ARTSQUEST ANNUAL RESIDENT ARTISTS’ EXHIBITION 2021

Crayola Gallery
Banana Factory Arts Center
25 W. Third Street Bethlehem, PA

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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The Banana Factory Arts Center is ArtsQuest’s hub of visual arts and education programming, serving as a convening space for the community to create and appreciate the arts. Visitors to the Banana Factory are encouraged to experience art through exhibitions, classes, tours and events. The arts center, however, is more than just a collection of galleries and classrooms - it is an ecosystem of creativity and collaboration fueled by a community of Resident Artists. The Resident Artists are teachers, entrepreneurs, mentors, innovators and community leaders. Their individual talents are nurtured in this unique environment through peer-to-peer feedback and support. Their work, from conception to exhibition, is represented at the Banana Factory. The ArtsQuest Annual Resident Exhibition showcases the tremendous work of these talented individuals. The pieces in this exhibition speak to the breadth of talent in the Banana Factory, as well as the diversity. A variety of styles, materials and presentations are on view. We ask you to experience the works in this exhibition through observation and reflection, encourage you to purchase original works of art for your own collection and we invite you to engage in a dialogue with the artists in their studios.

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HISTORY OF THE BANANA FACTORY ARTS CENTER & RESIDENT ARTISTS

In early 1996 The Bethlehem Musikfest Association (which would become the non-profit ArtsQuest in 2000) sought to support the City’s revitalization by creating a cultural center for arts and education, especially for young people in the community. Mayor Kenneth Smith recommended a former banana distribution warehouse at the western gateway to the SouthSide as a location that the City wanted to develop. With the strong support of local philanthropist Marlene “Linny” Fowler, The Bethlehem Musikfest Association purchased the former Theodoreidis Banana distribution warehouse in September 1996. Renovations commenced and in January 1998, the Banana Factory Arts Center opened.

In 2000, the Bethlehem Musikfest Association formally changed its name to ArtsQuest and purchased a former auto parts store adjacent to the Banana Factory, thus extending the facility and parking lot for a strategic city block. Two years later, the nonprofit completed the expansion of the Banana Factory to incorporate the large new Crayola Gallery, the R.K. Laros Ceramics Classroom, the general arts classroom and the Banko Family Community Room. Since 2003, the Banana Factory has added the Olympus Digital Imaging Center (which was updated in 2018 with all new Mac desktop computers and iPads with Apple Pencil for digital illustration and design), the ArtsQuest Glass Studio (the region’s only teaching hot glass studio), and additional artist studios, raising the total to thirty resident artists.

The Resident Artists at the Banana Factory arts center hold a significant role within the building and the mission of ArtsQuest to make the artistic community accessible. All studio spaces have subsidized rent, and Resident Artists can participate in a number of annual programs; such as the Resident Artist Annual Exhibition and multiple First Friday open houses throughout the year. Each month, a rotating set of resident artists are featured and display their work in the main lobby and have a digital feature on the Banana Factory’s Instagram page.

To date, over one hundred artists have used the Banana Factory Art’s center studio spaces as a place to create their art and share with the surrounding community during the twenty three years since the official opening of the building. The artists span a variety of different mediums, covering everything from painting to printmaking, fashion design to glass sculpture.

SHOP LOCAL: SUPPORT ARTISTS & SMALL BUSINESS

When you purchase a piece of artwork by an artist within your community, you are helping to support your local creative economy!
I’m sitting in a waiting room with an open New Yorker in my lap, convincing myself that it means I have great taste in clever, well-written reportage, when what I’m actually doing is aggressively consuming the cartoons scattered throughout the magazine. It’s sort of the grown-up version of the comic-book-in-the-text-book trick. There’s certainly intellectual merit to these cartoons, but let’s face it, I’m here for the silly drawings mostly. Cartooning is sometimes viewed as an art of simplification – a shorthand method of refined draftsmanship that communicates with clarity and wit. I love cartoons and their stylized execution. I’ll consume them anywhere I can find them.

