

Art show turns Roanoke store into a Grateful Dead zone

By Mike Allen | The Roanoke Times



DON PETERSEN | Special to The Roanoke Times

Christy Starchild, owner of the downtown Roanoke store Ripple, shows examples of the work by Grateful Dead photographer Robbi Cohn and rock 'n' roll poster artist Richard Biffle

An upcoming Roanoke art show offers Grateful Dead fans — in fact, all fans of rock and roll from the Age of Aquarius — a trippy nostalgia trip.

Robbi Cohn, an official photographer for the Grateful Dead, and Richard Biffle, a painter who's created posters and album covers for numerous bands including the Dead, will exhibit and sell their work together at Ripple. Both previously have shown work at the store, which owner Christy Starchild describes as "a counter-culture bazaar, a hippie general store, a psychedelic boutique."

Starchild, 42, used to be a travelling vendor at Grateful Dead rock concerts, as well as with acts like Furthur — made up of members of the original Grateful Dead — and Widespread Panic, a newer band in the Grateful Dead mold, prone to long instrumental jams.

"I've been in this business 15 years," she said.

After three years of the nomadic concert vendor life she founded a permanent store in Greenville, N.C. A Roanoke native, she moved her business to the Shenandoah Building in Roanoke in 2011; the next year, she relocated to the old Seeds of Light location at 112 Market St. S.E., across from the Roanoke City Market Building. The store sells T-shirts, stickers, jewelry, posters, tapestries, glass pipes and other items.

Starchild, whose maiden name is Koren, acquired her thematically perfect last name in June when she married Joringel Starchild, son of Roanoke artist Judith Starchild. She got to know Cohn and Biffle during her touring years. "We consider ourselves family," she said.

At present, Cohn, of North Carolina, is the only photographer officially licensed by the Grateful Dead. She became the first photographer to receive a license from the band in 1984, although she'd been sneaking her equipment into concerts and taking unauthorized photos well before then. She shot many shows and even got invitations to rehearsals, despite what she has described in interviews as an "adversarial relationship" with band publicist and biographer Dennis McNally. Her website at deadimages.com sports photos captured during 10 years of Dead tours, showcasing all the band members.

Biffle, a California native who lives in Virginia Beach, created many posters for the Grateful Dead and provided the cover art for their live album, "Truckin' Up to Buffalo." Like Cohn, he got started selling his art at the band's shows as he followed their tours across the country. He's also created posters for Carlos Santana and bands such as The Black Crowes and The Doobie Brothers.

Both artists will be present to sign their work. The signings take place at Ripple on Feb. 8 from noon to 6 p.m. and Feb. 9 from noon to 5 p.m.. For more information, call 492-9878, email rippleroanoke@gmail.com or visit the Ripple page on Facebook.

Art assemblages

Signature 9 Gallery in Roanoke will open an exhibition Feb. 7 by Deer Island, Maine, artists Patricia Wheeler and J. Fred Woell, a married couple who create art from found objects.

Woell makes jewelry that combines precious metals and photos with castoff items such as watch pieces and soda can tabs. He has work in the collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Museum of Arts and Design in New York.

Wheeler builds assemblages out of wood and paints in layers mixed with joint compound. She attaches things she finds to her paintings and makes frequent use of "river teeth," objects created when the log from a coniferous tree is worn down by river current until only the knots remain.

Roanoke County artist Nancy Stark, one of the founding members of Signature 9, said she and her cohorts have gotten to know Wheeler and Woell through annual retreats they take to Deer Isle.

The opening reception, at which Wheeler will be present, takes place during the next Art by Night gallery tour on Feb. 7 from 5 to 9 p.m. in Roanoke. For more information call 342-0703.

Innovative landscapes

The Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech has opened "Landscape: Another Dimension," with different artists highlighting unusual approaches to landscape in all three of the Moss Arts Center's galleries and its experimental black box theater, The Cube.

Blacksburg artist Joni Pienkowski's paintings, on display in the Ruth C. Horton Gallery until March 8, are composed to be viewable from multiple angles, and in fact will be rearranged through the duration of the show to allow new views of her exhibition.

New York artist Adam Cvijanovic has set up a three-dimensional, site-specific installation in the Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery that will be on display until March 2. He used frescoes, wood and mirrors to create a response to New River Valley scenery. Dutch artist Jacco Olivier's animations will show in the Sherwood Payne Quillen '71 Reception Gallery until March 2. His works combine landscape painting with filmmaking.

The Cube will show Japanese artist Chiho Aoshima's five-channel video "City Glow" through March 2. Influenced by Manga and anime, Aoshima's landscapes transform from garden paradises to surreal cityscapes to night scenes full of ghosts and fairies.



Courtesy Christy Starchild

The poster advertising the Grateful Dead art show at Ripple features photographs of painter Richard Biffle, photographer Robbi Cohn and their work. Both artists will be present to sign their work.