

Under the Influence: Catskill Art Circle Defies Boundaries



From left: Robin Factor, Mary McFerran, Patrice Lorenz and Gail Freund celebrated an exhibition of their work in a show called *Women Under the Influence* that opened at ArtUp Gallery in Margaretville Friday, June 5. The four women belong to the Catskills Art Circle formed last year.
J. LAWRENCE-BAUER/THE REPORTER



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By J. Lawrence-Bauer

MARGARETVILLE - The natural beauty of the Catskills has long been a sanctuary for creators, but a compelling new exhibition at ArtUp Gallery proves that nature is only half the equation. The true catalyst for artistic evolution might just be conversation. The exhibition, “Women Under the Influence, officially opened with a bustling public reception Friday, June 5. Running through June 28, the show features the diverse works of the Catskills Art Circle, a collective of ten female artists formed in early 2025. United by a shared goal to deepen and expand each artist’s practice through research, discussion, and an ongoing engagement with art, the group has brought an astonishingly varied multi-media showcase to Margaretville.

The gallery walls and pedestals teem with a wide array of disciplines, ranging from acrylic gouache on paper and board mounted on panel, to traditional oil on canvas, to cradle board featuring hydrangea interwoven with torn paper. The exhibition also heavily features tactile media like encaustic, plant matter, and handmade paper, cut and woven paper and mixed media on paper.

Despite their unified presence, the artists are quick to note that they do not paint together in the traditional, en plein air sense. Instead, their bond is intellectual and structural.

“The exciting part is we are so different,” said Robin Factor of the work. “But you know what we... I think what we come together with is kind of the idea of equality. So it doesn’t have to be abstract, it doesn’t have to be non-representational, it just has to be good,” explained the abstract artist.

Factor’s pieces in the show, including one titled “Leaving Gilboa,” reflect her personal evolution since moving to the region. Coming from a background in non-objective minimalism, the local terrain forced a dramatic shift in her perspective.

“Well, so they’re landscapes, as far as I’m concerned,” Factor said. “I consider them landscapes, but they’re obviously kind of deconstructed. So I take elements that are part of it, and then put it together in a more, maybe contemporary way... looking around the landscape was like unbelievable ... and yet how fragile everything is, so I felt like I had to respond to it.”

Factor, who notes she has “always loved maps” as a way of “locating yourself,” describes her current work as a “false map” that connects an internal landscape with the external world. She cites legendary modernist Hans Hofmann as a major

historical influence, but credits the group for expanding her contemporary horizons.

Out of the Habitual Zone

The Catskill Art Circle meets physically every month, rejecting digital substitutes like Zoom, to foster deeper, more organic conversations. Each meeting is hosted by a different member who selects an artist of influence to study, sending out articles and interviews beforehand for the group to critique. Collective members Mary McFerran and Gail Freund emphasized how this rigorous academic approach keeps their work dynamic.

“We meet every month and talk about art, and we have learned through this experience that we are influenced by what we’re reading and seeing, of course, and each other,” McFerran said. “So we thought, well, maybe we should try to get a grant to put together a show and share with the community what we’re doing.”

Freund added that the physical nature of their meetings is vital.

“Because we’re 10 of us, one person’s a writer, Patricia Wadsley, and our work is extremely different, as you can see. So the fact that we meet physically together, as opposed to Zoom or some digital form, one conversation leads to another, and we’re also exposed by whoever hosts the meetings for discussion. It may be someone that I’ve never paid attention to, knew about, or liked their work, so it takes you out of your unusual habitual zone and it opens up a lot of new ideas.”

When asked about her own inspirations, Freund noted that living here can help, while she also draws from her travels, such as visits to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

McFerran, whose background includes textile arts, noted how the painters in the group have fundamentally shifted her focus back toward modernism and anchorage concepts she hadn’t considered since college. “I do think I’m under the influence of the land. I wouldn’t say landscapes. I like to find things, you know, the shapes,” McFerran said.

Material Explorations

For artist GG Stankiewicz, a full-time area resident since 2022, the influence of the environment manifests directly through her medium. Stankiewicz contributes rich, highly textured encaustic works; a complex process combining heated beeswax and oil pigments.

“I’m a materialist geek. I love working with all kinds of materials,” Stankiewicz laughed, though she noted a recent shift toward sustainability. “I’ve moved in the

direction of working with eco-friendly materials... I'm now moving the direction back with eco-friendly pigments. Also, like, I'm making paper from local plants, foraging plants to create pigments."

Her subject matter remains deeply tied to the local flora of Delaware County. Stankiewicz echoed the sentiment that the diversity of the group's media is its greatest strength. "If you look at the exhibition, you can see we all work with varied materials and our styles are different, right? So that says something about the artist we would look at... I learn about that artist, I may not, my work may not, look like that, but I may be inspired by their process."

In addition to Factor, Freund, McFerran, Wadsley, and Stankiewicz, *Women Under the Influence* features celebrated local artists including Beth Casper, Cena Pohl Crane, Patrice Lorenz, Sheila McManus and Amy Masters, offering a sweeping look at the region's contemporary female voices.

ArtUp Gallery will host a live panel discussion featuring the artists on Sunday, June 14, from 2 - 4 p.m. The public is invited to attend, ask questions, and experience firsthand the dialogue that shaped this remarkable collection. For more information visit artupmargaretville.com