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Riverdale artists represented at Yonkers studio event



If a picture speaks a thousand words then does a gallery of artists tell a never-ending story?

Art connoisseurs may learn that answer at the 20th annual artist open studio event, part of Yonkers Arts Weekend, at the Carpet Mills Art District on May 4 and May 5. More than 50 artists will present their work, including Riverdale artists, at both their studios and a newly inaugurated art gym, a 6,000-square-foot innovative gallery.

Visitors will find paintings of Wave Hill Garden, abstract steel sculptures, and a collection of napkins from Riverdale restaurants adorning all of them.

The art gym will also display some of the work of the late George Gutierrez, a former staff photographer with The Riverdale Press and The New York Times.

Yoho artist Mary Hardiman, a Riverdale resident who worked with Gutierrez at the New York Times, said the event will give visitors an opportunity to see the amount of work artists put into their craftsmanship.

“They’re spending a lot of money on rent to come and take and create in their spaces,” Hardiman said. “And it’s always fascinating. We have artists that I would say are on the brink of being discovered. Some have been discovered. It’s a great space, it’s a community space.”

One Riverdale sculptor, David Fischweicher, works on welded steel alongside fellow resident Miriam Hendel.

The two artists use metal from the edging of street corners dumped by the city, discarded railroad tracks and car parts.

More than a decade ago, Hendel was primarily a two-dimensional painter, but Fischweicher insisted she learned how to weld and the two now share a studio filled with abstract steel work.

“It’s kind of interesting to have progressed to something that can really injure me,” Hendel said. “Unlike painting, where you can sort of be in any state of mind, you have to be really focused and aware (with welding).”

Fischweicher lost 15 years worth of work in a studio fire years ago. He said it was a devastating and sad year after that, but he found some inspiration in seeing how the fire charred his sculptures black. He currently paints some of his sculptures black.

Jerome Levkov, a retired chemistry professor and Riverdale resident, uses pastel watercolors to illustrate portraits and landscapes of national parks and nature.

“Watercolor is very unforgiving and pastels, you can get great colors,” Levkov said. “It’s messy, I can’t do this in my apartment. What I wind up with is often not what I thought I was starting out to do, but it’s great.”

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Another Riverdale artist whose work embodies the spirit of nature is Shelley Haven, a former professor at Cooper Union and the School of Visual Arts. During Covid, she became obsessed with going on walks in the woods, her garden, or Wave Hill and coming home to make sculptures out of pinecones, magnolia seeds and leaves.

“I feel like artists are working with the notion of time, no matter what they’re doing,” Haven said. “Because making art is a process and it’s about time and how things change and transform from time.”

Betty Eastland, another Riverdale resident, draws from her family’s history and culture when creating clothes, fibers and veils. One side of her family came from the mountains of Syria while another came from Ireland. Through her art, Eastland said she has tried to capture history that has been lost and maintain her family’s culture.

Her veils have been hand dyed with materials she finds or eats from, such as avocados or black sunflower seeds in her yard. She has also used wild pink berries she’s found in Van Cortlandt Park and turmeric plants, which created a rusty orange color.

“When I’m touching these materials, I feel the lineage of these cultures,” Eastland said.

“I feel the lineage of people moving through the mountains with herds of sheep and goats. I feel the lineage of my grandmother being the first female line boss at Maaloula. I feel the energy of my great grandfather squeezing the cheese through the cheesecloth, catching (it) to use it for other things. All of these materials were touched by people’s hands.”

Adam Shultz, co-president of Yonkers Art, said it is a city organization but YoHo is considered the home base. For the first time, YoHo produced Yonkers Art Weekend across the entire city. It is the 10th annual event.

“We’ve got over 50 artists who will be featured (at YoHo), and a lot of them are longtime participants. There’s a lot of new people,” Shultz said. “And we’ve always had great attendance.”

The director of the new art gym and curator of the space is Barry Kostrinsky, a painter, ceramicist and arts writer who said there is no doubt who is king in Yoho.

“It’s not the art world, it’s the artist world,” Kostrinsky said. “The artist is at the top. They make art and then dealers, distributors, paint makers, writers, everyone else services the art. Who makes it? The artist.”