

ENRICHING AND EDUCATING

ART CONNECTS AT CATAMOUNT

It all began in 1975 when filmmaker Jay Craven launched a four-night-a-week, traveling 16mm film series presenting foreign, classic, and independent movies to residents in rural communities of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. By 1986, it had grown to become Catamount Arts, now northern New England's largest independent arts center, which helped found other cultural organizations such as Circus Smirkus and Kingdom County Productions. Today, it is responsible for a diversified program in film, music, theater, dance and visual art that enhances the lives of residents throughout northern Vermont and New Hampshire.

In its early years, Catamount Arts operated from a modest building located next door

to St. Johnsbury's Masonic Temple. In 2005, the Masonic Lodge gifted the building to Catamount Arts, and today the newly renovated arts center is central to the St. Johnsbury community, offering an array of artistic programs that often include world-class films and premier performers, in addition to simulcasts of the Metropolitan Opera,

the Bolshoi Ballet and London's National Theatre. An annex building hosts art education programs for children and adults, an EPIC Music Program in conjunction with St. Johnsbury schools

received almost 600 pieces for consideration; 77 works by established and emerging artists were selected.

Gallery director Katherine French, who mounted the exhibition so that

the diverse pieces show well together, said juried shows provide a special opportunity for artists who often work in solitude. "Juried shows bring artists together while allowing the wider public an opportunity to view their work – and for serious collectors to purchase art. A show like this creates conversation and allows us to make intellectual sense of what we are looking at."

The current exhibit is un-themed in order to be more inclusive and to allow various media to be included. The result is an exciting, eclectic and visually stimulating

collection of work, ranging from paintings to photography to sculpture and animated video.

Sol Hartman's painting, "St. James Street," is reminiscent of Edward Hopper, while Karen Moss' "Meltdown in Blue" suggests Picasso's early work. Leslie Sills' "The Artist (With Dracula)" evokes Salvador Dalí.



REVIEW

ARTSCONNECT

CATAMOUNT ARTS

115 EASTERN AVENUE

ST. JOHNSBURY,
VERMONT

THROUGH
FEBRUARY 16

LEFT: Fran Gardino, *Georgia on My Mind*, 2014, archival photograph on canvas, 80" x 30".

RIGHT: Jamie Young, *River Head Rain*, 2014, oil on canvas, 81" x 30".

Then there is the haunting photography, including an image of a woman in India whose face is hidden, in "Breakfast Preparation," by Susan Lewinnek. "Linens" by Richard Perry, with its copious white sheets hanging to dry, is strangely moving. And Rachel Portesi's two portrait photos from her ongoing "Branches Series," which received Honorable Mention, are rife with meaning meant to be teased out.

Portesi's photographs, 14" x 14" wet plate collodion tintypes, are made using an early photographic process from chemistry she mixes in a laboratory-like darkroom. Each light-sensitive plate slides into a large wooden camera for a few seconds and then is developed while the plate is wet. There are 50 plates in the series she began five years ago. The portraits, in which hair is predominant, are a form of self-reflection. "My images reflect how it feels to be pulled in many directions, sometimes finding strength in moments of chaos, sometimes finding beauty, and sometimes bound by cultural expectations and the expectations we have of ourselves personally," Portesi said. Created through the lens of gender, the works celebrate women's growing empowerment while exploring the sadness the artist feels in "not quite having that much strength at an earlier age."

A bit of humor is provided by Jessica Straus' "Earth Churn," a wall hanging constructed of found objects, wood and paper. And Keith Chamberlain's digital photograph of two ladders forming the letter "A" – titled "Alphabetsanonymous," puts a smile on viewers' faces.

Two noteworthy sculptures are the small (8" x 5"), delicate paper/clay "Party Dress," which seems to suggest a white Victorian frock with an aura of sadness about it, and the boldly different "Janus Swan Maiden Mythology" by Judith

Unger, a one-of-a-kind ceramic sculpture with 22-karat-gold glaze.

Book ends to the show are provided by two large, enticing works. "Trees – Blue" by Wally Gilbert is a digital print on aluminum vivid with color. It captures the eye immediately upon entering the exhibition. Gilbert, a former molecular biologist at Harvard University and Nobel Laureate for his work on DNA sequencing and genome deciphering, began his career as a photographer and visual artist after he retired. "I wanted to create something new and beautiful that had an emotional impact on the viewer," he says of his large, colorful images that most recently reflect nature. His technique relies on layering digital photographs on a computer in such a way that the layers interact with each other. "It's all in the creative eye, not the equipment," the artist said of his intense color combinations that appear to be lit from behind.

At the other end of the gallery, "Georgia on My Mind," another large, archival photograph on an 80" x 30" canvas by Francis Gardino, offers a muted, somewhat-abstract color palette of soft yellow and green that appears to reflect upon the artist's personal memories.

Jamie Young's oil painting on canvas, "River Head," one of two 2nd Prize winners in the exhibit, hangs next to and complements first-prize-winner Valerie Hird's 33" x 40" oil painting on paper, "Cloud Mountains." Young's work is abstract and uses soft



tones of yellow, blue, white and other complementary colors that sooth both the eye and the mind.

Hird, from Burlington, Vermont, trained at the Rhode Island School of Design and the College of Fine Arts in Vermont; she is inspired by her travels. While in the Middle East, she became disenchanted with "the fusion of religion and politics," so she decided to "create a whole new mythology" that could offer relief from that juxtaposition by focusing on the natural world. Her work since then has focused on complex natural systems with an emphasis on the four elements of earth, fire, water and air.

Many aspects of her work also derive from different cultures, in particular iconography from central Asia and China in which she perceives a highly developed sense of gesture and solace. She combines that sense with her own cultural roots. "I believe that natural systems are very complex, so I try to

Robin Reynolds,
*Creamy Dahlia and
Coleus*, 2015, oil on
panel, 36" x 36".

reflect that in my paintings. A number of systems are working within a single painting," she says of her nuanced palette.

Seeing the show in its entirety as she was contemplating how to hang the pieces to their best advantage, Katherine French saw three themes emerge. First, she noted that a number of pieces focused on expressive elements found in landscape or the natural world. Then, she realized, some of the works displayed elements of the surreal. Finally, she said, "the range of medium and styles proved that we are truly living in an age of pluralism when it comes to visual expression."


Artists in this unusual, carefully selected, and well-mounted exhibit come from all parts of New England. Some of them are well-trained, seasoned artists whose work appears in various venues and garners impressive sales, while others are self-taught and new to showing their work. All of them are part of a creative process that French, a former curator and arts administrator, finds exhilarating and deeply rewarding.

"I am inordinately pleased to work with artists and to witness the end result of their creative process," she said. "Modern society is sometimes bereft of visual sense-making. Our eyes take in copious amounts of pre-digested material in the form of advertising, but we are rarely given access to original art in the course of everyday life. This kind of exhibit gives both artists and those who view their work a way to understand how others look at the world, to participate in the local and even global community. It's a privilege to be part of this."

| Elayne Clift

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The other side sucks, Lorraine Sullivan, Sculptural Assemblage, 21"x34"

de Menil Gallery
USEFUL STORIES
sculptures by
LORRAINE SULLIVAN

January 8 - February 27

Artist's Open House:
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Open Monday - Friday 9-3, Saturday-Sunday 11-4
Closed every Wednesday, and closed on February 9 thru 12
Information: www.groton.org or 978-448-7278

The de Menil Gallery is located in the Dillon Art Center
on the Groton School campus,
at 282 Farmers Row, (Rt. 111), Groton, MA 01450