.

During this 20th anniversary year, many special events will take place at SPA. We invite you to take part in this celebration of one of the many treasures of our state.

Anne Sarcka, Montpelier

Letter to the Editor/*The Times Argus*

Published Feb. 6, 2020

An oasis of art

In the 20 years Studio Place Arts has graced the very heart of downtown Barre, it has become a beacon for artists throughout New England and beyond. Locally, the readers of *The Times Argus* have named SPA “Best of the Best” of central Vermont’s art galleries and art schools several years running, and SPA has presented an incredible 394 original art exhibits over the decades. SPA offers art classes for young and old, provides studio space for some of the most talented artists in our area, and hosts some of the most densely packed and joyful artists’ receptions imaginable.

In a city made famous by the artists who emigrated here to make art from the beautiful granite found in the hills that surround Barre, SPA has honored those world-class artists, both past and present, with an annual show entitled, “Rock Solid.” And, in recent years, the vision and leadership of SPA Director Sue Higby has brought granite art to spaces up and down Main Street through the Sculpture Legacy Program supported by the city’s Semprebon Fund.

The core group of artists who came together in 1998-99 to restore the historic brick building SPA calls home have created an oasis for the community, a place to view and contemplate the artistry of the many hundreds who’ve exhibited their work at SPA. Though a devoted admirer of Studio Place Arts, even I do not manage to see all there is to see with each new group of exhibits — four in all throughout the building — including the delightful repurposed phone booth “Quick Change Gallery” — so I challenge *Times Argus* readers to make their way to SPA throughout this anniversary year to enjoy them all. You’ll be inspired by what you see.

Happy Birthday, SPA!

Karen Lane, East Calais

Letter to the Editor/*The Times Argus*

Published Feb. 18, 2020

SPA: Barre's gem

It's February. Time to make use of the lengthening daylight to visit and enjoy the striking exhibits in Barre's Studio Place Arts (SPA) as it continues to celebrate its 20th anniversary. Wander through the historic building, enjoy its 'Botanical Blitz' exhibit decorated and alive with wonderful plants and animals. Climb the stairs (or take the elevator) to its second floor's more meditative monoprints and the third floor's array of artists' work over the past decade. Become a member. Discover, in classes and wide-ranging talks, in spontaneous encounters with resident artists, how works of art are developed and brought to perfection.

I remember, 20 years ago, when SPA's founders – Eva Schectman, Nancy Hanson, Chris Wood, Maggie Neale, Georgia Landau and Janet Van Fleet – marched in a sunny seasonal local parade, jubilant with their optimistic plan to restore one of Barre's great old buildings and to create an arts center that would offer us all sorts of creative possibilities, from galleries to art classes to performance space. Since then, SPA has blossomed and bloomed, living through inevitable growing pains, and enduring. It has inspired and attracted artists and visitors from near and far, skillfully guided by Sue Higby, prized and tended by its many friends. View its website to see what it has accomplished, and take advantage of all it has to offer. Right in the center of Barre, it is truly a shining jewel.

Jane Pincus, Roxbury

Letter to the Editor/*The Times Argus*

Published Feb. 20, 2020

Studio Place Arts appreciation

Three weeks ago, we enjoyed the terrific excitement of once again finding SPA on the front page of *The Times Argus*.

Since then, a lot has happened. On Valentine's Day, I thought to send a love letter to Studio Place Arts. The galleries are filled with much of what we need. "Botanical Blitz" is a celebration of life, living and growth. The color and vibrant gestures are clear and resonant in this fine, deep-cold, winter light. The atmosphere is filled with the imperiled music of birdsong. Something worthy to cherish. The second floor has a solo show of recent monoprints by Lois Beatty, and the third floor features highlights from the hundreds of exhibitions SPA has realized since 2000.

Twenty years already, the count of accomplishments and inspiring experience has real substance and durable memories. When my family and I began to settle in central Vermont, there was no hub of the creative community that we could adhere to. No one expected the serendipitous collision of need, imagination and opportunity to find its charismatic catalyst in the burned-out hulk of a historic building standing smoke-stained and forlorn at the center of Barre's Main Street. The founders of SPA were imbued with what beloved Marshfield artist Adele Godchaux Dawson described as, "A Whim of Iron." Together, they loosed the time-honored, Vermont traditions of a community coming together to grow in purpose, to successfully inspire imagination, creativity and expression in the heart of the place we live.

