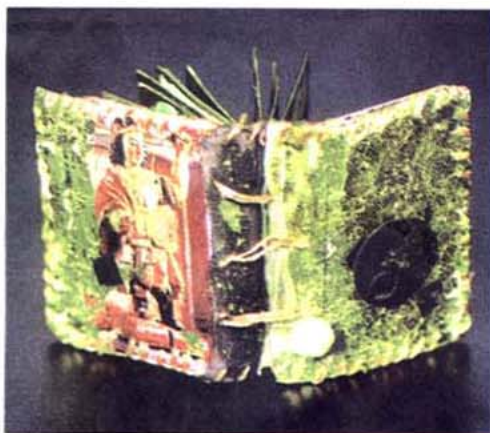


In Bridgeport, Female Artists Go Back to the Garden



By BESS LIEBENSON

BYOND the Garden Wall" takes flowers beyond their normal form, place and season — well beyond.

The juried exhibition, on view at the Discovery Museum in Bridgeport June 10 through July 29, represents the museum's third annual collaboration with the 70-year-old Connecticut Women Artists Inc. This year works by 44 artists are featured.

It is also part of the museum's major fund-raising festival of garden events, including a tour next Friday of six private gardens in Greenfield Hill, Southport and Westport, and a black-tie dinner-dance reception to open the exhibition on Saturday.

"The committee running the benefit wanted a special theme for the art show that would tie in to the 'Art in the Garden' benefit," said Kit Powers, a museum spokesman. "They thought the title would be intriguing to artists because what lies beyond the garden wall is your imagination. So in a sense that left it wide open — whatever the artists interpreted."

Both Mr. Powers and Wendy Kelley, the museum's consulting curator of art, were surprised and amused at the results.

"We would have thought more artists would pick up on the garden theme," Mr. Powers said.

Ms. Kelley said the most literal submissions were generally not the ones chosen by the juror, Judith Tannenbaum, curator of Contemporary Art at the Rhode Island School of Design.

"The jurying was done from slides — without my knowledge of the artists' names, ages, educational backgrounds, exhibition histories, race, ethnicity, and other identifying characteristics," Ms. Tannenbaum said. "The theme was open-ended enough to allow for a very broad interpretation."

She spoke of two general categories — "those that do stay closer to the idea of the garden and the other where works in fact do not represent landscape and are not based on gardens — where things do not seem to be related."

"But," she added, "the whole idea beyond the garden wall is the mental image of extending outside the garden, which opens up into different kinds of experiences."

More 400 slides of paintings, prints, sculpture and photography were submitted; for the show 55 works by 44 artists were selected, 18 of which are award winners. The artworks are for sale, with 30 percent of the proceeds benefiting the Discovery Museum's educational programs for children and teens.

First place went to June Bisantz Evans' "Stay in the Struggle." It pictures as a group of seven, dressed mostly in leopard-print leotards, pulling on a rope, with just beyond a hint of greenery. The artist places herself in every

picture (like Alfred Hitchcock).

"Cliff Dwelling" by Nina LoRicco, an imaginary contemporary greenhouse in glass and mixed media that took second place, "is closer to the theme in a very inventive way," Ms. Tannenbaum said.

Third place went to a mono print and mixed media work called "Innocence" by Susan Newfold, which pictures only the bottom half of a little boy in short blue pants.

The works will be arranged in two large galleries with floral arrangements set on pedestals creating a garden-like atmosphere. Local garden clubs, inspired by nine of the works, will create their interpretations. "It's a challenging interpretation of an interpretation," Mr. Powers said.

As Ms. Kelley said, "Sometimes it takes works that are a little off-the-wall or beyond the garden wall to make us stop, think and look."

A reception to meet the artists and an awards presentation will be held at the museum June 17, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. For information about the reception and the garden tour as well as the black-tie dinner and dance, contact the Discovery Museum, 4450 Park Avenue in Bridgeport, open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Information: (203) 372-3521, extension 134.

An exhibition next Sunday through July 29 called "Beyond the Garden Wall," at the Discovery Museum in Bridgeport, will display works by women, including "Stay in the Struggle" (above), which took first place, June Bisantz Evans,

Discovery Museum



Taking art to new heights

June Bisantz Evans, an artist, professor and musician, has created bold, elevating artworks that are deliberately way over everyone's head. Nonetheless, she is hoping that her lofty billboard creations — three digital collages — will win her a mass audience.

Her new project — a mix of billboard hype, humor and art — gets off the ground Monday when her images will be put up on three billboards in Hartford and one in Columbia. They'll maintain their towering niche in the Connecticut art world through Nov. 1.

