

July OPAA Peninsula ArtWalks, Noyes

“Art is the Highest Form of Hope.”

Aside from serious disruption in our personal daily lives, the Corona Virus Pandemic has derailed most artistic venues. Co-operatives, galleries, art museums and not-for-profits across the country have switched to virtual formats so as not to lose touch with their artists, clientele and supporters, and to stay within the public eye. Virtual viewing continues as a learning curve for some, but the very real future of work, education and shopping from home is here to stay.

What does all of this mean for the prospect of art, how we make it, see it and sell it?

Some businesses will re-open with traditional art shows operating within the current framework of face masks, gloves and social distancing. Or new exhibitions and competitions may only be available online. Online viewing can't compete with the excitement of attending live openings or juried shows. It *will* still show incredible art that we can relate and aspire to. Despite unresolved global pandemic, mass unemployment, decreased tourism and travel, along with a host of other ills, we must keep our artistic motivation.

It isn't all about sales - creativity is a saving grace. Lose yourself in the process and enjoy what you're doing. Artists create because we must fill the empty page, canvas, paper. Sculpt, carve, photograph, sew, weave, cast, hammer away – but do it for your own self. Whatever your audience – build it, they will come. *Field of Dreams* can't be all wrong.

Many of us still rely on some income from our artwork. I've been following Reddot Blog from Xanadu Gallery, based in the southwest. Owner Jason Horejs addresses many current questions about art and markets; artists write in sharing thoughts and tips. You can take a virtual tour of his Santa Fe gallery. Fielding these times may be the greatest challenge of our entire careers. It helps to relate to venues outside our comfy studios.

On that note I contacted Sarah Jane of ***Port Angeles Fine Arts Center (PAFAC)***. She's a serious Gallery and Program Director poised on the cusp of change - with the flexibility and energy to weather the state we're in. Sarah took this position in 2018. Originally from the east side



of the Cascades, she and her partner were ready to relocate. Their eyes were on Port Angeles, a favored destination for years.

She explains that PAFAC has been through many transitions, both prior and in addition to her nearly two years here. Beyond day-to-day operations, important questions are being asked about its identity as an organization and continuing growth and development. She's delighted to be part of the restructure process.

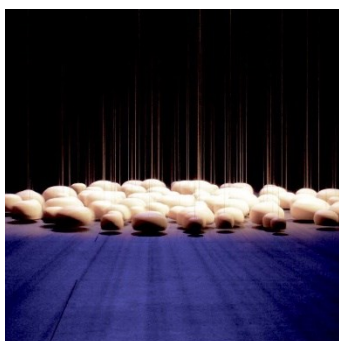
I asked how restructure aspects differ now under Corona Virus conditions of closure and reopening phases.

"It's challenging navigating these uncertainties with a goal in mind," she admits. "The current challenge is to find ways to continue PAFAC's mission and program without risk to public health. We made the decision to put our spring exhibit online. It's encouraging to see folks purchasing art from this exhibit and engaging with our other virtual programming as well."

With restrictions and possible second viral wave, what physical changes will the Port Angeles Arts Center undergo in the next six months?

"The sculpture park lends itself to social distancing, while the Webster House is a more challenging space," she explains. "We're discussing logistics on re-opening the Gallery for the next exhibit, **Well + Being**, opening Sat., July 11, 2020. This and future exhibits will continue to show online, providing extra flexibility for those people who remain uncomfortable with public venues."

That's good news for those sequestered until a vaccine is in place. Sarah believes Covid-19 will impact PAFAC's programming in 2021, but that impact is yet unknown. I asked about financial conditions – they have received extra grant money and donations to help them through, and those virtual exhibit sales were helpful.



So how does Sarah Jane cope with Covid-19 on a personal level?

"These past three months have been difficult in ways I didn't realize difficult could be. Right now I'm observing and letting the entire experience just wash over me," she says.

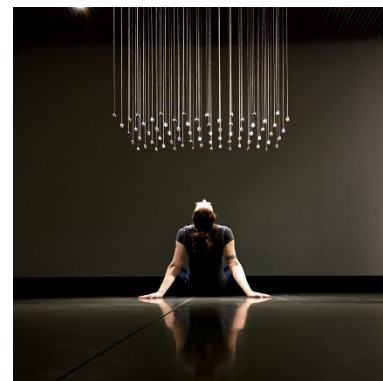
I also asked about her own artistic endeavors, what makes art an important process for her.

“Printmaker Gerald Ferstman once told me to stop making images and start making experiences. That advice resonated with me. I’ve exhibited drawings, ceramics, installations, assemblages and much participatory art.

Regardless of the medium, I’m focused on what kind of experience I’m creating. My current project (developing slowly since last fall) will be an installation or assemblage of dozens, hundreds (?) of old carpenter levels.”

Sarah’s father was an exacting woodworker, serious about perfect measurements. Those carpenter levels became unreliable if not cared for properly. “Generations used the best tools available to build the best work possible,” says Sarah. “I envision the finished piece as a kind of monument to that ongoing human quest to make things right – and perhaps an encouragement to those of us who are still trying to make things right in our own time.”

Due to current restrictions, she hasn’t been able to collect additional tools since specific stores closed. She continues honing her concept of the best way to present them. Visualization is always an important process for artists. Sarah Jane says her most consistent inspiration over the previous fifteen years has been the art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, whose work conveys profound, complex meanings with the simplest of objects, plastic clocks or piles of candy. His work has been described as, “visually spare, but emotionally lush”, which



pretty much sums it up for her. Another key influence is Argentinian artist Victor Grippo, whose work incorporates simple objects like potatoes or wooden tables to create a potent message about the power of ordinary working people. Finally, the writings of Wendell Berry, whose observations on the role of the poet are interpreted by Sarah Jane to include the role of the artist, as well.

“I’ve always admired artists who have a disciplined studio practice, because my approach to creativity is spontaneous and unpredictable, even to myself.”

Which I suggest comes from the heart and joy in her work.

See summer exhibits and offerings: **Port Angeles Fine Arts Center, (360) 457-3532,**

1203 E. Lauridsen Blvd., Port Angeles, WA 98362, [pafac@olympen.com](mailto:pafac@olympen.com) Website: [www.pafac.org](http://www.pafac.org)

**City of Sequim**, virtual show, *Fluidity* opens Fri., July 3, 2020,

[www.sequimwa.gov/705/Current-Exhibits](http://www.sequimwa.gov/705/Current-Exhibits)

See OPAA's July newsletter for virtual show information: *Fall Fantastic 2020*, [sequimarts.org](http://sequimarts.org)

**Jason Horejs' Blog** [reddot@xanadugallery.com](mailto:reddot@xanadugallery.com)

Photos:

**Sarah Jane** (photo credit: Lauren Bailey)

**Resonance**, a kinetic installation featuring ceramic bells that sway and ring in gentle, ever-changing patterns; the photo is from a 2015 exhibition at the Sheen Center for Arts & Culture, NYC.

**Mere Objects**, a participatory project honoring people who have experienced sexual violence; the photo is from a 2017 exhibition at the MAC Gallery, Wenatchee Valley College, Wenatchee, WA.

(Both art images are Sarah's photos.)