

# Hartford Courant.



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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2004

stepping out

## A PUBLIC ART PROJECT, WRIT LARGE AND MOBILE

Starting this week, Connecticut visual artist June Bisantz Evans unveils a new work presented on an unusual canvas — billboards and buses from Willimantic to North Adams, Mass. — drawn from an even more unusual inspiration, the feel-good imagery of TV infomercials.

The piece, titled “5 Easy Steps,” includes five images that will be displayed on 17 billboard and 17 buses between Monday and April 1. Each features one of Bisantz Evans’ “Steps,” dramatized by an expressive photo of the artist

herself digitally incorporated into a vintage ad or photograph.

The message is one of personal empowerment. Bisantz Evans says there’s nothing to buy in her home-shopping-inspired project, only a simple plan to take a positive approach to one’s problems and goals.

Bisantz Evans teaches digital art and design at Eastern Connecticut State University. She’s shown her work at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, Boston’s Copley Society of Art and in the pages of *Esquire* magazine.



She took the same billboards-and-buses approach to displaying her work in a series of cinematic-themed self-portraits created in 2002.

In Connecticut, “5 Easy Steps” will be displayed on billboards in downtown Hartford, Willimantic and Manchester, as well as on Connecticut Transit buses bound

for Enfield, Avon, Middletown and Bolton. For exact locations, visit [www.junebisantzevans.com](http://www.junebisantzevans.com).

5 Easy Steps  
[JuneBisantzEvans.com](http://JuneBisantzEvans.com)

— NICK R. SCALIA

# HARTFORD Advocate

NEWS & ARTS WEEKLY

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MARCH 11 - 17, 2004

[ Art ]

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**#2.**

**Take ACTION!**

**5 EASY STEPS**  
JUNE BISANTZ EVANS.COM

TAKE ACTION, JUNE BISANTZ EVANS; PHOTO BY HARRISON JUDD

## Art or Ad?

THROUGH APRIL 1

**M**imicking the look and language of vintage advertisements, June Bisantz Evans' public art project *5 Easy Steps* offers viewers a formula for success that can be achieved without buying anything at all in — you guessed it — five easy steps! Bisantz Evans's *Steps* can be seen on billboards and buses from Willimantic, Conn. to North Adams, Mass. through April 1. The artist explains her inspiration: "*5 Easy Steps* began with the idea of creating a Burma Shave-style trail of billboards and buses that would follow a route I was interested in traveling — a project about the journey we're all making ... I hope it will be fun for the viewers."

Exact locations and images are available at [www.junebisantzevans.com](http://www.junebisantzevans.com).

— K.V.



# North Adams Transcript

Wednesday, March 3, 2004 • North Adams, Massachusetts



This billboard, entitled 'Take Action,' has been posted on Rand Street near Union Street, on the side of Linda's Café by artist June Bisantz-Evans.

## Artist looks to inspire with series of billboards

By Karen Gardner  
NORTH ADAMS TRANSCRIPT

NORTH ADAMS — For a Connecticut artist, all roads lead to MASS MoCA, and she's taking the public along for the ride with a billboard and bus project called "Five Easy Steps."

The project features a series of five works to be posted this month on billboards and buses between artist June Bisantz-Evans' hometown of Willimantic, Conn. and North Adams, because the city is home to her favorite East Coast museum.

Bisantz-Evans started working with billboards and buses about five years ago as an alternative to gallery exhibition.

"The idea was to widen the conversation, to reach more people and to make more of a difference," said Bisantz-Evans. "Unless you're Picasso, relative-

ly few people ever really see it or experience the work, and my focus has always been on making a connection ... and having some fun."

According to Bisantz-Evans, "Five Easy Steps" is a formula that outlines what it takes for a person to succeed.

"It really just boils down to these five steps, in my opinion," she said. "You've got to start somewhere. You take action and you don't panic, be marvelous, and then you can claim your prize."

The ideas for the billboards were inspired by infomercial advertising.

"What they sell are ideas more than products," said Bisantz-Evans. "They're inspiring."

MASS MoCA, too, is inspiring, she said.

"MASS MoCA is my favorite East Coast museum, bar none, and that includes the museums in New York,

which I also love," said Bisantz-Evans. "But MASS MoCA is truly a magical environment. They just bring unexpected things to the viewer that you just won't see anywhere else. It transforms your notion of what art is. I relate to that because that's what I've done by putting my stuff on billboards."

