

# What's art got to do, got to do with it?

BY GEORGETTE GOUVEIA THE JOURNAL NEWS • FEBRUARY 14, 200

"For the Love of Art" is a new juried exhibit of some 30 Hudson Valley artists at The Hat Factory in Peekskill that poses intriguing questions.

Is the love of art only personal, psychological, even spiritual? Or is it also commercial? Can art be a financial investment as well as an emotional one?

These are no small considerations in a terrible economy in which the art market has sent mixed signals, with some artists' works selling surprisingly well while other sales have disappointed.

For many, art is a business and a successful one at that. The exhibit's sponsors include Yamet Arts Inc., a private dealer in Old Masters as well as modern and contemporary artists like Chagall, Picasso and Lichtenstein. It's celebrating its 10th anniversary at the sprawling, brick Hat Factory, a former millinery dating from 1879 that is home to lawyers, artisans and artists like Jo-Ann Brody, who helped coordinate the show.

The other sponsors are The Hat Factory, the neighboring, not-for-profit Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art and the Peekskill Arts Council and Collaborative Concepts in Beacon.

For some artists in the show, however, art is primarily about a deep-seated need, even a compulsion; an expression of self-fulfillment, and a glorious means to human connection that transcends dollars.

"You don't live in Westchester on art," Lael Morgan, a Croton-on-Hudson painter, says wryly.

Her "Road #8" (2008), an oil on open-weave Aida cloth, is a tantalizing nightscape from a driver's perspective, in which the cluster of shimmering lights down the highway could be some fabulous destination or an alarming pileup.

"It's an extension of seeing," Morgan says of her paintings - she sells them, but she doesn't make a living her work. "I like it when people can build their own narratives."

"Art should be a dialogue between the viewer and the object," says Bruce Richards, of Dobbs Ferry. "If it sells, that's a bonus."

Richards, who supports himself as an instructor, has two oils-on-canvas in the show, representing 40 years of painting. "A New Breeze" (1989), with its heart atop a weather vane, is about the caprice of love and the

change in direction it can symbolize. "Darwinian Theory" (2007) juxtaposes the Venus of Willendorf, a prehistoric fertility icon, with one of Jeff Koons' animal-balloon sculptures.

Is this a commentary on the descent of man? That, Richards says with a smile, is for you to decide.

On the other hand, there's nothing ambiguous about Leslie Pelino's funky fabric fountains and standing lamps. They make you laugh out loud in delight.

"For me, I'm an anxious person," says Pelino, a New Paltz resident. "So I start sewing."

Sometimes she begins at 5 a.m. and doesn't finish until 7 p.m., stitching together her children's old toys and clothing, preserving their childhood.

The structure of her fabric sculptures may have something to do with the idea that she's a potter interested in vessels. Storing these vessels is expensive, she says. Still, she'd be happy to give away her works to a place like Ronald McDonald House.

Indeed, the notion of sharing is a compelling part of the show. Twenty percent of the proceeds from the sale of the works will go to the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art.

"Peekskill is always trying to be an artistic community," Penny Yamet of Yamet Arts Inc. says of the city, which has been described as a suburban SoHo.

It's her hope that the show will draw visitors to Peekskill's galleries, artists' lofts and performances.

"For the Love of Art" will also spotlight artists you may not have encountered before, people like Kate Vrijmoet, of Pawling.

The exhibit's six jurors - Kenise Barnes of Kenise Barnes Fine Art in Larchmont; Kara Lenkeit of Purchase College; William C. Maxwell of Maxwell Fine Arts in Peekskill, Michael Anthony Natiello of Collaborative Concepts; Sara Pasti, director of the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art at SUNY New Paltz; and artist Tilly Strauss - have chosen two of the works from Vrijmoet's series "50 Paintings in 50 Days."

They're dripping images of Pawling friends and acquaintances, done in Benjamin Moore latex paints on paper, that evoke Jackson Pollock and Francis Bacon.

"I needed to make art on a daily basis," says Vrijmoet, who's also busy with a family, chickens, an orchard

and her enterprising 7- and 6-year-olds' egg stand. It is, she says with a laugh about the egg stand, not enough to support an artist.

"I'd be happy to sell my work," Vrijmoet says. "But I can't make art with the thought of selling it."

That sentiment is echoed by painter Richards.

"If you try to make a living as an artist, it puts a different burden on the work," he says.



Artist Bruce Richards of Dobbs Ferry with his work "The New Breeze," part of the exhibit "For The Love of Art" at The Hat Factory in Peekskill. (Photos by Stuart Bayer/The Journal News)

Far more important to these artists is the desire to communicate what's in their hearts.

"If I could give people an experience they might not otherwise have," Vrijmoet says, "then I've enriched their lives in some way."

Lael Morgan of Croton-on-Hudson with her work "Road #8."



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