

Irons, refrigerators, and The Cronks are all part

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AUBURN — Some social commentators have called it “nesting.” The desire for Americans to concentrate on their homes, their families, and if they have one, their hearths.

Think of June Cleaver wearing her matronly dress, usually with a string of pearls, readying the milk and cookies for her sons’ afternoon snack.

The Schweinfurth Memorial Art Center’s latest exhibit is a celebration of our need for contentment. It’s titled “Domestic Bliss: Refrigerator Art & More,” and opens 1 p.m. Sunday.

The idea for the show originally came from board member John Latanyshyn, a banker by day.

“It was kind of a joke. We were kidding around one day, and he made a comment about a refrigerator art. And a light bulb went off, and we thought, ‘This isn’t such a bad idea,’” said Donna Lamb, the museum’s executive director.

The door didn’t close, the bulb stayed on, and Lamb began to expand on the theme of domesticity. “It’s about how artists interpret the idea of home,” she said.

Watch the crumbs

Nancy Callahan hails from the Oneonta area, and her work is titled “Must You Eat Crackers in Bed.” Her space is split into dueling bedrooms — a messy, chaotic side, and a neat, sparse side.

Callahan got her inspiration from different sources.

“My mother does eat crackers in bed, and it drives my father mad,

yet they have been married for over 60 years,” she said. “And I have to admit that I’ve eaten more that one pretzel in bed while glaring a bright light in my ex-husband’s eyes as I read until 1 a.m.”

The Schweinfurth put out a call for entries to be included in Domestic Bliss. A mailing was sent to area artists, a total of 10 were ultimately selected. It was the first time the museum had used such a process.

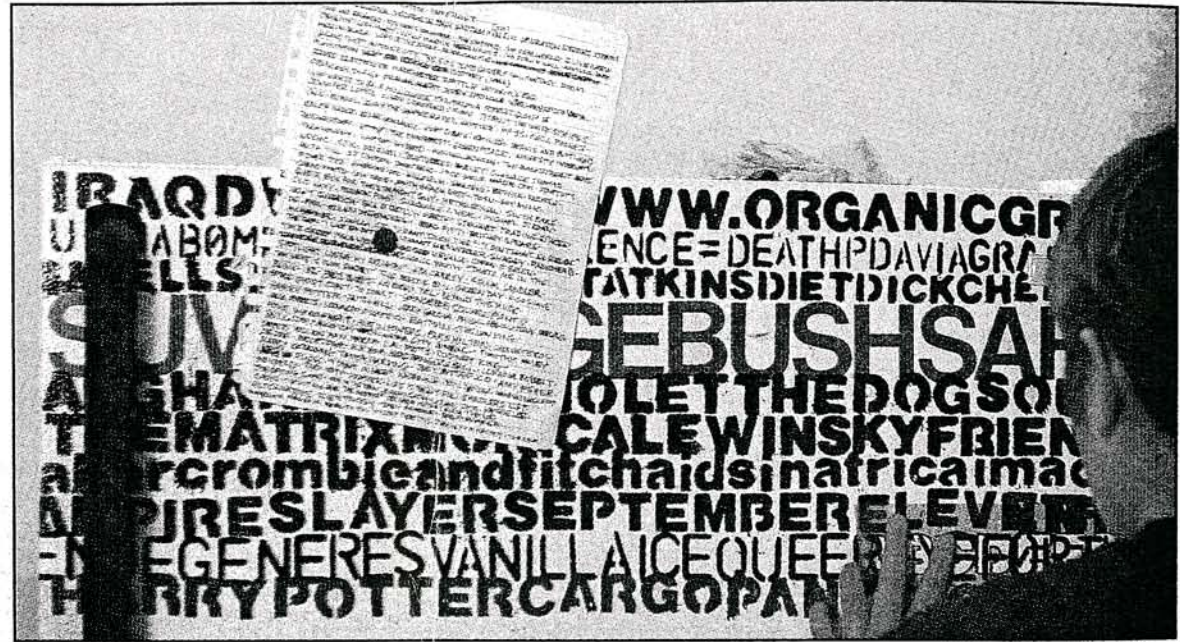
Two of the works involve photography. Richard Margolis of Rochester has more formal photos, pictures of dining room scenes that represent different holidays and cultures — such as Thanksgiving and a Passover Seder. Ithaca’s Stafford Smith takes a more light-hearted approach.