"When I first went to MASS MoCA, a light bulb went off in my head," she continued. "I just thought, 'Oh man, this is it. This is great. This is what art ought to be. This is what contemporary art is.'"

Bisantz-Evans used a computer to create the billboards, combining photographs of herself with various scenarios usually taken from vintage magazines. Her life partner, Harrison Judd, is the photographer. He also appears with Bisantz-Evans in the "Be Marvelous" work.

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## Artist: Billboards meant to inspire

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Three of her messages will be displayed on billboards in North County.

In North Adams, "Take Action" has been posted on Union Street at Rand Street, on the side of Linda's Café. "Be Marvelous" is at 199 Howland Ave. in Adams, across from the Bounti-Fare restaurant. Those traveling along Route 8 should look for "Claim Your Prize" to be displayed on Cheshire Road, north of the railroad.

All five of the billboards are displayed as a series in three areas — in Willimantic and Hartford, Conn., and in Springfield.

"Up in the Berkshires, the billboard advertising thins out a bit," said Bisantz-Evans, so she relies more heavily on buses to display her work throughout Western Massachusetts.

Berkshire Regional Transit Authority buses will exhibit Bisantz-Evans' work throughout Berkshire County, including between Pittsfield and Great Barrington, and heading north to North Adams.

Connecticut Transit buses will bring "Five Easy Steps" to the Greater Hartford, Conn. area and beyond, and the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority will move them through Springfield, Westfield, Holyoke, Northampton and Amherst.

"The ultimate, for me, is to reach as many people as possible, and to try to change the environment a little bit — to appropriate advertising space with a personal message," Bisantz-Evans said.

The non-profit project is supported by \$10,000 in grant funding from the Connecticut State University Research Foundation, the Berkshire Artist Trust, and a women's grant from a Connecticut organization, the Te Foundation.

Callahan Outdoor Advertising, too, made a "significant contribution of space" in support of the project, according to business owner Mick Callahan.

"We're really proud to partner with June Evans in an effort to bring her artwork of images to public spaces," Callahan said. "I also see a great connection between Connecticut and MASS MoCA in that this program started in Willimantic and runs all the way through the Berkshires. In my view, MASS MoCA is a very important part of the Berkshires" for economic reasons and as a cultural attraction.

He hopes Bisantz-Evans will continue the project.

"From everything I've heard to date, it's had a great reception," said Callahan.

Bisantz-Evans is an associate professor of visual arts at Eastern Connecticut State University. Her work as a commercial artist and illustrator has appeared in Esquire and Vanity Fair magazines, and her paintings, collages and multimedia pieces have been shown in galleries and museums nationally and internationally.

For more information, go to [www.junebisantzevans.com](http://www.junebisantzevans.com).

Karen Gardner's e-mail address is [kgardner@thetranscript.com](mailto:kgardner@thetranscript.com), telephone extension 224.



## Playful public art exhibit links regions

An unusual public art display is driving through Pittsfield every day this month.

June Bisantz Evans' "Five Easy Steps" uses billboards and bus advertisements to track a route from Connecticut into the Berkshires.

"In the beginning it started with my love of old signs and old billboards," said the Connecticut artist. "I love that way of putting a message out, it's big and it's huge."

Bisantz Evans' playful exhibit certainly qualifies as big.

It involves 17 billboards and ads on 17 busses, including three Pittsfield-area billboards and several Berkshire Regional Transit Authority busses.

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Artist June Bisantz Evans' "Five Easy Steps" mock advertisements have landed on area billboards and busses.

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The Pittsfield Gazette March 11, 2004

## Art exhibit leads to Mass. MoCA

continued from page 1

"It's a great art venue because people don't have to go to a gallery," she said. "They see it and they respond to it ... It's a way of connecting."

While the five pieces in "Five Easy Steps" have a vintage feel, they're inspired by a decidedly contemporary phenomenon: television infomercials, those program-length ads that tout oddball products.

"I adore infomercials," said Bisantz Evans. "Really what they're about is ideas, the products are incidental... They are an incredible way of connecting with and inspiring people."

For her oversized display, Bisantz Evans distills five elements of a good infomercial — working with scenes that include photographs of the artist herself.

