



ALLEN FETAHI

IN THE BEGINNING

Arm-of-the-Sea celebrates our industrial heritage while taking measure of its consequences

BY CHRIS CONROY

NO CURTAIN PARTED ON ARM-OF-THE-Sea Theater's new production *Under Mill Wheels* when it premiered last weekend, since it would have had to drape the entirety of Saugerties from battens fixed in the clouds. The watery, kaleidoscopic set served as the focal point of a story that implicated almost two centuries of town history, from Henry Barclay's purchase of 150 acres of land in 1825 to that pair of summer nights in 2012.

In lieu of a curtain, the nonprofit organization's founder, playwright and performer Patrick Wadden,

signaled the show's start by taking the stage and voicing his desire to "channel some of the ghosts of this place." A haunting melody then joined minimal instrumentals as 19th century stonemason Cornelius "Connie" Lynch appeared to bring us further back in time with the story of the town's founding. "Facts are nothing but hooks for useful fictions," he says to his wife, Madeline.

Arm-of-the-Sea has a rich and unabashed history of blending topical social and environmental concerns with rich visuals in the hue of "magical realism," and this production is no exception. In fact, *Under Mill Wheels* seems to take its cues as much from Bible stories and a diverse pool of legends as

from local history, culminating in what amounts to Saugerties' own creation myth.

We meet Henry Barclay as he arrives in the area. Enchanted by the mountains and river, he establishes Ulster Iron Works and a paper mill. The water feeds the factories, which feed the burgeoning town. In a surge of inspiration, Barclay names streets like Adam named animals in the Garden of Eden. A mysterious bluebird hovers in the sky above the waterfall that powers the mills, embodying a different possibility for every member of the community—freedom or happiness, oblivion or despair.

The play thrives on ambiguities. What represents a chance to work for wages for a pair of former slaves escaped North—although they are still relegated to a separate, peripheral community on Augusta Savage Road—also represents the destruction of home and community for regional Native Americans. A pair visit Barclay in a dream and lament that the "water runs black from coal dust and bitter waste."

Issues of water contamination are nothing new to the region, from General Electric dumping PCBs in the Hudson to the Ashokan releases that have turned the Esopus Creek a muddy brown. *Under Mill Wheels* underlines the ethical questions that surround these issues and questions the values of progress.

Nor does it pull any punches in sweetening up local heroes. "You're welcome to stay," the generous Henry Barclay says to the Native Americans, "but put on clothes, get baptized, and go to work just like everybody else here."

The somber is tempered by the comedic. One scene in particular could just as easily appear in a Looney Toons short; a hunter and black bear stalk each other through a stand of trees, and after a few narrow misses the bear emerges with the musket in his paws. Moments like this helped keep the attention of younger viewers.

Under Mill Wheels was what Patrick Wadden promised; a ghost story of sorts, but perhaps not for a century has Saugerties' history felt so real, so alive—and certainly never more magical.

Arm-of-the-Sea Theater will take a break from touring this season to do more work "in Saugerties about Saugerties," as Wadden phrased it, as well as a residency in local schools this fall. They call the upcoming project *Stories From Here*. Proceeds from *Under Mill Wheels* will go toward funding this local work. You can check out Arm-of-the-Sea on their website, www.armofthesea.org, or catch them around town. ●

ages her gallery and curates the shows. The current show reflects her ongoing plan to feature a local artist together with a non-local artist; a juxtaposition of sorts between the Hudson Valley and the rest of the world.

Currently, the Imogen Holloway Gallery is show-

Check out the show over the weekend, if you can. Next week the exhibits change

ing "Yellow Makes a Sound," new paintings by artists Meg Lipke and Jack Davidson, on view through Sunday, Sept. 2. Lipke is the regional artist (Philmont) and Davidson is Scottish, lately of Barcelona, Spain.

Works by the two artists are not separated. Individual pieces play off one another throughout the gallery. Dwyer says she chose to exhibit these two artists together purely for aesthetic reasons, because she thought they showed well together.

Lipke's works on paper are made using melted beeswax as a drawing medium and resist, in the way that wax is used in batik work to block out line and create patterns on cloth. She came to the process by happenstance, when making batik drawings on her children's clothes. Taken with the painterly potential for the medium, she began integrating the batik process into her fine art work.

"Bright Beacon" and "Saint Story," both 22" x 30", are done with ink, dye and beeswax on paper. They're characteristic of all of the works by Lipke on exhibit, each showing abstract forms of an indeterminate source in a palette of bright colors accented with black. There is a playful, childlike exuberance to

the works, some showing a debt to traditional batik fabric design, and others with a quality reminiscent of Paul Klee.

Davidson's works are oil on linen and small in scale, generally 15" x 18" in size. They work well on the walls with Lipke's work, showing geometric shapes in clear, bright colors. Seen together as a grouping, they resemble sophisticated nautical flags in their simplicity of design, especially "before Hollywood," painted in yellow, black and white.

In an interview, the artist said he comes across color combinations inadvertently.

He is also quoted as saying that he works quickly and spontaneously without over-thinking the process: "Your touch gets the job done," he said.

Meg Lipke has an MFA in Painting from Cornell University, and has had her work reviewed in *Art in America* and the *New York Times*. Jack Davidson was educated in his native Scotland and has exhibited his work in group and solo shows in the

U.S. and Spain.

The additional exhibition space in the gallery's windows is devoted to either separate installations or to three-dimensional works by the artists showing on the main walls of the gallery.

At the moment, the windows show the work of four artists who were a part of the recent Saugerties Artists Studio Tour; the mythic-themed painted baseballs by Carol Zaloom, art pottery by Steve Frederick and Cherie Jemsek, wood turnings by Ze'ev Willy Neumann, and welded metal sculpture by Jeffrey Schiller. Dwyer doesn't represent these artists professionally; she offered the space in support of the studio tour artists and organizers.

The Imogen Holloway Gallery is located at 81 Partition St. in the village of Saugerties. Gallery hours are Thursday-Sunday 11 a.m.-6 p.m. or by appointment. For more information, visit www.ihgallery.com, email diane@ihgallery.com, or call (347) 387-3212. ●

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