

'Art in the Orchard'

Exhibitors cultivate unusual setting

By STEVE PFARRER
Staff Writer

IT started in 2011 as a kind of experiment: Put some art amid the trees and pastures of a working orchard and see what happens.

From that modest beginning, Easthampton's "Art in the Orchard" exhibit has gained a good amount of momentum and visibility. The now-biannual show is back for the third time with an expanded list of contributors who have created a wide variety of outdoor art — from freestanding metal and steel sculptures, to trees whose knotholes are embedded with precisely cut mirrors, to a colorful structure created from plastic spools that once held fabric.

The exhibit, which opens Thursday at Park Hill Orchard and runs through Oc-

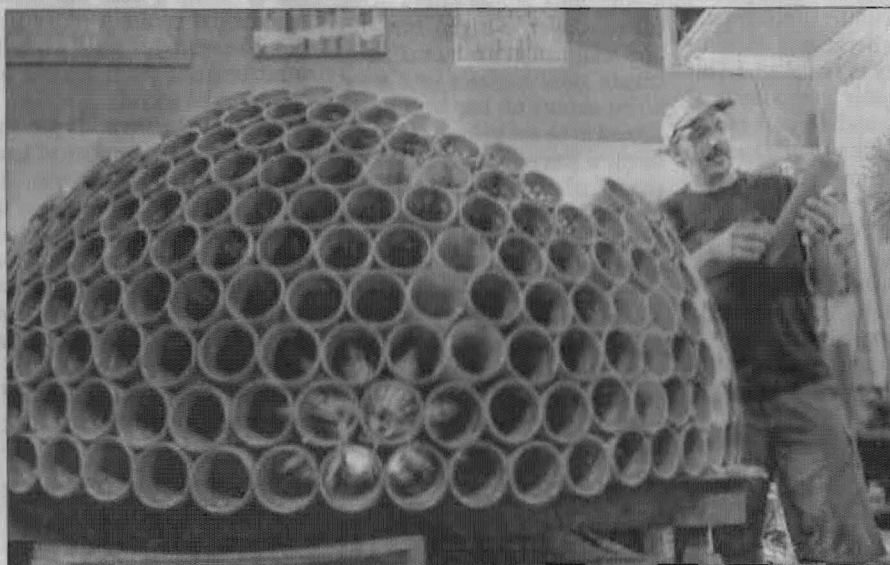
tober, has again been organized primarily by Jean-Pierre Pasche, the owner of Big Red Frame, an Easthampton framing shop, and orchard owners Russell Braen and Alane Hartley. Pasche said their efforts have been helped by numerous volunteers and other artists.

This year, for the first time, a jury made up of six local artists, business leaders (including Pasche) and community members reviewed almost 50 applications for the show, eventually settling on 28 designs.

"We had planned on having just 22, but it's hard to say no when you have so much variety," Pasche said. "We have more visibility today, so we're getting more applications, including from artists outside the area."

