

Peeking behind the screen

4th annual Wood River Valley Studio Tour offers glimpse into artistic process



Courtesy photo A young visitor to the studio tour's group exhibit examines a painting during the 2015 Wood River Valley Studio Tour.

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When Ketchum artist Suzanne Hazlett spearheaded the first Wood River Valley Studio Tour in 2012, she and co-organizer and fellow artist Mary Williams each made 20 calls a night trying to find local artists to participate.

They thought that would be the easy part—asking artists they knew about to tell them about other local artists they knew. “We were meeting artists throughout the valley who thought they were the only ones,” Hazlett said. Organizing that first tour and establishing a database of local artists in the process was a laborious task. “We had to do a lot of groundwork,” Hazlett said.

Since that first tour, and after the upcoming studio tour on Saturday, Aug. 20, and Sunday, Aug. 21, more than 100 local artists will have participated in the tour, in which visitors, art enthusiasts and fellow artists alike can visit local artists in their studios and get behind-the-scenes glimpses of their projects and processes.

This year, 52 artists in Bellevue, Hailey, Ketchum and Sun Valley will open their studio doors from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Artwork by all 52 artists also is currently being displayed in a group exhibition at the nexStage Theatre at 120 S. Main St. in Ketchum through Sunday to give visitors a preview of the art they will see in the self-guided tours.

“We have top-tier galleries here that rival those in many metropolitan areas, but rarely do you see this diversity of art in one room,” Hazlett said. “There truly is something for everyone.”

The media represented by this year’s participating artists are ceramics, drawing, fiber, jewelry, mixed media, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture and woodworking. Hazlett said eight of the artists this year are brand new to the tour, including a couple of artists who have recently moved to the area.

The tour has grown in the number of participating artists every year as the event has grown in stature, Hazlett said.

And while introducing local artists to visitors and residents alike and getting glimpses of their artistic processes is a major function of the tour, the tour serves an equally if not more important function for the artists themselves.

Hazlett said the tour provides great opportunities for artists to network, alleviating some of the feelings of isolation some artists had felt in the past. But also simply disseminating knowledge of the artists’ names and works can help boost their careers.

“We want to not only create an enjoyable educational opportunity but to elevate the professional opportunities of our artists,” Hazlett said. “Because if they’re succeeding, our community is succeeding.”

Hazlett said the Wood River Valley has a unique artistic community and environment that fosters creativity that deserves more recognition.

“Our aspiration ultimately is to elevate our art community to the national level,” Hazlett said. “We want the Wood River Valley to be recognized for the creative spirit we have here for the artists who live and work here.”

She said the valley—aside from the obvious draws of its stunning natural scenery—has a unique culture that draws artists to live here.

“We do have a culturally rich and storied history in this community that attracts creative people,” Hazlett said. “We have an inspiring and attractive community environment.”

Though the opportunities for the artists themselves are important, the studio tour is just as much an educational and edifying opportunity for tour-goers. Hazlett said one of the goals of the tour is to dispel some of the mystique around art and the process of its creation.

“We want to make art accessible to all ages, interests and abilities,” Hazlett said. “We are able to help remove those imaginary or real barriers people might feel in understanding art and being comfortable with it,” she said.

The days leading up to the tour include some free events, as well. Today, Aug. 17, the tour is bringing in 15 patients and their caregivers from the Maple Valley Rehabilitation Center, which is a daycare for adults with cognitive and physical challenges.

“These folks because of their challenges in life have never experienced an art exhibition like this before,” Hazlett said. “We’re dedicating the day to their experience.”

In addition to the group exhibition at the nexStage, the theater also will host a lecture about how people can incorporate art into their homes on Aug. 18 from 3-4 p.m., and an artists’ reception for all 52 artists will be held on Friday, Aug. 19, from 5-8 p.m. at the nexStage.

“Every year, the events are different from what we did before,” Hazlett said.

For more information about the tour, the participating artists and for a virtual guide of the tour, visit www.wrvstudiotour.com.

Schedule of events

- Group art exhibition: Aug. 16-21 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the nexStage Theatre in Ketchum.
- “How to Incorporate Art into Your Home Décor” talk: Thursday, Aug. 18, from 3-4 p.m. at the nexStage.
- Artists’ Reception: Friday, Aug. 19, from 5-8 p.m. at the nexStage Theatre.
- Studio Tour: Saturday, Aug. 20, and Sunday, Aug. 21, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Participating artists

- Bellevue: Martha Andrea, Anne Jeffery, Judy Pittman, Brent Rasmussen, Jack Sept, Mark Sheehan and Pamela Street.
- Hailey: Sarah Bird, Ginny Blakeslee Breen, Jeannie Catchpole and Steve Behal, Margery Friedlander, Jen Galpin, Alison Higdon, Lisa Horton, Mark Kashino, Jill Lear, Annie May, Wendy Pabich, David Roberson, Mary Roberson, Janet Starr, Valerie Stuart and Poo Wright-Pulliam.
- Ketchum/Sun Valley: Merete Abbott, Gay Bawa Odmark, Will Caldwell, Dorothea Cheney, Diana Citret, Sarah Davies, Marybeth Flower and Joe Bauwens, Nina Fox, Jineen Griffith, Susan Hall, Suzanne Hazlett, Arlene Herich, Lisa Holley, Karen Jacobsen, Sue Jacobsen, Judith Kindler, Jan Lassetter, Marc Longley, Susan P. Perin, Paul Potters, Tom Prater, Donna Pritchard, Susan Ward, Christine Warjone, Judy Whitmyre and Wendel Wirth.