

Arts

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'Round Trip'

Former NHS art students return to show their stuff



CAROL LOLLIS

This painting by Mariah Swanson was inspired by a trip she took to Cairo, Egypt, in March 2012, where she witnessed demonstrations in Tahrir Square.

By EMMALINE M. DEIHL
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THEY have traversed the globe, explored new lifestyles, labored on projects in art school and discovered what it takes to forge their own paths in the world. Now a group of young artists is returning to Northampton, at least temporarily, to soak up the once-familiar atmosphere as they reconnect with fellow artists and old friends.

The homegrown artists, all Northampton High School alumni, are being welcomed back with a group exhibit, on view through Aug. 19 at the A.P.E. Gallery in Northampton. The artists graduated from NHS between 2001 to 2011, and were students in Lisa Leary's honors art program. "Round Trip," curated by

Robert Eastman ('07), Carolyn Clayton ('05) and Leary, features recent works by 20 graduates.

Whether they moved away from home, traveled, attended college or stayed put in their hometown, all the artists whose work is on view share the experience of growing up in the Valley and studying with Leary.

A.P.E. has frequently exhibited work by local highschoolers, especially in its former third-floor space in Thornes Marketplace in

To hear Mariah Swanson discuss her painting that was inspired by a trip to Cairo, Egypt, click on this story at www.gazettenet.com.

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CAROL LOLLIS

Carolyn Clayton filled her assemblage, "Home Slice," with wax, plaster, rubber and found objects and then sawed it in half.



CAROL LOLLIS

"Round Trip" co-curators, Carolyn Clayton, left, and Robert Eastman, are assisted by A.P.E. associate director, Lisa Thompson, as they hang a painting by Matthew Samolewicz at the Gallery.

Former NHS art students return

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Northampton. "Round Trip" marks the first alumni show in the gallery's current space on Main Street.

Lisa Thompson, associate director of A.P.E., approached Leary with the idea for the show, and they brought Clayton and Eastman on board as co-curators. After contacting former classmates through Facebook, the curators collected submissions and organized the show's layout.

Clayton says she is excited to bring back these artists who grew up in Northampton but whose now more mature work may not be familiar locally.

"It's going to be really nice for them to see artwork that's rooted in the Valley and that's rooted in Northampton. I'm psyched to see some of those people too," she said.

Ready for the real world

Reflective of their vast experiences and interests, the show comprises a wide variety of mediums, subjects and styles. The participating artists are Clayton, Eastman, Stella Cilman, Lea Chiara, Lauren Donovan, Rina Goldfield, William Hannum, Eliza Mason, Christopher Millete, Mac Milsark, Rachel Prouty, Claire Rayton, Kendra Rowan, Emma Sadowski, Zoe Sasson, Matthew Samolewicz, Rebecca Spangenthal, Mariah Swanson, Travis Weitzman and Elena Zachary. The honors art program they all participated in aims to build technique, Leary says, while encouraging students to think conceptually and to be objective about their work. It helps, she says, to launch them into the real world.

To that end, Leary says, it's important that her students learn how to handle critiques and evaluate their own work.

"I think it's important for me to be honest with them. The last thing I want is for them to go to a portfolio day, and I'm just this cheerleader telling them everything is wonderful, and then they go and somebody at the college gives them some other feedback," Leary said. "I'm trying to prepare them for college and life. It's not just a high school art class."

During the second semester of the program, students propose a theme they want to explore.

"It's very individualized," Leary said, adding that the process can be difficult. It requires students to search within themselves, she says, to find inspiration.

"I'm really looking for them to tap into a very deep place within themselves," she said. "I had an English professor one time tell my class that anyone can skim the stuff off the top of the water, but the good stuff is where you have to dig deep."

While the artists have continued to develop and change their styles, their ideas took root in Leary's class, Clayton says. Her own interest in three-dimensional art, for example, began in high school.

"Something I think about often is how the way I was working in high school was very intuitive," Clayton said. "I would just go with my gut instinct and pick materials I was interested in and start making a lot of box assemblages." Her contribution to the exhibit, "Home Slice," is in the shape of a hollow wooden house, which she filled with wax, plaster, rubber and found objects and then sawed in half.

Clayton, who has been living in Easthampton since receiv-



Carol Lollis
Carolyn Clayton, left, and Lisa Thompson hang a painting by Claire Rayton at the A.P.E. Gallery.



Carol Lollis
Carolyn Clayton, at top of ladder, Lisa Leary, left, Robert Eastman and Lisa Thompson coordinated the exhibit "Round Trip," on view at the A.P.E. Gallery.

ning but also just a hint of concept so that I was able to take that technique and really start to think about my ideas and develop it at Carnegie Mellon," she said.

Eastman, who received a bachelor's degree with a concentration in studio art in 2011 from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., says he, too, was well-prepped for college and the real world by Leary.

"It was a really awesome program. I felt prepared for it by having taken honors art courses with Ms. Leary, which are very rigorous for high school art classes," Eastman said.

Paths diverged

Having been prepared by Leary, these alumni have continued creating art as their paths diverged. From studying abroad in Egypt (Rayton) and Mongolia (Chiara) to attending schools such as Parsons The New School for Design in New York City (Swanson), the Maryland Institute of Art in Baltimore (Sadowski) and Colorado College in Colorado Springs (Hannum) the artists bring a range of experiences to their work, making for a varied exhibit.

There is a colorful, highly textural abstract painting by Samolewicz, for example, and a black-and-white woodcut print by Millete. Swanson became interested in illustration while at Parsons, and paints with a narrative or message in mind. She visited a friend living in Cairo, Egypt, in March 2012, where she witnessed demonstrations in Tahrir Square surrounding presidential candidates. Working from photographs she took, Swanson began a series of oil paintings documenting her experience, the first of which is in the show.

Chiara adapted Mongolian Tsam Buddhist mask-maker practices to her own masks

which she uses in performance. Eastman is interested in drawings and installations. Currently working on a series of drawings on materials such as envelopes and bank statements, he likes thinking about the paths of these common materials and how they come to be hanging in art galleries.

Performance art is explored by Hannum in "Birthday Cake Performance," a video that is inspired by the feelings of loneliness and pessimism he says he often experiences on his birthday. Rayton continues to explore painting and highly personal, color-subjective portraiture while experimenting with sculpture. Her current work features oil self-portraits paired with mummified casts of herself.

Eastman says he's looks forward to getting everyone back together.

"What's so awesome about this show is reconnecting with everyone, even students that were a little bit older or younger and I didn't really know. I'm really excited to get everyone back together."

For Leary, it is a chance to see her former students and all they have accomplished since her mentoring.

"I'm really proud of the fact that they took the step to take the class and then took the next step, which is like a leap of faith. Even if it's not something they end up doing as their career, they've chosen to value a creative life. I'm just really proud of them," she said.

An opening reception for "Round Trip" will be held Friday from 5 to 8 p.m. at the A.P.E. Gallery, 126 Main St., Northampton. Gallery hours are Tuesdays through Sundays from noon to 5 p.m. and Fridays from noon to 8 p.m. For information, call 586-5553.