

KIRRA KENT/Photo

Visual artist Kirra Kent combines her special attachment to donkeys with her love of Arizona in Sunset Sweethearts.

Conversations, VASA's new exhibition, offers lots to talk about

Twenty-five members of Visual Arts Studio Association converge with paintings that echo diverse artistic visions

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There's a new board at Visual Arts Studio Association (VASA) and they're shaking things up and ramping up a lot of interest with their latest exhibition.

Conversations, composed of 25 VASA members, is astounding in its vast spectrum of artistic styles, subject matter and materials. At times, while attending the Sept. 4 opening, I wondered how the diversity of paintings could coexist within the same walls while still expressing their individuality.

Judging by the crowd's interest, the exhibition was deemed to be extremely successful. While many paintings were playful and whimsical, others projected more serious, questioning tones with slightly harder edges.

For instance, Gail Seeman's two realistic, representational paintings are a celebration of feminine beauty, grace and imagination. Seeman's concept of feminine beauty is featured through *Serenity of Nature,* a painting of a young woman sitting on a deck chair during early sunrise, her eyes completely closed as if she's dreaming. Two birds sit on her outstretched hands, while, poised at her feet, a cat surrounded by flowers gazes at the two birds. Breakfast?

Instead, *Garden of Creation* shifts from the present to an idealized heavenly world blending Greek and Roman mythology with today's realism. The painting's focus is a majestic woman dressed in a yellow Roman toga with a wreath of flowers crowning her black hair. The garden itself is packed with florals while planets float through time and space. It is easy to imagine she is a goddess walking through the Garden of Eden while planets float around her.

"They are part of series that represent women in idealized situations," said Seeman. "I became interested in Greek and Roman mythology, reading about it as an adolescent. By painting, I have been able to explore mythology beyond what I could manifest in my own life," said Seeman.

On the other hand, Kirra Kent puts new meaning behind her two acrylic paintings of a celebrity cuttlefish and a quintet of donkeys. Fascinated by the animal world, she has a master's degree in science specializing in arachnology, the study of spiders.

Upon completing a stressful dissertation, Kent decided to decompress by painting. One of her earliest paintings is *Depth of Perception* of a cute pink cuttlefish wearing 3D glasses, one blue lens and one red lens. The comedic lens pairing inspires the viewer to wonder if a fish sees the world differently, wearing glasses.



GAIL SEEMAN/Photo

Gail Seeman's representation of femininity and beauty in Garden of Creation takes on ehtereal overtones.

"I've always loved art, and I've always loved 3D movies. I spent three to four hours drawing the cuttlefish at Monterey Bay. By adding the glasses to it, I get people's attention to my art, and I get to do my science thing."

Her second piece of art, *Sunset Sweethearts*, is a line of five donkeys each with its own distinct personality. Behind them, the orange glow of the setting desert sun warmly contrasts with their grey coats.

"Donkeys hold a special place in my world. There was a place in Arizona I used to go to. I remembered the scenery, and I used a photo from Royalty Free Group to make sure the donkeys have the right body shape."

Instead, Dianne Jackshaw's two acrylic-on-canvas paintings reflect her artistic spontaneity. A self-taught abstract fluid artist, she explores the chemistry of poured paint on a surface and how it can be manipulated into creating divergent designs.

Jackshaw is a health care practitioner and turned to art as a de-stressor. She clicked on to YouTube for arts-related activities and came across videos of artists pouring paint and using a variety of tools to blend the colours.

"I'm crafty, but I'm not very good at drawing. When I saw this, I said, 'I think I can do this," Jackshaw said.

Two of her paintings currently hang at VASA, *Fantasy* and *Geode*. She uses the colours teal, blue, gold and magenta for both. But she's implemented different tools to create special effects that make the paintings look completely unrelated.

In *Fantasy*, Jackshaw spread paint, waving a blow dryer back and forth across the canvas, leaving the effect of stormy waves.

"When I worked on this painting, I was thinking of Disney's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. With *Geode*, I layered the paint in a cup and made circles. Because the paint was very fluid, I tilted it on the canvas until I had the design I wanted."

Byron McBride, a University of Albert art and design alumnus, creates dynamic and quirky experimental style using acrylic on wood panels. Tired of working in a rectangular format, he challenges himself by designing triangular frames.