Now I’m in an art gallery viewing painted canvases, sculptures, and framed works, convincing myself that it means I have great taste in visual culture and depth of spirit, but what I find myself doing is continuously gravitating to a set of cartoons on the wall by multi-talented artist Katie Hovencamp. Unlike my experience with those aforementioned New Yorker comics, which offer me quick satisfaction, these drawings have my attention because they challenge me. They are a Trojan Horse, infiltrating my naive mind with their sharply distilled linework and simple presentation, while full-bel-
Have you ever wondered about the moments left empty in a vast expansion of space? Landscapes seemingly abandoned become a formidable wasteland. Undesired. As a child, I imagined deserts this way. When something is no longer exciting or useful to humans, what does it become? Deserted. Hiking on hot heaps of sand under the brutal and beating sun. Why would anyone go there? Sure, I’ve heard stories of ancient civilizations with treasures and mounds of knowledge buried away in pyramids. Those who dare to find those relics must be tortured in the cruel climate of a wasteland that once was. Yet, their quest was only for the “man-made” objects and substances, the seemingly “valuable” items only that yearned to be discovered. At least, this is what was depicted to me in my many years of only viewing the world through a censored lens, carefully curated for the young mind.

With this, I developed a fascination for travel but only to densely populated areas, with “culture” and “philosophy.” Places that demonstrated the rise and fall of civilizations and the assertiveness of men retrying for centuries with different versions of their higher power and updated outfits. Yet, slowly I begin to wonder about open space. Places practically untouched by humans. Places seemingly without history. History defined by its relation to human affairs. As I grow, I’m realizing how much dominance humans project onto their surroundings. I always found the ever-changing topography and the footprint of man a bit poetic, but this idea of vastness bewilders me. How could there not be anything there?

Bruce Ward’s photographs are unmistakably the desert. A horizontal view level to the burnt umber grit of the ground. Life blooms from the scorched stone, tufts of vegetation creating a mini aerial view into a smaller world living within the stories of its surroundings. The warmth of the ground and coolness of the grassy textured shrubbery foil each other. In the distance, there is nothing but more and more plains of land. Pangs of light outline fogged draped mountains in an ever expanding sky. A simply electric and breathtaking moment captured. In its neighbor photograph, you see mountainous rocks and boulders. The ground is calm and cool, resting in preparation for another blazing day. The forms dividing the scene create a skyline similar to that of a row of buildings in the distance with pink powered clouds echoing above. What treasures could be found there in these natural pillars? What knowledge?

The Mojave Desert in Nevada is home to the Valley of Fire. An escape of avenues of cemented sandstone, iron oxide, silica, and manganese, giving brilliant and bold hues of reds, yellows, pinks and oranges. How could all this be “wasted”? Waves in the sediment pay homage to its original ecosystem: the ocean. Imagining this vast sand dune desert submerged under the sea is a concept perplexing from our current perception of the world. It is understood that evolution isn’t rapid, and the thousands of different versions of this terrain transformed itself over a millennia. Mud slabs and slow moving streams that erode. Flash floods and rainfall construct new geological stories in every direction. The ravines and archways create doors, alleyways, and hidden rooms within the natural assemblage of earth. It showcases artwork from a time of the past. Intrigue compels us to remember this time with a photograph, realizing how similar and infinitely different we are from past versions of ourselves. It is time that molds our diversity. Some may question: was there ever a time when this landscape was at peak potential? That may be defined through the only way most people can see, the vision of how it can be manipulated into something for them. The Earth is not here for us to admire and make something of. It’s here to evolve, change and become.
The Earth’s lifetimes and phases continue to fascinate me as the common correlation of geological and atmospheric systems combine with the many growing and shrinking waterways. It all does its part to reshape, reinvent, reinterpret the appearance of our surroundings. We typically don’t see this in a generation. Captivating to me is our ability to time travel just by digging. Digging to the previous layers of our planet to find what earlier versions existed and what shapes our path today. The miraculous things we find in the Earth’s soil strike me. What are we able to uncover from a time unfathomable by today’s modern humans. Yet, humans made routes through our landscape long before the written word, translating their language in footsteps and their trail across the curvature of rock.

