



VIENNA ARTS SOCIETY

Take a Seat, Vienna!

AN INVITING INSTALLATION | BY ALICE NODINE

Save the date: Take a Seat, Vienna! bench auction on November 2, 6 p.m., at the Vienna Community Center.

The town of Vienna, already known for its walkability, now boasts 42 additional reasons for visitors and residents to stroll through its vibrant shopping and dining district. The Vienna Arts Society (VAS), which installed a colorful array of painted benches throughout the town in April, invites the public to enjoy them until they are auctioned off in November. The “Take a Seat, Vienna!” installation, created by VAS member artists, features colorful renditions ranging from celebrations of nature and elegant portraits to playful homages and patriotic salutes.

Although work on the benches began in earnest last winter, many of the participating artists were thinking ahead to warmer days. As she worked on “Poppydot,” Marvel Adams was hoping that her large, vibrant blooms would brighten someone’s day. Mary Ellyn Perkowski’s bench, “Spring,” was inspired by a bed of tulips she had photographed at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens in Vienna. “Grandmother’s Legacy” recalls Hayden Luczka’s memory of an English rose garden. For a baseball-themed bench dubbed “Mine!,” Sheeler Kowalewski depicted one of the boys of summer diving for a line drive.



Furry and feathered friends make appearances on a number of benches, including “Kaleidoscope Cats” by Julie Cochran and “Sun Seekers” by Grace Rooney. For “Sit Down With Birds All Around,” VAS President Ruth Ensley painted a bevy of native birds in hopes of creating awareness of nature and the importance of protecting our ecosystems. Rita Ann Butcher, who enjoys frequent sightings of deer and fox, cites “the beauty and peacefulness of our parks” as the inspiration for “A Haven of Harmony,” her contribution to the installation.

Susan Scanlon’s “Simply Dreaming,” located outside Caffè Amouri on Church Street, features the classic likeness of Holly Golightly, the heroine of Breakfast at Tiffany’s. “I painted Audrey Hepburn looking into the window at Tiffany’s because it is a fabulous, whimsical and iconic image,” says Susan. “Here stands an elegantly dressed woman having breakfast, while still dressed in her gown and jewels, who seems to be ‘Simply Dreaming.’”

“Honor to All Who Serve,” which can be seen at the American Legion Post 180 on Center Street, was inspired by the Navy veteran husband of artist

Joyce Myers. Anchored by a majestic eagle, the bench features 50 red-and-white-striped stars symbolizing the American flag. “The back of the bench represents the spirits of fallen soldiers,” says Joyce, adding that the piece is designed to honor all former and active military personnel.

“Be the One,” painted by Shari MacFarlane, reflects her “wish for everyone to accept the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” According to Shari, the bench “invites all to sit down and perhaps have a conversation with someone very different from themselves. Even if viewers are not quite ready for sitting with anyone, they may at least think about its message and be more aware of those who are left out in the future.” Shari, a longtime art instructor, also collaborated on another piece with some of her students. Their piece, “Creative Kids,” is on view at Dr. Jack Weil’s pediatric dentistry office on Maple Avenue. “Children are always watching to see what we adults do,” says Shari. “They are very interested in the projects I do with others and [seeing] how art can be a special power for good.”

Doré Skidmore, who began her career as a sculptor,

Page 27: Shari MacFarlane's Thursday class working on "Creative Kids" bench

First row, left to right: "Creative Kids" by Sharon MacFarlane; "Just for You" by Anna Watson; and "Happy Daze" by Jane Ponder

Second row, left to right: "Kaleidoscope Cats" by Julie Cochran; "I See You" by Jodi Condes; and "Every Child is an Artist" by Shari MacFarlane

Third row, left to right: "Cat-o-Line" by Gunnel Gyllenhoff; "Cascade" by Jeff Gorrell; and "Unlock the Cosmos" by Doré Skidmore



First row, left to right: "Simply Dreaming" by Susan Scanlon; "Poppydot" by Marvel Adams; and "Ladies" by Deborah Schneider

Second row, left to right: "Engenuity" by Ken Britz; "Sit Down with Birds All Around" by Ruth Ensley; and "Big Wave" by Viktoriya Maslova

Third row, left to right: "Sun Seekers" by Grace Rooney; "Honor to All Who Serve" by Joyce Myers; and "Patriotic Price" by Regina Petrecca

carved the title of her work, "Unlock the Cosmos," onto a bench that is now stationed on the porch of independent bookstore Bards Alley. "The bench has a series of vertical slats on the back that suggested a bookshelf filled with great books for all ages," says Doré. "My family's favorite books are on that 'shelf,' with one turned around to represent a book that might be your favorite read or the book you plan to write someday. In addition, there's a clue to another great book on the seat of the bench."

Doré recalls numerous challenges posed by the project. Although the benches arrived primed and ready to paint from their Pennsylvania Amish supplier, artists were encouraged to lightly sand the pieces and add another coat of primer, she says. Artists then employed house paint to create their designs. Once the painting part of the process was completed, several coats of exterior varnish were applied. Regina Petrecca describes the challenge of working with a new medium and applying four coats of house paint to each of the 41 stars on "Patriotic Pride," which pays tribute to the American flag. "I've never painted on wood," she says, "so this project was a 'learning experience' from

day one." Rosemary Gallick notes that her "Musical Bench" required a good deal of measurements and calculations before she was satisfied with her large-scale keyboard. Despite the obstacles, participating artists learned from the undertaking. "Anytime we go out of our comfort zone and take on something new," says Mary Ellyn Perkowski, "it expands how we process things. I now see old furniture and think how some paint and a decorative design could bring it to life."

VAS recently launched a scavenger hunt, inviting visitors to create Facebook photo albums of themselves perched on at least 40 benches. Scavenger hunt participants will be entered in a drawing for a \$250 gift card to be awarded at the Take a Seat, Vienna! bench auction on November 2, 6 p.m., at the Vienna Community Center, where attendees will be able to bid on their favorite benches and meet the artists who created them. Proceeds from the auction will support VAS outreach activities, art demonstrations and classes.

Vienna Arts Society | www.ViennaArtsSociety.org