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## ArtStart presents its summer exhibition

'A Tiny Rivulet in the Distant Forest' features over 20 Midwestern artists



**Evan Verploegh**  
Features Reporter

Though summer in the Northwoods is famous for participation in a slew of outdoor activities, stormy weather inevitably puts a damper on this from time to time. ArtStart in Rhinelander provides an opportunity to expand one's mind to encompass characteristic artwork, art education, roots music concerts and distinctive events.

ArtStart has spent the last six years in efforts to bring big city opportunities to small town residents - and people love them for it. Development director Melinda Childs hails from the Twin Cities in Minnesota, making this plight personal to her.

"It's really exciting to me that ArtStart is able to bring in artists, curators and exhibitions from around the Midwest that are of very high quality and different than what we normally do not have the opportunity to see up here," Childs said. "That would hold true for this exhibition, as well. Normally you may have to travel to Minneapolis, Madison or Chicago to see contemporary art such as this - and that's what we're trying to bring to people of the Northwoods."

Childs went on to say for this particular exhibit, "A Tiny Rivulet in the Distant Forest," having an outside curator travel to Rhinelander and give an unique approach to ArtStart's gallery space allowed the project to flourish beyond its usual perceived boundaries.

"What he (curator Michael Velliquette) did, in my opinion, completely transformed the space. He looked at it in a different way that our exhibition team does," she said. "Having a fresh perspective and an outside perspective was fantastic."

The work in the exhibition is seemingly designed to evoke emotion. "A Tiny Rivulet in the Distant Forests" is marketed as "work dealing with the nature of matter, sensation, perception, reaction and consciousness." That would be entirely accurate. But the exhibit can also go as far as tapping into our most simple, primitive emotions - joy, fear, anger - it is an series of artwork that truly makes you feel.

Saturday, June 3, hosted an opening reception for the exhibition at ArtStart. Those in attendance were treated to words from both exhibition coordinator Laura Ehmann, and exhibit curator Michael Velliquette. Several of the featured artists were also present, where they discussed their process and personal vision for their displayed pieces.

"This exhibition, for me, is a culmination of what we dream of here at ArtStart. We're talking about the work of 23 artists - not only from the Midwest, but from North Carolina, Texas and other areas of the country. The best part about it was I didn't have to do it!" Ehmann said, drawing much laughter from the crowd.

Velliquette was a featured artist at ArtStart a couple of years, to which Ehmann in turn asked if he would ever be interested in curating a show. Velliquette enthusiastically agreed.



Photos by Evan Verploegh/Lakeland Times

Curator Michael Velliquette discusses his vision for "A Tiny Rivulet in the Distant Forest" at the June 3 exhibition opening reception at ArtStart in Rhinelander.



Liz Miller of Good Thunder, Minn., is one of 23 featured artists in "A Tiny Rivulet in the Distant Forest," which runs May 26 through Aug. 12 at ArtStart in Rhinelander.

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"And here we are. I'm constantly surprised by the generosity of artists. I can't believe we ask, and they come. This gallery is becoming one of the cornerstones, and one of the foundations of our community," Ehmann said. "You all (the visitors) and the artists have helped us do this, and for that I'd like to thank you."

Velliquette is a mixed media artist commonly known for works using cut paper. He currently has work displayed across the country - from Seattle to Boston - and also works as a faculty associate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Velliquette was born in Phillips before his family moved to upstate New York, returning later to Superior, Wisconsin. These Wisconsin roots gave Velliquette the zeal to present Midwestern artists and showcase their perspective on the world at large.

In terms of physical demographics, 14 of the featured artists are based in Wisconsin.

"In terms of personal demographics, they're basically all my friends," Velliquette said, to a laugh from the crowd. "It's true - most I know from the MFA program at UW-Madison, and some I know from past curatorial processes or experiences. This was an opportunity to pull them all together."

Velliquette said when he was asked to do the show, having a theme in mind and then choosing artists to fit that theme was not the format. In fact, it was quite the opposite.

"My curatorial style is to generally foreground the selection of works with people I'm interested in getting to know better - it's really about a personal relationship to the artist," he said. "I picked the artist first and then talked with them over the course of a couple of months to see what they would be interested in showing and what I thought would add an interesting perspective to the exhibition."

Rather than curating, Velliquette said he generally prefers to think of his process as organizing, or a middle ground between the two. Because of that approach, the show took on a quite expansive nature. With a variety of mediums explored, the onlooker has the opportunity to have their own preconceived notions about art challenged in a thoughtful way.

"There are things on the floor, there are things on the wall, and there are things directly on the wall. There are things hanging from the ceiling, vertical things and horizontal things. There are colorful things, monochrome things and achromatic things. There is representational work and abstract. Narrative and non-narrative. Things that are made, things that are altered, things that are found," Velliquette said.

The show's title assures the visitor there is in fact a cohesive idea within the exhibition. Velliquette said "you can't get much broader than that," when referring to the show's billed description. 'A Tiny Rivulet in the Distant Forest' is a phrase he picked up from an article by scientific philosopher Abraham Flexner where he discusses the "usefulness of useless knowledge."

"He analyzed the importance of scientists pursuing their research for its own sake. Free of any concern regarding the research's value or its concrete application," he said. "He suggests that these discrete areas of research coalesce over time into bigger scientific breakthroughs."

Velliquette said he was struck by the concept of the idea, beginning with a trickle and gaining momentum over time, until it became a more substantial force.

"This exhibition ultimately became about routing all of these streams of these individual artists into a torrent," he said.

Velliquette succeeded in this concept and was able to create an exhibition giving viewers a chance to dive into torrential waters and explore concepts and thoughts of individuals, and then analyze how they fit into the grander scheme. Gaining momentum before becoming a true pioneering entity mirrors exactly what ArtStart has done for Northwoods creative beings.

"'A Tiny Rivulet in the Distant Forest' is ArtStart. This place is wellspring of creative of expression for a place that can feel quite distant if you're not from here," he said.

Velliquette has managed to put together an exhibition that truly represents what value an imaginative place like ArtStart can bring to a community like the Northwoods.

Featured artists in "A Tiny Rivulet in the Distant Forest" include Jordan Acker Anderson, Josh Anderson, Lynda Barry, Rachel Bruya, Scott Espeseth, Joey Fauerso, Andrea Ferrigno, Leslee Fraser, Michelle Grabner, John Kowalczyk, Shane McAdams, Liz Miller, Trent Miller, Mollie Oblinger, Riley Robinson, Rafael Salas, Gyan Shrosbree, Geoffrey Todd Smith, Trina May Smith, Claire Stigliani, Michael Velliquette, Hilary Wilder and Jeremy Wineberg.

The exhibit runs from May 26 to Aug. 12. ArtStart is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday to Saturday.

On June 15, ArtStart will host Charlie Parr in their latest Roots Concert Series performance beginning at 7 p.m. On June 22, ArtStart presents their Bling Out! 2017: a summertime fashion and fun event at the Quality Inn in Rhinelander beginning at 4:30 p.m.

ArtStart will also be hosting youth drama day camps and art classes throughout the summer months

For tickets, or more information about ArtStart, visit [artstartrhinelander.org](http://artstartrhinelander.org) or call 715-362-4328. ArtStart is at 68 S. Stevens St. in Rhinelander, WI 54501.

Evan Verploegh may be reached via email at [everploegh@lakelandtimes.com](mailto:everploegh@lakelandtimes.com).

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