

keep up with the pulse of what's happening – not just in Westport, but globally.

The current exhibition, *Landscape Scenel Re-seen* is a good example of visually presenting themes involving current issues which engage the public. During says, "We were very fortunate in having access to one of the world's pre-eminent art collections from Andrew and Christine Hall of Southport. The Landscape exhibition features works by 20 major contemporary artists whose works are in the collections of MOMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney, Tate Modern and even the Pompidou in Paris. Each artist explores the way we look at landscapes today as they are impacted by man's footprint. As collector Andy Hall says, "Man's impact on his surroundings today is so vast that it would be absurd to ignore... But beauty resides in unlikely places. Even the utilitarian structures we have created in order to make possible our modern world pose their own grandeur and sculptural qualities that merit documentation."

"Integrated programming is part of every exhibition," says During. "We are using the landscape as a springboard to get people thinking about the place of art and environment in their lives, what is precious and the danger of man's imprint. The Westport Arts Center collaborates with many local organizations such as Save the Children, Westport Library, Westport Country Playhouse and Americares. For Landscapes they will partner with the Nature Conservancy in an integrated program, "Nurturing Nature" on July 19. The Nature Conservancy CT Chapter is concerned with both local issues such as dam busting and watershed with the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound, as well as global conservation, especially in Brazil, says chairman John Levison." Other WAC programs include Summer Farmer's Market, Wednesday Talks on July 11 and 25, August 8 and 29 where participants discuss the environment and art while enjoying lunch with local food purveyors on the Center's riverside deck, and on August 3, a talk with Stacy Bass, author of *In the Garden* and Moffly Media publisher, Gabriella Mays.

"We're poised to have a meaningful effect on how people engage with art and community here," says Van Heerden. "It's a critical time for the arts center to be concerned with what's happening in the world. And it feels like the right calendar time to be doing things – it's summer, people are going outside and becoming more aware. The landscape is shifting a lot – from global to local."

A second provocative exhibition, "Foodies" will open with a reception on September 14 and run through November 4. It is one of two annual juried shows for member artists. Jurors will be prominent people in the food industry including Pat Callaghan, president of Pepperidge Farm, Stew Leonard Jr., and chefs Bill Taibe of Le Farm and The Whelk, and Michel Nischan

Art of Exploration

A rewarding journey at the Westport Arts Center *by Nancy Helle*

"ART IS NOT JUST PICTURES on the wall", says Helen During, Director of Visual Arts of the Westport Arts Center. "It's about how about how you look at them, how you think about them," attests Peter Van Heerden, the Center's Executive Director. "The purpose of art is to make you think; Good art should do this." A native of South Africa, Peter was previously involved in education and the performing arts as a teacher of film, TV and multi-media at a Capetown college specializing in theater, film and performance.

His introduction to the Westport Arts Center (WAC) was a visit to the Friday morning Arts Café, a popular weekly event launched by During. A native of New Zealand, Helen has been working as an international art advisor and curator for over 20 years. She was Gallery Director of the Silvermine Guild Arts Center prior to coming to Westport Arts Center in 2010, a year ahead of Peter.

Bringing new perspectives, both have traveled extensively, have wide interests and are

passionate about the arts, happy to share their enthusiasm and creativity in thinking outside the box. Planning provocative exhibitions and events to engage the community is their modus operandi. Thanks to this dynamic duo – often called "The Dream Team", it's a small wonder that WAC has become the "IT" destination for people of all ages and walks of life who want to



The Westport Arts Center's Helen During, Director of Visual Arts, and Peter Van Heerden, Executive Director, at the Westport Art Center's gala event, the Warhol Ball.



Joel Sternfeld, Grafton, Looking West on 30th Street on a September Evening, 2000, 2000, Digital C-Print, 39-7/16" x 49-7/8". Image: Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

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spark conversation, such as Helen’s recent documentation of the Artfair at the New York Amory. This is also true of the popular monthly Happy Hours from 6 to 7 p.m. on the riverside deck. Discussions evoke many perspectives at both events as participants include art lovers, artists, collectors, nannies and people of all ages who just want to catch the scene in congenial surroundings. The website: wesportartscenter.org also has an Arts Café blog where interested parties can weigh in on different topics. Reaching

children is another priority. Through close ties with the Westport director of education, During says, “We either bring children here or we go to them. Either way, the arts center has a very vital presence.”

“We’re not stuffy; people like to come because it’s fun,” she proclaims. “We’re having fun doing what we’re doing and have a chance to be creative – not just frivolous, but thought provoking.” Van Heerden adds, “Our mission is to connect the community through the arts. Westport Arts Center plays a vital role in engaging members of the local community and keeping them informed and active in the arts.” (Both Peter and Helen agree that coming to a gallery is really an exploration. During likes to quote T.S. Eliot who said:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

T.S. Eliot -- “Little Gidding” Waste Land (the last of his Four Quartets)

Peter Bialobrzeski, Paradise Now #28, 2008, C-Print, 51" x 63". Image: Courtesy of Laurence Miller Gallery.

of The Dressing Room. The concept is much broader than just going green – it’s about sustainability. Van Heerden notes that both the Landscape and the Foodies shows generate the same kind of thinking – you need the landscape to get food – you can’t have one without the other; they’re both precious commodities.

During describes “Foodies” as a celebration of our members and people who live and breathe what they do. WAC is partnering with the Green Village Initiative. GVI is a grass roots non-profit created in 2008 to create environment and systemic community change through local action to spread community awareness. There will be several special events at the center with all food sourced from local farmers.

In addition to events integrated with exhibitions, the Center hosts many ongoing programs to engage the public. The Friday morning Art Café, replete with Helen’s homemade muffins, explores current topics in the art world both locally, regionally and around the world. There is always a presenter and frequently a video to

