

## At SM Home Art Gallery, a new art exhibit packs a punch

By Alexandra Villarreal Updated 5:58 pm, Wednesday, October 4, 2017



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Camilla Cook, left, and Sandra Morgan stand near a work by artist and photographer Janice Mehlman of Brooklyn, N.Y., titled "Inappropriate Entanglements," that is part of the "Punch & Sizzle" art show featuring ... more

GREENWICH — Sandy Morgan always saves the New York Times arts section that heralds a new season. It excites her — the promise of novelty that comes with change. To her, autumn is a second New Year's, chock full of hope and enthusiasm.

So for her gallery's fall show, Morgan has decided to encapsulate the freneticism and vitality of new beginnings by forging a few of her own with painters and photographers from throughout the East Coast. Through their shared passionate pastels, dynamic angularities and dramatic compositions, five artists' diverse styles converge in "Punch and Sizzle," which runs at her SM Home Art Gallery through Nov. 18.

Monique Lazard, Brooke Maples, Janice Mehlman, Beth Munro and Katie Ré Scheidt are all new to the gallery. Though their works span from abstracts to figurative paintings to florals and have no unifying theme, they are in dialogue because of their pull toward color and life.

When Camilla Cook, associate art director at the gallery, curated the collection, she thought of a few words: "Lush, seductive, playful, exuberant, unexpected."

"It was all of those adjectives that seemed right for the new season," Morgan said.

The descriptors eventually landed on a gallery invitation, in a whimsical yet refined font that is reflective of the exhibit itself. Cook also named the show. When she threw "Punch and Sizzle" out as a prospective title, Morgan said, "That's it!"

"The words do mean something, but it's more a feeling and a mood. We're not serving punch," Morgan joked.

"We wanted to shake it up a little bit. Just inject a little bit of energy and vibrancy," Cook said. "Just give it a little edge, a little something."

Janice Mehlman, a photographer who splits time between New York City and Pietrasanta, Italy, may be adding more than a little edge to Greenwich. Her newest series features abstract photographs of her lingerie, structured in a way to seem almost biological, like veins and arteries.

"I'm looking into myself a lot this year, and I'm thinking a lot about my sexuality," Mehlman said. "I think this body of work has a lot of angst in it."

The series includes some 17 photographs, three of which will be on display at Morgan's gallery. It is making its debut in Greenwich.

In the past, Mehlman primarily focused on structures in her art, often in black and white. But slowly, she incorporated color over the years, and now her photographs burst with strong, eye-catching hues.

For her latest series, she said, "I just sort of started an exploration. They're very, very different than my previous works, even my previous colored works."

Cook said Mehlman "represented a niche we didn't have." The gallery has presented photographs before, but they have tended more toward seascapes and shorelines.

"Janice's work was very vibrant and architectural," Cook said. "We felt that it would be a nice counterpoint to the things we have here."

Lazard's still lifes could not be more different.

"They're traditional," the painter said. "They're conservative. They prove non-offensive. They make you happy, they're happy paintings. I think it fits into the lifestyle in the sense of the good life. They're feel-good paintings."

Hailing from Miami, Lazard uses more representative, impressionistic techniques. Though she has painted a myriad of subjects — including the Cuban landscape during a trip to Havana in January 2016, sponsored by PleinAir Magazine — she said Morgan was drawn to her bouquets. And she understood the pull.

"I think the paintings, the florals, really speak to people," she said. "Everybody loves flowers, let's face it."

Unlike more typical exhibition spaces, SM Home Art Gallery, on Arch Street, feels like a house. The art looks how it might inside a habitable place and not the whitewashed environs where it is sometimes shown.

"People can imagine what the work would look like at their home, over their sofa," Cook said.

Still, Morgan — who painted when she was in school — said art serves a larger role than mere decoration. To her, it's part of life itself.

"It records moments that we don't want to forget, that we may not have noticed," she said. "But it's essential. It's like breathing."