

STUDIO MONTCLAIR COMES HOME TO A NEW SPACE

October 8, 2017

Jon Taner's work hangs on a banner in Montclair.
COURTESY STUDIO MONTCLAIR

A 20th-anniversary celebration of Studio Montclair

Saturday, Oct. 21, 7:30-11 p.m.

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After 20 years, Studio Montclair Inc. is putting down roots.

The artist-membership organization has signed a lease on a building at 127 Bloomfield Ave.

Since 1997, SMI has shown its work around town. It had its roots in a 1997 exhibit at the Montclair Art Museum — or rather not in that exhibit: “The Montclair Art Colony Past and Present” did not include all local artists.

Five artists whose work was not included in the MAM show — Virginia Schaffer Block, Jean Kawecki, Charlee Swanson, Sarah Teofanov and Joan Anne Vaccaro — decided to

hold a rival exhibit titled “The Rest Of The Colony, A Creative Response to the Montclair Art Museum’s ‘Colony’ Exhibition,” according to a history of Studio Montclair at studiomontclair.org.

Fast forward 20 years: Studio Montclair Inc. now has about 400 members.

They show their art together, join critique groups, inspire one another. Their work includes painting, photography, digital media, sculpture and other mediums.

For the past few years, SMI has exhibited mainly at the Academy Square Galleries, the Montclair Public Library, and at Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art in the Heart of Newark.

Having a new home won’t alter the nomadic nature of the group, Ed Remsen rushed to say at a coffee meeting with SMI President RitaMarie Cimini.

Remsen, a former Montclair mayor, is an SMI board member.

“We don’t want to recentralize everything we do,” he said, “but we will have a base and an office.”

ED REMSEN

Remsen runs a nonprofit home health agency in northern Bergen County. His hobby is helping small nonprofits.

“I always say ‘don’t ask me to join the board,’” he said with a laugh.

“He does,” Cimini agreed.

Yet Remsen joined the SMI board.

He got so excited about SMI's plans that he became a member, too; he works with wood and clay.

Cimini has been a member for eight years and became president in June after a term as interim president.

Once the organization made a commitment to have its own space, "it changed how we do business," Cimini said. "It was a dramatic change. We had relied only on dues." Not all of the members live locally: SMI members come from 35 states and eight countries.

Making the decision to get a business meant "raising money and raising visibility. Everything was geared to those two objectives."

ROOMS AND NEW VIEWS

The new home, a 1,000-square-foot space, will have six recessed windows to highlight the work of individual artists, room for exhibits that include three-dimensional work, and room for workshops for artists to give and to take.

The new space for Studio Montclair will have room for art, and room for workshops. COURTESY RITAMARIE CIMINI.

"People ask, 'Where's Studio Montclair?'" Remsen said. "Getting a permanent space will let us have a gallery and an office." Executive Director Susanna Baker works out of her dining room, he said with a laugh. "It will create buzz and visibility."

The fundraiser "Affair of the Art," on Saturday, Oct. 21, will feature an auction of 10 works of art that are currently displayed on 70 banners around town. "Banners in Montclair" features the work of Jon Taner, Asha Ganpat, Sharon Pitts, Jennifer Levine, Yvette Lucas, Gwen Charles, Joan Lesikin, Samuel Iztueta, Ela Shah and Paul Jervis. The banners will hang until the night of the fundraiser.

Banners fly highlighting each of ten art pieces to be auctioned at the fundraiser.

ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

The event will include a live art performance by speed painter Tim Decker with an auction of the pieces he creates, and a musical performance by violinist Sarah Charness.

“The banners advertise our organization and promote the members,” Cimini said. In addition to the work displayed on the banners, the auction will include more work by SMI members, with more than 100 works in total.

COMING BACK TO THE STUDIO

“Studio Montclair is about helping support the members develop professionally,” Cimini said. She moved to Montclair after trying to build a career in the city for 10 years. After spending time raising her son, she was “out of the process of applying for shows. For some period of time I was not in the studio that much.”

RITAMARIE CIMINI

Then she joined SMI, and had a solo show in a space on Orange Road (since moving to Academy Square, SMI really doesn't do solo shows). She said, “Participating in group shows got me back in the studio.”

SMI gave her exhibition opportunities. It brought her in contact with other artists who come out for openings. “The new space will be able to expand what we are doing,” she said.

One of the services SMI provides to its members is a weekly “Hot List,” sent out by Baker, which lists shows coming up that members can submit to.

“If they see one thing a year and submit, it's worth it,” she said.

Some of the special events for the 20th anniversary include:

- “20/20,” a show that winks at the anniversary year, at perfect vision, and in which every piece will measure 20 inches by 20 inches. “20/20” will be at Academy Square from Oct. 13 to Dec. 15.
- “Celebrate!” a show at the Montclair Public Library that displays work inspired by victories, achievements and milestones, will run from Nov. 2 to Nov. 29.

Members have the opportunity to submit to at least six curated or juried exhibitions every year.

SMI will sometimes have a presence in the Farmers’ Market and at the Upper Montclair sidewalk sale.

For Remsen and Cimini, the new space will help secure SMI as a player in a new artistic Montclair.

Said Remsen, “We want to create art that is visible throughout town.”

Art hangs at Academy Square. COURTESY RITAMARIE CIMINI