

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ARTS

Open season for open studios in Yonkers

By Iris Hiskey Arno

REGION — For local artists, spring has become the time to haul out the canvases, sculptures, photographs, videos, and mixed media work of the past year; time to reevaluate the old, frame the new, and get ready for a popular rite of spring: the open studio tour.

This weekend, the two dozen artists who call the YoHo Artists Studios their creative home are ready to welcome the public from noon to 5 p.m. tomorrow and Sunday (April 21-22). It's a great chance to explore the 100-year-old Alexander Smith Carpet Mills Building at 578 Nepperhan Avenue in Yonkers and talk with painters, sculptors, etchers, photographers, illustrators, assemblage artists, and jewelers. Among those participating are Barbara King and Tracy Allan of Hastings and Melanie Roher of Ardsley.



CHRIS RIBEIRO/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Melanie Roher

A graduate of Pratt Institute and a former exhibit designer at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Roher is also the co-owner of a graphic design firm in Irvington (Roher/Sprague). Although she has painted with watercolors and pastels for years, it was only recently that she returned to oils, rediscovering the medium as an adult and studying master techniques.

Roher has always gravitated toward landscapes and still life subjects, which she sees in terms of shape, form, and color relationships. Traveling to France and Japan over the past year, she stored up images for inspiration. In "Yoyogi Park," a painting that will be on display, she evokes a moment in a Tokyo park during the cherry blossom season.

"It was twilight and the colors were muted. There was a pink light in the sky but yet the ground was very dark," she said. "The trees were silhouetted against the sky with the light coming through the cherry blossoms, and I tried to capture how it felt to be in that scene at that time of day."

Roher uses a renaissance technique that involves first preparing the entire canvas with a burnt sienna (rust) wash. "It's all about the light and seeing through the layers and having the

Melanie Roher

luminescence in the work," she explained. "After the burnt sienna, you take a big brush and block out the major areas and forms in burnt umber (dark brown). That's your road map. After that, you do larger areas of color in a very light wash and keep building it up, layer after layer. It's a very rich, very slow process."

In addition to the oil paintings, Roher will be showing some of her watercolor and pastels.

Barbara King

King is interested in creating a dialogue involving art, culture, and politics. For this weekend's event, the artist — who was born in Syracuse and received degrees from SUNY Buffalo and Hunter College — has reworked an installation she initially created in 1989. Three walls of her large studio are covered with rows of colorful 7 x 27" replicas of the decorative bars that serve as medals of military honor and distinction. "I started

becoming intrigued by the symbolism of the military during the time of the Iran-contra hearings," she said. "Initially, I didn't know what the medals meant but, as an artist, I was looking at them in terms of color, design, and pattern."

Interested in creating an environment that involved the viewer, King added bars of reflective silver mylar. "It becomes about looking in and questioning where one fits in," she said. After playing with the concept of the medals as decoration, she invented some new ones. A number of these are pink, a color not used in the official bars but a foreshadowing of the current role of women in the military. King chose to remount the installation this year "because of what's going on currently in the world," and has added new medals designed to commemorate action in Iraq and Afghanistan in the form of large canvas floor panels.

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Studio tours

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Tracy Allan

Allan is a newcomer to the River-towns, having moved to Hastings less than a year ago. Raised in San Diego, he earned his MFA at UCLA and then worked as an art director and director of commercials. When, on a whim, he designed a line of clothes called Spuds — made out of “real, actual potato sacks” — and it became a surprise sensation, he took a quick detour into the fashion industry before returning to making commercials. In 2001, Allan turned his sights on feature films and a year later had completed one about four teenagers who get wrapped up in an Ecstasy deal that goes sour. “It’s about choices and consequences,” he said of the film, which is awaiting distribution. Although he has three scripts in development and is writing a new movie, Allan rented the studio at YoHo two months ago to get back to an old passion — still fine art photography.

He’s intending to do a series of glamour shots of people with disfiguring injuries, aiming to reveal their beauty without avoiding the disfigurement.

This weekend, Allan will be showing a video clip from a documentary he hopes to make about Romanian street kids. Accompanying a young Mormon woman who has made it her mission to help these homeless children and teenagers, he took a film crew to Bucharest, where they lived in the subways and tunnels with the kids for several weeks. “It’s amazing the faith they have that their lives will turn out,” he said. “This movie is our way of

helping raise the money for a house for them to live in and for training in basic life skills.”

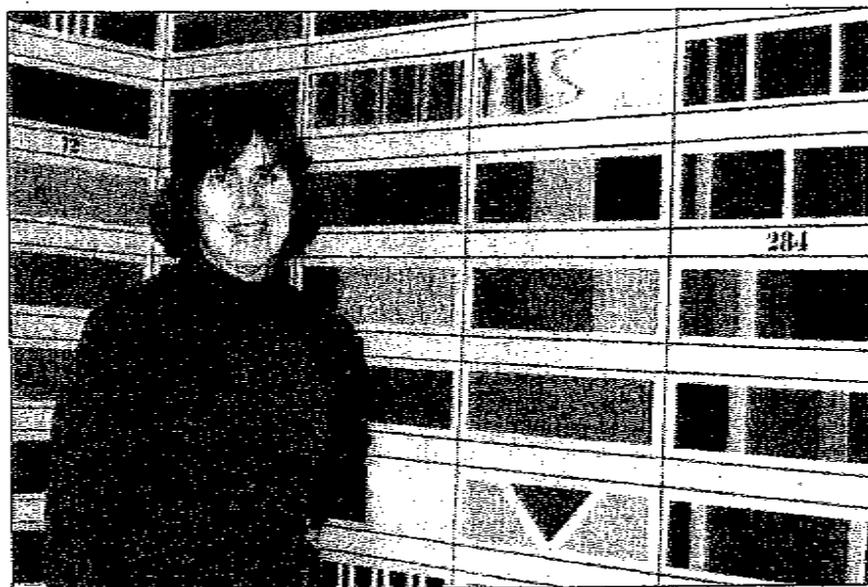
Landford makes way for exhibits

The YoHo building was bought less than two years ago by George Huang, who has the dream of making it a regional art center with the entire edifice full of artists and galleries. Amazing his tenants, he has thrown himself whole-heartedly into publicity, website design and maintenance, planning meetings and general support of the artists and open studios, including donating space for a new gallery on the third floor. Local businesses are on board as well. Two Hastings eateries, Antoinette’s and Bloom, are providing the refreshments for a pre-opening press reception.

While strolling from studio to studio on the fifth floor of the funky old building, ask any one of the artists how he created a certain effect or what she’s hoping to say with her work, and you’re in for an interesting conversation. On your way in or out, drop by the new gallery to see the work of guest artists — including Hastings photographer Peter Freed — and listen to some jazz played by keyboardist Marilyn Seits.

It’s time to put last weekend’s deluge behind, and kick off the spring art season this weekend at YoHo. The fun continues next Saturday and Sunday at the 14th Annual Rivertowns Arts Council’s Artists’ Studio Tour and the brand new Hastings District Art Show. Perhaps April should be renamed Poetry and Art Month — at least in the River-towns.

For more information and directions to YoHo, go to www.yohoartists.com.



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