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Art Invasion

Williamsport artists invade Mechanicsburg

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By MATTHEW PARRISH (mparrish@sungazette.com) , Williamsport Sun-Gazette

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MECHANICSBURG - Williamsport residents and Grey Art Gallery (now Converge Gallery) regulars Janelle Whisenant, Jeremiah Johnson and Liz Parrish, along with gallery co-owner Casey Gleghorn, have art on display as a part of the Trash Art Gallery's debut exhibit, "A Taste of Trash," at the Metropolis Collective, 17-19 Main St., Mechanicsburg.

The Trash Art Gallery is a new venue for art recently opened by Harrisburg native Danielle Charette and New York City native Richard Reilly, both of whom frequently make the trip to Williamsport for First Friday or for openings at the Grey Art Gallery.

Recently, the Sun-Gazette talked to the hip duo via email about their new gallery and the Williamsport art scene.

MATTHEW PARRISH: Why did you start coming to Williamsport?

DANIELLE CHARETTE: We started coming to Williamsport because I had heard about the Grey Gallery [now Converge Gallery] from a fellow artist who was working with them, and after being introduced and submitting my artwork they began including my work in shows they were doing. Initially, we came to Williamsport to support my art, but it quickly became so much more as The Grey Art Gallery and the artistic community were so welcoming and supportive, we felt a kindred spirit of sorts with Williamsport and it quickly became about supporting a wonderful gallery, new friends and an artistic community.

MP: What do you think of Williamsport's art scene? The Grey Art Gallery?

RICHARD REILLY: We love the Grey and have made many what we expect to be long lasting friendships with the artists who hang there and Casey and John [Yogodzinski] who own the gallery.

We also are very intrigued by what is happening at the Pajama Factory.

DC: What he said and I love the freshness of the art coming from Williamsport - the artists have not and refuse to be bound to antiquated rules of the conservative art world. They are always pushing to the next level in their thought and creative processes. I think the art scene in Williamsport is white hot.

MP: What inspired you to open a gallery?

RR: Seemed a natural thing for Danielle and I. I worked for 20 years at the prestigious Adelson Gallery of NYC and Danielle has worked hand-in-hand with galleries over the last 20 years in showing her art.

DC: After much debate about whether to stay in Pa. or return to NYC, we decided to call Harrisburg our home.

We decided in order to have the best of both worlds - we would open a business that incorporates our professional loves in a space that feels like our city home but with all the charms of Pennsylvania. We hope to give the next generation of artists a community that perhaps inspires them to create and be productive.

MP: Why did you open the gallery in Mechanicsburg?

DC: I've always had a great affection for Mechanicsburg, it is a very quaint historic town and a town that we saw beginning to blossom and have a renaissance with new restaurants, shops and art galleries emerging. It is the same feeling we had about a neighborhood called Williamsburg, Brooklyn, 20 years ago. It was love at first sight with the art deco building we now occupy and we occupied the building within 24 hours of seeing it and started tearing it down to build it.

MP: Has Mechanicsburg been receptive to your ideas?

RR: After some initial apprehension, we have seemingly been embraced by the town residents. It is difficult when you move into a space that housed a long-term, beloved business in a small town. There were a lot of very fond memories attached to this building. The other galleries and downtown businesses have been very supportive of us.

MP: How would you describe the art scene there?

RR: Better since a week ago :) [the gallery had opened a week prior to the interview].

DC: I would describe the art scene as very traditional, but changing and evolving. We believe people want what we are offering but haven't had the opportunity to find it here and the people creating it have had to travel elsewhere to show it, until now.

MP: How did the opening reception for the first exhibit, "A Taste of Trash," go?

DC: Despite the warnings of tornadoes and heavy downpours, we had a very nice turnout. People were speechless with the transformation of the space and the caliber of the art on display. They were very focussed on the artwork and learning all about the artists through reading bios.

MP: What plans do you have for the gallery?

RR: We will be finishing up the back over the next two months, which will allow us to fully realize our vision of having a place that embraces performing artists as well as visual artists.

DC: We plan for the gallery to have something new and exciting upon each visitors return.

MP: Why did you choose to exhibit the art of Williamsport artists Jeremiah Johnson, Liz Parrish, Casey Gleghorn and Janelle Whisenant?

RR: We are very big fans of their work and the Grey was kind enough to arrange for us to have some of their work for us to exhibit.

DC: What he said and I have seen the the caliber of work of these artists in many shows, and time and time again I remain impressed.

MP: How has the reaction been to the gallery so far?

RR: Curiosity, intrigue and the overall reaction has been very welcoming.

DC: Overwhelmingly supportive!

The greater Harrisburg area and the surrounding communities have been very receptive to what we are doing, especially the art and music communities. People are excited to see something fresh and new, to have things shaken up a bit so to speak. We have filled a void.

MP: Has the art of Williamsport artists been attracting attention?

RR: Yes, very much so.

DC: Yes. It always surprises me to see the reactions of people when they realize that people in their own backyard, so to speak, are so talented. It would be impossible for me to choose one of these artists above another as the reception to all of their work has been nothing but praise.

MP: Are you interested in working with Williamsport artists in the future?

RR: Absolutely.

DC: I wouldn't have it any other way! I love Williamsport artists.

MP: What do you have planned for your next exhibit?

RR: "Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll."?Uhm. We're easing the community into the 21st century

DC: Yes, both of what he said, a themed group showing called "Sex, Drugs, and Rock-n-Roll" featuring a slew of locally residing and Williamsport artists, as well as works of those nationally and internationally emerging and established.

For more information about the Metropolis Collective, call 717-458-8245, www.metropoliscollective.com or www.facebook.com/metropoliscollective.

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