

Living

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At Paradise City Arts Festival in Northampton, there's

Beauty in bloom

By KEITH O'CONNOR
Special to The Republican

Everything from hand-thrown mugs to wedding rings to elaborate sculptures can be found at the Paradise City Arts Festival, which opens to the public on Memorial Day weekend at the Three County Fairgrounds in Northampton.

While attending the craft fair Saturday and May 29 and 30, visitors will meet 250 accomplished artists and master craft makers from across the country, who will show off their talents in ceramics, painting, decorative fiber, art glass, furniture, jewelry, metal, mixed media, photography, large-scale sculpture, wearable art and woodworking.

"We have a lot of exciting new artists joining us this year, about 50 of them, and that's a lot from a group of 250," said Linda Post, who founded the popular art fest held in the spring and fall.

Post offered her thoughts on several artists exhibiting at the show, which is held rain or shine since exhibitors are undercover in buildings:

Yanick Lapuh: Born in France but now living in Amherst, Lapuh makes his Paradise City Northampton debut with sculptural paintings. A graduate of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Lapuh takes wood and cuts out puzzle shaped pieces that he puts together in three-dimensional form and also relief. "These are very fun and interesting pieces, like the wall piece which depicts fire, a ladder and a hydrant, and I believe people at the show will enjoy looking at them," said Post.

Stephen Procter: Hailing from Vermont, Procter is a



Above, "Strombo Cactus" necklace by Sooyoung Kim of Cumberland, Rhode Island. At right, a stack of "Vincent Bowls" by Aron Leaman of Lowell.



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"Sunset," a thrown, carved and glazed porcelain vase by Stephanie Young of Plaistow, New Hampshire.



"Barns," a photograph by Jon Olsen of Norwich, Vermont.

Paradise

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ceramic sculptor who creates enormous vessels from clay. "His giant pots, which can be placed indoors or outdoors, are really quite a feat to throw something that large on a wheel. What is interesting about Stephen is that he has always done very natural looking things with natural glaze to let the color of the clay shine through, but now he is also doing more colorful pieces," said Post. The show founder said Procter is one of the few artists, because of the large nature of his work, allowed to have their booth outdoors.

Sooyoung Kim: For Sooyoung Kim, a graduate of the Rochester Institute of Technology's School for American Crafts' MFA program, dramatic gemstones and minerals are often the inspiration for her otherworldly brooches reminiscent of a flowering cacti desert or spiky marshland. "Her pieces are so beautifully put together. You might think they are a little too much, but they are very delicate and very wearable. I've never seen anything like her jewelry, and I've seen a lot," said Post about the Rhode Island artist.

Each May and October in

Northampton, the Paradise City Arts Festival holds a themed "show-within-a-show," noted Post.

As part of "American Beauty," the themed exhibit in the Arena Building, Paradise City exhibitors will offer their fresh interpretations of the landscapes that surround them. Using paint, clay, metal, glass, fiber and wood, they have woven together a visual panorama of America's great outdoor spaces.

"In American Beauty, offering some inspired landscapes and dreamscapes, some will be heard saying, 'Oh, I know that place,' while other pieces will be much more abstract. Some will not be two dimensional, but sculptures and jewelry and all sorts of things inspired by landscapes. Some will even be surreal, and I have entered a surreal painting," said Post.

The spring season's silent art action featuring hundreds of valuable pieces donated by festival artists will benefit Kestrel Land Trust, which has been conserving and caring for forests, farms and riverways in the Pioneer Valley since 1970. Kestrel also nurtures a love of the land by connecting people to special places through nature walks and cultural programs linking the arts, music, and history with the land.

For those who enjoy learning more about the arts and who want to extend their shopping experience to a little education, there will be several "Smart Talks" held over the three-day show in the Exhibition Building - Barn 3. The talks begin on Saturday at 3 p.m. with ceramic artist Stephanie Young on "The Sweet Balance of Nature and Nouveau." On Sunday at 1 p.m. Corina Miller, head florist at The Botaniste in Easthampton, will present "Bringing the Garden Inside," followed at 3 p.m. by "The Art of the Landscape, Past & Present" by Lewis Bryden and Andrea Caluori-Rivera. The talks will end on Monday at 12:30 p.m. at Booth 601 in the Arena Building with James Kitchen, who has won many awards at Paradise City for his large-scale, often philosophical sculpture welded from found metal objects. He will discuss "Pondering Imponderables," a session on looking where creativity comes from.

Also, to celebrate the culinary and musical arts, the Festival Dining Tent plays host to a number of popular Northampton restaurants and serves as the soundstage on Saturday for the Paradise Jazz Group, Sugar Ray and the Bluetones on Sunday, and the O-Tones on Monday.