I trust this effort will expand its intergenerational alliance to further SPA's forward looking freedom of expression policy and its courage to work on a wide variety of exhibitions.

Be sure to visit SPA in the coming months.

Jeffrey Gilbert, Plainfield

Letter to the Editor/*The Times Argus*

Published Feb. 21, 2020

SPA makes you glad

After 20 years, it is hard to imagine a Barre without Studio Place Arts enhancing our community as a cultural center. I have been teaching at SPA for nine years and have had shows of my own, my husband's and my work and exhibits of students' work. My husband, Jim Lund, taught an art class for many years for students with disabilities. My students travel to Barre to take classes at SPA from all over central Vermont and places like St. Johnsbury, Randolph and Waitsfield.

As well as cutting edge exhibitions, SPA's annual Rock Solid exhibition proudly displays our cultural heritage here in Barre. Thanks to SPA's director, Sue Higby, who (as a volunteer) has managed the commissioning and installation of many granite sculptures all over town — and created an Art Stroll map that guides visitors to see all of Barre's stone sculptures — we now have more awareness of this vibrant industry and its place in Vermont art history.

SPA is there for us all year around, with classes, exhibits, talks and a great community feeling. If you haven't experienced it yet, go on over during their 20th anniversary year and walk through all three floors to see the great things happening. I guarantee you, you'll be glad you did.

Jeneane Lunn, Barre

Letter to the Editor

Published in *The Times Argus*, Feb. 25, 2020

Thank you for SPA

Thank you for the recent article about Studio Place Art's 20th anniversary.

Studio Place Arts presents exhibitions of work by professional artists from across New England and many different regions of the country, as well. SPA has a freedom of expression policy that reflects Barre's rich history of cultural diversity and social inclusiveness.

It's a center for arts education, offering adult and children's classes throughout the year. They sponsor lectures and artist talks that are free and open to the public. The studios of the artists in the building allow the public to observe professional artists creating a wide range of art.

In 2008, I had the pleasure of exhibiting my art work at SPA in a solo exhibition. I also have had work included in numerous group exhibitions.

I lived in Boston for many years. In 2018, my husband and I decided to retire to Vermont. Before that, I was involved in community arts organizations in the Boston area. I was an artist member of the Cambridge Art Association. In 1997, I was one of the 10 founding members of the Artist Group of Charlestown which has grown and now occupies the historic Stove Factory Building in Charlestown, Massachusetts. It is similar to SPA with ongoing exhibitions in their gallery and provides studio space for artists. Having been involved with these arts organizations, I understand what it takes to run an organization like SPA.

Because of the hard work and commitment of Sue Higby and a lot of other people over the last 20 years, Studio Place Arts has flourished. It has contributed to the quality of life not just for artists, but for everyone within our community.

Thank you for recognizing the significant need for art in everyone's lives.

Larry Bowling, Barre

Commentary published in *The Times Argus*, March 3, 2020

Brown: Congratulations, SPA!

I'm delighted by the coverage of Studio Place Arts celebrating its 20th anniversary in Barre.

It began with audacious determination from a group of local artists to save a decrepit building and create an art space. It is today a vibrant place with a packed schedule of contemporary art exhibitions and educational opportunities for all ages and abilities. Artists love working at SPA, in their studios, sharing ideas and encouragement. The studios are often open to the public. Artists are happy to discuss their work and the creative process. The educational offerings for children are a priority and a success. Studio Place Arts inspires far beyond the building walls. Its success is a credit to the hard work and resourcefulness of a very dedicated, creative group with help from a generous community of supporters.

I witnessed the groundbreaking celebration and have tried to give what support I can through the years as a member, student, visitor, through my business and as a volunteer board member. Throughout my involvement and particularly with Sue Higby as executive director, I've been really impressed by how every dollar or hour given is put to use.

A trip to SPA is inspiring, with frequently changing, high quality art exhibits on all of the building's three floors, coupled with artist studios. SPA started a studio residency program five years ago that provides work space to an emerging artist for nearly one year and a guaranteed exhibit at the conclusion of the residency. Additionally, SPA recently created a fourth exhibit space for informal shows from a repurposed telephone booth on the second floor, and a short walk to the Morse Block Deli provides a chance to view another great show, curated by SPA.

Congratulations and thank you SPA for an inspiring 20 years! I look forward with excitement to the next chapter in the creative lifetime of our art center.

Jody Brown lives in Montpelier.