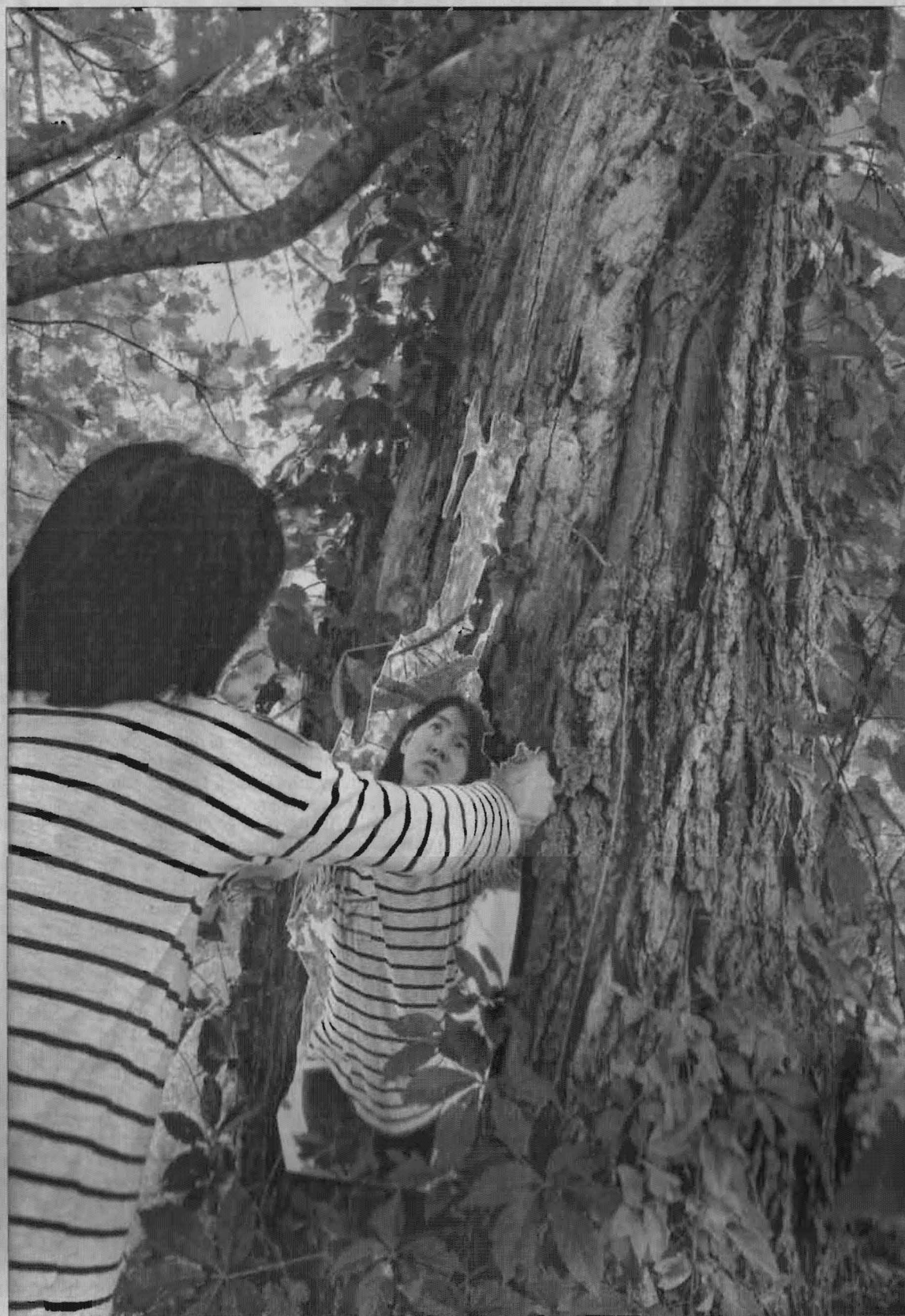
When the first "Art in the Orchard" ex-

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KEVIN GUTTING

Westhampton artist David Poppie is taking advantage of the tapered shape of surplus plastic cones, originally designed for spooling thread,



KEVIN GUTTING

Florence artist Sue Huang positions a piece of precisely measured laser-cut mirrored acrylic she's about to install into the cavity of a tree as part "Invisible Piece: Mirrors I," her



KEVIN GUTTING

Sue Huang installed pieces of laser-cut mirrored acrylic into the knots and cavities of a trio of trees at Park Hill Orchard in Easthampton.



KEVIN GUTTING

Piper Foreso's contribution to "Art in the Orchard" will be a series of metal and glass characters she calls "Multidimensional Intergalactic Friends." In late July, one "friend" stood near a window in her Easthampton studio, nearly ready to go.

'Art in the Orchard' — a community experience

Continued from C1

hibit opened in 2011 — a somewhat ad-hoc operation, Pasche jokes, that was put together on the fly — the work of fewer than 20 artists was featured. But the number of applications and pieces jumped at the exhibit in 2013, and visitation shot up to over 15,000 people over the two-plus months the show was in place, he noted.

"The response was really quite good," he said. "I think people enjoy the experience of walking around a very beautiful natural setting and seeing some varied art. ... Russell and Alane have done a wonderful job in restoring the orchard, and they've been great hosts [for the exhibit]. It's just a really good community experience."

As in the two past exhibits, art in the current show has been set out along a trail that snakes through the orchard's grounds, which offer an excellent view of Mount Tom. Braen and Hartley, who bought the orchard about eight years ago — it dates to 1923 — have extensively reworked the land and planted new trees. Park Hill offers 43 varieties of apples and a range of other fruit, from pears to peaches to cherries, and it also has a farm stand and pick-your-own offerings.

Sponsored by local businesses, a grant from the Easthampton Cultural Council and visitor donations, "Art in the Orchard 2015" will also offer some special events, like a moonlight walk.

Sculpture of 1,000 pieces

For many participating artists, returnees and well as newcomers, "Art in the Orchard" gives them a chance to do something different, and to display their art in an unusual setting. For David Poppie of Westhampton, who makes 2- and 3-dimensional structures from everyday objects — colored pencils, cutlery, matchbook covers — the new show let him use items he'd had in storage for years: narrow, 12-inch plastic spools, or spindles, that once held yards of thread.

"I got them from one of the old mills in Easthampton about six years ago," Poppie said recently as he worked in his studio on his sculpture, called "Burst." "I was sure I'd want to use them someday — I just didn't know for what, until now."

The narrow, tapered spools, of several different colors, are full of small holes through which thread was once wound. Poppie had lashed hundreds of them together with plastic zip ties in a giant circle, 6 feet in diameter and about 3 feet high; he figured the design would eventually incorpo-

rate about 1,000 of the pieces.

Since Poppie generally designs his pieces on a smaller scale, predominantly for indoor installations — last week he was simultaneously working on a wall design made up of fragments of old rock album covers and pictures set on a dark backdrop — he was enjoying the chance to do something different for the Easthampton show, even though he was racing to finish on time.