Billboard No. 1, "Start Here," shows the artist — traveling case in hand — setting out from her hometown of Willimantic, Connecticut. The second billboard, "Take Action," shows her in an old-fashioned nurse's uniform, with a pill bottle of "Action" promising "Big Results."

Billboard No. 3 reflects regression as Bisantz Evans desperately clutches a pillow with the bloodcurdling heading, "Don't Panic."

The artist is dressed for success in Billboard No. 4, emerging from a sports car to the heading "Be Marvelous." The finale is "Claim Your Prize," with Bisantz Evans holding a big bag of money.

The billboard routing from Willimantic to the Berkshires — with stops in Hartford and Springfield — is no coincidence, as the path leads to Mass. MoCA in North Adams.

"It's my favorite east coast museum," she said.

But "Five Easy Steps" is not associated with Mass. MoCA or any other institution.

"This is the exhibit," she said. "Part of the route to the museum is symbolic of the artist leaving the home studio and going to the professional world."

Creating the billboards and bus ads — and obtaining the space throughout the region — cost \$10,000,

funded through three grants.

"It's not that easy," Bisantz Evans said of conceiving and funding public art. "When I have the idea, I write the grants." The application process helps the artist refine her potentially unwieldy concepts.

"Since I have to write about the project, I have to have all my conceptual ducks in a row," she said. "Once I have the funding in place, I'm getting used to working with the vendors."

The extended scope of "Five Easy Pieces" meant negotiating and coordinating advertising space with multiple bus operators and billboard operators. "It's a big project because it spans so many miles," she said.

The artist has enjoyed initial reaction to "Five Easy Pieces," saying that media attention along the route

has helped viewers grasp the concept.

"It's been fantastic," she said. "People are bombarded with advertisements and here we have art replacing advertisements."

For those not prepared to track the route from Connecticut to the Berkshires, the images can be seen online at [www.junebisantzevans.com](http://www.junebisantzevans.com)

The artist also is distributing a set of postcards featuring the images. Like the larger designs, the postcards are patterned on vintage images.

"I'm hoping people will keep sending them out," she said. "It extends the life of the project, it's a way of keeping it out there."

The postcards may be around for a long time to come, but the billboards and bus ads are only booked through April 1.



June Bisantz Evans emerges from a sports car in image 4 from her "Five Easy Steps" exhibit.



June Bisantz Evans' use of busses for her "Five Easy Steps" exhibit makes art part of daily life. On Wednesday afternoon, an art piece drove up as a bus patron waited at Park Square.



## Billboards and Bus Signs Carry Optimistic Message of Local Artist

By BRENDA SULLIVAN  
The Reminder

WILLIMANTIC—Want to know how to get ahead in life? Local artist June Bisantz Evans has a system for success.

Operators are *not* standing by. You don't have to act now, although this *is* a limited time offer.

It may, or may not put the spark back into your marriage, or help you lose 10 pounds without dieting.

But, it probably will do two things: make you smile, and make you say, "hmmmm."

Evans, who lives in Willimantic and teaches design and digital art at Eastern Connecticut State University, has combined her life-long love of "vintage" print ads with her current fascination with the infomercial to create a public artwork called, "5 Easy Steps."

With the support of the Connecticut State University, the Berkshire Artist's Trust Fund, and the The Foundation Women's Grant, she has brought this formula for success to a billboard near you.

From now until April 1, Evans's 5-Step program will appear on billboards stretching from Willimantic through

Hartford and up into Massachusetts.

Her images, using herself as model, also will be smiling down on commuters and unwary pedestrians from the sides of buses traveling through Manchester, Avon, Middletown, Farmington and Enfield, among

The first billboard shows Evans, suitcase in hand, heading optimistically off to the Big City.

Step 2: Take Action. Otherwise, you aren't going anywhere.

In the second billboard, action is offered (by "Nurse" Evans) as a kind of tonic.



**Step This Way**—A series of billboards, "5 Easy Steps," created by local artist June Bisantz Evans is coming to a highway near you, from now until April 1. Evans teaches at Eastern Connecticut State University, and is well-known for her public art works that draw on familiar media images, from a touristy postcard theme (top) to a horror movie poster (bottom). These five images will be displayed on 19 billboards and 17 buses, stretching from Willimantic through Manchester and Hartford, and North into Massachusetts. Images reproduced courtesy of June Bisantz Evans.

other towns. Here's how this Zen-like plan works:

Step 1: Start Here.

