

Arts and Entertainment

Community Arts Collective seeks input

by Tunomukwathi Asino

The Community Arts Collective is working to bring a multimedia collaborative community mural, integrating mosaic and painting, to the State College area.

“The vision for this project is a mural that will unite everyone in Happy Valley and draw on the omnipresent pride that’s born and bred here,” according to the CAC website.

The launch location is the wall along Calder Alley near Allen Street and McLanahan’s in downtown State College.

“We are also in the pursuit of more walls, but will definitely be putting the main part of the mural on that wall,” said Elody Gyekis, the artistic director of CAC.

The non-partisan CAC was founded in the late spring of 2009 by Penn State alumnus Gyekis, the artistic director, and Natalia Pilato, executive director. Gyekis has done projects in Harrisburg and the Dominican Republic, Pilato has worked in Oregon, and the two have worked in Williamsport. They founded the nonprofit organization with “a desire to strengthen community relations through egalitarian creative processes.”

Gyekis said murals are one of the most

ancient art forms, from cave paintings to the Sistine Chapel; they are the most common form of public art throughout history and across cultures. Painting on architectural structures is a powerful way to use visual imagery to reach everyone who lives in a location, she said.

“The point [of the murals] is to get people involved, express themselves, meet people and build community and build a public project,” she said. “My focus is to maximize this aspect of mural projects, collaborating extensively with the community to create the design and using new technology and materials to make it possible for the community to take part in painting while still having a professional-looking final result,” she said.

And part of the enjoyment is gauging reaction to the mural.

“The range of responses and the range of people I have received responses from have been very large,” Gyekis said. “Some of my favorite moments have been hearing about a response to the Millheim mural that came from an Amish lady. She said she thought it was beautiful.”

And involving an equally broad range of members of the public offers new experi-



Photo by Pat Little

Elody Gyekis works on a recent project. Gyekis and collaborator Natalia Pilato have formed the Community Arts Collective to actively involve members of the community in public arts project.

ences as well, as Gyekis did with work release prisoners from the Dauphin County prison system in Harrisburg.

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Artist Frost inspires creativity through latest exhibit

by Jordan Toronto

April brought the re-emergence of local artist Stuart Frost to the Borland Gallery which showed *Drawn In: The Art of Stuart H. Frost*, a retrospective exhibition about the life and artwork of a man who has been a part of the State College community for more than 50 years. But the exhibit itself also served as a creation of a particular group of Penn State students.

Frost has studied at various art schools and his work has been displayed all over the country. He is a native of Pennsylvania and a long-time resident of State College. Frost, Penn State emeritus of art, is known for his dedication as a teacher who, even after retiring, has continued to interact with and educate students.

“The exciting thing about this exhibit is

that Stuart is a working artist,” said Angela Breeden, executive director of the Centre County Historical Society and instructor of “The Museum Exhibit,” an Integrative Arts class that gave 13 students from history, art history and integrative arts, the opportunity to work together and create the exhibit.

“Most of the exhibits that I have organized have been about a specific topic, movement or artist that is no longer living,” Breeden said. “The students who organized this exhibit never needed to guess at the artist’s intentions or thoughts; it only required a phone call to receive an answer to a question.”

The class did everything involved in the creation of the exhibit. They gathered information from Frost, selected which pieces to display, found a photographer to take

images of the art and wrote all labels and brochures.

“Stuart is a lovely person; generous, kind and very tuned in to helping students,” said Breeden. “He was the perfect person to help guide our first experiences with this class.”

When the Creamery moved from its location at the Borland building, the building underwent a renovation. That included a gallery space, which was to be used by students in a variety of ways. But when Breeden saw the gallery, she could not stop thinking about a course she took as a graduate student, she said. Now that she is actually working in the field, she has looked back on that class as a unique and valuable experience.

Breeden imagined the opportunities a class like that could provide her students, to

have their own hands-on experience in a gallery.

“Bill Kelly and the Department of Integrative Arts have been very kind to me in allowing me to create this new class,” Breeden said.

One part of the class was traditional classroom instruction, during which the students were introduced to the topics they would encounter. But mostly, the class focused on whatever it took to put together a museum-quality exhibit. Breeden divided the tasks into committees. Each student served on four committees and chaired one.

“It asks them to be leaders as well as members of a team,” said Breeden, “in a

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very 'real-world' situation."

