

Guided Wonders

Stopping by Silvermine Arts Center

David Podgurski



Hydro-seeding. Grass being planted on covered Mountaintop Removal mining site around Kayford Mountain, WV

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Two words about Silvermine: Go visit.

If you're not one of the 12,000 annual visitors, you're missing out on five gorgeous New Canaan woodland acres featuring a decades' old school of art, impeccably curated galleries, a sculpture walk, and the creative essence of a lively art colony.

"We're trying to bridge the gap between a community art space and the art scene," says Executive Director Jeffrey Mueller.

Formed in 1922, the Guild at one time incorporated writers and even ballerinas. After the 1960s, its focus was narrowed to the visual arts. At present, there are some 300-plus Guild members and three main curated galleries. Until Dec. 23, Silvermine's primary exhibit will be "Beauty and Ruin: Broken Landscapes, Lost Symbols," featuring the works of J. Henry Fair, Carlos Davila and June Ahrens. Fair's abstract photographic work in his gallery, "The Hand of Man," details de-forested landscapes, polluted waterways, and other industrial sites, producing imagery from decay or devastation.

In "Neo-Archaism," Davila's presents sculpture, three-dimensional wall pieces and diptychs/triptychs investigating the interplay between various ancient civilizations and modern society itself. Ahren's work, "What's Left," is a "site-dependent" gallery featuring video as an important element and a (literal) exploration of the studio space, utilizing salt and glass, and blending notions of residua with the human form.

"Beauty and Ruin" follows installations by Kristina Kuester-Witt, Leslie Giuliani, and James Flora, whose RCA playful album cover art is both vintage and extremely iconic (Silvermine's exhibit also featured a large percentage never-before-seen works by Flora). Mueller explains that, through recent curatorial moves, SAC has honed focus and sharpened direction. The result is greater regional reach and a local feel—Fairfield County locals still come to Silvermine Market, across the street, for breakfast and morning coffee, for example.

"We're bringing in influential curators and metropolitan minds," he says. "Silvermine is for those artists with a high level of craft who need a place to show works in a curated environment. ...We offer the accessibility of a community space with a metropolitan reach." This reach expands in 2015, when Michelle Grabner, one of three curators of this year's Whitney Biennale, and her husband, Brad Killam, curate Silvermine's "Art of the Northeast." The 65th annual competition, open to artists from Maine to the Mid-Atlantic, follows a new exhibition of Grabner's work now on view at New York's [James Cohan Gallery](#).

Of course, visiting the grounds and galleries at SAC is one thing: another is the participatory route. Classes offered range from art history courses to instruction in painting, photography, sculpture, mixed media, ceramics, jewelry, collage, silversmithing and beyond. There are also many social events throughout the calendar year.

Basically, if you want superb art in your backyard, just come to the grounds—you'll find that a contemplative creative space (and much more) isn't very far away.

Gallery admission is free; for more information, visit www.silvermineart.org or call (203) 966-9700.

Silvermine Arts Center

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