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# The Long Island ADVANCE <sup>(/)</sup>

Long Island Advance



## **An exhibit of two friends and artists**

**'John Perreault & Mark Van Wagner Exhibit' at Marquee Projects**



(/uploads/original/20210707-114426-adv Marquee Projects Perrault and Van Wagner .jpg)

**Curator Beverly Allan Starke & Mark Van Wagner at Marquee Projects gallery's new show, "John Perreault & Mark Van Wagner." The show will run to Aug. 1.**

ADV/LEUZZI

Posted Thursday, July 8, 2021 12:00 am

### **Linda Leuzzi**

The usually art-evident storefront window of Marquee Projects in Bellport was obscured on Friday afternoon, the day before the "John Perreault & Mark Van Wagner Exhibit" opening.

"We thought we'd start teasing people," said curator Beverly Allan Starke.

But inside, the clean, fresh walls and space of the intimate gallery were gloriously graced with "Scratch Paintings," canvasses by *Village Voice* and *The SoHo Weekly News* art critic John Perreault, who died in 2015; and "Sandboxes," sculptures by his friend and gallery owner, Mark Van Wagner.

The two had forged an affectionate and admiring friendship before Perreault's death, but that story will come later.

There are five of Perreault's creations in the main room and seven of Van Wagner's; the window, when unfurled, would feature several more.

But the feel inside was transcendent.

Perreault's work utilizes "clean white acrylic paint applied to insulation panels," as Starke described the process. "They're drawn into and scratched upon with free-form fluid gesture marks. John made these the last three years of his life."

As for Van Wagner's, "There's something volcanic about them," Starke said. "The colors are intense and bejeweled. They sparkle and teeter. They're not attached."

Van Wagner uses pigmented sand, gathered from beaches around the world. He applies the sand to cardboard boxes, compressed with a vice, and then formed. There are clumps of little stones and sand, inverted lumps and holes. The sand colors ebb, swirl and become more intense, but hues are utilized as well, black and purple, blues and blue greys, lime green and red cardamom. The boxes are moveable.

(This journalist was asked to move one. Uh-uh. Accidently drop a wonderful creation? Not on your life.)

"I started thinking of life cycles," he said of his sandboxes. "There's probably billions of particles of sand in each piece being reassembled; then they're put on recycled cardboard boxes."

A session talking with Van Wagner and Starke is akin to an art lesson. They peer at the works, think a bit, and comment, always coming up with a new insight.

"The interesting thing about John's work is that he was an art critic and poet, and these are abstract essays to me," Starke said.

Starke is modest and downplays her role. She had a gallery in Greenpoint and Jersey City and owned a restaurant. Exhibits took place in her Brookhaven home for a while. "I had a valet parker; then it got really crazy," she said, so those ended. Starke curated Van Wagner's inaugural show in Bellport with Perreault's work in 2017, "It's Only Art."

Van Wagner has always been upfront about his reticence to feature his work at his own gallery. But Starke, who curated Van Wagner's very first exhibit here, convinced him.

"Mark and [his wife] Tonja approached me about doing a show," Starke said. "I said, 'I want to show *your* work, too.'"

Did it take two bottles of good wine? The promise of a good dinner locally?

"I had to go slow with them," Starke said. "I had to circle my prey."

Pairing Van Wagner's work with Perreault's work seemed like a natural.

Van Wagner had seen Perreault's work when he and his wife, Tonja, lived in Kauai, and wrote the artist of his admiration and the fact that they had chosen similar topics; Perreault wrote back via email and the communication continued from there. They did a show together at the Kauai Museum in 2011; that sealed the friendship.

"I'm familiar with Mark's work," she said of the joint exhibit. "It really took my breath away. There's his many years of being an artist, and you've been making art for how many years?"

"Forty," said Van Wagner. (His sister has his first piece from when he was 5.)

The exhibit drew a crowd.

"There were 75 to 100 people who came to our opening, and people stayed beyond the closing time," Van Wagner said after the opening. "We ushered them out at 7:20 p.m."

## Comments

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