

DAILY SOUTHTOWN

Art galleries at area community colleges offer culture, inspiration to underserved communities



Patrons view "A Broken Crayon Still Colors" by Antonia Ruppert during a 2023 exhibition at the Robert F. DeCaprio Gallery at Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills. (Mollie Burkiewicz/MVCC)



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When Beth Shadur assembled a recent art exhibit at Prairie State College, she combined the work of two artists whose interpretations of female power could speak to the novice and art connoisseur alike.

It was a task that required expertise in curating exhibits as well as a love of art.

"Sometimes when I put work together, I put it together because it feels like it would work together visually, sometimes it's more based on content, themes or something like that," said Shadur, who has been the director of Christopher Gallery at the college in Chicago Heights for a dozen years. "Sometimes there will be work where the mood is very similar. That's why I think about these relationships. You can tip it either way."



Banners showcasing photography by Ginny Sykes are part of the exhibit "Power" at the Christopher Gallery at Prairie State College in Chicago Heights. (Janice Neumann/Daily Southtown)

The thought behind exhibits goes well beyond just tacking artwork to a wall, or placing sculptures.

At Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills, the community gets a say in what is featured in the Robert F. DeCaprio Gallery. The process includes faculty and students, but it is led by longtime exhibition preparator and gallery coordinator Daniel Jarvis.

“We love to showcase artwork that oftentimes challenges our visitors to change their point of view on a topic or presents a traditional artistic medium in a new and exciting way,” said Jarvis, who has helped with exhibitions since he was a Moraine Valley student 20 years ago. “We also strive for diversity and inclusion when it comes to the work we exhibit and always aim to represent a wide variety of cultural and artistic viewpoints through our visiting artists.”

The gallery also features an annual High School Art Exhibition in the spring and yearly Juried Community Art Exhibition from artists 18 and older who live in a 50-mile radius of the college. Jarvis said they also try to reach a variety of people, whether students, faculty or art lovers from all over Chicagoland.

A recent exhibit by artist David Wischer called Remember Me for 30 Days did just that.

“Art is a universal communicator that has the power to cross language barriers and connect with people on a deeper level,” said Jarvis, an artist, photographer and musician. “Our mission is to present significant works from local, national and international artists who have something profound to communicate through their work, whether it be happy, sad, or at times, even comical.”



Sculptures by Lilach Schrag are featured in the exhibit "Power" at the Christopher Gallery at Prairie State College in Chicago Heights. (Janice Neumann/Daily Southtown)

At Prairie State College, the current "Power" exhibit, which started during Women's History Month and ends April 11, includes Chicago artists Lilach Schrag and Ginny Sykes. Sykes' work includes photographic banners of women from her project 100 Women: Collaborations Beyond the Veil, which she began in 2016. Schrag's art shows six figures from Greek mythology, biblical mythology and folktales, including sculptures and murals.

"I just think it's a spectacular project that has great sensitivity. It really does show the power of women, all of these women standing regally, looking very powerful," Shadur said. "Lilith's work has a very primal feeling to it and so when I was thinking about the idea of power and expressing the idea of women's power, I felt her work fit right in with that."

"She looks at women throughout history and many of them based on myth and talks about the essence of power within these mythological women."

Shadur, also an exhibiting artist in her own right, does paintings mainly in water color with a little mixed media and is working on a National Parks project "that looks at the human impact on pristine landscapes."

Galleries at community colleges offer a cultural outlet for people who may not have access to fine arts otherwise, while helping to inspire students to create their own art, she said.

"Many are the first to go to college in their family, so they might not think of an art career as viable," Shadur said. "I want them to see all the possibilities and try to vary the exhibits so they can see a wide variety."

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