“It takes idealized images from the ‘50s and ‘60s and does some funny things with them,” Lamb said.

Smith was a stay-at-home dad with his first daughter, after a stint in television production, and it was his job at home that was the influence for his Domestic Bliss project. His pictures take place in the kitchen, where “there is a lot of irony and drama.”

“I wanted to create strange little Tableau Vivants that are about the twists and turns in domestic relationships that lurk beneath the polished surface that we are so careful not to show to friends and neighbors,” said Smith, who is currently working on his master of Fine Arts degree in photography at Cornell University.

There’s also activities for visitors, a series of refrigerators in the center of the main display room that allow adults and children to work



Jeff Costello / The Citizen

Local artist Amy Chamberlain, one of the contributors to the ‘Domestic Bliss’ exhibit, puts words on one of several refrigerators she painted for the show. According to Chamberlain, this piece is a statement on the chaos of information overload in recent years.

on their own piece. You have the “Create a Landscape” fridge where cross-sections of the world around us can be mixed and matched. There’s also a poetry fridge, using phrases and different cut-out images.

Work on the exhibit has been going on the past three weeks. Usually Lamb and her staff have only five days in between exhibits, but because of renovation being done this winter, much more time was available.

“It gave us time to do some more elaborate installation work that we don’t normally have time to do,” Lamb said. That’s been

especially beneficial for Amy Chamberlain, Terry Cuddy, and Jesse Kline, three Auburn artists working together to tell the history of a somewhat typical American family, the Cronks.

Meet the Cronks

Chamberlain was busy Monday painting the last of the Cronk family’s three refrigerators.

The first, representing the two decades after World War II, is an older model painted with just three words in large block letters, “Eggs, Milk, Meat.” The second is a colorful, slightly-psychedelic model,

and the third uses a series of block letters with phrases from the 90s and today.

“By the end, it’s just going to be a craziness of words, an overload of information,” Chamberlain said. “People, events, song lyrics, catch-phrases.”

There was a piece of lined notebook paper taped to the fridge, dozens of phrases written in black ink such as “George Bush, Reebok Pump, low carb, cargo pants, Harry Potter, the White Stripes.”

Her collaborators made suggestions for the list, and Chamberlain said that sheet was just a starting off point.

If you go:

• “Domestic Art: Refrigerator Art & More” opens Sunday, Feb. 1, at the Schweinfurth Memorial Art Center, 205 Genesee St. The show runs through March 28. A reception for the artists will be held from 3 to 5 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8.

For more information on the exhibit, visit

www.cayuganet.org/smac.

• The Schweinfurth is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and from 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. Suggested admission is \$3 for adults.

Chamberlain has worked on projects with Cuddy before, but never with Kline. She has done murals in her home, however, and “she has offered suggestions once in awhile,” she said.

“What I’m trying to do, most of all, is put things that should be more important next to things that shouldn’t,” Chamberlain said. “In our minds, because we’re such consumers, harassed by commercials with everything an advertisement, that’s just the way it comes out.”

Upstairs, Cuddy and Kline were busy assembling a timeline of the Cronks’ life together since the end of WWII, information on historical events interspersed with images from the Cronk family photo album and short vignettes of their everyday lives.

“We leave it up to the viewer’s imagination of how the text relates to the images — which member

of the family is this person, for instance,” said Cuddy, who described the images as both “intimate and mundane. These are glimpses into both world history, and the personal history of this fictional family.”

One photo is of a white teacup perched on a man’s stomach, shot from above, taken by Kline of a friend years ago. “That’s domestic bliss for you,” she said.

Inside the boundaries of the timeline, in the center of the room, there are several tables displaying the pop culture artifacts the Cronks have saved over the years. There’s an accumulation of records, dolls, magazines, and family portraits.

For the three artists, having the time to work at the museum itself was a rare luxury.

“Usually artists just send their pieces to be installed,” Kline said. “But to be able to pull this together, makes it more special. It makes it more spontaneous, because we’re reacting as we go along.”

But while their work evolves, Kline said there was a significant amount of planning prior to getting hands on. She and Cuddy sketched it out thoroughly, figured out how the timeline would work.

“Ferry has been great to work with. This is a great opportunity to work together,” she said. “We’re having a ball. We’re having too much fun.”

Lamb was enjoying herself as well Monday. She’s happy with how the exhibit has come together.

“It gives people the idea that art doesn’t just have to be in a museum. You can have art in your kitchen,” Lamb said.