BOZEMAN

A SUMMER ART DESTINATION

by **MICHELE CORRIEL**



Motorhead | 24”x 24”x 8” | Found Objects | Steve Bormes | Old Main Gallery & Framing



I don’t trust nobody but the land | Layli Long Soldier | Tinworks Art | Photo by Blair Speed

Bozeman, quickly becoming an “art” town, shines in the summer. The doors fling open, windows open wide, and everywhere from Main Street to the side streets fills with art enthusiasts. This summer will be no different. Here, we take a deep dive into two establishments that fly the art banner high and proud.

This summer, Old Main Gallery widens their array of artists. Aside from the usual amazing art (barbed wire art, serious oil paintings, and contemporary ceramics), this year’s offering includes Steve Bormes, a one-of-a-kind assemblage artist whose work is only limited by his imagination.

Then we have a real treat with the seasonal opening of Tinworks, which never disappoints. The art space shows contemporary installation work from artists both local and international. This year, the shows center around the idea of land, landscape, and community, with very special installations by renowned artists like ecological/land artist Agnes Denes and photographer Stephen Shore. Don’t miss this one. You might even want to visit it throughout the season, June – October, to fully immerse yourself in these works.



Steve Bormes creating in his studio

Old Main Gallery

RECYCLED, REUSED, & REIMAGINED



Inside Steve Bormes' Studio

"I USE A LOT OF EVERYDAY ITEMS AND PRESENT THEM IN A DIFFERENT WAY; WHEN PEOPLE DISCOVER WHAT'S IN THE PIECE, THEY GET EXCITED. WHEN I'M SCOUTING AROUND, I START OUT WITH AN EMPTY SUBURBAN AND I EXPECT TO FILL IT. IF I SEE A RANCH WITH A LOT OF STUFF, I STOP TO SEE IF THEY'LL LET ME GO THROUGH IT ALL. I'LL USE PARTS FROM CARS, INCLUDING TAILLIGHTS, FENDERS, AND OUTBOARD MOTOR COWLS FROM BOATS."

–Steve Bormes, Artist



Buffa Lolo | 42"x 8"x 24" | Found Objects

Thanks to his love of spare parts, his sense of invention and a large dose of insomnia, Old Main Gallery artist Steve Bormes plays with ideas of utility and art. His assemblage pieces harken back to a time when broken things did not mean throwing them away.

"I use a lot of everyday items and present them in a different way; when people discover what's in the piece, they get excited," Bormes says. "When I'm scouting around, I start out with an empty Suburban and I expect to fill it. If I see a ranch with a lot of stuff, I stop to see if they'll let me go through it all. I'll use parts from cars, including taillights, fenders, and outboard motor cowls from boats."

Using the vernacular of mid-century cultural references, the contours of the 1950s and 1960s, Bormes' assemblages reflect a sense of nostalgic comfort while also being whimsically futuristic, like the first episodes of Star Trek. Through his collector's eye, his pieces take on personalities – whether it is a mask-like wall piece with colored lights emitting from the back, or aquatic life swimming in undiscovered waters – each one asks the viewer to consider it both as recognizable parts and as sculptures commenting on the many aspects of society.

For owner and gallery director Lindsey McCann, Bormes' work opened up a more humorous aspect of her prior sense of the gallery.

"My personal aesthetic and view on art has always been rather serious," McCann says. "However, after my recent cancer diagnosis, I've found my perspectives on many things changing, art being one of them."

Facing something as serious as cancer has McCann looking for the lighter side of art.

"Taking things too seriously narrows my life experience," she says. "Capital A Art isn't always a fine oil painting or highly-valued bronze sculpture. Art is a feeling, a story, a message, a path for connection and discussion, a way to build community, a laugh, or a tear. Steve's work is full of story, of connection to communities and for me personally, smiles. Every voice needs to be heard, it's as simple as that."



Pony Tale | 32”x48”x9” | Found Objects



Behe Moth | 59”x75”x31” | Found Objects

“MY PARENTS THREW US IN A 1970 WINNEBAGO. WE WERE JUST PILED IN THERE. THEY TOOK US MOSTLY TO ALL THE CHURCHES, THE ONES WITH COOL ART, AND GREAT ARCHITECTURE. WE STOPPED AT LOTS OF ART MUSEUMS. BUT I NEVER WANTED TO DRAW OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT.” *–Steve Bormes, Artist*

Although his work can bring about a feeling of joy, it also becomes a comment on our throw-away culture, our discarding of childhood dreams, and the celebration of pure imagination in a very tactile form.

