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Art Center Draws On New Artists

Torpedo Factory Visiting Artist Program welcomes 10 artists for the summer.

By Dylan Yep

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For a brief time this summer, visitors can view a King Street "planet," a two-dimensional landscape featuring the Washington Monument made from strips of magazine, mixed media paintings — from oils to acrylics to watercolors, and a number of other unique pieces in the studios of the visiting artists at The Torpedo Factory Art Center in Alexandria.

Ten artists are being welcomed into a summer residence at the Torpedo Factory for the first time as part of the Visiting Artist Program. The purpose is to provide a professional development opportunity for emerging and experienced visual artists and to expose those visiting the Torpedo Factory to a rotating group of painters, sculptors, and others.

"We wanted to bring in some new people on a short-term basis to experiment with revitalizing the center with new works, new ideas," said Sue Lynch, head of the Visiting Artist Program committee.

Craig Sterling, Visiting Artist Program committee member, added "We felt that to invigorate the center and to bring in new artists on a frequent basis would give the new artists an opportunity to show their work to the public as well as giving the public an opportunity to see new things."

More than 50 artists from across the U.S. and as far away as South America applied to become a visiting artist. The 10 artists were chosen by juror Jack Rasmussen, director and curator of the American University Museum. Rasmussen was chosen by the Visiting Artist Program for his experience with many mediums and his reputation as a generalist. The artists are working in studios throughout the art center and will be actively involved in art enrichment events throughout the summer. In July, visiting artists David Alfuth, Megan Coyle, Corwin Levi, Julian Parker-Burns, Erica Raby, Kazaan Viveiros and Wan Ju-Wei will be exhibiting a variety of styles and in many different media.

The eclectic work of Corwin Levi of Alexandria can be described as mixed-media painting. He has worked in a variety of locations, including the Czech Republic and in New York. His travels do not allow him to stay in one place for a long period of time so he appreciates the opportunity the Visiting Artist Program offers. "It's great because at a normal artist residency you have a bunch of artists around, maybe some writers or composers, but here, you have so many different people from so many different areas of life who get to talk about art and you get to hear what they think. It's very valuable ... there's just so many people around who come to talk about art work with me or to not talk artwork with me."

Megan Coyle of Alexandria creates textured collages of anything from portraits to landscapes with strips of magazines. She appreciates that the program is an excellent opportunity to make a name for herself in the art community, but also recognizes the benefits offered to the public. "It's nice because it introduces a few new artists that people haven't seen before if they come here a lot." She added, "I can have a conversation with people when they see what I'm working on ... they can see the actual process while I'm working on it. Usually, people stumble upon my website and they see my finished works of art, but don't really have an idea of how it's pieced together."

Erica Raby of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, works primarily with installations, sight-specific, 3-D works designed to transform the perception of a space, and drawings. While her works may appear cute and playful on the surface, she tries to infuse her art with a serious undertone through materials like post-consumer waste. Like Coyle, Raby sees the program as an opportunity for the public to "see the beginning stages of a piece of art and see materials before they get transformed. It can be a learning experience."

Kazaan Viveiros of Alexandria typically creates her art in a small studio by herself. Her works feature animal and landscaped-based paintings to address environmental issues. She recognizes that the program allows "new blood, new ideas, and new techniques" to enter the Torpedo Factory, and that this experience will help her professionally.



Corwin Levi begins work on a series of flower paintings.



Megan Coyle creates a collage of the Washington, D.C., landscape made from magazine strips.



Julian Parker-Burns works on one of his "planet" collages made from photographs and paintings.



Erica Raby transforms post-consumer waste into different objects.

Wan-Ju Wei of Allston, Mass., grew up in Taiwan and her background is reflected in her paintings. She focuses on the perception of shadow and uses it to convey ideas from both Eastern and Western thought. While the west often views shadows as a dark force, Wei believes shadows represent parts of her that are hidden and mysterious. Her beliefs are reflected in many of her paintings in which dark figures are surrounded by warm colors.



Wan-Ju Wei's art is influenced by her upbringing in Taiwan.

While many Alexandrians have enjoyed visiting the Torpedo Factory for years, they may not realize how those outside of the area view the art center located at the end of King Street along the Potomac River.

Julian Parker-Burns of Silver Spring creates mixed-media collage that often combine painting and photographs to create surreal scenes. He has been living overseas for the past 10 years. "Every time I return to D.C., I always go by The Torpedo Factory. I've always thought that it is one of the greatest art sites in the world because you can meet with the artists and see all different kinds of art." Living overseas, he has felt increasingly out of touch with the American art scene and saw the Visiting Artist Program as a great opportunity to rejoin it. He has been working at The Torpedo Factory since the beginning of June and finds the experience invaluable.



Kazaan Viveiros' paintings reflect her interest in evolution, ecology, ecosystems and environmental issues.

Parker-Burns explained what he believes are the key elements to being an artist at The Torpedo Factory: that there are other artists with which to discuss technical information; to be inspired by the work of others; and, for the professional standards that are practiced.

"The Torpedo Factory is perhaps one of the most important parts of Alexandria because it enables people from all around the world and perhaps more importantly everyone from Alexandria to come here, see the art that they love, and even better yet see the art they don't understand and ask those artists 'so why are you painting flowers in a vase?' and have the artists explain why. I'm not asking the public to love flowers in a vase or big, black, abstract squares but that the public has a unique experience of expanding their mind, understanding other people and going boldly where most other communities don't have a chance to go. Alexandria has that in the Torpedo Factory."



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