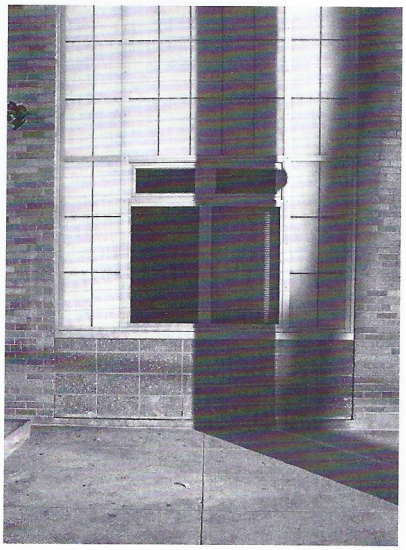
ART AND PLAY

STUDIO 550 SAYS "RELAX!"



Timothy Duffy, *Corner of Union and Lowell,* archival pigment print.

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

– Marcel Proust

Looking at art and community with new eyes inspired Monica Leap to create Studio 550, a community art studio where, as Leap likes to say, "Art is not a spectator sport."

An art gallery, teaching studio, artists' working space and small business incubator for the arts, Studio 550 is dedicated to bringing art of all kinds to the community in and around Manchester, N.H., offering art classes for children and adults as well as workshops by visiting artists. Meanwhile, Tai Chi, dance and movement classes are held in the dance studio, and a menu of at least two dozen teas is available in the Tea Room. A mobile ceramics studio brings clay to the community for schools, the elderly, businesses or events. Presiding over all is a notice painted on the wall: "Relax. You are here to PLAY."

Every month or two brings a new exhibition to the Studio 550 gallery space. During January and February, Studio 550 will be showing "Unseen in the City," an exhibition of photographs that present uncommon views of the people or places found in the city of Manchester. Said Leap, "I feel like there are a lot of beautiful things about this city, but it also has a really gritty edge to it."

Timothy Duffy's black-and-white archival pigment print, "Corner of Union and Lowell," captures a rectangular shadow as it covers one side of a pair of vertically oriented windows set in a brick wall, a fleeting moment of intriguing environmental geometry.

Roberta Provencal's color photograph, "The Pound," is centered on a strange monument in Manchester's Derryfield Park. Two granite posts support a granite lintel with the words "TOWN POUND MDCCCXLI/MOLLY STARK CHAPTER/D.A.R./1916." An ancient wooden door seems barely supported between the posts and the structure stands in a vibrant field of green grass, a door to nowhere. An American flag, made tiny by distance, flutters from a building in the background.

Also on view is the extended run of Studio 550's First Annual Cup Show, which is just that: cups, mugs, yunomis, tumblers, shot glasses, tea bowls and other drinking vessels made of clay.

Adero Kai Willard, the juror for last February's "Made for Each Other" Studio 550 exhibition, returned to the gallery with a set of four electric-fired earthenware "Tumblers." irregularly shaped and patterned with reddish-orange organic forms against loosely patterned grids.

Adero Kai Willard, *Tumblers,* electric-fired earthenware.

Christopher Archer, who teaches at the New Hampshire Institute of Art in Manchester, included a rough, wood-fired cup that sits on a base of almost-triangular petals. It is a little cup of contrasts, cream against brown, rough against smooth, round against angle.

Although she grew up in Nashua, Leap was familiar with the neighborhood around 550 Elm Street in Manchester. Her parents, Cambodian refugees, ran an Asian market in the same building while Leap was growing up. She explained that in the 1970s, her parents had to leave everything they knew behind to flee to a country where they did not even speak the language. Understanding this struggle has shaped Leap's life and ambitions. As a city-planning student, she knew she wanted to revitalize existing downtown buildings and create an art center where the community could come together. Studio 550 is the realization of this dream.

"As a first-generation American, I've grown up with the desire to build communities in hopes that people would not feel the need to leave," Leap said. "As a studio potter and dancer, art has become the way I create community."

Marcia Santore

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