**Rachael Bell** is a mixed media painter, and floral designer. She works in a variety of materials to create 2D and 3D work, largely including the floral motif or object as part of her materials. She maintains her art making practice in Studio 248A on the Banana Factory’s 2nd floor in Southside Bethlehem. Her other professional duties involve being the Assistant Director at Bethlehem House Gallery on Main Street in Bethlehem, PA, and a Floral Designer at Bloomie’s Flower Shop in Easton, PA.
Robert Tucher is a relatively new resident artist at the Banana Factory, coming on board with us during the height of the pandemic last year. Though we initially did not see too much of each other in the beginning, I’ve come to admire his technical virtuosity and skill at taking photographs from hard-to-reach places. His impressive work ethic also keeps us all on our toes. For the Resident Artist Show this year Rob choose to display two pieces, a photo of Lower Manhattan from the Jersey shore he calls “World Trade Towers from Tug Piers, Jersey City NJ”. Also on display is his spooky decayed house photo he named “Vultures, Middle Valley, NJ”.

Whenever I think about photographs of New York with the Twin Towers in them I feel like its symbolic of an age or innocence. They seem to represent an age where America knew who she was, and the triumphalism of her power was perhaps best exemplified by these buildings. As bleak and sterile as they were – I remember visiting the World Trade Center during my undergrad years with a college friend in the 90’s and remarking on how cold they were – they came to represent an unwavering determination to conquer and succeed at anything. How appropriate is it that this photograph of the city’s Lower Manhattan skyline is set against a decaying Jersey shore dock? Is that not the best representation of today’s state of affairs?

Troubled skies in the distance frame the backdrop of this photo with a foreground of rotting dock timbers, wild overgrown grasses and a forlorn droopy tree which reminds me of the Charlie Brown Christmas tree. The tangled branches of this tree stretch out to delicately caress the tops of the World Trade and World Financial Centers like the bony hands of death, prophesizing the building’s future. As haunting as this photo seems to me as a viewer, I’m delighted that it can just as easily be read as a hopeful image. The brightness peaking through corners of the sky, symbolic of progress. The still standing city, a symbol of defiance. The craggy vegetation in the foreground, a symbol of rebirth and regeneration. Out of ashes comes life. I think the best artists, lead viewers by the nose to a point of discovery which is their own to make. With this image, it would be hard for any viewer to look at it with anything other than yearning for simpler times.

Rob’s other work for the Annual is equally as masterful as his World Trade Center piece. “Vultures, Middle Valley, NJ” could easily be a backdrop for a modern-day retelling of the Amityville Horrors or Psycho.

When I was a kid, I hung out a lot with a kid, Kenneth, who grew up in a house like this. Kenneth’s dad was a widower and something about his wife’s passing seemed to take the spirit out of the man, such was his love for her. He let the house decay around him. The house seemed to never have been painted, so dilatated were its siding. A dank always seemed to be in the air whenever I visited. And, a dreary light, through dusty old shades, always made the place feel like one of those old Southern novels where great dames wait for their long-gone gents. I think a great photograph not only brings forth a sense of nostalgia as in Rob’s trade center piece, they also evoke a memory. I smell the dank of my friend Kenny’s house looking at this photo. Though scary vultures never lurked about his house’s ruined window ledges, a frightening aura did pervade there.

Formally, the photo is tightly cropped and divided into layers like a sandwich. Bread equaling the sky and foreground. Defeated house the meat and cheese in between. And a sliver of tree, the pickle on the side. Light seems to bath all surfaces evenly in the image, allowing the house no romantic shadow or highlighted corner to escape the viewer interpretation that this house is dead. Yet, like in the previous photo Rob again allows for another interpretation. Clearly, someone of means once owned this house. Housing being
such a prized commodity today, such a picture as this likely appears like opportunity and fortune to realtors and desperate home-seekers.

Rob told me in our brief conversation about these two works that he’s been to both spots in later times, taking new photos of the dramatically different places. Where once a bleak pier and a bulky overwrought city skyline once stood, now exists a gleaming shore. Off in the middle distance a leaner, perhaps more respectful, and less triumphalist skyline rests in a humbled city tepidly and country. Where once a horror movie backdrop terrified passersby’s, now stands a beautiful house, a bed and breakfast in fact, which welcomes visitors and encourages rest. These new photos he took will for future audiences become new frozen moments in time. They will evoke a different sense of nostalgia and yearning, and perhaps - like these works displayed - stand as bookends of our country’s prosperity and decline.