For Bormes, the pieces “come alive” once they are plugged in when the light paints each environment beyond the boundaries of a piece. He likes to point out that when his pieces are incorporated into art collections, once the night falls, his pieces take center stage.

“I strive to combine components born of engineering with an artistic approach to light, to create pieces that both celebrate the original ingenuity of their creators and yet transcend a static presentation of that work,” he says.

It is hard not to conjure some kind of mad scientist, a friendly version of Dr. Doom bringing his spare part robots to life with light. Bormes works in his studio surrounded by vacuum parts, truck lids, rusty metal and shiny things, pieces of thrown-aside wood, spiky knitting needles, bullets, found nails and corn snouts (the triangular steel parts on the front of a corn combine that push between the stalks). At the moment, he admits to a VW Beetle fetish.

“I collect in my studio, storage unit, and trailer,” he says. “I look for cool shapes ... I really love things I’ve never seen before. New things attract me.” New to him, not brand-new, naturally.

Originally, from South Dakota, Bormes studied biology and math at the University of South Dakota. He also worked a variety of jobs including as a club bouncer, a communicable disease specialist, a salesman, a certified arborist, and an international textile and antiquities buyer. All these aspects contribute to his unique perspective on collecting and creating.

“When I started working on the reservations in South Dakota selling office supplies, I found myself drawn to the art,” he says. “No one ever talked about it back then. That lasted for six years. Then I started a tree business. So, I became an arborist, and I would talk to the owners into not chopping their trees down. Instead, I pruned them and made them look good.”

That seems to be a bit of a turning point for Bormes. He began making giant fish out of chicken wire and hanging them from the trees he worked on. “The art was just coming out of me,” he says. “I didn’t even realize it.”

As things go, Bormes met Hassan, a Turkish rug dealer. “I bought six rugs – they were another form of art.” Before he knew it, he was traveling with Hassan across the country selling Turkish rugs.

One day a restaurant owner asked him to refurbish their lighting. Because he was traveling to Turkey, and picking up things he found interesting, Bormes took antique butter churns from Turkey and hung them like a swag light. “I started putting groovy round holes in them and it was like the Flintstones meet the Jetsons. No one had ever seen anything like them before,” he says.

After two art professors told him they liked his work, he began to rethink everything.

“I let my hair down, focused on my assemblages,” Bormes says. “I wanted to be a hippie millionaire as a kid and that’s what I’m trying to be still.”

For his Montana show this summer, Bormes wants to make creatures. All kinds of creatures could be derived from his biggest inspirations like Chitty Chitty Bang Bang or Dr. Seuss. They could be imagined underwater fish from the deepest unexplored trenches. One thing they most definitely will be is straight from the mind of Bormes.

Bormes grew up in a family with eight children and parents who loved to travel and loved art.

“My parents threw us in a 1970 Winnebago,” he says. “We were just piled in there. They took us mostly to all the churches, the ones with cool art, and great architecture. We stopped at lots of art museums. But I never wanted to draw or anything like that.”

With eight kids there was no money. His father would have everyone collecting stuff from the neighborhood and together they built the thing they needed from scratch.

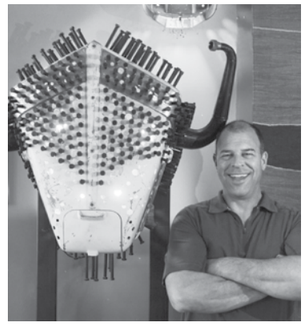
“My dad had a garage of vacuum parts, old telephone parts; he could fix anything with those pieces. It was more fun to create a hinge for something than to go the store and get one. It was a thrill. In my pieces, there are a lot of thrills like that.”

He came up with a name for the style of his work, “Prairie Funk,” he calls it.

When thinking about his Bozeman show, he is considering making caribou. “I have these gigantic motorboat covers, old snow skis that will be the antlers, with their twisted tips, and right now I have a hay fork in my hand, it looks like a big machete with two handles. If I make this caribou, he might have that for his spiky hair.”

Taking inventory of his collection around his studio, of the spare parts and springs, doohickies and gismos, Bormes knows he’ll create pieces that are just waiting to be made. ■

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Scaredy Kat | 11”x18”x12” | Found Objects



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