Breeden's syllabus explains the unique responsibility of the students working on this project: "This class is responsible for producing a high-quality exhibit that is not only important to you and your grade, but to the artist, the department of Integrative Arts, and the university community. Your full dedication and participation is necessary and expected."

Drawn in: The Art of Stuart H. Frost included art from all stages of Frost's life, including his own childhood drawings and artwork by his family and mentors.

"It is easy for me to think of my life as divided into three periods," Frost said. "An early period that relates to my childhood attempts at drawing. A middle period that was devoted to college and years spent in art schools working under the direction of three important artists: Hobson Pittman, Henry Varnum Poor, and Max Beckmann.

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"One of the men told me that when he got out he would take his kids to the mural site and say 'Your daddy did that,'" Gyekis said.

Experiences getting permission to paint murals vary greatly as well, Gyekis said.

"One mural I have done was on a bridge that was owned by three different bureaucratic entities. Permission was very difficult to obtain. Another mural was on a building owned by someone I knew. I got permission in one simple conversation. Usually it is not hard, but often it takes some time to get permission from various layers of involved parties," she said.

Asked if she censors what goes into murals, Gyekis said yes and no.

"It isn't about censoring myself because I am not putting my vision on the wall; I am putting a community vision on the wall. Do I censor the community? Yes and no. The goal is to create something that is positive and beautiful to uplift the community, so I make that clear in the idea-building sessions."

She said even when working with difficult subject matter such as anti-gun violence in Harrisburg, "the mural design focuses on alternatives to violence rather than depicting violence directly and further

And a final period when I think I finally outgrew, maybe rejected the tenets of my education and became myself."

One of Frost's early drawings (from 1933) is a simple drawing of a frog. Under the drawing he had written the words, "The Frog. I like frogs. I have a frog."

Frost's family encouraged him from early on to be creative. Both his father, an entomological illustrator who taught for many years at Penn State, and his grandfather, were gifted artists. Frost credits his father for his love of animals and his passion for exploring the world around him.

Also displayed at Frost's exhibit is the work of one of his instructors from high school and college, nationally renowned artist, Hobson Pittman. According to the caption, Pittman instilled in Frost the idea that art "is basically competitive and professional" and that Frost had no talent for figure drawings. But there was one piece of advice Pittman told Frost that has stuck with him: Always keep a sense of humor. When Frost assisted Henry Varnum Poor,

he once again heard the words "no talent" used to describe him as an artist.

However, a drawing that he did in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, during his time in the Navy, became Frost's first publicly exhibited piece. "The Hallway" is said to have "opened the door" to the art world.

"I began to draw with conviction," said Frost, "and this conviction has sustained me for almost 30 years."

Several of Frost's pieces in this exhibit were done in State College, including Ridge (1963), an experiment with mixing his painting and drawing styles to create watercolors; Memory Town (1970), a drawing of his childhood town, Ardentsville, Pa., in which he drew his signature in the form of a self-portrait on a Time Magazine; and Tussey Ridge (1980), one of his large-scale paintings, that he did in a spontaneous style, without a pre-drawn plan.

There was a whole display called "Artist's Doodles on Receipts," that expressed how Frost's urge to draw is compulsive.

"If you're an artist," said Frost, "you can draw anytime, anywhere."

A standout piece in the exhibit is Roger's Vegetable Garden, not necessarily as a striking image, but as a portal into the mind and heart of Frost's artistic process.

The caption next to the drawing explains its significance.

"Roger's Vegetable Garden is a perfect example of the thoughtful technique which Frost uses to convey personal meaning to the often overlooked aspects of life. He suggests the vegetables by leaving them mostly white and filling in the surrounding soil instead. For Frost, 'What makes an object is what's around it.'"

Like the vegetables, what "made" this exhibition, and made it great, was the energy of the inspired, passionate students who created it, and people in the community who were touched by a feeling of connection to a truly accessible and thoughtful local artist.

"I am putting a community vision on the wall...The goal is to create something that is positive and beautiful to uplift the community..."

--Elody Gyekis

stigmatizing the community with a bloody mural."

She continued by saying that once the theme is set, she gathers hundreds of ideas from the community, a trend she has seen developing over recent years.

"I think that community murals are starting to catch on, which I think is wonderful," she said. "Traditionally, muralists put their vision up on the wall, a vision that often represents the community and voices their vision. But now some artists are actually working more directly with the communities."

The Community Arts Collective generates money through fundraisers, personal donations and business donations. Founders hope a majority of funding will come from the Centre County Community Foundation, Gyekis said.