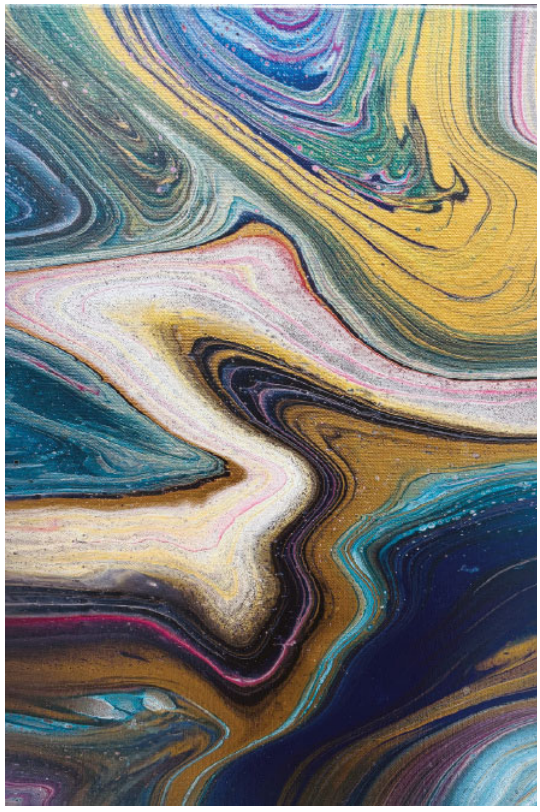
His paintings are filled with incongruous images in bold colours that somehow flow into compatible surreal worlds. *Bermuda Triangle* anchors together several triangular sheets of plywood painted over with a sailing ship, dinosaur and puzzle pieces, creating a techno vibe.

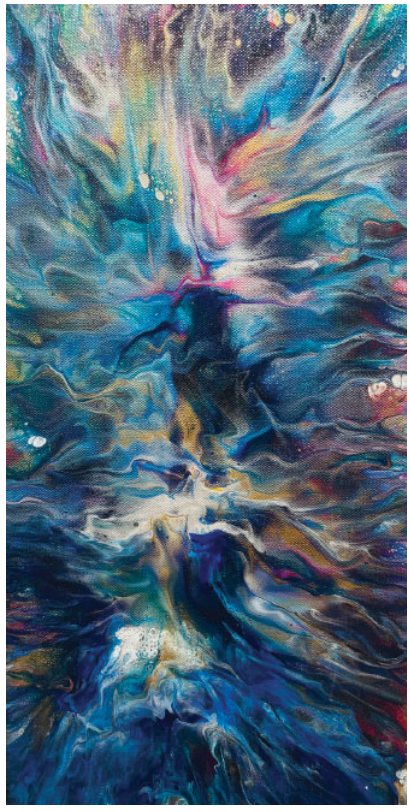
Triangular Earth Society, a tongue-in-cheek jab at Flat Earth Society, depicts a steamship sailing to the edge of a triangular world. Hidden under the ocean is an octopus eyeing its prey as the ship is about to reach the edge and sail off the world.

"I like to express the fun of movement and the vibrancy and motion in art," McBride said, adding he enjoys a vivid imagination.

"My Dad was into the supernatural and he'd watch documentaries on the Bermuda Triangle. It was interesting. The physics behind it was abnormal or bent and it played into my imagination. The fascination stuck, and I have my Dad to thank for it."

Conversations can be viewed at VASA until Oct. 25. ■





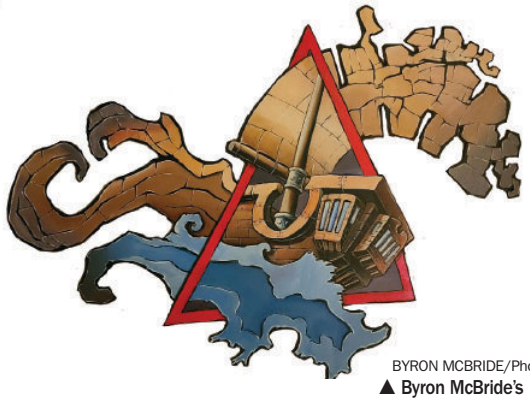
DIANNE JACKSHAW/Photos

Far left, Geode, Dianne Jackshaw's poured painting, starts with acrylic paint in a glass poured over a canvas to create a wide swath of swirls. Left, Dianne Jackshaw's Fantasy is poured paint over canvas manipulated by a hand held blow dryer.



GAIL SEEMAN/Photo

Gail Seeman celebrates femininity in her painting title Serenity of Nature.



BYRON MCBRIDE/Photos

▲ Byron McBride's The Bermuda Triangle takes on a surreal vibe that is open to interpretation.



◀ Byron McBride takes a light-hearted mocking tone to the Flat Earth Society in his version of The Triangular Earth Society.

KIRRA KENT/Photo

▼ Kirra Kent's Depth of Perception takes the viewer to the underwater world of saucy cuttle fish.

