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Daily Herald
Suburban Chicago's Information Source

Special collective series finds home at Blue Moon Gallery



The CRAM Collective, from left, Amanda Jolley, Melissa Hall, Crystal Marie and Rebecca Stahr. The Collective's "Transcend:distance" series will be on display at the Blue Moon Gallery in Grayslake. (*Courtesy of Blue Moon Gallery*)

Submitted by Courtesy of Blue Moon Gallery Updated 12/13/2021 1:46 PM

In January 2020, four artists known as the CRAM Collective -- Crystal Marie of Gurnee; Rebecca Stahr of Grayslake; Amanda Jolley of Kansas City, Missouri; and Melissa Hall of Lexington, Kentucky -- gathered in one studio for a week to reignite their creative fires.

But that retreat gave them more than just a creative spark. It created a bond that inspired an artistic collection.

The series, called "Transcend:distance," began as a way to remain creatively connected across the miles. As each artist returned to their own homes, a round-robin of art-making began.

But little did they know that a worldwide pandemic was on its way, and what began as a fun activity would soon become a lifeline of connection through social distancing and stay-at-home orders.

Beginning with a blank panel, each artist simply created from their own style, then mailed it to the next artist in the collective. A new blank panel was begun with each round, but with each round the collection of works began to influence the materials, colors, themes, and energy of the new works.

After four rounds (16 12-inch-by-12-inch panels), the original concept for the round-robin was complete, but the desire to stay connected remained. Thus, the start of another round, this time a complex web of art-making and exchanging on 6-inch-by-6-inch panels, with a goal of 64 total.

The result is an exhibition of more than 75 pieces of mixed media art showcasing an enormous web of creativity and connection that transcends the distance of heart, body, and soul.

"We are quite excited to share this very special exhibition with our community," said Kendra Kett, director/owner of the Blue Moon Gallery. "The art is engaging, beautiful, unique, and soulful. These artists are top tier, and you can literally see and feel their strong connection to one another through the art they produced as they completed their round-robin efforts across three states.

"The pieces are mixed media, including encaustic, oil and cold wax, photography, paperfolding, and collage. It's a stunning show."

Blue Moon Gallery will also be featuring the needle-and-thread works of Grayslake artist Laura O'Connor in an exhibition titled "Embroidery as Testimony and Dissent."

O'Connor joins a long and strong tradition of women who have turned needlecraft into a vehicle for political expression and commentary on society.

Working primarily in embroidery and cross-stitch, O'Connor likes the balance that these two approaches can provide. They each have a long history, but they also have the ability to be flexible and to change to fit modern times.

Compared to the relative quickness it takes to write a comment on social media, each of O'Connor's pieces takes a good amount of time and thought in order to create a tangible product that is pithy, aesthetic and relevant.

"When reflecting upon my recent works, they appeared at first to have little connection," O'Connor said. "I realized, though, that the connection running through all of them was that this collection of work represents a visual journal of my last 18 months.

"Embroidery was how I worked through my frustration and grief related to politics and the pandemic. It was also how I learned more about craftivism and feminism. And it was how I documented the funny, little things. My work uses a symbol of domesticity and femininity to challenge those same notions."

"Patrons will get to experience O'Connor's world of embroidery hoops featuring the T-Shirt Girls, Tiny Sweaters, Socks and High Heels, and her sassy (and sometimes necessarily biting) testimony and dissent. This is a fun, inspiring, and unusual presentation," Kett said.

The gallery's 2021 collective artists -- John Kirkpatrick Jr., Michael Bellefeuille, Bob Nonnemacher, Leisa Corbett, and Michael Litewski -- will also be presenting new works in a variety of genres and mediums.

Litewski will have a special homecoming exhibition featuring his award-winning painting "The Rosetta Stone" after being presented in five exhibitions in three states.

"Transcend:distance" and "Embroidery as Testimony and Dissent" will be on view from 1-4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through Jan. 2. The gallery will be closed Dec. 25-26 and Jan. 1.

The gallery is at 18620 Belvidere Road in Grayslake. For more information,

call Kendra Kett at (224) 388-7948 or visit www.thebluemoongallery.com
(<http://www.thebluemoongallery.com>).

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