

Ashburnham gallery showcases local artists



SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / ALANA MELANSON «Appearance,» an oil painting by local artist Richard Membrino, is among works on display in the «1st Day of School» exhibit, opening Saturday at the SchoolHouse Gallery in Ashburnham's Veterans Memorial School.

ASHBURNHAM -- Saturday will be the «1st Day of School» at Veterans Memorial School, though it will be of a rather different sort.

The opening reception for the North Country Sustainability Center's SchoolHouse Gallery and its «1st Day of School Group Show» will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Saturday and will mark the first exhibit for members of the center's art guild.

Featured in the showing will be Ashburnham-based artists Justin McGonigle, Michelle Biscotti, and Elaine and Richard Membrino, whose work represents a

number of visual styles and media, ranging from abstract oil painting to collage to box assemblage.

According to Elaine Membrino, the box assemblage is akin to the shoebox dioramas young schoolchildren make, but these are much more complex, utilize more sophisticated materials and often abstractly convey a message to the viewer rather than simply showing a scene. Her box pieces in the gallery will tackle diverse subjects from flowers to AIDS, she said.

Elaine Membrino said her work has been shown at the Fitchburg Art Museum and Rollstone Studios in downtown Fitchburg.

Her husband, Richard, will be showing his abstract oil paintings, which feature «richly colored amalgams of geometric shapes» that are often multidimensional and sometimes textile-like, she said.

McGonigle's work will feature abstract expressionist paintings and Biscotti's will likely include mixed-media collage, according to the gallery.

North Country Sustainability

Center President Patricia Garland Stewart said the space for this first exhibit will be rather small, but she and the artists are hoping to soon expand to take advantage of the full Veterans Memorial School building, which would allow for not only more gallery space, but more rooms for classes and other activities, such as a studio for weaving and other textile arts.

«This exhibit will show what we can do if they let us get going,» Stewart said.

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Another gallery exhibit, titled «Gr'ass'roots» and centering around donkey-related art, is scheduled for early April and people from as far away as Connecticut have already expressed interest in becoming involved, Stewart said.

Follow Alana Melanson at [facebook.com/alanasentinel](https://www.facebook.com/alanasentinel) or at twitter.com/alanamelanson.

The exhibit is an opportunity to «integrate arts and agriculture,» she said, and to allow farmers to «realize that arts and agriculture can work together.»

In addition to expanding programs the center already offers, Stewart is also interested in creating an «oral history room,» which she described as an informal card room-style setting in which the town's senior citizens and younger folk and children could interact and share town history so that it does not become lost over time, an opportunity she said the Council on Aging is particularly excited about.

Stewart said the center's expansion into the rest of the Veterans Memorial School will have to go before voters at the May Town Meeting, as the building is municipally owned.

Stewart is confident voters will approve and said there has been a great deal of local support for the North Country Sustainability Center.

Though submissions are closed for the «1st Day of School Group Show,» pieces for «Gr'ass'roots» will be accepted through mid- to late March, Stewart said.

The show beginning Saturday is free and will run through March 24 and will be open to the public Wednesdays and Fridays noon to 5 p.m., Thursdays and Saturdays, noon to 8 p.m. and Sundays, noon to 3 p.m.

For more information about the SchoolHouse Gallery, visit schoolhousegallery.org. To learn more about the North Country Sustainability center, visit northcountry sustain.org.

http://www.sentinelandenterprise.com/local/ci_20026741