

YELLOW SPRINGS NEWS

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A loo with a view: flush with high art in low places



PHOTO BY LAUREN HEATON

Nancy Mellon (left) and Corrine Bayraktaroglu peered over a bathroom stall this week at the ChamberPot Gallery art show they created in the restrooms at the Chamber of Commerce.

By Lauren Heaton

There is no place too sacred or profane for art in Yellow Springs, and the village's newest art gallery venue in the public restrooms of the train station that houses the Yellow Springs Chamber of Commerce, is a little bit of both. Starting next weekend, locals and visitors are invited to use and peruse their loo with a view, which for one year will display the works of 19 local artists who have given their art over to a different kind of showplace, affectionately known as the ChamberPot Gallery.

Local artist Nancy Mellon conceived of the idea for the most public of all galleries because she was noticing that people on the bike path would stop for a rest and a bathroom break at the train station and never step foot in the village, she said. Displaying art in the bathrooms would say something about the kind of town Yellow Springs is and, Mellon hoped, would draw people into town and make them want to experience more.

"We're a funky, arty town and what better place to show them than in the public restroom?" Mellon said.

Local artist Corrine Bayraktaroglu, who has taken to placing her own surprise art in public spaces around town, became enamored with the idea of creating an unusual space for artists to display their work. She and Mellon both wanted to support the idea that "the whole town is an art gallery," they said.

After getting approval from the Village Design Review Committee and Village Council, who had to approve the plans for the gallery located in a Village building, and the support of the Chamber of Commerce and the Yellow Springs Arts Council, Mellon and Bayraktaroglu solicited standard 24"x36" works on canvas from local artists to hang on the upper story wall of both the men's and women's bathrooms for one year. Half of the pieces will hang on the women's side and the other half on the men's side, and after six months, the art will switch sides.

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What the artists received was a variety of work both from people they knew and from local residents they hadn't known were artists, they said. Some of the submissions related to the bathroom theme, such as Bayraktaroglu's "Got Paper?" oil painting of a laughing ghostly clown head, Amy Achor's "Nature Calls" photo collage of the Yellow Spring and Rosie Huart's mixed media piece using toilet paper. They also received art not at all related to the theme, such as Jason Morgan's portrait of Thelonious Monk in a red wagon, and Parvis Dadras's still life on a windowsill.

Other artists participating in the ChamberPot exhibit are Anna Arbor, Sue Brezine, Shannon Crothers, Talitha Green, Leah Grommon, Patricia High, Jan Jackson, Matthew Laurenzi, Mary Peirano, Jean and Lance Rudegear, Stephen Rumbaugh and Ken Simon.

The gallery will host a grand opening during the Art Stroll on Friday, June 16, from 6 to 10 p.m., featuring guest appearances by classical guitarist Timothy Wolf, local poet Robert Paschel and hopefully a visit from the "toilet fairy." Organizers will also post porcelain poetry and joke jokes around the gallery, sell souvenir potty portraits, and have an hourly drawing to give away wacky bathroom related prizes.

Since Mellon and Bayraktaroglu began putting together the exhibit, they have learned a surprising amount about bathrooms, they said. For instance, there are many options to reference the commode, also known as the bog, the loo, the netty or the betty, as in "cloggy betty going to the netty," the john, the W.C., the crapper, the jakes, the thunderbox, and the list goes on.

Wanting to incorporate a little humor into their promotions, they went online and found whole cultures focused on potty talk, including a site called Bathroom Diaries that rates public restrooms and gave the train station a fairly high rating, according to Bayraktaroglu. The site also gives a golden plunger award for the best decorated bathroom, one Yellow Springs might aspire to once the art installation is complete.

The main objective for the ChamberPot Gallery is to continue to support local artists and promote their creative work to as many people as possible, said Mellon and Bayraktaroglu, who are both members of the YSAC. The arts community in Yellow Springs is strong, and it's part of what drew both of them to the village, they said. And the support they have received with this project has justified for them the town's reputation.

"I've never been in a place that has more support and embraces more artists," Bayraktaroglu said.

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