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Artist Winn Kane inspired by simple objects

by Veronica Winters

Laura Winn Kane's discovery of her passion for the arts happened when she was just six years old and completed her first painting. However, the young artist did not think of art as a career for awhile. As a mathematics major in college, Winn Kane practically lived in the art studio, and one of her professors teased her at mid-term with, "Well Laura, I sure do hope you love your major subject as much as you love painting.." Those words were a wake-up call for the artist, and she began pursuing her formal art education then—a B.A. in studio art at the State University of New York, College at Plattsburgh and an M.F.A. degree in painting at Rochester Institute of Technology. She emerged in a local art scene back in 1995 when she moved to Port Matilda from Liverpool, N.Y.

Winn Kane is a still-life painter. Her large, representational paintings revolve around decorative, utilitarian objects like pitchers, cups, teapots, silk flowers, figurines and other items that she has collected over the years by visiting local flea markets and stores.

Her creative obsession with collecting was influenced by her grandmother, who used to have stuff everywhere around her house. "I spent my summers at my grandmother's home," Winn Kane said.

The artist is currently working on a new set of oil paintings that deal with a very simple object—the apple. Most artists create art being influenced by his or her surroundings. Winn Kane is no exception. Living next door to the "Way Fruit Farm," the artist does not have to travel far to find her inspiration in a perfectly round, juicy apple. The titles of her artworks contain names of the apples, like Roma, Apollo's Empire, Gala and so on. Winn Kane likes to play with words. Subject, description and event coincide in a single name of the apple. For example, "Gala" is the name of the apple but it also means a lavish, festive social gathering of the rich. And her paintings are rich in color with elaborate settings and complicated fabric patterns.

The artist was eager to share her current work process set in her studio that is located in the basement of her house. Winn Kane paints from life only and generally does not

In the studio

rely on photography as aid to make art. She had a still life set up ready on a table of a beautifully shaped, porcelain urn she bought at a flea market, a tea-cup and dark-green patterned fabric with soon to be placed apples. On her table the artist also had a small sketchbook filled with sketches and notes on her future painting. Painting on a large scale (24x36" or 36x48") the artist must work out the composition and general layout of objects in her sketchers beforehand. She also kept a record of specific colors she wanted to use in a piece.

The artist is mostly influenced by French, Fauvist painter—Henry Matisse in her use of bright, patterned fabric and strong fluid lines. Just like Matisse, Winn Kane disregards classical school of painting by creating still lifes where background fabric is painted with equal saturation of color and the amount of detail as the subjects themselves.

"To me both the objects and the background are equally important," Winn Kane said.

The artist also admires another 19th century French painter of classical school—Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. He becomes a major influence for Winn Kane's pastel drawings of still life and people.

She enjoys creating tension between the objects and its surroundings, puzzling the viewer even more with her festive, somewhat decorative artwork. One of her large 36x48" oil paintings is hanging in a hallway entrance of the artist's home. Titled "Dark Sun, Einstein's Tea," the painting attracts the viewer not only with its size but also with complexity of shapes and patterns found within a simple metal teapot, a stack of sugar cubes and an astrolabe. The artist simply monumentalizes a single object and brings it to viewers' attention in an unexpected light.

Artistic life is far from being monumental however. There is always that social pressure to make a living and be financially successful in the eyes of others to earn respect.

"It is often frustrating and sometimes seems pointless, but there is a personal need



Photo by Veronica Winters
Laura Winn Kane stands in front of two of her works hanging in the stairway of her home in Port Matilda.

somehow. In ways my paintings are cathartic for me. My mental therapy for dealing with life," she said.

Also, the biggest challenge for the artist is time management and self-promotion—business aspects of the art world that are not taught in art schools. Yet, the intangible rewards always outweigh the hardships.

"The icing on a cake is when some complete stranger says one of my paintings communicates with them and they ask to purchase it so they can enjoy it every day," Winn Kane said.

Winn Kane is hoping to finish working

on her new series of paintings by this fall to exhibit them locally. Winn Kane is a member of the Art Alliance of Central Pennsylvania, where she serves as a board member and teaches art classes. She is a signature member of the Central Pennsylvania Pastel Society and as a member of the Art Association of Harrisburg, Susquehanna River Art Center and Art In Common. Winn Kane often shows her work across the state and beyond.

For more information about the artist, visit www.winnkaneart.com.



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