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Forget SoHo, talent shines in Yonkers

Posted May 13, 2016



George Gutierrez at his Yonkers studio on May 6.

David 'Dee' Delgado



By Shant Shahrigan

There is Biagio “Gino” Civale, an artist of Florentine origin who has seemingly seen it all in the art world. There’s also two Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalists turned painters, a woman whose day job includes making sonograms of wild animals and a small army of Riverdale artists.

These and other residents of the Yonkers Carpet Mills Arts District are opening their studios to the public this weekend. Visitors will have a chance to meander through a cavernous warehouse off the Saw Mill River Parkway, nibble on snacks, sip some wine and meet about 60 artists in their natural habitat.

On a recent visit to the warehouse at 578 Nepperhan Ave., the site of dozens of artists’ studios, several painters provided a preview of the open house.

Deborah Holcombe’s spacious studio was crammed with bottles and glasses — fodder for her still lifes — and paintings at various stages of

completion. There was also a small photo of her clasping an alligator on an operating table.

"I have two arts, the practice of medicine — the practice of diagnostic ultrasounds — and I'm also passionate about that," said Ms. Holcombe, who works as a sonographer at the Animal General veterinary center in Manhattan. "Then of course, I love to be here making this work, and they both involve — what's weird — reflection and refraction and distortion."

Subjects of her paintings included a ruler gorgeously refracted by a glass of white wine, a piece called "After the Bomb," centering on a destroyed breakfast table, and a medieval-inspired vanitas juxtaposing a skull with a bowl of apples.

Didn't the photo of the alligator, which received treatment from Animal General about a year ago, also inspire musings about one's mortality?

Ms. Holcombe responded with a laugh.

"It's a creepy kind of parallel in the physics of our world that I love the results of both of those things," she said of her sonography work and painting.

A few paces away from her studio, Shelley Haven's workspace gave testament to an entirely different worldview. Along with paintings on her walls, there were ferns near tall windows and random branches and other plant specimens strewn about the room.

Ms. Haven, one of about 30 Riverdale residents who work at the warehouse, said she has found inspiration throughout the great outdoors. She has spent days at a time painting scenes from Wave Hill, Long Island's shore, the Berkshires and other locales.

"If I see a place a number of times, I usually figure out what it is that draws me to that particular place," she remarked.

Ms. Haven added that working in the Yonkers warehouse, which became her home base about three years ago, has given her a sense of community.

"So many artists start from a similar place," she said. "We all branch out in different directions. It's very reinforcing."

Elsewhere in the building, George Gutierrez was settling in for a morning of work. Tokens from his work as a photojournalist, like old cameras and stacks of books, filled his studio. Some of his vivid paintings featured sheets torn right out of *The New York Times*, where his work after 9/11 earned him a Pulitzer Prize.

"I don't paint like a photo," said Mr. Gutierrez, a previous photo editor for *The Riverdale Press*. "It's more cartoony, it's more expressionist."

One of his paintings, showing a firefighter in mourning, was a direct response to 9/11. Others, like a banjo superimposed on a yellow-and-white U.S. flag, seemed like abstract riffs on identity.

Mr. Gutierrez said working in close quarters with other painters at the warehouse is inspiring. His colleagues there include legendary photographer and painter Librado "Lee" Romero.

"All these artists — no two are alike," Mr. Gutierrez said. "And they're all real artists, they really love what they're doing."

Mr. Civale has been at the game for years, starting with a Paris show in 1954. He said he still finds events like the upcoming open house provide energy.

Speaking in a studio overflowing with paintings, posters and other mementos from his career, he said, "The main thing is to compare feelings. That's what motivates all of us."

YOHO Artists Open Studio runs from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. this Saturday and Sunday. For more info, visit www.yohoartists.org.

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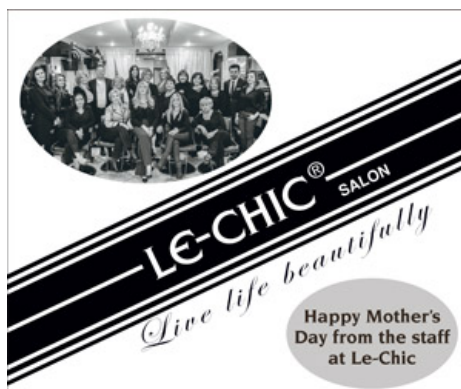
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