

## SPA's 'Up & Away': Everything that flies but Superman

By Mary Gow Arts Correspondent  
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B. Amore: "Dreams of Flight"

Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff photo

A cloud of wooden insects with mica and seedpod wings, wire proboscises and delightful expressions on their little faces drift overhead on air currents. Smooth river-rounded pebbles float aloft, suspended by delicate lines. Birds erupt in a blast of beating wings. An owl banks its turn, eyes laser-focused on its goal.

“Up & Away,” the new exhibition that opened this week in the Main Floor Gallery at Barre’s Studio Place Arts, invites viewers to lift off to an airier realm. Trucks fly, seeds parachute, a bumblebee hovers over spring blossoms, creatures real and imagined take flight, spirits ascend, and much more in the artwork of 25 artists.

Upstairs at SPA, three more exhibitions also just opened. “In Place of Absence,” a solo exhibition of Gail Skudera’s woven mixed media works, fills the Second Floor Gallery. Five artists explore themes including waste, desire, grief and narrative in “De-Functioning the Functional,” in the Third Floor Gallery. In SPA’s telephone booth Quick Change Gallery, “The Whole WHIRLD IS Upside Down” features with collages, including maps, by Ellen Urman.

“Flight is so liberating and so inspirational,” Sue Higby SPA executive director, said noting the theme “Up & Away” is especially appealing during this long stationary phase of our lives.

“Up & Away” takes off in SPA’s front window with Joe John’s “The Assumption.” Look closely, or not even that closely, and recognize that its propeller-like elements with curves, spirals, and fins are agitators — washing machine agitators, those things that have been gyrating laundry in top loaded washing machines since the mid 20th century.

In John’s installation, these space-age looking plastic forms combine in whimsical and intriguing assemblages. One group floats overhead, bringing to mind perhaps a plump ceiling fan or an air raid siren. One pair seems headed for space, satellite or missile like, on its angle of escape. A slender column of agitators soars upwards, the narrowest parts seeming to defy gravity, while a multi-agitator lamp stands topped by a glass orb.

John, who lives in Plainfield, began collecting agitators in the 1980s — their flight analogies striking him even then. A 1987 photograph taken by Mark Quinlan, “North 6th Street Pier, Williamsburg,” shows John atop a tall post with arms outstretched, an agitator in each hand, almost flying like the birds above him.

Adelaide Murphy Tyrol of Plainfield takes viewers to breathtaking moments in birds' flights in her sumi-e watercolor paintings. In sumi-e, the artist uses black ink painting a bit like watercolor without the color. Tyrol's paintings have precision and abstraction. In "Merlin" the owl's face is gripping with details of its razor sharp curved beak, focused eyes and short feathers. Its wings curve aerodynamically in a backward "C," the fluid black ink conveying their form as well as a sense of their movement through the air.

"Throughout human history, birds have held an emblematic power in the collective psyche: As objects of wonder they often symbolize freedom, incarnation, prophesy and are often seen as direct portals to the divine. For me, birds are the living representation of vital forces that define our existence. ... Watching birds, studying them, drawing them is my way of honoring them and of honoring our coexistence," Tyrol says in her artist's statement.

Tuyen My Nguyen's "Airborne," a stretched thread installation, evokes a sense of a bird's wings mid-stroke. Its 500 interwoven lines honor lives lost to the pandemic.

Janet Van Fleet's "Insects" form a friendly swarm with their wooden thoraxes, bent nail legs and disarming expressions. Christopher Curtis' "Floating Stones" seem to calmly rest in the air above his "The Suspension of Disbelief" a stainless steel and stone sculpture.

Human flight, spiritual flight, and even flying box trucks also make appearances in "Up & Away."

Upstairs, Skudera's solo show features her woven pieces — some woven block prints, some multi-media pieces. Skudera works with photographs, mostly vintage ones of women that she disassembles into strips and then weaves back together with thread, threads passing over and under the images.

“The reweaving of the photograph both abstracts and restores attributes of the original photograph. They are also about time and are obsessive about wanting to bring forward something from behind. Like photographs from a vintage album, the subjects can be viewed as voyagers in a sightseeing boat on an unknown waterway,” Skudera says in her artist’s statement.

The five artists — Karen Cygnarowicz, Chiyomi McKibbin, Hannah Morris, Angela Paladino and Laura Young — in “De-Functioning the Functional” work in a range of media, ceramic, collage and textile among them.

“This exhibition aims to reassert the value of objects and materials when their original function has been removed,” they say in their group statement.

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## Studio Place Arts

Studio Place Arts presents “Up & Away,” through May 1, group exhibit about flight; “In the Place of Absence,” through May 1, woven mixed media by Gail Skudera, Second Floor Gallery; “De-Functioning the Functional,” through May 1, Karen Cygnarowicz, Chiyomi McKibbin, Hannah Morris, Angela Paladino and Laura Young explore waste, grief, desire, narrative, and communication, Third Floor Gallery; “The Whole WHIRLD Is Upside Down,” through April 3, collages by Ellen Urman, Quick Change Gallery, SPA, 201 N. Main St., Barre. Hours are: 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; private hours available starting at 3:30 p.m. (call to schedule); call 802-479-7069, or go online to [www.studioplacearts.com](http://www.studioplacearts.com)