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November 3, 2012

Art imitates food, and vice-versa, in Common Street Arts exhibit

CSA: Community Supporting Arts, a project of the Harlow Gallery in Hallowell and the Kennebec Valley Arts Association, unites artists and farmers

By Rachel Ohm rohm@mainetoday.com
Staff Writer

WATERVILLE -- Jamie Ribisi-Braley munched on a pumpkin and beet curry with pumpkin cornbread triangles, as she mingled at the opening of a new art exhibit in downtown Waterville Saturday night.

"The red color in the beet curry reflects the red in some of my paintings," she said.

Ribisi-Braley is a painter who spent the past growing season at Wholesome Holmstead, a beef and dairy farm in Winthrop, creating art inspired by community-supported agriculture.

Her work is on display as part of "CSA: Community Supporting Arts," an exhibit featuring the work of 14 artists, who were paired with 13 farms across Maine. On Saturday the exhibit, which is a project of the Harlow Gallery in Hallowell and the Kennebec Valley Arts Association, opened at the Common Street Arts gallery in downtown Waterville, with a reception featuring dishes inspired by the art work and made from local food.

"I personally love food and I love local food even more," said Emilie Knight, the project coordinator at Common Street. "This project was a great opportunity to get involved with that."



Zach Vickers, of Coopers Mills, looks at art works on display during the opening of a new exhibit, featuring a collection of art inspired by local farms over the last growing season, on Saturday.

Staff photo by Michael G. Seamans



Art lovers gathered at Common Street Arts in Waterville for the opening of a new exhibit, featuring a collection of art inspired by local farms over the last growing season, on Saturday.

Staff photo by Michael G. Seamans

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She said that the exhibit, the third to be installed at Common Street since the gallery opened in July, was also a chance to partner with local food purveyor Barrels Market, which catered the event.

"We had a bunch of people and our staff look at the paintings and either literally or creatively match them with foods," said Barrels manager David Gulak.

Some of the other pairings were a "Bull's Blood Beet Salad," paired with a painting of cattle by Kate Barnes, who was partnered with Grassland Organics, in Skowhegan; and a table of dessert squares -- wild blueberry cake and homemade graham crackers -- that played off a puzzle of square pieces made by photographer Kerstin Engman at Treble Ridge Farm, in Whitefield.

Many of the artists as well as farm owners said that they learned a lot from the partnerships.

Craig Hickman, the owner of Annabessacook Farm in Winthrop, said his partnership with artist Christine Higgins was both a rewarding and inspiring experience.

"I feel like my farm is my canvas and I try to create art on my farm by the way I grow things," he said. "When I heard about this, I felt like it was a once in a lifetime opportunity."

He said he wasn't sure how he was paired with Higgins, but that he hopes to keep collaborating with her.

One of their first projects on the farm involved his writing a poem about animal life, on a piece of paper she made from collard greens.

Higgins, who is a former high school art teacher specializing in print and papermaking, said she would like to see similar projects take place in other communities.

"There's an increased awareness for the artist and for the farmer," she said. "They're kindred spirits, really. There's also more room for appreciation from the audience, more awareness of our natural resources and where food comes from."

"CSA: Community Supporting Arts" is on exhibit at Common Street Arts through Nov. 30. The gallery is open Wednesday through Saturday from 12 to 6 p.m.

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