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FEATURED

The Villager showcasing artwork created during COVID-19

By HILLARY GAVAN Senior staff writer
Oct 25, 2020



The Villager Gallery & Frame Shop, 429 E. Grand Ave., owner Betsy Schmiechen and artist Frank Maier hold two pieces of Maier's artwork. The gallery is featuring a mix of 21 amateur and professional artists' work created during COVID-19. The exhibit is visible from the shop's windows.

Hillary Gavan

BELOIT—The solitude caused by the COVID-19 pandemic can be a time of creativity, contemplation and new beginnings as evidenced in the windows of The Villager Gallery & Frame Shop, 429 E. Grand Ave.

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A mix of 21 amateur and professional artists' work is showcased. The art went up Oct. 16 and will remain there until the end of the month.

Although people may step inside the frame shop for a closer inspection, they also can enjoy a window-side view safely outside.

"I intentionally made it so it can be seen from the outside, in case people aren't comfortable coming in," said Villager Gallery & Framing owner Betsy Schmiechen.



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Schmiechen also posts about one of the artists each day on the gallery's Facebook page, calling it the "daily dose of COVID art" as she invites people to post their own art made during the pandemic to the page.

Artists featured in the window-side exhibit include: Derek Arneson, Abbie Bahnamann, Pierre Charles, Leah Desing, Darcy Disch-Demos, Roger Dutcher, Joanna Kutter, Frank Maier, Nancy Mayhew, Judy Olson, Pam Pier, Jim Richter, Jeannie Ripple, Val Saxer, Will Schmechen, Betsy Schmiechen, Karen Smerlinski, Susan Swedlund, Amy Truttman, Carol Wickersham and Rachel Wilson.

Some pieces are for sale and some are just to share.

"It's not a juried show. It's why there is so much diversity in the types of art," Schmiechen said.

Some of the stories behind the art are compelling and revealing.

“These pieces are painted snapshots of my observations, visual, emotional, political during the pandemic. Some days I paint what I see; some days I depict what I feel; some days I am not sure,” said Carol Wickersham in her Covid journal about her artwork.

Frank Maier, an artist self-taught from YouTube, has a scene of a mission in Arizona and his cat in dark hues in the exhibit.

“I call her kitty,” he said.

One of his oil paintings is a plein air picture he painted from his pickup truck along the Sugar River as his wife took a bike ride.

“I made 10 plein air paintings during Coronavirus,” he said.

Maier said he was grateful for the opportunity to show his work.

In artist statements provided, Joanna Kutter said her work eventually came to feature a bird in a nest resulting from her nesting mode, alone in her studio in the middle of the pandemic.

Artist Amy Truttman found herself “safer at home” with her second job of serving at a local restaurant. As a fun project she took a vintage wooden window and painted a sunflower on the back.

Karen Smerlinksy was inspired by leaves found on a recent walk. During her isolation, she’s taking a course in computer graphics to learn to make patterns for fabrics for a design collection.

Rodger Dutcher’s artist statement said COVID-19 didn’t stop his creativity and doodling has been a way for him to open his mind and to write, draw and relax.

Darcy Disch-Demos, a former elementary art teacher, made paper flowers like she used to do for Mother's Day with her students. She has created 50 paper floral wreaths from the flowers during COVID, some of which are on display at The Villager.

Schmiechen said artist Pam Pier decided to paint all her pictures taken during travel the previous summer.

"She loves traveling," Schmiechen said. "She relived the trips painting them."

Schmiechen also has artwork in the exhibit, made when she wasn't tending her shop. She combined colorful papers with old wood slats found in her frame shop to make printed images of women in the 1920s in a collage.

"It was fun. I really felt like I needed to do something," she said.

Her son Will Schmiechen who lives in Brooklyn, New York also participated in the show. He had a career managing and booking bands which ended during the pandemic. Going back to school for digital media arts, he is unveiling some of his newest visual art in the exhibit.

For more information visit [The Villager Gallery & Frame Shop on Facebook](#).

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