

Glimpse the world within Fountain Street studios

By Joyce Kelly/Daily News staff

GHS

Posted Apr 23, 2008 @ 08:23 PM

FRAMINGHAM — There's nothing "pretty" about Romanian native Sorin Bica's art.

Red shadows are brazenly cast over contorted orange people with scattered, unfocused eyes, as dozens of hands grab and push at bodies, and lipless mouths seek to devour the scene covering an entire wall of Bica's studio.

"I used to paint kind of normal - portraits and things like that - but that's changed," Bica said, laughing.

The audacity of his work seems to emerge in direct proportion to his growth as a person and his artistic development, he explained. (For instance, the central figure of the mural is a father holding a baby.)

A self-taught artist, Bica began his career drawing political cartoons in Romania, he said. Finding it difficult to continue the work here, he delved into his real passion: painting.

"At some point, I said, 'That's it - I'm painting, I'm out of the closet,'" Bica said.

"This has been in me all my life. It's just a little tough sometimes to put your soul out there for everybody to see. I need to do this," he said, waving his arm in front of his 8-by-21-foot mural, thus far unnamed (possibly "38 Hands," he says).

Artists like Bica spend the year summoning their muses, accessing images from the subconscious, adding layers, then scraping them away and brushing on a few more, until it finally feels right.

Next Saturday and Sunday, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Bica and more than 50 other resident artists invite the public to catch a glimpse of their worlds at an annual event at the Fountain Street Open Studios, 59 Fountain St.

Most of the artists hail from the Framingham area, including five Framingham State College students and professor/department head Marc Cote, said Karen Jacobs, a featured painter and Open Studios organizer.

In addition to varied painting styles - realist, abstract and contemporary, for instance - artists' work includes sculpture, mixed media, hand-painted paper boxes and journals, glass art and jewelry, landscapes and cityscapes, photography, metal gliding, woodcuts, etching, monotypes and computer art.

Grids

Amy Furman will be showing her abstract grid paintings, which typically take a year to complete, in her sunlit studio on the fourth floor of the Fountain Street studios next weekend.

"I'm excited, because I have a bunch of new work," including three or four new pieces and monoprints, she said.

Furman, a 1974 Massachusetts College of Art graduate, has focused on abstract painting in a grid format for about seven years, and has most recently begun incorporating circles and hard lines to her textured pieces, she said.

"It's something that's evolved over time, it was the thing that made sense for me, for my work, because I'm so interested in color, texture and surface. Simplifying the image to just a grid lets me work on the things I'm most interested in," Furman said, explaining her process of adding sand, plaster, "and various other things" to acrylic paint before putting the first layer on a blank canvas.

"I paint layer upon layer upon layer, take it off," at times with the assistance of an electric sander, she said.

The late James Gahagan, who taught classes out of his Vermont home and studied under Hanz Hoffman, influences her art, Furman said.

"I'm always drawn to abstract work and color, and he really helped me to understand what I was doing and what direction to go in," she said.

Furman, a Needham resident, recently had her own show at The Bromfield Gallery in the South End, and the curator of contemporary art at MIT selected her "Red Admiral" to be featured at the Cambridge Art Association's "The Red Show."

Abstract art like Furman's grid painting, "Blues and Browns," doesn't necessarily evoke a particular feeling or convey a message, she said.

"When I look at ("Blues and Browns"), I like the coloration in it, I find it pleasing. I like the composition and surface. It's really about how the elements I'm using to create the piece work together. You find it pleasing or satisfying on some level that sometimes you can't articulate," Furman said.

A peaceable kingdom

Just a few doors down the hall from Furman at Fountain Street studios, Laura Riegelhaupt's studio is filled with a much different style of artwork that conveys the beauty and peace of nature: pastel and oil landscapes.

Riegelhaupt is inspired by the world around her - a fall day in the Berkshires, the edge of a lily pond, Lake Waban at Wellesley College, the coast of Maine or a Cape Cod beach house, for instance - and that is reflected in her work.

"Sometimes I feel there's so much going on in the world. ... It's important for people to stay aware of nature and how beautiful it is. You get up at 5:30 in the morning and see mist in the valley like that, and it's really very magical," Riegelhaupt said, adding that her paintings are like "a little reminder" of vacation escapes.

Using water-miscible oil paint and pastels, Riegelhaupt's work also captures bucolic scenes from her trips abroad - the open fields and gray weather of Cambridgeshire, England, the aqua water surrounding St. Thomas, and the serenity and majesty of Lake Periyar and "Saffron Mountain" (so named by the artist), a tiger preserve in Kerala, India.

"It was gorgeous at sunset. The afternoon light looked so different in every direction, it was very striking," Riegelhaupt said.

Several Framingham residents native to Brazil have recognized with nostalgia Riegelhaupt's depiction of a street scene with a horse resting beside an historic Portuguese colonial building in Tiredentes in the Minas Gerais region of the country where many local immigrants were born, she said.

"I'll never really leave landscapes. That feeds me - being outdoors. I go outside and see something that inspires me. There's just an awakening in me. As I try to find a little piece of that, I ... choose what I think will capture the essence of what the scene feels like to me," Riegelhaupt said.

"I look at what's really out there: I ask, 'Is it the movement? Is it the reflections? Is it the light and shadows? Is it the crispness of the air, or conversely, fog or mist? Is that what's kind of magical about this scene?'" Riegelhaupt said.

THE ESSENTIALS:

Fountain Street Open Studios, featuring the artistry of more than 50 resident artists, Framingham State College students and non-resident artists, is open to the public Saturday, April 26 and Sunday, April 27, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Artists occupy floors 2 through 5 of 59 Fountain St. A purple flag hanging in front of a studio denotes a participating resident.

For more information, visit www.fountainstreetstudios.com.

To check out the artwork of Sorin Bica, visit www.sorinbica.com; Amy Furman, www.amyfurman.com, and Laura Riegelhaupt, www.laurariiegelhaupt.com.