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CENTERPIECE

(VIDEO) Florham Park artist looks at the world differently through photography, mixed media, jewelry

By CHRISTINE LEE Editor Feb 13, 2019



Florham Park resident Jennifer Hughes has some of her photographs hung at the Ridgedale Avenue home. Her work h OnBound, the gallery at Valley Arts, both in Orange, the Watchung Arts Center.

Photos by Christine Lee

FLORHAM PARK - When resident Jennifer Hughes wants to take a photo of someone, she doesn't just want to capture someone smiling.

"I want to give people an idea of who they really are, project their story," she remarked.

Hughes, of Ridgedale Avenue, is an artist specializing in photography and mixed media, specifically alcohol ink and acrylics. Instead of painting with acrylics, she pours the material and rolls it on a canvas. The alcohol ink is spread on paper using a hairdryer.

She says mixed media “adds another dimension” to her photography.

“I always have the urge to paint my photographs or put them on a block and make them into some kind of sculpture,” Hughes remarks.

Once the art is complete, she creates jewelry out of her photos and art by shrinking the piece and putting it in a dome.

“It’s either a mini painting or photograph,” she explains.

Her work has been displayed in exhibits around the state, including at the Florham Park Public Library on Ridgedale Avenue.

An exhibition of her photography, “Passage,” is up at The Gallery at the Summit Free Public Library at 75 Maple Ave. in Summit until Sunday, March 31.

Originally from Ramsey, Hughes says she was always interested in art, but didn't pursue the medium until later in life.

After graduating from the University of Vermont, Burlington in 1995 she moved to Berkeley, Calif., staying there for five years. In 2000, she enrolled at the Academy of Art College, San Francisco, studying motion pictures and video.

Even though she intended to produce documentaries, design and still photography were part of her coursework. Shortly after graduating, she moved to New York City, taking a job at HBO.

While working in the television industry, her interest in art grew. Hughes took classes at the International Center of Photography in Manhattan and worked for event designer Barb Salzman, owner of Hatch Creative Studio in the city.

"I started to get more and more into it," she recalls, "started taking more pictures."

Hughes credits Salzman with pushing her to be more creative.

In 2011, she moved back to New Jersey with her husband, Steve Lettie. The couple has resided in the borough with their son, Quinn, 7, since 2012.

Hughes describes the move to New Jersey as “full of change,” and it spurred her to take photos. All the time, she adds, when she could.

It has only been in the past few years that she began thinking of herself as a working artist. She credits a workshop taught by artist Sarah Walko at Visual Arts Center of New Jersey in New Jersey with planting the idea of doing art full-time. Walko focused on marketing artwork in her workshop.

Hughes says Walko was impressed enough with her pieces to have have them displayed at galas and exhibitions.

The first place Hughes showcased her work was at Cuozzo Hair Studio at 79 Main St. Her art has also been displayed at Arts OnBound, the gallery at Valley Arts, both in Orange, the Watchung Arts Center, and was a featured artist at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey’s “Culture Crawl.” She launched a website, conjureimages.com, to showcase and sell her work and sells her jewelry on the e-commerce website Etsy.

In addition to art, she works with children and families with Good Grief, a Morristown-based non-profit organization that helps families who have experienced the death of a father, mother, brother or sister. In the future, Hughes said she hopes to combine art with her work at the organization.

‘Flaws And Imperfections’

When taking photos, she loves taking to the streets and candid shots of people. Hughes uses a Canon 5D Mark 4 camera.

"I love when they let their guard down, drop that mask and show you themselves," Hughes remarks, "and they're not really aware of it."

She feels society is "inundated" with glossy, aesthetically pleasing pictures, which she said she feels "don't feel real."

"I love flaws and imperfections," Hughes observes.

When a viewer looks at her photos, she hopes they can see their story in the image. She is also fond of abstract photography, focusing on form as opposed to content, photographing close-up shots of an object's texture and grouping items together.

Scale and perspective are played with in her photos, as Hughes says she "likes to throw the viewer off a little bit."

For instance, she uses a macro lense photograph something tiny, like a bug, and make it appear larger in scale in the picture.

"I like to play around with things and throw the perspective off a little bit," she says. "It makes someone curious."

She admires photographer Diane Arbus' ability to create an intimacy with people in the fringe of society in her photos. Other inspirations are photographers William Eggleston and Stephen Shore. Hughes said she likes Eggleston's ability to make everyday things extraordinary.

Going forward, she says she doesn't have a concrete business plan with her work, but confident that everything will work out.

"I'm on the right course," she remarks. "It all feels right, even though I don't know what the plan is."

"I feel like I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing."