

## Diverse, Innovative, and Now Outdoors

By SUSAN HODARA MAY 18, 2012

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y.

EVERY two years since 1998, the Castle Gallery at the College of New Rochelle has presented the “Westchester Biennial,” a juried exhibition showcasing the diversity of innovative work by emerging and established artists based in Westchester County. This year, both diversity and innovation are plentiful.

Consider the 21 artists represented. Ranging in age from their 20s to their 70s, they include a former therapist, a young man with severe autism whose imagery was chosen by the United Nations Postal Authority for its Autism Awareness stamp series, and the creative director of the acclaimed Halloween extravaganza “The Great Jack O’Lantern Blaze” in Croton-on-Hudson. Some of the artists have lived as far from Westchester as Japan and Slovenia; some are related by blood or marriage.

And consider the artwork this eclectic group has created. Among the 40 works on view are abstract and figurative paintings, drawings and prints — including cartoonish social commentaries, lively patterns of color and intimate expressions of loss. There are black-and-white and color photographs — some manipulated, some not — and mixed-media constructions and installations, one of which uses dozens of coffee mugs individually cocooned with yarn. For the first time, the exhibition extends beyond the gallery’s three rooms, with sculptures placed outdoors in the Rose Garden. Almost all the pieces are for

sale, priced \$300 to \$17,000.

Visitors to the show may experience a variety of emotions: a sense of wonder, a sigh of calm, a shudder, a chuckle or a tear.

“I was looking for work that hit my gut,” said Ruth Hardinger, a sculptor and one of the biennial’s jurors, along with Chana Benjamin, the founder and director of New Century Artists in Chelsea, and Mary Birmingham, the curator at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey. The three jurors spent a full day in February examining hundreds of images submitted by nearly 100 artists. They were seeking originality, a strong statement and, Ms. Birmingham said, “quality — in concept, execution and presentation.”

The selections were installed by Katrina Rhein, Castle Gallery’s director, and Michelle Jammes, its manager. “I like to hang something provocative facing the front door,” Ms. Rhein said.

This year, that piece is Charles McGill’s “RAMWAR.” This 4-by-4-foot sculptural assemblage of fragments of golf bags greets visitors head on: assorted straps, buckles, zippers and tan, brown and red leather are reconstructed to suggest a (somewhat menacing) hooded torso. Mr. McGill, whose alter ego is Art Negro, the fictitious founder of the Former Black Militant Golf and Country Club, took up golfing in the 1990s and began making related artwork soon after. “RAMWAR” and a second piece in the biennial, “The Scream,” are from his latest series, “Skinned.”

“Golf bags are not meant to come apart,” said Mr. McGill, whose work has been exhibited nationally and appeared in the 2008 “Westchester Biennial,” “so there’s no way to make these pieces without getting really frustrated. I get so angry, and some of that emotion ends up in the work.”

“RAMWAR,” he said, embodies aggressiveness. “When I put the zipper on the hood where the mouth might be, the aggression is heightened,” he said. “It’s like gnashing teeth.”

Behind the wall that holds “RAMWAR” is a section of the gallery Ms. Rhein described as “the domestic area.” Here are Galina Dargery’s “Just a Taste,” an oil painting of a young woman sprawled on a bed, about to stick her finger into the frosting of a cake, and two oil portraits by Patricia Horing,

whose subjects, a lounging barefoot couple and a woman drinking tea, gaze boldly at the viewer.

The theme of family extends into the second gallery, where four mixed-media drawings from Rima Grad's series "Not What I Had In Mind" document aspects of her husband's decline into the degenerative disease A.L.S. "Our Beautiful Bed," for instance, is a childlike illustration of a colorful bed; along the bottom, it reads, "We said goodbye to our beautiful bed."

These pieces, Ms. Grad said, employ more drawing than her earlier work, which was heavily collaged. "My life took a turn, and so my art took a turn, as well. Making these images was a release for me. Sometimes it's hard to trust your own instinct, your own hand, your own voice. But I was ready."

Across the room, Tomoko Amaki Abe's V-shaped installation, "Gauze Fall," was cast using shreds of gauze dipped into slip, a liquid form of clay, fired and arranged on the wall like cascading brush strokes. Ms. Abe inherited the gauze from her grandfather, a doctor who lost a leg while fighting for Japan during World War II. "As a child I watched him treat his leg with gauze every night," Ms. Abe said.

When the pieces of "Gauze Fall" were fired, the gauze burned away, leaving only the clay, "like a fossil," she said, "like a memory."

Outside in the well-tended Rose Garden, Michael Anthony Natiello's sculptures, "Red Neck Gong" and "Red Neck Garden Ornament," stand 6 feet 2 inches tall. Both are made from found materials: "Gong" is an oil tank lid suspended with chain from a frame of rough-hewed timber; "Ornament" is a spherical cage built from rusted metal barrel hoops, perched on a wooden column.

Mr. Natiello, the creative director (and a pumpkin carver) for "Blaze," an annual installation of thousands of jack-o'-lanterns at Van Cortlandt Manor, said that one of the influences on his personal work was, not surprisingly, Halloween. "The fact that my mind is always thinking about macabre scenes has definitely affected me," he said.

Regarding the "red neck" reference in the names of his pieces, Mr. Natiello said: "It's a cheeky term, I guess. I joke that the best way to hear the

gong played is with a BB gun.”

Joking aside, Mr. Natiello said, the gong does sing when struck. “It makes a tinny industrial sound,” he said. “At some point, we’ll record it, and you’ll probably hear it in the music at ‘Blaze.’ ”

“The Westchester Biennial 2012” runs through June 17 at Castle Gallery, in Leland Castle on the campus of the College of New Rochelle, 29 Castle Place, New Rochelle. Admission is free. Open Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. For more information: [cnr.edu/cg.htm](http://cnr.edu/cg.htm) or (914) 654-5423.

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