"I told my wife, 'You're not gonna see a lot of me the next few days,'" he said with a laugh. "I'll be in to use the bathroom and eat and that's about it."

Mirror, mirror

On the southern edge of the orchard, Sue Huang of Northampton has designed a very site-specific piece. In various crevices and knotholes of two isolated trees that stand close to each other — and in the crumbling, stunted trunk of a dead tree in between them — Huang has fastened slivers and odd-shaped pieces of mirror.

To make what she calls "Invisible Piece: Mirrors I," she took photographs of the various spots on the trees she wanted to use, then created digital drawings of them; a fabrication shop transposed the drawings to laser-cut pieces of thin, acrylic mirror material.

Last week, the artist had pulled

a ladder alongside the small cluster of trees to see how the pieces would fit. She had about a dozen in all, including an elongated one with several odd bumps and projections that resembled a giant jigsaw puzzle piece; it was designed to fit a section of thin, papery bark on the dead tree that had a cavity of the same dimensions. The pieces of mirror would be edged with silicone to keep them in place and prevent damage from rain.

Huang, who teaches part-time at Smith College and specializes in mixed media art, said her design was inspired in part by walks she's taken near her home.

"I've done outdoor installations before, but not something that was so specifically connected to nature," she said. "I came out a few months ago and walked through the orchard, and when I saw these trees, I thought this would be good spot to work with."

And because the pieces of mirror are of varied size (one is 48 inches long), and placed in knotholes and other spots up and down the tree trunks, Huang added, "I think you'll get a different perspective from wherever you stand."

A family of humanoid

Piper Foreso, a Florence sculptor, is a seasoned vet of "Art in the Orchard." She displayed her work in the past two exhibits,

and in 2013 she won the show's "People's Choice Award" for the most popular design, a 14-foot dragon made of aluminum strips cut from old beverage cans. This year, Foreso has returned with another imaginative design made largely from found materials.

"I'm calling it 'Multidimensional Intergalactic Friends,'" she said a few weeks ago in her Easthampton studio at 1 Cottage St.

Foreso, who wields a welding torch and metal-working tools like other artists flash a paintbrush, uses steel rods and plates, wire, old agricultural implements like harrow wheels, and glass to make a variety of sculptures. Humor is a regular component of her work, too, and it's part of her new design — three freestanding, vaguely humanoid figures, including a smaller "childlike" one, that form a sort of family.

The idea behind the art, she said, "is that there's no need to judge people by appearance. I call them 'friends' because you don't have to assume something's threatening because it looks different."

Foreso has also embedded cast glass — thickly cut glass of varied colors — in the figures. The glass will be lit by LED lighting at night, and between that and refracting sunlight during the day, "I think [the art] will have a changing look."

'Art in the Orchard' — the particulars

"Art in the Orchard" opens Thursday and will remain on view through October at the Park Hill Orchard, 83 Park Hill Road in Easthampton (parkhillorchard.com).

Other local participating artists include Sally Curcio of Northampton; Pat Bennett, Laura Reinhard, both of Florence; Gerald S. Clark III and Anne LaPrade, both of Hadley; Trisha Moody-Bourbeau

of Deerfield; and Susan Halls, Matt Evald Johnson, Fletcher Smith and Chris Woodman, all of Easthampton.

In addition, smaller works by some of the participating artists are on exhibit through Sept. 4 at the Elusie Gallery (part of Big Red Frame), 43 Main St., Easthampton, in the old Town Hall building. For information, visit www.bigredframe.com.

Fusing glass

Another Cottage Street artist, Eileen Jager, designs furniture and wall sculpture by fusing intricate glass mosaics with wood. Since almost all her work is designed to be set indoors, she said, doing a piece for "Art in the Orchard" offers her an opportunity to do something completely different — "Something for myself, in a way."

For the Easthampton exhibit, Jager has created "Chalice and Blade," in which she's attached hand-blown glass bottles with an old scythe; the piece will hang from a tree. She sees it as em-

bodying both feminine and masculine themes, and the bottles can almost create a musical effect, like muted chimes, when the wind brushes them against one another, she added.

An avid gardener, Jager says she's created a number of small sculptures from old tools, like shovels, for her garden over the years. But that's about the only time she varies from her main glass work, she says, which gives "Art in the Orchard" a special appeal: "It's really exciting to create a piece of site-specific art."

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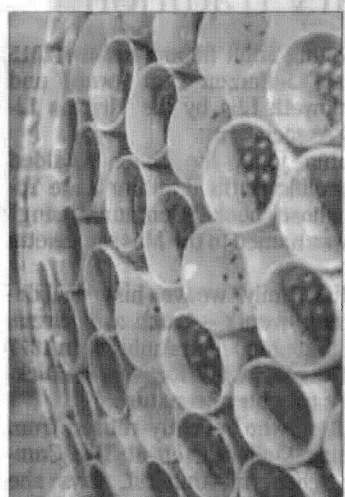
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David Poppie, who found these spools in an old mill about six years ago, says he was sure he'd use them someday. "I just didn't know for what, until now."