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Give A Gift, Get A Gift: Art For The Cause At deCordova Gallery In Greenport

Joan Baum



"Montauk Mist" by Harvey Hellering

Greenport - No, Dorothy, we're not in Kansas anymore but in Suffolk County. "There's no place like home for the holidays - if you have one," is the motto of deCordova Gallery & Studio's third holiday benefit for Maureen's Haven (MH). An Eastern Suffolk County health and human services organization, MH provides safe and warm temporary housing for the homeless, from Nov. 1 to April 1. It also offers "HopeLine" assistance, including referrals, for those in imminent need. And need could not be more pronounced this year, notes MH Executive Director Peter Saros. Into the 2008 winter season barely a month, the Overnight Program, run under the auspices of the Peconic Community Council, already reports a dramatic increase in its adult shelter population, up 39 percent over last year, not to mention the growing number of families on the verge of difficulty and the strain on the transportation budget. Can art really make a difference?

You bet it can, say gallery owners Hector and Joyce deCordova, and they don't just mean providing food for the soul. As always with their annual benefit, it's never business as usual.

Sensitive to the economic downturn, deCordova is offering even more affordable art this year, with 30 percent of the proceeds going to MH and 40 percent to the artists. This generous arrangement, Hector says, is courtesy of the artists. This year there is more bin art - folders of unframed paintings "perfect for holiday giving," including some wonderful bin watercolors by Hector deCordova himself, though if not, and abstract is preferred, his acrylics on the wall will more than satisfy. Of course, what's on the walls and floors of this Victorian house, gallery, and studio provides a real-world sense of how paintings and sculpture can look in a home. Yes, times are tough, but unlike many holiday gifts, art appreciates in value.

Of the artists on exhibit this year, many are deCordova familiars, such as Scott Partlow, whose anatomical, smooth textured bing cherry, mahogany and beech nut sculptures grace a front room, and "birdman" Kristian Iglesias, whose elegant, airy, witty titled constructs in steel, brass, copper, and pigmented cement perch atop pedestals. Bob Lefferts is back with some marvelously smooth Caribbean shots, and who could not recognize Bob Markell's sure-



"Entrada" by Bryan Landsberg

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hand monoprint and monotype and pastel nudes? Cat lovers will not be disappointed: Guillermo Espinasse's "gatos" arch themselves in one mixed media piece, while the abstract "En El Café" shows off the artist's bold use of ink on watercolor.



"Sunflowers" by Sherry Schreiber

Harvey Hellering is also back (oh, that moody "Montauk Mist") as are Ursula Thomas (beautiful watercolors on rice paper, elegant, serene); Lianne Alcon (whose portraits of apprehensive Latino faces seem particularly suited to the benefit theme); Linda Butti (with two large, impressionistic pastel and acrylic landscapes) and Janet Culbertson, whose "Green Glade" elicited admiration from visitors for her luminous mixed media landscapes.

Also doing a nice return engagement are Bryan Landsberg, with more "little gift" painted rectangle boxes (lots of red and gold), attractively displayed by deCordova in a twig basket; Helen Giaquinto, with four crisp local-scene watercolors; and Sal Gulla, whose

massive semi-abstract acrylic, "The Brownstone," terraced lines of open geometric fretwork on commanding red and orange just about blows away a gallery wall but surprise, surprise, in a hallway nearby hang two of his watercolors and a charcoal, each different, lest this multi-talented artist should be pinned down to one style. Georgia Charuhas's hand-colored prints, profile faces with a contour look also prompted opening-night comments.

Mixed media pieces were particularly in evidence, as in an Emily Barnett's abstract collage (last year she was showing delicate bird nest etchings); Martha Ferguson's buckling, fan-effect abstract in mauve and aqua, featuring a sea chart; and Adrienne Fierman's raku earth-toned ceramic wall plaques with their mysterious calligraphic designs. Tactility? How about Sherry Schreiber's impressive poppy and corn flower fiber tapestry that graces a hallway (her lovely pastels, "Sunflowers" and "Wheat Fields With Poppies" are a room away).

Implied tactility can be seen in Walter Schwab's fine photo, "Through The Glass, #1," with its incredible contrast of a peeling window frame, shot as a cross, and an out-of-focus icon in the background. The poppy also makes an unannounced exhibit appearance in "Big Red" by Verena Michel, one of Hector's fall workshop students. As for Victor Friedman's "gorgeous" sepia-toned "Tree In The Mist" and hand-worked photo "Nude," the adjective says it. Are those charcoals by Mike Maas and Rosamaria Eisler? No, they're solar plate etchings, but don't ask for an explanation of this complicated process unless there is world enough and time. Also new to deCordova, Ted Stamatelos delivers two distinctively painted squiggles on metal abstracts.

The average price of all works is \$300, the cause extremely important, as this Thanksgiving weekend anecdote suggests: a note arrived at the gallery, no return address, inside a short typed note and \$20. Someone had found the bill on the street and decided that it could not be put to better use than as a donation to Maureen's Haven. The framed note and the postmarked envelope are displayed near the gallery front door, a gift in the fullest sense of the spirit of the season.



"Big Red" by Verena Michel

- "Give a Gift, Get a Gift" will run through Dec. 21. The deCordova Studio & Gallery is located at 538 Main Street, Greenport.

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