

New gallery brings diversity to city's art scene

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A woman throws her head back in a pained expression as she receives a Botox injection, simultaneously spilling Over her glass of red wine. The painting "Above: Botox parties can be both economical and fun. Just be sure to cover the furniture! Left: Better networking through Botox parties" was one of the many pieces featured Wednesday night in the Alfa Art Gallery's Gala Opening Exhibition.

Charice Silverman, a recent graduate of the School of Visual Arts in New York City, created "Botox Party" as a part of her project "What's Beauty Got to Do With it? Her "paintings were featured at the exhibition, which featured the artwork of Vesselin Kourtev, the gallery's owner and director, as well as Michael Fenton, Doreen Valenza, Kevin Lyons, Valentin Yotkov and Anthony Kirov.

- New Brunswick Mayor James C. Cahill commenced the ribbon-cutting ceremony, welcoming the gallery into the city. Art connoisseurs and students also attended the gallery's opening exhibition at 108 Church St.

Kourtev, a native Bulgarian, brings an international influence to the gallery. But other painters and sculptors are local New Jersey residents. Alfa offers multimedia presentations of tile art, including lyrics, camera, lighting and music effects.

"[Alfa] has a very strong belief in the interdisciplinary nature of art that painting doesn't exist in a vacuum," said New Jersey-based artist Michael Fenton. "I think it's a very European style gallery."

Fenton, whose work was featured at the exhibit, does representational and impressionist art. He studies Minhwa, an ancient Korean folk art form that is created using handmade materials.

"It's a wonderful art form," he said. "It's got a great history. I just think it's beautiful and needs to be seen. I think it's been neglected in the world, not just in this country."

Fenton said his work is greatly inspired by Minhwa and Korean culture. One of his pieces at the Alfa Gallery, titled "The Guardians," features 12 oil paintings of the heads of tigers on a 36-by-29 tile taken from an old master painting in Korea. He said tigers are symbolic guardians in Korea and people

hang depictions of them in their houses to ward off evil spirits.

"Learning how to do this kind of painting is like learning how to be a Buddhist," Fenton said. "It's very involved, and you don't just sit down and learn it. It's a lifetime tiling."

His work has also been on display at the Paper Mill Playhouse

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in Millburn, N.J., the Wilson School in Mountain Lakes, N.J. and the Tides Institute Maritime Center in Eastport, Maine.

Fenton said the Alfa Art Gallery distinguishes itself from other galleries since many of the artists create their work right in the gallery. This way, people can come in and observe the creative process as it happens.

"Beware of the Snakes in the Grass" is a 9-by-12 work of paint

paper on masonite created by collagist and oil painter Doreen Valenza. She used materials such as cut painted paper, acrylic, ink and ails on masonite and canvas to create her pieces.

Recently, Valenza utilized a unique collage process by scraping off the wallpaper of her studio and then applying color to it to bring out an intense saturation she then incorporates into her collages. Valenza also has her own trademark called "Girlfriend Goddesses."

She makes paintings of bodies and turns them into fertility goddess sculpture necklaces.

"I'm so happy to be in this gallery," Valenza said. "They took a chance with me. I've been in a couple different positions, but they're really promoting me. They believe in my art. and they believe in my vision. I'm so thankful to [the Kourtevs] for the opportunity to be here."

Valenza said the Aha Art Gallery is innovative in the sense that it not only features the visual arts but performing arts as well. Acclaimed soprano singer Anna Veleva performed at the gallery opening and the Olson/De Cart Duo, a husband and wife guitarist

duo, is scheduled to perform Feb. 2 at the gallery.

Art metal pieces created by master silversmith Valentin Yotkov were also featured in; the opening exhibition. He created his current art display by using an ancient Bulgarian metal technique.

Yotkov specializes in the art metal technique of chasing and repousse. This is the process of raising relief in metals like gold, silver or copper, and is a process that was lost following the Industrial Revolution. He Owns the Valentin Yotkov Studio in Brooklyn, N.Y., the only school in the United States that specializes in chasing and repousse instruction. Yotkov said he has also instructed members of the silverware department at Tiffany & Co.

"I'm happy that there is a gallery in New Brunswick," said Debbie Manville, an artist in attendance. "In fact, I think New Brunswick needs more galleries. It says Arts and Theater district on the way up here, and there are theaters but there is really no art. I think that New Brunswick needs to grow its art district a little bigger so that maybe we'll get a larger cross section of people coming into the city."