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Summer shorts at the Westport Arts Center

By Lee Scharf

As Edward Hopper once said, "If I could say it in words, there would be no reason to paint..."

Evidently, a great number of Westport Arts Center members, who are unable to say it in words, agree with Hopper, and they want to paint as well as exhibit.

With so many talented artists in our area, WAC has developed a new format for their annual Members Show. It is the brain child of well known Westport artist Roe Halper, and is called "Summer Shorts." It features five exhibitions by member artists comprised of three solo shows and two group shows.

Halper, who is co-chairman with Lee Chmielewski, is in charge of the Solos, while Chmielewski is in charge of the group exhibitions. Halper worked with a committee consisting of artists Jean Esposito, Leonard Everett Fisher and Ellin Spadone. "Many members of the Westport Arts Center felt it was time to give the opportunity to the art members to show a current body of work, regardless of size," she said. "We hoped to establish a format where four artist members (which would change each year) would choose 4 - 8 artists at a time for Solo Shows. The term "Solos" is used because each artist shows their concentrated work in one area, as opposed to spreading out evenly through the gallery. We felt it was important to reveal our members' art even though the length of each show is only 12 days. We decided before choosing our artists that three of the four jurors must agree to accept the artist. In this way we would keep the criteria for acceptance at a high level. Of course it is only the juror's opinion, and in another year with other jurors, the rejected work could be accepted."

"Eye for the Natural," the second group show that runs through August 23, showcases art in all media that uses the natural world as inspiration. Chmielewski commented, "The new format allows us to dispense with multi-tier hanging. One can see the work so much better when the walls are not jam packed and you don't have to get down on your knees to view it. We feel that the series of group and Solo shows have been very successful. We're getting good feedback. It is the only true show for members over a long period."

The work of over 100 artist members is mounted in "Eye for the Natural". Most are from Westport and other area towns. The entries encompass familiar names as well as a number of newcomers. Excellent photographers include Nancy E. Fales, "Serengeti Scene"; Pamela Zaremba, "Girl in a Tree Trunk"; and Sierra Dobson, "Aquarius". **Migg Burroughs' lenticular, "Piquant" is fascinating in its changing motion** and Bill Moran's humorous acrylic "Fanfare in in Blue" has 16 trumpeters blowing their brains out.

Artists featured in the final Solo show that opens with a reception on Friday, August 26 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. and continues through September 2, have expressed themselves in various ways. Janine Brown stated, "My work explores objects as though they are being viewed during a rainstorm. On paper, the images appear as though they are being washed away by the rain-blurring and becoming unrecognizable. The objects around me, such as the ammunition machinery outside my studio, often become catalysts for visual ideas. For instance, I utilize shapes of the machinery and the colors at various times of the day as a basis for drawing. The drawing then continues to develop by adding layers with a diagonal stroke to blur the image and create depth. For me, the diagonal stroke is as soothing as the sound of rain."

Katherine Draper explains that her work is "based on organic shapes and related to my long time study of ikebana with the Sogetsu School in Japan. Recently I have been experimenting in a new direction which is less about texture and more about depth and movement in space. She is exhibiting abstract monotypes in mixed media based on her new exploration.

Joan Gardner, who was selected as a finalist for a One Percent for Art commission for the Beecher School in New Haven, decided to design three murals for her submission and chose to use color pencil and ink. This led to color and form combinations she had never conceived before. She has created over 20 different mural designs since then. She considers them serious works in their own right and shows them as such, imagining them as murals in cafes, subways, even in zoos and bedrooms. Her books and fanciful paintings grace her part of the last Solo show.

Leigh Libel is exhibiting photographs of teenagers on the brink of adulthood. "I use black and white film to find the extraordinary in the ordinary and document the psychological undercurrents of everyday life." he said.

In 2004 Woodfin Wood exhibited drawing, paintings and mixed media creations at the Steve Martin Studio in New Orleans. They were inspired by an Orphic Fragment that begins, "Exploding from the Great Soul, souls reel and writhe, seeking each other in space." This ancient verse, attributed to musician poet Orpheus, has defined an ongoing series of powerful beauty for Wood. "In the year since this New Orleans exhibition, my life-sized life drawing has explored a deep emotional interpretation of the words through figures who literally reel, write and explode. Moving and moving." She is exhibiting black and white works.

The Westport Arts Center is located at 51 Riverside Avenue in Westport. Gallery hours are Monday - Friday 10 - 4 and Saturday & Sunday 12 - 4. For further information call (203) 222-7070 or visit www.westportartscenter.org.