

PHOTOS BY DONA KOPOL BORNIK

## UNDER THE BIG TOP

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Everybody loves a circus. Lions, tigers, daredevils, clowns and jesters are the things memories are made of for children of all ages.

Now through May 5, nowhere in the valley is the spirit of the carnival in more evidence than in the main gallery of the Napa Valley Museum in Yountville. Connoisseurs of all things under the big top will find their dreams and wishes fulfilled through a special exhibit presented by the museum titled "Cirque du Vin."

Following the juried guidelines set forth by Napa Vintner's Association, sponsors of the Napa Valley Wine Auction 2002, 27 area artists created original works of art under the theme, Revelry in the Vineyards, to be auctioned off as a part of this year's wine auction. A small portion of the sale of each piece will go to the artist, while the lion's share of the proceeds will be added to the coffers of what has evolved into the world's largest charity auction.

Depending on the breadth of the subject matter, the danger of a theme exhibit lies in the manner in which the artists interpret their marching orders. To broadly interpret the theme yields pieces that are only marginally connected to the focus of the exhibit. Too narrow of an interpretation ends in repetition of subject matter, no matter how isolated the artist's working environment may be when they approach their work.

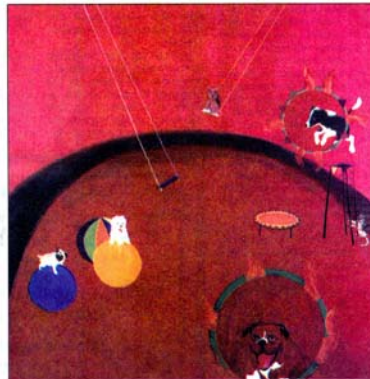
There's a little of both here. Some of the artwork seems to be better suited for exhibition in a completely different setting. In many of the others, the circus motif demands the presence of clowns, circus rinks, high-flying trapeze artists and the prerequisite animal cast of characters. I counted no less than three harlequin jesters among the 27 pieces on display — let's not even mention the number of clowns present in many of the pieces — but that's OK. Ultimately, this is a delightful exhibit about the circus and the wine.

Having made note of this minor flaw in the exhibit, these are some of the valley's finest artists. The artwork in most of the pieces is exquisite. The colors are extraordinarily vivid, reminiscent of the purples of the merlot grape at harvest, the greens of the grapevines in late summer and the yellows of a field spread for as far as the eye can see with the yellow of mustard plants in spring.

Fundamentally, this is an exhibit about color and the world of circus with a very modern twist. There are surprises throughout the exhibit — some downright outlandish, but all the more alluring for their bizarre and

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Pictured here are some of the works featured in this year's Wine Auction art show. Clockwise from above: "Cru Magique" by Ib Larsen, "Circus Act" by Marvin Humphrey, "Moonstruck" by Ed Ian Grant, "The First Trans-Valley Crossing by a Motorized Floating Machine" by Dave Huddleston, and "Acrobatics" by Angela Tirrell.



# Art

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exotic dealing with the circus theme.

Dave Huddleston's, "The First Trans-Valley Crossing by a Motorized Floating Machine," is a case in point. One of many memorable pieces in the exhibit, Huddleston is an artist who has it all — most supremely — talent and a wicked sense of humor. Any attempt to describe his cast of "circus characters" would be woefully inadequate on my part. His brush work, composition and attention to detail is a must-see for any lover of art in the area.

Jocelyn Audette's "Esther," on the other hand, falls under the sumptuously exotic category. Audette captures on the surface of her canvas the spiraling motion of a twirling rope and the performer suspended from it high above the crowd. Her use of red, green and black pigments is a bold statement that adds depth and a unique richness to the surreal quality to the painting.

Speaking of surreal, Ib Larsen's piece, "Cru Magique" is by a far among the best in the show — and most unusual. Tight-rope walking on the circus theme boundaries, his interpretation of Salvador Dali as a bigger-than-life personae brings to mind childhood memories of the awesome and mysterious — some-

times menacing — power of the clown. Larsen's mastery of his art is evident here in spades. Beautiful, hard to define and utterly fantastic, Larsen's "Cru Magique," like Huddleston's "Trans-Valley Crossing" is worth the trek up valley just say you've seen his work.

Throughout the exhibit, local artist reveal sides of their talent not often seen in what Valley art aficionados have come to expect from their works. Angela Tirrell's, "Acrobatics," is an excellent example.

Known for her intriguing abstract works, Tirrell instilled a heavy dose of whimsy in the Cirque du Vin piece she has on display at the museum. Her subject, circus of the dogs, howls with a crimson hue that fits the

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fanciful nature of the work. My only hope is she gives her Valley fans more of the same in the future.

While the above are only a fraction of the pieces in the exhibit, the energy and excitement of this show is genuine and a great follow up for the museum on the heels of the wildly popular American flag exhibit which closed last month. Well worth the time and effort for a visit to the

Yountville location, Cirque du Vin will make you laugh and bring to memory the joys of the big top and the excitement the circus evokes in us all.

The Napa Valley Wine Auction runs from June 6 to June 9. As a non-profit organization, the wine auction supports a variety of local causes. Since its inception in 1981, the auction has funneled \$36 million dollars into to local health organizations, programs

dedicated to providing affordable housing and youth development for area residents.

The Napa Valley Museum is located at 55 Presidents Circle, on the grounds of the Veterans Home of California in Yountville. Admission fees are \$4.50 for adults, students and seniors \$3.50, youth — ages 7 to 17 —

\$2.50 and children under age 7 free. Museum hours run from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday through Monday. Call 944-0500 for more information or log on to [www.nvavalleymuseum.org](http://www.nvavalleymuseum.org).

Admission is free every Monday. **Gary Brady-Herndon can be reached at 256-2219 or at [gherndon@napanews.com](mailto:gherndon@napanews.com)**