

ARTS

3 Springfield artists collaborate for ‘Trade Show’ exhibit at Randy Bacon Studio & Gallery

The show runs through the end of February at the Commercial Street studio



by Mary Ellen Chiles
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Heidi Herrman, Jackie Warren, and Jo Van Arkel pose in front of Warren’s work at the Randy Bacon Studio & Gallery. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles)

Three Springfield artists — Jacqueline Warren, Heidi Herrman and Jo Van Arkel — are collaborating on their second exhibition together. This one is named “Trade Show” and runs through February at Randy Bacon Studio & Gallery.

It all started with a chance meeting.

Warren happened to walk by the Randy Bacon Studio & Gallery on Commercial Street a couple of years ago and stepped in to take a closer look. She met Herrman, a fashion designer who co-owns the space with husband, Randy Bacon, a portrait photographer.

“I had three black-and-white stitched fabric pieces in the very front of the gallery that were very bold,” Herrman said.

Herrman also works with encaustic, when paint is mixed with hot, liquid wax.

Warren paints in oils, acrylic, and watercolor, and incorporates collage.

The two hit it off.

“Those pieces allowed us to start a conversation about being artists and our work,” Herrman said. “We saw similarities, like a camaraderie in (our) pieces.”

Warren, an art professor at Drury University, jumped off the tenure track to become an artist-in-residence. She also creates works on commission and spends part of the year at her studio in Florence, Italy.

She thought Herrman should meet another local artist, too: Jo Van Arkel.

Van Arkel teaches creative writing and poetry at Drury. She also works in monoprints and letterpress, which have “a long history in the literary arts” she said. Plus, she’s an abstract painter who likens her works to haikus.

“They’re moment-driven,” Van Arkel said. “They’re intended to be intense, compressed visual statements of an emotional experience.”

From chatting to ‘Conversations’



A close-up of Heidi Herrman’s “Salutations,” in collaboration with Jackie Warren. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles)

The three got along so well that they decided to exhibit their work together. Instead of separating works by artist, they displayed their pieces side by side throughout the Randy Bacon Studio & Gallery on Commercial Street. They called the show “Conversations.”

“We picked specific pieces that would speak to one another’s pieces,” Herrman said.

They organized the exhibit by feel, then stepped back and noted reactions during the opening last spring.

“I just watched people’s faces as they looked, and you could see them forming an experience with it,” Van Arkel said. “They were engaged with it.”

Still, the three were curious about how their art might communicate if they worked on it together. So last fall each woman contributed a few works – and sliced them up. They spread the pieces on a table and felt their way through it.

Warren understood the assignment right away.

“I saw (art) on the table that I wanted to put in my painting, then I could build around it,” Warren said. “You interlock the piece that you introduced.”

This kind of experiment isn't for everyone.

“I've had other artists tell me that this concept would be hard for them to do, because it means losing some control of your piece and leaning into somebody else's process,” Van Arkel said.

The three artists also had a short deadline for this exhibit, called “Trade Show.”

“We had about a month to put the collaboration together,” Herrman said. “Sometimes a big piece will (typically) take me six months or more.”

“As I worked through one piece, I had to make a decision that I was done with it and go on to the next,” Van Arkel said. “I had a rule that I had to work fast.”

Not all of the pieces in “Trade Show” are brand new, but many are collaborations with each other.

“It pushes you,” Herrman said. “I'm kind of a planner, but I have limited time, so I need to create within that.”

Trade Show



“Balancing Act” by Jo Van Arkel, in collaboration with Heidi Herrman. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles)

In “Conversations,” the three artists arranged pieces on the textured walls at the gallery based on feel.

“The best thing that I can say is it’s the energy that’s coming off of the piece,” Van Arkel said.

Initially, they replicated that for “Trade Show,” but they found it chaotic and distracting. Warren had large works that overpowered Herrman’s smaller pieces, and they wanted each artist to have a voice. So, this time each artist has her own section, with collaborators noted.

“We wanted everybody to have the experience of each piece in its own separate energy,” Herrman said.

The artists opened the exhibit in November and recently extended the show through the end of February.

Herrman calls the gallery “a labor of love” and hopes to use the space to highlight emerging artists who create time-intensive, unique fine art pieces.

She wants to give people options.

“We get that Midwestern mentality that you go to the home good store and put up a flower and it was \$40, and that’s your art choice,” Herrman said.

Springfieldians aren’t necessarily known for investing in fine art, but they have a history of doing so.

“I’m not going to name names, but there have been a lot of people in the past in Springfield who are collectors,” Warren said.

There’s art beyond “Live, Laugh, Love” stencils at big box stores.

“There are better ways to support somebody’s livelihood and creative talent,” Herrman said.

“Trade Show” will continue through the end of February. Randy Bacon Studio & Gallery is open Tuesday-Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., and **by appointment**.



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More by Mary Ellen Chiles