The Earth’s lifetimes and phases continue to fascinate me as the common correlation of geological and atmospheric systems combine with the many growing and shrinking waterways. It all does its part to reshape, reinvent, reinterpret the appearance of our surroundings. We typically don’t see this in a generation. Captivating to me is our ability to time travel just by digging. Digging to the previous layers of our planet to find what earlier versions existed and what shapes our path today. The miraculous things we find in the Earth’s soil strike me. What are we able to uncover from a time unfathomable by today’s modern humans. Yet, humans made routes through our landscape long before the written word, translating their language in footsteps and their trail across the curvature of rock.

Anthony Smith received a B.A. in Fine Arts from Amherst College (1999) and an M.F.A. in Painting from the University of Michigan (2001). He’s showed nationally in “From Here on Out” exhibit at Gallery Marzen/ IAG in Madison Wisconsin in 2020, the “Mid-Atlantic Painting 2016” exhibit at the University of Mary Washington Fredericksburg, VA in 2016; the 2010 “Sailing the Barbarous Coast” which traveled to Boston and Amherst, MA and Milwaukee, WI; and notably the 2008 “Runaway” show at the University of Texas Pan-American Gallery in McAllen TX for which he received a Puffin Foundation grant. Additionally he has received a Project Stream grant from the Pennsylvania Council for the Arts for the Pilot series of paintings exhibited in the show Dreadnaught at the ArtQuest SteelStacks Center in Bethlehem, PA in 2018. Internationally he’s shown in the “Tribute to Michelangelo” show at CrisolArts Gallery in Barcelona, Spain in 2013, and in various Pennsylvania exhibitions including the Winter Show at the Bethlehem House Gallery in 2016 and 2019. He’s been reviewed in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Boston Globe, The Detroit Free Press, The Ann Arbor News and the Artist’s Magazine. Smith has taught at such institutions as the University of Michigan, Parsons, Princeton and Maryland Institute College of Art. Additionally he served as artist-in-residence at the National Academy of Design (2006 – 2008), and at the Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, VT in 2016 and 2021. Most recently he’s taught at Muhlenberg College in Allentown Pa (2014-2018). He lives in Allentown Pa with a studio at the Banana Factory Art Center in Bethlehem, PA.

Room for Reflection:
Dr. Lee Riley & Marie Haba

Dr. Lee Riley’s artwork, “Wandering”, reminds me of prehistoric Cave Paintings in its form and shape. The piece consists of multiple colors that not only attracts viewers’ attention but it gives balance to the painting. In my view, the warm colors such as red and orange convey warmth, happiness and excitement and the cool colors like blue and purple are associated with trust and sincerity.

I believe the placement of the colorful melted glasses on the surface enhances the painting and leads the viewer to quickly scan the artwork back and forth. As I look at it over and over again, my eyes can’t rest in one place. I feel that the artist intention was for the viewers not to only focus on one part of the painting but also see it as a whole.

“Wandering’s” ambiguous form and shape forces the viewers’ own interpretation of the piece. The most intriguing part for me is that the lines control the viewers’ eyes movement and always brings you back to the beginning of the painting where the viewers’ eyes first start to view the piece. To me, this feeling of repetition, motion and flow invokes the “Circle of Life”.

Marie Haba is an independent artist working and living in Pennsylvania. Haba has been creating stained-glass, painting and doing other various projects for 10 years. Coming from west Africa, art as an expression of creativity was not something she was exposed to. During high school as part of ESL (English as a Second Language), Haba was introduced to stained-glass. Stained glass class was a place where she could express my artistic skills. Haba was taught how to cut, grind, clean, foil, solder the glass in addition to all the safety precautions necessary before cutting, grinding and soldering the glass. This experience led her to create my own stained-glass technique. While in college she took numerous art courses and was especially interested in 3D techniques and pottery, expanding the mediums she works in further.

Room for Reflection:

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