And, "here" is wherever you happen to be at this moment.

Step 3: Don't Panic!  
This billboard is reminiscent of a movie poster for a Bette Davis thriller-chiller.

(See "Billboards," inside.)

## Billboards Spoof Infomercials Continued from Page 1

—Step 4: Be Marvelous.  
This is about strutting your stuff. In this billboard, Evans strikes a Holly Golightly pose from a convertible where her real-life partner, and photographer, Harrison Judd seems unaffected by her exuberance.  
And, finally, Step 5: Claim Your Prize!  
Tell a friend. After all, it's just five easy steps.

at her work.  
"Actually, humor is a very important thing in my art work, and for all of us, for our health and happiness. Laughter is good medicine," Evans said.  
"But, I am also serious about it. I don't think humor and seriousness are contradictory," she said.  
So, why is it her face in these billboards?



**And, Don't Call Me in the Morning.** Typical of the humor that runs throughout the her billboard series, "Nurse June" offers up an "Action" tonic as Step 2 to success. All images this page courtesy of June Bisantz Evans.

"It's my way of directly having a conversation with the viewer," Evans said.  
"It's like, if they came to see my work at a gallery and I was there, it would be my presence," she explained.  
"If I put up those images using the original model, I don't think they'd have the same power," she said.

**Playing Dress-Up**  
Evans has a collection of vintage clothes, but she doesn't use any of them for costumes in her pictures.

"It's really an illusion. It's all done through the magic of the computer," Evans said.

"I don't really dress up. I collage myself into scenarios I find in vintage magazines," she explained.

"It's been an obsession with me since I was a kid, looking through vintage magazines — particularly the women in the ads, because they were so glamorous," she said.

"I work with Harrison Judd —my life partner— and we have great fun doing this," she added, noting that she always tries to get at least one shot of him into her works, as well.

The idea of using billboards also is tied to Evans's fascination with infomercials.

"Infomercials are such an interesting way to reach people with a product, or anything else. They are very personal, and usually use testimonials, which are incredibly persuasive," Evans said.

"I'm not interested in selling a product, but in appropriating advertising space and using it for a personal message," she said.

Also, Evans doesn't mind if you laugh



**You're a Winner!** All it takes to reach your dreams is to "Be Marvelous," and when that pays off, "Claim Your Prize." These two billboards complete the artist's tongue-in-cheek, 5 Easy Steps formula for success.

Evans includes a list of locations where you can see the billboards at the website: [junebisantzevans.com](http://junebisantzevans.com).

In the Willimantic area, look for Step 1 on Main Street across from Dairy Queen; Step 2, at the corner of Bridge and Mountain Streets; Step 3, on Route 195, past Eastbrook Mall (across from the park); Step 4, on Route 66 off Main Street, towards Columbia (near the tire shop); and Step 5, on Route 32 towards Willimantic, past the Mansfield Drive-In.





# Artist's gambit on infomercials takes to the road

**W**ITH an exhibition space that spans 50 miles and crosses state lines, it's fair to say a public art project by Connecticut artist **June Bisantz Evans** can lay claim to thinking big.

She has chosen as her canvas: 17 billboards and 17 buses in Connecticut and Massachusetts, including PVTA buses in Northampton, Amherst, Holyoke and Springfield.



**PHOEBE MITCHELL**

*Art Notes*

Called "5 Easy Steps," the show, Bisantz Evans' largest public project to date, offers viewers a formula for obtaining their hearts' desires using a 1950s-era infomercial advertising approach.

The five images make their appearance March 1 on billboards in Willimantic, then travel north to billboards and buses in Hartford and western Massachusetts, reaching their final destination at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) in North Adams by April 1.



One of five public art pieces, to be shown on billboards and buses, by Connecticut artist June Bisantz Evans.

Bisantz Evans uses digital technology to combine photographs of herself with other scenarios, creating images that dramatize each step. "Step #3 Don't Panic," for example, features Bisantz Evans clutching a pillow, clearly needing to take her own advice.

"Step #5 Claim Your Prize" shows her holding a bag of money and saying "5 Easy Steps!!! TELL A FRIEND!"

While the message — and its journey — takes a tongue-in-cheek approach, they are based on Bisantz Evans' belief that creative goals can be reached with an easy-to-follow plan.

More information on the show is available online at [www.junebisantzevans.com](http://www.junebisantzevans.com).