Despite their superior positioning, there's nothing haughty in her works, which take a wry view of how we see ourselves in a world of strain, struggle and career choices. "If there is a common thread that runs through all my work," she says, "it is my fascination with identity and message — who we are and what has made us that way."

In her billboard series, she makes collages using photographs of herself and images recycled from old magazines. In a touch of Madison Avenue, each billboard contains a line of text that underscores the meaning of the scenario, which features her front and center as the lead character.

In "Be an Artist," shown here, Bisantz Evans, like some luminously ecstatic actor in a toothpaste ad, promotes the glories of choosing the artistic life as a career option. "Earn extra money — plan you own career," the sign proclaims. It's an in-joke, of course, since becoming an artist, for most wannabes, is anything but a quick route to financial bliss.

"Try Not To Worry" portrays the angst-ridden artist trapped on a roller coaster. White-knuckle fear rules in her "Twilight Zone" of an amusement park. "Stay in the Struggle" portrays her in the company of tiger-skinned, stooge-like strong men tugging away desperately in a tug of war with some invisible, perhaps invincible force pulling at the other end.

Her paintings have been shown in many more conventional, down-to-earth venues, including the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the New Britain Museum of American Art. As a commercial artist and illustrator, her work has been published in *Esquire* and *Vanity Fair*. As a musician, she has produced three albums of original music with her ex-husband, musician and composer Steve Evans. When not making music or art, she teaches graphic design and studio art at Eastern Connecticut State University, Willimantic.

Pieces from her billboard series will be shown in Hartford at High Street, 5 feet west of Church Street (south side); Buckingham Street, 100 feet west of Hudson Street (north side), and Airport Road, 150 feet east of Locust Street (north side). In Columbia, it will be displayed on Route 66, 300 feet east of Cards Mill Road (south side). The work was funded with a Connecticut State University Research Grant.

the Chronicle

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Out . . . there

By **TERESE KARMELE**
Chronicle Features Editor

If you're driving to work in Hartford next week, you may recognize a familiar face looking down at you from a billboard.

The face, contained in digital collages, is that of June Bisantz Evans, an Eastern Connecticut State University art professor, whose work will be featured throughout October on four billboards, three in downtown Hartford and a fourth on Route 66 in Columbia.

"This is an idea I have had for a while ... getting art outside of the gallery," Bisantz Evans said. "I want to make it visible to all people."

And visible the billboards will be.

The images combine photographs of Bisantz Evans, herself, with vintage images from old magazines, a variation on a style she has used in the past. Each billboard contains a single line of text related to the visual images.

"Stay in the Struggle" features multiple shots of Bisantz Evans in an intense rope pull. It will be posted on Route 66 in Columbia, 300 feet east of Cards Mill Road, and on High Street in downtown Hartford, 5 feet west of Church Street.

"Try Not to Worry," in which a nervous Bisantz Evans is pictured clinging to a bar on a roller coaster, will be on a billboard on Airport Road, 150 feet east of Locust Street (and visible from I-91).

"Be An Artist," in which Bisantz Evans is pictured as a buxom woman in a magazine ad that urges readers to "earn extra

June Bisantz Evans' billboards will be in downtown Hartford and on Route 66 in Columbia. Her image is pictured on the billboards which she describes as an integration between her life and her art.



money — plan your own career" will be placed on Buckingham Street in Hartford, 100 feet west of Hudson Street, near the Bushnell Auditorium.

The general theme of her work is "about identity and the messages we get from advertisements and society in general," Bisantz Evans said. The work is a continuation of her explorations into popular culture and its effect on women and their self-images, with a new twist.

"I'm part of the picture now," the Willimantic resident said.

"I'm very excited about it ... it's about making connections."

"I am interested in who we are, how we see ourselves and the many things that have conditioned our awareness, she continued. "I explore images from the years of my childhood, focusing on their look and message, searching for parts of myself," she says in an artistic statement about the latest work.

"If there is a common thread that runs through all my work, it is my fascination with the identity and message — who we are

and what has made us that way."

On her lively, informative web site (www.junebisantzevans.com) she notes that the billboards are "a way to leave giant motivational notes for myself — and for others as well — all over the landscape."

She said the final products were the result of a "long meditative process" aided by the fact that her life has become more integrated with her art as she has matured.

HARTFORD Advocate

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Look Around You

Art is all around us. No one knows this better than June Bisantz Evans who has chosen to display her work on 3 billboards around Hartford. Evans uses photographs of herself with vintage images taken from old magazines to create scenes of high personal drama. Each billboard also contains a single line of text like "Stay in the Struggle," or "Try Not to Worry," which underscores the meaning of the image. If you haven't found them yet one is located 5 ft. west of Church Street., another is 100 ft. west of Hudson Street. and the last one is 150 ft. east of Locust Street.