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Raising the Roost

🕒 September 15, 2016 👤 Sam Manzella 📁 A&E 💬 0



Photo by Sam Manzella.

I ascend the stairs behind an open door on Main Street with a bit of hesitation: the entrance doesn't look like much, and the orange sign hanging above the open door leaves me with few expectations. I emerge into a vast, airy studio loft converted into a hip modern art gallery. The cool air from buzzing overhead fans is a welcome break from the summer heat, and my sensory experience is made all the more wonderful by the diverse collection of art lining the gallery walls.

New York City-based artist Michael Stewart was a featured summer artist at Roost Studios, an art cooperative and gallery on Main

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Street in downtown New Paltz, New York. Roost Studios regularly highlights artists from their cooperative in a spacious, chic rotating gallery adjoined to a gift and fine art shop.

A practicing member of Roost Studios' collective, Stewart works in a variety of mediums; his summer 2016 solo exhibition and mini-retrospective featured ceramic pieces and abstract multimedia collages. The exhibition ran from Thursday, Aug. 18 through Tuesday, Sept. 13.

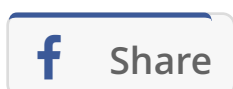
Roost Studios' open gallery — accented by chic hardwood floors, high ceilings and exposed brick walls — is thoughtfully laid out. Stewart's collages of watercolor on paper stood out against the gallery's stark, white walls, allowing his use of bold colors to shine. The artist works with vibrant hues of blue, orange and green in a way that falls just short of gaudiness. For better or worse, some of his larger collages are the kind of works one would find in the home of a Brooklyn-dwelling hipster. Still, Stewart's work has a decidedly modern feel to it, incorporating elements of Picasso-esque cubism and mid 20th-century abstract expressionism.

The real highlight of Stewart's summer exhibition, though, was his collection of ceramic masks. Finished with a variety of brilliant glazes, the ceramic visages are uniquely expressive. Stewart's ceramics channel dramatic theatre masks of antiquity. The artist carves wrinkles, crevices and smile lines into the faces with expertise, animating the masks to the point of tasteful caricature.

Seven of the masks on display were part of Stewart's "Seven Deadly Sins" series, which shined in its own right. The facial expressions Stewart chose to portray each deadly sin did not always align with my expectations. The artist toys with an overdone concept, ensuring his ceramic series does not fall prey to tired clichés.

Art lovers can stop by Roost Studios at 69 Main St. in New Paltz or visit their website at roostcoop.com for updates on upcoming exhibitions and events.

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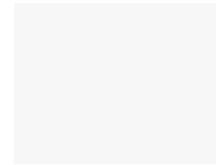
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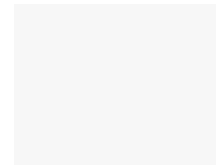
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